

# Meeting with an Editorial Board

One of the most effective means of using your scientific or technical expertise for the public good is by acting as a resource to your local media. Meeting with an editorial board (the group of editors who write editorials stating their publication's position on various issues) can result in more accurate and more frequent science coverage—coverage that can educate both the public and policymakers. Here are some frequently asked questions about how to set up and conduct a meeting with an editorial board.

## What do editorial boards want to cover?

Most editorials recommend a plan of action, call public attention to an issue or program, or critique the actions of governments or public officials.

## Why would they want to meet with me?

Editorial boards want to meet with responsible people who have something to say on a timely topic that is relevant to the

community. You should position yourself as an expert on the issue, and clearly explain why it's important for their readership.

## How do I arrange a meeting?

Write a letter to the editorial board (the contact information should be on the editorial page) that concisely describes the issue and its relevancy; your point of view; and the names, expertise, and—if you are comfortable with it—institutional or professional affiliations of the people you intend to bring to the meeting with you. The letter should not be any longer than two-thirds of a page.

Editorial boards are busy, so you'll want to follow up on your letter with a phone call or email to confirm whether the board, or an individual member, is interested in meeting with you. If they say they do not have the capacity for an in-person meeting, suggest a brief conference call.

As an example, here is an actual request the Union of Concerned Scientists sent to an editorial board asking the paper

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Whether at their office or a local coffee shop, meeting with your local paper's editors can be an effective way to get critical issues covered in the local media.

to expose attempts to sideline science by now-former Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt. (Successfully building public pressure to call out the many ways in which Pruitt was a dangerous choice to lead the EPA is also an example of the impact a collective of advocacy efforts, public education, and media exposure can have!):

*Good afternoon. President Trump has nominated Scott Pruitt to lead the Environmental Protection Agency. In Tennessee, a group of 56 scientists, economists, and health professionals have sent a letter to Senators Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker asking them to vote against Pruitt's confirmation, saying that he would undermine the vital scientific and public health work of the agency. You can find their letter here: [link]*

*I wanted to offer your editorial board the opportunity to meet next week with some of the signers of this letter so they can talk with you all about the threat Pruitt would pose as EPA administrator. In a closely divided Senate, the votes of Tennessee's senators will be crucial.*

*Thank you and have a great weekend.*

## What makes for a successful meeting?

Editorial board meetings tend to last no more than 30 to 45 minutes. In planning your agenda, allow time for a collaborative discussion that invites board members to offer their take on the issue.

Follow this basic outline:

1. Very brief introductions and clearly stated purpose of the meeting
2. Brief description of the issue and what their readership needs to know about it
3. Explanation of why it matters, with a few validating details or facts. Be sure your sources are publicly accessible.
4. Concrete “ask”: the specific topic you would like to see covered in the publication

5. Question or discussion prompt that invites the board's reaction
6. Restatement of the ask
7. Appreciation for the board's time, offer of additional resources, and promise to follow up

If possible, tie your presentation to something newsworthy or of high local interest—ideally a story that the publication recently covered or one it knows is approaching.

## How should I prepare for the meeting?

- Collect concise and understandable background information—but no more than four or five different pieces of information (any more than that and they may not read any of it)
- Create an agenda you will stick to. If you are bringing other people to the meeting, decide who will deliver what parts of your overarching message, and designate a team leader who will open the meeting and help your group stay on track.
- Ask yourself “What does this have to do with my local community, institutions, and policymakers right now?” and brainstorm as many angles as possible, then decide which are the highest priorities to mention in the meeting

## What should I do after the meeting?

Following up with any additional information you offered to provide, along with a thank-you note, will increase your odds of getting covered.

## What if the meeting is cancelled because of late-breaking news?

Don't give up. Write a letter to the editor using the information you compiled, or invite the board to attend a public meeting on the topic.