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Staff Corner

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The newsletter is one of our section members' most valued assets. This result has shown up in all the section surveys I have seen during my six-year tenure with the Society of Actuaries (SOA). This Staff Corner will shed some light on how newsletters are produced. Let's open up the hood and check it out.

Several groups of people take part in this initiative:

- **Article authors.** SOA members and nonmembers who volunteer to write articles.

- **Newsletter editors.** Volunteers who solicit and peer-review the articles and provide feedback to authors and SOA staff.

- **SOA section staff partner.** The liaison between the section, the volunteer newsletter editor and the newsletter staff. This person oversees reputation risk management and offers guidance as needed.

- **SOA staff editor.** An in-house editor who guides the newsletters from copyediting to publication. This person is the gatekeeper of the newsletter.

- **SOA graphic designer.** The person responsible for design and layout of the newsletters. The graphic designer also ensures the quality of graphics and tables.

In chronological order, the newsletter process looks like this:

1. Authors write articles. Generally, either the newsletter editor reaches out to potential authors with a request for an article on a specific topic, or an author reaches out to the newsletter editor and offers to write an article on a given topic. In some cases, authors are asked to republish an article that is already written.

2. Newsletter volunteer editors peer-review articles. They assess their fit within the newsletter regarding quality and topic and provide feedback on the content of each article.[1] For example, the topic of an article may be a better fit for a different section than originally intended. In that case, that article is forwarded to the other section's newsletter editor.

After a few weeks of back-and-forth to firm up the content, the articles (along with author bios, head shots and figure and table source files) reach the staff partner. For a previously published article, the back-and-forth is replaced with a reach to the owner of the copyright for reprint permission.

3. The section staff partner reviews all the articles to assess whether there is any reputation risk regarding their content (e.g., self-advertising, lobbying or other pitfalls). This step sometimes takes place slightly later in the process.

4. The staff editor receives the finalized content and oversees copyediting for grammar and editorial style, as well as production of the newsletter. This is where the i's get dotted. The editor monitors the schedule, nudges volunteers as needed, and sends metadata[2] and copyright forms to the authors.

5. The staff editor and volunteer newsletter editor work together to address any challenges that go beyond punctuation. The newsletter editor answers the staff editor's questions directly or turns to the authors as needed. Common questions include, "Who should approach the coauthor to soften the tone of the conclusion, which is a bit too self-serving?" "Do we still have time for a last-minute announcement?" "Did anyone receive Jane Doe's article she promised us a while back?" "Should we keep that article for the next issue as it is not quite ready, and we have a lot of content already?" "Do we have head shots and authors'

names correctly aligned?" This back-and-forth can take time, but multiple pairs of eyes are key to the quality of the newsletter.

6. The staff graphic designer makes the content look great. The newsletter editor and authors review the page proofs for any typos and readability of the graphs, while the staff editor proofreads the full newsletter one more time. This is where loose ends are tied.

7. The staff editor sends the newsletter to the printer and/or digital vendor after green lights from all. Printing and shipping take place (as appropriate), the digital edition is created and, finally, the PDF version and links to the digital version are posted on the SOA website. This is the time to update the section's landing page with a link to the newsletter. For printed newsletters, readers at home receive their copies a few weeks later.

Toward step 5 of the current newsletter is when volunteer editors begin to gather articles for the next issue, whether it's the promise of an article or articles that are already in hand. Then the process begins all over again.

Want to join the fun? We are always looking for editors and authors to improve our content. ■

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ENDNOTES

1 For some newsletters, the volunteer authors and volunteer editors are blended. For example, *Taxing Times* has a large group of newsletter editors who peer-review and cross-check every statement of every author (there are lawyers in the group).

2 Metadata includes topics, country of relevance, and keywords for each article. Topics and country of relevance are filters on the SOA website and help get readers to the content faster. Keywords are additional hints for search-engine optimization.