

TIPS FOR WRITING AN OP-ED TO ENGAGE LOCAL MEDIA OUTLETS

Outreach to traditional media (e.g., television, radio, newspapers, magazines) relies on capturing reporters' and editors' interest and includes press releases, opinion articles, and event promotion in community calendars.

Op-ed Articles

Op-ed articles appear in most print and online versions of newspapers and create an opportunity for you to express your thoughts about substance misuse prevention and positive mental health, as well as correct common misconceptions about these topics and offer strategies for parents, caregivers, teachers, and young adults. Consider connecting your op-ed to broader themes related to the overall well-being of youth and young adults. Remember that op-eds need to be timely and offer an opinion about something happening in your community.

Op-eds should begin with a powerful introductory statement that captures the reader's interest by connecting your thoughts to recent events. Effective op-eds clearly express an opinion, cite evidence to prove your point, and mention specific people in your examples. The final paragraph and closing argument serve as your last opportunity to draw readers to your point of view. Your closing should offer solutions to the problem, repeat your main points, and remind readers of the issue's relevance.

Guidelines for submitting op-eds can be found on the outlet's website, but note that in general, op-eds should be no longer than 800 words and can appear in both print and online outlets. Even some television stations offer community forums where their viewers can share their opinions on the local news. Some smaller, local

community newspapers offer guest columns if they do not have a traditional op-ed page. Get creative, and you can find countless opportunities to place opinion pieces. Just remember that each op-ed is exclusive to the outlet where it first appears and can only be reprinted with the outlet's permission.

Drop-in Articles

Drop-in articles, also known as camera-ready news, are a cost-effective way to share information about your organization and substance misuse prevention. A drop-in article is written for direct insertion in community and weekly newspapers. If space is available, include a reader-friendly graphic to enhance the article's appeal.

Community newspapers tend to have a much smaller staff than larger daily papers, sometimes only an editor and several staff or contributing writers, so these papers rely on editorials more often. Don't be afraid to focus on a wide range of outlets for drop-in distribution—the more places that receive your drop-in, the higher the odds of placement.

You should ensure, however, that your article provides a resource where readers can find more information, is no more than 500 words, and is written at no higher than a third-grade reading level. Submit the article with a short cover note in an email or a letter that outlines the importance of your article to the outlet's readers. Your short cover note should make the case for publication.