



Tools to help you write Op-Eds

It's important and impactful for community members to hear from their local shelter leaders on animal welfare topics and issues. By sharing your position and the latest information, you can help shape and inform your community's knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about proven practices in the ever-evolving industry of animal welfare. The following information is provided to help you craft an Op-Ed that is effective in delivering your opinion with data-backed information to make your point clear and persuasive and to create a call to action.

1. Things to frame up/think through for your Op-Ed:

- Why are you writing this?
 - Is it to convince, change, share/update, celebrate, influence/sway, or change public policy?
- What's the purpose or intent of your piece?
 - Is it a legislative opportunity? Are you asking your local representative for something?
 - Issue(s) that you want to change or improve?
 - Change you want to see in your city or a new behavior you want to see?
 - Who is your audience? Who are you asking to do something?
- Does the topic tie into to your location with other recent news cycle stories?
 - Is there activity coming up that would make your Op-Ed relevant?
- Word Limits – depends on the publication; check each website or call for specifics. Usually they are between 250 – 750 words max. You can check your word count at the bottom left of your word document.

2. Key facts and information to consider including or conveying in your Op-Ed:

- How are “traditional” ways of thinking not working? How do new solutions provide results in alignment with current values or possibilities?
- How would what you are recommending/advocating for be advantageous? What's the benefit to the community/individual?
 - Define key phrasing or terms
 - Remember: the public may not be familiar with animal welfare terms, so stay away from insider lingo and clearly define terms that may seem obvious to you, like community cats or TNR

3. Tools, suggestions and timely examples of Op-Eds on animal welfare topics:

- [Writing Effective Op-Eds](#) Duke Communicator Toolkit

Below are some recent Editorials and Op-Eds from Best Friends employees:

** If any of these topics pertain to your community, please feel free to use these as thought starters. Please do NOT copy/paste these editorials. If you'd like to write about the same topic, please feel free to use ideas, but put them into your own words. **

- [The Dilemma of the Friendly Outdoor Cat](#) – by Michelle Logan
- [The Best Home for a Cat isn't always a house](#) – by Makena Yarbrough
- [Let L.A.'s ferals get neutered and die out](#) – recent Op-Ed In *L.A. Times* where they just overcame a 10-year injunction preventing TNR, the last piece needed to clinch no-kill.
- [Let's Not Kill Cats](#) – by Lee Greenwood

4. **Submitting your Op-Ed:**

- Sometimes, you'll be able to submit your Op-Ed through the paper's website. Check the Opinion section for directions.
- If you don't see that, check your paper's staff directory for the Opinion Editor. If you can't find that person, call or email the paper and ask who is best to receive it.

5. **Guide: Here are definitions of general terms Best Friends uses that may come in handy:**

Trap-neuter-return: In trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs, community cats are trapped and transported directly to a spay/neuter clinic, where they are sterilized, vaccinated and ear-tipped for identification. Following recovery, the cats are returned to the location where they were trapped to live out their lives without producing any more kittens.

Return-to-field: Return-to-field (RTF) programs operate similarly to traditional trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs, with the exception that the cats have been admitted to a shelter at some point in the process.

Community cats: Outdoor cats who live in the community and are often cared for by multiple residents. Adjectives to use to describe community cats include stray, free-roaming, feral, outdoor. (We've decided not to use "unowned" or "ownerless" to describe these cats, since that's not an important descriptor.) Upon first mention of community cats in a piece, it's a good idea to provide a brief description, since readers might not know what we mean by "community cat." For example: community cats (aka stray, feral or outdoor cats).

Community-supported sheltering: This new term encapsulates the future of sheltering — having communities more actively involved in the lifesaving process through comprehensive fostering, adoption and outreach programs. "Community-driven sheltering" may be appropriate in some situations, but not for general use.

Breed-specific legislation: BSL stands for breed-specific legislation. It refers to laws that ban or restrict certain types of dogs based simply on their appearance, usually because they are perceived as dangerous. BSL is a misnomer in that BSL laws are anything but specific. These laws target dogs not because they are a specific breed, but because someone thinks they *may look like* a certain breed. And even if dogs may look alike, it doesn't mean they will behave the same way. BSL is sometimes known by another acronym: BDL or breed-discriminatory legislation.

Dog breed discrimination: Dog breed bans and other forms of breed-discriminatory legislation force many people to give up their beloved pets. In America, responsible people should be allowed to love and care for any breed of dog they choose. Working together, we can ensure that every loving pet—no matter the breed—receives a loving home.

Pet-inclusive housing: Housing is second most frequently cited reason people give for surrendering a pet, so it is imperative that people have access to pet-inclusive housing. Many rentals and government-subsidized housing make it difficult to own a pet. Even properties that are “pet-friendly” might have pet weight limits, such as “no dogs over 25 pounds” or breed restrictions. When families are forced to choose between securing a place to live and keeping their family pets, they may see surrender as a last resort.