ACTIVISM '10'1

SGAC’s guide to taking effective political action
Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them, in our incomplete state, there would be no advance towards civilization.

- Oscar Wilde

If you think you’re too small to be effective, you have never been in bed with a mosquito.

- Betty Reese

CONNECT WITH US

For more information, and for news updates, find us online at:
www.studentglobalaidscampaign.org
Twitter: @FightGlobalAIDS
www.facebook.com/fightglobalaids

CONTACT US

Our SGAC staff is here to support and help you with all your SGAC work!

Amirah Sequeira – National Coordinator
amirah@studentglobalaidscampaign.org

Mythili Prabhu – SGAC Fellow
mythili@studentglobalaidscampaign.org
In order to make BIG changes for people living with HIV/AIDS, we must demand it from our decision makers through different forms of activism. This includes talking with LEGISLATORS AND THEIR STAFF in lobby visits, doing nation-wide call-ins to representatives, using direct action tactics like PROTESTS, RALLIES, AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE to influence decision making, using the media to bring positive attention to our campaigns, and accessing our targets directly through birddogging.

All of these forms of activism are tools to achieve lasting change, which is why it is so important that our SGAC chapters have a good understanding of each of these tactics. This toolkit is your guide to taking effective & powerful political action.

Remember that these tools should always be employed strategically so that they are most effective. Different situations and political climates may call for certain tactics to be used over others. Throughout the year, look to the SGAC Google group and national calls to discuss tools and strategy.

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GUIDE TO LOBBY VISITS

Why are Lobby Visits Important?
Lobby visits are an essential component of effective SGAC work and are most effective when our chapters work in tandem to deliver clear and concise messaging to elected representatives. These visits allow SGAC to collectively voice our demands and advocate for change. Your visit will not only help to persuade your representative, but it will also be an educational experience for you. During your visit you will get an inside look at the political climate and insight on how to better promote your issue.

How to set up a meeting with your legislator:

1. Decide which legislator(s) you’d like to meet with – you have two senators and a representative. Contact SGAC to learn more about any past discussions we have had with the legislator, and to learn about their history on issues relating to HIV/AIDS and global health.

2. Call your legislator’s office to schedule a meeting. You can find their phone number on their website – make sure to call their local district office, unless you are planning on meeting with them in Washington DC. Try to call a week or more in advance. You may be asked to e-mail a scheduler. Make sure to follow up with the office by phone to make sure the meeting is scheduled. Keep following up as often as you need to!

3. If you are having trouble scheduling a meeting, contact SGAC to see if they have any contacts with staffers in the office of your legislator to speed up the process.

NOTE: It is a great idea for chapters to plan to meet consistently with the office of their representatives in order to build a relationship with staff. Chapters can meet as often as every two weeks, and use each meeting to discuss a different campaign with the office. It may also be a good idea to invite students from other organizations to join your meetings - this gets other students involved in our campaign work, and demonstrates to the legislator that young people with a variety of interests care about these issues. Natural allies for many of our campaigns are often found in medical students organizations, LGBTQ groups, cultural groups like Black students organizations or Latino students organization, and environmental and labor rights activist groups.
How to prepare for your meeting:

1. It is important to be as relaxed as possible during your visit. Expect to be a little nervous. Have everyone who is planning on attending get together at least 1 hour in advance of the meeting to plan out who is handling each agenda point. Decide who will “chair” the meeting based on familiarity with the issue and speaking skills.

2. Bring a “leave behind” kit with you to hand the staffer after your meeting – this can include briefings, articles, and fact sheets. SGAC will provide most fact sheets and briefings to your chapter in advance of your meeting. You can also look to our friends at amfAR, Medicines Sans Frontier, Public Citizen, or AMSA for their resources.

3. If possible, try and form a delegation by bringing friends who are also from your district. If they are not from your district, you have no obligation to divulge this fact if you are not asked, but also do NOT lie if asked.

4. Do some basic research on the interests of your legislator so that you can cater your main arguments to issues, activities, or affected populations that he/she cares about.

Sample Agenda for the Meeting

1. **Introductions** – If you are affiliated with an organization, introduce the mission of that organization, and what your college chapter focuses on. Then do individual introductions of each person in attendance. You may want to provide more details and background on who you are, and why you are interested in working on global health disparities and HIV/AIDS. Acknowledge your member of Congress for any previous actions on the issue. Connect with your member of Congress and/or staff by asking specific questions, such as, “What are your main priorities in Congress this year?”

2. **Current State of the AIDS Pandemic**
   a. Opportunity to end AIDS
      i. Treatment is prevention – NIH-funded research from June 2011 shows that receiving treatment prevents a person from passing HIV on to their partners (reduces the transmission rate by 96%)
      ii. Mathematical models show we can end AIDS – using treatment & prevention tools we already have (condoms, preventing mother-to-child transmission), we can drive new infections down and save lives.
      iii. Economic benefits – HIV treatment results in return to full employment (Bor, Health Affairs 2012), cost-savings in the long-term (UNAIDS Investment Framework, Schwartlander et al., Lancet 2011)
      iv. Personal connection – if you have them, consider telling stories of friends/acquaintances with HIV or successful programs you’ve witnessed
3. **Presentation of Issues** – When discussing the issues with your members of Congress or their staff, focus on engaging them in the conversation as well as making requests.
   
a. Make a short, concise presentation of the issue – whether it is about funding for PEPFAR/Global Fund, the Robin Hood Tax, or the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

b. This is a good time to go through documents in your “leave behind” kit, and give it to them after you are finished speaking.

4. **Asks**
   
a. Make **specific** requests and ask for their answer right then. Ask them to take some sort of action – will they write a letter to the appropriations committee about protecting funding for Global AIDS programs? Will they co-sponsor legislation for the Robin Hood Tax? Will they call the President to express their disapproval with provisions in the TPP? Will the vote against fast-track authority? If they are unwilling to make a commitment, set a date to follow up.

b. Also carefully record any objections, questions, or concerns. If you can’t address a specific question, tell them you will get back to them with an answer. One person should take notes during the conversation, being sure to write down any commitments made by the legislator or aide.

c. Set a plan for following up with the appropriate congressional staff.

5. **Follow-Up** - Fax or mail a “Thank You” letter and follow up with the appropriate aide(s). Without follow up, your effort in scheduling a meeting and speaking powerfully about our issues could be wasted. If your representative does what you asked, then be sure to thank them and let them know you appreciate their continued efforts.

6. **Report back** to SGAC about your meeting through the Google discussion group to prompt discussion on follow up action items for both your own chapter, and chapters in other locations.
CALL-IN GUIDE

Why do a Call-In?

1. It impacts decisions made by legislators – they actually do pay attention to calls they get!
2. It’s an easy way to engage A LOT of students and youth in activism – and then recruit them to get involved more!

Tips for a great call-in

• Call your legislators from your home state, your home district, and your school’s district if they are different. Depending on the campaign and the strategy, you will probably also want to make calls to the House and Senate leadership. Call-ins to the White House can also be an effective strategy.

• Set up a table on your campus or in a public place, and make it attractive with signs and free food. (People love free food!) When people approach your table, explain who you are and the work that you’re doing, and ask them if they would make a call to their legislator (or your legislator of choice) to urge them to support the campaign you’re working on. Have many copies of your call-in script printed and ready to go, along with fact sheets about your demands, so that people calling in feel prepared and confident in their engagement. Make sure to get the names and contact information for everyone you talk to so that you can stay in touch with them for future actions!

• Send out the call-in script and your plans through all of the email listservs and social media channels that you have access to.

• Keep track of the number of calls you make, and let us know! That way we can monitor our progress!

Info on your representatives: http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/
And their DC numbers here: http://www.house.gov/representatives/
You can find information on your senators here: http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

Information on the House and Senate leadership:
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D–NV): (202) 224–3542
Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R–KY): (202) 224–2541
Speaker of the House John Boehner (R–OH): (202) 225–6205
House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D–CA): (202) 225–4965
Call-in Script Templates

GLOBAL AIDS FUNDING
"My name is ________ and I am calling from ______________ and am a member of (your organization, school chapter, church or service provider group). As you’ve seen previously, science has shown us that increasing the number of people on HIV treatment could now end the AIDS pandemic, preventing new HIV infections while allowing those living with HIV to live a productive and healthy life. We need you to stand up and lead the effort to finish the bipartisan work started by President Bush and continued by President Obama, by fully funding PEPFAR and the Global Fund during the budget negotiations for FY 2014. Will you propose $4.58 Billion for PEPFAR and $1.65 Billion for the Global Fund in committee? Will you and [the member of congress] meet with us to discuss this further? Creating an AIDS-free generation is a big priority for the US around the world, and for us here back home.”

ROBIN HOOD TAX
My name is ________ and I am calling from ____(city, town)____ and am a member of (your organization, school chapter, church or service provider group). I am calling because I wanted to express my support for the Inclusive Prosperity Act (HR 1579) and I wanted to encourage Representative/Senator __________ to do the same. A small tax on financial transactions could raise billions of dollars for public services spending at home and sustainable development abroad. H.R. 1579 provides a sustainable revenue source for health care (including ending HIV/AIDS), climate change mitigation and adaptation, jobs creation, and education, using the success of the financial sector to support our most vulnerable communities. Will Representative __________ co-sponsor HR 1579?
DIRECT ACTION: PLANNING A RALLY

Strategy

**Location:** Consider the issue you are raising awareness about or trying to force action on, and think of where to make the most impact with your message. Pick a location that has symbolic value, such as in front of a bank if you’re rallying for the Robin Hood Tax, or that will capture attention of people in power, like in front of the office of a legislator you’re trying to persuade.

**Framing:** Create chants (always try to make them rhyme!), slogans for signs or T-shirts, and messaging for any informational materials that grab attention of passersby with a moral call to action. For example, the slogan “AIDS Budget Cuts Kill” is short, to the point, but grabs attention and forces a viewer to consider the moral implications of letting people die due to budget cuts.

**Timing:** Pick a strategic time and date. If you’re demonstrating on campus, think about a time during lunch breaks so there will be high traffic and a higher likelihood of supporters joining you. Rallies around noon are similarly popular for off-campus locations, as you can reach people going to and from their lunch breaks. If you demonstrate on a weekend, be aware that press may be harder to generate and it’s likely that fewer people will interact with your rally.

Logistics

**Location:** Once you’ve decided on a strategic location, check with the police to see if you need a permit to hold a rally in your desired location. If you do, you may want to consider using another space that doesn’t require a permit. You can also choose to apply for a permit so that your rally is as effective as possible. You will also want to look into any city or town rules and regulations about the use of bullhorns, obstructing pedestrian space, or stopping traffic. Be sure to comply with all of these rules and regulations if you intend to limit any risk of arrest.

**Speakers:** Organize 3-5 speakers to speak at the rally about the issues you want addresses. Give each speaker clear instructions as to the points you want them to address and the short time limit they each have. Choose an MC who will keep the rally on message and on time. You probably don’t want the rally to last much longer than an hour.

**Recruitment:** Check with your members to see who can make the rally. Then, ask everyone to reach out to friends who may be interested in global health but can’t join your chapter. Be sure to talk to local AIDS service organizations too—they will likely have great tips from experience and be happy to spread the word to their staff and clients. See our turn-out tips sheet for more info!

**Materials:** If possible, finish all the poster files or sign-making two days before the action so you can deal with any printing mishaps in advance. It’s often a good idea to print out half or quarter sheets with information about why you are rallying, your demands, and contact info for further
information to hand out to interested passersby. Sign making parties or art builds in advance are a great way to get people involved in the planning of the rally, and to build excitement for the upcoming action. People love to be creative, and you can often recruit folks to the rally just by getting them to help make signs and banners ahead of time.

**Getting there:** Have a meeting the night before to make sure everyone knows what materials they are responsible for bringing, where to meet, etc to avoid confusion the day-of.

**Media:** See our media fact sheet for tips about getting press coverage! Make sure to have a dedicated media spokesperson (or two) to handle all media inquiries. If you would like a press team to support you from afar by calling media outlets the day before and emailing out press releases, contact SGAC staff or email the SGAC listserve.

Also identify someone to handle live social media coverage of the action. Let SGAC staff know in advance where to find the live social media coverage, so that we can assist in the social media strategy.

**Outcomes**

**Follow Up:** Take pictures during the rally and then put them up on facebook, send them to reporters, or even send them to your political target! Make sure to send pictures to SGAC so that we can publicize your great work!
DIRECT ACTION: STREET STUNTS

Street theater and stunts are a great way to bring both public and media attention to your issue. They are eye-catching ways to supplement a larger rally, or can be done with a small group of people and be just as effective as a rally with a lot of people. They are also an engaging opportunity to be creative and get new people involved in your activism!

There are some important elements to think about before doing this sort of direct action:

1. As always, think about your strategy. What is the message you are trying to get across, and what is your demand?
2. Who is the most strategic target for your demand? In what public space can you use an interesting stunt to command their attention and/or command the media's attention?
3. How can this message or demand be represented in a new and creative way? Could using props (such as giant puppets, pill bottles, or other creative items) enhance your action?
4. Is this stunt going to happen once? Or could it be a part of a series targeting the same decision maker, or targeting others nationwide?
5. When is the best time to do the stunt? When will it get the most attention?
6. Do you need to obtain a permit to pull off the stunt? Do you risk violating any laws about the use of public space or obstructing pedestrian or vehicle traffic?
7. How many people will you need to pull off the stunt? Should it be a part of a larger rally?

If you go ahead with a fun and creative stunt, make sure to take photos and video for social media distribution, and to think about media tactics and recruitment strategies.
BIRDDOGGING 101

What is “birddogging?”
Birddogging is the name given to the activist tactic of attending public appearances in order to win new policies from politicians. It usually involves asking a candidate a question in order to get a commitment on an issue. This direct interaction between activists and decision makers rarely happens in Washington. It is easy to have a big impact through the simple act of bringing five people to an event, working together to raise your hands and ask questions that provoke an answer from the target politician. Birddogging has been particularly effective during election campaign season, when politicians are trying to impress the public to gain their votes. Through birddogging, we can make it known that our campaigns are voting issues, and get commitments from people running for election.

Why birddog?
Many of us have at one point written a letter to our Member of Congress, and some of us have even called their office in Washington. These are all important parts of a campaign to win new policies, because we are communicating our demand (and sometimes our strength in numbers) to decision makers- the people who have the power to give us what we want. But sometimes, when phone calls and letters aren’t enough, directly interacting with the decision maker is a way to ensure that our demands are translated quickly into effective new policies and funding for people with HIV. All of these tactics can and should be used to win policy victories.

Birddogging can be particularly effective because it’s a tactic where we directly reach policy makers, at public appearances like campaign events or town meetings, when the people we need to say “yes” to our demands for policy change are outside of the protective bubbles they surround themselves with when they are in Washington. Public events are especially valuable since activists can often gain direct access and get an answer in front of members of the public and media, so we can hold politicians accountable for their promises.

How to birddog

1. **GET TO EVENTS:** Make note of candidate events that will be happening near you. You can learn about upcoming public events by getting on party and candidate e-mail lists, join the lists of campus democrats and republicans, and monitor the “political futures” columns on ABC and MSNBC pages. Keep your eye on local press, though, because often local reports will be the first to announce specific events.
   a. **CALLS:** During campaign season, call the campaign offices and say “Hi, I have a few friends who were wondering what the next couple of opportunities are to see Senator so-and-so?”
b. **EVENT FORMAT:** Ask the event organizers about the event: when do the doors open, do you need a ticket and where can you get one, and, most importantly, is there a question and answer period. National groups will often be able to help with this work also.

c. **ACCESS:** Sometimes you need a ticket. These almost always go quickly. Sometimes you just need to print a ticket off of the candidate’s website. If the tickets are gone or the event is a fundraiser, you can volunteer for the event to get in for free. It is perfectly fine to ask questions or even shout questions at politicians – even if you are a volunteer!

d. **THERE IS HELP!:** Let other SGAC chapters know when you are planning to attend an event in your area. Also, Health GAP may know of other people nearby who can come back you up!

2. **GET A POSSE:** It can be intimidating to go to a campaign appearance by yourself, no question. So bring a posse – just as simple as collecting a few friends will strengthen your effort a lot. Every single person can have a big impact when you’re bird-dogging. But four or five polite people armed with effective questions can completely alter the vibe of a question-and-answer period and win new commitments from the candidate! It is best to bring a group with you so you are better able to get your questions asked and answered and so that you can back each other up.

3. **MAKE A PLAN:** It is very important to make a plan in advance with your posse. Truthfully, it never works to “wing it,” nor can we really just tell our team what to do and expect them to do it.

   a. Important: Write your questions in advance—even the most experienced birddoggers sometimes stumble over their questions when the microphone is on and the cameras are pointing at them. Many regular folks who are interested in issues and who are not working with a team to win something will write their questions before asking them. (See below for help on good questions). A posse of five-to-ten activists might write just two or three questions and then be ready to follow up when and if the target gives an incomplete answer.

   b. Be sure to follow up on each other’s questions. Birddoggers have been successful at large and small events simply by speaking with the decision maker on the way to the stage, or during the handshake line after the event. (See below for more on handshakes).

   c. If the event is large, like a rally with thousands of people, AIDS activists have gotten the candidates attention by getting up to the front and holding up 11x17 posters with clear, short questions or statements they slipped into their pockets, and/or shouting a chant ten or fifteen times. If you’re going to chant, one person will need to cue the chanting at the appropriate time, and the group will have determined in advance how long to chant. It’s easy to run out of steam when all the cameras are pointing, but getting heard is the goal, right?

   d. **PRACTICE:** Especially if you’ll be chanting or shouting questions, it is very important to make sure you can be heard. In even a medium rally, you will need to be louder
than you ever knew you could be! Even for simple Q&A sessions, practice with your teammates to strengthen everyone’s efforts and avoid mistakes.

4. **GET GOOD SEATS** – which means arriving early! Good seats are in or near the very front row and/or near microphones placed in the aisles.
   
   a. Most of the time, unless you have secured special tickets, there will be some sort of VIP area. Don’t worry; clever activists can almost always slip into these areas to get to the front. Just walk in like you know what you’re doing, and you will almost never get stopped. On the off chance that you do get stopped, just wait for the VIP section to open up to the general public – it always will!
   
   b. Arrive early – around an hour early for a small meeting, half an hour early for a very small gathering at a coffee shop, and as much as three hours before the doors open for a big rally or town hall with a front-runner candidate.
   
   c. If there are several people in your team, spread out. People sitting next to each other will not be called on. This is part of why it is important to have a plan in advance and to practice.
   
   d. Make eye contact with the candidate or the staff who decide whether to call on you or hand you the mic.
   
   e. Sit where the target can hear you, and see you (right in front of the podium if you can)!
   
   f. Applauding wildly and shouting supportive things during the speech can make it much more likely you will be called on.

5. **GET YOUR HAND UP FIRST, FAST, AND HIGH:** This sounds simple, but it is the most important thing to do to get called on! Most people will wait for the second or third question to raise their hand, and some only raise their hand half way. These people will rarely get called on. However, for some reason, if you are the first, fastest, highest person to get their hand in the air, you will almost always get called on!
   
   a. Raise your hand before questions are called for – like before the candidate finishes inviting questions. Raise your hand even if there is not supposed to be a Q&A period—if you are in the font and have been applauding, the target will often spontaneously decide to give you a question.
   
   b. Keep in mind- we are on a mission! Our job is to get an answer from the candidate, and our mission requires us to get heard. See below for help on constructing powerful questions.

6. **Get a handshake – and a photo, and an autograph – and AN ANSWER!** The handshake line is another chance to ask the target a question, in public, and usually near reporters. After the formal parts of an event, there is almost always a handshake line.
   
   a. Anticipate where the handshake is going to be (usually near the stage) and quickly bring your team forward, even before the Q&A section is done (but only if you’ve gotten your question answered). Squish right up next to the rope, don’t lose your
spot in front, and wait for the candidate to come to you!

b. One important tactic: don’t let go of her hand until you have your answer! Politicians are used to this, and they will rarely pull away. If there are a few of you, it can help to crowd around the candidate to prolong the handshake for as long as necessary until they have said “yes” to your team. If there are more than 4 in your team, you can get them twice!

c. Another way to get their attention, when grabbing their hand, is to simply say “Sen/Gov/Mayor ___, can I ask you a question?” Remember that even in the best situations, you only have a few seconds to ask your question, so make it short (just one sentence) and PRACTICE since you won’t be able to read off a piece of paper!

d. Politicians – even the most powerful – are suckers for posed photographs. Getting a photo of you and your posse one at a time with the target while the questioning is going on is a good way to extend discussion and/or seal the deal. They also like to autograph signs, clothing books or whatever you have.

e. **Have a camera!** If the target answers your question, we want to have their answer recorded so that we can use the commitment (or lack thereof) to target them in the future.

7. **GET QUOTED:** After the event, talk to the press and get them to cover your questions and the politician’s statement. The press will not come to talk to you – you’ve got to go to them. But they will be interested in what you have to say. Prepare your quote just like you prepared your question.

   a. Important: when you’re talking with a reporter, you’ll want to keep the discussion to what YOU want to say about your issue, and not on other, less important items. You only have to answer the question you should have been asked! If a reporter asks you, “What did you think about Senator so-and-so’s speech on Social Security?” or “How do you like the Senator’s new hairpiece?” it’s perfectly appropriate to dodge the question completely and respond with your quote instead (“The important thing here today was that the Senator made a clear commitment to support $8 billion over 5 years to hire new health care workers that will save the lives of people living with AIDS in Africa”). Reporters are accustomed to people ignoring questions, and they have some obligation to report on what the public thinks at campaign appearances, so be sure to give them only what you want your quote to say—otherwise your quote might end at the point that you have filled in the blank in the story the reporter already has written in their head.

8. **REPORT BACK:** Birddoggers are networked across the country in many different states—but it only works if we keep each other appraised of our efforts and progress. Our collective voices can be much more powerful if someone follow up on your birddogging ten states away. Send an email to SGAC so others can follow up!
EXAMPLE BIRDDOGGING QUESTIONS

Global AIDS Funding: When the Republicans launched the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief in 2003, they understood that fighting global AIDS was critical to our national security. It was also the right thing to do. But over the last three years, funding for Global AIDS Programs has been flat-lined or cut, leading to thousands of deaths due to AIDS. For the FY 2014 budget, funding for Global AIDS programs have decreased from previous years. Mr./Mrs.______________, will you stand up for Global AIDS programs and fight for funding at a level of $6.23 billion for FY 2014?

Robin Hood Tax: A small tax on financial transactions could raise billions of dollars for public services at home and sustainable development abroad. H.R. 1579 is a bill for a Robin Hood Tax and would provide a sustainable revenue source for health care, HIV/AIDS, climate change, job creation, and education. Representative ____________, will you support the Robin Hood Tax and sign onto H.R. 1579?
WRITING AN OP-ED

What is an Op-Ed vs. a Letter to the Editor?

Op-ed stands for “opposite of editorial,” which means in a print newspaper, op-eds will appear on the page facing the editorial page. The editorial page is where the newspaper makes its opinions known, often to endorse political candidates or specific sides of issues. News reporting is supposed to be objective, omitting opinions, but the editorial and op-ed pages are the one place in the news (especially print newspapers) where opinions of both the news source and community members are published.

A Letter to the Editor (LTE), like an op-ed, is a great way to get attention in a newspaper or magazine. An LTE is a very brief statement of your opinion, written in response to a recent news article or event. Keep track of any news articles or editorials in the media that may warrant a response that can further our campaign work.

Op-eds and LTE’S are a tactic to gain public support and facilitate dialogue around campaigns. They are also monitored by government officials - President Obama has a whole team of people whose job it is to follow college newspapers and the issues that young people are concerned about.

Strategy

To have the biggest impact, there are several elements to consider:

- **Goal of your argument**: In an op-ed or LTE, you state your conclusion first (and last). You make your strongest point up front and then spend the rest of the op-ed making your case with the facts that support it. You will help the issue win converts, gain publicity, and reach the audience of opinion-makers who regularly read the op-ed pages. Remember that an op-ed is not a news story that simply describes a situation; it is your opinion about how to improve matters.

- **Timing**: Track the news and jump at opportunities. Timing is essential. Editors want to publish op-eds that relate to issues that are in the news. Whenever possible, therefore, link your issue explicitly to something happening in the news.

- **Audience**: Consider who you want to reach with your op-ed or LTE and tailor your content.

- **News source**: Determine which news source would be best – campus, local, or even national?
After determining your strategy, refining the content is an essential part of any op-ed or LTE:

- **Length:** The most important thing about these pieces is that they are short, clear, and engaging. Stick to 750 words or less for op-eds and 200 words or less for LTEs (but check the specific regulations of the news source you’re aiming for).

- **Structure and content:** Have a clear editorial viewpoint - come down hard on one side of the issue. Don’t equivocate!
  - Be controversial, but not outrageous. Be the voice of reason.
  - Focus tightly on one issue or idea - be brief.
  - Express your opinion, then base it on factual, researched or first-hand information. It’s ok to use first-person accounts in first-person voice (“When I saw this, I felt...”)
  - Provide insight, understanding: educate your reader without preaching.
  - Acknowledge the other side of the argument, then explain why you disagree.
  - Near the end, clearly re-state your position and issue a call to action – tell the reader what to do to fix this situation. Don’t philosophize or merely analyze.
  - Tell readers why they should care. At the end of every few paragraphs, ask out loud: “So what? Who cares?” You need to answer these questions. Explain why. Appeals to self-interest are usually more effective than abstract punditry.
  - Make one point, and make it clear from the beginning. Don’t try to cover a whole range of arguments.
  - Include a brief bio and your organizational affiliation (SGAC) with the op-ed, along with website or twitter for readers to learn more.

- **Style:** One of the most important aspects of the op-ed or LTE – grab your readers’ attention and hold it!
  - Be personal and conversational; it can help you make your point. No one likes a stuffed shirt.
  - Be humorous, provided that your topic lends itself to humor. Keep in mind that humor is very contextual and might not work in print the same way it works in person.
  - Have verve, and “fire in the gut” indignation to accompany your logical analysis.
  - Emphasize active verbs and forget the adjectives and adverbs, which only weaken writing.
  - Avoid clichés and jargon. Write out acronyms.
  - Appeal to the average reader. Clarity is paramount. Use short sentences and paragraphs.
o Use clear, powerful, direct language. Avoid dry statistics, especially when written in number format. Write out the comparisons in words ("cut funding by half" rather than "funding was cut from $6bn to $3bn")

Other tips

• If possible, find a community leader (like a professor, religious leader, or doctor) to co-sign the op-ed with you. This will make it more likely that your opinion is published.
• When we are working on a national campaign and need every chapter to write a stellar op-ed, SGAC national will send out a sample op-ed for your chapter to adapt with a local spin.
• Remember to use the SGAC Google group! Feel free to send out an in-progress piece for others to edit with suggestions if you want.
• When you’ve gotten published, promote, promote, promote. Send the link to the SGAC Google group and national staff will feature your work on our social media pages and website! Also, make sure to show off your hard work on your chapter’s social media accounts and website as well as your personal accounts.
MEDIA TIPS

One critical way to help get your message out is to get the media to cover your event. Here are some special considerations for your campus media sources:

- **Timing:** Since the reporters and editors are busy students too, most appreciate at least a week notice in order to plan how to cover your event.

- **Point person:** For any event you are trying to publicize, it’s a good idea to assign someone from your chapter to be the media point person. Send the editor or assigned reporter the contact info of this member.

- **Build relationships:** It’s important to maintain a good relationship with campus media outlets, so always try to respond promptly to emails or calls, follow up with sending any materials you promise them, and thank them for their work covering your event!

You can also try to generate coverage from **local press sources** if your event will be large enough:

- **Send a press release:** Include the name and contact info of the media point person from your chapter (who should have no other job at the event than talking to media), an attention-grabbing headline about the event, and a blurb written in past tense that includes the purpose and details (be sure to include date, time and location) of the event. Always paste the press release into the body of the email rather than sending an attachment.

- **Always call:** You have to actually speak to a reporter on the phone to get them to come. Sending a press release is never enough to get reporters to come out. When you call, ask to speak to the reporter who covers your target (Senator, Representative, etc). Keep calling back, until you’ve talked to them and told them about your event. Contact SGAC to see if we have any press contacts in your region or city.

- **Be assertive (politely):** Ask them if they’ll come. This seems obvious, but oftentimes people forget to ask them to come. Just like turnout, they’re more likely to come if they’re asked. Oftentimes the stories a reporter writes are decided by their editor. If you know anything about the editor and what style that editor likes, mention that when you talk to the reporter.

- **Timing:** Don’t call print reporters after 3pm, they’re usually busy writing their story for the next day (on deadline). Don’t call radio during “drive time” (7-9am, 4-6pm). Don’t call TV reporters during newscasts (6-7am, 5-7pm). Otherwise, any time is fine. Best time to call in the days before the event is 10am. But, the morning of the event, call early (no later than 8:30am). At 8:30 or 9am, most reporters go into an assignment meeting, where they are told what to cover for the day, and you want to be fresh on their mind.
Follow up: After the event, make more calls. Tell reporters about the event, offer to send them photos, tell them who’s already covering it. Just keep calling! **The more you call, the more coverage you will get.**
TURNOUT TIPS

Getting people to attend your event or meeting rather than one of the dozen competing events on your campus can be hard, but here are some tips to increase turnout:

• **Advertising** your event is key. Flyers are a critical way to advertise on most campuses, but don’t stop there! To get as many people to your event as possible, you have to ask people - preferably in person. Also, send a blurb into any listservs or calendars seen by people who might be interested. You can even email professors teaching related classes to send out the blurb, or see if you can stop by in person to hand out flyers and speak briefly about the event. Make a Facebook event and ask your chapter members to invite their friends. If you are planning a big rally or fundraiser that requires high attendance, you can even dorm-storm (print out small slips of paper, like half- or quarter-sheets to place under the door of everyone in your building).

• Having a **social media** presence for your chapter can be really helpful for turnout. Use your chapter’s Facebook and twitter to advertise your events and encourage discussion about what you’re up to on campus. Use the social media platforms to post interesting and relevant articles, research, and news updates to build an engaged following.

• For rallies or other actions, one trick is to **ask people to sign up** to attend. Get their contact information, including email and phone number, and put it all into a spreadsheet. If the event is a ways off, you can email them once a week to give them updates and ask for help or volunteers. But, the day before, **make sure to call everyone who signed up and remind them**. Get them to say they’ll come three times, and they’ll be much more likely to show up.

• **Give people tasks** for events. Ask someone who you think might not make it to bring some food. Ask another person to volunteer to help you sign people in. Someone else can speak. Think of roles for people, and they’re much more likely to actually show up.

• You can **ask other organizations to co-sponsor** your event, and make a rule that if they co-sponsor, they have to bring ten of their members. Co-sponsorships bring in interested folks and can help your chapter build strategic relationships on campus – win, win!

• Remember the **rule of halves**. Half the people who say they’re going to attend don’t go. Half the people who you talk to will say they can’t come. So if you want 30 people at your event, you need to get 60 people to say they’ll come, and talk to 120 people.

• However, you can increase the percentage of people who show up to an event by reminding people regularly. **Call** everyone who said they’d come the night before and remind them of the event. Don’t just email people. How many times have you gotten an
email and ignored it? Assume people will do the same thing with your email, so skip the hassle and just call them. This goes for your friends, too!

- **Don’t forget to include date, time, location and contact information in your emails and flyers!** Too often, people forget one of these and then no one knows where an event is being held. Seriously, it happens all the time. Double check your flyers and emails to make sure all the information is there.

- One last tip - people are more likely to engage in ACTION immediately after attending an event. Are you inviting a speaker to campus that will attract a lot of people? Have an immediate action item for students to follow up with. Invite people to a legislative visit happening two days later, or to a rally the following week. Get people to call their legislators immediately following the event. Always make sure to have a **sign-in sheet** so that you collect the names, emails, and phone numbers of people who attend the event, and add them to your listserv.