Giving Editors Community: Lessons from Creating an Online Editor Portal

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The Publications Department at the American Geophysical Union (AGU) publishes 19 journals; this calls for an extensive group of editors (more than 100) and a staff of 20. Communication between the two groups is key to a strong journals program. As publications staff, we found ourselves sending out many emails to editors requesting their feedback. We had a difficult time tracking editor replies, preferences, and suggestions. We frequently sent separate emails with the same peer review– and journals-related information to current editors, and the same training information to each new editor. We needed a central location for information on policy, procedure, and our peer-review system GEMS (EJournalPress). We wanted one place to post publications updates, submission and publication statistics, and a calendar of scientific meetings. We wanted to increase communication among editors so that they could come up with ways to grow their journals. We decided we needed a sort of online portal for the editors. The concept of AGU's Editor Portal was born.

We spent two years developing this idea before we launched a site. In those two years, we developed content, and had discussions with every AGU staff member involved in technology and budget regarding which platform to use as the site. Finally, after about a year of discussion on which software to use for the site, we were granted budget to hire an outside vendor.

Developing content for the Portal took a long time. Over the year or so developing content, we created instructional videos demonstrating the editors' main tasks. We learned new video recording and editing software in order to create and edit the videos. We also developed an Editor Resource Guide but found much of our documentation and our procedures needed updating. Developing content took longer than we had expected. We found ourselves sidetracked by discussions on how to update procedures, asking ourselves what the procedures said, what we were actually doing, and what the procedures *should* say. Don't underestimate the time it takes to develop content—it certainly wasn't as easy as pulling together a few documents from a folder labeled "editor instructions."

Before sending out the RFP to various vendors, we had to decide exactly what we wanted the Portal to be. Major questions for us were: Where do we want the site to "live"? How will the editors log in? Will their "editor" statuses have to be validated against a different database? What format do we want the Editor Handbook to be in? What pages do we want in our site, and how do users navigate between them? How do we want the editors to experience the discussion forums, and what groups will we have?

After selecting a vendor and working with them to develop the site (which took approximately 6 months), the vendor was ready to hand off the Portal. They provided documentation and a short training to a few publications staff. The Portal was a WordPress site, so there were also a lot on online resources. However, once I started updating the site in order to launch to the editors, I found that testing and updating took more time than I had expected. Time-consuming issues included identifying and modifying role attributions, creating profiles, testing access of various roles, updating artwork, posting videos and ensuring they played properly, and other issues typical of launching a new website.

After launch, adoption by the editors was slow. We did post occasional articles (*e.g.*, Publications Department News), but the editors didn't exactly rush to the site. To help increase editor and staff use of the Portal, we assembled a task force of a few publications staff. We came up with content ideas ("Better Know an Editor!") and a schedule for posting, conducted training sessions with the rest of the publications staff about how to post new content, and created verbiage for staff to send
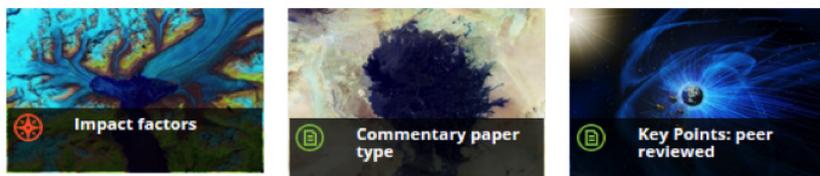
Figure 1. Editor Portal homepage.

to editors that would lead them to a page in the Editor Portal to answer their specific questions. We're still working on increasing the use of the Portal by posting all information for editors on the site. We do send important notifications to the editors through email but the bulk of the message is posted in an article on the Portal. The next goal is to encourage the editors to use the Discussion Forums—each journal editorial board has a private discussion form. We're hoping this increases communication among an editorial board so they can generate new ideas for developing their journal.

Box 1. Examples of editor resource content available at the AGU Editor Portal.

- Ethical obligations of editors
- Guidance for onboarding and releasing editorial boards
- Publications policies and submissions guidelines
- Manuscript handling system training page
- Information on the publication fee waiver process
- Procedures for interjournal manuscript transfers
- Advice on press releases
- Policies governing journal special sections and guest editors