

How to plan and execute an editorial board meeting¹

Most daily newspapers and some weeklies schedule meetings between their editorial staff and invited guests to explore an issue and determine whether it is of sufficient importance to the community to justify the newspaper taking a position and supporting it on the editorial page. Meetings do not always result in an editorial; sometimes, the visitors will be invited to submit a guest editorial or a letter to the editor in lieu of a stand-alone editorial. Even if an editorial does not immediately result, editorial board meetings are an excellent way to bring attention to issues and to build relationships with newspaper editors and staff.

The format of an editorial board meeting can vary widely, depending on the issue and on the newspaper itself. Some meetings are relaxed and informal with one or two editorial writers talking with the guests over coffee. Others are large with numerous reporters and editors attending. Newspapers' approaches to these meetings vary greatly, but the purpose is the same: to evaluate the issue and decide if it warrants editorial support, and, if so, what position the newspaper should take. Therefore, an editorial board meeting is a serious undertaking.

Requesting an Editorial Board Meeting

Begin by e-mailing the editorial page editor or the editor-in-chief. Ask for an editorial board meeting to discuss, for example, trail and active transportation issues in your community. Editors are interested in timely issues and how their readers may be affected.

Your goals are:

- To garner the support of the newspaper's editorial board as part of the campaign to generate attention to issues related to the community's active transportation infrastructure;
- To communicate the key points behind your policy and legislative agenda; and
- To encourage editorial page support for active transportation issues

Roles and Preparation

After brief introductions, the group that requested the meeting will usually give a brief (10 minutes or so) presentation. Questions and answers will follow and are usually the longer portion of the meeting. Editorial board meetings rarely last more than an hour.

Ideally, have two or three people from your organization participate. Consider bringing two key members of your organization with different roles. You might also include a key volunteer or local business representative who is a recognized supporter of your project(s). Choose one participant to lead the meeting. It is best to rehearse the meeting and decide who will respond to what kinds of questions ahead of time.

Tips on Participants' Roles:

Leader of the group

- Reviews the reasons for requesting the meeting;
- Discusses the importance of active transportation; and
- Introduces key messages.

¹ Adapted from PRRX. www.txla.org/html/toolkit/press/II_editboard.html

Other participants

- Should make the issues come alive by providing examples and anecdotes illustrating the importance of active transportation infrastructure; and
- Develop questions that can serve as a guide to developing anecdotes. For instance:
 - *How do trails encourage people to start bicycling?*
 - *What would be the specific benefits of more federal funding for active transportation in our community?*

“Policy Expert”

One person should be designated as the legislative or policy expert and be prepared to answer questions about the current state of policies that most affect active transportation.

Note: One person should also be designated to take notes and to follow up on any questions that could not be answered in the meeting and other requests made by the editorial board.

Your editorial board meeting should emphasize your key messages!

Following the Meeting

Immediately following the meeting, send a handwritten thank-you note to each of the editors and reporters who attended the meeting. If nothing appears in the paper in a week or two, send an e-mail or place a follow-up call to ascertain whether they will be writing an editorial supporting your issue. If not, you can ask why and also whether they would be willing to print a guest editorial on the same issues.