

***AuthorAid:***  
a project to open access of under-represented contributors to  
scholarly publications

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Collaborators at the *Journal of Public Health Policy*, the Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research (CCGHR), and Knowledgeview Ltd. propose to create a program of developmental editing assistance—***AuthorAid***—for inexperienced and “would-be” authors, principally from developing countries, who want to publish their research and policy writing in widely read journals. Developmental editing is the process of turning preliminary findings or ideas into publishable manuscripts.

### **The Problem**

Research and policy debates about how to improve population health too often exclude the voices and insights of those closest to the greatest problems. The health of developing world populations compares badly to that of industrial world populations. Investments to improve health in developing countries, where most of the world’s people reside, are small compared to what is spent to improve health in high-income countries. In its 1993 World Development Report, the World Bank focused global attention on *health* spending inequities, and their consequences for health and development.<sup>5</sup> The Global Forum for Health Research has followed up earlier efforts to relate inequities in spending for *health research* to population health and development<sup>6, 7</sup>. Its reports trace the inadequate flow of research funding for health problems occurring in developing countries.<sup>8</sup> The Commission for Health Research on Development and others have emphasized building national health research capacities. Finally, there is new attention to the limited opportunities that exist for health researchers from low- and middle-income settings to present their work.<sup>9</sup>

A small but significant part of the inequity manifests itself in the field of scientific publishing, where the bulk of what is published in widely read scientific journals, including articles about health in developing countries, is authored by writers associated with institutions in industrialized countries. For potential authors working in health programs or laboratories far from elite scientific or academic institutions, even if their practice, observations, or studies might contribute to improving public health, the disincentives and obstacles to publication in widely read peer-reviewed journals, indexed in Medline, are immense. These authors often lack experience writing for scientific or policy audiences, even if they can use a library or the internet to peruse what now gets published; lack resources to attend international meetings where they might make contacts, seek informal advice, and build confidence to submit articles; and lack time to make sense of journals’ editorial conventions and standards—and, as is often required, to do so in English.

The greatest obstacle to publication for many would be contributors to global health debates, is the appropriately rigorous review and selection process used by peer-reviewed journals. Most of these journals are published in industrial countries and edited by men based at institutions in these countries. A review of the latest Citation Index reveals no developing country journal among the most influential, ranked by the frequency with which they are cited in the scientific literature.<sup>10</sup>

## The Proposal

Developmental editing seems a luxury that most authors do without and only appreciate after the experience of working with a fine editor. Writing for peer-reviewed, academic journals is an accepted part of the academic environment in higher income settings, and something students privileged to study in these environments may learn from mentors, or by trial and error. For would-be contributors to Medline-indexed journals from developing countries, such editorial assistance is likely to make the difference between rejection and acceptance by a peer-reviewed journal. Especially in lower income countries, potential mentors have too little time to help their young colleagues edit manuscripts for publication in competitive journals—they are simply overwhelmed with responsibilities. We propose a four-part project to bring more developmental editing assistance to authors seeking to publish in the widely read, peer-reviewed journals:

- Reach out to find the authors in developing world public health programs and institutions with good ideas and/or results to publish, but insufficient experience to be likely to succeed without assistance.
- Engage experienced researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who have published frequently in widely read journals (chiefly those who have retired from major institutional responsibilities) to serve as mentors and developmental editors.
- Triage requests from “would-be authors” and assign and link them to appropriate mentors.
- Assemble a roster of journals that subscribe to sustain *AuthorAid* so that they can benefit from better submissions from authors who are working directly with public health challenges in developing countries.

## Work plan

- 1) During year one, we would design each element of *AuthorAid* in consultation with colleagues and a small advisory board of developing world public health leaders, journal editors, and, information technology specialists publishers worldwide. Next we would prepare an addition to *JPHP*'s website as well as the web site of the CCGHR to describe how to use *AuthorAid* and to solicit users once the process is activated. We would then reach out to organizations and colleagues to alert the world to the launch of *AuthorAid*.
- 2) Before completing step 1, we would begin to assemble a diverse panel of mentor/developmental editors to cover many regions of the world and many domains of research and policy. In this context, we would explore the feasibility of adding language capabilities beyond English to support this process. We would determine the number and

time commitment of these mentors that would be needed to launch *AuthorAid*. We propose, in the future, to pay a small annual retainer or stipend for ongoing participation.

- 3) In year two, we will activate the web-based triage and linking process and start connecting “would-be authors” who have promising ideas, results, or manuscripts with appropriate mentor/developmental editors.
- 4) During operational years two, three, and four, we will maintain careful records about each author request and how it is handled by *AuthorAid*, including a description of how the edited manuscript is received when submitted to *JPHP* or other journals. Do articles produced by the *AuthorAid* process seem to be well received by journals? We will alert and query other journals to *AuthorAid* and seek constructive suggestions, particularly from those to which an *AuthorAid* author, in consultation with the mentor/developmental editor, has submitted a manuscript.

In the next few months, the collaborators will seek funds from foundations, governments, and international organizations to test the concept. We will also seek additional collaborators.

If results suggest that we have significantly increased publication of *AuthorAid* authors in widely read journals, we will undertake a campaign to have other journals subscribe to sustaining *AuthorAid*. We will also seek future funding from organizations and foundations committed to improving public health in developing countries.

### The Collaborators

The Journal of Public Health Policy, Inc. [www.JournalPublicHealthPolicy.org](http://www.JournalPublicHealthPolicy.org) has published the global quarterly, *Journal of Public Health Policy*, since 1980. Phyllis Freeman and Anthony Robbins, its editors since 2003, proposed this collaboration to our Canadian colleague, Jerry Spiegel who extended the partnership to include the Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research.

The Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research [www.ccghr.ca](http://www.ccghr.ca), created originally as an informal network<sup>1</sup>, is a newly-established organization that links global health researchers, people actively engaged in applying research to improve global health and organizations interested in funding health research.

Knowledgeview Ltd., a UK-based corporation [www.KnowledgeView.co.uk](http://www.KnowledgeView.co.uk) has worked extensively with clients to find, retrieve and present relevant information on the web, and to encourage “knowledge communities” that reinforce collaboration to advance knowledge and its use. They currently work under a large grant from the European Community with Templeton College, Oxford.

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- <sup>5</sup> World Bank. *World Development Report 1993: Investing in Health*. (England): Oxford University Press (1993).
- <sup>6</sup> Commission on Health Research for Development. *Health Research: Essential Link to Equity in Development*. (England): Oxford University Press (1990).
- <sup>7</sup> World Health Organization. *Investing in Health Research and Development: Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Health Research Relating to Future Intervention Options*. (Geneva): World Health Organization (1996).
- <sup>8</sup> See: Global forum for Health Research, The 10/90 Report on Health Research 1999, Geneva, 1999 and many updates since then. The full list of reports is posted at <http://www.GlobalForumHealthResearch.org>.
- <sup>9</sup> Keiser J, Utzinger J, Tanner M, Singer BH. Representation of authors and editors from countries with different human development indexes in the leading literature on tropical medicine: survey of current evidence. *BMJ* 2004. 328:1229-1232.
- <sup>10</sup> ISI Citation Index, <http://www.isinet.com/>, accessed 4 September 2004
- <sup>11</sup> Spiegel JM, Labonte R, Hatcher-Roberts J, Girard J, Neufeld V. Tackling the 10-90 gap: A Report from Canada. *Lancet*. 2003. 362, 9387(Sept.13):917-918.