Meeting the Editorial Board

Suggestions for groups seeking a meeting with their local paper's editorial board (compiled from recommendations of members of the National Conference of Editorial Writers):

First, make sure it's the editorial board you need to talk to. If you want to discuss the newspaper's news coverage, then you should talk to the editor or managing editor. If you hope to influence the paper's editorial position, the editorial board is the right venue.

Call the editorial page editor and ask for a meeting. An e-mail request may work as well, with contact information -- and a brief (3-4 paragraphs) summary of why the group wants to meet with the editorial board; what the group hopes to get out of the meeting; and -- most important -- why the editorial board and the public should care about this issue, particularly at this given time.

Be politely persistent, recognizing that editorial writers often are swamped with requests. If the editorial page editor doesn't call you back right away, give her or him a day or two. At some papers, there is only one person writing editorials, facing extreme time constraints; he or she may want to meet with your group but simply does not have time at the moment.

Be flexible as far as your time availability.

Limit the number of attendees. Two to four people should be enough. Large groups seldom are disciplined enough to present information as clearly as smaller groups. Sheer numbers won't impress the editors. Ask what an acceptable size of your delegation is. Provide in advance the names and relevance of attendees. Don't bring more people than the board has been led to expect.

Have a specific policy issue or issues as your topic. The chances are the editors know your organization and its goals and no purpose will be served by seeking to "educate" them about your organization. Their concern is issues. If your objective is to make your organization and its resources known to the editors, write a letter to the editorial page editor with specific details showing how you can be helpful in dealing with future issues.

Don't attempt to use an editorial board as part of the red carpet treatment for the national leader of your organization who happens to be in town (some organizational handbooks suggest this), unless there is a specific current policy matter on your agenda.

Bring a printed summary of your key points with enough copies for all editorial board members or submit it ahead of time -- no more than two pages.

Know the newspaper's position on your issue. Be armed not only with facts and figures but also an understanding of the logic of the editorial page's present position. Expect to be challenged, even if the paper generally agrees with your stance.

If the board does not agree to meet, ask to speak to or meet with the editorial writer who deals with the topic in which you are interested. That may be just as productive.

Avoid calling on Friday: It's a daily newspaper editor's busiest day, preparing pages for the next three days' papers. You'll get a less hurried hearing if you call early in the week.

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