

SCRA Member Resource to Obtain Guidance : Publishing Letters to Editor, Editorials & Op-Eds

Overview

As community psychologists we have a key role and opportunity to take public positions on important public matters. These public positions have the potential to express core values including: a commitment to social justice, respect for all cultures, prevention, protection of public health and environment, as well as empowering citizens to solve community problems to name a few.

Letters to the Editor, Editorials and Op-Eds present valuable opportunities to advance such values. Such public positions can advance various goals such as to: educate and empower the public on critical matters; build consensus with public and other community stakeholders on key issues; promote citizen participation; and influence legislators on important public policies at national, state or local levels to advance public interests.

Policy Committee Role

The Policy Committee encourages and supports such actions by SCRA members. Towards that end, the Policy Committee offers informal consultation and guidance on such letters or positions, recognizing the publication would not be attributed to, nor does it represent a position of either SCRA or its Policy Committee. (*Note: it would however, be proper and appropriate, as the author deems fit, to self-identify relevant education, experience and affiliations, such as membership in professional organizations including SCRA.*)

Such consultation may be requested by providing a copy to the Policy Committee Chair who will route the draft to two or three Policy Committee members with successful publication experience. They will offer individual comments directly to the author. Respondents will strive for a three day turnaround.

Authors have full discretion considering or discarding any comments or suggestions. Where the author succeeds with publication, the Policy Committee requests it be notified, ideally with permission to publicize a reference, or link, on the Policy Committee website, to inform and assist others with similar interests and as examples of successful publications by community psychologists.

Guidance for Authors and Ethical Issues

The difficulty in successfully obtaining publication varies widely. For example, Letters to the Editor in local newspapers or blogs can be relatively easy. A key first step is to obtain from potential outlets the requirements you must follow. These requirements, word count, format, etc., may vary widely but should be scrupulously followed. Following is one common illustration:

“We accept only letters that are sent exclusively to this paper. Only original letters will be considered for publication. We do not accept form letters, chain letters, letters that have been posted on Web sites or letters that have been prepared by anyone other than the individual who has signed his or her name on the bottom.”

This raises the issue of seeking publication in multiple outlets. As a practical matter, this is commonly addressed by altering title and content making related points, while still achieving important goals of the author.

This policy quoted above reinforces an important point: the most compelling letters and editorials reflect the individual values and passion of the author-- which are very powerful as they reflect the field's community based values. *This is often readily apparent to editors and they are most likely to print original thinking that addresses important community interests, in a timely manner in relation to what they are publishing now.* Editors readily spot form letters, or standard language often drafted by individuals with an agenda that they seek to advance though others, so your originality and passion for your topic will increase your probabilities of success. Also, given the greater challenges of acceptance as an Editorial or Op-Ed, authors may wish to start with Letters to the Editor to develop and refine their publication skills-- and with success, move on to more detailed Editorials and Op-Eds with the broader influence that comes with regional or national distribution. *Authors should especially be alert to copyright requirements common with Editorials and Op-Eds.*

If you have further questions or require additional guidance, please contact the Policy Chair so your inquiry can be forwarded to an appropriate Policy Committee member for an individual response.