

HOW TO SET UP AN EDITORIAL BOARD MEETING

A meeting with the editorial board of local newspapers or with managers at television and radio stations can help advocates get out the facts about what people with disabilities, family members, and providers have at stake in the budget debate. If we can state our point of view to the people making the decisions about what is news and what this campaign means, then we get a chance to inoculate the opposition's views and set the stage for our success.

NEWSPAPERS

Community groups, candidates for public office, business-interest groups and others regularly meet with the editorial board of newspapers in order to offer their point of view on issues important to them. The paper then, in turn, takes this information into consideration when deciding what editorial stances to take and even what stories to cover. Such a meeting can give us a chance to influence some editors' opinions -or at least soften the blows if the paper is against us. An editorial board meeting on this issue may include the editorial page editor, an editorial writer and, possibly, a political or labor reporter.

To set up a meeting with your newspaper:

- Decide the two to four people who should represent the disability community in the meeting.
- People with disabilities, family members, providers;
- Community leaders;
- Local disability agency.

- The presence of a prominent member of the community can help to underscore the importance of disability issues.

- Call the editorial page editor for an appointment. Most newspaper editors will know exactly what you are talking about when you request a visit with the editorial board. Generally editors like to meet between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Smaller newspaper may not have an editorial board, and the editor may want to meet with you along with a reporter.

- Prepare all the participants representing the disability community with background materials and any articles written by the newspaper on your subject.

Making the presentation:

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- Often, one participant acts as the spokesperson. The spokesperson outlines the format of the meeting, introduces himself / herself and asks other members of the team to briefly introduce themselves. The spokesperson then outlines the group's position in a 15 -20 minute presentation. The spokesperson will then ask for questions and direct them to the appropriate members of the team.
- 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 5 -10 minutes and focusing on their designated point.
- Pass out background packets, and give editors time to look through them:
 - Fact sheets;
 - Favorable op-eds, letters to the editor and articles that have appeared in other publications.
- BE PREPARED for the meeting. Have points that you want to make, regardless of what questions you are asked. If you encounter an institution sentiment, don't get mad. Just have your facts ready and present them in a professional manner.
- Remember that you are always talking on the record
- In closing the meeting ask for specific actions and/or responses from the newspaper:
 - Consider the facts when forming editorial stances;
 - Allow us to submit an op-ed article for their consideration.
- The meeting should last 30-45 minutes.
- Follow-up with a letter or phone call thanking the editorial page editor for his or her time, and restating your position.

TELEVISION & RADIO

A meeting with a television or radio station serves the same purpose as the newspaper visit and the format is much the same. Some differences may be:

- The general manager of a television station is usually the chief "editorial" officer of the station. Each station also has a program manager and a public affairs director who control editorial feedback and talk-shows. Each station also has a news director who decides what is worthy of coverage. Radio stations often have a news director who fills all of the above roles.
- Television general managers and radio station managers are generally not used to getting requests for "editorial board visits" per se. Ask instead to meet with the manager and perhaps the news and program directors in order to discuss with them your position on this subject.
- Most television people will want to meet with you at the beginning or end of the day.
- Small television or radio stations may want to do an interview with you right there, on the spot. Be prepared.
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