

## GenEQ Action Tools: Editorials and Op-Eds

### Editorials

Editorials educate a paper's readers on important issues of the day, shape public attitudes, make or break electoral candidates, and affect key policy decisions. College/University presidents, administration and boards of trustees are sensitive to editorial opinion published in the campus or local paper. Editorials which support your campaign – getting official recognition for your GLBT club/organization, adding sexual orientation or gender identity to non-discrimination or anti-harassment policies, funding a campus GLBT resource center or office, or obtaining gender neutral housing or bathrooms – are a valuable resource for the campus activist.

Getting supportive editorials published should be a priority in your campaign's media strategy. Once a paper has editorialized on a subject, good or bad, it's difficult to reverse that opinion. Therefore, it makes sense to try to get the kind of editorial you want early in your efforts. You generally will find editors interested in your viewpoint, even if they disagree with it. Editorial writers are always looking for ideas and facts; by providing editorial writers with information on your issue, you're actually helping them do their jobs.

Larger papers will have an editorial board and each of the writers on the board may have specialties or a group of topics s/he writes about. Find out which editorial writer covers GLBT issues and direct your efforts toward her/him. Many local and campus papers, however, have only one editorial writer. Regardless of whether you are dealing with a number of writers or just one, editorial writers generally have the same responsibility: to lead, reflect upon or add to the body of opinion on local and campus issues.

Meeting with your paper's editorial writer or board may be easier than you think. It is very similar to lobbying an elected official. Here are a few tips for making your editorial meeting a success:

- When you call for an appointment, let them know who is attending and what you want to discuss.
- If you don't go solo, keep your group small. There are a number of ways you can put together your group: have several members of your organization attend the meeting; invite a few campus leaders from other organizations or coalition partners; invite individuals who can speak to a specific facet of the issue (faculty, religious leaders, alumni, future-students, etc).
- Meet as a group ahead of time and figure out who will say what. Decide who will be the main spokesperson for the group and make sure you introduce all the members.
- Make your case early in the meeting, and then let the editorial writer(s) ask questions. Remember that the purpose of the meeting is to provide the writer(s) with information about your issue so the paper will consider doing an editorial supporting your issue.
- If you are meeting with an editorial board request a list of the attendees in advance. Research the opinion history of each of the board members to know in advance where they might stand.
- Ask when a decision will be made and when or if an editorial will be written.
- Take written material, fact sheets, and other supporting documents with you to the meeting. It's likely that the writer will want to review 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 is credible to say "I don't know" and then follow up later with the answer.
- Be sure to leave the names and telephone numbers of your group in case the paper has questions later.

- When the meeting ends, remind the editorial writer(s) that you think the issue is an important one and worthy of an editorial from the newspaper. Even if you are told that the plan is to write an editorial contrary to your viewpoint, thank them for their time.
- Follow up with a letter thanking the editorial writer(s) for the meeting. Add any information you promised and offer again to make yourself or members of your group available for additional information.

If you can get a positive editorial on your issue, you have accomplished a great deal.

- If the editorial supports your cause, photocopy it and add it to your portfolio of media clippings. Be sure your copy includes the paper's masthead (top of the front page) from that day – cut and paste if necessary.
- Send it with a cover letter to elected officials.
- Use it to recruit other groups to your issue or coalition.
- Send an original with the paper's masthead to HRC.

If you don't get a positive editorial but the paper also doesn't write a negative piece then consider your efforts successful. It's just like lobbying elected officials – you may not get them to vote with you but you can get them to not vote against you.

### **The Op-Ed**

Newspapers also publish editorial articles written by people who are not on the paper's staff. These are called Opinion-Editorials (op-eds) and usually appear on the page opposite the Editorial Page of the newspaper.

Op-eds are a great way to have your say in a format that allows more detail than a letter to the editor. If your paper editorializes on a subject and you disagree with that opinion, ask for space to publish an alternative view. When writing an op-ed, you should follow the tips on writing a letter to the editor – however you need only to conform to the paper's length limitations.

Have a good grasp of the issue before you write an op-ed. You can expect the paper to exercise considerable editorial control, not only on length, but on style and content. The paper will have definite deadlines for you to submit your op-ed; be sure to follow the guidelines.

You can have an op-ed published on a campus, local, state or national issue. Sometimes, HRC will have an op-ed already written about the same issue your campaign is working on. You can ask to have it printed in your paper or modify it to fit your campaign. HRC may also have the latest polling information, research or compelling anecdotes about your issue.

Be selective in the name you choose to sign the op-ed. When possible, it should be a high-profile individual who is well respected in the campus community (tenured faculty, board of trustee, famous alumni, etc). It is helpful if that person is someone viewed as a “moderate” rather than a “liberal.” It is common practice for a public figure to put his or her name on an op-ed written by a local activist or organization so consider writing it and then approaching the person who you'd like to sign it.

For more information, contact HRC's Youth & Campus Outreach Program [campus@hrc.org](mailto:campus@hrc.org).