



Letter to the Editor and Op-Ed Toolkit

AmeriCorps Funding

March 2017

Letters to the Editor

Tips for Placing a Letter to the Editor (Courtesy of Voices for National Service)

Letters to the editor are a great tool for letting elected officials and other local leaders know what matters to local residents. By submitting a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, you can let others in your community know why national service matters to you – and why it should matter to them, too.

Here are some tips to writing an effective letter to the editor (LTE) and getting it placed.

1. **Local matters.** Make sure that your letter has local information (e.g. talk about how AmeriCorps national service has helped your city or community).
2. **Share your expertise.** Include your relevant qualifications to the topic in your letter (e.g. if you're an AmeriCorps alum or run an AmeriCorps program, say so; talk about your program, etc.).
3. **Refer to the legislator(s) you are trying to influence by name.** In almost all cases, if your letter includes a legislator's name, their staff will give them the letter to read personally.
4. **Be timely.** If you're responding to a specific story or op-ed that ran in your paper, do so within two or three days of its publication (the sooner the better).
5. **Keep your letter short, focused, and interesting.** In general, letters should be 150 words or less; stay focused on one (or, at the most, two) main point(s). Include interesting facts, relevant personal experience, and any local connections to the issue. Wrap your letter up by explaining what you think needs to happen now by making a call to action. If your letter is longer than 150 words, it will likely be edited or not printed (visit your paper's website for specific word guidelines).
6. **Follow the paper's directions.** Information on how and to whom to submit a letter-to-the-editor is usually found right on the letters page in your paper. This often includes guidelines on what the paper looks for in LTEs. Follow these guidelines to increase the likelihood that your letter will be printed. If you can't find the information you need, call the paper and ask how to go about submitting a letter.
7. **Include your contact information.** Be sure to include your name, address, and daytime phone number. The paper will contact you before printing your

letter. Do not include attachments in your email.

8. **Share your letter to the editor on social media.** Once your letter is published, share the link to the letter on social media. This will help spread the word about national service and its role in your community.

Template Letter to the Editor

Please feel encouraged to use and customize the template letter below.

Dear Editor,

The White House recently issued its fiscal year 2018 budget proposal that eliminates the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) in an attempt to reduce federal spending. Eliminating CNCS, and its core programs including AmeriCorps, would have a crippling impact on our community, devastating local organizations like Reading Partners that leverage AmeriCorps funding to engage citizens in service and to cultivate matching support from non-federal sources.

INCLUDE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH READING PARTNERS AND THE IMPACT YOU SEE IT HAVING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

National service programs not only provide vital services to local residents here in **CITY/STATE**. These programs also provide a pathway to employment for young Americans. Through their service, AmeriCorps members gain skills and experience, develop professional networks, and earn an education award that can reduce the cost of college.

There is a proud history of bipartisan support of AmeriCorps and other forms of national service. I am counting on **MEMBERS OF CONGRESS** to continue that legacy of support for this cost-effective, results-driven resource for our community.

NAME, TITLE, ORGANIZATION
CONTACT INFORMATION

Op-Ed Submissions

Finding submission details for your local paper

If interested in writing an op-ed on behalf of Reading Partners, please feel free to reference [this helpful resource](#) developed by The OpEd Project that outlines the submission guidelines for hundreds of the top online and print publications in the country. Op-eds are typically around 500-600 words, but word restrictions can range from 300 to 1200 and vary by outlet.

Other guidance

- Be yourself, be authentic!
- Please feel free to use some of the statistics and talking points on the following pages as content or inspiration for content in your submission.
- Above all else, write about your personal experience as a Reading Partners volunteer, board member, employee, AmeriCorps member, school partner, donor, etc. and articulate the impact that you see Reading Partners having in your community.
- While protecting their anonymity, make sure to talk about the students you have worked with, where applicable, since our ultimate mission is to help children from under-resourced schools and communities make the all-important transition from learning to read to reading to learn, and in the process help them to become lifelong readers.

Example op-ed about the AmeriCorps funding issue

- [Save AmeriCorps funding, for Tulsa's sake](#)

Statistics and Other Talking Points to Use (*optional*)

- The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the federal agency that supports AmeriCorps, has been included by the White House in a proposed list of federal agencies to be eliminated in the FY 2018 federal budget.
- CNCS funds more than 3,000 organizations including Reading Partners, Boys and Girls Clubs, City Year, Habitat for Humanity, United Ways and Catholic Charities
- There is a strong bi-partisan history of support for national service, in large part because it both lessens dependence on government and voters are overwhelmingly in favor of it.
 - 83% of voters want Congress to maintain or increase federal investment in national service (includes 78 percent of Republicans, 84 percent of Independents, and 90 percent of Democrats surveyed)
- For every one dollar the federal government invests in national service, there is a nearly four dollar return on investment.
- CNCS mobilizes more than 80,000 people annually, including hundreds at Reading Partners, who are working together to provide critical services to local communities across the country.
- Reading Partners is a national nonprofit that mobilizes community volunteers to provide individualized reading support to students in under-resourced public elementary schools and equip them with the foundational skills they need to be able to read at grade level by fourth grade.
- Reading Partners volunteers are matched one-on-one with students in kindergarten through fourth grade who are reading anywhere from a few months to two and a half years below grade level. Volunteers utilize an easy-to-follow, individualized lesson plan each week, specific to their students' needs in order to meet them at their level and help build both literacy skills and confidence. Tutors typically commit to one hour a week with the same student for the duration of the academic school year.
- In the 2016-17 school year, over 360 AmeriCorps members are performing volunteer service years with Reading Partners in 14 metro areas across the country. AmeriCorps members are invaluable to Reading Partners and the 11,000 students from under-resourced schools we serve nationwide.
 - AmeriCorps members represent approximately 65% of Reading Partners' workforce

- For Reading Partners, if CNCS were to be eliminated, it would mean that the following AmeriCorps positions would all be at risk of being cut:
 - Site Coordinators
 - Regional Site Coordinators
 - Literacy Leads
 - Volunteer Coordinators
- AmeriCorps members play an integral role in making it possible for Reading Partners to provide thousands of students with the early literacy support they need to succeed in reading and in life. Employing a model that combines hundreds of AmeriCorps members with thousands of volunteer community tutors is what has enabled Reading Partners to become a [proven](#), cost-efficient early literacy solution that delivers \$2 in resources to students for every \$1 invested in the program.
- For Reading Partners, the impact of losing AmeriCorps funding would be devastating. Our annual AmeriCorps revenue is \$5.4M, or 15% of our total budget. This covers over 350 AmeriCorps members, reaching 14 metropolitan areas, and serving approximately 11,000 students.
- With only one in five fourth graders from low-income families in the U.S. reading at grade level, thousands of kids are counting on Reading Partners' staff, AmeriCorps members and community volunteers to be a steady presence for them as they gain the foundational literacy skills needed to become our future leaders.

Here are some additional resources if you are looking for more [talking points and statistics about CNCS](#) or if you are looking for [more examples of op-eds](#).