



TASB Advocacy Tool Kit: Editorial Board Meetings

The Editorial Board Meeting

The editorial board meeting is a vital component of any advocacy campaign, and consists of a meeting between newspaper staff and a person or group that wishes to communicate an important issue to the publication.

As one of the primary sources of news in most communities, local newspapers determine what the public reads about important issues and how they perceive those making news.

Community groups, candidates for public office, and others regularly meet with the editorial boards of newspapers in order to offer their point of view on issues important to them. An editorial board meeting may include the editorial page editor, an editorial writer, a staff reporter, the managing editor, or even the publisher or owner. Editorial staff often take information and opinions gleaned from such meetings into consideration when deciding what editorial stances to take and even what stories to cover.

Setting Up an Editorial Board Meeting

First of all, determine why it is that you want to meet with your local newspaper. Clearly define the issue of importance and develop message points that best illustrate your position and why you are advocating it.

Next, find contact information for your local newspaper, which may be done through TASB GR contact tools available on www.gr.tasb.org. Call the newspaper's editorial department and ask for the editorial page editor or the person responsible for scheduling editorial board meetings.

You will then have about one minute to deliver a concise and compelling overview of who you are, which group you represent, (briefly) what your group stands for, and what it is you want to share with the editorial board. If the editor feels that the issue you are calling in reference to is newsworthy and timely, and that you are providing a fresh perspective or new information on the subject, he or she may schedule a time for an editorial board meeting.

Keep in mind that smaller newspapers may not have large editorial staff, and that you will most likely meet with an editorial page editor and a staff writer.

Preparing Advocates for a Meeting

Now that the meeting is scheduled, select a small group (no more than four) to present your position to the editorial staff. Editorial boards are not impressed by large groups, and do not appreciate visitors that have little to add. When developing the list for your group, try to include school board members, administrators or superintendents that are well-versed in the subject matter and bring a different area of expertise to the meeting.

Gather articles that have appeared in the targeted newspaper and distribute them to the group attending the meeting. Past articles and editorials are good indicators of the kind of reception you will get from newspaper staff and provides context for your upcoming discussion. Also, distribute talking points, the TASB Advocacy Agenda, and other relevant background materials to your group.

During the Meeting

Choose one participant to act as the spokesperson. The spokesperson outlines the format of the meeting, introduces himself/herself and either asks other members of the team to briefly introduce themselves or delivers brief introductions for the group. The spokesperson then outlines the group's position in a brief presentation (10-15 minutes).

Some groups choose to have each participant address a separate point pertaining to the group's position. This style of meeting may take a little more preparation. Each member needs to be disciplined about keeping their piece to about five minutes and focusing on their designated point.

Pass out information packets, and give editors time to look through them. Examples of relevant background materials include: fact sheets, opinion editorials, letters to the editor, articles, editorials, press releases, frequently asked questions, and biography pages.

Have points that you want to make, regardless of what questions you are asked. If you encounter an editorial board that is in opposition to your position, remain poised. Present your facts in a professional manner and allow your passion and earnestness to show.

Also remember that you are always talking on the record and that anything you say may end up in the paper the next day.

In closing the meeting ask for specific actions and/or responses from the newspaper. Try to ensure that your point was made and offer to clarify any areas of confusion.

If you require any assistance setting up or preparing for an editorial board meeting, contact Dax Gonzalez at TASB Governmental Relations: (512) 478-4044 or dax.gonzalez@tasb.org.