

# Guide to Op-Ed Placement, Letters to the Editor and Editorial Board Meetings

## Editorial Placement

The issue of the uninsured is great fodder for an op-ed or a letter to the editor. What follows are specific suggestions for meeting with your paper's editorial board and getting an op-ed or letter to the editor placed.

### :: OPINION-EDITORIALS

The op-ed section of a newspaper allows relevant experts or individuals to share their opinions about timely issues. Different groups have different perspectives on how to solve the problem of the uninsured, and those perspectives can be represented in the op-eds they draft. For ideas on op-eds, visit [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org) and read the latest news on the issue of health care coverage. You can also sign up to receive the news digest via e-mail.

### The following pointers will help you get your op-ed piece published:

- **Use *Cover the Uninsured* as a news hook.** Tying your piece to the events you are planning will increase your chance of getting published.
- **Keep it brief.** Newspapers have limited space, and editors don't have the time to cut your piece down to size. In general, 750 to 800 words will do.
- **Make a single point.** You only have 750 to 800 words. Make one point clearly and persuasively.
- **Avoid jargon.** Simple language ensures that all readers, even non-experts, can understand your point. For example, don't use acronyms or technical language.
- **Use examples.** Illustrations, anecdotes and personal stories are persuasive tools. They help explain and bring complicated issues to life.
- **Make a specific recommendation.** This is an opinion piece. State your opinion on how to improve matters.
- **Draw the reader in.** Your first paragraph should draw the reader in by using a dramatic vignette or a well-stated argument.
- **End with a bang.** Your final paragraph is as important as your opening paragraph. Be sure to summarize your argument in one strong final paragraph.

- **Follow up.** Most op-ed editors will respond to you within a week. If you haven't heard in that time frame or if your piece is particularly time sensitive, you can make one follow-up phone call to be sure it was received and ask about its status.

Make sure your article is double-spaced with wide margins. List your name, address, phone, fax and e-mail contact information at the top of the piece. Find out from your local paper the best way to send an op-ed. Instructions for submitting an op-ed are usually at the bottom of the page where they appear or on the paper's Web site. Some papers like them mailed, others prefer faxes, while others favor e-mails.

## Letter to the Editor

The letters to the editor section of a newspaper is one of the most widely read sections and offers you a good way to express your thoughts about the issue of the uninsured and the cost of coverage. Your letter should be in response to an editorial, op-ed or article that has already run in the newspaper.

### These tips will help:

- **Link to your planned activities.** Editors are interested in printing letters that relate to events happening in the community.
- **Make one clear argument.** The piece should be in favor of or critical of a particular position taken by the paper or described in an article.
- **Be specific.** The letter should focus on a specific issue that was raised in an article or opinion piece.
- **Cite the article.** Be sure to mention the title and date of the article you're responding to in one of your first two sentences. For example "Dear Editor, Your recent coverage of the issue of the uninsured ("Healthcare in America," May 13, 2005) was a thoughtful piece..."
- **Be brief.** Generally, four to six paragraphs are ideal—about 300-400 words. If you can't contain the piece to that length, consider asking someone to help you edit it or write a 750-word op-ed instead.
- **Follow up.** If you have sent your letter to the editor and haven't heard anything within a week, make a follow-up call to check on its status. Be aware that editors receive hundreds of letters and may not respond to you immediately.

You must include your name, address and daytime phone number in your letter. Instructions for submitting a letter to the editor are usually at the bottom of the page where they appear or on the paper's Web site. Find out from your local paper the best way to send a letter. Some papers like them mailed, others prefer faxes, while others favor e-mails.

## Editorial Board Meetings

Nearly every newspaper has an Editorial Board that convenes regularly to discuss their views on various news issues. This is how the paper arrives at the positions it takes on the paper's Editorial page. You should consider requesting a meeting with the Editorial Board to present your views on health care coverage and its effect on the community.

### The following tips will help you secure a successful Editorial Board meeting:

- **Identify your key points.** Editorial Board meetings are formal and structured. You need to identify the four or five key points you want to make, and think about what information you will use to support those points – facts from your state or community, personal anecdotes, etc. You should also think about what you would like a resulting editorial to include and make sure you provide this information.
- **Select spokespersons.** Editorial Board meetings typically involve no more than four spokespersons who are joined by members of the paper's editorial page staff (typically from two to eight people). You should identify spokespersons who bring diverse perspectives, have credibility on the issue and can personalize the facts.
- **Contact the newspaper.** Call your newspaper's editorial page and ask when Editorial Board meetings are conducted and how you can request a meeting. Most papers have standard times and procedures. You will probably need to prepare and send a brief email that explains who would like to attend and what you want to discuss. Appointments are booked within a matter of days.
- **Do your homework.** Prior to meeting with the Editorial Board, visit the paper's Web site to see how it has covered similar issues. Nearly every paper has a good search engine to help quickly review past media coverage.
- **Provide a brief presentation.** At your Editorial Board meeting, you will be asked to provide a brief presentation – about 10-15 minutes – presenting your view and the facts that support it. You should plan in advance who among your spokesperson will make which points. Remember that nothing you say is off the record.
- **Be prepared for questions.** The Editorial Board will follow with up to a half-hour in questions. Think through the tough questions in advance and how you will answer.
- **Follow up.** At the conclusion of the meeting, ask if the paper will consider writing an editorial on this topic. You can also offer to submit an op-ed that you write. Once you return from the meeting, follow up with an e-mail thanking the Editorial Board for its time.