

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Introduction:

Influencing public policy is an ambitious undertaking. To influence or implement policy, Community Psychologists (CP) need methods or strategies that work for you. As you develop your plan, a key element often *requires taking public positions* to influence others to build support for your ideas, proposal or plan.

Letters to the Editor, Editorials and Op-Eds. provide powerful opportunities to influence the public, key stakeholders, community leaders and legislators.

C. Corbett

Albany, NY

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

“Going Public”

Seeking publication in a public forum is intimidating to many. You may wonder if you have the credentials, experience or insight. And, if you succeed, you should expect or be prepared for critical replies. Seeking publication requires taking a public position with which others may quite understandably disagree.

Your contribution to solving or preventing a community problem may well not be in providing a “solution” –*though your CP training will provide you keen insights into the problem as well as solutions--* enabling you to play a catalyst role.

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

“Going Public”

What do you bring to the Table?

* you have values, skills, competencies & fortitude to engage in community problem solving

* your training & personal qualities provide a solid foundation to exercise personal influence to solve or prevent social problems

“You Are the Message: Getting What You Want by Being Who You Are” (Ailes 1988)--*authenticity*

* you are trained to address community needs while being concerned with all members of the community*--not advance private or personal needs

[This is very important in engaging policymakers as it distinguishes you from most other constituents who are seeking influence for their own self-interests.]

* “Community Psychologists are interested in the health and well-being of all members of a community.” (Heller, Price, et al., 1984)

Exercising Policy Influence:

Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

“Going Public” SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

What do you bring to the Table?

“Community psychologists are interested with the health and well being of all members of a community.” *

Why is this important?

As you develop issues, positions, remedies or solutions ideally you will have well considered, respected and anticipated impacts on all members of the community. This is key as any public position will be exposed to critique—particularly by the disaffected.

If you have well anticipated, balanced and mitigated those impacts you can pre-empt or minimize critical replies and opposition.
Remedies that advance everyone’s interests are best ones of all.

* “Community Psychologists are interested in the health and well-being of all members of a community.” (Heller, Price, et al., 1984)

Exercising Policy Influence:

Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

“Going Public” SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

What do you bring to the Table?

“Community psychologists are interested with the health and well being of all members of a community.” *

Fashioning Your Position

Taking a “public position” opens it to debate in the public forum. For a *letter to the editor* or *Op-Ed* in a local paper, the audience will likely be limited to the circulation in that geographic area. Wider circulation papers like New York Times or Washington Post will expose to a much broader critique. If you seek broader influence yet, National publications will provide that-- along with greater exposure to critique. *A well designed position will greatly reduce or mitigate critiques -- while building community support.*

* “Community Psychologists are interested in the health and well-being of all members of a community.” (Heller, Price, et al., 1984)

Exercising Policy Influence:

Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

“Going Public” SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

What do you bring to the Table?

“Community psychologists are interested with the health and well being of all members of a community.” *

Fashioning Your Position

Fashioning your position depends largely on your goals.

Some possible goals:

- * express a personal or professional opinion
- * educate and inform the public on an issue of concern
- * take a public position to generate debate
- * help solve a serious community problem by engaging citizens with possible options or solutions
- * rally or build public support for a position or legislation

What is your Goal???

* “Community Psychologists are interested in the health and well-being of all members of a community.” (Heller, Price, et al., 1984)

Exercising Policy Influence:

Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

“Going Public” *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

What is your Goal?

“Community psychologists are interested with the health and well being of all members of a community.” *

Fashioning Your Position: While this may vary by goal, generally:

A well designed position will greatly reduce or mitigate critiques -- while building community support.

One ideal position is one that helps solve real community problems and identifies options or remedies that: engage citizens; harm no one; and make all members of the community better off.

While not easy, this is a legitimate goal of social problem solving.

* “Community Psychologists are interested in the health and well-being of all members of a community.” (Heller, Price, et al., 1984)

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 1:

Op-Ed in Sunday Paper: Daily Gazette

Community Problem:

Schenectady NY was experiencing repeated problems with vicious dog attacks on citizens and children.

Substantial injuries and trauma, emergency room use caused by dogs of dangerous or violent breeds

Repeated press exposure was creating fear and strong public backlash.

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 1:

Op-Ed in Sunday Paper: Daily Gazette

Community Problem:

These dangerous dogs were creating demand on public services requiring regular intervention by:

- * police
- * animal control
- * courts
- * elected officials

The significant public health hazard was creating legal liabilities, bad publicity and public fear. The animal rights activists were up in arms over the city's sub-par facilities. Cost of housing, maintenance and vet care was placing undue demands on fragile city resources. Police were being displaced from their regular duties jeopardizing residents.

Exercising Policy Influence:

Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

Case Example 1:

Op-Ed in Sunday Paper: Daily Gazette

Community Problem:

Additionally, the controversial issue arose as to whether these vicious dogs should be returned to owners, put up for adoption or euthanized.

Proposed Solution

Reflecting the widespread public concern over need for— and risks of increased taxes, the local newspaper *The Daily Gazette*, published an Editorial entitled: “*Time for dog volunteers to step up*”.

Exercising Policy Influence:

Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

Case Example 1:

Op-Ed in Sunday Paper: Daily Gazette

Proposed Solution: “Time for dog volunteers to step up”

The Editorial:

- * concluded City care was adequate
- * no need for increased taxes to improve care
- * instead called for “dog volunteers’ to step forward to:
 - walk the dogs -clean cages
 - help care for dogs - feed them
 - help place the dogs in peoples homes so fewer dogs would need shelter

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 1:

Op-Ed in Sunday Paper: Daily Gazette

Proposed Solution: “Time for dog volunteers to step up”

Assessment: From a CP perspective, the proposed solution did not appear a realistic long term solution to the complex problems faced.

- * would volunteers step forward? * could City manage volunteers?
- * no resources to improve conditions * no funding for vet care
- * dogs to return to homes to get loose again?

The Editorial provided no real system level changes, no increase in funds for sustainability and did not instill confidence that future recurrences would be prevented.

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 1:

Op-Ed in Sunday Paper: Daily Gazette

Proposed Solution: “Time for dog volunteers to step up”

Assessment: The Editorial did not appear to provide any system level change, no funding for sustainability, no prevention steps and no basis for concluding any significant improvement in status-quo would occur.

As the dogs were returned to owners, who never licensed them to begin with, the dogs would likely get loose and the cycle would begin again.

The apparent deficits of the Editorial “solution” provided a wide opportunity for alternative proposals to address the complex issues.

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 1:

Op-Ed in Sunday Paper: Daily Gazette

The depth of the problems and apparent deficits of the Editorial “solution” provided a wide opportunity for an Editorial reply that could identify alternative proposals to address the complex issues faced.

A Proposed Reply Editorial?

The basic assessment was a preferred solution would provide:

- * long term systemic solution
- * second order change
- * prevention potential
- * roles for all community stakeholders
- * a new recurring stream of revenues to upgrade conditions and ensure the program was sustainable

Exercising Policy Influence:

Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

Case Example 1: A Proposed Reply Editorial?

The basic assessment was a preferred solution would provide:

- * long term systemic solution
- * second order change
- * prevention potential
- * roles for all community stakeholders
- * a new recurring stream of revenues to upgrade conditions and ensure the program was sustainable

Objective of Proposed Editorial:

To propose an alternative solution incorporating above principles to present a superior alternative, build community support, engage all stakeholders and/or act as a catalyst to generate other alternatives.

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 1: Summary of Reply Editorial

The basic assessment was that a preferred solution would provide:

- * long term solution
- * prevention based
- * system level change
- * roles for community stakeholders
(veterinarians, animal rights activists, etc.)
- * formal role for city officials
- * ongoing citizen participation
- * new funding for sustainability
- * no new tax burden

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 1: Summary of Reply Editorial

Proposed Approach:

Given the City's dire financial condition, a solution that proposed or relied upon *increased taxes would not be defensible*. Possible options were essential that could rely on incremental revenues to support an ongoing systemic solution.

Any possible systemic solution would require increased funding voluntarily provided. This pre-requisite effectively precluded a Government Sector based solution-- pointing instead to reliance upon the Voluntary or Nonprofit Sector. The decision was made to develop an alternative Proposal relying upon the Nonprofit Sector rather than the *Daily Gazette's* Government Sector based solution.

Exercising Policy Influence:

Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

Case Example 1: Summary of Reply Editorial

The Editorial explains strengths and weaknesses of the different Sectors (Government, For Profit and Nonprofit) and communities are often best served by one Sector or a combination. A Voluntary Sector solution, a Nonprofit, would have distinct advantages here-- *including access to tax advantaged voluntary donations that would not be available to Government or For Profit Sector solutions.*

Also, given the community based and inclusionary nature of a Nonprofit, permanent roles could be fashioned for all stakeholders: community members, animal rights activists, veterinarians, city employees including policymakers, the mayor and anyone passionate about humane animal care or funding it. *The Editorial essentially proposes this is the forte of the Voluntary Sector and Nonprofit options often far better serve communities than Government Sector solutions.*

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

Case Example 1: Summary of Reply Editorial

To achieve such system level change, the Editorial proposed formation of a Nonprofit organization with board members made up of a diversity of community stakeholders in the form of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

The Editorial noted such solution would require citizens to step forward with financial and leadership experience, including experience with fundraising.

Whether such resources exist and are willing to step forward remains to be seen, but such resources could achieve second order, systemic change, with active citizen participation, using tax subsidized funding for sustainability.

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 1: Daily Gazette Response to Submittal

The Managing Editor immediately responded on receipt and committed to publication. No editing or word count reduction was introduced. It was published on September 21, 2014.

The very next Sunday Edition, the Editorial was published on the front page, top of fold, Opinion Section with a color picture of the shelter dogs with the remainder of the article on a following page.

The Editorial likely met Daily Gazette's keenest need to find a solution that required *no increase in taxes*. No letters to editor or Editorials followed and the case for a new Nonprofit can be re-raised as the problem intensifies or community leaders can no longer crisis manage the status-quo.

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 1: Conclusion

This was the first Op-Ed I ever drafted and submitted for publication.

While I had not previously seen myself as playing such a role, at the last SCRA pre-conference Policy session, some of these presenters made the case for Op-Eds and how they had succeeded. This spurred me on.

I did however have experience with ~ 12 successful Letters to the Editor with at least six local periodicals.

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

Case Example 1: Conclusion

I did however have experience with ~ 12 successful Letters to the Editor with six local periodicals.

	Local Papers	National Publication
letter to the editor		
Albany Times Union	X	
Daily Gazette	X	
Troy Record	X	
Altamont Enterprise	X	
Legislative Gazette	X	
The Evangelist [Catholic]	X	
Op-Ed		
Daily Gazette	X	

Recommendation: start w/ Letters to Editor and develop proficiency in the art and politics of letter writing to gain confidence and success. Such experience can be the path to local Op-Eds success and set sights on National Publication.

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

Case Example 2:

Letter to the Editor: Chronicle of Philanthropy

Problem Definition:

A longstanding problem or challenge many organizations face is the *lack of diversity at both staff and leadership levels*. Promoting diversity and inclusion are key Community Psychology values.

Many organizations have expended much effort and funds to promote more diverse workforces such as through: diversity training, internal policies, improved hiring practices and hiring of diversity officers to name a few and at substantial expense.

Yet, for all such efforts, progress is lacking for many organizations.

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 2:

Letter to the Editor: Chronicle of Philanthropy

Problem Definition:

This lack of diversity has been linked to the tragic killings of African-American men in Ferguson, MO and Staten Island, NY, the subsequent protests and the failure to indict police officers involved.

The *Chronicle of Philanthropy* has published two recent articles* describing this lack of diversity that call out nonprofits for apparent failures and urge changes to promote diversity at both staff and nonprofit board levels.

* Lehman, A.: *Need for diversity at nonprofits is more vital after Garner and Brown cases*, December 19, 2014. and *Nonprofit hiring needs to catch up to the new civil rights era*, February 12, 2015, Vol. XXVII (7), p. 37.

Exercising Policy Influence:

Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

Case Example 2:

Letter to the Editor: Chronicle of Philanthropy

Lehman's Proposed Solution:

The author A. Lehman, offers various solutions which she has taken from the “for profit world”. Those remedies include: changing or developing internal policies; hold management accountable; conduct internal audits; hire diversity officers and diversify the nonprofit board.

Assessment:

Nonprofits operate in dramatically different settings than for profits. They are often resource strapped and lack excess revenues that are common in the for profit sector. *The article does not appear to identify economic or practical remedies to promote diversity or alter status-quo.*

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 2: Letter to the Editor: Chronicle of Philanthropy

A Proposed Reply to Lehman:

“Promoting Diversity at Nonprofits: Another View”

Objective of Proposed Reply:

Recognizing the cash strapped nature of nonprofits, another approach should be considered that would constitute permanent, system level change at little or no cost.

Instead of relying upon the practices of for profits, to propose an alternative approach and rely upon the “best practices” of “A” rated nonprofits-- who had already proactively addressed diversity at both board and staff levels.

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 2: Letter to the Editor: Chronicle of Philanthropy

A Proposed Reply to Lehman:

“Promoting Diversity at Nonprofits: Another View”

The proposed solution is to translate the principle of diversity into practice by incorporating such priorities directly within the nonprofit’s bylaws.

The proposed bylaw requires:

- * the nominating committee to report on makeup of board on gender, race, nationality etc.
- * diversity considered in recruiting staff
- * President to report annually on staff makeup
- * nominating committee required to consider diversity in nominations and report to board

This bylaw requirement ensures board members will have key diversity information in hand *before critical board decisions are made.*

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 2: Letter to the Editor: Chronicle of Philanthropy

A Proposed Reply to Lehman:

“Promoting Diversity at Nonprofits: Another View”

The proposed solution is to translate the principle of diversity into practice by incorporating such priorities directly within the nonprofit’s bylaws. This places *control and enforcement* in board hands.

Several key advantages include:

- * no cost
- * second order change
- * permanent
- * enforceable by board
- * establishes regular diversity reporting
- * requires a nominating committee to diversify control
- * “top down” process; if diversity is to succeed-- *it must start at top*

Exercising Policy Influence: Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds. *SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session*

Case Example 2: Letter to the Editor: Chronicle of Philanthropy

A Proposed Reply to Lehman:

“Promoting Diversity at Nonprofits: Another View”

Chronicle of Philanthropy Response to Submittal:

The Editor of the Chronicle responded the Reply would be published as a *Letter to the Editor*. It was published online on April 3 and re-titled by the Editor to: *“Simple Steps to Promote Diversity at Nonprofits”*.

Note: this bylaw on diversity is one of many bylaw “best practices” contained in “Advancing Nonprofit Stewardship Through Self Regulation: Translating Principles into Practice” Corbett (2011). The book implements the 33 Principles of Good Governance and Ethical Practice issued by Independent Sector (2007, 2015), particularly including Principle #11 on Diversity, one of the key values of the field of Community Psychology.

Exercising Policy Influence:

Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

Summary: Developing Your Plan?

Local Papers

National Publication

letter to the editor

Albany Times Union	X	
Daily Gazette	X	
Troy Record	X	
Altamont Enterprise	X	
Legislative Gazette	X	
The Evangelist [Catholic]	X	
The Chronicle of Philanthropy [2015]		X [Case Example 2]
_____	?	?
_____	?	?

OP-Ed

Daily Gazette [2014]	X [Case Example 1]	
_____	?	?
_____	?	?

Goal: *identify your priorities— Which publications? Local or National_?*

Exercising Policy Influence:

Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds.

Conclusion: Exercising Influence

As a Community Psychologist, you have unique values and training with a capacity to see and solve community problems differently than most other professions.

A first step in making system level change will require, at times, taking public positions to make your views and ideas known.

It may be to explain a unique perspective, inform the public, build consensus, engage stakeholders, identify solutions, act in a catalyst role or precipitate solutions to empower communities to solve their own problems as they see fit.

For whatever role you fashion, your capacity to *disseminate* will be greatly advanced and ability to influence others if you develop the skills and capacity to take public positions and take advantage of the opportunities presented by *Letters to the Editor, Editorials* and *Op-Eds*.

Research Methodologies to Influence Public Policy

SCRA 15 Pre-Conference Session

Christopher Corbett

Independent Researcher