IEEE Communication Society
Guidelines and Best Practices for Editor-in-Chiefs

This document provides general guidelines and best practices for Editor-in-Chiefs (EiCs) of journals that are sponsored or co-sponsored by the IEEE Communications Society (ComSoc).

ComSoc Journals
ComSoc is the sole sponsor of the following journals:

1. IEEE Communication Letters
2. IEEE Communication Surveys & Tutorials
3. IEEE Journal on Selected Areas in Communications
4. IEEE Transactions on Communications
5. IEEE Transactions on Molecular, Biological and Multi-Scale Communications

ComSoc is a co-sponsor of the following journals:

1. IEEE Transactions on Cognitive Communications and Networking
2. IEEE Transactions on Green Communications and Networking
3. IEEE Transactions on Network and Service Management
4. IEEE Transactions on Wireless Communications
5. IEEE Wireless Communications Letters
6. IEEE Networking Letters
7. IEEE/ACM Transactions on Networking
8. IEEE/KICS Journal of Communications and Networks
9. IEEE/OSA Journal of Optical Communications and Networking

EiCs of ComSoc sponsored journals report directly to the ComSoc Vice President Publications (VP Pubs) and the Director of Journals (DoJ). EiCs of ComSoc co-sponsored journals also report to a Steering Committee which is composed of representatives of the different stakeholders of the journal.

The Role of EiC
The role of EiC includes the following responsibilities:

- As EiC, you are responsible for managing the day-to-day operation of your journal. This includes timely assignment of papers to Editors, ensuring a timely and fair review process, dealing with authors' appeals of decisions, etc.
- As EiC, you are responsible for managing your Editorial Board. This includes finding and appointing new Editors, retiring existing Editors when their terms expire or their performance is severely lacking, and educating and training your Editors, etc.
- As EiC, you are also responsible for the strategic planning for your journal. This may include measures to improve the timeliness and quality of the review process, to increase

the visibility of your journal, to increase the paper flow, and to improve performance metrics such as sub-to-pub times, impact factor, etc.

- As EiC, you are a member of the ComSoc Publication Council. This Council meets twice per year at ICC and Globecom and you are expected to attend these meetings on a regular basis. Usually, the DoJ will ask you to prepare a report for the meeting and update the other Council members on the status of your journal. You will receive this request typically two months before the conference. You will receive a sample report along with this document.
- As EiC, you are a voting member of the Journals Board (https://www.comsoc.org/boards/publications/journals), which reports to the Publication Council. The Journals Board does usually not have separate meetings but takes part in the publication council meeting.
- As EiC, every year you will be invited to attend the Panel of Editor meeting, which takes place typically in April. This meeting is organized by IEEE and all EiCs of IEEE journals are encouraged to attend. Attending is especially useful in the first years of your tenure. In this meeting, IEEE presents useful information regarding new developments, new tools, and new processes surrounding the publication process. In addition, there are also special sessions for new EiCs and presentations by Manuscript Central.
- As EiC, you are responsible for preparing a report on the status of your journal for the IEEE Periodicals Review and Advisory Committee (PRAC). This Committee reviews all IEEE journals on a regular basis (at least once every 5 years).

Being an EiC

EiC is a very respectful and highly visible position within both the editorial board of your journal and the professional community in general. As a result, colleagues will closely watch your actions and conduct. It is important that you are aware of this and act accordingly. Here are some guidelines:

- In all your actions, you always consider potential (perceived) conflicts of interest and avoid them. For example, avoid appointing your close personal friends, colleagues, family members, and former students and supervisors as Editors. If you believe you cannot avoid appointing somebody despite a conflict of interest (e.g. because of a unique expertise), please consult first with the DoJ.
- You set the tone for your editorial board and have to lead by example! If you want your Editors to process papers in a timely manner, you have to do the same. You cannot expect your Editors to obtain high quality reviews in a timely manner if you take one month for assigning the papers to them.
- Try to minimize the number of papers that you submit to your own journal. Many EiCs do not submit any papers to their journal. Invariably, your Editors will feel uneasy to handle your papers and the reviewers will also feel unsure about their anonymity and the confidentiality of the review process. If you cannot avoid submitting papers to your own journal (e.g. because it is the only journal in the area), make sure that the number of papers that you submit per year is not higher than before you were EiC. Establish a process for the review of your papers that ensures absolute confidentiality and that is

transparent to the reviewers. Have senior Editors handle your papers and **inform the DoJ prior to the submission of every paper**.

- Remain professional and impartial in all your communications with Editors and authors, even in difficult cases (e.g. suspected cases of plagiarism, appeals, non-responsive Editors, etc.). As EiC, you represent the journal and ComSoc and your conduct should reflect this.
- If you encounter any serious problems or are not sure how to proceed, ask a trusted and experienced colleague for advice, e.g. your predecessor in the position or the DoJ.

Managing the Editorial Board

Although the exact composition of the Editorial Board varies somewhat across different ComSoc journals, with the exception of the IEEE Journal on Selected Areas which only publishes special issues, the overall structure is similar. In particular, besides the EiC, the Editorial Board typically comprises an Editorial Assistant, Editors, and possibly Area Editors and Senior Editors. Here are some guidelines for managing your Editorial Board:

- As EiC, you have a budget to hire a part-time Editorial Assistant. This is a very important resource and a capable assistant can make your life as EiC a lot easier. The assistant can help you with prescreening the submitted papers (e.g. formatting, plagiarism check, etc.), collecting the data for your report to the Publication Council, and sending reminders to and communicating with Editors, reviewers, and authors.
- Editors are your most important resource but it is very difficult to find good Editors. When looking for new Editors please consider the following:

  o The more time you invest in finding a good Editor, the more time you will save later as you will not have to constantly remind him/her or deal with unhappy authors. Only appoint someone if you are absolutely convinced of him/her.
  o Discuss all Editor Candidates with a senior colleague you trust (e.g. your predecessor, or a Senior Editor on your board). Ask him/her for an independent evaluation.
  o Editor candidates should not be too junior. Assistant professors should be appointed only in exceptional cases. Colleagues working in industry and government should be removed at least 3 years from the Ph.D.
  o Editor candidates should have published regularly in IEEE journals, preferably in your journal.
  o Well-known and prominent researchers are not always good Editors. In many cases, they are not willing to dedicate the necessary time. Although there are also counter-examples, of course. Good Editor Candidates are good researchers and have a good track record of professional service.
  o To identify Editor Candidates you can browse the recent papers in the relevant area, ask senior colleagues for recommendations, ask the Area Editor and other Editors for recommendations, check the colleagues who have performed recent reviews for your journal in the relevant area, check out the Guest Editors of recent special issues on the topic, and ComSoc maintains a volunteer database that you

can consult. To get access to the volunteer database, please contact Natasha Simonovski (n.simonsovski@comsoc.org).

- o Do as much research on Editor Candidates as you can. If they have served as Editors for other journals before, contact the EiC and ask for a candid evaluation. Often, they will have performed reviews for your own journal. Their reviews will give you a good idea about their expertise, thoroughness, and timeliness.
- o If you have decided to invite somebody to become an Editor, clearly specify your expectations regarding the number of papers to handle and timeliness in your invitation email. A sample invitation email is provided in the Appendix.

- Give all new Editors for your journal detailed guidelines for their new task. Most journals have a written document with guidelines for Editors and policies regarding the Editorial process. If your journal does not have such a document, please create one. Provide an excerpt of the guidelines already in the welcome email that you send after the Candidate has accepted your invitation to serve on the board, see the Appendix for an example.
- Monitor the performance of your Editors closely. If an Editor falls behind, ask for an explanation and offer help. If the problem persists and cannot be resolved, you can retire the Editor at any time. However, some EiCs prefer to simply stop assigning papers to the Editor and retiring him/her after his/her first 3-year term is up. In any case, you have to take action to prevent further harm from the journal and its authors.
- If possible at all, please send a personal performance report to each Editor, ideally every 6 month but at least once per year. In this report, you can comment on the timeliness of the Editor in comparison with your expectations and averages, the quality of the review process, and the quality of the decision letter (some examples are provided in the Appendix of this document). Your letter should be personal and clearly show that you looked at the individual Editor's performance (i.e., reviewed his decision letters, the reviewers he/she picked, and the decision times). Generating such reports is a time-consuming task, especially for journals with many Editors. However, the benefits outweigh the time consumed by far. These reports will show your Editors that you really care, reemphasize your expectations, and serve as reward for well performing Editors. From experience, especially well performing Editors are appreciative of these reports. The reports will also allow you to detect problems that you may have missed otherwise (e.g. superficial decision letters, repeated assignment of unqualified reviewers, etc.).
- Communicate the performance of the journal and your expectations regularly to your Editors. Schedule regular Editorial Board meetings at ICC and Globecom and encourage your Editors to attend (You have to request a room for this meeting about two months before the conference takes place.). Give a report on the status of the journal (e.g. average review times, number of submissions, acceptance rates, retiring Editors, new Editors, etc.) at these meetings and use them also to reiterate your (and IEEE's) expectations. You will receive a sample report along with this document.
- Ensure that your Editors are not overloaded. Overload has a negative impact on the quality of the review process. For journals publishing full-length papers, ideally the load should not exceed 15 new papers per year (excluding revisions). For letter journals, ideally the load should not exceed 30 papers per year. Unfortunately, for journals with a large number of submissions (e.g. IEEE Trans. Wireless Commun., IEEE Commun. Letters), exceeding these limits may be unavoidable. In such cases, try to monitor the

Editors particularly closely and contact Editors that appear to be struggling early on. Also, clearly communicate the expected load when you appoint a new Editor. You may consider a reduced load for Editors from industry as they typically cannot dedicate as much time to professional service as colleagues from academia.

- Depending on the number of submissions, you may find it convenient to introduce thematic areas in your journal. In this case, each area is led by an Area Editor, typically a senior colleague who served as Editor before. The EiC assigns papers to the Area Editor and the Area Editor assigns them to an Editor in his/her area. Nevertheless, as EiC, you have still full responsibility not only for the Area Editors but also for all Editors.
- Some journals also have a small number of Senior Editors, who are used for consultation on difficult matters and who may be asked to oversee the review process of difficult papers. Senior Editor candidates may be former EiCs of the journal or senior colleagues who have served as Area Editors or Editors before.
- Try to maintain a balance in terms of gender, geographical, and industry representation on your Editorial board.

Financial Matters

As EiC, every year you will be asked by ComSoc staff to prepare a budget for your journal. This budget should include the salary of your Editorial Assistant as well as travel costs for ICC, Globecom, and the Panel of Editor meeting. The ComSoc point of contact for this is Bruce Worthman (b.worthman@comsoc.org).

Editorial Procedures

All policies and procedures regarding the publication process can be found in the [IEEE Publication Services and Products Board Operations Manual.](#) The guidelines provided in the following are in line with these regulations but go beyond them.

- The review process in all ComSoc journals should be timely and fair. The decisions should be of high quality. IEEE expects a decision on all full journal papers at most 90 days after submission. For letters this deadline is 40 days. Hence, fast processing by the EiC and the Area Editors is of high importance.
- All submitted papers should be subjected to a plagiarism check. The tool available in Manuscript Central (iThenticate) will flag suspicious papers. However, a careful manual verification is needed. For example, a paper may be flagged because of an overlap with its conference version or the Ph.D. thesis of one of the authors or because the authors have uploaded the paper to arxiv, which are all usually not a reason for concern. Please also note that this tool may not be able to find all cases of plagiarism. So, the Editor and the Reviewers should still be encouraged to check the paper carefully in this regard.
- As EiC, you can reject papers that you deem to be out of the scope of your journal without consulting with reviewers. However, the rejection email should carefully explain why the paper is deemed to be out of scope. Also, in case of doubt, you may still want to consult with one of your Area Editors or Senior Editors.
- All papers that fall within the scope of the journal need at least two independent reviewers. The Editor (which could be the EiC, an Area Editor, a Senior Editor, or a

regular Editor) making the decision on the paper cannot be one of these reviewers. The Editor can provide an additional review, of course, but has to disclose that he/she is the author of the review.

- All papers entering the regular review process of ComSoc journals should receive at least **three** independent reviews. Two reviews are acceptable only in exceptional cases (e.g. "quick reject", non-responsive reviewer, etc.).

- Journals with large numbers of submissions find it useful to "quick reject" papers whose quality is clearly below the expectations of the journal. Quick reject decisions still need two independent reviews. In this case, it is convenient if the EiC or an Area Editor act as the Editor for the paper and two other members of the Editorial Board serve as reviewers. This category should be reserved only for clearly subpar papers such that short reviews are sufficient and reviewing the papers is not time consuming.

- Editors should report any form of suspected author misconduct (e.g. double submission, plagiarism, adding self-citations after acceptance of a paper, etc.) to the EiC. Neither the EiC nor the Editors should communicate their concerns to the authors. Instead, the EiC should collect all relevant evidence and report the case to the relevant ComSoc committee on author misconduct. They will provide further instructions to the EiC. See also: https://www.comsoc.org/publications/ieee-communications-society-policy-plagiarism-and-multiple-submissions

- Implement a process that ensures that the final files submitted by the authors of an accepted paper do not differ from the review version (minor changes such as fixing typos are ok). In particular, ensure that the authors do not add references to their own papers, do not shorten the paper to avoid paying overlength charges, and do not add additional author names. Examples of each of these behaviors have been observed in the past.

- All Editor appointments in ComSoc journals have term limits. The normal term is 36 months, of which the first 12 months are probational, and can be extended by another 24 months. This means the normal term of an Editor is 5 years but you have the opportunity to retire them after 36 months if they do not perform well (without having to deal with the awkwardness of an earlier forced retirement). These term limits should be strictly enforced, although there is some flexibility if needed (e.g. because the expertise of the Editor is difficult to replace). However, even in these cases, alternative solutions should be sought. If the Editor changes the position, e.g. is promoted from Editor to Area Editor, a new 5-year term starts.

EiC Transition

A smooth handoff from one EiC to his/her successor is crucial for the continuous success of a journal. The following guidelines will help in this regard.

- The outgoing EiC should arrange for a meeting with the incoming EiC (e.g. at the Globecom/ICC preceding the transition) and provide a detailed report regarding the operation of the journal and Manuscript Central and the performance of the current Editors.

- For a few months after the transition the previous EiC should be available for consultation and answer questions that his/her successor may have.

- Once the new EiC has been announced, the outgoing EiC should make all new Editor appointments in consultation with the new EiC.

Appendix

1. Sample Editor Invitation Email

Dear XXX,

I am pleased to formally invite you to join the Editorial Board of the IEEE Transactions on Communications (TCOM) as an Associate Editor, effective immediately. The standard term of the appointment is three years and can be renewed for another two years.

Your responsibility would be to handle papers mainly in the area of transmission systems (with a focus to be discussed with the Area Editor, YY). The average workload is about 15 papers per year, and the expectation is that you will be able to make a first decision on each paper after fewer than 90 days of the submission date. I will send you more information if you accept my invitation.

Please be aware that being an Editor is a time-consuming job that requires a strong commitment. If your other commitments may prevent you from dedicating a sufficient amount of time to TCOM, please don't accept this invitation (although I very much hope you will accept).

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

ZZ

2. Sample Editor Welcome Email

Dear XXX,

Welcome to the TCOM editorial board ! Now that you have formally become an Editor, I would like to let you know what my expectation for TCOM Editors are.

I am sure you will do an excellent job for TCOM. However, I still would like to inform you about what is important to me:

1) Quality of the review process:
- Each paper should be assigned to at least *3* reviewers. Once you have two negative reviews, it is ok to make a decision before the third review arrives (assuming you agree with the negative reviews).
- The Editor should read the paper and the reviews before making a decision.
- The decision letter should explain the decision in some detail (using just the template is generally not acceptable) and provide guidelines for the revision (especially if the reviews are contradictory).

2) Timeliness of the review process:
- Our goal is to have for each paper a (high quality and fair) decision after less than *90* days.
- To achieve this goal, please be proactive, assign reviewers immediately after receiving a new paper, and send personal emails to overdue reviewers (the automatic emails are easily ignored).

Our overall goal has to be to further improve the excellent reputation of TCOM and to provide an excellent service to our authors and readers.

You can find more detailed guidelines in the attached document. Please read it carefully and let me or your Area Editor know if you have any questions.

Please suggest 2-3 topics to your Area Editor for your editorial area designation which will be posted on the TCOM website and printed on its inside cover.

I am looking forward to working closely with you over next few years to achieve our goals. Thank you very much for volunteering your time and energy for this service to IEEE, COMSOC, and our technical community.

Best regards,

ZZ

3. Three Sample Performance Report Emails

#1

Dear XX:

I hope this email finds you well.

The purpose of this email is to provide you with some feedback regarding your performance as Editor for TCOM.

Over the last year, your average time for the first decision of the papers you handled was 72.5 days, which is outstanding.

I also looked at some of your decision letters. They are very detailed and they give a clear explanation for your decision and clear instructions for the revision, which is excellent. I can also see that you always try to find at least 3 reviewers for each paper.

I also noticed that you check papers with a minor revision decision in the second or third round yourself without sending them back to the reviewers, which is great, as it speeds up the process without compromising the quality.

In summary, you have done an excellent job! Please keep up the good work.

Best wishes,

YY

#2

Dear XX:

I hope this email finds you well.

The purpose of this email is to provide you with some feedback regarding your performance as Editor for TCOM.

Over the last year, your average time for the first decision of the papers you handled was 58.3 days, which is outstanding.

I also looked at some of your decision letters. While you usually provide some explanation for your decision and some instructions for the revision, please try to make the letters more detailed and more specific. The decision letter should clearly show that you read the paper and have formed an own opinion. Please don't forget that you are making the decision and the reviews are only an input.

I can also see that you always try to find at least 3 reviewers for each paper, which is great.

In summary, you have done an excellent job! Please keep up the good work. The only aspect that you could improve are the decision letters.

Best wishes,

YY

#3

Dear XX:

I hope this email finds you well.

The purpose of this email is to provide you with some feedback regarding your performance as Editor for TCOM.

Over the last year, your average time for the first decision of the papers you handled was 95.9 days. This is above our target of having a first decision on every paper after 90 days. However, all in all, I think your timeliness is fine and it seems you always take the appropriate measures if a reviewer does not come through. Maybe you can start sending personal reminder emails a bit earlier in order to get the average time down.

I also looked at some of your decision letters. They give a clear explanation for your decision and clear instructions for the revision, which is excellent. I can also see that you always try to find at least 3 reviewers for each paper.

You may want to consider checking papers with a minor revision decision in the second or third round yourself without sending them back to the reviewers, especially if the remaining issues are really minor. This speeds up the process without compromising the quality.

Overall, you have done an excellent job! Please keep up the good work.

Best wishes,

YY

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