

OP-ED FIELD GUIDE



Foundation

OP-ED 101

WHAT IS AN OP-ED?

Unlike a news story that is prepared by a journalist, an op-ed—short for “opposite the editorial page,” now commonly taken to stand for “opinion editorial”—is a commentary that is drafted by a member of the public or someone serving in a professional capacity and published in a newspaper or other outlet. Op-eds express an opinion about a timely topic that is important to the reader. Anyone with an opinion worth sharing can draft and submit an op-ed, yet only a small percentage of submitted op-eds are accepted for publication.

WHY SHOULD I WRITE AN OP-ED?

The opinion pages of newspapers are widely read—including by policymakers and local officials, who read them for clues about issues of concern in the community. Writing an op-ed can be a useful way to share your topical knowledge with the local community and its leaders, and to shape or change the conversation on important issues facing your community or the communities you serve.

HOW DO I WRITE AN OP-ED?

Refer to these five key points to craft a newspaper-worthy op-ed.

- 1. Determine key messages.** As with any writing project, understanding what you want to say and how you want to say it is vitally important. Before beginning an op-ed you should determine the key messages you want to convey, and most importantly, pinpoint the opinion you want to express and the facts you have to support it. Messages may be determined via the construct:
 - I. What is the problem?
 - II. What is the solution? One you are proposing or one you support?
 - III. What are you/organization doing about it?
 - IV. How can we/public help (Call to Action)?
- 2. Have an opinion.** Are you for or against something? Are you supplying a new solution or advocating for something already in the public domain? Do you have experience or credibility on a topic that might improve the public's or policymakers' understanding of an issue? Having a specific voice and fully formed opinion on an issue are just as important as your key messages. Take a position and stick with it throughout your opinion piece. *The New York Times* editorial department suggests op-eds contain 80 percent facts and 20 percent opinion, so be sure to have the data/facts to back up your opinion.
- 3. Write clearly and concisely (and within the word count).** Most local newspapers request that your submission be 450 to 650 words; however, some national publications like the *Wall Street Journal* allow up to 1,200 words. The recommended length is however long it takes to state your opinion clearly and concisely with supporting statements. Always check your local newspaper for length requirements prior to submitting.
- 4. When you submit matters.** Op-eds have a greater chance of being accepted if they are tied to a local/national debate or news event than if they are written on a pet project rarely discussed in the public discourse. As a general rule, you should submit your op-ed as close to the news event/debate it is related to as possible, but up to five business days after said event before it's considered “old news.” Observances like “National Nurses Week” and Black History Month, or anniversaries of important events like the passage of an important law, can be used as op-ed tie-ins. However, your piece still needs a strong message and opinion; tie-ins do not help the odds of publication significantly.
- 5. Authors matter.** Op-eds have an increased chance for publication if they are authored by people who are experts in the subject matter at hand. Even if they are not experts in a subject, op-eds authored by organization leaders like CEOs or board members may be attractive to editors, and the “lived” experience also counts toward expertise—it is not just about being a recognized expert in your field, but having direct experience.

OP-ED SUBMISSION

HOW DO I SUBMIT AN OP-ED?

- 1. Research.** Ideally you will have identified your target publication before drafting the op-ed—this way you know the outlet’s exact requirements—including word count and any exclusivity riders. (Most newspapers require op-ed writers to make their submission exclusive to the media outlet.)
- 2. Submit.** Some newspapers have an online submission form that you can use, but you can send it directly to an opinion editor via email, if listed on their website. Sending directly to an editor is recommended. Send your op-ed text in the body of your email with two sentences on why this op-ed is newsworthy/why the editor should consider it. Be sure to include your contact information—name, title, email, and phone number.
- 3. Follow up.** Once submitted, newspapers typically take a few days to acknowledge receipt and let you know if they will run the piece or pass. It’s customary to follow up via phone with the opinion page editor to check the status of your submission.
- 4. Have a back-up.** If you discover your op-ed will not run, or if you have not heard back within five business days, you may email the paper and let them know you are submitting elsewhere—this frees you from any exclusivity riders and provides one last chance for the paper to say if it will run your op-ed or not. You are now free to submit your op-ed to a different outlet.

I’VE BEEN ACCEPTED, NOW WHAT?

Congratulations! You have an op-ed published. It’s time to share this great news with your professional and personal networks. Share the link to your published op-ed with your professional colleagues and friends and family via email and social media to continue the conversation you started with your piece.

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA LANGUAGE INCLUDES:

- Check out my op-ed on funding community health centers in the Centerville Times *<include op-ed URL>*
- Read my take on the minimum wage hike in the Daily Herald. Pass it on! *<include op-ed URL>*
- Agree or disagree with the new school levy? I share my opinion in this week’s edition of Hometown Pride Magazine. Give it a read *<include op-ed URL>*

I WAS NOT ACCEPTED, NOW WHAT?

Even though you conducted thorough research, had a well-formed opinion and submitted a quality, timely op-ed, rejection occurred. If you have already submitted to another paper and been similarly rejected or decided to forgo resubmission, you have options for your op-ed. You can repurpose the op-ed content into a blog post (on your own blog, or as a guest author on another blog) or trim down the piece into a letter to the editor. A letter to the editor is a short, formal response, 150-200 words, to a current news item/article or a response to a published op-ed. You will want to review letter to the editor submission guidelines on the target newspaper website and submit accordingly.

SAMPLE OP-ED TEMPLATE

This template offers a guide on the elements required for an op-ed. Your final op-ed should be drafted in narrative format and submitted without these headers, but will include the author details at the bottom.

LEDE/OPENING *[State your reason for writing here.]*

STATE YOUR CASE *[State your case here. Include facts, references, research, or stories and anecdotes that illustrate your point to establish credibility.]*

CALL TO ACTION *[Include a call to action, asking readers to follow up with some activity, such as joining in calling on policymakers to address the issue.]*

CLOSING *[End with a strong, positive statement in support of your case.]*

Sincerely,

[Name of Writer]

[Writer's Title/Role]

[Writer's Organization]

OP-ED EXAMPLES

These local and national op-ed samples demonstrate the use of diverse opinion, supporting facts, and the use of op-eds as effective tools to drive conversation on an issue at the national, state, or local level.

LOCAL EXAMPLES

[Funding deadline looms for program that matches nurses and new mothers](#)

The News & Observer (NC)

Partha Daughtridge, 09/27/2017

I've called North Carolina my home for 50 years. I've met some of my dearest friends, created a small business, and watched my family and community grow here. An important part of healthy growth in our community relies on supporting mothers and giving children an equal opportunity to succeed—starting with a healthy pregnancy.

Each year in North Carolina, 20,000 children are born to first-time, low-income mothers who are at the greatest risk of suffering health, education and economic disparities—disparities that perpetuate a vicious cycle of poverty. Luckily our state has access to a life-changing program called the Nurse-Family Partnership, which is a free community health program for vulnerable, low-income mothers pregnant with their first child. Nurse-Family Partnership connects mothers in communities across North Carolina with local maternal and child health nurses, who offer support for healthy pregnancies, effective parenting and a strong start in infancy. When mothers and babies benefit, we all benefit.

I first learned of Nurse-Family Partnership while I was sitting on the Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina board. I decided to join the board of the North Carolina Nurse-Family Partnership because I wanted to focus on prevention when it needs to start—before children are born. There is nothing more important to the health and well-being of a child than the bond with his or her mother. If a young mother can establish a loving and healthy relationship with her baby, she will empower herself and her baby as she develops through childhood.

Established nearly two decades ago, Nurse-Family Partnership has served 5,684 families in 25 counties across the state. By connecting pregnant women with registered nurses who check in regularly through home visits, we see significant improvement in pregnancy outcomes, including a reduction in preterm births and fewer high-risk pregnancies.

The program, however, goes far beyond preventative health practices. Take Shelley, for example, whose story I learned about through my time on the board. She was partnered with a prenatal nurse during her first pregnancy at 23 years old. With the support of her Nurse-Family Partnership nurse, Barb, she set goals to be the best mom that she can be, and is one of the 91 percent of North Carolina women in the program who give birth to a child at full term. I'm also proud to report the program motivated Shelley to go back to school and become a nurse herself. The choices Shelley and many other Nurse-Family Partnership mothers make regarding their health, education and economic self-sufficiency in the early stages of pregnancy ensure North Carolina's children have safe, nurturing relationships that they need to become healthy and productive citizens.

But this critical program is in danger. In less than a week, federal funding for Nurse-Family Partnership will discontinue unless Congress reauthorizes the MIECHV program, which has served just under 1,000 families in the state since 2010. And if elected officials in Washington don't reauthorize or appropriately fund the program by September 30, communities across North Carolina may no longer see the program's long-term benefits. To change health outcomes for more families, we need stable, predictable funding that allows our state to meet the growing demand of these services. We need reauthorization now.

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Congress needs to continue to support our program to strengthen families at a time when it matters most: from the very start of a baby's entrance into the world.

Partha Daughtridge serves as a board member for the North Carolina Nurse-Family Partnership.

[Making sure hungry NC kids get food this summer](#)

The News & Observer (NC)

Tommy Tobin, 04/19/2015

For many students, the prospect of summer is exciting, but for students in low-income homes the long break often increases the likelihood of food insecurity. For these students and their families, already-tight food budgets grow even more constrained over the summer.

When at school, low-income students across North Carolina are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. With 1 in 4 of North Carolina's children struggling with food insecurity, this USDA school lunch program addresses a much-needed nutritional gap for many of the state's youth. For students near the poverty line who qualify, this national program wards off the risk of hunger. While approximately 80 percent of eligible young people receive school meals nationwide, summer means no school and, consequently, less access to healthy and nutritious food.

Officials estimate that in 2014 over 820,000 children in North Carolina were eligible for summer meals programs under federal guidelines. For these students, a lack of regular access to nutritious food can contribute to falling behind in school. Feeding hungry kids in the state should be a priority, but unfortunately these programs are not reaching over 675,000 of North Carolina's youngest residents.

North Carolina has made tremendous progress in recent years with the Summer Food Service Program, a USDA program administered at the state level by the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. Just five

years ago, the state's participation in the summer meals program was in the single digits with only 8.5 percent of eligible youth participating. Participation was so low in 2010 that the USDA concluded that "the shortage of SFSP sites and low participation means that small increases in the overall participation rate will garner dramatic results." Federal bureaucrats are not prone to using words like "dramatic."

Fortunately, the tide may be turning. Cynthia Ervin, the state's SFSP coordinator, worked tirelessly to increase the participation rate by 30 percent from 2013 to 2014. Even with these efforts, the participation in the SFSP is far too low to meet the needs of the state's young people at risk of food insecurity over the summer.

The most straightforward way to raise the SFSP participation rate is to bring more eligible children into the program. No Kid Hungry NC and the state government have done excellent work at raising awareness and conducting outreach, but access and transportation to each food service location remain a substantial challenge.

Another way to increase the SFSP participation is to recruit more food service sponsors and sites. Unfortunately, the extensive requirements and heavy administrative burden of this seasonal program can be daunting for prospective partners. While Congress and the state have initiated programs like the Simplified Summer option, recruitment continues to be a hard sell. Maureen Berner at the UNC Chapel Hill School of Government recently received a two-year fellowship to research these barriers to participation and develop potential strategies to overcome them.

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Childhood hunger affects every North Carolinian. This is our next generation, let's support them and not let them fall behind this summer. Ervin and her partners in and out of government are ramping up efforts for summer 2015. Food-service organizations can participate as vendors. Nonprofit, local government agencies and colleges can sign up to be sponsors

or sites for the program. Together, we can take a bite out of food insecurity and help feed hungry kids this summer.

Tommy Tobin is a student at Harvard Law School from South Carolina who recently presented on the SFSP at the N.C. Central University's School of Law.

[For Charlotte to be a great city, it needs to first be a good one](#)

The Charlotte Observer (NC)
Julie Porter, 09/25/2015

The Charlotte region has been struggling with our ranking in a Harvard Study revealing our city as last among large cities in the ability for a child, born in poverty, to have a shot at the "American Dream." Charlotte's high-poverty communities are more likely to be racially segregated and have poorer performing schools, fewer job prospects, higher crime and less access to high-quality foods. If your parents are low-income and you live in a high-poverty neighborhood, you start your race for that American Dream miles behind your peers in south Charlotte.

Importantly, the city, county and Foundation For the Carolinas have vowed to help fix this inequity. Much of the resulting discussion has focused on encouraging a mix of incomes at public schools, which is a key part of the solution. However, there is another overlooked avenue – workforce housing for families in all parts of our city.

Workforce housing (also called affordable housing) is built using tax incentives from the federal government allowing nonprofit organizations such as the Housing Partnership to charge lower rent to working families who earn less than 60 percent of median income.

Workforce housing isn't public housing and is typically equal if not better quality than most market rate apartments. Federal tax credits are needed to make projects feasible, but in areas where land is

expensive, such as in south Charlotte, there remains a large funding gap.

For this reason, whenever possible, Charlotte should greatly deepen the subsidies to encourage developers to reserve land for workforce apartments in new subdivisions or allow nonprofit developers to purchase land outright.

For a typical workforce apartment, a family of four earning \$41,160 or less would pay \$700-900 monthly rent. That's well below market rents and allows a family to retain more of their wages for books, computers, healthy food and decent clothing. It allows a family to live in a wealthier part of Charlotte, with ready access to jobs and excellent schools. However, there are few affordable housing options in or near our affluent communities due to "not in my backyard" attitudes.

Why should you care? Financially stable families reduce the burden on public subsidies. A suitable, available supply of workforce housing attracts new industry. Having a safe home near good schools allows children to excel.

And, because a city can't be great without first being good. Good to its workers, good to its kids and good to its neighborhoods.

Every day we entrust our children to school bus drivers, daycare workers and teachers' aides. We are happy to talk to our waiter and bank teller or hire landscapers and roofers. We have no problem interacting with these people. Why are we against

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them living nearby? They care for our children and elderly parents, help us with our groceries and make our morning coffee.

They deserve an affordable home near work where their children can get a good education and have the potential to succeed.

Let's Take Care of the Workers

Who Care For Our Seniors

Port Arthur News (TX)

Chelsey Musick, 10/25/17

In the weeks since Hurricane Harvey flooded communities across Texas and upended millions of lives, Texans have focused on rebuilding and identifying ways to move forward. During this critical time, we must make sure not to forget about older adults in residential communities and the workers who care for them.

My colleagues at Calder Woods, a senior living community in Beaumont, went out of their way to provide stability to our residents during the chaos of Harvey. In the days leading up to the storm, everyone went about their usual work: our licensed nursing staff provided high-quality medical care to the residents, never knowing what medical event may occur on a given day. The nursing assistants provided general care and helped residents in and out of beds and to and from appointments. In addition, our direct care workers provided nourishing meals, cleaned the grounds, and performed many other duties to keep the facility running.

We chose this profession because we care, and a storm can't stop us. So it didn't surprise me to see my team step up to the challenge—even one the scale of Harvey—to ensure the safety, security, and well-being of our residents. Half the residents in our care never knew the hurricane was happening, which is amazing considering older adults are often the most severely impacted during times of

Charlotte is a great city and we can make that happen.

Julie Porter, President of the Housing Partnership of Charlotte.

disaster. Life was business as usual, because the people they knew and trusted were with them. The executive team even brought in extra mattresses, food, clothing, and personal items to ensure the staff received what we needed during the storm so we could take care of the residents. As crazy as it might sound, by supporting the staff, the executive team allowed the residents to be better cared for.

Our staff worked through the hurricane as the water encroached on lives and burst into homes. Most of us did not know how our own homes fared during the storm as we worked. My family personally lost our home during this disaster, and we were evacuated by boat during my day off. Sadly, many of my colleagues, including direct care workers and nursing assistants, lost more—and were in less of a position to deal with the aftermath.

Working with older adults has been an incredibly rewarding career choice and I am grateful for the opportunity to get to know the people I care for every day. As our country prepares for an increase in the population of older adults—88 million by 2050, we will also need 2.5 million long-term services and supports workers by 2030 to keep up.

That's why it's so important that we justly treat the dedicated professionals who take care of our nation's elders. Organizations like LeadingAge believe that reforms such as increased wages, more paid time off, reduced number of double shifts, hiring more and better trained workers, and improved access to education and training opportunities, can help.

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Let's ensure that older adults have access to the same passionate care providers that serve our community residents day in and day out, even in the worst of times.

Chelsey Musick is the assistant director of nursing at Calder Woods Senior Living in Beaumont, Tex.

[Affordable Housing Program Helps Older Americans Make The Rent Tap Into Plainfield \(NJ\)](#) **Linda Couch, 11/10/2017**

While Barbara Ross's income places her below the poverty line, she isn't one of the nearly 2 million households with older adults in dire need of affordable housing. Thanks to a little-known federal program, Ross, 64, is able to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Plainfield, N.J.

Through the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) "Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly" program, Ross is one of 400,000 households with older adults that don't pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

In fact, the program is what saves Ross, whose income is less than half of others' incomes in her area – from being considered a "worst case housing need." That term refers to impoverished renters who spend more than half of their incomes on housing—in other words, those most impacted by the nation's lack of affordable housing.

Tragically, the number of all households considered "worst case housing needs" continues to grow—increasing by more than half a million households from 2013-15 to reach 8.3 million households nationwide. What's more, 66 percent of the increase came from older adult households. In part, Section 202 and its long waiting lists are a clear sign that the private market simply cannot produce homes on its own that rent low enough for someone with an income of \$13,300 a year to afford.

"I live below the poverty line," Ms. Ross told attendees at a housing rally for LeadingAge—a 6,000 member aging services nonprofit—in Washington, D.C. earlier this year. "It does something to a person. You lose yourself emotionally and spiritually. When you have services like the 202 program, it lifts you, it brings you back to your dignity, and to your self-respect. You no longer depend on your children or your relatives. You're living independently. You pay your own rent. You're once again a thriving person in the community."

Congress has shown its own appreciation for the 202 program, providing it with \$10 million in new housing construction funds this year—the first time since 2010 the federal government has funded new construction through the initiative. What's more, it's happening at a time when budget caps are tightening the vise on other HUD programs serving older adults. But more should be done to support at-risk older adults like Ms. Ross. These are but small steps to erase the suffering of those in desperate need of affordable housing.

And suffer worst case households do. By definition, "worst case needs" households spend more than 50 percent of their incomes for rent. In reality, this often means spending as much as 80 percent of their income on rent. As you might imagine, that leaves very little money for other necessities—whether food, medicine, or transportation—creating tough choices for low-income older adults without assistance.

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While Congress's support for Section 202 is promising, we can and must do better by the hundreds of thousands of older adults poised to show up for the first time in HUD's next "worst" report. To fix the worst, we must do our best. Let's get going.

Linda Couch is the Vice President of Housing Policy at LeadingAge on their Congressional Affairs and Housing Team. She has been with the organization for five years.

NATIONAL EXAMPLE

States fill family caregiver void left by Congress

The Hill

Rani Snyder, 11/20/2017

Not even members of Congress can avoid the emotional ups and downs that accompany being a caregiver for an older family member. A bipartisan group of lawmakers recently shared stories of their caregiving journeys, the good and the bad. Indeed, caregiving is not a partisan issue—most of us can expect to be affected eventually.

Rep. Michelle Lujan-Grisham (D-N.M.) shared a bittersweet story about receiving a call from her elderly mother, who wanted to wish her a happy birthday, despite getting the date wrong. Her experience has prompted her to chair the bipartisan, bicameral Assisting Caregivers Today (ACT) Caucus. Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) relayed how caring for his mother when she was diagnosed with brain cancer and early onset Alzheimer's disease became a family affair.

I joined these lawmakers at a panel discussion hosted by the Gerontological Society of America to raise awareness of the plight of family caregivers and discuss policy solutions to better support them. With more than 18 million family members currently taking care of older adults in the United States—many of them at risk for poor health, emotional stress, and financial harm—supporting caregivers should be one of our nation's top priorities.

The strains on family caregivers are real. According to a study from AARP, when asked to rate their own health, almost 20 percent of caregivers say that it is "fair to poor," which is double the rate of non-caregivers.

Many caregivers in the United States—about 8.5 million people—are providing care to an older adult with "high needs," which means they are either struggling with dementia or have two or more self-care needs. These caregivers too often don't receive training to perform complex medical and nursing tasks like wound care and injections, potentially placing the older adult at risk. This is in addition to the financial strain; on average, caregivers over age 50 stand to lose over \$300,000 in lifetime earnings.

Despite bipartisan support and dozens of personal experiences with the topic, Congress has been slow to resolve these critical problems affecting millions of Americans. There are some promising proposals at the federal level—but it remains to be seen whether they will gain traction in the current Congress. One example is the Recognize, Assist, Include, Support and Engage (RAISE) Family Caregivers Act—sponsored by Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.)—which calls for the secretary of Health and Human Services to develop a national strategy to recognize and support family caregivers. This strategy includes a public-private partnership to help communities, government agencies, and providers support caregivers. The

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Senate passed this bill in September, but the House has yet to take a vote. Whatever the result, Congress should continue working to find solutions.

Fortunately, states are taking note of successful new models to support family caregivers, and they are taking action. Already, 39 states and territories have enacted the Caregiver Advise, Record and Enable (CARE) Act. These bills, which have rapidly spread across the country in just three years, require hospitals to identify and provide education to family caregivers of hospitalized patients. The aim is to ensure that caregivers have the training to carry out medical tasks and reduce the odds that the family member will be readmitted. This is a tremendous achievement, but there is more work to do.

With support from The John A. Hartford Foundation, pilot care models across the country with replication potential are empowering family caregivers. An Alzheimer's and Dementia Care program at the University of California, Los Angeles provides patient-centered care and coordination—reducing the burden on family caregivers by improving patient independence and function. The program prepares nurse dementia care managers to provide better

support to patient families. After three and a half years, participants had \$2,100 lower Medicare costs per year than the comparison group and were 33 percent less likely to be admitted to a long-term care facility, likely saving thousands for Medicaid and their families.

We're also working with The Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging and the Family Caregiver Alliance to develop an online resource with detailed information on approximately 50 evidence-based dementia caregiving programs to encourage community implementation and choice. Resources like these will do wonders for stressed and overburdened caregivers.

Congress needs to rise to the challenge, and look to some of these promising models as inspiration for building better support for family caregivers. We owe it to the more than 18 million Americans and their families who are living these stories each and every day.

Rani Snyder is Program Director of The John A. Hartford Foundation, a private, nonpartisan, national philanthropy dedicated to improving the care of older adults.