

Nurse Author & Editor

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Editorial Boards

Thinking Strategically About a Journal Editorial Board

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Editorial Boards are a critical element of any nursing periodical. The individuals who serve on these boards are typically seen as experts in the field. They are there to offer their best advice about the future of the field and about emerging changes in the industry and to identify prospective authors, reviewers, and board members. Sometimes board members are also expected to write manuscripts for the journals on which they serve and to provide advice about editorial policy.

Elsevier (2016) states that members of the editorial board have specific duties: “Review submitted manuscripts; advise on journal policy and scope; identify topics for special issues, which they may guest edit; and attract new authors and

submissions.” To gain a broader insight other than just my personal experiences for this article, I decided to solicit input from nursing editors connected to the International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE).

A survey was sent to nursing editors via the INANE mailing list to ask about their editorial boards, such as the role they had, their responsibilities, and so forth. Thirteen responses were received. The materials received focused on two elements—the characteristics/qualifications of board members and the typical responsibilities the board members were expected to perform.

CHARACTERISTICS/QUALIFICATIONS

Only five responses contained statements about qualifications for those to serve as a board member. The key, most consistently mentioned, characteristic in those responses was **expertise** in the aspect on which the journal focuses, for example, a clinical or functional area. This makes total sense because our knowledge has expanded greatly in the last few decades so it is not possible to be an expert in the full field of nursing.

Another frequently mentioned characteristic related to having a **publication record**. Some journal editors called specifically for research publications. This expectation also makes sense because it is the other key area of expertise that a board member exercises on a regular basis, that is clarity in writing.

One editor of a large subscriber-based journal also sought board members who were representative of **diversity** in geography, ethnicity, education, position, and area of expertise and practice settings. A quick review of web sites represented by the respective journals suggested that most of us attend to geographic diversity too, even though it was not listed as an expectation. Most editors also sought members with at least a Master’s degree in nursing, as evidenced from the listings

of editorial members on the respective web sites. Additionally, from the materials received from the request to the editors, those journals associated with professional organizations reported the expectation of membership in the organization for selection to the editorial board.

Only one journal editor cited the expectation of no apparent conflict of interest. While other editors did not cite that factor, logically that would be an expectation for most editorial boards.

RESPONSIBILITIES EXPECTED

Almost all editors expected that members of the board would solicit manuscripts, help with strategic thinking, and review manuscripts. The idea of the **future** was evident in several editorial boards. The editor of one journal wrote, "Provide visionary leadership and global insight." The editor of another journal identified this futuristic view as participation in strategic planning. Seven of the 13 responses contained some statement that suggested a future focus.

All responses contained statements about **reviewing manuscripts and recruiting authors** (and sometimes reviewers). Additionally, members were expected to participate in meetings, whether in person or by an electronic or telephonic means. Some editors identified additional activities such as writing guest editorials, assisting with promotion and marketing of the journal, assisting with determining awards associated with the journal, and doing podcasts.

Only one journal editor identified the rights or benefits of being a member of a editorial board, which included receiving a copy of the publication.

CREATING/REFINING THE BOARD

Being able to establish a board is a challenge and a delight for an editor. It is a challenge in the sense that often key leaders in the field are already committed to other journals and yet it is a delight because it is possible to identify specific individuals. If we ignore the descriptors for the role that are detail oriented (e.g., review about three manuscripts per year) and focus on the major expectations of who the board is and what the board should do, we have a list of key aspects to consider. Simultaneously, new editors should feel free to consider new aspects of creating an editorial board. Freda and Nicoll (2015) give some suggestions for thinking through when to completely “clean house” and create an entirely new board, versus keeping some members, adding new people, and politely thanking others for their service.

This latter situation, as Watkins (2016) pointed out, is probably the most common. In reality, most of us don't get to create our team (the editorial board). Rather we inherit the team that was in place. Figuring out how to reshape the team to be more effective and to meet a journal's mission is a complex and political process. It no longer is about one of these characteristics and two of those, if that ever were the case. It is figuring out the dynamics of the team that exists, what changes need to be made, how to find the new talent without creating anxiety on the part of the remaining board members and how to transition from what is to what could be.

NEW CONSIDERATIONS

Think for a minute about any board. While having a group of congenial, agreeable persons assembled to do work is a pleasant prospect, that arrangement doesn't always produce a cutting edge approach to a field. What would editors do if they had someone on their editorial boards who thought like Steve Jobs? While Apple remains successful, almost everyone credits the rapid innovations that occurred at Apple to him—and his willingness to hear others. Editors who hear only positive messages from their boards are either lulled into complacency or find the

challenge external to the board. Finding someone who thinks differently and is willing to share that alternative view of an issue is invaluable. We all need someone who will **respectfully challenge** what we are doing so that we do better.

No response in the 13 represented journals indicated editors were seeking **specific roles**, for example a statistician. Yet, as the profession has become more sophisticated in its approach to creating evidence, this role becomes ever more valuable. Another example is how the profession has become engaged in innovation or futuristic work and how we need people who clearly don't think like the majority of us do. Having someone external to the field could enhance our potential to connect the work of the journal with a different audience and provide a different voice for us to hear.

Whatever we do, we should consider our relationships with those who serve with us. The better we know them, the better able we are to capitalize on each person's distinctive talents in furthering the work of the journal. Our task is to capitalize on those individual talents and the talents of the board as a whole. People who serve on editorial boards will continue to shape the future of our publications; they provide the transition to the future.

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