Starting a New Journal: Nuts, Bolts, and Open Access

Offering another perspective, Angela Cochran walked through her experience launching new journals for ASCE, a large society that is mandated to publish the ideas of its members. Cochran noted that incentives motivate smaller groups in the organization to propose new journals. The decision to move forward with an idea was not described as being made after a lot of financial research; Cochran indicated if an idea is accepted it moves forward quickly. The importance of keeping track of all the small details that can be overlooked was emphasized by Cochran. ASCE uses a spreadsheet to track tasks needed to launch a journal, including who is responsible for each task and when it is due, as well as to track a number of identifiers and metadata, from ISSN through DOI. That spreadsheet becomes an authority file. This is important according to Cochran because some of the tasks will need to be followed up on years later; a journal must be three years old for Scopus, and inclusion in PubMed can be applied for only after 40 papers and 12 months.

Cochran offered some parting advice to attendees for navigating a journal launch, noting that to succeed you need to be organized, send updates out the core stakeholders often, and always use the spreadsheet—don’t retype things like ISSN manually and risk typos, note when changes have been made, and follow up on long-term things.

The final speaker of the session was Katherine Egan Bennett, sharing her experience of launching an open-access journal for the American Society for Radiation Oncology. Launching the publication took nearly three years, with a lot of time spent convincing society membership that the journal was needed. A desire to capture content leakage from the existing ASTRO journals helped make the case for a new publication. At the time, their flagship journal held a 31% accept rate and was rejecting hundreds of submissions each year.

The new journal launched successfully in January 2016, supported by author fees. The first volume launched with 56% accept and 39% reject rates, with 6% withdrawn, which Bennett noted showed open access is a publishing model, but it does not mean you will publish everything. Looking back on the process, Bennett offered up some lessons learned, saying it is important to build connections with editorial boards of existing journals in order to communicate the scope of new journal.