

Section 6: Communicating Effectively with Members, Stakeholders and the Public

- Communicate regularly with membership through a variety of means, such as non-work email, social media, text messaging, bulletin boards, and/or association newsletters.
- Utilize effective student-centered messaging to communicate association interests with the media and members of the public.

Developing Your Message

Developing messages and talking points that resonate with your audiences is vital to building support for your Local and its aims. The messages must frame your issues in ways that are easy for members and the public to understand. They should also focus on how your proposed solutions benefit students first and foremost, as well as educators and the rest of the community.

What is an effective message?

- The one, two or three ways we want to talk about an issue.
- It reflects our values and our priorities.
- It makes a point and is true and believable.
- Resonates with the target audience.

Determining your audience is one of the most important steps to successfully delivering your message..

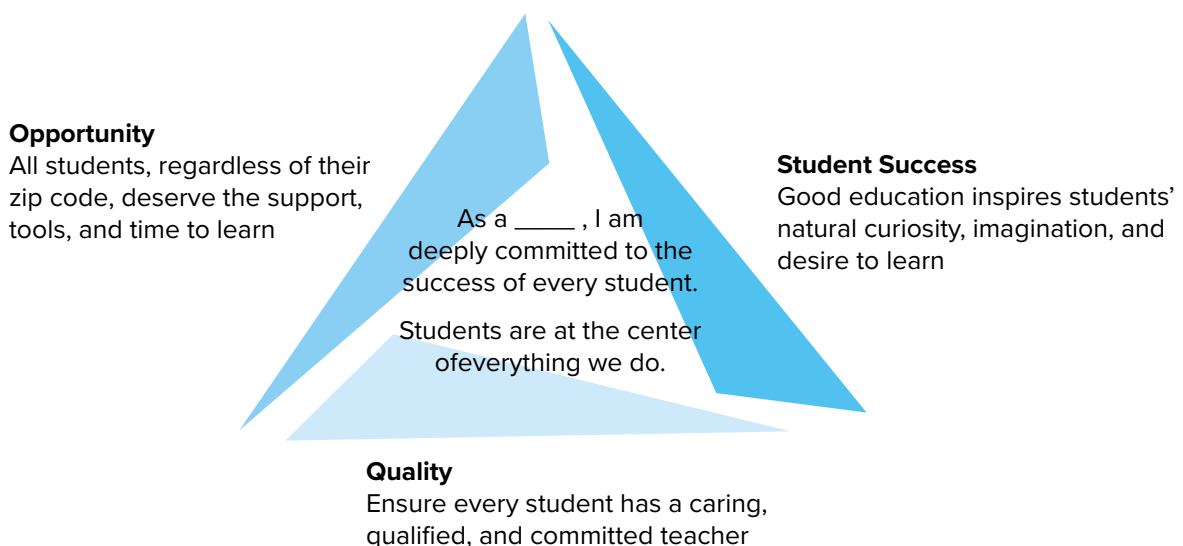
- Who are you trying to persuade?
- External Audience = parents, elected officials, policymakers, news media, business and community leaders, ordinary citizens/taxpayers, senior citizens w/o kids.
- Internal Audience = members, teachers, ESPs, prospective members, association leadership, allies, and friends.

The question isn't so much about what you want to say to them...rather, ask what do you want them to do? What do you want them to believe?

Message Strategy

Jotting down a message triangle can be an effective tool to help guide your thoughts about how to best message around your issues and to serve as a reference point to ensure whatever you're saying about your issues supports the priority values and core message that you've crafted.

The current NEA message triangle is summed up with three broad categories that reflect priority values for the organization and its members: Opportunity, Student Success, and Quality. At its heart is a core message that can be repeated throughout the organization with a student-centered focus that can and should guide all messaging around our issues. We double down on the student-centered commitment AND address very real issues you're facing in our schools, and as professionals.



Digital 101: Tips for Using Social and Electronic Media in Member Communications

Introduction to Digital

With the advent of digital and social media, we now have more direct lines of access to our members, and vice versa. Digital platforms are an important tool in our communication toolbox — a tool to be used in concert with offline organizing. Our union's future will always depend on the personal connections our leadership and staff have to their educators, union members, and their community. With digital integrated into your communications strategy, you can develop deeper relationships, identify new supporters and prospective members, and scale your mobilization efforts where you may otherwise not have a physical presence.

Start with Storytelling

Your digital program should be a storytelling program, full of content that serves a purpose. Compelling stories should be used to form a relationship with your audience and educate them about your key issues. In order to create a clear narrative, think about organizing your content into themes, like human interest stories, education content around key issues, or policy content around legislative moments. Tap into your audience's emotions. Good storytelling is all about creating an emotional response from your audience. Emotion — more than reason — drives action. The best digital content:

- Tells a story
- Is visually interesting
- Is tailored for each platform
- Is consumable and shareable
- Communicates a theory of change that motivates people to take action

Digital Goal-Setting

Any digital plan should have a clear goal or intended outcome in mind. Before you write an email, set an ad budget, or name a campaign, answer these five questions:

1. Who do you want to reach?
2. What story do you want to tell them?
3. What do you need them to do?
4. What content do you have or need to create?
5. When do you need to see results by?

Digital Best Practices

1. Be conversational. The tone coming from your website, email, and social channels should align with the way our association speaks about students and public education. You are the face and voice of your affiliate, so when writing for different channels, consider the spirit of your members, students, and community and ensure your posts are personable, entertaining, or relatable.

2. Communicate regularly. Long periods of inaction undermine the strength and power of the digital communications infrastructure you're building to be able to reach key stakeholders when it is most important. If you need ideas for content, consider trying posts to current events. Is there a new school board budget coming up for a vote? News about how recent efforts have reduced the time students spend on testing versus learning? Stay on top of education-related news at the local, state, and national level. Make sure your digital community is the first to know about relevant issues through your channels.

3. Consider your objective. Before sharing a post or sending an email, consider what point you are trying to make, what value you are providing, and what action you want your online community to take.

4. Show, then tell. The importance of visual media on social channels is undeniable. Visual media will catch readers' eyes, making it more likely for them to take a moment to read your post. Once they have stopped scrolling to see your post, make sure your content can keep their attention. Be concise; boil down your key points to fit within individual posts, rather than asking people to click to read more.

5. Invite participation and action. User-generated content — photos or text posted by users on social media sites — can play a big role in successful social media channels. Encouraging user-generated content tells your audience that you are interested in hearing their voices. Prompt participation by asking for personal stories or reactions to your content. Also consider using the questionnaire and polling functions to further interact and engage with the audience you are trying to reach.

A Closer Look at Facebook

Facebook is a very effective tool to share your Local's messaging and establish a sense of two-way communication with all relevant stakeholders. Your Local should create a private, members-only group to create a sense of community among educators and reinforce the kinds of messaging you would include in a traditional association newsletter. It should also create a public page to communicate regularly with the community and gain support for your association and its causes. You should never post anything on Facebook (in the private group or on the public page) that you would not want the public to know about.

- **Make it digestible.** Content like lists, short captions, and photos are more likely to grab a followers' attention. Dense text can often be overlooked. Vary your content types; include a mix of images, articles, actions, graphics, and discussion prompts. Because of Facebook's algorithm, always add content directly to the Facebook (e.g. upload a video vs. posting a link to YouTube) to maximize potential reach. If posting a link to an external site, you can summarize the content in your post to help explain the story and what you are linking to.
- **Create a dialogue.** Facebook creates an ecosystem for conversation. Monitor the comments for violations of established community standards (and make sure your community standards are a pinned post, so every user knows the rules) but, generally speaking, a free exchange of ideas and engagement is to be encouraged.
- **Learn about your audience.** Using Facebook's Insights feature, you can figure out which posts received the most clicks, likes, comments, shares, and overall engagement. Insights will also tell you the demographic breakdown of your followers, the times your followers are most often online, and other data that can help you tailor your content and posting schedule. Replicate and test successful content types, times of day for posting, and more.
- **Balance quality and quantity.** Find a good average number of posts per week to keep your content spread out without leaving large gaps in your feed. You should aim for a balance of original content and content shared from others and news sites. If something noteworthy occurs, posting more than once a day is fine. Facebook uses an algorithm to determine which posts are seen and when. To make sure your posts are getting in front of your audience, maintain a consistent schedule. Posting too frequently within a short amount of time will cause your posts to compete for attention with one another.

A Closer Look at Twitter

Twitter is a peer-to-peer broadcasting platform, where like-minded organizations, journalists, and enthusiasts are looking to connect with each other and have conversations around key topics. Use Twitter to increase visibility for your mission.

- **Connect on a professional level.** Share knowledge unique to you – break news around your association's efforts and share your point of view on relevant current events. Use the platform to connect with journalists and network with others who are contributing to public education conversation, either locally or at the state or national level. Be on the lookout when another account mentions or identifies you in their content.

- **Use hashtags to your advantage.** Hashtags classify and connect related social posts on certain topics. Use hashtags to start a conversation, respond to participants or join a conversation. For example, #PublicEdVotes and #PublicEducationMatters are central to increasing visibility for our causes and helping like-minded people find your tweets and your account. Don't go overboard, though. While tweets with hashtags receive more engagement than tweets without hashtags, engagement drops when two or more hashtags are added to a tweet. Twitter limits post length with shorter tweets being preferred by the algorithm – typically between 140-280 characters, and don't forget to include hashtags in your character count.
- **Vary your posting times.** Tweet when your audience is likely to be checking their Twitter streams. Try commuting hours, during lunch hours, and even on the weekend. When to tweet which content will depend on who you are trying to reach. Journalists and political staffers are on Twitter during work hours, while members are more likely to check Twitter outside of school hours. Tweet at different hours of the day (and night) to learn when your audience is most receptive. Tweets get buried in users' streams fairly quickly, so aim to post consistently to keep your channel active.

A Closer Look at Instagram

Instagram is a mobile-based, visual-first platform used to share images, videos, and stories with a community of followers. Instagram rewards engaging and interesting photos and videos above all else. Because it's hard to drive action off of Instagram, use this channel to build a closer relationship with your supporters by sharing visuals that show the people behind the union — the names, faces, and stories of members, supporters, communities, and students, and the actions they are taking.

- **Use hashtags to increase visibility.** Hashtags help classify and collect content on like topics. They also provide an opportunity to reach supporters who are not following your feed. You can create new hashtags for specific campaigns or use hashtags to take part in existing conversations. Using hashtags provide an opportunity for people who are interested in these topics discover your content and your account. It is recommended to use up to 10 hashtags, the more specific the better.
- **Focus on the image.** More than any other social platform, Instagram is all about visual media. It does not have to be a professional-level image to perform well. Your content should be authentic. Aim to capture the emotion of a moment, story of a person, or feeling of an event. Captions should complement an image and help explain a story. Whenever possible, keep copy short to avoid having a reader click to read a longer caption.
- **Tell a story.** Instagram's Stories feature allows you to post photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours. Users view Stories posts in a sequence, making it a great place to weave together pieces of content to create a compelling narrative. Instagram Stories can be used to cover a live event, like a rally or meeting, or to dive into a topic that might be too complex for a single Instagram post. Mix up using photos and videos to keep your story compelling. Layer copy, hashtags, and location tags on top of photos to help explain your story.

A Closer Look at Pinterest

Pinterest is a social media platform that allows users to bookmark and share content in the same way you might add magazine clippings to a pin board. While Pinterest is less widely used than other social channels, it's a very popular channel with teachers, who use the channel to find and save valuable classroom resources. Pinterest is primarily used to find and share creative ideas and is an ideal space for our members and potential members to connect with the union as a valuable resource in the profession; it is usually not an ideal space for explicitly political content.

- **Set up unique boards.** Pinterest allows you to organize content into different category "boards". These boards allow you to cluster like content together. Boards can be created for different topics, like Classroom Behavior Tips or topics that your affiliate might be focused on, like Justice and Equality in the Classroom. Create a set of boards that work for the content you will be sharing. Write keyword rich descriptions to help people find your content.

- **Curate your content.** Once you have boards created, add content — or pins — to your boards. You can do this by searching Pinterest for content related to your topic and saving those pins to your own board. While searching for relevant content, you can also find other users to follow. Their content will populate in your home feed. You can also add content from around the internet directly to your own Pinterest boards. Add a “pin it” button to your web browser. This button will allow you to save content from other websites directly to Pinterest.

A Closer Look at Email

Email is one of the most effective channels for communicating directly with members to keep them informed about what is happening in your Local and to provide them with details about upcoming opportunities to engage, like attending rallies or gathering petition signatures. Because of the ability to reach and educate supporters, email should be an integral part of any digital campaign.

- **Focus on the basics.** One of the most important factors of email is driving someone to open an email. When creating an email program, focus on compelling subject lines — something intriguing that will get supporters to open. You should also pay attention to the email sender name. Is there a leader in your affiliate who people know well? Use their name to help increase open rates.
- **Keep it friendly.** Keep it brief. When writing emails, avoid language that is overly formal or stuffy. Email, just like other digital channels, is casual in nature. Your email tone should match that style, while remaining professional. Be concise; use only the amount of space needed to make your point. People have short attention spans, so make sure you hit your key points early on.
- **Make your ask.** Make your asks bold and prominent. Bold and underline links so they stand out in the email copy. Don't bury your ask — make sure it's prominently placed in your emails so readers don't have to search for what you want them to do. Don't just ask once; make your ask twice (or three times!) in each email.
- **Explain your theory of change.** A theory of change is an explanation of how you will turn the resources you have into the power you need to change what you want. Readers want to know how and why the action you are asking them to take will create change, and how what you are asking them to do is credibly going to help reach a goal. Make sure to articulate your theory of change. This doesn't have to be in the format of an if/then statement, but make your ask clear and believable.

Measuring the success of your digital program is a fundamental part to running a smart and effective program. By measuring your success, you can see what works well, and adjust what does not. Reviewing measurement data will also allow you to determine how to best spend your time in future campaigns.

In reviewing metrics, it's important to focus on the right data — data that maps back to specific objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs). When looking at data, avoid vanity metrics — those data points that look good on the surface, but don't tell you about how people are engaging with your content. Vanity metrics include things like total list size or impressions. Instead, focus on the metrics that tell the real story. These include:

- Audience Growth: How many people you reach.
- Engagement: How your content activates and inspires users.
- Amplification: How well your content is being promoted and shared.
- Conversion: How effective your content is at getting people to take action.

Audience Growth: As you execute your digital program, it's important to grow your audience. The bigger your audience, the more potential there is of people seeing your content, engaging with your content, or taking action off of your content. These are numbers that should be monitored for growth over time. Key metrics to look at include:

- Facebook: Followers
- Twitter: Followers
- Instagram: Followers
- Pinterest: Reach
- Email: List growth

Engagement: Engagement rates are the best way to measure the overall quality and effectiveness of your social content. They look at how people are liking, commenting, or sharing your content. Engagement numbers can be calculated on a per-post basis, or in aggregate over a period of time for each channel. Engagement metrics to look at include:

- Facebook: Engagement rate
- Twitter: Engagement rate
- Instagram: Engagement rate
- Email: Click-through rate

Amplification: Amplification metrics give you an understanding of the reach and awareness of your content. People who are deeply engaged with your content are more likely to share or repost your content, helping to grow your audience over time. The metrics to look at include:

- Facebook: Shares
- Twitter: Retweet rate
- Pinterest: Repins

Conversion: Any time the goal of your content is to drive people off of a social platform to take an action, the key measure of success is conversion rate. Whether driving email signups, phone calls, or petition signatures, measure success by looking at how well you're able to convert people to take your action.

- For email, conversion rate can be calculated by measuring the number of people who complete a desired action, and dividing this by EITHER the the total number of recipients or the total number of unique clicks. Conversion is calculated differently depending on the platform you're using for your mass mailer.

- You can also use Google Analytics to measure website conversions. By setting up Goals in Google Analytics, you can measure how well your site fulfills your target objectives. A goal represents a completed activity, called a conversion. An example of a goal is submitting contact information on a form. Having properly configured goals allows Google Analytics to report on critical information, such as the number of conversions and the conversion rate for your site.

Tips for Creating an Association Newsletter

An informed membership is a unified membership, and newsletters are one way to deliver relevant, trustworthy content that keeps members informed about their union!

The following are nine best practices for developing an association newsletter:

1. Name your newsletter. Having a name will help readers feel like they are a part of a community. Naming the newsletter also increases the appeal and makes it more sharable. In fact, a name that rolls off the tongue or is catchy is more fun to share and easier to remember. Here are some helpful strategies for finding the right name for your newsletter:

- Rhyme – Simple rhyme schemes can be catchy and memorable. Choose a root word to build off of that ties into your association. Online tools like Rhymezone.com come in handy if you go this route.
- Alliteration – Using words that begin with the same letter or sound has been shown to focus a reader’s attention on specific sections of text and generate a natural rhythm. Specific sounds may also suggest various undertones. *Example: Anytown Education Association Monthly Membership Memo*
- Puns – A pun uses a word or phrase’s double meaning to its advantage. These are particularly popular as they’re often humorous and clever. *Example: First Class News*
- Places – Treat your newsletter like a place that people stop in on from time to time, like a “corner” or “hub.” This helps create an atmosphere for the reader. *Example: WAEA – Your Association Station for News.*
The following words can be used to personalize and creatively name your local’s newsletter: Update, Pulse, Scoop, Buzz, Report, Insights, Forecast, Edge, Bulletin, and Roundup.

2. Create a slogan or tag line that members will connect with. *Example: Impact. Inspire. Inform.*

3. Include the Association’s logo and its vision statement. A vision statement sets forth the association’s current and future objectives and is intended to guide the association to make decisions that align with its philosophy and goals. *Example: The Anytown Education Association works to ensure teacher welfare and professional growth while advocating the best educational programs for our students.*

4. Maintain a consistent color scheme. Any eye-catching color scheme will work, but do keep it consistent, and unique. Be careful not to adopt your school’s colors, as that can confuse the identity of the newsletter and its content. Members should understand that the information being provided is a service of their union. If you need help selecting a favorable color scheme, consult the color wheel for inspiration. A color wheel is an abstract illustrative organization of color hues around a circle that shows the relationships between primary colors, secondary colors, and tertiary colors.

5. Be sure to date the publication.

6. Remember that non-members will inevitably see the newsletter. Therefore, always include the following phrase “Intended for Anytown Education Association Use Only” on the newsletter.

7. Prominently display contact information for local leaders and/or instructions for who to contact if a member has a question about the newsletter content. The newsletter should also publicize the local’s webpage and social media handles (Twitter, Instagram, etc.), as well as how to sign up for Remind or a closed Facebook Group (if applicable).

8. Keep content fun, relevant, and/or inspirational. While it can be challenging to come up with innovative things to write about, the following are suggestions for articles:

- Dates/times/locations for upcoming meetings or association activities;
- Ways for members to become involved;
- Letter from the president about an ongoing issue of concern;
- Member spotlight including a biography and photo;
- Grievance or bargaining updates;
- Meeting minutes (building rep, district leadership team, labor-management committee, etc.);
- Legislative updates, which can be found here: <https://www.ohea.org/get-involved/legislative-watch/>;
- Reminders, such as deadlines for submitting contractual forms or paperwork (tuition reimbursement, letters of intent, etc.); and
- Inspirational quotes or images.

Brag about your union and all the great things its members are doing! Did the association sponsor a youth soccer team? Do your members volunteer at the local food pantry? If so, highlight these achievements in your newsletter! Just be sure to include who, what, where, when, why, and how for each of your articles.

9. Last but not least, a picture is worth a thousand words, so definitely include pictures of members engaged in association activities! Images grab attention and may lead to more members reading the article. Given that people often skim articles, a picture may also be the best way to convey your message quickly. Just be sure to get permission to use someone's photo before publishing, and always use good judgment. Pictures from the 11th hour of a holiday party aren't always a good idea (see #6 above).

In conclusion, don't be afraid to let your creative juices flow! Be cognizant of your audience and look for creative newsletter topics that will appeal to them and their interests. Using the suggestions provided and your own expertise about the association's goals will take you in the right direction!

Sending Out Press Releases

While press releases are frequently used during crises and strikes, they are also an important tool that can be used at all times to inform the public, via the local media, about issues and events that are happening in your Local. In some cases, press releases are used to raise awareness about the good work your members are doing, to uplift their standing in your community and uplift the value placed on educators in general. More often, they are used to call attention to ongoing issues to encourage members of the public to put pressure on the administration and the Board of Education to act. As with any public-facing communication, student-centered messaging is key.

Best practices:

- Keep it short. Press releases should be no longer than one page.
- Use inverted pyramid style. Assume most people will only read the headline and the first paragraph, so make sure if they do, they are able to get what they need out of your message. The most important, newsworthy information goes in the first paragraph; supporting points and quotes go in the middle; and the least important information goes at the end.
- Be timely. Don't wait several days to send out an update on a development in your local or an event that just occurred. The story will already be too dated. And, if inviting coverage of something in your local, make sure you give reporters lead time. Typically, you should send out a media advisory one week before the event and a reminder on the morning of the event you'd like them to cover.
- Include the critical components. All press releases should include a headline, the date of the release, and contact information for whomever will be acting as spokesperson and fielding media requests. They should also include an "About Us" section at the end, including social media info when possible, so reporters have context about who you are and where they can follow you for further information.
- Scheduling matters. Press releases tend to get the most media traction when sent around 9 a.m. on a weekday, as many newsrooms are beginning their first editorial meetings of the day. Press releases sent on Fridays and weekends tend to get lost in the shuffle.

Sample press release sharing positive news about your local (adapted from a CEA press statement):

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: __INSERT PRESIDENT’S NAME HERE__

__ASSOCIATION NAME__ President

Cell: (xxx) xxx-xxxx | localassociationpresident@email.com

Veteran Columbus Teacher Regina Fuentes to Represent Columbus Education Association, Ohio Education Association at White House Forum

COLUMBUS, Ohio – September 6, 2022 – The Columbus Education Association announced today that member Regina Fuentes has been selected to represent CEA, as well as the Union’s state affiliate the Ohio Education Association, at the Communities in Action: Building a Better Ohio forum to be held at the White House in Washington, D.C. on Wednesday, September 7.

The forum will feature local elected officials and community leaders working on behalf of their communities to create opportunities and improve people’s everyday lives. Fuentes is a 24-year Columbus City Schools veteran who currently teaches English at Eastmoor Academy. She also volunteers as CEA spokesperson, recently serving as the Union’s voice on local and national media during the historic three-day CEA strike in August.

“One huge victory secured by our strike was a guarantee that every classroom, gym, auditorium, and cafeteria in our District will have functional air conditioning and heating for our nearly 50,000 students,” said Fuentes. “Most of the funding for these projects will come from the American Rescue Plan, so I’m excited to go to Washington, D.C. and share how we fought to put this critical legislation into action in our community- and won!”

Attendees will include Labor Secretary Marty Walsh, White House Director of Public Engagement Keisha Lance Bottoms, American Rescue Plan Coordinator Gene Sperling, and other Ohio community and labor leaders. A livestream from the White House event will be available with registration at: https://pitc.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WN_EUsk_SrmSk-Xj0PaRqGfqw.

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The Columbus Education Association is the union representing nearly 4,500 teachers, librarians, nurses, counselors, psychologists, and other education professionals in Columbus City Schools. Like and follow CEA on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ColumbusEA> for the latest information.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor can be written by both your organization's leadership and your membership. They can help communicate the position of educators on issues in your community directly to the engaged citizens of the communities they serve. Keep track of local news, editorials, and letters that touch on the issues that matter to your members, and work with your members and fellow leaders to write and submit your own Letters to the Editor in response, as appropriate.

Letters to the Editor help:

- Enhance the Association's visibility on the editorial pages of your local newspapers and across the state.
- Respond to false attacks on public education, your organization/union, teachers and school employees.
- Raise and support positive education issues and information in your local newspaper and across the region.

When writing a Letter to the Editor:

- Know the Rules. Each newspaper has its own rules for letters it will publish. Check the "Letters to the Editor" section where the requirements will be explained. If a newspaper requires exclusivity for a Letter to the Editor, use your talking points to draft a different version for other papers.
- Stick to one or two good points. Anything more gives short shrift to your arguments.
- Be brief. Sometimes the best letters to the editor are only one paragraph, and always almost exclusively fewer than 250 words.
- Use simple words in declarative sentences.
- Use personal experience and anecdotes. Stress real issues that affect your students.
- Try to "connect" with the readers. Help them understand that you are on their side and working in the best interest of your students and the community. Student-centered messaging is key.
- Be positive, constructive, and aspirational. An upbeat tone is more persuasive than one that scolds, blames, or complains.
- Try to incorporate these secrets to published letters: humor, solid logic, a picturesque outlook or unique approach to an issue.
- Write as tightly and clearly as possible. The editor may edit your letter for readability, clarity, or just plain lack of space.
- Add a call to action: "Call your lawmaker," "Talk to your child's teacher," etc.
- Be neat. Check spelling, grammar—carefully. Write on a computer. Handwritten letters are a thing of the past.
- Just do it. Many perfectly good letters to the editor never get written because writers wait for a "pearl of wisdom" or the "perfect turn of phrase" or because they think what they have to say isn't "profound." Don't wait for lightning to strike. Just tell your story as simply, warmly, and briefly as possible. You'll be surprised how eloquent you'll be.

Talking with the Media

The media can be a powerful ally to help you effectively reach target audiences with your student-centered message. To maximize your relationship and reach, it is important to remember reporters are under constant deadline pressure and usually can't wait very long to get your side of the story. As president, you are often your Local's official media spokesperson outside of a bargaining crisis campaign. If a reporter reaches out to you, be prompt in your response, even if it's just to say you've received their request and are working on it.

Avoid saying "No comment." If you can't or shouldn't provide comment on a particular story, give a reason, if possible (i.e., 'The Association was not part of the decision-making process and therefore we can't weigh in on the situation') or refer them to OEA's Media Relations Consultant.

OEA Media Relations Consultant Katie Olmsted is a resource to help you prep for interviews and develop messaging to respond to media inquiries. Contact her at olmstedk@ohea.org for assistance or to schedule a virtual training.

