

EDITORIAL BOARD MEETING

What is an editorial and what is an editorial board?

An editorial expresses a newspaper's opinion on a certain topic or issue. Unlike op-eds or opinion columns, editorials express the publication's opinion as an institution rather than the opinion of a specific author.

The editorial board is a group of journalists who collectively write and manage these pieces to express the paper's opinions. Editorial boards can weigh in on hyperlocal issues such as city ordinances, national issues such as the federal budget, and anything in between. The board is comprised of writers, editors, and in some cases, newspaper executives. At larger papers, editorial staff can include multiple writers who cover specific beats. At smaller papers, the editorial board might include only two people—an editor and a writer.

Note, the editorial and news sections of a paper are separate and distinct. They each have their own staff and neither influences the other's coverage. The news section is expected to be unbiased and objective while the editorial section is not.

When and why should you meet with an editorial board?

Meeting with an editorial board gives you an opportunity to influence the paper's opinion of your campaign. Hopefully, your meeting will result in positive editorial coverage, but just because a media outlet grants a meeting doesn't mean they will write a favorable editorial or, in fact, that they'll write an editorial at all. At a minimum, it will still allow you to present your campaign's point of view.

What to do before you request a meeting

- ▶ **Research the newspaper.** Before making your request, learn as much as possible about how the newspaper has covered the issue previously. Try to answer the following questions:
 - ▶ Has this issue been covered by the news team in the past? If so, by whom?
 - ▶ Were any of your advocates interviewed or quoted in previous coverage? What about from the opposition?
 - ▶ Have they published any opinion or editorial pieces on this issue? If so, were they favorable or unfavorable to your point of view?
 - ▶ If they were favorable, try to find specific points they addressed that you could reinforce.
 - ▶ If they were unfavorable, try to find specific points that you could effectively rebut.
- ▶ **Hone your messaging.** Once you've completed this background work, review your own messaging and talking points. It is important to use your topline messages consistently. For messaging resources on different issues visit: <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/get-involved/>. Open the toolkit for the issue you're interested in, click on "resources" and scroll down to the "messaging" section.
- ▶ **Look for the best time to make the ask.** Finding time for an editorial board convening can be difficult. It is important to make your ask at the right moment to increase your chances of securing a meeting. Some factors to consider:
 - ▶ Your campaign launch date--a meeting could occur right before or right after.
 - ▶ The release of new research or data that supports your campaign.
 - ▶ Achievement of a significant milestone toward success (ex. legislation passing a committee, a significant endorsement, or financial investment).

Requesting a meeting

- ▶ **Find contact information.** Newspapers will usually have contact information for their editorial board available on their website. If not, you can call the newspaper and request to speak to an editor. If you have difficulty finding media contacts feel free to reach out to Voices for Healthy Kids media advocacy manager at voicesforhealthykids@heart.org for assistance.
- ▶ **Draft request.** Use the research you conducted to inform your call or request letter. Link or point to previous coverage when appropriate.
- ▶ **Include a list of participants.** Include in your letter who from your campaign would attend the meeting. It is best to provide a diverse group of spokespeople to highlight different facets of your campaign, including members of the community who are most affected by the issues. For example, an editorial meeting on Healthy Kids Meals could include a campaign/organizational leader, a nutritionist or pediatrician, a parent, and/or a supportive restaurant owner.
- ▶ **A draft request letter is below:**

Dear *[Name of Editorial Writer or Editor]*:

My name is *[Name]*. I am the *[Title]* of *[Campaign Name]*, a coalition devoted to *[XXX]*. I am writing to request a meeting with *[XXX]* paper's editorial board to discuss the importance of ensuring that restaurants provide healthy choices on their kids' meals. Specifically, we'd like to explain why we think *[Newspaper Name]* should support passage of *[Bill/Ordinance Number]*, legislation that would *[Specific Information on Impact of Legislation]*.

[Include Paragraph On History of Local Effort and Current Standing of Any Legislation or Ordinance]

[About one-third of children and teens in the U.S. eat fast food on a given day.](#) That's why it's so important that restaurants offer healthy food and beverage options—especially for children. *[Bill/Ordinance Number]* would help make that happen by *[Specific Information on Impact of Legislation]*.

A growing number of places have already passed similar legislation—cities like [Baltimore](#) and [Wilmington](#) as well as statewide in [California](#). *[Bill/Ordinance Number]* would build on this momentum. Even the [American Beverage Association](#) is encouraging restaurants to make their kids meals healthier by taking sodas and other sugary drinks off the menus. We are confident that *[State/City]* will be next.

The American Heart Association recommends that kids drink no more than 1 sugary drink such as soda, sports drinks, or fruit drinks with added sugar a week. However, [children today are consuming as much as ten times this recommended limit.](#) That's why we need to pass *[Bill/Ordinance Number]*.

Also attending the meeting on behalf of our coalition would be: *[Names & Titles]*

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. I will follow up with you via phone to schedule a meeting.

Sincerely,

Preparing for your meeting

- ▶ **Be prepared.** Come to the meeting prepared with an agenda, and make sure to run through it a few times before. The agenda can follow a few different formats:
 - ▶ Each spokesperson speaks briefly followed by a group discussion with the editorial board.
 - ▶ The campaign/organizational leader serves as a moderator and comes prepared with questions to engage the other spokespeople and editorial board members.
- ▶ **Be cautious.** It is important to keep in mind that everything said during an editorial board meeting is on the record.
- ▶ **Be flexible.** While it's important to have something prepared, it is possible that the board will have their own idea for how the meeting should run.
- ▶ **Be persistent.** At the close of the meeting, ask the editor if she or he finds the issue interesting and if it could be something for their editorial pages. Keep in mind that the board might need additional time to make a decision. If so, include this question in your follow-up.

Follow-up and next steps

- ▶ **Say thank you.** Follow up with the editorial board as quickly as possible--ideally within 24 hours--and thank them for their time. Be sure to include a recap of the conversation and highlight any key takeaways. You can also use this opportunity to share links to materials handed out in the meeting or any additional resources you'd like them to have.
- ▶ **Follow up when appropriate.** Follow up with editorial board members when appropriate as your campaign continues to reach new milestones and/or the paper covers the issue area.