

## Working with Media: Tips for OpEds

An OpEd (Opinion-Editorial) is written by a member of the community as an expression of a particular point of view. Most daily newspapers have an Editorial or Opinion Page containing OpEds, many written by syndicated or staff columnists. A few syndicated columnists you might be familiar with are Maureen Dowd, David Brooks, David Broder and Ellen Goodman.

Many newspapers welcome OpEds written by people in the community. The advantage of developing an OpEd is that it is written entirely in your own words – as opposed to having a reporter translate your viewpoint – and is usually not heavily edited unless you exceed the word limit. The piece will carry your byline and title. The disadvantages of OpEds are they do not have the same impact as regular news articles and generally attract fewer readers.

Most OpEds are between 500-800 words in length. They must be topical, timely, well written and must clearly state a strong opinion. Before deciding to craft your own piece, read some guest OpEds in your local newspaper to get a better sense of word length, subject matter and tone. You may want to contact the Editorial Page editor to see if he or she is interested in receiving an OpEd on foster care. If the editor sounds interested, find a way to customize the template OpEd provided in this Toolkit.

As you write your piece, incorporate a little bit about your personal experiences with foster care. It is good to feature local information, such as the number of foster children in your state. Include a contact agency or local foster care program that people can call for more information.

Once your piece is written, ask some friends who are not familiar with the issue to read it. See if they are able to understand both the issue you are writing about and why it should be considered important. Have several people proofread your piece before you send it to the Editorial Page editor. If you want the piece to run during Foster Care Month, try to submit it no later than the third week of April. Attach a brief note with your daytime and evening phone numbers. In the note, mention that May is National Foster Care Month so the editor understands the timeliness of your OpEd.

If you haven't received a response within two weeks, call the editor and ask if he or she is interested in using the OpEd. Ask the editor for feedback if they do not express interest. Offer to send them additional information about foster care if they wish to learn more about the issue.