

# SECTION III: CONTACTING THE MEDIA

## MEDIA OUTREACH TOOLS

**Media Advisory:** A media advisory is a brief notice to the media that lays out the Who, What, Where, When and Why of the event. Think of it as an invitation. It is best to send it out several days before the event and then follow up with a phone call to the reporters. Don't forget to include your contact information.

**Press/News Release:** A press release is a news story written from your point of view and released to the news media. Releases are used to inform reporters about news or events they might be interested in covering. The press release should be sent out the morning of the event, or the day a report is issued, or statement is made. Press releases should provide a quoted statement from one or more people involved with the event if they provide different perspectives, e.g. local and national or policy and field.

**Press Statement:** A press statement provides an official comment on a news development or position taken by someone else. It is best issued the day the statement is made. You can think of it as a platform for restating your organization's position on an issue.

For framing and messaging please see 'Racial Profiling: Face the Truth Talking Points'

## LETTERS TO THE EDITORS AND OPINION EDITORIALS

### Tips on writing Letters to the Editor:

- Letters to the editor (LTEs) generally respond to something previously published in the paper. Mention the name of the article and the date it was published.
- LTEs should be sent no later than 3 business days after the article they respond to was published.
- They are much shorter than op-eds--less than 250 words but even as little as 150 words. Check word limits with your local paper's website.
- Letter writers often express a personal viewpoint and don't have to be writing as experts or as representatives of institutions.
- Don't shy away from news outlets that don't share your political views. Often, these can be the most likely to print your opinion as a way of balancing their coverage.

### Tips on writing Op-Eds:

- Op-eds should always come in at under 750, but check word limits with your local paper.
- Aim to place the op-ed as close as possible to your news event or some notable date, e.g. a holiday that symbolizes your issue, anniversary of an important date, etc.

- Get your op-ed in at least 7 days prior to when you want it published to allow time for the editors to consider it.
- Send the op-ed to only one news outlet at a time. Many news outlets want exclusivity. If they turn you down, you can send it to the next news outlet on your list. This is another reason why it is important to allow enough time to get the op-ed considered by a few outlets.

### Tips on both LTEs and Op-Eds:

- Make unusual or original but solid arguments by tying together topics that people don't typically associate, e.g. government surveillance and immigration enforcement both compromise civil liberties.
- See what issues have already been covered – a paper won't print two letters/op-eds on the same issue with the same argument in the same week.
- Use facts and figures to lend credibility to your arguments. It is useful to have a document listing facts that are relevant to your work that you can reference easily when drafting LTEs and Op-Eds.
- Make sure to find the right contact information to email your submission.
- Paste the letter or op-ed submission into the body of the email as well as attaching it.
- Provide your name, full contact information, title, and affiliation and if you're sending it on behalf of the writer, make sure you provide contact info for both of you. Many papers will not accept anonymous contributions.

### Sample Published RWG Letter to Editor

*THE WASHINGTON POST*

*Taking Liberties At Homeland Security*  
*Tuesday, August 26, 2008; A12*

*Regarding the Aug. 20 front-page article "Citizens' U.S. Border Crossings Tracked":*

*The broad authority given to the Department of Homeland Security to monitor the comings and goings of U.S. citizens is evidence of the Bush administration's ongoing exploitation of the threat of terrorism to encroach on constitutional rights. There is legitimate outrage over such policies, but there should be equal outrage about other DHS policies that violate civil liberties and human rights in the name of national security.*

*Immigrants, including citizens and legal residents, are bearing the brunt of unnecessarily harsh DHS practices. DHS conducts warrantless, aggressive raids on homes and workplaces, locking up people without giving them an opportunity to make a phone call or see a lawyer. The inhumane conditions at DHS detention facilities, where people are sometimes denied access even to lifesaving medical care, have resulted in more than 70 deaths in the past few years. In this November's elections, DHS policies will result in the disenfranchisement of at least 300,000 people whose citizenship applications have been long delayed by extra security checks based on their race or religion, not any evidence of criminal activity.*

*It is time to hold DHS accountable for abusive policies that affect citizens and immigrants alike.*

MARGARET HUANG  
Executive Director  
Rights Working Group

## Sample Opinion Editorial

*Baltimore Sun - December 7, 2009 - By Benjamin Todd Jealous and Margaret Huang.*

*The End Racial Profiling Act (ERPA) will soon be reintroduced by Rep. John Conyers, Democrat of Michigan, and Sen. Russ Feingold, Democrat of Wisconsin. Numerous incidents throughout American history have taught us that racial profiling not only fails as a law enforcement tool but ultimately makes us all less safe. Passage of ERPA would be an important step toward ending racial profiling.*

*Over a century ago, Leon Czolgosz walked up to President William McKinley with a concealed weapon and shot him. The Secret Service agent assigned to search the president's visitors was focused on a "dark complexioned man" in line behind Czolgosz. Ironically, the same man whose appearance made the agent suspicious - Jim Parker, an African-American former constable - saved President McKinley from a third bullet.*

*In 1995, after the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, Timothy McVeigh, the white male assailant, fled while law enforcement officers looked for "Arab terrorists" whom they thought responsible.*

*Racial profiling does not always target minorities. In 2002, during the sniper attacks that terrorized Washington-area residents for months, police conducted surveillance searching for a disaffected white man with an accomplice, driving a white van. During that time, the actual culprits - an African-American man and boy who fit many of the characteristics of a serial killer, except that they were black - came into contact with police at least 10 times without being apprehended. How many lives would have been saved had race not been a part of the profile?*

*As airport security agents focused on people of Middle Eastern descent following the Sept. 11 attacks, Nathaniel Heatwole, a white college student, was able to smuggle knives, box cutters, bleach and other items onto at least six planes from February to September 2003. He then sent numerous e-mails to the Transportation Security Administration notifying them of his actions. It took the TSA more than a month to find the hidden items.*

*Just as history has shown that using race as a proxy for criminality is bad policy, history also shows that focusing on behavior over race is smart policy. When law enforcement officers eliminate race as a factor and instead rely on behavior, they catch more people who break the law. In the late 1990s, as a response to discrimination lawsuits, the U.S. Customs Service eliminated the use of race in deciding which individuals to stop and search for illegal contraband and instead began focusing on suspect behavior. Studies showed that this shift to "color-blind profiling techniques" increased the rate of productive searches (those leading to the discovery of illegal contraband or activity) by more than 300 percent.*

*Other examples in our nation's history demonstrate that we can be smart and safe in our efforts to find people who break the law, as opposed to focusing on people's race, gender or national origin. In the 1970s, the Secret Service relied on a presidential assassin profile that excluded females. After Sara Jane Moore took a shot at President Gerald Ford, the gender limitation was removed from this profile, a move that potentially saved President George H.W. Bush in 1992 when a young woman was arrested for threatening to kill him after bringing a rifle to a rally at which he was scheduled to speak.*

*Some enlightened members of Congress analyzed the culmination of evidence proving the ineffectiveness of racial profiling and introduced a bill that would ban racial profiling by federal, state and local law enforcement. The ERPA was first introduced in 2001 and gained bipartisan support. Unfortunately, after Sept. 11, misplaced fear stemmed the momentum for ERPA, and the U.S. government embarked on an era of intense profiling, rounding up more than 1,200 Arab, South Asian and Muslim men and holding them without charges.*

*Such action did not make us safer. In fact, the mass roundup within the United States after Sept. 11 never apprehended anyone subsequently officially linked to the attacks. An inspector general's report later revealed that many of the detainees had been blocked from contacting attorneys and that some of them had been beaten or otherwise physically abused by guards in federal prisons.*

*Unfortunately, the scope of racial profiling is expanding. As the responsibility for enforcing immigration laws and finding undocumented immigrants has been increasingly delegated to state and local police, evidence of increased racial profiling is emerging across the country.*

*President Barack Obama and Attorney General Eric H. Holder have stated that ending racial profiling is a "priority." The more than 40 members of Congress planning to reintroduce the ERPA agree. It's time to face the truth: Racial profiling is a violation of our constitutional and human rights, and it distracts the attention of law enforcement from real suspects, which puts all of us at risk. The ERPA should be passed this year, ensuring greater safety for all of our communities.*

## **AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW DOCUMENT**

### **What is an Available for Interview (AFI) document?**

A document issued when news breaks or on the anniversary of an event or major holiday that is relevant to your work. This tool can help you obtain interviews with organizational spokespeople or place quotes in news stories. It should be distributed to television and radio interview bookers, beat reporters and columnists.

### **When do you issue an AFI?**

Significant anniversaries, such as 9/11 or Citizenship Day on September 17 are suitable occasions for issuing an AFI. Similarly, it is appropriate to issue an AFI when there is a news development such as an egregious raid or an exposé of poor conditions at a detention facility or developments in local or national policy or important policy statements by political officials and/or candidates for office.

### **Who are you offering and why should they be chosen to be interviewed?**

Describe why your spokesperson is particularly suited to be a guest to comment on the news of the day. For example, they might be an expert on the issue and have information that can advance the story or provide a fresh analysis or angle. You should also include relevant activities illustrating the work that your group is doing that relates to the story in the news.

### **What else should go in the AFI?**

A brief bio of available spokespeople(s) and a description of your organizations' work may be included in the document. For example if the news is about an immigration enforcement program

that leads to racial profiling of immigrant communities and you are offering an immigration lawyer, it is important to mention any past work the attorney has done that is relevant to the issue, such as having won an injunction against ICE for rights violations.

## ONLINE ADVOCACY TIPS

### What is a blog?

A blog (*we**b** log*) is a website with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Many blogs provide commentary on a particular subject, others break news and others function as personal online diaries.

Many political or common-interest blogs have multiple regular contributors and/or may accept guest bloggers who provide expertise on a particular issue. This information should be available on the website.

### How do I post comments to a blog or online article?

If you come across a blog on a topic that you could respond to, check for a “Comments” section at the bottom of the page. Some blogs may require you to create a user account to comment (doing so is usually quick, simple and free).

Online news articles usually have a comments section where you can respond to the article directly or address someone else’s comments regarding the article. This also usually requires creating a user account but it is quick, simple and free as well.

### Tips for Posting to Blogs or Commenting on Online Articles

- Use numbers and statistics to illustrate the egregious nature of the violations. Figures that show a significant percentage of a population being affected by a practice can be particularly compelling.
- Use an individual’s story to put a human face on the violations and illustrate the nature of the problem particularly when discussing inhumane conditions or the abuse of rights caused a particular practice.
- Stay alert to happenings in the news and/or upcoming anniversaries/significant dates that may relate to your topic, which could serve as a timely hook for your posting or comments.
- Choose an effective title for your posting and incorporate any key words that relate to your subject.
- Use bullet points and using **bold**, *italics*, or underlining key words will help draw attention to main points.
- Keep it short but substantive. A target word count should fall between 250-1000 words.
- Have an opinion – people read blogs because people who have a point of view write them.
- Link to relevant articles or web pages that pertain to your blog.

- Most blogs allow you to “tag” your post with main themes that readers can use to find your blog. Use common search words that are pertinent to your topic, like: Racial Profiling, DHS, DOJ, civil liberties, immigration, TSA, human rights, etc.
- If for whatever reason, you want to protect your identity online, create a username instead of using your real name.

For framing and messaging please see ‘Racial Profiling: Face the Truth Talking Points’ in Section IV of the “Night of 1,000 Conversations Toolkit.”