

Book Editing 101

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Have you ever thought that you might create a great book—if only you had the time to write it? Are you an expert in your field with valuable insights to disseminate? Consider collaborating to write or edit a book.

The following are lessons learned from my experience editing *Building Partnerships in the Americas: A Guide for Global Health Workers*, published in 2013.

Inception. It starts with an idea. For this book, I was approached by the editor in chief of the Dartmouth College Press to edit a collection of essays for health professionals and students seeking to engage in health-related work in Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. The idea does not have to arise from an editor, however—SGIM members have written and edited books with numerous publishers, and Springer brings representatives to the national SGIM meeting every year. The book should fill an existing gap or niche. Ask yourself what is already published on this topic and what your work will contribute to the literature. What insights or experience do you bring to the endeavor? From my experience leading groups of college and medical students to Nicaragua, I was aware that cultural and ethical preparation is essential and that there was no book available to meet the needs of potential volunteers to Latin America.

Feasibility. As a clinician-educator, I had some experience writing articles and textbook chapters but had never seriously thought about editing a book. I needed to consider carefully the focus, energy, and time

required to achieve what I promised to deliver. Having multiple contributors distributes the workload and enriches the content by including diverse perspectives. It also requires that the editor, who is responsible for delivering the final product, trust the authors to complete their work on time. I had to recruit and obtain commitments from a diverse and busy group of chapter authors. This anthology was a true collaborative effort between me and 16 others in the field—a form of “building partnerships” similar to the book itself. The contributors were recruited through personal contacts and listserves, including two colleagues from the Society.

Proposal and contract. Once a robust team of authors is assembled, the author develops a book proposal (akin to a grant proposal), which outlines the content and themes for the book. The Press offered me a book contract based on the proposal. Contracts vary. Payment to the editor or author may be in the form of a lump sum or a portion of the royalties. Although the publisher ultimately owns the work, the contract may allow for personal academic use of the book. Many academic institutions require permission to do “outside” work—your department or division chief can assist you in understanding the rules that apply to your home institution.

Writing and editing. The editor is responsible for managing the project, although sometimes the publisher will assist in this. I developed the chapter template and timeline for completion and sent it to each chapter author. One of the real joys of this project was the close collab-

oration with physicians with diverse experiences building programs in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. The essayists also include a dentist, an anthropologist, and a sociologist as well as physicians from the countries described. It was a challenge to ask the chapter authors to write more or less “on spec” and on time, but they were uniformly responsive. I edited early drafts of chapters and returned them to the authors for revisions. In addition to my role as editor, I co-authored a chapter on Nicaragua. I was also responsible for the anthology’s introduction, which served to tie the chapters together into a unified and coherent book. Once completed, the publisher sent the manuscript for peer review to a physician, an anthropologist, and a health educator who offered constructive criticism. Integration of these suggestions led to another round of revisions. The editor in chief and production department at the University Press of New England (the publisher for Dartmouth College Press) played a key role in ensuring basic uniformity in writing and design across the chapters. I developed a great appreciation for how the publisher transformed a raw manuscript into a compelling book.

Publication. Book publishing can take over a year. This book started with an idea in 2010, required two years of manuscript preparation, began production in spring 2012, and was published a year later. Depending on the publisher, there may be a print run, print-on-demand, and

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an e-book. My publisher is now creating e-book “shorts” of individual chapters (country specific) that can be purchased by readers. Authors may have input into the cover design as well. I was especially pleased that we were able to use a photograph from Shoot 4 Change, a nonprofit organization that seeks to raise awareness of social issues throughout the world.

Sharing your work. We had a festive book launch event in Boston in fall 2013 that most of the authors attended. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet each other in person and celebrate the book’s publication with friends and readers. It is worthwhile to share your experience with colleagues and encourage them to take on book projects of their own.

The biggest reward in seeing *Building Partnerships in the Americas* in print is knowing that professionals and global health volunteers now have an easily accessible resource for understanding health care in the cultural, political, and historical context of the country where they will be working. This foundation will improve their effectiveness and enrich their experience. **SGIM**