

The Guardians Initiative™

Reclaiming the Public Trust

Guardians Toolkit: How to Write an Op-Ed, Letter to the Editor, or Speech

Trustees have a unique opportunity to advocate on behalf of higher education and its value to individuals, communities and our nation. In addition to engaging with colleagues and stakeholders, trustees can also advocate more publicly, through op-ed pieces, letters to the editor, or speeches to professional or community organizations.

Op-eds

Many newspapers (and their websites) are eager for op-ed pieces from prominent members of the community on a variety of topics. Below is some basic information that may be helpful for trustees who may want to share their support for higher education in an op-ed.

Op-eds are named for their location opposite the editorial page in most newspapers. This powerful media real estate is home to well-reasoned arguments about issues with currency in popular and political culture. These pieces typically start with a strong argument, lay out supporting information and data, acknowledge opposing positions, and close by returning to the original argument.

Op-eds have the best chance of being placed if they are short (between 600-800 words, though word counts vary by outlet), compelling, related to recent news, and written for laypeople.

Most newspapers publish contact information for the editors who oversee the op-ed page in the paper and on their website.

If you place an op-ed in your local newspaper, AGB would love to share it with colleagues across the country. Please send any published pieces to Tim McDonough at tmcdonough@agb.org.

Letters to the editor

Letters to the editor are an important tool to respond to published news stories or op-ed pieces, either positively or negatively. They offer an opportunity to challenge points made by those quoted in news stories, provide data or other information overlooked by op-eds, or offer praise for positions taken by elected officials or other leaders.

There are several keys to getting a letter to the editor published. First, letters must be short, typically 200 words or fewer, though word counts vary by outlet. Second, letters must be timely—those submitted on the same day a news story or op-ed runs have the best chance of being printed. Lastly, letters that focus on one point and make that point vividly, concisely and with data are often those that get published.

Most newspapers publish information on how to submit letters to the editor in the paper and on their website.

If your letter to the editor is published, AGB would love to share it with colleagues across the country. Please send any published pieces to Tim McDonough at tmcdonough@agb.org.

Speeches

Professional and community organizations often invite members to present on topics of general interest, which offers a great opportunity for trustees to share information about the value higher education offers to individuals, employers and communities.

In this toolkit, you will find talking points and sample PowerPoint decks that may be useful to you in presenting to organizations in which you are involved. In addition, the AGB staff can provide you with additional talking points and data on a wide range of topics related to higher education. Please contact Tim McDonough at tmcdonough@agb.org for assistance and information.