

CITIES ARE ESSENTIAL

nlc.org/CitiesAreEssential

Guidelines to Writing an Opinion Editorial or Letter to the Editor

Choose Your Format

An **op-ed**, typically around 750 words, is a good format for a longer, thought leadership piece. Please pay attention to the outlet's specific guidelines which are usually available on their website. Op-eds are generally longer than a letter to the editor.

A **letter to the editor** is typically closer to 400 words. Letters to the editor are primarily written in direct response to another article recently published in that paper or outlet, rather than a general topic of your choosing. The other piece should drive the focus of your writing and messaging. If possible, cite the article you're referencing or responding to. Don't assume the audience has read the other piece or is overly familiar with the position or situation. With a letter to the editor, be sure to keep it timely. Trying to submit a response to a piece from months ago is far less likely to be accepted by the outlet or to have as much of an impact.

General Guidelines

Utilize clear, powerful messaging that cuts through the noise.

Stay on topic. COVID-19 has affected every facet of life, but that is hard to get across in a short piece.

Make your viewpoint and expertise known as soon as possible – you can ramp up your messaging and story sharing, but don't let your key points get lost in the sauce.

The political capital of local leaders has never been higher. Draw on respect, partnership, inclusion and accountability.

Tell **YOUR** story. Tell your community and residents' stories. Lean on the personal connections that make this real. Data and statistics are important, but they are most impactful when paired with explaining **WHY** this issue matters and **WHO** is being affected.

Research and remember your key audiences – yes, you may be writing for the eyes of your Member of Congress, but who reads this outlet? Who are your community members? Carefully consider how you can draw others to your cause.

Topline Messaging

Cities provide essential services for more than 200 million residents across the country, including police, fire and sanitation.

- Relief for cities translates directly into quality of life for residents.
- **This money can save lives.**
- Without investment in local governments, our communities will be less safe, less healthy, less prosperous.

Cities, towns and villages are calling for \$500 billion in direct federal aid and economic relief over the next two years to support the communities on the frontline of America's response to COVID-19.

- Local government are being charged with executing the COVID-19 response – that should mean **ALL cities** receive federal support to get through the crisis.
- The first federal Coronavirus legislation was **passed in mid-March** – and there has been no direct aid provided to the majority of cities, towns and villages.

Cities are the engine of the American economy.

- Investing in local governments has a stimulating effect on the entire American economy.
- Cities create the **atmosphere for businesses to thrive** and allow residents to make a good living.
- Local officials understand the needs of our communities and what to do with any federal aid we receive.

Local governments do not want a handout or a bailout, we want a partner to help us reopen and recover.

- Direct, robust aid is **not about “bailing out” local governments** that have done something wrong - it is about providing much-needed support to those who acted quickly to execute the national response and recovery.
- We need a **partnership to rebuild America**.
- **Political parties are irrelevant** to providing services to families, residents and businesses.

- If local governments aren't empowered to reopen and federally supported in recovery efforts, it will be a **very long time before our country is back to business.**

Resources

[Cities Are Essential Roadmap Infographic](#)

[Myths & Truths About Providing Federal Assistance to State and Local Governments](#)

[NLC's COVID-19 Pandemic Response Series](#)

[NLC and Bloomberg COVID-19: Local Action Tracker](#)

[NLC Coronavirus Response Resources](#)