



# Contributing to news coverage

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## Media relations toolkit

### *Engaging the media to elevate sexual violence prevention*

Coverage in local, regional, and national media is important — news coverage across formats keeps communities and leaders up to date on key issues and informs public understanding. When sexual violence prevention practitioners engage the media, it is an opportunity to elevate sexual violence prevention, connect with new audiences, and increase your organization’s credibility and recognition.

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In addition to your efforts to serve as a source and expert for reporters, it is important that your media engagement strategy include opportunities to use opinion space. Using opinion space allows you to help shape how issues related to sexual violence are framed in the media. For more information about other ways to become part of the news, please see *Moving toward prevention: A guide for reframing sexual violence*.<sup>1</sup>

### **How to use editorial pages and opinion pieces**

Letters to the editor, editorials, and opinion pieces provide an opportunity to bring attention to issues related to sexual violence prevention, respond to recent news coverage, and promote key messages and solutions. Not only do opinion pieces promote dialogue and extend debate, but leaders at all levels across sectors pay attention to opinion pieces and news coverage as markers of the public’s agenda.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever type of opinion piece you choose to submit, remember that the news moves quickly, so it is important to be timely and responsive. A good way to be ready to quickly develop and submit an op-ed is to regularly track the news. The goal of tracking is to monitor which outlets and reporters frequently cover sexual violence, the angles of their coverage, and the stories they are paying attention to.

## Key terms

Understanding important terms in the media industry helps to ensure your contribution will be relevant and increases the likelihood of getting published.

**Newsworthy:** The element of a story or issue that makes it likely to attract news coverage. To identify what makes your story newsworthy, think about how you would answer the question, “Why should this story be published today?” You are more likely to be published if your topic is timely, localizes a national story, presents new information, connects to personal experience, is relevant to a newspaper’s readership, and/or relates to a meaningful anniversary or milestone.<sup>3</sup>

**Hook:** The angle (key idea, person, or event) that will capture the attention of your target audience.<sup>4</sup> Think like a journalist and identify an angle you can bring to the story to make it more timely and relevant for readers. For example, you could focus on the topic of making schools safer during back-to-school season or use a local issue as an opportunity to talk about prevention efforts in the community.

**Pitch:** The way you present your issue or story idea to a writer or editor in an effort to get published (via email, phone call, or social media such as Twitter).

## Letters to the editor

Submitting a letter to the editor to a local outlet is an opportunity to respond to recent coverage of sexual violence and share your message with a wide audience. Letters are usually 200 words or less and can be emailed to the editor of the newspaper in response to a specific article or editorial. The letter might:

- Offer a concise statement of opinion
- Highlight a solution to a problem in your community
- Make a point that was omitted in the coverage or correct misstated information

## Sample letter to the editor:<sup>5,6</sup>

To: Sent in the body of an email to the editor or via webform

To: letters@latimes.com

Subject line: RE: Title of article being addressed in response, Date article was printed

RE: "Students accused of campus sexual assault are now guilty until proved innocent," March 3

To the Editor:

To the Editor: KC Johnson and Stuart Taylor wrote that "sexual assault allegations should be handled by the same police and prosecutors who deal with all other serious crimes," not by colleges and universities where many cases occur. I disagree.

Your response should include a URL link to the article and identify the author who contributed the author.

A strong response explains why an issue is important and may include statistics or personal experience to strengthen your claim.

Victim-centered campus policies establish norms that sexual violence is not tolerated and perpetrators will face consequences for their actions. They ensure victims can access services, take actions protecting their safety and promoting recovery, and seek justice, while offering all parties options beyond the scope of criminal cases.

Every student has the right to due process and to complete their education free from sexual violence. Colleges and the criminal justice system both have a role to play in response.

Your name

Karen Baker

Title

Executive Director

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

Contact information

Mailing address

Phone number

Email address

## Opinion article (op-ed)

An op-ed is a clear and persuasive 600-800 word opinion piece written from the point of view of someone who is not affiliated with the publication. An op-ed can inform and educate, raise awareness, or start a dialogue and exchange ideas.

An effectively written op-ed:

- Concisely describes a problem and the proposed solution
- Explains why the topic is relevant to readers and why they should care
- Provides evidence to support claims, such as statistics or lived experience

### Opinions

## How my restaurant dealt with harassment from customers.



- Uses plain language, avoids jargon, and incorporates storytelling to engage readers
- Illustrates why the author is a credible source and what makes their point of view distinct

Submission guidelines vary for each publication, so be sure to review the complete instructions provided by the outlet, including contact information for where submissions can be sent.

## Learn More

**The Op-Ed Project:** For more tips on how to write an opinion editorial, submission guidelines, and contact information for top outlets, visit: [www.theopedproject.org](http://www.theopedproject.org). Founded to increase the range of voices and quality of ideas we hear in the world, The Op-Ed Project also regularly runs day-long seminars around the country.

## Editorials

In addition to publishing reader opinions, newspapers also publish unsigned editorials written by the editorial board to express the outlet's official perspective on an issue. The editorial board is a group of writers and editors who guide the tone and direction of editorials. The size and composition of the editorial board varies based on the size of the paper.

### Editorial

## The true cost of sexual violence



You can request a meeting with the editorial board to share information, and ask them to take a position on a topic or issue.<sup>7</sup> During this face-to-face meeting, one or more spokespeople for an organization briefs the editorial board about various aspects of the issue and shares different perspectives on who is impacted. For example, you could talk about how sexual harassment, abuse, and assault impact not only

individual survivors and their families, but also community members, parents, students, and professionals.

Meeting with an editorial board:

- Creates opportunities for more in-depth conversation than a typical interview, allowing time to discuss background, context, and questions
- Builds relationships between your organization and the news outlet and informs reporters and editors about your goals
- Generates story ideas and may result in multiple stories or future interview requests

Even if the newspaper decides not to write an editorial, you can always follow up to request the paper publish an op-ed you provide instead.

## References

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