



## **Weigh in on the Important Issues: How to Write and Pitch an Effective Op-Ed**

Whether you are writing about foreign policy or domestic issues, it is very important that Arab Americans have a voice in the media locally and nationally. The Arab American community is often at the center of, or affected by some of the most important issues in the national spotlight. The more that our voices are heard in the media, the narrower the gap is between the Arab American narrative and the general American narrative. Our issues are America's issues.

### ***The Basics of an Ideal Op-Ed***

- It should be brief, ideally 550-700 words
- It should be as timely as possible
- It should have a clear point
- It should argue that point from a specific perspective
- It should use strong clear language, and avoid jargon

### ***Op-Ed Placement Strategy***

Placement is important in getting your voice in front of the right audience. An effective op-ed can make a big difference, whether placed in a national print outlet or in a local paper in communities around the country.

AAI has several media tools available to assist with contacting key members of the press across the country. If you are interested in moving forward with an Op-Ed or need help pitching an idea to press in your area, we would like to help you. Please contact Jennifer Salan at [jsalan@aaiusa.org](mailto:jsalan@aaiusa.org) or (202) 429-9210 for assistance.

Below is an outline designed to help you write and pitch your Op-Ed:

### ***Market Your Op-Ed***

#### **The Pitch:**

**Your pitch is just as important as writing a great Op-Ed. Know who you are pitching your idea to and give them a reason to consider your story.**

- Conduct some research on the paper's coverage or lack thereof on the topic of your Op-Ed. Check out the editorial section of your paper: your Op-Ed needs to make an argument that takes a unique perspective and discusses the issues in a way that isn't present in that paper or the local/national discourse.
- Identify the News Editor or Op-Ed Editor (*we can help you find the right editor*). Referencing your research on the paper's coverage of your topic, explain why your argument provides a unique perspective. Don't be afraid to cite a specific editorial author or article and express your disagreement with their perspective.

## ***Writing the Op-Ed***

### **Getting Started:**

***(An engaging opening is critical, engage the reader with a strong opening statement. Then, explain the issue, who you are, why you are writing, and your expertise on the issue.)***

- The backlash against the Islamic Cultural Center betrays American values. As an Arab American, I have been closely following the discussion surrounding this development. I serve on [\_\_\_\_\_ council, board, belong to \_\_\_\_\_ club, group etc] and believe it is important to challenge the [disconcerting, unthinkable, baffling, disappointing rhetoric \_\_\_\_\_] that has permeated our national debate about what is basically a local zoning issue.

### **Raise the Issue:**

***(Why is the issue important?)***

- The controversy has called into question many issues such as:
  - Freedom of religion/religious tolerance
  - Civil liberties
  - National security
  - Hate crimes
  - Anti-Arab & Anti-Muslim backlash
  - American values
  - American identity
  - Role of politics and governance
- The debate has received a tremendous amount of media coverage and many have weighed in including my member of Congress who said...[insert provided quote or statement]

### **Make the Issue Stick**

***(Where appropriate call out member of congress or other elected officials and explain why their statement and viewpoint is wrong or right.)***

Below are a few examples of issues to raise in arguing against an officials' statement:

- Exploits a political wedge issue
- It plays 'cheap politics' for political gain
- Is contrary to constitutional rights
- Marginalizes an ethnic or religious community
- Is detrimental to national security and to our troops overseas (cite quotes from national security and military personnel)
- Is profoundly negative for America's image abroad
- Threatens to unwind the social fabric of a country whose fundamental values are tolerance and freedom.
- Plays into the idea that constituents' religion, ethnicity can be used for personal, political capital
- It does not represent your feelings as a constituent
- Isolates them from the Arab American and American Muslim constituents in their district
- Contributes to a wave of anti- Arab and anti-Muslim backlash
- It will be remembered as a dark period in American history

### **Create an Action**

#### ***(End with a call to action and a way to make things right)***

- Demand member of Congress or elected officials reexamine their position and issue a follow-up statement OR thank them for speaking out on what you argue is the correct side of the issue.
- Mention community campaigns to call representative to express concern with their statements.

#### **\*Things to Remember\***

- Clarity and concision are key; every sentence should be essential to the points you make
- Use clear language and avoid using any specialized vocabulary to communicate your points
- Ensure that you are bringing a unique perspective to the issue in question