

HOW TO WRITE AND LEVERAGE AN LTE, OP-ED, OR BLOG

A Letter to the Editor (LTE), opinion piece (op-ed), or blog post offers you significant control over how your message is delivered to your audience – you’re the author! Because of that, it’s important to select a tactic that is tailored to your audience. Here are some approaches you may want to consider when determining the most strategic tactic to employ.

- **Place your message where your audience will read it.** The best-placed product is the one your audience reads. A well-timed op-ed in your State Senator’s local newspaper can be an effective way to grab their attention (even if that paper is “smaller” than other regional media outlets) because it’s the one they’re most likely to read. Alternatively, a blog post that’s later shared on LinkedIn could reach peers in your field, and correcting the record on your issue via a timely LTE published and then shared on Instagram can push back against misinformation, creating roadblocks for your campaign.
- **Leverage the finished product.** Consider what you’ll do with the LTE, op-ed, or blog post once it’s gone live. Since you’ve carefully crafted your message to meet your campaign needs, you want to leverage the finished product fully. Often, that means strategically sharing the piece on social media, printing it out as an in-person handout for meetings, or linking to it in a pitch to journalists. [This blog post](#) offers some ideas for how social media, earned media, paid media, and more can be part of your strategy after publication.
 - ▶ **If you’re going to share something on social media, keep in mind a couple of best practices.**
 - **Tagging elected officials.** If you tag an elected official, thoroughly proofread your message before posting it. Additionally, consider your organization’s affiliation as a nonprofit or advocacy group – as a 501(c)(3) organization, you should **only** tag an elected official’s official account, not their campaign account. 501(c)(4) organizations should strategically determine when to tag a campaign account versus an official account (i.e., their willingness to engage with you might shift during an election cycle).
 - **Including locations.** Lawmakers are most likely to listen to the people from their districts who vote them into and out of power. With that in mind, don’t shy away from including locations in your social media posts. A location that tags their district can illustrate that your organization’s work directly supports their constituents. Of course, it’s crucial to consider your storytellers’ and colleagues’ safety when tagging a location in a public space online, so consider posting after an event has concluded and everyone has gone home safely.
 - ▶ **Make it even more powerful.** When your piece is published, add a layer of grassroots pressure by forwarding your published piece to grassroots advocates with an alert that walks them through how to send it to their own lawmakers alongside a message reinforcing the budget ask. The lawmaker you’re targeting might have missed your blog post, op-ed, or LTE, but getting copies of it from a few of their voters might grab their attention.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (LTE)

WHAT IS AN LTE?

LTE is a letter submitted to a newspaper or online media outlet that responds to an article, editorial, or op-ed in that newspaper. Placing a letter, similar to an op-ed, is a great tactic to insert your message and can be effective in getting the attention of community members and lawmakers. However, LTEs tend to be easier to write and place than op-eds because they are shorter, and there are a greater number of strong opportunities to submit an LTE when compared to an op-ed.

WHAT KIND OF ARTICLES SHOULD I RESPOND TO?

- You should respond to articles that are (or aren't, but should be!) related to prenatal-to-three health and your state's budget.
- Generally, you will find two types of articles to respond to:
 - ▶ Articles that "get it right" but leave out something important that readers should know, such as data, the outsized impact of a state program on a specific community, or a unique personal story from a personally impacted constituent that explains how a program impacts them for better or worse.
 - ▶ A story that "gets it wrong" and compels you to correct the record for readers, pushing back on something misleading by offering fresh research, data, or perspective.

HOW DO I SUBMIT AN LTE?

- Every outlet has different submission guidelines, so you should check the guidelines for the news outlet that you are responding to verify length and submission requirements. This can usually be found on your media outlet's website under the Opinion section.
- Check to see if your outlet has designated "letters editors" to whom you can address your email.
- Some outlets will ask you to submit letters via email, while others will provide an online form you can fill out.

OTHER THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT AN LTE

- Most LTEs will be around 150-200 words.
- An editor may respond to your submission with edits if they are interested in publishing your letter, so be sure to check your inbox!
- Most LTE submissions will require you to include the writer's address and phone number. Addresses and phone numbers may be used for verification, but only your name and hometown will be published.
- We recommend that you submit an LTE in response to an article in a timely manner – within four days is ideal. We do not recommend waiting longer than one week to respond.

- You can see an example of an outlet’s submission guidelines [here](#) and [an online tool that will help you draft an LTE here](#).
- Asking grassroots advocates to author or sign their name to an LTE is a great way to move them up the ladder of engagement in your campaign. Having someone respond in their own words is compelling, particularly when they are coming from a strategically relevant legislative district. Be sure to allow the author’s voice to shine through the messaging and resist the urge to make it perfect – authenticity is valuable here!

OP-EDS

An op-ed is a longer form of written content where someone is expressing their opinion on a relevant topic. It got its name from the way newspapers are organized. You can typically find the “opinion” section “opposite” of the editorial section, as in on the opposite side of the page. Hence, “op-ed.” While the editorial section is where the paper takes its own stand on an issue (e.g., the *New York Times* Editorial Board often endorses presidential candidates, which can be seen as “the paper’s” endorsement) the opinion, or op-ed, section is where readers’ commentary on an issue will appear. Some news outlets will call their opinion section by other names, such as the commentary section or the guest essay section, but the purpose it serves is the same.

GUIDANCE AND TIPS

1. **Be sure that you have something to say.** Don’t just write an op-ed to write one! Write because you have a clear and novel opinion on an issue and make it clear why that issue is important **now** and warrants action.
2. **Consider a co-signer.** It can often be enticing for editors to see different types of people, or people from different sides of the political spectrum, coming together to support an issue or argument. If you have a partner that fits the bill, consider having them co-sign the piece with you; just make sure to limit it to no more than two signers per piece. Otherwise, it can get unwieldy.
3. **Check your word count.** Newspapers and online outlets have different word count requirements for op-eds, but generally, it is best to keep your piece between 650 and 700 words. Before you start writing, think of where you want the op-ed placed and check the outlet’s website for word count requirements.
4. **Use personality and stories to keep your piece moving.** An op-ed is not a report, nor is it overflowing with data. It’s a lawyer’s closing arguments – a crucial chance to make a personal appeal.
5. **Know when to submit your op-ed.** If you’re aiming to submit an op-ed timed to the Week of Action, plan to pitch at least one week in advance. Let the editor know when you’d like them to consider running the story. They will often be open to accommodating you, but since schedules fill up quickly, you’ll have a better chance if you get the piece in early.



TIP: When seeking a co-signer, reach out to the NCIT network to see if there are any issue experts who can be quoted in an op-ed or local voices who could serve as co-authors.

6. **Expect feedback from the editor.** The editor may offer edits or ask you to rewrite certain parts of the piece. Barring any significant ethical concerns, follow their guidance, and you'll likely end up with an even stronger final product.
7. **Follow-up after you submit.** If you have not heard back from the publication within 48 hours, it's usually a good idea to follow up via phone or email. If you receive a "no," then you should consider submitting to another local paper or online outlet.
8. **Only submit to one place at a time.** If you don't hear back from your first option and want to move on to another outlet, let the editor at the first publication know you're withdrawing your submission so there's no confusion.
9. **Repurpose any content that doesn't get accepted.** If your draft op-ed doesn't get accepted by an editor when you first submit it, consider repurposing that language as blog content or newsletter content, or trim it down and post it as a social media thread. And, if you think there will be another, stronger moment in the near future to re-submit the op-ed with some minor updates (e.g., once a key piece of legislation is passed), you can hold your draft for a future moment.

BLOG POSTS

A blog post should be tailored to your organization's voice, messaging, and audience. This may mean that you can repurpose an op-ed that a media outlet did not accept and use it as blog post content. If so, that's a fantastic option because it provides you with a link to leverage on social media, in pitches to journalists, and beyond. However, it's important to consider how the audience for your op-ed may differ from your website's audience.

Here are some questions to consider when crafting a blog post.

- Why are you writing this blog post?
- Is now the right time to share this message? If so, why? Make sure your audience knows the answer.
- Who are you speaking to?
- What do I want the reader to do with this blog post?
- Do I want my partners to share this blog post on their social media platforms once it's live? If so, is there an opportunity for collaboration by co-writing the piece or linking to another organization's research products to encourage their promotion? This can be a smart way to deepen an existing partnership.
- Is the blog post's tone, language, and length accessible to your audience?



TIP: Compared to an op-ed, a blog post is more likely to become too long. While op-ed editors require a limited word count, there's greater flexibility without an editor cutting words from your blog post. Consider that op-eds have a word count for a reason — the average reader's attention span may not last past about 750 words.