

Working with Editorial Writers

Editorial writers have a strong effect on the opinions of their readers. Therefore, by convincing editorial writers to take an editorial position on your issue, you could potentially influence thousands of others. It is to your benefit to find the editors in your area who are most likely to cover your issues and meet with them whenever you have a specific issue that is appropriate for editorial coverage. The same rules for working with reporters apply to editorial writers; however, you'll want to make sure you:

1. Come prepared with attractive written materials, brochures, fact sheets, etc. on your organization and the issues you specifically want to get across in your meeting.
2. Be prepared to prove why your issues are important to their audience. Use facts, figures and mention academics and researchers, preferably from their local area or media market, who support your position.

WORKING WITH EDITORIAL BOARDS

Some things to know about meeting with editorial boards:

- Larger newspapers often have editorial boards that share editorial responsibilities. Like individual editorial writers, these boards are prominent opinion-makers. However, editorial board meetings are more formal than editorial writer meetings. Also, the editorial board only gets together at regularly scheduled intervals, so your meeting will be less spontaneous and the topics you discuss will be more general than with an individual editorial writer. With the exception of the two differences just mentioned, meetings with editorial boards follow the same protocol as meetings with editorial writers.
- When you call for an appointment, let the secretary know who will attend and what you wish to discuss.
- If you go with a group, keep it small and select. Invite a few community leaders from other organizations who share your viewpoint, or ask individuals who can speak to a specific fact of the issue, i.e. educators, scientists, workers in the community affected by legislation, religious leaders, etc. Diversity within your group will add to the credibility of your message.
- Before the meeting, know what the paper has written on your subject in the past. This is part of good preparation and common courtesy.
- Meet among yourselves first to decide who will say what. You should decide who will be the spokesperson for the group and make sure you introduce all those attending. Set an agenda that all will follow so that it flows smoothly and logically.
- Make your case early in the meeting, and then let the editorial writers ask questions. Be prepared: not all of the questions will seem friendly, even if the editors are predisposed to agreeing with you. Remember that the purpose of the meeting is to provide the writer with information about your issue so that he or she will consider doing an editorial from your point of view.
- Take written materials, fact sheets and other supporting documents with you to the meeting. It's likely the writer will want to ponder some of your material later, as well as gather information from the other side.

- Never stretch the facts or speculate on points you are not sure of. Just as with hard news reporters and elected officials, your credibility is your most precious asset. Guard against false statements, even made innocently. It's better to say, "I don't know" and then follow up later with the answer
- Leave the name and telephone number of your group in case the paper has questions later.
- When the meeting is over, let the editorial writer know you think the issue is an important one and worthy of an editorial from the newspaper. Ask directly for the paper's support. Even if the editorial writer plans to write an editorial contrary to your viewpoint, thank the editor for his or her time.
- Follow up with a letter thanking the editorial writer or the entire editorial board for the meeting with you. Add any information you promised and offer again to make yourself or members of your group available for additional information.
- If the editorial writer intends to write an editorial contrary to your position, ask to write an op-ed piece to run the same day.
- If your meeting involved a group of people, don't discuss how the meeting went at the newspaper's office- you never know who will hear you. Take your group to a restaurant, coffee shop, or one of the group's offices to download thoughts and who is going to follow-up on which points.

EDITORIAL MEETING LETTER REQUEST

Often times, you may need to introduce yourself and request a meeting with the editorial writer or the editorial board through a formal request letter.

Feel free to use this sample letter as a guide, though the information is outdated:

SAMPLE EDITORIAL MEETING REQUEST LETTER

March 31, 2008

Mr. David Seago
Editorial Page Editor
The News Tribune,
Tacoma, WA

Dear Mr. Seago,

I and other Washington State conservationists recently visited Washington, DC to participate in an Alaska wilderness outreach event sponsored by Alaska Wilderness League and other conservation organizations. We were there for about a week and had the opportunity to learn about current critical issues facing Arctic Alaskan ecosystems as the Bush Administration moves frenetically forward with leasing for oil and gas exploration and development in the area. While there, we were able to meet with the offices of both of our state's Senators and several House members concerning the areas of the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas, Teshekpuk Lake, and the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. We would like to meet with you at your convenience to discuss these matters and the various issues surrounding them.

Alaska's Arctic ecosystems have very close and concrete biological ties to our state. We see them most visibly in the form of migratory birds and whales as they winter in or pass through our area. The 3 areas we discussed are all of special ecological significance and in need of stronger protections than they currently have.

In particular, we discussed a bill which is expected to be introduced very soon, and a similar measure which has been introduced in the Senate by Senator Kerry, of which, both Senators Cantwell and Murray are

cosponsors. Both would call for a “time out” on oil exploration and development activities in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas, thereby providing time for essential research regarding their ecosystems and the wildlife at stake before any further oil activity occurs there. These seas hold invaluable populations of walrus, whales, and the only polar bears in American territory, and provide critical subsistence resources for the native peoples of the area. The Bush Administration recently auctioned off large tracts within the Chukchi Sea to Shell and other multinational oil companies.

The second issue we discussed was Teshekpuk Lake in the western Arctic and its associated habitats which have been recognized for decades as warranting protection. The area provides critical breeding and molting habitats for numerous bird species, many of which grace Washington State at one time or another each year. If this area is opened to oil exploration and development, many species we see in Washington State, such as ducks, geese, loons, and shorebirds will likely be negatively impacted. The Bush Administration may soon lift the protections for this special area in favor of oil and gas development.

In addition, we discussed the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. As this has been a very contentious issue much in the media for decades, I’m sure you are quite familiar with it, but we would be happy to discuss it as well and provide any addition information you would like.

I and the 2 other Washingtonians, who also made the trip to Washington, DC would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues in greater detail. We will be representing the Alaska Coalition of Washington. Please contact me to set up this meeting. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME
YOUR ORGANIZATION
YOUR CONTACT INFO

Representing:

List of groups