

Maintaining and promoting editorial proficiency in the life sciences

From the President

The results are in! Thanks to all of you who responded to our first-ever membership survey in May. You may be wondering: If BELS is celebrating its 30th year, why is this the first-ever membership survey? Since its inception, BELS has primarily been a certification body, with application and registration fees for in-person exams comprising the foundation of our financial base. As you can guess, the pandemic and the associated canceling of in-person events quickly revealed that that financial model was not sustainable. Luckily, the Certification Examination Development

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The BELS Letter

Karen Stanwood, ELS
(with Eevee)
Managing Editor



Alex Rudie
Publications Coordinator

From the President

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Committee, led by Naomi Ruff, was able to finalize and launch a computer-based version of the ELS exam by October 2020. It was an enormous undertaking, and we are grateful to the entire team of volunteers who worked to make it happen. During that same time, we realized that BELS should focus more on its members and their needs to make membership more valuable. To that end, we developed the survey. Of our 501 members, 150 (30%) completed the survey.

One of the most interesting results was related to the question: “What would make membership more valuable to you?” The top two results were ‘more collaboration with other organizations’ (55%) and ‘more engagement through events, email discussions, etc.’ (46%). Collaboration and engagement are the hallmarks of a strong member organization, not just a certifying body. Based on these results, our Membership and Marketing Committee will be creating action items and new initiatives to address what our members really want and need from BELS. Email **your** ideas to the committee chair, Karen Stanwood, at kstanwood@slackinc.com.

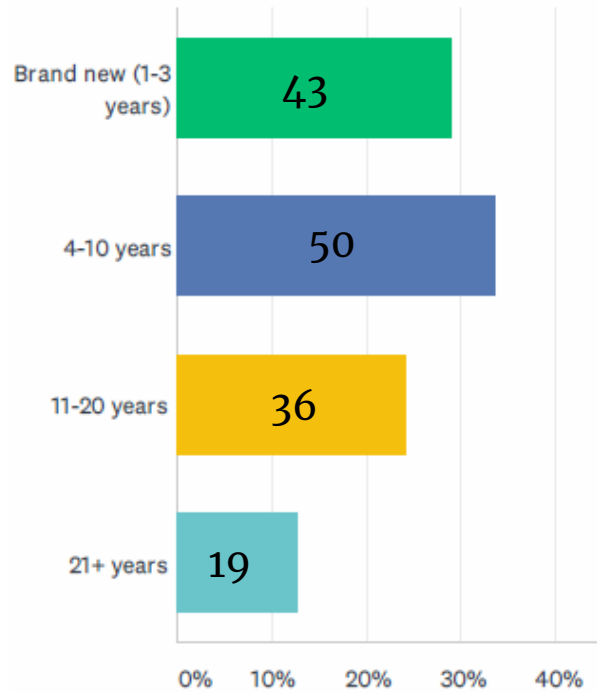
The survey also revealed an expected result: Most of us need more time to be able to volunteer for a professional organization like BELS. While we can’t create more time for you, we can provide micro-volunteering opportunities for those who are interested in helping but aren’t able to commit to serving on a committee for a year or more. Examples include suggesting an event topic and speaker, reviewing event evaluations and recommending improvements, designing a new featured member questionnaire, and updating the BELS Wikipedia page. Please email us at info@bels.org if you’re interested in helping with any of these micro-volunteering tasks.

As you review the results of our first membership survey, I’m sure you’ll have thoughts and feedback. Please share them with us! We’re happy to hear from you at any time via email at info@bels.org.

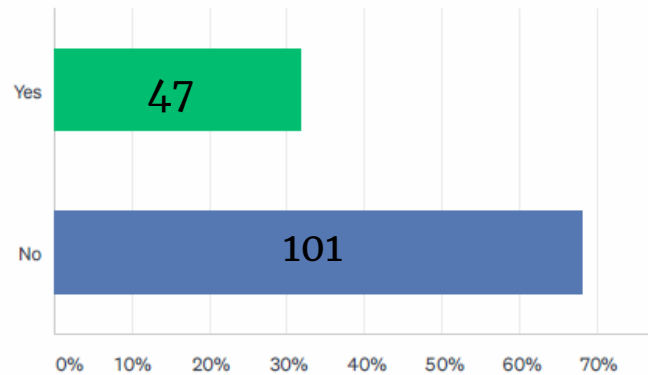
*Kristina Wasson-Blader, PhD, ELS
BELS President*

Member Survey Results

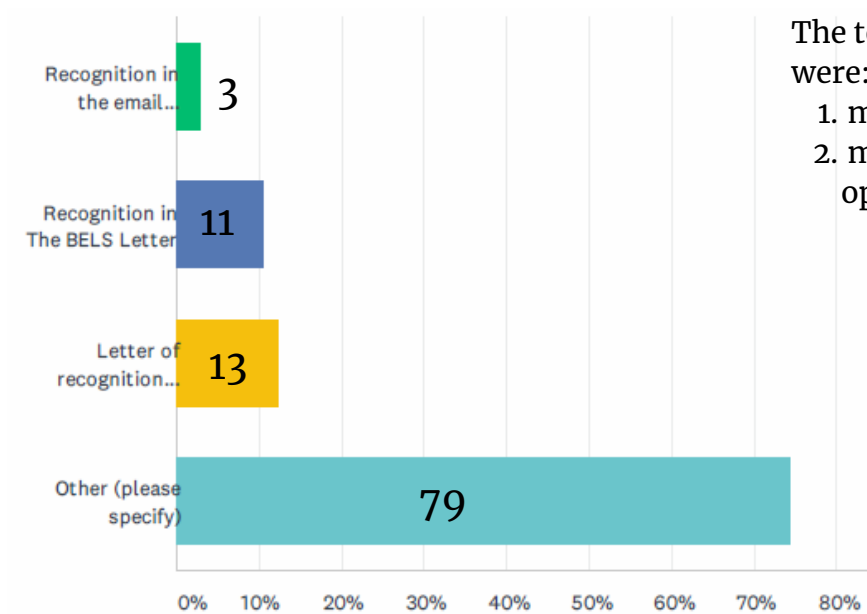
How long have you been a BELS member?



Have you ever volunteered with BELS?



If no, what might encourage you to volunteer?



The top two write-in responses were:

1. more time (29%) and
2. more information about opportunities (20%)

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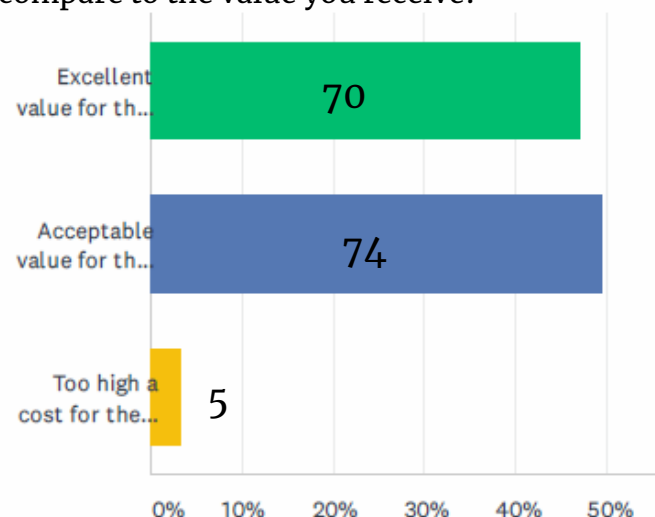
Member Survey Results

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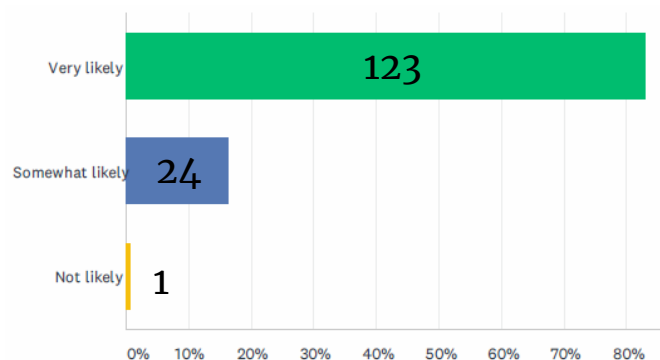
Please indicate your level of use/participation in the following BELS member benefits:

	I DID NOT KNOW ABOUT THIS BENEFIT.	I KNOW ABOUT THIS BENEFIT BUT HAVEN'T USED IT.	I KNOW ABOUT THIS BENEFIT AND HAVE USED IT OCCASIONALLY.	I KNOW ABOUT THIS BENEFIT AND USE IT OFTEN.
30% discount on a single license of PerfectIt	36.67% 55	52.67% 79	5.33% 8	5.33% 8
25% discount on Stedman's products	46.67% 70	47.33% 71	6.00% 9	0.00% 0
20% discount on University of Chicago Press products	47.65% 71	42.95% 64	8.05% 12	1.34% 2
Members-only events	6.67% 10	50.00% 75	33.33% 50	10.00% 15
Email discussion list	15.33% 23	29.33% 44	38.00% 57	17.33% 26
Ability to post in the freelance directory	12.00% 18	54.67% 82	22.67% 34	10.67% 16
Access to Job Board	16.67% 25	44.67% 67	31.33% 47	7.33% 11

How does the membership cost (\$45/year) compare to the value you receive?



How likely are you to continue renewing your membership with BELS?

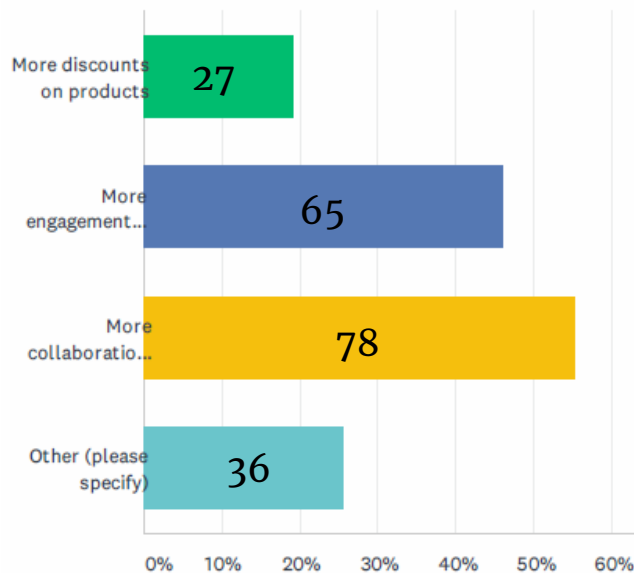


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Member Survey Results

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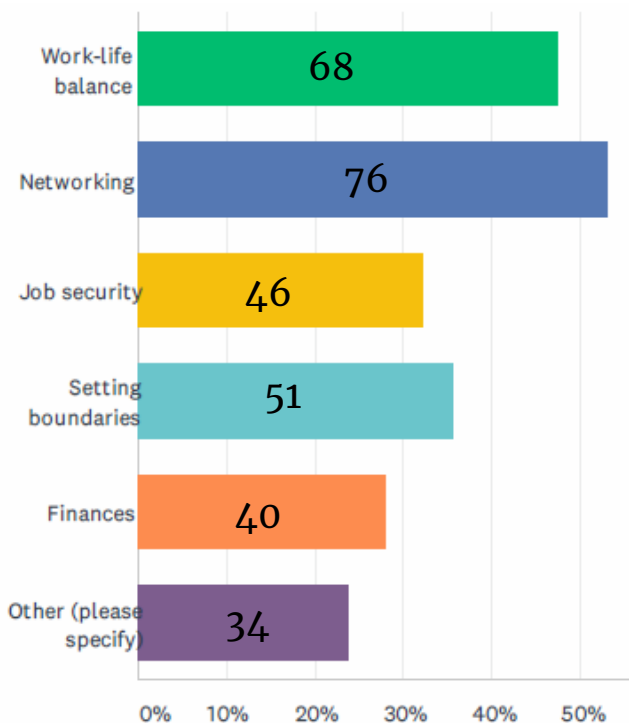
What would make membership more valuable to you?



The top two write-in responses were:

1. more professional development opportunities (17%) and
2. greater visibility/understanding of BELS in the industry (14%)

What industry-related topics are of greatest interest to you right now?



The top two write-in responses were:

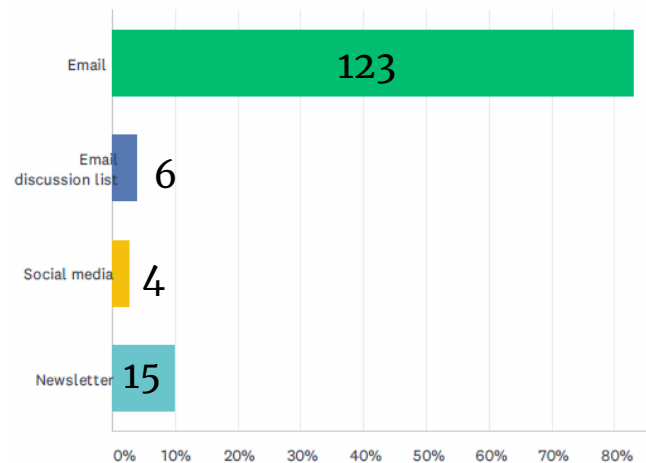
1. professional development (26%) and
2. technical and related skills (24%)

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Member Survey Results

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How do you prefer to hear from BELS?



How often do you look at/read the following features in *The BELS Letter*?

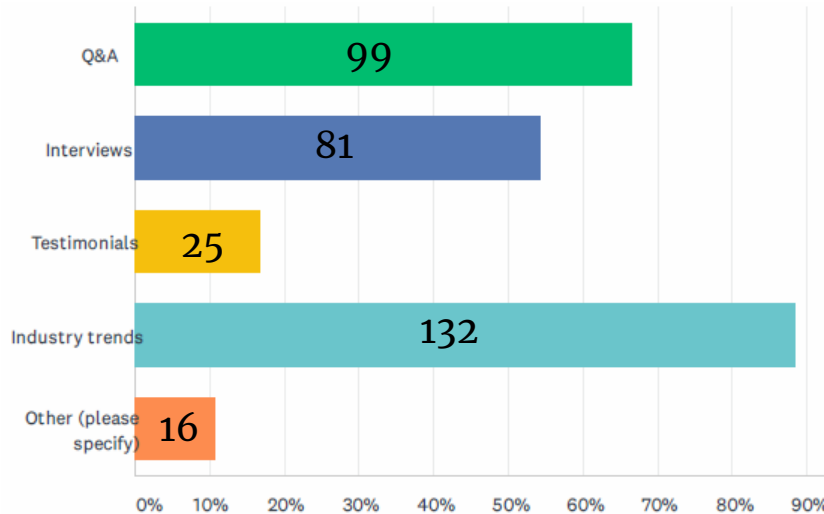
	EVERY ISSUE	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER
President's Letter	50.00% 73	39.73% 58	10.27% 15
Ask the Editors	54.79% 80	41.10% 60	4.11% 6
BELS Gallery	41.26% 59	40.56% 58	18.18% 26
Featured Members	42.47% 62	47.26% 69	10.27% 15
New Certified Editors	39.58% 57	46.53% 67	13.89% 20

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Member Survey Results

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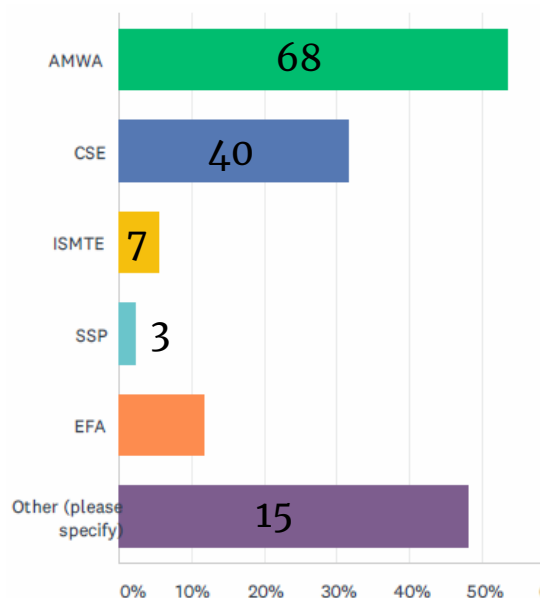
What type of content would you like to see in *The BELS Letter*?



The top write-in response was:

1. editing issues, tips and tricks (50%)

What other organizations are you involved in or a member of?



The top two write-in responses (tied) were:

1. the European Medical Writers Association (EMWA) (27%) and
2. the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP) (27%)

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Member Survey Results

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Any additional comments or feedback on BELS membership?

Below is a sampling of the write-in comments.

Might be good to have summaries of actions taken by the Board of Directors from time to time.

The ELS is acknowledged to be a gold standard in the field and I have a deep appreciation of the organization for your efforts to maintain these high standards. Thanks for all you do.

I would participate in a membership effort focused on informing and encouraging young people of color to pursue STEM careers and science editing! I do a lot of work with international development agencies; it is important to me that not all editing is done by, well, let's face it: "old white people," like me. Every scientist and technical writer should have an opportunity to mark up each others' writing :) !

I've always thought BELS could have more impact than it does. I don't know how to achieve that but would like to see it happen.

BELS certification was a novelty in 1993 and a way to distinguish myself from other writers/editors. The ELS designation is better known now, but ignorance about the role of medical writers/editors is still widespread, even among those who hire us. We should be proud of our skills and eagerly promote them.

I think BELS is a valuable resource and there are many good points to being a member. It's well recognized in the scientific editing world. However, I do think more can be done with this platform and its reach. I'm looking forward to seeing BELS continue to grow and transform with industry changes. I hope to contribute in some capacity to this worthwhile organization in the future.

I would be interested in more interaction with other BELS members either through an annual meeting (once it is safe to meet in person again) or local/regional gatherings.

BELS is a great organization and I am happy I joined. The profession is so diversified but I would love to see BELS work to enhance recognition of the editor profession as much as possible.

I can tell that BELS volunteers are putting more energy to updating the BELS image/newsletter/website through new logo and seeking input from members, which is great. Keep up the good work.

BELS is great, and I am a proud member. The dedication of the volunteers that steer this group is without peer, and the efforts made over the past couple of years to reach out and gel the community have been wonderful. Even so, a continued challenge has been that members of BELS and related organizations (e.g., AMWA, CSE, etc.) know what the ELS is, but it would be incredibly valuable if more industry professionals who hire medical and scientific editors knew of it (and set it as required or preferred for hiring). My clients typically do not have an in-house staff, so they are not editors hiring editors, they are scientists or business development personnel looking for a professional to solve their problem. In these and similar situations, certifications have the potential to be valuable currency, but they have to be known and understood (to some degree) to be valued. If these professionals knew what BELS and the ELS is and used the ELS as a criterion for engaging editorial professionals, the ELS would be a more valuable certification. Even a simple social media campaign across LinkedIn letting folks in industry (and academia too, I suppose) know what the ELS is, what it takes to have the designation, etc., would be incredibly valuable to the BELS community.

I really appreciated the immediate feedback after completing the BELS exam last month, and I received my certificate and pin within a few days of the exam—it was all so quick and efficient!!

BELS Featured Members



BELS
Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

MEMBER PROFILE

Eleanor Mayfield, ELS

Freelance writer-editor

ELM Communications

Year of ELS certification:

1998

Grammar pet peeve:

incorrect subject-verb
agreement and
use of 'impact' as a verb



BELS
Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

MEMBER PROFILE

Lisa Kisner, CQIA, ELS, CAE

Communications Specialist

Los Alamos National Laboratory


Year of ELS certification:

2012

Grammar pet peeve:

when authors use 'that'
instead of 'who'; even in song
lyrics, I find myself correcting
it when I sing along

BELS Featured Members



Stephen

BELS
Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

MEMBER PROFILE

Stephen Bublitz, ELS

Freelance Editor
Great Pyr Reviews

Year of ELS certification:
2019

Grammar pet peeve:
too many to list



Mary

BELS
Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

MEMBER PROFILE

Mary E. Archer, ELS

Senior Editor
Evoke Group

Year of ELS certification:
2002

Grammar pet peeve:
overuse of the word 'literally';
either something happened,
or it didn't

Officers

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Executive Director

The Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) was founded in 1991 to evaluate the proficiency of manuscript editors in the life sciences and to award credentials similar to those obtainable in other professions.

Potential employers and clients of manuscript editors usually have no objective way to assess the proficiency of editors. For their part, editors are frustrated by the difficulty of demonstrating their ability. That is why both employers and editors so often resort to personal references or ad hoc tests, not always with satisfactory results. The need for an objective test of editorial skill has long been recognized.

To meet that need, BELS developed a process for testing and evaluating proficiency in editing in the life sciences. The Board administers two examinations—one for certification and one for diplomate status. The examinations, written by senior life-science editors assisted by testing experts, focus on the principles and practices of scientific editing in English.