



Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor (LTE) or an Opinion Editorial (Op-Ed)

Updated September 24, 2025

This guide includes resources and templates to help you write a Letter to the Editor or an Op-Ed. Both are helpful ways to raise awareness, get your lawmaker's attention, and garner more public support.

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For assistance with any content in this guide, please contact Shanelle Oliver, soliver2@cityyear.org.

Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor (LTE)

Letters to the editor (LTE) are widely read not only by members of Congress and their staff, but also the general public, newspaper editors and reporters, and other opinion leaders. An LTE that speaks to a broader audience, and underscores AmeriCorps' vital importance to the local community, is a great way to get your legislator's attention and garner more public support.

Keep these helpful tips in mind when writing an LTE:

- **Respond to recent news:** Often, LTEs respond to a specific article that recently ran in the paper, so it is important to closely monitor for any news regarding appropriations, AmeriCorps, local programs, and/or community service more generally. If you're responding to an article, the faster you can submit your LTE the greater likelihood it will be accepted. However, newspapers also accept LTEs that do not refer to a specific article. It's a good idea to look at the LTEs in the paper you are targeting to get a flavor for the types of letters they publish.
- **Stay local:** Consider submitting it to a smaller local paper, not just the nearest big city paper. You'll have a better chance of getting published and still get noticed by your members of Congress.
- **Keep your letter short, focused, and interesting.** Stay focused on one (or, at the most, two) main point(s). In this case, protecting AmeriCorps funding. Include interesting facts, relevant personal experience, and any local connections to the issue. Wrap your letter up by explaining what you think needs to happen now and making a call to action. If you are trying to influence a legislator(s), refer to them by name.
- **Stick to word limits:** Papers have a word limit, and you must stick to it. Look up the word limit for your intended publication (google the name of the publication and "letter to the editor submission") prior to drafting. Be clear and concise – many only allow about 150 words.
- **Submitting your LTE:** You can find the email address for submitting your LTE on the newspaper's website. Paste your letter into the body of your email – do NOT include it as an attachment.
 - Many newspapers require that letter writers submit contact information with their letter. Phone numbers won't be published. This is just to verify your identity.
- **Keep us posted:** Voices for National Service is available to help edit your LTE and/or offer advice on placement, if needed. Please also let us know when your LTE is published, so we can pass it along to your members of Congress and amplify it on our social media channels. Contact Shanelle Oliver, soliver2@cityyear.org, for assistance.

Template LTE

Below is an LTE template that you can customize with your story or insights:

[Note: Look at the LTEs that run in the paper you are targeting to get a flavor for the types of letters they publish. Also, be sure to check the paper's LTE instructions, especially word length guidance.]

Subject: [City or State Name] is Stronger Because of AmeriCorps

Dear Editor,

AmeriCorps has empowered more than a million Americans nationally to serve their communities—rebuilding homes after disasters, mentoring students, and helping veterans access care. They are the “people power” behind many of [name of city/state]’s nonprofit and faith-based organizations – including [x, y, and z].

Yet recent funding proposals in Congress threaten to eliminate [# , or hundreds/thousands of] “boots on the ground” in our [community/state].

AmeriCorps is a fiscally responsible investment that yields strong returns—\$17 in economic value for every federal dollar. It builds workforce skills, strengthens local nonprofits, and unites Americans through shared purpose – and, it has received strong bipartisan support for decades.

As our congressional delegation votes on funding for AmeriCorps, I urge them to recognize the importance of this beloved program and ensure it remains a priority.

[Name]

[City, State]

[Email]

[Phone number]

[Some outlets may also ask for your title and organization]

Tips for Writing an Opinion Editorial (Op-Ed)

Opinion pieces can play a crucial role in highlighting AmeriCorps' significance to the work of local organizations and its impact on local communities. These pieces can show AmeriCorps' vital importance to local nonprofit, faith-based, and community organizations, and why AmeriCorps should be protected.

Here are some tips for writing your opinion editorial or op-ed. Please contact Shanelle Oliver at soliver2@cityyear.org if you need any help with drafting or placing your op-ed.

1. **Make sure it communicates an opinion:** The purpose of an op-ed is to offer an opinion on a topic that is timely and unique. Your chances of getting your op-ed published are much stronger if you can connect your submission to the current news cycle and make it relevant to local readers.
2. **Grab the reader's attention at the top:** From the first line, your op-ed should compel readers to keep reading and not lose their attention to another headline. Try to avoid an opening that is just background information. Instead, write an opening that says something new or clever.
3. **Write fast, edit deliberately:** You should be able to communicate what you are trying to say in one sentence (journalists call this the "budget line"). Build out your draft or outline from there. As you write your thoughts down on paper, connect them back to that one line.
4. **Keep it simple:** The goal of an op-ed is to persuade. To persuade someone, they must understand your message. When you are trying to articulate your opinion, write how you speak. For example, you would not say: "We are experiencing precipitation and I failed to secure the entrance." You would say "It's raining, and I forgot to lock the door." In most cases, short, simple sentences are best. While writing with lofty vocabulary and jargon may impress experts, it can lose the attention of a typical reader. Let verbs be verbs and try to avoid adverbs, jargon, and acronyms. It is helpful to read your draft out loud once you are complete, as areas of improvement will become clearer.
5. **Emotional connection:** To persuade your intended audience, your writing must inspire an emotional connection in the reader. You want the reader to care about your cause. If your piece does not make someone think about your issue, it's not going to bring them to your side.
6. **Use examples:** Readers often do not remember facts or statistics, but they will remember people. People desire emotion and connection. They are more sympathetic motivators than any organization. Real-life examples can help humanize a complex topic. Anecdotes also provide opportunities to include and activate local people who have benefited from AmeriCorps who may be interested in standing up for the program.
7. **Conclusion.** It often helps to end with a call to action, such as urging your members of Congress to support AmeriCorps. Refer to the member(s) by name, if you're submitting to a local paper (versus a national outlet).
8. **Length.** Op-eds are typically 500 – 750 words in length and it helps to know the word guidelines before you start drafting. You can typically google the name of the paper and "submitting an op-ed" to find specific instructions for the paper.
9. **Getting placed:** When you have a strong piece, it is time to pitch it.

- Landing a placement requires identifying an outlet that is a good fit for the target audience. For AmeriCorps partner organizations, it will most likely be a local community or regional paper. To find submission instructions, google the name of the paper and “submitting an op ed.” You will likely get a general email address. If possible, also look up the name of the opinion page editor and include them in the email as well. Paste the op-ed into the body of the email. Do not send it as an attachment.
 - Unless your paper has a form submission, include a concise pitch note when submitting. When writing it, try to think about how to recycle your “one sentence” that captures what you have to say in the op-ed. You do not need to fully contextualize your piece beyond 2-3 sentences of what you seek to convey and why they should be interested. Include the text of the op-ed in the body of the email (not as an attachment).
 - It is helpful to have an eye-catching subject line, as editors receive many submissions each day. Most papers need three days to get back to you (and, unfortunately, many do not respond if they decide not to publish your piece). Before you move on to another outlet, email again (and try to call) to check on the status of your piece.
 - Include your name, email address and phone number in your submission, and let them know that the piece is unique to their paper. If you have gotten a rejection or not heard back after your first follow-up, you can move on to another paper.
10. **If your piece is accepted:** Your op-ed may receive a few tweaks, and editors often change headlines. Once the piece has been published, do not forget to use the publication’s link across your social channels, in newsletters, and in other owned stakeholder email distributions. Extra amplification can go a long way toward getting your message in front of – and reinforcing it with – the right audience.
- Email your published piece to Shanelle Oliver, soliver2@cityyear.org, so Voices for National Service can also share across our communication channels.
11. **Op-ed alternatives:** If you are struggling to place a piece, don’t give up! It is still impactful to publish the piece using your own channels, such as a blog post on your website, or through a post on a site that is used for communicating ideas and policy positions, like Medium or LinkedIn. Posting your piece on more than one channel can help amplify your organization’s impact and story.

Template – Op-Ed

Below is a template for an op-ed using [City or State Name] as a placeholder for the local community. The listed author of an op-ed should ideally be one (or two, in co-authorship) recognizable names in the community, such as the head of a community-based organization, a businessperson, or a religious leader. You may also want to consider asking a local elected official to author an op-ed – such as your mayor, a city councilor, county executive, school board member, etc.

Sample Headline: [City or State Name] is Stronger Because of AmeriCorps

1. Open with one to two paragraphs that emphasize the tangible impact of AmeriCorps in the region; this could include:
 - Anecdotes about one or two people whose lives were made better because of your local AmeriCorps program.
 - Ideally the piece should include their name(s) and a personal story(ies) of these individual(s). For example: If discussing the impact of an after-school program on a student, you could include a vignette from the student, their parent, the student's teacher, or the AmeriCorps member whose service resulted in the positive change.
 - Data: Wherever possible, cite specific impact data that backs up the anecdotal evidence or personal story. For example: a school may be able to affirm improved attendance records, test scores, etc.
2. Next, connect these stories to the broader narrative from the region/program and, wherever possible, connect back to [national data](#) on AmeriCorps' impact on the same issues. If you need help finding national data, [contact Voices](#).
 - Connect to your state: Consider citing other AmeriCorps programs across the state that are fulfilling similar local needs. [Access state-specific data on National Service](#) in your state, including details on the full scope of AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors presence in your state from February 2024 to February 2025.
 - Connect nationally: Use national statistics that relate to the op-ed topic. For example, if you are writing an op-ed related to education, you could note that, "Nearly 36,000 AmeriCorps members serve annually at more than 9,500 K-12 schools. Additionally, AmeriCorps Seniors tutor and mentor over 90,000 children each year."
3. The concluding paragraph should re-emphasize the call to action and work in AmeriCorps' messages.
 - For example, "AmeriCorps is built on the notion that the best solutions come from states and communities, not Washington. Through partnerships with faith-based organizations, nonprofits, and local businesses, AmeriCorps ensures that service efforts are uniquely tailored to the specific needs of each community. AmeriCorps also stands as a model for tax dollar return on investment. For every federal dollar invested, AmeriCorps generates an impressive \$17 in economic value - demonstrating how a well- structured public-private partnership can multiply the impact of taxpayer dollars.
 - "Congress is facing challenging funding decisions, but AmeriCorps is not the place to cut. By fostering workforce development, facilitating community-oriented solutions through public-private partnerships, and strengthening national resilience to natural disasters, AmeriCorps delivers tangible, cost-effective results for taxpayers. With the support of [Congressman Smith], AmeriCorps can continue to be a vital resource for [city or state name] and America for decades to come."