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Recent Updates to the CSE White Paper: Guidelines for Editor in Chief and Guest Editors of Supplements, Special Series, or Calls for Papers

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Abstract

The Council of Science Editors' (CSE) White Paper on Promoting Integrity in Scientific Journal Publications was first published in 2006, and the full document was updated in 2009 and again in 2012. In 2018, the CSE Editorial Policy Committee (EPC) began making updates on a rolling basis as new sections were added or existing sections updated to reflect new information or best practices. This updated method for amending the document allows for more rapid dissemination of its contents so that they can be quickly put into practice in journal operations. In this column, the author advises the readership of a recent update that provides guidance on the important roles of guest editors and editors in chief in facilitating the creation of supplements, special series, or calls for papers. The full White Paper is available at <https://www.councilscienceeditors.org/resource-library/editorial-policies/white-paper-on-publication-ethics/>.

Ensuring Scientific Integrity in Supplements and Special Series

The range of evolving and timely topics positions journals to publish relevant research content to meet the needs of their readers. Frequently, journals may decide to publish supplements, special series, or calls for papers to highlight research, advances, recommendations, and guidelines. Journals may solicit guest editors (GEs) with specific areas of expertise to facilitate the peer-review process, lend credibility to the overall effort, and ensure that timelines are met. Individuals identified to serve as GEs should reflect the journal's commitment to upholding the highest editorial standards and scientific integrity (see e.g., <https://publicationethics.org>). These new CSE guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of the editor in chief (EIC) and GEs of supplements, special series, or calls for papers were developed to meet the needs of journals, societies, and publishers for either for-profit or nonprofit entities. The guidelines identify standards for the roles and responsibilities of the EIC and GEs, with the goals of establishing clear boundaries, reducing miscommunications, avoiding conflicts of interests, meeting timelines, and generating

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rigorous peer-reviewed content that readers can trust. This commentary provides a brief overview of new content regarding responsibilities for the EIC and GEs of supplements, special series, and calls for papers (Figure) that will be added to the CSE White Paper on Promoting Integrity in Scientific Journal Publications.

Role of the EIC

The EIC serves as the primary contact on supplements, special series, and calls for papers internally and externally to individuals, groups, networks, and organizations. Hence, the EIC is responsible for ensuring the rigorous review of material to maintain its scientific integrity, and to this end, the new guidelines detail several of the EIC's responsibilities. The EIC has the final responsibility of ensuring that GEs have the necessary expertise in the content areas of focus whether they are current or former editorial board members, associate editors, or established experts who have not served in a previous capacity with the journal. Expectations among the EIC and GEs can become confusing without an established document clarifying expectations, roles, and responsibilities. These guidelines recommend that the journal establish a letter of understanding or memorandum of agreement with GEs that details roles and responsibilities for the EIC and GEs, publication tasks and timelines, key deliverables, compensation (if appropriate), and procedures for dealing with conflicts of interest. The selected GEs may have disclosures that should be identified upfront to ensure that the journal's credibility remains the highest priority. Therefore, the guidelines recommend that conflicts of interest be disclosed and appropriately dealt with throughout the service of any and all GEs.

Whether GEs have previously served in this capacity or not, the new guidelines suggest that the EIC or editorial office provide an orientation to GEs to specify their respective roles; how to deal with conflicts of interest; the timeline for generating the supplement, special series, or call for papers; and the use of the journal's manuscript management system, if necessary. This orientation allows for clarifying questions to ensure that the confidentiality and objectivity of the peer-review and decision-making process used by GEs, peer reviewers, and journal staff are fully understood prior to implementation. It will be the EIC's responsibility to provide overall coordination and final decision making of the publication to ensure consistency with the journal's processes and editorial standards throughout all stages of publication.

Role of GEs

Serving as a GE is an honor and conveys that the individual selected has the necessary experience and credibility to help a journal publish rigorous peer-reviewed content. The GE must also adhere to fundamental responsibilities that result in the smooth execution of generating a supplement, special series, or call for papers. GEs should be encouraged to discuss their roles and responsibilities and those of the EIC. The orientation allows GEs to ask questions, discuss ways to best communicate, review and revise timelines, as well as discuss how to handle conflicts of interest.

GEs must declare potential conflicts of interest to the EIC to avoid any appearance of bias or unfairness prior to initiating their role and during and up to publication. The new guidelines strongly suggest that GEs disclose all financial relationships related to the content and focus of the material, which is particularly important if the supplement, special series, or call for papers is funded by an entity from which the GE received monetary payments for services rendered (e.g., consultant, contractor, content expert). GEs should avoid facilitating peer review of material they coauthored, and if they have submitted manuscripts for consideration in the proposed material, they must recuse themselves from all handling of such manuscripts. In addition, the journal should disclose to the public how such papers were handled if they are accepted for publication.

GEs should only consider material that fits with the journal's vision and mission, its assessment processes and editorial standards, and the focus of the supplement. If charged with the responsibility, GEs should assign manuscripts and follow the journal's peer-review policy. In this instance, they may have the responsibility of making decision recommendations about acceptance to the EIC or make the final decision based on peer-review reports. They should adhere to established timelines and consult with the EIC before granting extensions to authors. Generating supplements and special series involves several interrelated steps that are time sensitive and resource intensive because of the overarching goal of generating content-rich, innovative, and timely material. Therefore, GEs must work closely with the EIC, contributing authors, and journal staff to execute tasks and generate deliverables to meet established timelines.

Conclusion

There are major themes reflected in this initial set of guidelines that will likely continue to evolve: adhering to editorial standards, providing an orientation to GEs, ensuring that GEs have the necessary expertise, establishing a letter of understanding, ensuring confidentiality and objectivity, avoiding conflicts of interest, and adhering to established timelines. These new guidelines were developed with the goal of providing journals with identified roles and responsibilities for the EIC and GEs that can be modified and expanded upon and will vary in their application based on a journal's editorial policies and procedures.

Acknowledgment

I thank the members of the EPC for their assistance with these updates.

CSE Guidelines for Editor in Chief and Guest Editors of Supplements, Special Series, and Calls for Papers

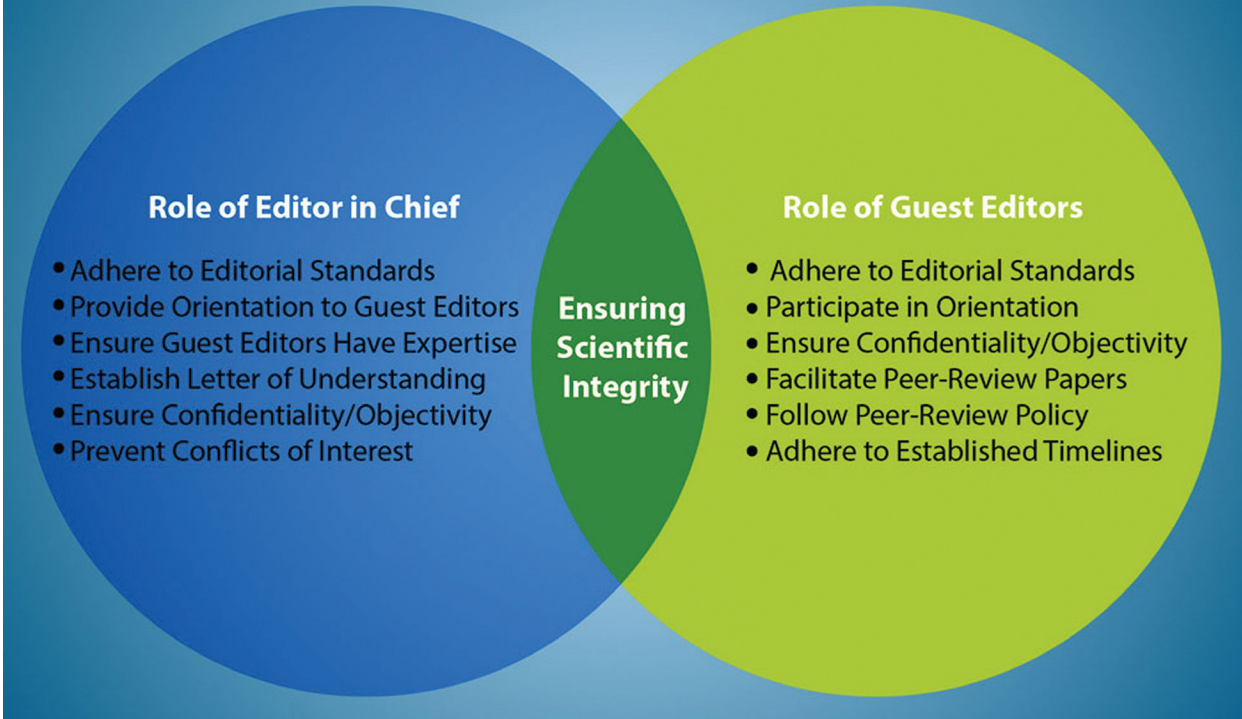


Figure.
CSE guidelines for EIC and GEs.