

Editor-in-Chief Transitions

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Transitions in leadership are inevitable in the lives of all organizations, including scientific publications. New leadership can bring fresh energy and ideas that sustain innovation and growth. However, when changes are poorly planned and executed, transitions can bring discord and conflict that sap energy and commitment. We have been fortunate to have transitioned into and out of our roles as Editor-in-Chief (EIC) in a manner that was healthy for the journal, our predecessors, our successors, and ourselves.

Our transitions were planned well in advance, and except in one situation, we had the opportunity to work with our predecessors for several months before assuming leadership. We recognize that, on occasion, a transition may need to occur quickly due to unforeseen circumstances. Journals should develop plans to manage unexpected transitions in an effort to mitigate the effects of crisis management on the people involved in, and the processes related to, the publication.

At the individual level, we identified 4 factors that led to smooth and gratifying transitions that fostered improvement and minimized disruption. The first is **mentorship**. The EIC needs to be available to a successor before and after the transition in leadership. In some cases, an EIC might elect to invite a future successor into meetings and activities or delegate duties to enable the individual to develop needed skills. The EIC occupies a unique role and is engaged in far more of the editorial process than is often apparent on the surface, for example, publication ethics and perceived or real conflicts of interest. Depending on the organization and the journal, the EIC may also have a substantial role in budgeting and financial planning, which requires interaction with management and organizational leadership. Although an incoming EIC may never be fully prepared for all that will be required, exposure to every aspect of the job is critical to a successful transition.

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Second, **complete transparency** is essential. Don't hide the skeletons in the closet from a successor. All organizations face ongoing and emerging challenges. At the time of the transition, a new EIC inherits the problems and concerns already inherent in an organization. An incoming EIC should be able to set an agenda with full knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, as well as any potential threats to success. Little can derail an agenda more rapidly or extensively than needing to address difficulties hidden by a predecessor.

Third, an outgoing EIC needs to be **supportive but stay out of the way**. It can be difficult to serve as a consultant, if asked, while avoiding the tendency to impart advice on how something was or should be done. An incoming EIC is appointed to lead and innovate, not answer to a predecessor. A journal cannot grow and adapt to the changing landscape of scientific publication without developing new strategies, editorial policies, and methods of delivering content to its audience. Change involves risk, which a predecessor may view as a threat to his or her legacy of success rather than the necessary continuing evolution of the journal that was central to his or her success as the EIC.

Lastly, it is critical that the transition in EIC **involves the managing editor and members of the editorial office**. The managing editor plays an essential role in overseeing and facilitating a smooth transition. In fact, one of us transitioned into the role of EIC after a stint as founding editor of another journal without the support of a professional managing editor and editorial office. The impact of these resources on the EIC's ability to successfully execute the responsibilities of the position was immense. The managing editor provides continuity in relationships with the editorial board, manuscript reviewers, subscribers, and key leaders within the host professional society. The EIC–managing editor relationship should be a partnership rather than a hierarchy. Clearly, a highly competent and dedicated managing editor makes the job of EIC enjoyable and gratifying. The managing editor who is engaged throughout the process ensures a smooth transition for the EIC.

Each EIC transition has its unique wins and pain points. If both the outgoing and incoming EICs are committed to a smooth process, they will be able to look back on the transition as a time of positive change for themselves, the organization, and the journal.