

### Try different angles with different outlets

If your op-ed is not published by your media outlet of choice—remember that the *New York Times* receives thousands of op-ed submissions every day—then consider re-submitting to a smaller, local or regional paper. They are always hungry for news items. The key is to keep pushing—if the issue is important to you, try different angles and different outlets. Be careful not to send your Op-ed to too many newspapers. Giving a newspaper an exclusive to the Op-ed might be an enticement to run it. If you need to send it to other publications, rewrite it to meet the needs of that publication.

### Timely and relevant increase odds

Just as each organization or person has his or her own agenda, so does each publication. In order to make your Op-ed more desirable to a media outlet, the author should make it timely and relevant. Current issues affecting a community or a national topic that can be tied to an issue facing the entire community are more likely to be published.

### Stick to the guidelines

Most publications have submission requirements, including word count—which usually falls between 700-800 words maximum. Make sure to draft your op-ed within these guidelines. Submit your piece with a letter that includes a brief biography (including your social work credentials), your phone number, and an explanation of why your piece is timely and relevant to readers.

Send your op-ed and cover letter by fax, e-mail, or regular mail, depending on the guidelines set by the publication. Most publications do not read faxes—e-mail is probably preferable, but again, research the specific publication's requirements. For more information about submission guidelines, go to the outlet's Web site. For more information contact NASW Communications for assistance at [media@naswdc.org](mailto:media@naswdc.org) or call 202-336-8228.

## HOW TO WRITE AND USE AN EFFECTIVE BACKGROUNDER IN PUBLIC RELATIONS



**In order to write an effective backgrounder for a press kit (or for other uses), you must first understand what a backgrounder is.**

### What is a backgrounder?

A backgrounder is an in-depth informational piece providing, as the name implies, background information on a specific issue. They often accompany press releases and provide additional information not found in the releases.

### How do you write a backgrounder?

To write a backgrounder, you need to follow some basic guidelines:

- Start with a concise statement on the issue or subject about the topic of accompanying press release. For example: “Clinical social workers provide the majority of the nation’s mental health services.”
- Follow the opening statement with a historical overview of the issue. Trace the issue’s evolution—how it came to be—and the major events leading up to it. You can utilize outside information in this section. However, cite your statements within the text, according to the appropriate style guidelines of the publication you are sending it to.
- Explain why this issue is important TODAY. State its significance and back that statement up, as appropriate.
- Present the implications of the issue. Back up that statement with facts.
- Use subheads where appropriate to make for easier reading. A backgrounder should average four to five pages in length; however, it is always a good idea to let the information, not the page number, dictate the length of your piece.

### What are the uses for backgrounders?

- Collateral material for partner groups
- Talking points for an interview
- Preparation documents for a media interview
- Inclusion in an online or print press kit

For help preparing a backgrounder, use *Social Work Speaks*, *NASW NEWS*, and the *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, or contact the NASW Communications Department at [media@naswdc.org](mailto:media@naswdc.org).