Create a Letter Writing Ladder! It’s Easy!

The media undeniably affects people’s ideas about immigration. Letters to the Editor, which anyone can write to their local newspaper, are an important tool when it comes to shifting public opinion and shaping politics.

Generating lots of Letters to the Editor in response to articles that matter to you is one solution to changing biased media and debunking the many myths surrounding immigration. An effective and fun way to do this is by creating a Letter Writing Ladder!

Individuals, like YOU, can change people’s ideas about immigrants and challenge these myths through thoughtful and accurate Letters to The Editor.

Did you know?
The Letters to the Editor page of a newspaper is the first most read page by Policy Makers and the second most read page nationwide!

This Letter Writing Ladder model was created by Coloradans For Immigrants Rights, a project of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). If you live in the Denver-Metro Area, please call Jordan T. Garcia, Immigrant Ally Organizing Director with the AFSC at 303.326.3464 or email at jgarcia@afsc.org to get involved in the CFIR letter writing ladder.

This packet includes:
How a Letter Writing Ladder Works
Sample Invite to Write!
Tips for Getting Published
Samples of Published Letters
How a Letter Writing Ladder Works

To create a letter writing ladder in your community or for your organization, you’ll need:

- One person or a small team to monitor the most read local newspaper, or various newspapers, and send out alerts to your volunteer letter writers. *(There are some internet tools such as Google News that may help you monitor your local news outlets.)*
- A team of folks, ideally ten or more, who will make up your Ladder. They are people willing to write letters to the editor in response to alerts or what we’ll call “Invites to Write!”

Coloradans for Immigrant Rights’ Letter Writing Ladder divides Volunteer Letter Writers into groups of five, or steps on a ladder. When an article about immigration appears in the local newspaper, we email the first step of four with “Your Invite to Write!” and follow up with a phone call. This technique is useful because it continues to raise awareness through the submission of five unique letters to the editor regarding the same issue; thus increasing the chances of having any letter published. However, if you have less people, you could send your alert out to two or three people at a time.

When you find an article in the paper that warrants a positive or negative response, you will send an “Invite to Write” to a few members of your group. We have included an example of this invitation, which should include:

- A link to the original article
- 3-5 talking points to get you started, maybe a fact or two
- Easy instructions for submitting your letter

The only thing left to do now is wait to hear if one of your letters will get published. Often the newspaper will call to confirm name and address with the author.

We also suggest a few other follow up steps:

- Clip and save your published letters to the editor. It’s a great way to get others to join your ladder and donors love them, too!
- Send your published letter to the editor to any policy makers you think should see it.
- Let your supporters know that a letter got published. This can keep your volunteer letter writers spirits high and your supporters might want to make positive comments on the online version.

Sample Invite to Write!
Subject: Your Invite to Write!
From: Jennifer Piper <jpiper@afsc.org>
Date: Wed, June 14, 2009 10:25 am

Mary Anne, Michelle, Rosyln, & Marie!
As some of you may know, Chandra recently had an Op Ed published in the Denver Post! We were hoping that you’d write a letter to the editor in support of her reflection on the Migrant Trail Walk! Let me know if you need any help! If you want to forward it on to a friend that you know will do it, please do! If you cannot write a letter, please let me know so I can ask someone else!

~ Jordan

OPINION Near the border, a trail of tears
By Chandra Russo, POSTED: 06/14/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT
Link to article: http://www.denverpost.com/perspective/ci_12573219
It is the threatening hour of the day. At just 10 a.m., we plod on in 100 degree heat under a vicious sun. Even the desert insects have stopped their rattling below the dry burn.
(click on the link above to read entire article)
For this op-ed about the Migrant Trail, you might say:
• This column shows that mass tragedy is happening at the US-Mexico border. This humanitarian crisis is a direct result of our failing immigration laws.
• Thousands of innocent deaths should be an unacceptable ramification of any US policy, here or abroad.
• We need to demand that our leaders take urgent action to reform an outdated, unrealistic system that breaks apart families and does not accommodate for economic realities.

Three points are sufficient (although more is okay), the length of your letter can be anywhere from 8 sentences to a few paragraphs.
Please write a letter to the Denver Post and send it to openforum@denverpost.com by June 18, 2009. Remember, editors like to publish personal accounts or community impact. Often times, the newspaper will call indicating they might print your letter.
1. Maximum length: 150 words
2. Submissions must include full name, home address, and day and evening telephone numbers for verification purposes.
3. Letters may be edited for length, grammar and accuracy.
Please send a copy of your letter to jpiper@afsc.org
Just remember to send us a copy of your submitted letter AND let us know if you get published!

Tips for Getting Published

This is how the first part of your email could look
Include a link to the article as well as its title, date, and author
Stick in some talking points that your writers may choose to use to get them started
Close it out with a date that the letters should be submitted by and guidelines for the article.
Here we've included a few tips for getting letters published. You can modify and send them on to your crew, suggesting they tack these up by a desk or save them somewhere easy to find.
The most successful letter is a published letter. Here are a few simple steps to increase the chance your letter to the editor will reach a wide audience!

**Best to keep it short & simple.**
都已经 a concise letter is a publishable letter. Editors prefer to publish timely, concise letters that respond to an article, editorial, or other letter to the editor.

Before writing your letter, review the newspaper’s policy on letters to the editor. Many papers have a suggested word limit; follow the guidelines for each editor and you’re more likely to have your letter printed. In fact, editors might modify your letter for clarity, and could cut parts of it entirely if it is too long. It's best to send a short, well written letter to avoid the chance that you disagree with the changes the editor makes.

**What’s MY point?**

**Opening** your letter with a strong statement that comments on the thoughtfulness of the reporter, quality of the article, editorial, or other letter that appeared in the newspaper. Your opening statement can also comment on a specific quote from someone interviewed for the story, add to the discussion by pointing out something readers would need to know, disagree with an editorial position, or point out an error or misrepresentation in an article.

**Ask yourself:** Is this the clearest expression of what I want to say?

**Close your letter** with the thought you'd like readers to remember. Instead of focusing your attention at a reporter, editor, or expert who got it wrong, consider the central point you want people reading the letter to take away.

**Re - Read & Re - Write.**

Ask someone you trust to read your draft. Have them review your letter to be sure your writing is clear and you are getting your point across.

Remember to be careful about accuracy and avoid personal attacks. Support your position with facts, statistics, citations, or other evidence. Use active voice and eliminate unnecessary words such as, like, that, of, etc.

**Be Timely...**

Write and submit your letter as quickly as possible, preferably the same day that the article runs, or try to respond within three days to the published event, topic, article, or letter.

Editors are on guard about fake identities and will often contact you to verify that you wrote your letter. They will not run anonymous letters. The editorial pages exist to offer a cross section of community opinion. Editors are more likely to publish letters on issues that are important to their readers. Also, don’t respond to numerous articles in a short amount of time. Many papers have policies that limit how frequently they will publish the opinion of one individual or organization.
Samples of Published Letters

Immigrants left out
by DP Opinion on January 9, 2009
Re: “Immigration panel urges leverage for cops,” Jan. 7 Denver & The West.

While we agree that there is a need to come together as a community to discuss the ways immigration and public safety inform each other, it is vital that all affected parties be part of a discussion. The task force on immigration was useful in understanding a law enforcement point of view, but the voice of the community, including immigrants, was largely left out of the discussion and report.

Most troubling was that the report does not distinguish between people who commit crimes and law-abiding community members. This distinction is especially important given that crime rates among the immigrant community are lower than the native population. In order to preserve trust and respect among the community, law enforcement must not target the general immigrant population. When they do, it causes more fear in the community and they are much less likely to report crimes.

We urge Gov. Ritter to confer with community members in order to better understand these solutions.

Sabrina Karim, Rights for All People, Denver
This letter appeared in the Jan. 10th edition.

From: Norris, Bob
Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2009 7:51 AM
Letter to editor as it appeared this week in the Longmont Times-Call

Tuition Equity, Good for Colorado

Tuition equity is good for Colorado. Senate Bill 170 would allow all high school graduates that attended a Colorado high school for three years to qualify for instate tuition. This bill has been supported by the Longmont City Council (7-0 vote), the Boulder Valley and Denver Public School Boards, the Denver City Council, numerous state education groups, teachers, school officials, school counselors, Greeley, Denver, and Colorado Spring newspapers, as well as several prominent Republican businessmen and members of law enforcement.

Why the broad spectrum support? One learns from speaking with school officials, teachers, and councilors that many bright and high performing children of undocumented parents, once realizing that college is not a possibility because of the high out of state tuition rates and lack of publically funded scholarships, reduce their level of effort or drop out of school. This situation is not good for our schools or our community.

Businesses realize the detrimental impact to them as a result of Colorado having a low rate of students going on to college (32nd in the nation). Businesses need an educated work force. Our low rate of student going on to college is a major factor for businesses deciding to or not to relocate here. This bill will provide more funds for colleges because an in state tuition provides more revenue that an empty seat. Finally, students with a college degree will earn more and pay more taxes.

Bob Norris
Longmont, Colorado
We encourage the use of this model to achieve common goals regarding Immigrant Rights. If you would like to distribute this model, please feel free to add your own logo, tag line, title, etc and cut and paste alerts into emails and change items to fit your needs. However, we would appreciate it if you including the following sentence: ‘This model was created by Coloradans For Immigrants Rights, a project of the American Friends Service Committee.’

Let us know what you are up to, and if something is not helpful or you need more information please don’t hesitate to ask!

Strengthening the Movement for Immigrant Justice!
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