



Influence Editorials: Conduct an Editorial Board Meeting

Community members, policymakers, donors, and many other audiences that we work to communicate with often read and are influenced by editorials. A favorable editorial can help you make progress toward your goals, while one that supports your opposition's viewpoint can impede your efforts.

It's important to note that an editorial is different from an op-ed. Editorials are written by staff at the newspaper and express the paper's opinion on an issue. Op-eds may be written by staff or outside contributors and express solely the author's opinion.

The following offers tips on requesting, preparing for and conducting an editorial board meeting, as well as basic information about how a newspaper's editorial page generally operates.

What is an editorial board?

An editorial board is a group of individuals at a newspaper that determine what the paper's position will be on an issue and pen editorials expressing those views. In a nutshell, the editorial board is comprised of the writers and editors of the editorial page.

From one newspaper to another, editorial pages vary greatly in their number of staff. A large paper such as the *Los Angeles Times* has several editorial writers with beats, similar to news beat reporters, along with an editorial page editor, that make up the board. Smaller papers may have only one editorial writer and an editorial page editor that comprise the board.

What is an editorial board meeting?

Meeting with the editorial board of a local or regional newspaper provides you with the opportunity to get across your point of view to the people that determine what the newspaper's opinion will be about a particular issue. During the meeting, you sit with the editorial board members, provide information on an issue and ask the paper to consider writing an editorial in support of your position.

Who you meet with will depend both on the size of the newspaper and the scope and priority of your issue. At a larger newspaper, you might meet just with the writer that covers your specific issue area. That writer could also be joined by one or more interested colleagues. At a smaller paper, you're more likely to meet with the entire board because the board itself is smaller and its members are less likely to have assigned issue areas.

When should we request an editorial board meeting?

There are several times when it may be useful to request an editorial board meeting, including:

- When you are launching a campaign or new program and wish to ask the newspaper to editorialize in support of your efforts.
- When you release a report or otherwise have new information that you wish to share with the editorial board. (In this case, simply sending a letter and a copy of the report may suffice.) However, if the new information is extremely newsworthy and leads to a necessary call to action for policymakers or community members, you can meet with the board to ask them to call for relevant decision makers to act.
- After a newspaper prints one or more editorials opposing your position, in order to share your side of the story with the board.

In general, an editorial board meeting gives you a chance to influence the board's opinions in your favor or, if the paper seems likely to oppose your viewpoint, gives you the opportunity to try to move the coverage of your issue in a more favorable direction.

What's the best way to request an editorial board meeting?

In preparation for scheduling the meeting, research editorial coverage to see if they have editorialized on your issues in the past. (If they have editorialized recently, and are on your side, you might not need to schedule a meeting right now, unless you have something new to add to the story. In this situation, it would be more appropriate to send a letter to the editor expressing your support for the coverage.)

Based upon your research, decide the one to four people (depending on the issue) who should serve as the spokespeople at the meeting. These may be staff from your organization, members of a coalition, etc. It's a good idea to assemble a team that will all have the same message but can offer slightly different perspectives. For example, you might include an advocate, a family member and a policy expert, depending on the issue.

Contact the editorial page with a letter sent via e-mail, fax or mail. If you can find out the name of the person who writes on your issue, address the letter to him or her. If you're unable to do this, address the letter to the editorial page editor. In general, the person who writes on your issue will take the lead in scheduling the meeting and will help to shepherd you through the process.

When asking for a meeting, briefly outline your position, the people who will attend, and suggest a timeframe for the meeting, such as a few days of a particular week. Be sure to include any information about why the meeting is timely, such as an upcoming event, anniversary, vote on a piece of legislation, etc.

How should we prepare for the meeting?

Once the meeting is secured, ask if you should send materials in advance or bring them with you. A background packet should include appropriate press releases, fact sheets, and op-eds that relate to your issue. You may also include past editorials on the issue by the paper that you are meeting with.

It's a good idea for your spokespeople to talk prior to the meeting about how it will go, who will speak, and what will be said. You should also try to anticipate challenging questions, as some board members may play the role of devil's advocate. Each participant will want to plan to speak for three to five minutes. It's best if everyone is in agreement on key messages to use and what they are asking for.

What happens during the meeting?

When you go to meet with the editorial board, one participant should act as the moderator. The moderator will outline the reason for the meeting, introduce himself/herself and ask other participants to briefly introduce themselves. Each participant will speak for three to five minutes on his or her perspective on the issue at hand. The moderator will then ask for questions and direct them to the appropriate member of the team. Make sure to conclude by asking if there is any more information that you can provide. Finally, close the meeting by asking the editorial board to do something. This ask will depend on the situation. If the newspaper has not editorialized on your issue, you may ask them to editorialize in support of your position. If they've written editorials in the past that oppose your position, you might ask them to consider the new information that you have provided when writing future editorials.

What should we do after the meeting?

Follow up after the meeting with a letter thanking the editorial board members that you met with for their time and restating your position. Include any materials that you promised to send.

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