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Nine tips for writing op-eds that get published

ROCHESTER, NY – November 15, 2014 – Op-eds – essays that appear opposite the editorial pages of newspapers – are powerful communications tools for nonprofit organizations working to influence public policy or initiate change. But one communicator says that too many local nonprofits miss some of their best opportunities to inform readers through these opinionated essays.

"National headline news stories give nonprofits the hook their opinion pieces need to catch an editorial page editor's attention, but nonprofits don't always take advantage of this because they can't react quickly enough to write and place an essay when it's still timely," says Sandra Beckwith, author of *Publicity for Nonprofits: Generating Media Exposure That Leads to Awareness, Growth, and Contributions* (Kaplan Publishing).

Beckwith recommends having at least one op-ed written in advance to use when a news event brings the op-ed's topic to the public's attention. She cites recent headlines as examples: The latest celebrity starting a family before getting married creates a news peg for pro-family organizations while a weather disaster provides a hook for groups helping businesses and individuals prepare for disasters.

Beckwith's book offers these nine tips for writing effective op-eds you can update according to the news story for immediate publication:

- Introduce yourself to your newspaper's op-ed page editor by telephone or e-mail and request the publication's op-ed guidelines. Then follow them.
- Determine your goal. What do you want to achieve through your op-ed? Do you want people to behave differently or take a specific action? Keep this goal in mind as you write.
- Select one message to communicate. Op-eds are short – typically no more than 800 words – so you have room to make just one good point.
- Be controversial. Editors like essays with strong opinions that will spark conversation.
- Illustrate how the topic or issue affects readers. Put a face on the issue by starting your essay with the story of somebody who has been affected or begin with an attention-getting statistic.
- Describe the problem and why it exists. This is often where you can address the opposing viewpoint and explain your group's perspective.
- Offer your solution to the problem and explain why it's the best option.
- Conclude on a strong note by repeating your message or stating a call to action.
- Add one or two sentences at the end that describe your credentials as they relate to the topic.

"With this approach, when your issue is suddenly making headlines, you can write an introduction that connects the news to your essay and e-mail it to the editor quickly," adds Beckwith.

Publicity for Nonprofits: Generating Media Exposure that Leads to Awareness, Growth, and Contributions is available at neighborhood and online booksellers or by calling 800-245-BOOK. For more information, go to www.nonprofitpublicity.com.