

Against the Firewall: Society/Journal Relationships

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The interactive CSE 2019 session “Against the Firewall: Society/Journal Relationships” presented hypothetical cases for attendees to work through together in order to find agreeable solutions for maintaining the separation between journals and the non-profit societies that own them. Before reviewing case examples, the moderators provided a brief overview that defined firewalls and why they are important for societies and journals. It was emphasized that firewalls between journals and societies maintain credibility for the journal, ensure that journal content is properly scrutinized for quality and lack of bias, and prevent the journal from becoming a “mouthpiece” for the organization. Upholding the journal’s editorial independence and separating it from the society also provides greater opportunities for conflicts of interest to be properly managed in a secure fashion. Moderators also discussed that, with clear communication, strong leadership, and consistency, journal staff and editors can help enforce firewalls and make sure that they remain effective.

While firewalls can often provide clear definitions on how journal issues are to be handled, the moderators explained that there are situations in which both journals and societies can be impacted regardless of what protocols are already in place. These situations require special attention. To further explore such instances, the moderators presented four hypothetical cases for group discussion and resolution. It was noted that one size does not fit all when trying to apply solutions to journal issues. As such, group discussion allowed attendees to learn from one another and see the issues from different lenses that they may not have considered independently.

The hypothetical cases that follow were discussed and resolved during the remainder of the session. Possible

solutions were shared by the moderators that journals may choose to employ depending on their unique situations.

Case One: How to handle a situation in which the journal editor-in-chief will be stepping into the role of the society’s president

To ensure the financial and ownership responsibilities of the society remained separate from the editorial independence of the journal editorial board, the editor-in-chief role was temporarily filled by an associate editor while the individual previously sitting as editor-in-chief served a two-year term as the society’s president. At the end of the term, the associate editor stepped down for the individual to resume their role as editor-in-chief. A new policy was also established that specifically stated that the same person cannot hold both the editor-in-chief and society president roles at the same time.

Case Two: If, how, and when to involve the society in the review of a society program report submission authored by an independent group of authors

The journal added program organizers from the society to serve as peer reviewers in order to suggest changes directly to the authors. However, since their roles as reviewers were strictly instructional to ensure data presented about the program were accurately reported by the authors, they were not granted the authority to make decisions on the manuscript.


Case Three: Responding to society board directors who believe that they deserve guaranteed review for any manuscripts they submit to the society’s journal

As a general rule of thumb, the journal determined that people who hold leadership roles in the society should not be given preferential treatment when submitting to the society’s journal. As such, the journal did not offer guaranteed review to the board director. Instead, the journal shared information on the appeal process it has in place for all authors in the event that the board author felt they were being treated unfairly.

*CONTINUED***Case Four: Addressing pressures to appoint a recommended individual to a newly-vacant editor-in-chief position without formally opening the opportunity to the public**

Unfortunately, editorial staff does not always get a final say in major decisions about journal leadership. The journal





editorial staff can, however, encourage the adoption of a formal policy for filling vacant editor-in-chief positions and suggest the use of interim terms when a full search is not possible at that time. In this case, without a formal policy in place, the society filled the editor-in-chief vacancy with the recommended individual in lieu of a formal, public search.



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