

# Tips on Writing an Op-Ed



National Arts and Humanities Month is an opportune time to highlight the value of the arts and humanities in an op-ed, an opinion piece that appears opposite the editorial page of your local newspaper. An op-ed enables you to raise public awareness of an issue while educating policy makers and positioning your agency as a resource for the media.

Below you'll find some general guidelines and ideas for op-eds, including a checklist, tips, recommended talking points and other uses for op-eds. When you do an op-ed, it is important to underscore your broader message of the value of the arts and humanities to your community and the people in it with examples and statistics of local significance; be sure to address specific issues and draw attention to the cultural life in your community.

## Op-Ed Checklist

**Define the goal of the piece.** Determine whether you are trying to: educate the public and policy makers, frame the issue, raise awareness, etc. Use National Arts and Humanities Month as a jumping-off point for your op-ed, not as the subject.

**Select the best author.** Sometimes an op-ed is most effective when it is ghost written for a prominent business leader or public figure by the person who can provide comprehensive information on the subject: You!

**Timing.** Always consider how the op-ed can be linked to a particular event to maximize its impact such as the signing of the proclamation. Use National Arts and Humanities Month as a strategic way to educate public officials and business and civic leaders about the year-round contributions of the arts and humanities.

**Follow up.** Be sure to follow up with the editor to see if/when your op-ed may be used. Offer to edit it, if necessary to see it in print.

## Tips for Authors

**Be clear and concise.** Your op-ed should be only about 500-800 words, including a suggested headline and byline, as well as a very short biographical statement about the author.

**Remember the reader.** Keep your sentences short and punchy. Back up general statements with facts and make the issue relevant to your community with anecdotes and/or examples.

**Be creative!** Take a fresh approach. Find a way to engage your reader start to finish.

**Timeline.** Newspapers take up to two weeks to publish an op-ed. Be patient, but keep in touch to find out the status of the piece once you've submitted it.

## Other Uses for Op-Eds

**Letters to the editor.** If the paper doesn't run your op-ed, feel free to resubmit it as a letter to the editor by paring it down to about 300 words.

**Press releases.** Adapt the op-ed for a press release for reporters and talk show/public affairs program directors.

**Position statements.** Use your piece as the framework for a position paper to distribute to key decision makers and other audiences as appropriate.

## **Recommended Themes and Talking Points**

**Cultural Treasures.** Each community, no matter what size or where, has its own artists and treasured cultural organizations. Each community has its important patrons and supportive elected officials, its own local heroes for the arts and humanities. National Arts and Humanities Month is a good time to say thanks and draw attention to the impact these artists made and the arts challenges ahead.

**Arts Participation.** Use the [2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts](#) by the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as surveys by the Travel Industry Association of America, that demonstrate the broad and growing interest of Americans in the arts and humanities. Public investment in the arts and humanities helps ensure that every citizen has the opportunity to participate in the arts and humanities.

**The Arts Mean Business.** The arts play a key role in community economic development. Cultural districts are reviving forgotten downtowns and main streets. Recent studies have demonstrated the power of the arts and humanities to draw visitors and businesses to cities and towns across the country. Contact your state or local arts agencies for local and national cultural economic impact studies or visit Artworks on the NASAA Web site for anecdotes and current statistics on cultural tourism. Talk with local businesses about the importance of the arts and humanities to the local business climate.

**Rationale for National Arts and Humanities Month.** National Arts and Humanities month is a special time to honor and learn more about cultural life in communities across the country. The arts and humanities play an important role in our lives. Here is an extraordinary chance to illustrate the value of cultural programs, particularly those that receive public funding. It is also the time for elected officials to hear what is important to the people they serve.

## **Resources**

### **2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts**

<http://www.nea.gov/pub/Notes/81.pdf>

### **Cultural Visitor Profile**

[http://www.nasaa-arts.org/artworks/culture\\_profile.shtml](http://www.nasaa-arts.org/artworks/culture_profile.shtml)

### **National Assembly of State Arts Agencies**

<http://www.nasaa-arts.org>