



The Housing Collective

Overview

This document provides guidance on op-ed-specific outreach, including best practices for placing op-eds, the key to writing compelling narratives and top contacts to know at local Connecticut publications.

It also outlines essential media dos and don'ts to help you navigate interviews and outreach to journalists with confidence and clarity. It covers key terminology used to define how your comments may be used by reporters—such as on the record, off the record, and on background—and provides practical strategies for framing your messages and handling difficult questions.

Op-Ed Guidelines

- **Timeliness:** To “sell” your op-ed to the news outlet you want to pitch, give your piece a news hook. Tie it into recent and relevant events that are top of mind for this outlet’s readers.
- **Clear and concise argument:** Your op-ed needs a clear argument running throughout the piece. By giving it a strong theme and opinion, you will make it more compelling to potential readers.
- **Write for your audience:** When writing for a news outlet that is trying to reach a wide audience, remember who you’re writing for. Avoid (or at the very least, briefly explain) jargon, acronyms, and big, complex words and phrases.
- **Research your outlet:** Make sure the outlet you’re pitching is the right fit for your piece. Review the outlet’s submission guidelines to make sure you adhere to the word count and stylistic preferences.
- **Pitch to one outlet at a time:** An op-ed is an exclusive piece, and should be shared with one outlet at a time. If you go a few days with no response to your follow-ups, move on to the next outlet.
- **Pitch the right person:** Avoid pitching to standard reporters – the best target for submitting op-eds is usually listed on the staff directory page of a news outlet. News outlets often will have an email address listed on their websites for submitting opinion pieces, as well. Opinion editors and managing editors are often the best targets. Some opinion targets include:
 - Paul Stern, CT Mirror: pstern@ctmirror.org
 - John Breunig, CT Post/CT Insider (Hearst Connecticut): jbreunig@stamfordadvocate.com
 - Owen Poole, The Day: o.poole@theday.com

If you’re looking to place an op-ed, reach out to the opinion editor or managing editor at your desired publication with a friendly topnote briefly explaining what the piece is about and if they’re interested, let them know you’re able to send it along. The BerlinRosen and HC communications team is here to support with specific questions or recommendations as needed.

Press Inbound Process

- If a reporter reaches out with an inquiry, please flag it promptly to the Housing Collective communications team: Mark McNulty (mark@thehousingcollective.org) and the BerlinRosen team (housingcollective@berlinrosen.com).
- The BR team will then help coordinate interview schedules and/or written responses with reporters.
 - a. If any team members have a personal relationship with a reporter (or are looking to foster a relationship), they are welcome to communicate directly with reporters. Please just keep the same group mentioned above in the loop with any ongoing/pending media requests.
- The BR team monitors/flags coverage daily and will share stories as they publish.

General Guidance

- **Be Prepared:** Prior to the interview, make sure you're aware of the topics the reporter wants to speak to and come prepped with relevant data, commentary and trends in the space. The BR team will help prepare backgrounders on reporters ahead of time and is available for any questions.
- **Use Clear, Non-Technical Language:** Avoid jargon and acronyms – speak clearly and concisely and clarify when necessary.
- **Power of Soundbites:** Use quotable, concise phrases that are easy to lift for headlines or pull quotes.
- **Be Clear:** About what you can and cannot talk about as you start the interview.
- **Clarify Deadlines:** In general, try to get back to reporters as quickly as possible, and normally, that means within 24 hours. Always be sure to ask if they are on deadline in case they need information sooner.

Interview Tips & Tricks

Ahead of your conversation with a reporter, below are some best practices to keep in mind. For starters, there are certain terms that are commonly used during interviews to help distinguish what information is permitted to be used in a reporter's piece, how it is attributed, or what should not be included:

- **On the Record** – Everything in the conversation can be used and attributed to your source by name and job title. Unless specified otherwise, assume that everything you say is on-the-record.
- **Not for Attribution** – The comments may be quoted directly, but the source may only be identified in general terms.
- **On Background** – Information provided by a source can be used, but the source cannot be named directly.
- **Off the Record** – Information provided is not for publication.

Framing is a verbal cue that points out when you're saying something of particular importance. It helps prevent journalists from drawing their own conclusions:

Examples of framing

- "There are four main points... To start...

- “The critical point is...”
- “The most important thing to remember is...”
- “I need to emphasize....”

Common Mistakes to Avoid

If you get a difficult question, don't avoid or ignore it — acknowledge the question and then bridge to your key message. Also known as pivoting, bridge back to your key messages with phrases like:

- “I think the real question is...”
- “I can tell you from my own experience...”
- “It's hard to say, but what I CAN say is...”

When a reporter asks a tough question, it can be easy to get defensive or speculate. When possible, try to avoid the following mistakes:

- **Don't Speculate:** Avoid “what if” scenarios or hypotheticals unless they are relevant to the narrative. Stick to what you know.
 - You can always refer a reporter to another connection who you think might be better suited to answer the question.
- **Don't Say “No Comment”:** It sounds evasive. Instead, say why you can't answer: “We're still gathering facts,” or “That's not something I can speak to right now.”
- **Don't Repeat Negative Language:** Even if correcting or denying a claim, don't repeat negative terms. Always try to frame your answer positively.
- **Don't Ramble:** Stick to your points. Clear and concise answers will help the reporter decipher the most relevant information.
- **Don't Go Off the Record Unless You Trust the Journalist:** And even then, be cautious. Off-the-record statements can still shape coverage indirectly. Also, don't make assumptions about what is “on” and “off” the record. Clarify as needed.
- **Don't Assume the Reporter's Intentions:** Always be courteous and professional, even if the questions are tough!