

What is your budget? Are you self-funding, crowdfunding, selling subscriptions? Under what conditions will you have to cancel your project? You don't have to publicize all the details of your business plan. But you definitely need to have a business plan.

A BUSINESS PLAN

Figure out where you'll announce your call. This could include some combination of online market listings like Duotrope and The Submission Grinder, as well as Facebook groups, Discords, or mailing lists. Consider how widely you want your call shared—and understand that good opportunities will be discussed by authors. So will hilariously badly written guidelines. Decide how you're going to manage your submissions (a portal, an email inbox) and whether you'll have slush readers. A lot of publishers have a presence on social media or in community spaces. Lurk or join some of these publisher networks, see what has (and hasn't) worked in the past, and ask for advice.

HOW TO CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS WITHOUT ANNOYING WRITERS

INTRODUCTION

So, you want to publish a new magazine or anthology. That's great!

This advice is intended for new editors/publishers, especially those who want to focus on science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Those genres have a rich short fiction ecosystem, various funding models, and strong communities of authors, readers, and publishers.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Get a general idea of what your corner of publishing looks like. Make sure that you understand industry standards for posting open calls, evaluating manuscripts, and drafting contracts.

Do write clear guidelines. You're in charge; you get to set your desired word count and subgenres, whether you accept reprints or multiple submissions. Do let authors know if there are vibes you're aiming for—or hard sells. Do give authors some idea of when they can expect a response. (Bonus points for sticking to

SUBMISSION GUIDELINE DO'S

Set realistic expectations for your contributors—and yourself! Publication schedule, formats, production, and distribution channels are some of the basics. Also consider how you will distribute contributor copies and pay authors—and how those two decisions in particular might impact your ability to publish international authors.

SET EXPECTATIONS

And keep Yog's Law in mind: Money flows to the writer. Don't plan on raising publishing funds from authors via service or submission fees.

Projects fail. But if they fail gracefully, you the publisher can maintain good will. That will come in very handy when you launch your next venture.

AUTHOR NETWORKS

Authors talk to each other. Be aware that some will not tolerate certain problems or practices (late payment, missed deadlines, generative AI cover art, rights grabs, public screeds targeting authors, etc.) Accept that, sometimes, professional bridges may be burned and move on gracefully. Your best reputational defense is having an overall good reputation; that takes time and a positive track record.

Remember that author networks can work to your benefit. Authors talk about good experiences. If you treat them well, you'll have even more people eager to work with you on future projects.

What is your schedule for responding to submissions? As you read, waiting for the end of the submission window, sending acceptances first and then rejections? Are you going to respond to every submission? (Recommended. But if you only plan to respond to accepted stories, include a time after which authors can assume rejection.) If you are paying well.

RESPONSES

Don't reinvent the wheel. Divergence from industry standards should be done thoughtfully and with purpose. Don't tie up authors' work for too long. If you expect your evaluation process will take more than a couple months, consider allowing simultaneous submissions. Don't underestimate the eventual size of your slush pile—especially if you're

SUBMISSION GUIDELINE DON'TS

it.) Do give them an idea of a publication timeline. (Bonus points for announcing when future submission windows are likely to open.)

publicize author names until you have a signed contract in hand. Protect your authors' privacy.

WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG

Something is going to go wrong with your project. I don't know what it is, but I'm sure it will happen. Authors understand that shit happens. The real question is how you deal with it.

Communication is key. Authors deserve to know what's going on. If a project will be delayed, *tell them*. (You may also need to update other people—campaign backers, folks with preorders, donors, etc.—but it's a nice gesture to let your contributors know first.) There's a big difference between a project that posts updates on delays and a project that appears dead.

If you won't be able to publish, release authors from their contracts early and in writing. (Authors will appreciate not having to wait until the rights reversion clause kicks in.)

Authors (should) expect edits on accepted stories. These typically fall into the category of copy editing, applying a house style, or offering line editing suggestions to make a passage flow more smoothly. Generally, these edits should be communicated with the author who can approve or decline changes. This is an opportunity for dialog as the editor and author try to make the story as strong as possible.

EDITS

Don't give generalized writing advice in rejections. Some authors will skim over it entirely; others will ruminate or feel annoyed. Offering meaningful story critiques is a substantial time commitment. Unless you're really committed to that as part of your process, I recommend embracing simple form rejections.

requesting a rewrite, be clear about chances of acceptance, which changes you consider non-negotiable, and so forth.

CONTRACTS

Spend some time looking at contracts from comparable markets or model contracts (sfwa.org is a place to start). Try to avoid nonstandard clauses or a rights grab. (Are you going to publish an audio book? If not, you don't need audio rights.) Take one or more steps to avoid surprises: post your contract publicly, describe terms in your submission guidelines, stick to industry standards. If authors offer feedback on the contract, consider their asks. Remember that the contract is a business agreement, meant to delineate what happens when all goes well *and* offer protections if all does not go according to plan.

PUBLIC BEHAVIOR

Don't snark on social media or in other public spaces. Yes, your slush pile will probably include some real doozies. No, authors don't need to be shamed in public (or see others shamed and wonder if they're next). Don't