
How to Establish An Association Editorial Board for a New Periodical

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CAREFUL SELECTION AND PLANNING CAN HELP YOU HARNESS THE BEST BRAINS IN YOUR FIELD

An association's editorial board, or committee, is defined as the group of individuals that volunteers to advise the publisher or editor of a membership magazine. As such, it can be one of the most important ingredients in the success of your association's magazine. The members of the editorial board have the primary job of keeping the magazine relevant to the industry and pointed editorially in the right direction. Tough job, but somebody's got to do it!

In his book *How to Edit a Scientific Journal*, Claude T. Bishop says it nicely: "To fulfill its proper functions of advice and assistance, an editorial board should supplement and reinforce the editor's expertise. The actual number of members will reflect the breadth of the subject matter covered by the journal because editors will want assistance in all specialties that are represented by a significant number of papers."

Though it may seem a daunting task at first glance, with some careful thought, planning and management, you can create an effective editorial board that harnesses association members' talents to your magazine's greatest advantage. The editorial board can be called upon to write articles, review submitted manuscripts, keep you up to date on the industry's hottest topics, and provide expertise that would be lacking without their involvement.

ESTABLISHING AN EDITORIAL BOARD

First off, you need to determine the type of individual you want to recruit to your editorial board. Bishop states, "In short, good judgment should be near the top of the list of qualities for members of an editorial board. Other factors are stature and knowledge in the field, an appreciation of deadlines in the review process and an

ability to meet them, and a compatible personality." Manuscript reviewers should be diplomatic and tactful, even though their job is critiquing the manuscripts they read.

Of course, whether publishing staff unilaterally can appoint editorial review board members will depend on your association publishing bylaws. Usually the appointment of editorial board members requires the approval of the board of directors. Generally, journal editorial board members, and not magazine board members, come under the purview of the association's board of directors. Some associations have a volunteer officer overseeing publications so the publisher and/or editor may need to coordinate editorial board activities with this officer.

If possible, operational or decision-making authority should remain with the editor of the magazine. It is important to remember that the editor is the paid staff person and, as such, needs to keep a handle on how things are run. After all, the editor has the knowledge of that particular association.

You should prepare a brief position description for editorial board members. Specify the responsibilities and the length of appointment. Prospective editorial board members, as manuscript reviewers, should know that they exercise an important quality control function of what ultimately is published in the magazine. The reviewers' critical comments will provide guidance to the authors in the revision of their accepted articles as they work with the magazine's editorial staff.

You may also want to include other basic criteria in the position description such as

- Is available to take occasional phone calls from staff editors and provide advice, recommendations for contributors, and other help

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- Will turn around article reviews within X days or weeks
- Attends and participates in annual editorial board meeting

For the majority of editorial boards, the most important function is to read and review the submitted manuscripts by serving as referees or reviewers. You may want to quantify how many manuscripts a committee member can expect to receive each year at the outset so that new members know what they're getting into. Create an easy-to-use article review form that board members can fill out, and leave plenty of space for additional comments.

Your job in recommending board members is to identify individuals who represent the best and most contemporary thinkers in the field of your publication. Set minimal standards for education and experience for prospective board members. You want the most knowledgeable and competent to serve your magazine. Your editorial board members ideally should represent a cross-section of industry, education, and government. Make an effort to actively use the services of all the members; you don't want figure-head members.

Create a list of those members you feel are the best and the brightest. Ask throughout the association for recommendations of knowledgeable, responsive members to be considered for the board. Use your outside contacts as well and ask who they believe are the people most qualified to be on the board. Leaf through other periodicals looking for names of industry movers and shakers.

Once you have your list of potential members in hand, identify your top choices of possible members, considering their specific areas of expertise, and try to select the most knowledgeable, diverse group possible. Once your list is approved, send an appointment letter to the candidates and include the position description and all rele-

vant information about the duties and responsibilities of the editorial board member's role. Include the publication's mission statement and information about the overall readership. This will help keep the board on the same page at the same time.

ROLE OF THE CHAIRPERSON

In some cases, the chair of the editorial board is the individual coordinating the work of the editorial board. Often, the chair is a member of the board of directors, though in other cases, he or she is an active volunteer with aspirations to move up in the organization. In either case, the chairperson should be the greatest champion of the membership magazine and help the staff ensure that editorial board members are doing their work and meeting deadlines. It would be helpful to establish at the outset that the staff editor or publisher can rely on the chairperson to make phone calls to editorial board members who are not meeting deadlines. The chairperson is someone who supports the overall board, someone they can rely on to discuss controversial articles in more detail, prior to submitting the article review form to the staff.

The chairperson should conduct the annual editorial board meeting. It's important that the chairperson understands and supports the role of the editorial board member so that he or she can keep the discussions focused on content, and not on operational matters.

CONDUCTING THE ANNUAL EDITORIAL BOARD MEETING

Whether you're working with a new board or one already established, it's important to plan ahead for the annual editorial board meeting. Prior to the meeting, you may want to conduct a meeting or conference call with the committee chairperson to go over the topics for the upcoming meeting. This is your opportunity to prepare the chairperson so that he or she is as knowledgeable and prepared as possible.

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At the editorial board meeting, the chairperson can conduct the meeting, and trade off with the staff editor on activities such as providing an update on the status of the publication, reviewing the editorial plan, sharing appropriate feedback and letters, asking for suggestions for improvement, and introducing new members. Set aside a good portion of the meeting to be dedicated to editorial brainstorming. Here, in one room, you have the best thinkers in your field, and if you ask the right questions and listen, you will leave the meeting with a number of ideas.

If the board is an established one, you'll want to train any new members either by phone individually or by group via conference call before the annual meeting or hold a 30-minute session prior to the editorial board meeting to orient the new members. Review the publication's mission statement and the role of editorial board members. Work through an article review form together so that members know what to look for when reviewing manuscripts.

FINAL THOUGHTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL BOARD

In order to have a successful editorial board, consider overlapping the terms of appointment to ensure "new blood" on the board every year. A term of appointment is usually three to five years, although many organizations appoint members for one year only. Another idea when organizing an editorial board is to consider a two-tiered approach. The first tier of members would provide judgments as to general interest submissions while the second tier consists of technical reviewers who are experts in their specialty.

If board members are not carrying out their duties, alert the chairperson in a timely fashion so he or she can contact those members to discuss the situation. If a board member continues to not respond, replace that member with a new one who commits to doing the necessary work.

Be sure to establish a manuscript tracking system so that at all times you know the status of manuscripts out for review. Make sure the tracking and trafficking of manuscripts is under the control of your staff editor.

Volunteers simply do not have the time or background to keep track of manuscripts out to reviewer. An excellent book on this subject is *The Peer-Reviewed Journal: A Comprehensive Guide through the Editorial Process* by Gary Michael Smith www.ChatgrisPress.com.

Creating and managing an association editorial board takes time and effort, but if done well, can reap many benefits. Your association's magazine will benefit from members' expertise in the field and board members will enjoy the recognition of serving the publication, having their names included in the masthead, and making a true contribution to the excellent, relevant content read by all of your association's readers.

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