

Send a message to your community!
Submit an op-ed to your local newspaper!

Arts and Humanities Month – Rhode Island is an opportunity to highlight the arts and humanities and their broader impact on your community in an op-ed piece, a 500–600 word opinion piece that appears opposite the editorial page of your local newspaper. For many community papers, ‘letters to the editor’ serve this role.

About the Op-Ed page and Letters to the Editor

- **Define the goal of the piece.** Determine what you are trying to accomplish with the piece. Are you defining an issue, adding information, or calling for action? Put it in the context of your local community’s issues—like budget concerns and other affecting factors. Connect it to your local education issues. State your case quickly.
- **Speak with editorial staff prior to October.** By itself, October as National Arts and Humanities Month will not guarantee a story—even if your local elected official signs a proclamation. It should give you an entrée to speak with your local editorial board about the arts in your community. Ask the arts or education reporter to arrange the meeting and join the discussion about a piece on Arts and Humanities Month and arts education. Ask the paper to consider writing an editorial on the month and what’s happening in your community. If they will not write an editorial, pursue the op-ed piece. Make certain that you understand their guidelines regarding editorials, op-ed pieces, and even letters to the editor.
- **Op-ed pieces are usually written by an expert expanding on a recent issue** or the subject of continuing interest by the newspaper. They add new information, or a point of view, rather than review established facts. Try to get your paper to photograph or write a story about your local elected leaders signing a proclamation naming October as National Arts and Humanities Month.
- **Get an expert to sign the Op-ed.** This can be an elected official, head of a local arts organization, official of your local PTA, superintendent of schools, or the head of the board of education. Other possibilities are a senior arts teacher, the head of your student government, or a state or federal legislator—particularly if that person is a leader on the arts.
- **Letters to the editor also allow you to raise public awareness** about an issue and educate policy makers, while positioning your agency as an information resource to the media. The threshold for publication of a letter is somewhat lower, but again, writers usually are commenting on a recent news topic. Connecting to a Arts and Humanities Month photo or article is helpful. The signer also counts with letters to the editor.
- **Timeline and follow-up.** Start to work on this as early as possible. Newspapers take up to two weeks to publish an op-ed. Stay in touch with your editor or reporter and offer to edit the piece. Also, everyone likes to be thanked.

Recommended Themes and Talking Points

- **Review the research** at http://www.AmericansForTheArts.org/public_awareness on arts education for research to bolster your local community's case on that particular subject.
- **Speak about one issue.** You should concentrate on a single issue, and it should be the strongest arts issue in your community.
- **Specific Artists/Treasures.** Each community, no matter what size or where, has its own artists and treasured cultural organizations. Each community has its own important patrons and supportive elected officials, its own local heroes for the arts and humanities. Arts and Humanities Month – Rhode Island can be a time to say thanks, to highlight the impact these artists made and the arts challenges ahead.

American Public Opinion

- **A recent Harris Poll** on the attitudes of Americans toward arts education revealed that 93 percent of Americans agree that the arts are vital to providing a well-rounded education for children. Additionally, 54 percent rated the importance of arts education a “ten” on a scale of one to ten. Go to www.AmericansForTheArts.org for details of the study on arts education, links to other recent research, and advice on what actions can be taken.
- **Arts and Humanities Month – Rhode Island** is a good opportunity to raise awareness in your local community about the value of the arts in children's lives—especially for children at risk—and to share ways parents can help change the situation in your schools.

Op-Ed Checklist

- **Define the goal of the piece.** Are you trying to educate the public and policy-makers, frame the issue, raise awareness about the arts and healing, etc? Use Arts and Humanities Month – Rhode Island 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. Remember: Use Arts and Humanities Month – Rhode Island as a strategic way to educate public officials about what happens year round.
- **Follow-up.** Be sure to reconnect with the editor to see if/when your op-ed may be used. Offer to tweak it, if necessary to see it in print.

Tips for Authors

- **Be clear and concise.** Limit the article to 600 words, including a suggested headline and byline. Write a short biographical statement about the signer, and always disclose pertinent relationships that person may have with the organization.

- **Remember the reader.** Keep sentences short. Use facts and figures. Attribute statements and conclusions. Connect the issue to your own community.

If Your Local Paper Declines to Run the Article: Other Uses for Op-Eds

Letters to the editor. Shorten the piece to about 150 words and resubmit it as a letter to the editor.

- **Press release.** If some of the points in the op-ed piece qualify as news, that is, facts rather than the opinion of the writer, like statistics, occurrences, or study findings, convert it to a press release and send it to specific reporters, depending on the news subject—arts and education reporters, radio or broadcast TV public affairs directors, talk-show hosts, or program directors.
- **Position statements:** Adapt the piece to a position paper and distribute it to key decision-makers and other audiences you want to influence. Use it to introduce your organization to a new group.
- **Print it in your newsletter.** Don't overlook your own publications as a place for an op-ed piece by your executive director.