

### In this Toolkit:

- **Messaging**
  - What not to say and the reasons why
  - [Messages to use](#)
- [Factors that Affect your Media Coverage](#)
- [Interviewing 101](#)
- [Influence your Targets via Op-Eds and LTEs](#)

Don't Say This	Explanation
"Illegal immigrant"	By labeling immigrants as "illegal," you are reinforcing the opposition's message and "othering" them.
"No human being is illegal" "Detainees" or "Prisoners"	<p>As much as we wish otherwise, negating a claim actually brings it top of mind. People latch onto the most tangible element of a sentence – usually the noun. In contrast, words like "don't" and "not" are intangible. Message testing shows that people remember the assertion and forget that it's a lie.</p> <p>Additionally, some immigrants <i>do</i> have contact with the criminal legal system and in the wake of the uprising for Black lives, there is unprecedented recognition that policing and incarceration, by design, criminalize Black people and communities of color. Rather than framing your messaging from the harmful "good versus bad" immigrant narrative we should include details about the nature of a person's criminal record: the crime committed, time served and how long ago the crime happened. By doing this we're providing context for the current situation, answering audiences questions/concerns and potentially building empathy for long-ago behavior. Furthermore, we must include policy details that underscore specific, unjust circumstances someone is facing as a result of being an immigrant with a criminal conviction to fill in the gaps and correct flawed mental templates that our audience may hold. But others may be more serious or recent. This doesn't negate the fact that they deserve dignity, respect and the preservation of</p>

Don't Say This	Explanation
	their human rights—all things that the detention system seeks to strip away.  Finally, when you call people “prisoners” or “detainees” you are stripping someone of their humanity and putting emphasis on the negative situation, which distracts audiences from connecting to the person rather than the situation. <b>Instead say a person who has experienced immigration detention.</b>

### Factors that Affect your Media Coverage

---

Now more than ever, the news cycle is crowded. With major news breaking, seemingly everyday, reporters are finding themselves with competing priorities as they try to keep pace with the next breaking news story. For us, this means that we need to manage our expectations and be proactive in the steps we take to increase our chances for coverage!

#### Proactive steps you can take to increase your chances of media coverage

- ❑ Before you set your event date that your seeking media coverage for, make sure it does not conflict with holidays, religious events, sporting events or any other local happenings that would hinder reporter turnout.
- ❑ Research your local media outlets and start building relationships now. Research your local press to find newspapers, TV stations and radio stations that you want your event covered by. Find the immigration reporter, research their past coverage and assess their reporting (What language do they use? Do they include quotes from people who have experienced detention and activists? Do their stories only have comments from ICE?). If you come to the conclusion that the reporter shares some of your values and is accurate and fair in their reporting, ask them to coffee to more broadly talk about your campaign, the upcoming event and ask what their interests are.
- ❑ Build a targeted reporter outreach list and divide ownership for outreach.

### Communications Toolkit

Based on your research and budding reporter relationships, make a targeted outreach list of at least 10 reporters that you are going to invest effort in.

- ❑ Send out your media advisory two days in advance of your event.  
Just like us, reporters are busy! The more advance warning we can give them the better, since ultimately it is up to their editor on whether or not they will be able to cover your event.
- ❑ Personalize your event pitches.  
Don't rely on a mass emailing of your media advisory for reporter turnout. Flag the advisory for your targeted list with personalized individual follow up. Here's a [sample pitch](#) that you can tailor to each reporter. If a reporter is interested, be a resource for them without getting into a pattern of doing their work for them.
- ❑ Follow up.  
Start your initial pitch with an email (remember: reporters have a lot of competing stories, so they will need to refer back to what your event is all about), but then be sure to follow up with a call if you do not hear from them. You want to build long-term relationships with reporters, so be sure to thank them for attending and reporting on your event.
- ❑ Designate spokespeople and a media liaison for your event.  
Have at least three people prepped and ready for reporter interviews. Make sure that you've also picked someone to be the media liaison. This person should know which reporters have committed to coming and/or covering the story, and should ensure that reporters connect with the spokespeople at the event.

### Interviewing 101

---

- Come prepared
  - Come with the three points you wouldn't want your audience to miss
  - Research your audience — both the interviewer and the outlets' readership
  - Identify potential negative and tough questions before you arrive and practice answering them with your three points
- Concisely deliver your message

## Communications Toolkit

- Lead with your message
- Give one or two points as background, only if necessary
- Don't repeat the charge or question — if the interviewer says something inflammatory, pivot to your point without repeating theirs
- Make your point and stop talking — **resist the urge to fill the silence**
  - If doing a TV interview, speak in short quotable soundbites, aim for 20 to 30 seconds at a time
- **Don't lie: if you don't know the answer, don't guess, just tell them you will get back to them later**
- Contextualize the conversation
  - Storytelling — use stories to flesh out your message
  - Statistics — important, but use sparingly and only for illustrating a point, and never use more than one at a time
- Control the interview
  - Flagging — signal the importance of key points with specific phrases:
    - “The bottom line is...”
    - “The one thing you need to know about this issue is...”
    - “The biggest problem is...”
    - “There are two major reasons why you should care about this...”
    - “This is the major takeaway...”
  - Bridging — pivot from the question to your message:
    - “That's a great question, but the most important thing to know here is...”
    - “I'll look into that, but it's also true that...”
    - “I want to get back at the matter at the heart of this issue...”
- Your presentation matters
  - Be personable
  - Keep good posture — sit up/stand up straight
  - Avoid excessive or distracting hand gestures and pause words (um, uh, like...)
  - Avoid clothing that is distracting
  - Sometimes when we are nervous we have a tendency to talk too fast, resist doing this by taking a few deep breaths before doing your interview

### Communications Toolkit

- Practice
  - Roleplay an interview with another spokesperson using this format:
    - Interview your practice partner for five minutes, then have that person provide feedback on how they feel they did followed by your feedback (both positive and things that could be improved upon), feedback should not run over five minutes. Then switch places, five minute interview followed by five minutes of feedback.
  - Call Carly! Please feel free to set up a mock interview with Carly Pérez Fernández, the Communications Director at DWN. You can contact her at [cperez@detentionwatchnetwork.org](mailto:cperez@detentionwatchnetwork.org)

#### Attribution

Don't ever say anything to a reporter that you wouldn't want on the front page of the paper or on the evening news. At the same time, protecting sources is a key element of journalistic ethics and sometimes you need to talk to reporters without going public. You must give reporters notice about the status of what you are going to say **before** you say it, and you must get their verbal agreement before journalistic ethics are considered binding. Always remember, even with these guidelines, reporters can decide to break them. In general, we recommend sticking to comments you're comfortable being reported and attributed to you when working with a reporter you don't have a relationship with.

- Telling the reporter something that is “not for attribution” or “on background:” means that the reporter can use the information you give them, but you cannot be sourced as the specific individual. The reporter may ask to describe you with a descriptive phrase such as “an immigrant rights advocate...”
- Telling the reporter something is “off the record:” means that what you are saying should not be written down by a reporter. This information should never be attributed to you in any form.

#### Influence your Target via Op-eds and LTEs

---

##### Op-Eds

Op-Eds are an opportunity to communicate directly to the public, including decision-makers, and shape or frame a debate in your own words. An op-ed is a

### Communications Toolkit

short, usually 500-800 word, guest essay published in the opinion section of a newspaper, Opposite the Editorial page.

#### Best practices

- **Op-eds should be timely, lively, and present strong arguments from an issue area expert or someone who has a stake in the subject.** Op-ed page editors are not looking for event **announcements, promotional materials, or generic ideas.**
- **Determine your goal and audience.** Choose your outlet based on the audience.
- **Make your points compelling.** The first sentence should grab the reader's attention, and everything that follows should keep it. Illustrate your case with vivid examples and memorable evidence based facts. Definit it with a few strong arguments. Be short and specific. Use a lively, active voice. Give readers the minimum background they need to understand your case. Don't bog them down with jargon or too many statistics.
- **Make it timely.** Link or "hook," your op-ed to something in the news.
- **Make it short.** Check the word limit for your desired outlet before you start. Most have 500-800 word limits. Aim for a first draft under 1,000 words. Ask for suggestions and comments from Carly, DWN's communication director to edit it down. Restate your key argument at the end.
- **Submit the piece.** Email your piece to the opinion editor. Submission details can usually be found on the opinion page of your paper's website. Take note of whether the paper requires exclusive pieces (most do). Use a subject line that gives a glimpse of what the piece is about (i.e.: "Op-Ed submission: Immigration Detention is a false solution to economic growth). Include a short bio: name, location and affiliation.
- **Follow up and wait.** Once it's been sent, follow up with the editor after 24 hours. Ask about the timetable for editing and publishing the piece. Be ready to make updates and revisions, especially if several weeks have passed since you submitted it.
- **Don't be discouraged.** Not every piece finds a home -- blog posts are a great back-up. Newspapers and magazine receive a huge volume of submissions. Send to another news outlet. Keep writing and submitting pieces.
- **Leverage your success.** If your piece does get published send copies to elected officials and other stakeholders. An op-ed can serve as a springboard to talk-show appearances, panel discussions and a host of other opportunities.

#### Additional Resource

From our members, Opportunity Agenda:  
<https://toolkit.opportunityagenda.org/media/op-ed>

#### LTEs

Letters to the editor allow you to offer a short rebuttal to an article or commentary that was published in a specific paper or add a crucial missing perspective. Most letters should be 150-250 words. Specific guidelines by news outlet are listed on the outlet's website.

#### Best practices

- **Keep it short.** Respond quickly to the article you've read (note the headline and date it ran). **Make your points short and specific.** The outlet will edit if you don't, so do it yourself so they don't cut your key point.
- **Be factual but not dull.** State important facts that back up your point.
- **Pick a messenger.** Find a pertinent person to sign the byline. Identify the author's expertise and/or affiliation. Include full contact info and phone numbers.
- **Timing is everything.** Because of the volume of submissions at national newspapers, getting in a letter the same day will increase your chances of getting published. Send it by e-mail in the body of the text, not as an attachment.