

Community Advocacy Toolkit

A Citizen's Guide to
Protecting
the Quality of Life
in Southern
New Castle County,
Delaware



Southern New Castle County Alliance

Why Prepare a Community Advocacy Toolkit for the SNCCA

Southern New Castle County (SNCC) is the one of the most rapidly developing areas of New Castle County (NCC). Over 90% of the NCC development in the next 30 years is expected to occur in SNCC. We face many problems, but government agencies and elected officials sometimes lack the political will or awareness necessary to ensure the protection of our quality of life. In response to these problems, the SNCCA assists community activists organize to influence decisions-makers, policy, and public perception on matters related to our area. The SNCCA also assist with organizing advocacy efforts to influence change that improves these problems. These activities are vital to the protection of our quality of life in SNCC.

About this Document

This Community Advocacy Guide describes some of the basic elements of being a community activist - organizing, influencing decision-makers, media work, and message development - all from a community perspective. It will provide useful tips on how we SNCC residents can be more effective, as well as identify some of the common mistakes we sometimes make. It is hoped that this document will enhance our activity and experiences as advocates of our communities and our quality of life in SNCC.

Much of the content of this document is based on a publication of the Seattle Audubon Society titled an Activist Toolkit: A Citizens Guide to Protecting the Environment. We would like to thank Lauren Braden, author of the original Activist Toolkit for granting permission for us to use her work to guide us through the challenging public policy issues effecting our communities. We hope that many of the issue we address as community advocates will also include protection of environmental resources, a common goal of both organizations.

This document is to be used for grassroots community advocacy by the SNCCA (a 501C non-profit organization) and by the communities of SNCC. It is not to be used for profit.

For More Information

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Introduction

The Southern New Castle County Alliance (SNCCA), incorporated in July 1997, is the umbrella civic organization for one of the most rapidly growing areas in New Castle County. As per the adopted bylaws, the Alliance keeps its membership and general public advised of various quality of life issues within our area .

Over 90% of the New Castle County development in the next 30 years is expected to occur in SNCC. We face many problems, but government agencies and elected officials sometimes lack the political will or awareness necessary to ensure the protection of our quality of life. In response to these problems, the SNCCA assists community activists organize to influence decisions-makers, policy, and public perception on matters related to our area. The SNCCA works with its communities and other community advocates influencing change that improves these problems. These activities are vital to the protection of our quality of life in SNCC.

This Community Advocacy Guide describes some of the basic elements of being a community activist - organizing, influencing decision-makers, media work, and message development - all from a community perspective. It will provide useful tips on how we SNCC residents can be more effective, as well as identify some of the common mistakes we sometimes make. It is hoped that this document will enhance our activity and experiences as advocates of our communities and our quality of life in SNCC.

Message Development



Dave Carter

Bald Eagle along Drawyer Creek



Message Development: Overview

Effectively communicating your issue to your target audience is probably the most important component of a winning community campaign. Understanding your audience, developing your message, refining it, delivering it, and repeating it are vital to effective communications. We can boil this process down to three steps:

Step 1: Identify our Audience.

Step 2: Develop a message for our audience.

Step 3: Deliver this message to our audience over and over again.



Dave Carter

Blackbird Creek along Delaware Rt. 9



Identifying Our Audience

Identifying our target audience(s) is a key first step to any successful grassroots advocacy campaign. This is the person, persons, or government agency or legislative body you are trying to persuade. In order to do this, determine who is clearly on our side. Next determine who is definitely **not** on our side.

Those that are left are the undecided, and they can be persuaded to move to our position. It is this undecided group that should be our main target audience. (An exception is if you are seeking action or trying to increase support from those already on your side, such as with other SNCCA members.)



Getting to know this audience is the next step. We must understand the attitudes and biases of those you hope to influence. We need to know as many of the relevant points about our audience as we can. We should know what our audience thinks, feels, needs, and wants. However, do not rely on stereotypes of the audience. Talk to real people to gain information and test ideas. Knowing this information is important because it will help you manage your time and resources most effectively.

Elected Officials

When targeting undecided elected officials, you should carefully review their voting record and constituency base. This includes exploring their votes on similar types of legislation, the demographics of their district, and even their list of campaign contributors. These can be very different between the districts in northern and southern New Castle County. This information will help you identify where on the undecided spectrum this particular legislator likely falls.

Remember that elected officials represent their constituents, so much of the time you are targeting elected officials, you will be targeting the general public as well. Elected officials will often wait to gauge public opinion before making a decision on an issue.

Another indirect audience will be the legislative staff. These people play a major role in the decisions of their boss. Busy elected officials often rely on their aids to research issues and make initial recommendations. Do not underestimate the influence staff have, even if they appear very young or inexperienced.



The General Public

The undecided public is considered the “swing.” This swing is usually not constant; it will vary some from issue to issue. Here are some examples of possible target audiences.

Possible Target Audiences

Registered voters
Woman with Children
Taxpayers
Retired Persons or Senior Citizens
Baby Boomers
People of Color
Birdwatchers
Hunters
Fisherman

Teachers
Outdoor Recreation Enthusiasts
Health Professionals
Small Business Owners
Labor Unions
Homeowners
Farmers
Faith-Based Groups
Developers

It is extremely valuable to have a good network within your community so that you can reach out to these audiences. In other words, get to know and maintain relationships with these folks. You will need to do this in order to test messages and gain insight and understanding.

The Press

The media often serves as a liaison to the general public and to elected officials. Therefore, the press has a significant place in our community advocacy efforts and is always a target audience.



Developing Our Message

Our Message is what will persuade someone to support our cause. Determining how to frame the issue to garner support for our position is critical. The way we communicate about the issue to the media, elected officials, and the public must be consistent, appealing, and persuasive. How we frame the issue to them is known as the “message.” Developing, polishing, delivering, and repeating our message are the fundamentals of effective communication.

Define Our Audience

Any successful grassroots community advocacy campaign must first define its audience – the person, persons, group, or legislative body we are attempting to influence. An effective grassroots message is one that resonates with the people we are trying to convince. Our message may differ slightly for each of our audiences. Keep in mind that if legislators, such as County Council, are our target, we must target the public as well. Elected officials wait to hear from constituents before they take action.

What’s in a message?

- ***Explanation.*** It must answer the questions, “Why care?”
- ***Expression.*** It conveys in basic terms that we share the audience’s values.
- ***Integrity.*** It is in line with the organization’s mission and goals.
- ***Accuracy.*** It contains facts, which lend credibility and provide a framework. Don’t exaggerate!

Do Research on Our Audience and Opponents

Consider the results of public opinion polls and focus groups. Doing your own polling is costly, so use information from existing research. Check on the Internet and with other local civic organizations to see if they will share any recent polling or research information they may have. This research will help us identify the themes and messages that best resonate with voters and, through them, hopefully reach elected officials.

Research your opponent and your opponent’s message as well. Your message should contrast with theirs. Every time you talk about yourself, talk about your opponents as well. By saying who and what we are about, we are defining the differences between our opposition and us. Demonstrate how our opponents don’t take responsibility for the damage they do to our quality of life and how, at the same time, we are doing our work from the heart and for the greater good. Show the trail of money our opposition is following; this makes a big impression with the public. However, be careful not to come across as mean; always deliver our message in a respectful, credible way. Stating the truth about our opponent is usually harsh enough to do its own damage.



Define the Issue in Terms of People and Communities

One common mistake of community messages is that there are no people in them. The direct impact on the people of Southern New Castle County is the most effective arguments for actions to protect our quality of life. Therefore, we must relate our message to the people that make up our community to reach our audience at an emotional or personal level. People are most often compelled to take action when they see how the issue relates to them and their families.

Begin by asking questions about the issue, such as:

- How does it affect people, either by helping them or hurting them?
- In what ways is the issue local? How about county or statewide?
- How will solving the problem and the work of SNCCA help people, particularly in their everyday lives?
- What misconceptions do people have about SNCCA or our cause?
- Do we have examples of real people (i.e. names) that have been helped or hurt by the issue or the work of SNCCA?

Answering these questions will help us to define the issue in terms of its effect on SNCC residents, such as their health, quality of life, heritage, and economic prosperity. Our message should let them know that we are fighting for their best interest.

Next, craft a simple, focused paragraph that explains the theme of each campaign or issue. All of our communications with the public, media, and elected officials should be tied to this central theme. Each member or community can pull a single statement from this paragraph to use as the “slogan” for their campaign.

Connect Our Values with Our Audience’s Values

When people see that we share their values, they begin to feel a part of a group or team. This makes it more likely that they, in turn, will support our cause or get involved. One way to do this is to use key “value” words and phrases to frame our issues, such as:

- Respect. Show how our position represents the respect for SNCC communities, landscapes, environment, and our future.
- Rights and Responsibilities. Explain that in order to exercise our right to enjoy the SNCC quality of life, we must also take the responsibility to care for it.
- Accountability. Make sure we emphasize that everyone, including business, corporations, developers and government, needs to live up to their responsibilities in the community; if they don’t, they will be held accountable.



- Right to Know. Show people that they have a right to know about the issues that are going to affect their lives.

Watch Your Language

Certain language used regularly by community advocates and the environmental community have been shown not to be effective or well understood by the general public. Make sure you use language that people can relate to when you develop your message. As one communications expert put it, “You must be able to explain the problem to your Mom.”

If our issue is technically complex, be sure to use common-sense arguments and language that non-technical people can understand. For example, let’s look at the term “riparian corridor.” Many of us probably know what it means, but the average person probably doesn’t. If we simplify our language, in this case changing “riparian corridor” to “river or stream bank,” then we are communicating in a way that the majority of people can easily understand. Always avoid using acronyms and jargon in our message.

The “Three C’s of a Great Message:

- *Clear*
- *Concise*
- *Compelling*

Checklist for Our Message

When we have crafted our message, review this checklist and determine if any changes are needed.

- € Is our message clear, concise, and compelling?
- € Is all of the language used in our message easy for regular people to understand?
- € Does it explain what is at stake and connect us with others who share our values?
- € Does it contrast with the opposition’s message?
- € Is our message convincing and targeted to a specific audience?
- € Is our message fair and balanced (which will lend us credibility)?
- € Is it solution-oriented and optimistic?
- € If there is a deadline for our issue, is it clearly stated in the message?
- € Will people know what to do once they hear our message?
- € Is the message locally relevant?
- € Are there people in the message?
- € Is your message entirely factual (again, for credibility)?



Delivering Our Message

Once we have developed our message, we will deliver it through nearly everything the SNCCA does, and we will repeat it often. How? Most people immediately think of delivering a message through the media. The media is an invaluable tool and often very cost-effective, but keep in mind that it is sometimes difficult for us to control. We should also consider delivering our message through other vehicles that we have more control over, such as brochures, presentations, and advertising.

To get in the news, we must get to know the news. Keep on top of current issues and activities in each of our communities and remember to plan ahead. (For example, reporters need press releases ahead of deadline; public seminars must be well publicized in advance, etc.) By keeping track of what's happening locally and regionally, you will see trends over time in the kinds of stories your local media reports on, as well as the interests and opinions of individual reporters.

We also need to pay attention to the activities of our opposition. Read the editorial pages and letters to the editors religiously, and be ready to respond if our position is attacked. Likewise, we need to be prepared to move when a news story reinforces our message. There may be many ways to get your message out if you think opportunistically. Be on the offensive. Here are some of the ways to deliver our message.

Through the Media

- Op-eds and letters to the editor
- Radio-spot news
- TV-news
- Feature stories by reporters

Special Events

- Workshops
- SNCCA member meetings
- On-site demonstrations
- Media events: rallies or marches
- Press conferences
- House parties
- Information table at events
- Tours of sites we have concerns about
- Personal visits or telephone contact

Educational Information

- Brochures
- Email alerts
- Websites (SNCCA Y Others)
- Newsletters
- Publications
- Videotapes
- Public speeches
- Slide presentations
- Overhead transparencies
- Interested-group delivered information.



Who Delivers the SNCCA Message?

Whatever message we develop, we will want to make sure **everyone** who is on our side who speaks to the public or reporters knows it and can articulate it. In other words: “Many voices, one message.”

For delivering our message through the media, it usually proves more effective to have a single person equipped and prepared to be our spokesperson. For more information on spokespeople, see the “Choosing a Spokesperson” section of this Guide.

Community leaders may not always be the most effective messengers for our messages, because they are often dismissed as NIMBY’s (not in my back yard). Think about reaching beyond our organization to experts, local celebrities, or “real” people who share our concerns and who can help amplify our message. In addition, look for others with an independent perspective that can help validate our message. (For example, a local businessperson, a local farmer, a respected religious leader, a developer that agrees with our message.)

Tips for Delivering the Message

- First, connect with our audience. Always try to begin with a tangible, such as real stories about real people, so that our message will resonate with people emotionally or personally. Use images to tell our story as well as words. Don’t begin with scientific or technical information, and avoid jargon altogether.
- Keep your statements specific, but simple. Use plain language and be concise.
- Be optimistic and truthful. You may wish to convey a sense of urgency, but not hysteria. Focus on the positive and speak about lost potential instead of doom. Explain the problem and tell the audience how they can help solve it. When communicating specifics, be factual, not general. This will give you credibility.
- Stay “on message.” A classic mistake is to get bored with our message and go off of it. But you shouldn’t. The reporter you are talking to, or the group you are speaking in front of, may be hearing it for the first time.
- Remember, people need to hear a message several times in order for it to sink in.





Community Organizing



Community Tree Planting at Odessa Chase



Community Organizing: Overview

Creating a coalition of community members who are passionate about our issue and committed to our campaign is one of the most valuable and effective means you have of influencing policy makers. When people truly care about an issue (hopefully because we've inspired them to), they are more likely to do the work necessary to run a grassroots campaign. It takes a lot of volunteer hours to generate enough contact with people in the community to make our grassroots campaign successful. This section will help us understand the basic steps of grass roots organizing, which is mainly about motivating people:

Step 1 – Recruit volunteers.

Step 2 – Train volunteers and engage them in outreach activities.

Step 3 – Hold outreach events and meetings.

Step 4 – Build relationships and coalitions.



Dave Carter

Wildflower in SNCC



Recruiting Volunteers

Our campaign needs active members and volunteers to win. Finding members and volunteers who will help further our cause is not an easy task, but a necessary one. When we see how much more work the SNCCA will accomplish, the influence of volunteer efforts can make on others with their passion and energy, and how much more effective our campaigns are, each of us will see that it is worth the effort.

Identify Jobs and Volunteer Needs

Before we start recruiting and accepting volunteers, it's important to identify what we want them to help us accomplish. Here are some things we can do to manage our volunteers effectively and get the most out of their efforts:

1. **List the specific jobs** that we need completed in order to meet our goals.
2. **Assign meaningful tasks.** A volunteer can do almost any task that needs to be done. Don't hesitate to give him/her an "important" job to do. Although there will always be grunt work to do, make sure all of our volunteers get assigned some meaningful and rewarding tasks as well.
3. **Be flexible.** Most volunteers have a full work schedule, family, and other pressing activities outside of volunteering, which means that we need to have a flexible schedule.
4. **Write job descriptions.** This is important because it provides a guide for the volunteers. It keeps them on track and hopefully answers questions they may have when SNCCA leaders are not there.

Make Sure Volunteers are Satisfied

Don't take volunteers for granted—they want something in exchange for their time commitment. They are, after all, taking time out from work, friends, hobbies, etc., to help us. If they feel they are getting something out of the experience, then they are more likely to stay on for a while. For example, your volunteers may feel fulfilled simply by helping the community by supporting a cause they believe in; sometimes they just want to work with like-minded people who have interesting lives and are passionate about their endeavors. Take the time to find out what it is that motivates members & volunteers and makes them feel satisfied.



Potential Tasks for SNCCA Volunteers

Events

- **Staff an outreach table at an event.**
- **Hand out leaflets about key issues at public meetings.**
- **Attend community meetings to gather and distribute information.**

Media Work

- **Draft letters to the editor for activists to sign and submit.**
- **Research news sources and clip articles on issues important to SNCC.**
- **Create visuals and materials for media events.**

Administrative Work

- **Enter new names into a database.**
- **Call through lists to recruit volunteers for projects or to get people out to important meetings.**
- **Arrange meetings with decision-makers.**
- **Update files.**



The Phonebank: Calling for Clout

Collective phone-calling (called a phone bank) is a very effective way to inspire community action and attract people to meetings and events. They are also easy to organize. Collective phone calls can generate comment letters, votes, money, and/or more volunteers. Phone banks can be done in a common area if multiple phones or cell phones are used. This often works because it groups people together with a common purpose and the same goals, creating an atmosphere of excitement and accomplishment. Phone banks can also be run by individuals at home each of whom has a calling list.



Why do a phonebank?

- **Generate community action.** Phonebanks can reach a large number of people to produce comment letters and encourage turnout for a public hearing. Many people feel a phone call is more personal and will respond to a call, whereas they might not be responsive to a letter or e-mail from the organization.
- **Invite people to an event.** Phone banks let you personally invite your supporters to a special event that the SNCCA may be holding or attending. You can also follow up on a previous invitation to find out if they plan to attend.
- **Keep communities informed.** A phone bank may be used in targeted areas to help keep area residents informed of activities such as road construction projects, new development projects, or changes in zoning that will effect their specific area.

Steps for Successful Phonebank

1. **Start planning in advance.** Time is needed to recruit volunteers and plan the calling lists. You need to determine in advance how many people you plan to call and how many volunteers it will take to call them. Hold the phonebank activities at least 7-10 days before the hearing, comment deadline, or event.
2. **Define the target audience.** Who do we want to call? How many people? This will help plan for the number of volunteers. As a general rule, each phone bank volunteer can contact about 25-30 people per hour. The best time to contact people is to call between 6PM and 9PM on weekdays. Do not call after 9PM.
3. **Recruit and Schedule Volunteers.** Identify volunteers from the SNCCA membership and supports. Remember that phonebank work is hard and sometimes tedious, so don't overwork the callers. Keep the shifts short 1.5-3 hours.



4. **Produce the calling list.** Depending on the issues and objectives of the phonebank, the calling list may include SNCCA members, a list of residents that have attended past SNCCA meetings, specific communities, or the general public. Divide the list up among volunteers. Leave space for callers to leave notes such as “number disconnected” or “attending hearing”.
5. **Create a phone script.** A script gives volunteers more confidence when calling someone they don’t know. It includes all of the important information and helps them sound professional. The script may also have an option for leaving a phone message.

Tips for Callers

- **Always be polite and considerate. If the person you called is rude, don’t argue with them. Instead, end the call as quickly and politely as possible by saying, “I’m sorry you feel that way. Thank you for your time.”**
- **If the person you called has questions you can’t answer, ask the lead person setting up the phone bank. If you are calling from a location alone, tell them that you will check and get the answer. Then call them back when you do get the answer for them.**
- **Write something down about every call you make, such as “left a message” or “plans to attend workshop”. Get it written down quickly or you will forget.**
- **Remember to get up and stretch. Calling can be tiresome, so it’s good to take frequent breaks.**
- **Keep a glass of water by your calling station in case your throat gets dry.**



Successful Meetings

True organizing can only happen on an individual and personal basis. Face to face meetings are extremely important to building relationships and getting tasks accomplished, but they can also be an enormous waste of time if not prepared for and conducted properly. Follow these tips for better, more efficient meetings.



The Basics of a Good Meeting

- Designate a facilitator who moderates discussion, sticks to the agenda, and watches the clock.
- Designate a note taker who will distribute the notes to the group afterward. This way no one else has to take notes.
- Provide a comfortable setting (may want light refreshments).
- Prepare an agenda that is not overly ambitious.

Preparing for the Meeting

- Spend twice as much time preparing for the meeting as the length of the meeting.
- Set clear goals for the meeting and prepare an agenda that is within the time frame.
- Contact the participants of the meeting ahead of time (individually if possible) and talk to them about the goals of the meeting and the agenda.
- Prepare the meeting room and get all the necessary materials: easels with paper and markers, refreshments, pads & paper, pens, and copies of the agenda.

Running the Meeting

- One frustration people have with meetings is that people talk at the start and the meeting ends up starting late. To address this, especially if folks know each other, go ahead and allow 10 minutes of “chit chat” time on the agenda. The chit-chat will happen anyway, but planning for it will prevent it from cutting into your meeting time. Also, this social time helps ease tension from the workday and put people in a good mood.
- Introductions are important. Begin the meeting by going around the table and having everybody introduce themselves.

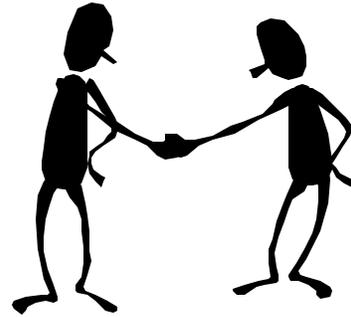


- Keep the discussion relevant by letting the participants know when the discussion has drifted. If this fails to bring it back on track, politely but firmly steer it back. Cut off the discussion when it becomes repetitive.
- Emotional discussions often occur. Don't invalidate a participant's feelings by cutting them off. Acknowledge it when someone is obviously angry so that they feel they are being heard and that it is all right to be honest.
- Listen for agreements. If an agreement seems to be emerging on an action item, try repeating what you think you're hearing from the group back to them. They may still want to continue discussion, but there may be enough agreement that you can move on to the next action item. If agreement seems to have been reached too easily, do test the agreement out on the group until it is clear that everyone agrees.
- When the meeting ends, make sure that everyone knows which follow-up tasks they agreed to do.



Building Relationships and Coalitions

One of the most important tasks in organizing a community advocacy effort is establishing a broad base of support. The key to doing this is through outreach to other groups and audiences. When you join voices with other influential people in the community, your message takes on added credibility. There are many potential allies for your cause. Even though you may not agree with someone on all issues, they may still be a valuable ally. Search for common ground and shared concerns.



Steps for Building Relationships

1. Identify the influential groups in New Castle County who the SNCCA would like to partner with in a coalition. Think through how their issues and ours might intersect. Having related interests can provide the common ground we need to build relationships with them. For example, here are some groups and potential shared issues we might consider:
 - Farmers (protecting rural areas from development)
 - Environmentalist (protecting natural resources)
 - School Boards (controlling growth to ensure adequate school infrastructure)
 - Teachers (battling overcrowding of our schools due to over-development)
 - Commuters (transportation issues)
 - Hunters & Fishers (habitat protection and enhancement)
 - Small business owners (battling large scale development or corporations such as Wal-Mart)
 - Homeowners and Civic Groups (Land use issues)
2. Identify who in SNCCA has the access to the potential partners. Also identify whom you'd like to meet with in these targeted groups.
3. Set goals for cultivating the relationships. Be realistic about who you have access to and who you can reach.
4. Make contact. Meet over coffee. Explain our issue and why we think their group is a natural partner for delivering the shared messages. Emphasize how our issue intersects with and impacts their group. Approach them with the attitude that a coalition will help both groups.
5. Use every opportunity to build your relationship with the contact and their group. Ask them to attend meetings with you and you attend meeting with them. Support each other on key issues at public meetings and hearings.



Tips for Building Relationships

- For the initial contact, try to meet face-to face for no more than a 15 to 30 minute meeting. Be very focused and quick; this gives the sense that you are well organized.
- Be careful and willing to learn as you go. When you are talking to someone who is from a group that you know little about, be prepared and committed to learn from them.
- Focus on the commonalties, not the differences.
- Be respectful of time commitments. Your issue is not central to their group, so don't expect them to put as much time into your cause as you do. Be appreciative of whatever support they can provide.
- Only ask people to speak from their own expertise and experience. After all, you are partnering with them because they can deliver your message from a **different perspective** than you can.



Outreach Events

Outreach and public involvement are among the most important building blocks of any community advocacy campaign. The will of the public is a very powerful force. Outreach events are a good way to get your message to the public. However, the success of the outreach effort will in large part hinge on how well the event was organized. Here are some tips for organizing successful outreach events:

- **Publicize educational meetings in the media**
- **Prepare a “Meeting Survival Kit”** with the essentials for conducting any meeting. Include things such as:
 - Registration sheet for attendees
 - Name tags
 - Double-faced tape
 - Logo banner for podium
 - Pencils, markers, and pens
 - Paper
 - Scissors
 - Extension cords and extra projector bulbs
 - Masking tape
 - Paper clips
- **Look professional!** Recognize that your audience will get a first impression of you from your appearance and behavior.
- **Develop a detailed outline** to organize the meeting.
- **Prepare visual aids** that will assist you in your message delivery.
- **Preview all audio/visuals** and determine how to operate the equipment. Be sure that visuals are complete and that slides are properly in place. Always pack extension cords and extra bulbs.
- **Become familiar with the meeting room and the meeting location.** Locate the light switches, room temperature control, water fountain, and restrooms.
- **Have the meeting room arranged** with chairs in place before attendees arrive.
- **Have people sign in** at a greeting table by the entrance.
- **Use nametags** for participants.



Action Alerts

An action alert is a message that someone sends out over the Internet or in the mail. It asks for a special action to be taken, usually on a current political issue. Well-designed, compelling action alerts are a powerful way to get people's attention and get them involved. They also provide far-reaching exposure for your cause.

Action alerts are very effective when sent to your organization's mailing list and to other organizations with similar messages. These people are more likely to pay attention to the issues, not only because they are part of your group and share your interests, but because they are probably already active in other ways in the community and have an ear for what's going on.

Helpful Hints:

- Identify your issue. Make sure that the headline is compelling, so that the reader is interested in reading further.
- Make sure you note the date. Action alerts can travel around for a long time and eventually become outdated. You want people to know when the alert is active and when they will be most effective in responding.
- Be concise. Effective message delivery includes a clear, concise message that people can easily understand. But avoid cutting out anything compelling when you compact the message.
- Provide the next steps. People care more about an issue when they become actively involved in its progress, but they often don't know how to help. Tell them how they can help.
- Be compelling. You are trying to inspire people to take action. Speak from your heart about why this issue is so important to you and to the community. Get people excited.
- Include your group's information. This helps establish the authenticity of the alert, making it more credible to the activist community.
- Use short paragraphs. Small sections have greater visual appeal and are easier to read.
- Be factual. You are responsible for the information you are sending out. Mistakes can discredit the SNCCA.



- Don't assume the readers will be educated on the issue. Give them enough information to fully explain our position, but don't overload them with material.
- Include clear beginning and end markers. Put a row of dashes or a graphic border along the top and bottom, so that any additions made by people other than yourself will clearly be modifications to your original.
- Ask for feedback. Tell people you want to know what they've done (e.g. sending letters or emails or making phone calls). This gives us an idea of who you can count on to be more active in general. It also gives us great statistics to present to elected officials or other decision-makers.
- Be selective in the number of action alerts sent. People can easily get sick of them.
- Follow-up. When the campaign is over, try to derive some lessons that others can benefit from. What problems did you have? What mistakes did you make? What unexpected connections did you make?



Tips for Activists

- Think big, start small
- Strength in numbers
- Learn from those with experience
- Protect your base of supporters, convince the swing, and forget the rest
- Always tell the truth
- Create small successes to build confidence and momentum
- Endless pressure, endlessly applied
- Celebrate each victory as it happens
- Take stock in our strengths
- The most important resource to conserve is our supporter's energy
- Form broad coalitions
- Localize and personalize the issues
- Stay on message, always
- Have echo power, our listeners remember and repeat our viewpoints
- Focus our message on the future
- Have fun!



Lobbying and Testifying



Lobbying and Testifying: Overview

In America, as in other representative democracies, government responds to the wishes of the people it represents. For SNCC, making our wishes heard is vital as we are often overshadowed by interest in the larger region. We must have a clear, concise message that we communicate to our elected officials. This takes active participation in the process. These activities are called lobbying.

Anyone who can write a letter or make a phone call can lobby for positive change. Simply put, lobbying is trying to persuade someone to our point of view, whether it be a town mayor, county council member, or a State legislator. We can also lobby the general public for support for our cause.

Always remember that each of us is a constituent, which means that we carry weight. But remember, legislation reflects the will of the people only IF we and enough others take the trouble to let our elected officials know what we want. Democracy is not a spectator sport.

Lobbying includes activities such as:

- Writing Letters
- Calling an elected official's office
- Meeting face to face with elected officials
- Organizing other to write/call/meet with officials
- Inviting a legislator to attend meetings on key issues
- Writing a letter to the editor

It is important to know that not all policy work or communication with legislators is lobbying. For example, if you are attempting to *educate* a legislator or the public about an issue, but not intending to influence them, it is not considered lobbying.

The theory behind community advocacy is simple: When legislators hear from their constituencies, they are more likely to respond to those constituents' needs. While the political process is full of special interests and professional lobbyist, community activist should know from experience that one voice can make a difference, and many voices make a movement.

The SNCCA, its members, and the constituents it represents must speak loudly and frequently on our priority community issues to ensure the future we desire for our area.

Who are constituents?

Constituents are the people who elected officials were elected to represent and who ultimately have a role in determining whether or not they are re-elected.



Tips for Successful Lobbying Meetings with Elected Officials

- Bring a one-page fact sheet that covers the main points about the issue. Give it to the legislator during the discussion.
- Unless the legislator sits on committees directly related to our issue, he/she will need information about the specifics of the problem and the bill.
- Avoid hostility at all costs. Even if you disagree with the legislator's opinions, avoid arguing. Just state your convictions and ask for support.
- Be a good listener as well as a good talker.
- Do not underestimate the influence of the staff of elected officials. Don't pass on the opportunity to meet with staff if the legislator is unavailable.
- If the legislator keeps changing the subject, tactfully but firmly bring the conversation back on topic.
- Elected officials are generalists and usually will not know as much about our issue as we do. Speak with confidence and authority on the issue remembering that you are their source of information at that moment.
- Don't just drop by their office. Elected officials are very busy, so always schedule an appointment.

Writing to an Elected Official

Letter writing is a very effective and persuasive (not to mention easy) way to effectively lobby elected officials. Anyone can send a letter to his or her representatives. Elected officials take the pulse of their district through the letters they receive from constituents. As a constituent yourself, you automatically have something that even the most well-paid and high-powered lobbyists must fight for – the ear of your elected official. Below are some guidelines to help you use your influence most effectively.

- Write to represent the SNCCA only if authorized by the board members. In most cases, you should write to represent your own interests, which will usually be the same as the SNCCA position on issues.
- Write to express your opinion about an issue they are considering or should be considering, to thank them for a vote or action with which you agree, or to express your disapproval for an action you don't agree with.



A Good Letter

1. Keep it short - less than one page - and limit the letter to one page.
2. The first paragraph should state that you are a constituent and what it is you are writing about. Ask the elected official to do something specific, such as introduce an ordinance or vote against an ordinance.
3. In the middle portion of the letter, explain your reason for writing, calling attention to the issues impact on you and the communities of SNCC.
4. Finally, restate your position and the action you want the elected official to take. Ask for a reply.

The Great Letter

1. Cite your own experience and observations if possible. Personal stories demonstrate the depth and sincerity of your concern.
2. Be helpful, rather than threatening or inflammatory, even when the legislator's viewpoints differ from yours.
3. Demonstrate your familiarity with the issue or the piece of legislation. This will indicate that constituents are serious about the community issue.
4. Mention your community affiliation (e.g. SNCCA, Civic Association, parent, etc.) to avoid being pigeon-holed as an extremist or as a NIMBY (not in my backyard).
5. Write on personal or business stationery and include a return address.
6. Address the elected official properly. For example, "The Honorable Christopher Coons, New Castle County President".
7. Mail your letter first class, if time permits. However, if a decision is coming up and time is critical, you should fax or e-mail the letter instead.

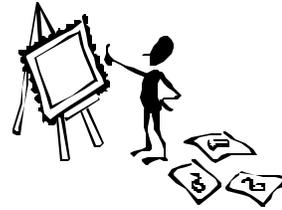
E-mail

E-mail can be a very quick and inexpensive way of communicating with legislators; however, it is usually not considered as effective as a personal letters. Nearly all elected officials have email addresses that are available to the public for use by constituents. E-mail messages are generally shorter than letters, so the message needs to be concise and, as always, polite.



Testifying at a Public Hearing

Public testimony opportunities are extremely important for your issue. Sometimes they may take the form of informal opinion gathering at a public workshop, but more often you will be testifying at a more formal public hearing held by a decision-making body. Written testimony is usually accepted at public hearings, but it is far more powerful to attend the hearing and deliver spoken testimony.



Why Public Hearings are Important

1. Testimony becomes part of the official record and will likely be used later in making a final decision.
2. Public hearings can provide new factual information, which can convince the decision-makers to re-think an earlier decision.
3. The media often attend hearings on controversial issues, so the hearing is another way to get your message out to a broader audience.
4. Public testimony sends a strong political signal to the legislative body or agency, as well as to the press, about public opinion on the issue.
5. Hearings are important from a legal standpoint. If you suspect that you may appeal the decision later, your legal standing is based on having made your legal arguments during the public comment period.

Guidelines for Effective Public Testimony

Before the hearing, spend as much time as possible preparing for your testimony:

- Verify time, date, and place of hearing in advance.
- Find out where in the meeting agenda the public testimony will be permitted.
- Find out time allowed for testimony (5 min.). Tailor your testimony to time allowed.
- Get on speaker's list.
- Prepare your testimony.
- Research the issue to provide support for your opinions with FACTS
- Use visual aids (photos, maps, etc.)
- If a land based issue, visit site and be familiar with it so you can speak more personally & confidently.



At the hearing, do the following:

- Sign in, even if you do not plan to speak.
- Try to get on list first, the earlier you speak-the stronger your impact.
- Begin by given name, address & whom you represent. Only one person should give “official” testimony for SNCCA, all other should speak as “residents or citizens”.
- Address the decision making body correctly -- e.g. Councilman X.
- Make eye contact and speak slowly.
- State position & why, provide personal story if possible.
- Be prepared to answer questions and don't be afraid to say “I don't know, but I will try to get the answer for you”.
- Thank the body before you leave podium.
- Listen and record statements made by opponents. Make notes of factual errors or new ideas.
- Show tact. Don't applaud or be a boo-bird (its not Vet. Stadium)

Tips for Public Speaking

- Write speech ahead of time and use summary notes.
- Practice, Practice, Practice.
- Make eye contact with Audience.
- Speak slowly.
- Uses pauses at key issues to emphasize them.
- If appropriate, tell a “issue related” joke.
- Speak clearly. Drink plenty of water, no milk beforehand.
- Breathe and relax while waiting your turn.
- Remove “I” from your speeches. Use “we”.
- Appearance matters. Comfortable but appropriate.
- Use gestures & movement to reinforce ideas.
- Use vocal variations - natural inflections.
- Be yourself & allow your personality to come through.
- Smile and have fun.



Telephoning Your Legislator

Some messages are better suited to certain methods of communication. If we wish to simply request that our legislator vote “yes” or “no” on a particular ordinance or legislation, then we can pick up the phone and call their office. Also opt for a phone call if the legislator will be voting soon. The SNCCA can use the telephone as a grassroots lobbying tool by organizing “call-in day” and spreading the word to our members and communities, encouraging them to participate. However, it is far better to use a personal letter or face-to-face meeting to deliver complicated messages and do relationship building with legislators.

Telephone Tips

- Before calling, write out the name of the ordinance or the issue you are calling about, what action the elected official should take, and two or three short reasons why they should take this action.
- When the call is answered, identify yourself by name and the voting district you are from (or your community name or address).
- Explain why you are calling. Be as specific about the issue as possible.
- Do not simply say, “I am calling to urge that you vote “No.” Instead, tell the staff person why the legislator should vote “no.” Provide supporting information by focusing on two or three of the talking points you wrote down.
- Ask that our message be conveyed to the legislator and that you receive a written response.
- Remember to politely thank the person taking the call for his/her time.
- Keep your call short and to the point.





Working with the Media



Working with the Media: Overview

The news media shape the agenda at every level of policymaking, and this is truer today than ever before. Unless the SNCCA issues are in the media, they might as well not exist to the general public. If our campaign fails to get favorable coverage in the media, it will often fail. On the bright side, getting our message out via the media can help our issue if enough people pay attention, are inundated with a repeated message, or take direct, immediate action. This section is designed to help community advocates work effectively with the media to champion our cause.

Successful media coverage ordinarily does not just happen. Good, sustained media coverage is a prized possession that usually can be achieved only through sophisticated strategies, including carefully crafted and targeted messages, cultivating relationships with reporters, monitoring the media even when our issues are not being covered, and committed resource allocation from the SNCCA.

While our opponents (such as developers) fully utilize the power of media to persuade the public, the SNCCA and communities it represents have underplayed this need. We must learn from the successes of our opponents and other larger organizations to implement media strategies in a smaller, less costly manner.

How Do We Get the News?

Think for a moment about the various ways in which you get your information each day.

This may include:

- **Read the News Journal over breakfast.**
- **Read the Middletown Transcript on Thursday Evenings**
- **Listen to the Radio on the way to work.**
- **Get information e-mails from SNCCA members**
- **Watch the nightly news on TV**
- **Talk with your co-workers, neighbors, or friends about events.**

Each of these, and other, are all opportunities to get our message out to our target audiences.



Types of News and Myths About the Media

There are three general types of news:

1. **Hard News.** This is the breaking news, which is happening *right now*. The story is not only timely, but also immediate. To get immediate coverage for this type of news, it pays to have some established relationship with reporters.

Example: The SNCCA files a lawsuit to appeal a development plan that will irreversibly change the community character of the area and impact fragile environmental landscape.

2. **Features.** Features are considered “soft news,” and timelines are less important. These stories give background on current events. Features have longer lead times than hard news, so this is the type of news you will usually “pitch” to reporters. Many community causes target feature news for coverage of their issues, because features often focus on the “news behind the news”.

Example: An in-depth look at Conservation Design, what it has been promised to do and what it will likely result in doing in relation to Suburban Sprawl. A panacea or a new form of development called “conservation sprawl”.

3. **Editorials.** Editorials are stories based on a particular opinion about the issue and are usually developed by an editorial staff. They include op-eds, which are written by an expert who is not on the media staff. The op-ed gives readers different sides of the issues, so they are better informed.

Example: An op-ed by a SNCCA member on the true cost of the SNCC sewer expansion that will require a rate increase County-wide, making Northern NCC residents subsidize the system that may not be needed and does not appear to be wanted by the majority of southern residents.

Myths about the Media

Free Media is actually free.

This is definitely not true, which is why we now call it earned media. This includes things like op-eds, letters to the editor, and coverage for your issues in news stories. It takes a lot of time to arrange “free” media. The SNCCA must invest time and resources into securing media coverage of our priority issues.

Press coverage just happens.

Occasionally press coverage does just happen, but our issue will derive far more benefit from planned press coverage. Although we may just get a call from a reporter, we will be far more effective if we have thought out in advance what we would like to say.

Want media coverage? Hold a press conference.

There are far too many press conferences for reporters to cover. Therefore, it is only useful for breaking news that merits a response from the SNCCA. Press releases are usually a more effective way to get the information out to the media.



Choosing a Spokesperson

One of the most important media decisions the SNCCA will make is the selection of a primary spokesperson for each major issue we work on. It is best to have one individual as a spokesperson, who will communicate the message of our issue and other information in interviews with reporters, radio, or sometimes-even television. Having an official spokesperson ensures that there will be uniformity in the information that is given out to the media and the public. This person needs considerable practice and experience to become comfortable and effective with public speaking and dealing with the media.

The media should know who the SNCCA spokesperson(s) are and that they have the authority to speak for the Alliance membership. Even if we have a spokesperson, reporters often prefer to talk to the person in charge of the organization. For this reason, the SNCCA President and other Board members should be trained and prepared for giving interviews as well. This will ensure that they deliver the same message to the media as the spokesperson and reflect well on the organization. It is important to have the organization speak one message with each voice.

Remember that working with the media is a team effort. A successful media strategy involves all of the SNCCA's most creative people.

Here are some points to consider when selecting a spokesperson for each of our issues or the SNCCA as an organization.

- Are they comfortable doing press interviews and speaking in public?
- Do they have a thorough knowledge of, and experience with, the SNCCA and its issues and message?
- Are they articulate? Can they communicate clearly and to the point?
- Do they possess an attractive, outgoing personality? Are they warm, personable, and relaxed in public situations?
- Do they have a clear and pleasant speaking voice?
- Are they willing to make the time this job will demand?
- Do they have the poise necessary to handle awkward or difficult questions in an interview situation?



Establishing Relationships with Reporters

Cultivating personal relationships with our local reporters is crucial to receiving regular favorable press coverage. Some organizations don't even bother with press releases; they just call reporters, tell them what's happening, and the reporters write stories. The reporters know from past experience that these organizations are credible sources of interesting news that is worth covering.

Identify the reporters that cover the area and types of issues central to the activities of the SNCCA. Work with the same reporters when possible to build respect and trust. Take the time to meet with the reporters. You don't need a hot story to meet with them. The idea is to establish a genuine relationship with the reporter and educate them by giving them compelling background on the SNCCA key issues and our position on these issues.

Building a Successful Relationship with a Reporter

1. Start by calling a reporter and scheduling an appointment to brief him/her on the issue. Ask for no more than half an hour of their time, but be willing to spend more time with them if they are interested. With plenty of advance notice, they will likely be more than happy to meet with you.
2. Be aware of the schedules and deadlines that newsrooms have *before* you call them. For example, the Middletown Transcript usually have their stories due by Tuesday Evening for the weekly paper.
3. The best place to meet is a site relevant to your issue, such as a proposed development site, intersection with serious traffic problems, or school site that is overcrowded with students. This way, the reporter can begin to get a firsthand understanding of the issue.
4. If the reporter tells you he/she is extremely busy and cannot meet at your suggested location, be ready and willing to meet them at their office or a nearby coffee shop.
5. During your initial meeting with a reporter, give him/her a snapshot of the issue we are working on and a preview of any upcoming milestones (such as a Section 3.319 Hearing with County Council) or events the SNCCA is sponsoring. Ask the reporter for advice on getting press coverage for our issue.
6. Credibility is the key to developing and maintaining your relationship with a reporter. To maintain credibility, always know your facts and don't call unless you have a good story.



Pitching Stories to Reporters

The following tips are primarily for soliciting coverage from reporters for breaking news, but much of this advice applies to building relationships with reporters as well.

- Before calling a reporter, write out what you are going to say and practice it on someone who is not a member of the SNCCA to see if they understand what you are saying and think it is interested.
- Ask yourself, “ Why should this reporter be interested?” Your pitch should answer the question.
- Reporters are attracted to “bad” news. Our pitch should point out how the issue affects people, such as their quality of life, safety, health, income levels, or home values.
- Any story pitch should be simple, interesting, short, and clear. However, background knowledge of the issue must be extensive, so that you can answer their questions once you have solicited their interest.
- Be prepared. Have talking points and any pertinent information in front of you, including statistics and spokesperson information, so you don’t sound disorganized.
- Be specific. Don’t say, “ we are doing interesting things that I want to tell you about.” Instead, say, we have done a buildout scenario for the conservation design ordinance and think the increase in housing units will exacerbate growth and development, further stressing our roads, schools, and rural character. Transfer of Development Rights may have also been a better option for environmental protection.
- Be timely; tie your pitch to something that is already in the news, if possible.
- Be courteous. If you catch the reporter at a bad time and they can’t talk, be respectful – don’t start in on your pitch. Save it for later when you have their full attention.
- Don’t speak off the cuff. Pitch calls are not “off the record.” If you don’t know the answer to a question, just say so and offer to call them back with the answer.
- If your conversation goes well, offer to provide additional information and background materials, or to escort them on a tour of the site of interest. Reporters like exclusives; if you offer an exclusive, don’t talk to other reporters about it!



Doing Interviews with Reporters

If we send out a really good press release and/or pitch a compelling story to a reporter, they will probably want an interview. This is when all our hard work can really pay off. If this makes you squirm, you are not alone. Some people start pouring sweat at the thought of being interviewed! The bottom line is that successful interviews come from practice.

Know Our Message Inside and Out

Successful interviews are message-driven. Our spokesperson will need to know what our key messages are. Experts and others we arrange to be interviewed for the story will need to know these key messages as well.

To have successful interviews, we need to answer questions in a way that supports our messages. One of our goals is to have the quotes included in the published story support our main messages. If they don't, then we are "off message," and the interview may be wasted, or worse, the wrong message might get transmitted. Interviews are one of the best opportunities to get our message out, so we must be prepared.

Messages are not necessarily sound bites, but rather ideas we are trying to get across. However, messages should be reinforced in an interview by sound bites, pith phrases, statistics, and anecdotes.

Preparing for the Interview

Get to these questions before the interview so you are better prepared:

1. What type of news source is conducting the interview-print, TV?
2. What is the interview about? Is our issue the main focus?
3. Who else is being interviewed for the story?
4. What is the interview format – is it one-on-one?
5. Where will the interview take place?
6. How long will the interviews last?



Interviewing Tips

- **Practice!** Do a “mock interview” with a friend or other SNCCA member. Try to anticipate the reporter’s questions prior to the interview. Practice staying on message.
- **Don’t wear white to a TV interview.** Blue or green works best. Also avoid patterns and stripes. If the interview is taking place outdoors, dress appropriately for the site.
- **Smile when you’re on camera.**
- **Start your interview from the beginning.** Even though you will have sent advance materials, don’t expect that the reporter has read them thoroughly or really knows that much about the SNCCA or a particular campaign.
- **Don’t wait for the reporter to ask the right questions.** You know more about our issues than he/she does, so you should have our agenda for getting the message out. If they aren’t asking the right questions to get to the heart of the story, then volunteer the information.
- **Don’t make things up.** Don’t ever lie to a reporter! If you don’t know the answer to a question, say you don’t know. If possible, tell the reporter you will get back to him/her with the information.
- **Anticipate tough questions.** Try to imagine what people who are skeptical of our viewpoint will ask or say and prepare an appropriate response.
- **Speak in plain language.** Never use jargon or acronyms. Our language should be both sophisticated and understandable.
- **Know our opponents’ viewpoints** and have counterpoints ready. It is rare for the media to only report one side of the story. Our opponents are probably being interviewed, too, so dismantle their arguments in our talking points.
- **Pause briefly between sentences,** so editors can pull quotes from the interview.
- **Don’t answer personal questions.** Just say, “That’s personal,” and move on.
- **Don’t say “no comment,”** because it implies you are guilty of something.



The Press Release

A press release is the best way to get media coverage. However, if we send out too many press releases that are not newsworthy, then our releases may be ignored. On the other hand, never miss a legitimate opportunity for press attention and be prepared to move quickly when the time comes. As with all media coverage, timeliness is key.

Do write a press release to:

- Respond to a recent development on our issue, or to announce a reaction or position.
- Release new data on a development issue, traffic issue, or environmental issue impacting the residents of SNCC.
- Expose a controversial element of a current piece of legislation.
- Provide context and background to breaking news.
- Announce a newsworthy event and invite the press to cover it.
- Highlight an important event for our issues, such as a public hearing.
- Announce a lawsuit the SNCCA has filed.

Don't write a press release in these cases:

- To announce our monthly membership meeting, unless it is a special meeting.
- To get news coverage on a "feature" issue or soft news; its better to meet with the reporter.
- Because you haven't sent one in a while.

How to Write a Press Release

Press releases should be written like a news story. They should not sound biased or editorialized. Do not include your opinions or viewpoints unless they are in quotation marks. Use a catchy headline to hook reporters and include all the facts a reporter will need to write the story.

If the press release is going to get coverage, the reporter will probably call for additional information, so be prepared. Include a quote or two; one from the SNCCA spokesperson and possibly one from a source outside the SNCCA that can provide a different angle or more credibility with the target audience. Anyone who is quoted should know they are quoted, and the release should include their contact information.

Write in an inverted pyramid format. Start with the compelling conclusion and a pithy quote, followed by facts that support the conclusion. End with the least important information. At the end of the press release, include a sentence or two about the SNCCA and a reference for more information about the Alliance.



Writing and Publishing an Op-Ed

Opinion/editorials, called “op-eds,” are articles that appear opposite a newspaper’s editorial page. Some op-eds are written by the paper’s own columnists or syndicated columnists, but many are written by local citizens, policy makers, experts, community leaders, and other people like SNCCA members. Writing an op-ed gives us the opportunity to communicate our message and viewpoints in greater detail than we can in a letter to the editor. Op-eds also have more credibility. They are good tools for influencing local decision-makers and getting a message out to a large portion of the general public.

Creating a Successful Op-Ed

Do Your Homework

If you haven’t written an op-ed before, you can get started by reading them on a regular basis. Notice what makes op-eds controversial, provocative, compelling, and current. Does our issue have these qualities? Decide which newspaper you want to approach for the piece (choose one that will best reach the target audience). Read its opinion section frequently to get to know the editorial direction of the paper. Call the paper to confirm the name of the editorial page editor and find out what the criteria are for submissions. Find out whether or not it publishes guest op-eds, how frequently, on what subjects, and by what types of authors. Also find out how they prefer op-eds be submitted.

Be Timely

Timing is the most important factor in deciding to submit an op-ed. Our piece should be tied to a current event, such as an upcoming controversial vote in a County or Town meeting, the release of a report, or a community event. Given the long lag-time between submission of an op-ed and its publication, submit your op-ed well in advance.

Follow Some Writing Guidelines

- The piece should be between 600-750 words long. Newspaper editors will reject it if it is too long.
- Write about only one issue and make no more than four key points.
- Begin with a surprising fact or a story – something that will catch the attention of both the editor and the readers. The first paragraph should introduce what you are going to cover in the rest of the op-ed.
- Make the piece personal – include some of your own experiences and relate the issue back to the reader.
- Emphasize the issue’s significance to the reader. Use local statistics.



- Mix short and long sentences, but use mostly short sentences. Paragraphs should be 2-4 sentences in length.
- Use plain language, omitting all jargon and acronyms, or people won't know what you're talking about.
- Avoid the passive voice.
- Double-space your piece and remove any fancy formatting.
- Give it a title (though it might not be used) and include your name, a short bio, the date, and a word count at the top (under the title).

Submitting an Op-Ed

Once the piece is written, send it off with a cover memo to the correct person (the opinion editor or op-ed editor). The cover memo is short and should include the author's name and contact information, as well as the significance and timelines of the piece. Send it overnight express and/or fax or e-mail it (depending on what the paper prefers).



Letters to the Editor

The “Letters to the Editor” is one of the most widely read sections of any local newspaper. The LTE column presents an ideal forum for reaching and educating a large number of people about our issues in SNCC. In addition, decision-makers and elected officials often read the LTE sections of local papers to gauge their constituents’ opinions on a wide variety of issues. Getting letters published is easy, if you follow a few simple guidelines.

Tips for Effective Letter-Writing

- Know the paper’s policy on letters to the editor. These are usually listed in the paper, but you can also call the paper to get the information.
- Be as clear and concise as possible. Letters are usually limited to 200-250 words.
- Always include your name, address, and phone number.
- Type or legibly write your letter on only one side of the paper – double-spaced is best.
- Discuss only one topic per letter; try to keep to 3-4 paragraphs.
- Be timely. Connect to a specific article, issue or event.
- Be prompt. Don’t wait two weeks to respond to a story – write your letter right away.
- Use local statistics in your letter and let the readers know the issue impacts them and their quality of life.
- Write with conviction. Use common-sense language that people can understand.
- State relevant facts, but also include humor, wit, irony, and passion in the letter.
- Unless you are a SNCCA Board Member writing on behalf of the Alliance, your letter will carry more weight if you do not identify yourself with the organization.
- Engage readers by asking direct questions that will force them to examine their own opinions.
- Ask readers to take action on the issue.
- Don’t send the same letter to multiple papers.
- The letter needs to be well written in order to get published and to reflect positively on our viewpoints.



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