Best Practices and Guidelines for Magazines

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A successful magazine demands great effort of many volunteers, particularly the editorial team consisting of editors and reviewers. After many years' successful operations for already successful magazines, IEEE Communications Society has taken initiative to develop the following best practices for magazines for the continuing success of its magazines.

Editorial Team

- Steering Committee (optional)
- Editor-in-Chief
- Associate Editor-in-Chief (AEiC)
- Senior Editors or Advisory Board (optional)
- Editors
- Guest Editors (GEs): a team appointed by the EiC for a special topic.

Steering Committee

Although this may not be necessary for current magazines, it is recommended to have one committee such as this to handle important issues for the strategic planning and search for leadership team (EiC and AEiC). It should include at least the Director of Magazines, the incumbent EiC and the immediate past EiC.

Editorial Leadership Selection

The success of a magazine heavily relies on the capability of the editorial leadership, namely, the EiC and the AEiC. Thus, it is crucial to select the right candidate who shall provide the leadership for the success of the magazine. If a magazine is newly initiated, then the choice of founding EiC should be carefully chosen. Typically, it would be the one who proposes the magazine.

Selection procedure and criteria for EiC may vary from magazine to magazine. The following procedure is recommended.
- A magazine shall have a steering committee consisting of at least the Director of Magazines (the Chair), the incumbent EiC and the immediate past EiC. If it does not have one, then the Director of Magazines, the incumbent EiC and the immediate past EiC becomes the default Steering Committee.
- The steering committee shall draft a call for EiC (CFE) at the beginning of the last year of the term of the incumbent EiC, stating the timeline, selection procedure, candidate qualification, and selection criteria.
- The steering committee shall publicize the CFE requesting for applications or nomination via the ComSoc news outlets such as the ComSoc publication webpage and mailing list.
- The candidate application shall include candidate statement, prior editorial experience, and updated CV. Recommendation letters are encouraged, but not required.

- After collecting all applications or nominations, the steering committee shall hold a meeting to discuss all candidates carefully, a ranked list with the most preferred as 1 is produced, and then the lowest sum of scores shall be used for the final selection. If a tie happens, the Director of Magazines, the incumbent EiC and the immediate EiC will rank it for the final selection.
- The finalist is submitted to the VP-Publications.
- The VP-Publications shall consult the publication council for the judgment whether the candidate is qualified as the EiC.
- Based on the feedback, the VP-Publications makes the final approval decision.

Since AEiCs help the EiC, acting as the role of EiC for many occasions, the selection of AEiCs is determined by incoming EiC. The number of AEiCs is up to 2, depending on the workload. The EiC is recommended to select the AEiCs with complementary expertise and knowledge. For example, if EiC is from academia, one of the AEiCs is recommended to be an expert from industries, and vice vesa. EiC selects candidate list of AEiCs, who must have editorial experiences acting as EiC and submits this list to the Director of Magazines. The Director of Magazines then consult the publication council and make the final approval decision.

Selection of GEs and Editors

The magazine leadership team, consisting of at least the EiC and AEiCs, shall develop the guideline for the selection of editors and guest editors. For a new magazine, it can start with experienced researchers who have prior editorial experience. For an established magazine, EiC could consult with reputed editors on board if needed. Qualification should include at least prior experience and strong research credential on specific topic or rich industrial practice. Editors or series editors, if necessary, should go through rigorous evaluation process based on the selection guideline. If a candidate is selected, EiC sends out the invitation along with the editor's guideline together with the expectation and workload, ensuring that the selected editor knows his/her obligation before accepting the editor position.

For guest editors (GEs), they are appointed to serve on a special topic. During the evaluation of the proposal for special topic, the qualification of GEs is assessed. The EiC shall make sure that GEs are highly qualified for the topic and the leading GE must have prior editorial experience. It is always recommended that one of the GEs have editorial experience with the magazine.

It is recommended that editorial board be geographically and demographically represented as much as possible while covering the topics of interest of the magazine.

It is recommended that the number of editors should be proportional to the workload. It is suggested that each editor handle at least 1.5 papers on average each month.

It is recommended that a small group of Editors is appointed as a SWAT team to handle papers that have been in the system for too long with no decision. They focus on only these "in trouble" papers on demand and get them a very prompt review with high quality and recommendation.

Editor's Training

Editor's training is very important for the timely handling papers with high efficiency. An editor, whether he/she is a new or an experienced editor for other publications, should be familiar with the magazine.

Editor's Guideline shall be developed for the magazine to provide the training, guidance and expectation in terms of selection of reviewers and workload. This document shall be posted on the magazine webpage and sent to the editor when he/she is invited for the appointment.

It is suggested that the EiC or AEiC hold a teleconference or a meeting with the recruited editors (including GEs), particularly those new editors who are not familiar with magazines of ComSoc, reviewing important guidelines for an editor and educating them with best practices for a responsible editor. This may offer opportunity for them to clarify their issues, which may save time later on.

It is recommended that editors have a good understanding of the review guideline from the PSPB that each accepted paper have received at least 2 solid independent reviews in order to make a sound and fair decision. Thus, it is recommended that at least 3 independent reviewers be solicited and confirmed. To save reviewer resource, it is also suggested that an editor not recruit more than 5 reviewers for a paper unless a previously invited reviewer is not responsive. In case that a paper only has two (solid) reviews when a decision has to be made, the editor is strongly recommended to add personal comments articulating the decision rationale.

It is recommended that a teleconference or a meeting be held annually for the EiC to gather feedback from editors for best practices and resolve issues encountered.

Guideline for the Selection of Reviewers

Timely high-quality reviews play a significant role in retaining the reputation for any publication. Although it is hard to train each individual reviewer, the magazine shall develop strategy to improve review quality.

The magazine web site shall have a weblink to provide reviewer guidance material. Editors should encourage all reviewers to read this material, especially if they are new reviewers. It is recommended that the reviewer's guideline be incorporated into the invitation letter.

It is suggested that the magazine develop a form of rewarding system to recognize the top reviewers for their exemplar services to the magazine.

Guideline for Editorial Decision

Editor recommendation usually needs to be approved by the EiC before sending out to the authors. Thus, the final decision is made by joint effort of EiC and editors.

It is recommended that editors make decision not based on majority rule, rather based on their own judgment. EiC shall ensure that editors exercise their judgment based on the detailed comments and their own expertise.

If the EiC does not agree with the recommendation of an editor, it is recommended that EiC first consult with the editor who made the editorial recommendation before contacting authors. Since both EiC and editors are working as a team, it is always better to act professionally and with due respect to each other.

It is suggested that EiC concentrate on the recommendation for papers with conflicting reviews or reviews without solid review details (e.g., short reviews).

Editor Term Limits

IEEE ComSoc has the following editor term limit policy for each editor position. A new editor is expected to have a roughly 6-month probationary period to determine whether the editor can and will be able to perform that role. If there are no issues, the initial term is for 3 years. At the discretion of the EiC and based on the performance, the term can be extended up to 2 years. After 5 years, the editor must have a minimum leave of 2 years from that position. There are variations between journals and magazines.

The magazine shall develop its own term limit under the confine of the above general guideline.

Steering committee membership, if any, shall not exceed 4-year term.

It is recommended that the EiC use 2+2 model. He/she is initially appointed for 2-year term. If the performance is judged excellent, a second 2-year term shall be extended. There is no extension beyond 4-year unless unexpected circumstance arises.

It is recommended that an editor (including senior editors) adopt 2+2 model. He/she is initially appointed for 2-year term. If his/her performance is good, then a second 2-year term can be extended. After 4-year service as an editor, he/she should stay away from the editorship (of the same rank) of the magazine for 2-year before eligible for a new application for the same position.

GEs do not have term limit.

Final Remark

The original document was drafted by Michael Fang, the Director of Magazines (2018-2020) in April 2018, reviewed by IEEE ComSoc Publication Council, and revised in October 2018.