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Journal Editors and the Sponsoring Organization:
Editorial Independence and Budgeting

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The scientific journal of an organization is often the face, and sometimes the highlight, of
the organization. The relationship between the sponsoring organization, which is
responsible to and for the core mission and values of the organization and has financial
responsibility for implementation of the mission, and the journal editor, who is
responsible for the integrity and quality of content published in the journal, is critical to
the success of the journal and must be based on mutual respect and trust.

Editorial independence
“The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) adopts the World
Association of Medical Editors’ definition of editorial freedom. According to this
definition, editorial freedom, or independence, is the concept that editors-in-chief
have full authority over the editorial content of their journal and the timing of
publication of that content. Journal owners should not interfere in the evaluation,
selection, or editing of individual articles either directly or by creating an environment
that strongly influences decisions. Journal owners should not require editors to publish
supplements as part of their contractual agreements. Editors should base decisions on the
validity of the work and its importance to the journal’s readers, not on the commercial
success of the journal. Editors should be free to express critical but responsible views
about all aspects of medicine without fear of retribution, even if these views conflict with
the commercial goals of the publisher. Editors and editors’ organizations are obligated to
support the concept of editorial freedom and to draw major transgressions of such
freedom to the attention of the international medical, academic, and lay communities.”

The editorial content of the journal comprises 1) the type of content, including original
research articles, brief communications, case reports, challenges, technical reports,
editorials, letters to the editor, special features, news, and special reports or consensus
statements; 2) the identification, evaluation, and selection of content, including definition
of the scope of topics, requirements or recommendations for adherence to reporting
guidelines, the process for peer review, including the number of reviews and whether the
process is open, blinded, or double-blinded, and the rendering of final decisions and
handling of appeals; 3) the format of content, including print or online publication and
journal style; and 4) the timing of the publication of content, including order of
publication and rapid (expedited) review and publication. In order to manage the
journal’s content, the editor should be free to appoint and manage subeditors, editorial
board members, and assistants and should operate in an environment free of political or
commercial influence.
**Editorial independence** can be ensured in a number of ways. The sponsoring organization can issue a public statement on editorial independence, which may be accompanied by a disclaimer that journal content does not represent the opinion of the organization (or publisher). As an example, in August 2010 the executive board of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) approved and publicly declared: “The AVMA recognizes and fully accepts the need for editorial independence of the AVMA journals and grants the editor-in-chief full authority over the editorial content of the journals, including the selection of content for publication and the timing of publication of that content. For these purposes, editorial content is understood to include research articles, other types of scientific reports, opinion articles, news, and advertising. Opinions and statements expressed in the AVMA journals are those of the contributors and do not represent the official policy of the AVMA, unless so stated. AVMA management does not interfere in the evaluation, selection, or editing of individual articles published in the AVMA journals, either directly or by creating an environment that strongly influences decisions of the editor-in-chief.”

A formal contract can provide a job description, including the authority and responsibilities of the editor, the term of appointment and renewal option, the reporting structure, mechanisms for resolving conflict, terms of compensation (ensuring that the source of compensation does not create a conflict of interest), and support for the editorial office and travel. For many organizations in veterinary medicine, an informal understanding, rather than a written contract, is in place.

The authority and responsibilities of the editor can be supported by publication of the journal’s mission, priorities, and objectives and by establishment of measures of journal success, procedures for evaluating the editor, written editorial policies, support (funding and staff) that enables the journal to succeed in fulfilling its mission, and direct communication between the editor and the highest level of organization (or oversight group). The editor should establish the terms and responsibilities of subeditors, editorial board members, and assistants, and the editorial staff should report directly to the editor.

The editor’s decisions must be based on the validity and importance of work with input from subeditors, editorial board members, readers, and advisors, and political, commercial, or personal influences should play no role in the decisions. The editor should be free of fear of reprisals for publishing critical or competing work or opinions counter to those of the organization or its strategic plan and should have the right to resist pressure from the sponsoring organization, prominent members, reviewers, or authors, including authors attempting to meet credentialing criteria (e.g., residents required to have an accepted publication prior to the certifying examination in the discipline). The editor should have the authority to review and refuse advertisements.

As the functional relationship between the sponsoring organization and editor is founded on mutual respect and trust, the editor should disclose conflicts of interest – scientific, commercial, and personal – and should maintain confidentiality regarding manuscripts, authors, and reviews. Termination of the editor should be based on sound reasons and should be conducted as a deliberative process.
The sponsoring organization should neither micromanage nor forget about the journal!

**Financial Management and Budgeting**
The organization (Association, College, or Society) may have full or partial (in conjunction with the publisher) responsibility for financial support of the journal enterprise. The editor may submit an annual budget to the organization to support projected costs and may make ad hoc requests throughout the year as needs and opportunities are identified. Editors must be cognizant of changes that may have a financial impact on the organization. Examples include increasing the number of issues published per year or adopting a double-blinded peer-review system, which incurs costs associated with removing all identifying information from manuscripts and reviews.

The organization can support the journal by providing compensation to the editor and subeditors (this may be provided by or shared by the publisher) and support for an office assistant and office supplies, hardware and software, and mailing/faxing expenses. Importantly, the organization can invest in the development of a new editor by supporting attendance of workshops and conferences on topics related to editing. Both new and experienced editors should attend the annual meetings of the organization to represent the journal and network with editorial staff, authors, and reviewers and conferences of science editors (such as IAVE); it may be beneficial for editors to attend conferences of related disciplines or of the same discipline in different countries. The sponsoring organization can support the presence of the editor at these venues.

The editor should receive the journal’s financial report at least annually. This may come from the publisher, the sponsoring organization, or both. Details about the costs associated with print publication, including copyediting, typesetting, and printing, and online publication, including maintenance of the journal’s website and digitizing archived issues, as well as amounts and sources of revenue from subscriptions (institutional, library, and personal) and advertising can help the editor understand the overall operation as well as be cognizant of financial decisions that may have an impact on the integrity and reputation of the journal in the scientific community.

**Questions to Consider**
Keeping in mind that a functional relationship between the sponsoring organization and the editor is founded on mutual respect and trust…

- What is the relationship between your organization and the journal?
- Do you have a contract that includes your job description and term of appointment? Were you asked to disclose possible scientific, commercial or personal conflicts of interest?
- To whom do you report? Are you evaluated, and, if so, what is the process?
- Is there a mission statement for the journal?
- Has your organization issued a public statement acknowledging your editorial independence? Do you have editorial independence in all matters of editorial content (scope, identification, review, selection, and timing) and staffing (e.g., appointment of subeditors and editorial board)?
• What is your role with respect to formatting, frequency of publication, advertisements, and affiliations with other organizations?
• Does the journal’s impact factor – or other metrics – play a role in the organization’s oversight of the journal?
• Is financial support sufficient to permit fulfillment of the journal’s mission? Do you receive financial reports?

Do the size and complexity of the organization have an impact on its relationship with the journal editor? Is there a difference if the organization is a large association, a discipline-specific college, or a small society?

Conclusion
Fundamentally, a functional relationship founded on mutual respect and trust is achieved most effectively by following the Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE):

Relations with journal owners and publishers:
• The relationship of editors to publishers and owners is often complex but should be based firmly on the principle of editorial independence.
• Editors should make decisions on which articles to publish based on quality and suitability for the journal and without interference from the journal owner/publisher.
• Editors should have a written contract(s) setting out their relationship with the journal’s owner and/or publisher.
• The terms of this contract should be in line with the COPE Code of Conduct for Journal Editors.

Best practice for editors would include:
• establishing mechanisms to handle disagreements between themselves and the journal owner/publisher with due process and
• communicating regularly with their journal’s owner and publisher.
Resources


Council of Science Editors. CSE's white paper on promoting integrity in scientific journal publications. 2.0 Roles and responsibilities in publishing. 2.5 Relations between editors and publishers, sponsoring societies, or journal owners. Available at: http://www.councilscienceeditors.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3358#2.5.1. Accessed July 10, 2011.
Biography

Karen M. Young earned a BA in History and Russian Language in 1973, a VMD in 1978, an internship certificate in 1979, a residency certificate in medical oncology in 1981, and a PhD in hematopathology in 1985, all from the University of Pennsylvania. She joined the faculty of the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1985 and is currently Clinical Professor of Clinical Pathology and Chief of Diagnostic Services in the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital. Her research interests include regulation of hematopoiesis, tumor markers, and effective strategies for teaching and assessing problem-solving abilities. A recipient of many teaching awards, she is a fellow of the UW-Madison Teaching Academy and the founding chair of the Education Committee of the American Society for Clinical Pathology. She has served on the editorial board and as Section Editor for Hematology and Immunology and Associate Editor of Veterinary Clinical Pathology and is currently Editor-in-Chief of the journal.