

Regional Media How-To Guide

Op-Eds and Letters-to-the-Editor

Placing opinion pieces in local newspapers can be an influential way to insert your viewpoint into an ongoing conversation, or one you want to generate in the community. An op-ed is a newspaper article that expresses an opinion about an issue in the news. The name op-ed comes from its usual location in the paper, opposite the editorial page. A letter to the editor (LTE) is just that — a letter written to a newspaper by a reader in order to respond to a previous article or to offer a newsworthy opinion.

How to Write and Submit an Op-Ed:

Step 1: Choose when to submit an op-ed. Op-eds are most likely to be placed when there is a public debate or coverage of a particular issue occurring in the news. The biggest rule about when to submit is to submit before it's too late — news goes stale very fast.

Step 2: Choose what to write in an op-ed. Many regional newspapers receive pieces with a national angle from newspaper syndicates, so it's best to emphasize a local/regional angle if possible (e.g., a personal story, local statistic and/or a local event).

Step 3: Write the op-ed. Op-eds should clearly articulate the problem at the beginning of the piece (e.g., the Helms amendment prevents access to safe abortion for women and girls in developing nations). Then narrow the arguments down to a very regional point (e.g., organizations in New Hampshire are working with survivors of sexual violence to implement meaningful reform on reproductive health legislation). Conclude with a clearly defined call-to-action (e.g., we must pressure the next White House and Congress to improve access to safe abortions for women and girls in developing countries in cases of rape and incest, or because their lives are at risk).

Step 4: Choose who should 'sign' an op-ed. What is the voice that can have the most strategic impact towards your goals and who you want to influence? Is it a first-person storyteller, academic or policy maker? Consider regional figureheads who support your issue and determine if it might be more advantageous to ask them to sign, or cosign, the piece once it is written. Remember that the op-ed's byline might not always be the same person that actually wrote the words.

Step 5: Check your word count. Newspapers and online outlets have different word count requirements for op-eds, but in general it is best to keep them between 650 to 700 words. Check the outlets' websites for information about word count requirements, as this information is usually listed in their editorial section.

Step 6: List your info. Always include your credentials and contact information, as most publications will require verbal or written verification that you have authored the piece.

Step 7: Submit to the op-ed editor. Editors usually like to see a finished product first, rather than a pitch of a future op-ed. Expect feedback and edits from the editor. Editors may even ask you to re-write the op-ed to shift focus on the piece entirely.

Step 8: Follow-up after you submit. If you have not heard back from the publication within 24 to 48 hours, it's usually a good idea to follow-up via phone or e-mail. If you receive a "no," then you should consider submitting to another local paper or online outlet. If there are no alternatives, consider posting your piece on a blog.

How to Write and Submit a Letter to the Editor (LTE):

Step 1: Choose when to submit an LTE. LTEs are most often placed when they are written in response to an article/editorial and either point out an alternate perspective, or highlight/strengthen the piece. In some cases it may make sense to submit an LTE that does not relate back to a particular article, but rather highlights a recent local event (e.g., local rally around the Helms campaign or a forum where a candidate mentions safe abortion).

Step 2: Choose what to write in an LTE. LTEs should be able to stand on their own and make sense to readers who may not have read the original article to which it is responding.

Step 3: Write your LTE. LTEs should be focused and direct. Trying to cover several topics and making too many points reduces letters' impact so try to keep to one subject if possible.

Step 4: Keep it brief. Newspapers and online outlets have different word count requirements for LTEs, but in general it is best to keep them as short and succinct as possible (usually between 150-200 words).

Step 5: List your info. Always include your credentials and contact information, as most publications will require verbal or written verification that you have authored the piece. As with op-eds, timing is everything – news goes stale very fast, so submit LTEs as quickly as possible. Your best shot at consideration is to have something submitted within 48 hours.

Step 6: Submit your LTE. Each outlet has different LTE submission guidelines. Be sure to check the outlet's website for further guidance. Usually, you will send an email to an address specifically assigned to letters to the editor at the particular publication, or to the letters editor directly.

Step 6: Follow-up after you submit. Most newspapers have areas online where you can post comments to articles. If your LTE does not get placed, consider going online and adding your letter as a comment to a story.

Editorial Boards

Step 1: What is an editorial board? An editorial board is the group of staff at a newspaper that is responsible for crafting the featured editorials. Getting this board to “endorse” your point of view on an issue is a powerful and influential communications tool. While it is unlikely that an editorial would cite Population Connection by name, an editorial board memo or editorial meeting gives you the opportunity to share your issue and potentially influence future pieces on the subject. Traditionally, an organization like Population Connection would prepare an editorial board memo to send 2-4 weeks before the desired meeting date to show why the issue is important to the region the newspaper covers. However, because of the busy realities of journalism today, editorial board meetings are becoming less common and often times an editorial board memo is the only opportunity you will have to get your message across.

Step 2: Choose what to include in an editorial board memo. The first step to writing a winning editorial board memo is doing your research and knowing what the editorial staff likes to write about — craft your pitch around these topics as you would for a reporter covering general news. Editorial writers, like reporters, tend to have “beats,” topic areas for which they are the board’s designated expert, so your pitch should usually start with the appropriate writer. The content of the memo will outline the main news or argument you want to get across while also making the case for why it matters to the people who read that newspaper. The most important thing is to clearly state what the position you would like them to take (e.g. We urge you to editorialize in support of fixing the Helms amendment to improve access to safe abortions for women and girls in developing countries in cases of rape and incest, or because their lives are at risk). At the conclusion of the memo, include a description of the Population Connection spokespeople who would like to meet with the board, along with their profiles and role in the community.

Step 3: Prepare for an editorial board meeting: If you do secure an editorial board meeting, be sure you have an agenda for the discussion, your facts in order, and an understanding of who will speak to which issues. Bring supporting materials and background documents to leave behind. Remember to clearly state your request for their support. Immediately following the meeting, send a follow-up note thanking the board member(s) for their time, reiterate your “ask” and share any additional background materials.

Social Media

Social media allows you to publicly pressure, persuade and interact with your target. Instead of tweeting at 2016 candidates directly, we would recommend tweeting at their field organizers, who will be more likely to hear and answer your questions and concerns. The handles for the 2016 top field organizers are as follows:

Name	Candidate	Title	State	Twitter
Matt Paul	Clinton	State Director	IA	https://twitter.com/mattpaulia

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Molly Scherrman	Clinton	Deputy State Director	IA	https://twitter.com/mollyscherrman
Michael Halle	Clinton	Caucus Director	IA	https://twitter.com/mhalle
Troy Price	Clinton	Political Director	IA	https://twitter.com/troymprice
Lily Adams	Clinton	Communications Director	IA	https://twitter.com/adamslily
Mike Vlachich	Clinton	State Director	NH	https://twitter.com/mvlacich
Gene Martin	Clinton	Deputy Political Director	NH	https://twitter.com/genemartin
Harrell Kirstein	Clinton	Communications Director	NH	https://twitter.com/harrellkirstein
Robert Becker	Sanders	State Director	IA	https://twitter.com/rbecker51
Brendan Summers	Sanders	Caucus Director	IA	https://twitter.com/brendansummers
Blair Lawton	Sanders	Political Director	IA	https://twitter.com/blairlawton
Lila Chacon	Sanders	Press Secretary	IA	https://twitter.com/LiliaChacon
Michael Ceraso	Sanders	Deputy State Director	NH	https://twitter.com/michaelceraso
Brandon Maheu	Sanders	Primary Director	NH	https://twitter.com/brandonmaheu
Karthik Ganapathy	Sanders	Communications Director	NH	https://twitter.com/kartpath
Annie Kelly	Bush	State Director	IA	https://twitter.com/Annie_Kelly
Mike Thom	Bush	Deputy State Director	IA	https://twitter.com/mikethomia
Eric Baker	Bush	Field Director	IA	https://twitter.com/ericbakerusa
Rich Killion	Bush	Strategist	NH	https://twitter.com/nhkillion
Nathan Lamb	Bush	State Director	NH	https://twitter.com/nathanslamb
Rob Varsalone	Bush	Senior Advisor	NH	https://twitter.com/robvarsalone
Jesse Hunt	Bush	Communications Director	NH	https://twitter.com/jjhunt10
Sen. Jack Whitver	Rubio	Chairman	IA	https://twitter.com/jackwhitver

Jordan Wiggins	Rubio	Field Director	IA	https://twitter.com/jpwiggins1
Justin Arnold	Rubio	Political Director	IA	https://twitter.com/justinarnold_ia
Jim Merrill	Rubio	Senior Advisor	NH	https://twitter.com/jimmerrilln_h
Karl Beckstein	Rubio	State Director	NH	https://twitter.com/karlbeckstein
Elise Voccola	Rubio	Deputy State Director	NH	https://twitter.com/elissavoccola
Ryan Keller	Trump	Deputy State Director	IA	https://twitter.com/ryankelleria
John Hulsizer	Trump	Senior Advisor	IA	https://twitter.com/jehulszr
Matt Ciepielowski	Trump	State Director	NH	https://twitter.com/mattcip
Zach Montanaro	Trump	Field Rep.	NH	https://twitter.com/zachmontanaro
Megan Assman	Carson	Field Coordinator	IA	https://twitter.com/meganassman
Megan Dieken	Carson	Field Coordinator	IA	https://twitter.com/diekenmegan
Bryan English	Cruz	State Director	IA	https://twitter.com/be_iowa
Ethan Zorf	Cruz	State Director	NH	https://twitter.com/ethan_zorf
Josh Moore	Cruz	Field Director	NH	https://twitter.com/thekingoman
Chris Rants	Fiorina	Senior Advisor	IA	https://twitter.com/c_rants
Lauren Carney	Fiorina	State Director	NH	https://twitter.com/laurencarney

Step 1: Draft your tweet. When drafting posts, it’s always a good idea to balance identifying your key headline/message, while sounding conversational. Put the most interesting part of the post first. Always tag (by using their Twitter handle) the journalist, ally, or partner’s twitter handle when mentioning their article, organization, etc. A tweet to one of the candidate’s staff members could look like one of the following:

- [@MattCip](#) NH-ers want to know: How can we ensure that women/girls raped by ISIS terrorists have access to abortion care? #HelmsHurts
- [@GeneMartin](#) What will you do on day one to ensure that women/girls raped by ISIS terrorists have access to abortion care? #HelmsHurts

Step 2: Shorten your links. Save valuable characters, tidy up your posts, and track click-throughs with bit.ly or ow.ly.

Step 3: Join the conversation and use hashtags. Get your tweets in front of reporters and advocates who are following this issue by using relevant hashtags (e.g. #HelmsHurts, #GOPDebate, #FITN, etc).