

September 2013 Action Sheet: Pitching an Op-Ed Piece

Connecting the Nobel Prize Announcement to the Youth PROMISE Act

The Issue: With only 5% of the world's population, the US manages to incarcerate 25% of the world's prison population. This is particularly tragic in the case of younger "offenders," for whom there are many proven healthier and more cost-effective alternatives to being locked up.

With the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates about to be announced, we are taking this opportunity to laud the achievements of our local neighborhood peacebuilders – whose work is so necessary and will be so greatly aided by passage of the Youth PROMISE Act.

The Action: For our first monthly action, we will be pitching an Op-Ed piece to our local newspapers – with the aim of getting it published.

The Op-Ed page is opposite the Editorial page (hence the name), and contains essays on current topics written by folks with apparent expertise.

The "pitch" may be the beginning of your relationship with the editorial board of the paper. We hope this relationship will be a long and fruitful one, so every communication (especially the first one) should be done with care and courtesy.

Please read the Sample Op-Ed.

Your mission is to persuade your local editorial board to print it, via email and possibly phone. (and by "persuade," I mean give them an empowered opportunity, fueled by information and connection).

Basic Steps

1. Choose your local paper(s).
2. Research their rules for printing Op-Eds (timing, length, etc).
3. Craft your pitch – send an email (with Op-Ed pasted below).

(Not in an attachment!)

4. Follow up with a phone call to discuss publication and also discuss the issue – get to know each other.

Here is a Good Summary of the Elements of a Strong Op-Ed Pitch:

Summary of a Good Pitch¹

A good pitch answers these questions:

Why now? Why is this newsworthy, at this moment?

So what? Why should people care?

Why me? Why am I the best one to write this piece?

An email pitch should include:

- The upcoming news peg – and any upcoming alternate news pegs
- Your idea in a few lines
- Your credentials – only those that are relevant
- The finished piece pasted below your pitch
- Your contact information

Aspects of a successful pitch:

- Timely
- Well written
- Brief and clear
- Conveys expertise
- Unexpected (aha!) point of view

Follow Up: If the editor responds:

Thank your editor. Even if they said “no.” Remember that “no” can be the beginning of a relationship that leads to “yes.” If they published you, thank them not for showcasing you but rather for giving space to the ideas and issues

Follow Up: If there is no response:

Have a time limit. If your idea has a very short shelf life, you might give an editor a day or less to respond; if it's evergreen, a week or more. Then send a follow-up email to your editor saying that (of course) you'd still like to run your piece in their publication, but since the piece is timely, if you don't hear from them by the end of the day (week, whatever) you will assume they have passed, and you'll be submitting your op-ed elsewhere.

Note: Some newspapers will not consider your piece if you submit to multiple papers at the same time. If you do so, tell editors in your pitch.

And here are some suggested talking/writing points in answer to some of the above questions:

“Why now?” – Nobel Peace Prize announcement makes it timely.

“So what?” – The rates of violence and incarceration among our youth – a tragic waste. (For more stats and info visit [link to our ypa page]).

“Why me?” – Bob Baskin is President of The Peace Alliance – TPA, with a nationwide grassroots constituency of some 70,000 advocates, was named by Youth PROMISE Act initial sponsor Congressman Bobby Scott (VA) as the lead grassroots advocacy organization in support of the YPA. (For more about TPA's track record, visit [link to page of TPA's achievements]).

¹ WorldPulse.com/TheOpEdProject – the full article is highly recommended!

Somewhere in your pitch you might also share about your own background, your presence/activity in the local community, and why you are passionate about this topic.

Remember: This could be the beginning of a beautiful relationship with a local editorial board. If you start off with that in mind, it could seed a lot of future media success!