

Scientific Editor Transitions

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Transitioning scientific journal editors can be challenging, especially when the new editors were not previously involved in managing peer review. This session provided case studies and practical tips from three editorial managers with experience in multiple editor transitions. The differing models for structuring the editorial team—including contract editors with fixed terms, contract editors with no term limits, and in-house editors on the staff of the publisher's organization—were addressed by the speakers.

Jean Mattes began by describing the current situation at the *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, a common one among scientific journals: a “baby boomer” Editor in Chief (EIC) approaching a decade in the role, an annual contract with no end date, no term limits, and no formal succession plan. Because editor searches can be time-consuming and costly with no guarantee of success, Mattes and the team at JGME will soon be implementing a comprehensive transition/succession plan (4 to 5 years ahead of the anticipated transition).

Steps include defining a term limit early in the process, establishing oversight within the publishers' organization, establishing editor performance expectations, and developing a formal plan that details how the candidates will be chosen and by whom (the oversight body, the current EIC, and/or others). Mattes suggests asking deputy editors to take responsibility for a section of the journal to develop their skills and test their suitability for the EIC role and creating a formal contingency plan in case the EIC is unable to carry out the duties of the office.

Mattes closed by stressing that publishers should view editor transitions as processes, not events, and should leverage the wisdom and experience of the current editor, the deputy editors, and the editorial board in ensuring success.

Kimberly Retzlaff continued by describing the *Journal—American Water Works Association's (JAWWA)* journey from staff EIC to contract EIC and back to staff EIC. Following a long period with an in-house staff editor, JAWWA moved to a contract editor in 2014 in an effort to gain additional expertise from the field and increased editorial autonomy. Two years later, they moved back to a staff editor after concluding that the advantages of a staff editor (proximity, integration with the editorial office, and ease in content development) outweighed the advantages of an editor under contract. They conducted an international search for the new EIC and received 45 resumes, which were then screened for fit (technical knowledge, association knowledge, publishing record, and experience/knowledge of scholarly publishing). Phone interviews were conducted and four candidates were invited for in-person interviews, after which the new EIC was chosen.

Retzlaff then described the transition process the JAWWA team used to orient the new editor to the journal's operations. They ensured an overlap between the outgoing and incoming editors and started the new editor's training with phone calls to explain the issue-planning strategy and peer-review process, then gradually moved on to content oversight and publishing context, including market and industry, trends such as open access, publishing ethics, and driving content from print to online.

She concluded by sharing ideas for tools to support communication, training, and collaboration, such as using collaborative software to track questions and tasks and encouraging the new editor to reach out to the editor of a similar organization to gain an EIC mentor. While the new JAWWA editor had a steep learning curve into scholarly publishing, with comparatively fewer contacts than the previous EIC, the team is pleased with the fresh perspective and close proximity of their in-house editor and believe that his in-depth knowledge of the industry and the association have been strong assets.

Randy Townsend wrapped up the session by sharing his experiences choosing and onboarding new EICs at the American Geophysical Union (AGU). New EICs for AGU's 20 peer-reviewed journals are chosen by a committee consisting of an AGU Council member, a Publications Committee member (as chair), and 3–4 subject experts. The committee's work is facilitated by AGU publishing staff.

Once a new EIC is chosen, journals staff manage the handoff of responsibilities from outgoing to incoming editor, with a goal of total transition within 3 months. Townsend indicated that each new editor is provided with information

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about Committee on Publication Ethics guidelines and editorial philosophy in addition to operational information on the peer-review process, including detailed training on the electronic manuscript submission system. AGU staff support the editors of each journal through quarterly calls, weekly reports, meetings at the AGU annual meeting, and an EIC retreat where all 20 editors can discuss issues and learn from each other.

Townsend concluded by highlighting the need for publishing staff to keep in constant communication with editors, especially new EICs, to ensure workload balance and that schedules and deadlines are met. "Think of the editorial manager as a conductor of a complicated orchestra of information and stakeholders," he said. "It takes constant communication for the orchestra to work together to meet the journals' strategic goals."