

NDD UNITED

WORKING TO
STRENGTHEN AMERICA



“Faces of Austerity 2.0” Communications Handbook



Public Affairs | Issue Advocacy | Media Relations | Speechwriting

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Introduction

The Senate is expected to pass a budget this week that will decimate already cash-strapped federally-funded programs, with impacts felt across sectors from public health and housing to job training and natural resources. NDD United is dedicated to telling the story of those left in the budget's aftermath—and how Congress's cuts to discretionary programs aren't just numbers on a spreadsheet, but sometimes a matter of life and death for millions of Americans who rely on them.

"Faces of Austerity 2.0: How Budget Cuts Continue to Make Us Sicker, Poorer, and Less Secure" documents the stories of Americans who will no longer have access to housing or child care or treatment for substance use disorders. It tells the stories of students who will lose access to an appropriate affordable education and at-risk youth who rely on programs to keep them from cycling in and out of the juvenile justice system, as well as others harmed by Congress' decision cut these programs.

We believe that Congress needs to hear these stories, as well as to hear a public outcry against the wrongheaded decisions to cut the programs that keep Americans out of poverty and keep them safe and secure. This handbook provides the tools to maximize your public presence and amplify your voice on behalf of NDD programs. It offers sample documents for major communications pieces: an op-ed, blogpost, media advisory and social media posts. It also offers tips on spreading your message in a way that engages the press, the public and our leaders.

We hope that through these tools, we can change the debate about funding of NDD programs for the better.

Proposed schedule of events and press activities for "Faces 2.0" report rollout and advocacy:

- Friday, Oct. 20—New Heights offers exclusive on report rollout to reporter, sends out media advisory for Oct. 25 Hill briefing. NDD United groups are encouraged to send out media advisory to their own lists or send targeted reporter list to New Heights for outreach.
- Monday, Oct. 23- Tuesday, Oct. 24—New Heights and NDD United orgs continue pitching Hill briefing, promote Facebook Live interviews taking place with Rep. Hoyer (send Tuesday).
- Wednesday, Oct. 25:
 - Before Hill briefing—NDD United orgs are encouraged to re-send media advisory and send out social media posts re: Facebook Live event
 - Any time that day—NDD United orgs should post suggested social media through their organizational channels
 - After Hill briefing and Hoyer event—NDD United orgs are encouraged to send our report release.

Need more help? New Heights Communications works with organizations inside the Beltway and out to provide tailored communications audits, support and services. Contact Christy Setzer, President, at 617-512-7572 or christy@newheightscommunications.com to discuss how we can help your organization. For more great PR tips and tools of the trade, sign up for our newsletter at info@newheightscommunications.com.



Telling Your Story: Talking Points

NDD United has a unique and potentially powerful voice. As the only organization fighting for all of the public services on which Americans truly do rely, we have a duty to make sure our voice is heard.

The key to getting your story out there? Powerful storytelling. Humans love narrative. They love heroes and villains, and they love calls to action and solutions. So unless you're on the Hill, this is not about budget negotiations. It's not about "allocations," or "reprogramming," or "nondefense discretionary" anything. This is about the people who are making devastating budget cuts versus the victims of the cuts. It's about budget cuts hurting real people.

Here are some talking points that help make the case for why we need to invest in discretionary programs and what's happening today. Feel free to adapt for your organization.

Why Invest in NDD?

- Just a tiny fraction of our federal budget goes toward supporting everything our government does outside of the military, Social Security and paying down the interest on the national debt. Everything from preventing disease to protecting the environment to protecting public safety is considered "discretionary funding," and that portion of the budget is at its lowest level in 50 years.
- That's because in an attempt to reduce the deficit, lawmakers have made dramatic cuts to NDD appropriations, even though experts across the political spectrum agree these programs aren't a driving factor behind our nation's fiscal challenges.
- The cuts may not help the economy, but they have certainly hurt the lives of millions of Americans—those who rely on federal programs that fund job training, child care, law enforcement, and more.
- These cuts are dragging down our economic recovery, hampering business growth and development, weakening public health preparedness and response, reducing resources for our nation's schools and colleges, compromising federal oversight and fraud recovery, hindering scientific discovery, eroding our infrastructure, and threatening our ability to address emergencies around the world. Simply put, these cuts are bad for the country and are not sustainable.
- NDD United, which represents more than 2,000 organizations spanning interests as varied as education, public health, infrastructure, and law enforcement, is calling on Congress to work together to raise the budget spending caps and restore funding to these programs that keep America healthy, safe and secure.

What's the latest?

This week, the Senate is poised to vote on a budget that continues to underfund these programs, which are scheduled for even more cuts under the 2011 Budget Control Act. As a share of the economy, spending on domestic services will be cut to levels not seen since before President Eisenhower, more than 50 years ago.



Telling Your Story: The Elevator Pitch

To make your story heard, it's critical to have a coherent introduction about your organization, why you exist and your relevance to the debate. Why, in other words, should the press, public and our lawmakers trust you as the voice on this issue?

Your elevator pitch should include:

- Who you are
- What the problem is
- Why you exist
- How we can solve the problem

Normally, elevator pitches are broken into time segments – 10, 30 and 60 seconds (or floors, to follow the analogy.) In this case, use the time to build up background – to explain what the problem is from the get-go. Start with the problem, then talk about why you are part of NDD United, and then your organization specifically. As you'll see, this suggested elevator pitch is just a condensed version of the talking points:

- Just a tiny fraction of our federal budget goes toward supporting everything our government does outside of the military, Social Security and paying down the interest on the national debt. Everything from preventing disease to protecting the environment to protecting public safety is considered “discretionary funding,” and that portion of the budget is at its lowest level in 50 years.
- Many critical programs have closed offices, cut workforce or have been forced to completely shut down.
- That means we're less equipped to control and treat widespread drug abuse. That our national parks can't be maintained. That our food may be less safe.
- We're all trying to do more with less, but Congress's cuts to core government services are hurting us all.
- That's why more than 2,000 organizations in NDD United including [your org's name] are standing together to demand that Congress invest in these programs and make America a safe place for our kids and our future.

What's important isn't that you memorize any of these word for word. What's important is that you know the answers to the questions of who you are and why you're here.

1. Right now, millions of Americans are suffering because of arbitrary and senseless cuts that Congress has made through cuts to the budget that supports programs we rely on—like funding for cancer research, early education and job training. These cuts don't solve our budget crisis – but they do cause real harm to Americans every day. **Add example of harmful cut/result in your specific area: If we don't restore funding, in 2018, 60,000 kids stand to lose access to pre-school entirely.**

NDD United is more than 2,000 organizations standing together to demand Congress work together to end senseless budget cuts and to raise the spending caps.

2. **(If time, add)** Your org's elevator pitch, plus: We are a member of NDD United because we recognize that only united can we succeed in taking our message to Congress and to the people. Our message is simple: Congress must come up with a balanced solution to end cuts to core government functions and the programs Americans rely on.



Telling Your Story: The North Star

The elevator pitch is important – and you’ll have to use it when you introduce yourself to reporters, etc. But you’ll more frequently be called upon to cogently talk about your work, the impact of budget cuts and more, in the context of what’s happening. That’s why you need a North Star – your guiding principle and the message you come back to. In NDD United’s case, that North Star is:

Arbitrary budget caps have led to the erosion of programs that keep Americans healthy, secure, and able to pursue a brighter future for themselves and their families. We urge members of Congress to end this era of austerity and re-invest in these programs which build strong communities and invest in Americans.

Come back to this North Star on any issue – this is the point from which the rest of your talking points derive. For example, to add context to stories you provide:

This example is just one that proves that budget cuts are in fact hurting real Americans, and the impact will only worsen if Congress does not end this era of austerity, once and for all.

Remember, your North Star is the reason NDD United is here – and it’s the point from which your other points flow. But it’s by no means the only thing you should ever say. Beware of “staying on message” to the point that you squander an opportunity to educate the press and the public about the true and lasting implications of budget cuts.

“We must end harmful budget cuts to programs Americans rely on with a balanced, bipartisan deal that raises the caps on nondefense spending and begins to address years of funding erosion.”

Come back to this North Star on any issue – this is the point from which the rest of your talking points derive. For example:

To add context to stories you provide:

“This example is just one that proves that these cuts are hurting real Americans, and the impact will only worsen without a balanced, bipartisan deal to restore funding and raise the budget caps once and for all.”



Spreading the Word

Be a Valuable Source

To become a go-to source for press and other audiences, you don't just need to be an expert – you need to be the first name that pops into people's minds when they think about your programs and issues – which for now is the impact of budget cuts on those programs and constituents. To this end, offer opinions and information frequently. Proactively seek media attention through pitching stories, writing Letters to the Editor (LTEs) and op-eds, and providing excellent and up-to-date information on your website.

Monitor the news for relevant external news hooks.

The first step to expanding your presence in the press is to determine when and whether you can offer a story that is newsworthy. This breaks down into making the news or reacting to the news: At times, your own work will merit media coverage, even without an additional news hook to entice reporters. But more frequently, you will need a good handle on current events to know when to insert its messaging into trending stories. Monitor local and national news about trends, statistics, and advocacy initiatives related to your issues. Trending stories and news will inform advocacy and help to identify potential stories about which you can make media pitches.

Monitor the advocacy and policy scenes for important events.

Along the same lines as monitoring the news, track news stories about advocacy campaigns and legislative progress (if any). Join email lists for an easy way to track progress. If other groups are working on the same issue or have made progress, you can identify both advocacy partners and possible pitches.

Monitor your own work for trends, events, and newsworthy product.

Make sure that staff are aware of trends to look for and potential constituent stories to flag. Review your calendar for up-coming newsworthy events: protests, citizen action campaigns, Hill advocacy days, impactful trainings, materials or educational drives, and possible legal or advocacy victories or losses.

Offer information that warrants media coverage.

Seek additional publicity by creating noteworthy materials. Because NDD United occupies an important space in the budget debate, it has a strong role to play in offering information no one else is gathering or analyzing. Consider crafting academic articles or submissions to issue-specific newsletters.

Package your information well.

Even simple organization of information can be a boon to busy reporters and open the door to your issue: Calculate how many children are impacted by a particular closure, compare costs with an

untouched program, or highlight how current trends map onto historical timelines and you'll likely have reporters or blogs eager to spread the word for you.

In short, whenever you are able to add something new and important about your issue, do so. Even if your addition seems simple, it may well create the framing or offer the visual that the press and public are looking for. Some ideas:

- **Do a little math.** Information may be out there, but disconnected. In a previous campaign, the Coalition for Health Funding's NDD United coalition published a [blog post](#) on the \$208 million Congress "reprogrammed" to start combat missions again. We took that \$208 million and explained exactly what it could have bought in other areas, from keeping 32,000 kids in Head Start to funding research grants for NIH. Never underestimate the power of doing a little math.
- **Shot/Chaser.** These are typically used to show when someone is saying the opposite of what s/he's said previously on an issue, or the opposite of what his/her policies demonstrate.
 - Shot: "We need to have a serious conversation about mental health, psychiatric drugs, and the potential impact violent video games and movies have on our kids," said Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) in the days following the Sandy Hook Tragedy. (Press Statement, [1/16/13](#))
 - Chaser: Blackburn voted against the "Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act," in 2008 and co-sponsored a 2007 bill, H.R. 2387, to prohibit the use of federal funds for universal or mandatory mental health screenings for students. (House Roll Call Vote 101, [3/5/08](#); H.R. 2387, [110th Congress](#))

They're fun ways to make a point to the press and to reinforce your narrative.

- Try putting your information in different formats. The Guttmacher Institute's "Publicly Supported Family Planning Services Are Essential" [video](#) explains the importance and impact of public funding for family planning services in simple terms, and did so against the backdrop of a user-friendly animated video. Similarly, infographics and Buzz Feed-type "listicles" may capture a web editor's attention in the way that a bulleted list can't.
- If your information is commentary, you can be creative in packaging that as well. Try captioned photos – the more biting the better – or even sarcastic tweets and blog posts. These often capture attention in a way an earnest op-ed may not.



Tips & Templates: Blog Posts

Blog posts can and should be brief: Aim for 400-500 words, unless there is true value in making a post longer. Blogs can reflect your organization’s “personality,” and be relatively informal. A good rule of thumb is to stick to just one topic per blog post.

Suggested Blog Post Topics

Events (yours or allied groups’)
Advocacy victories and setbacks
New partnerships, coalitions, or advocacy groups
Compelling “real people” stories
Commentary on relevant news stories
Campaigns, including petitions and protests
Infographics
Buzz Feed-type “listicles”

Tips for Writing a Blog Post

1. **Title.** Keep your title short but informative. It does help to keep search engine optimization principles in mind when writing titles, which means you should use as many of the words you think people might search for in your title as possible. But don’t make the title clunky.
2. **Intro Paragraph.** Your introductory paragraph should, as the name suggests, include an introduction to the post: a short summary of the background and the main idea. You should also include the news hook or hooks – and links thereto – in this paragraph.
3. **Second Section.** In the next section, include the body of your post, analysis, or whatever new or interesting idea you are adding. This is adaptable depending upon the type of post – whether it’s a worker’s story, commentary on existing law, or something different – but put the meat of your post here.
4. **Third Section.** In this section, add an interesting nugget, such as a quote, statistic, or other fun fact that adds substance and interest.
5. **Conclusion.** Shoot for interesting takeaways from the discussion.

Sample Blog Post, Example A (from NDD United, Sept 2015)

Prevention is Better than Cure: End Sequestration before Fiscal Disaster

They say an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, but some in Congress haven't gotten the message. On October 1st, if Congress doesn't take action, the disastrous budget cuts to our nation's most critical programs—including early education, veterans' care, law enforcement, women's health, and more-- will go back into effect, causing pain to millions of Americans across the country.

How did we get here? In 2011, Congress passed a law that cut federal spending by nearly \$1 trillion and said that if lawmakers couldn't agree on a plan to reduce our deficit by \$4 trillion, another \$1 trillion in automatic, arbitrary and across the board budget cuts would start to take effect in 2013. Though the "Murray-Ryan" deal temporarily stopped these cuts from taking place, that deal expires in fiscal year 2016. That's why more than 2,500 national, state and local organizations are calling on Congress to avoid the impending fiscal disaster and end sequestration. These organizations have come together to say, Raise the Spending Caps. Enough is enough.

The impending cuts will be bad, really bad. If Congress does not work together to stop sequestration, the resulting budget could:

- De-fund preschool programs in 18 states, causing 60,000 children to lose access to preschool entirely;
- Shortchange Veterans' Administration medical care by \$690 million, meaning 70,000 fewer veterans receiving medical care, fewer staff critical to improving quality of care, and delays in medical research;
- Eliminate funding for Title X Family Planning, denying 4 million women access to health services like contraception, sexually transmitted infection testing and treatment, and prenatal services;
- Eliminate the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) hiring program, resulting in 1,300 fewer law enforcement positions safeguarding communities;
- Eliminate Positive Train Control (PTC) technology, which could have prevented tragic crashes in the Bronx and Philadelphia that caused a dozen deaths, hundreds of injuries, and millions of dollars in damage.

Experts across the political spectrum agree these programs aren't a driving factor behind our nation's mid- and long-term fiscal challenges. In fact, reversing sequestration could actually create as many as 1.4 million jobs over the next two years, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reports.

So Congress can act to end a failed policy now and prevent another fiscal crisis, or deal with finding a cure for its aftermath. There is bipartisan agreement that sequestration is bad policy and ultimately hurts our nation. Let's choose prevention over cure and Raise the Spending Caps.

Sample Blog Post, Example B (NDD United, 2013)

How to Solve the Budget Crisis

A 6-step primer for Congress and the Administration, with visual aids

By NDD United – a coalition of 2,000 groups working to strengthen American and protect core government functions

1. Admit that you have a (really big) problem.

It's time to face facts: Budget cuts have already done immense damage to our country. And, if you don't act now, things will just get worse. The cuts known as sequestration will remain in place for the next decade. Sequestration, by the way, is that thing that made the [planes late that time](#). Would you believe it had other effects, too? Reading is a drag, so we made a video! Consider it the Cliff's Notes of the damage to our country if you don't act now to come to a responsible, balanced solution. Rewind and replay as necessary.



2. **Start a dialogue.** This means having people get together to actually have a discussion. [It's tough to get people to hang out](#), especially when you're so [very unpopular](#). But remember student association meetings? Those tricks to get people to come to your event are just as relevant here. Here's a sample flier to get people interested. If all else fails, offer a screening of *Arrested Development* (appropriate, we think).



3. **Consider all the options.** Your skills in this regard may be a bit rusty, since you've been categorically ignoring one another's ideas for years. But when there are a lot of decisions to be made, it helps to make a pros and cons list. Organize your thoughts with this template.

Cutting core government functions	
Pros	Cons
	- Budget <i>still</i> won't be balanced—even if we cut every dollar from these programs.
	- Public safety and security will suffer, cancer research will be placed on the back burner, students trying to go to college will have less assistance, roads and bridges will be in disrepair and kids will have less access to programs like Head Start.
	- Our country won't be able to compete in global marketplace.

4. **Make amend(ment)s.** It's tempting to throw up your hands and leave when people are beholden to tiny constituencies and/or outdated ideas of how our economy works, but do your best to cut through the baggage. Start by being a good listener, and paraphrasing back what you hear, to make sure you understood. Not sure how? Here's an example:

"I'm hearing you suggest cutting discretionary funding even beyond sequestration levels, which would not go very far in balancing the budget, but which would have dramatic consequences for Americans of all walks of life. Is that right?"



5. **Be the Communicator.** When it's your turn to talk, use "I statements." This keeps people from feeling alienated and can help you express exactly what you perceive the problem to be. For example:

"I feel as though you aren't considering the country's dependence on core government programs when you suggest decimating their budgets without considering other areas for cuts or revenues."

6. **Getting to Yes.** Nobody likes a critic – or someone who complains but offers no solutions. In order to come to a compromise that addresses our budget woes head-on, doesn't rely on short-term fixes, and reflects balanced approach, you'll have to consider *all* the options on the table. This sounds really hard – maybe impossible – right now. But by completing steps 1 – 4 you'll have come to a place where you can actually reach a compromise. You'll have carefully considered the magnitude of the problem and the best ways to move our country forward. You'll be able to craft a solution that doesn't rely solely on decimating the programs Americans from all walks of life rely on.





Tips & Templates: Press Releases & Media Advisories

As the media landscape changes, both press releases and media advisories are becoming less frequently used. However, both can still be handy to put in the body of a pitch email as background (reporters are unlikely to open attachments), and both make easily distributable reports of your events.

Tips (Step-by-Step) for Writing a Press Release or Media Advisory

1. **Logo.** Put your logo or name at the top, along with any coalition member logos.
2. **Contact Info.** Put a name and number where you can be reached. If there is an event, include a cell phone number for the person who will be at the event.
3. **Headline.** It helps to think of this first. Create a catchy headline that gets your main idea across.
4. **Riders.** Write a secondary headline, called a rider, that adds another detail about the story but is separate from the story itself. Then write one more rider, with another, more granular detail.
5. **Lede.** Write the lede – the first sentence or two, intended to entice the reader. Begin the release with the city and state where the event took place (or if there’s no event, where your group is based), and date. These should be italicized.
6. **The 411.** Put the who/what/where/when in the first couple sentences. Note that in an advisory, this information should be highlighted in bullet or table form as well.
7. **Conclusion.** The remaining paragraphs (3-4 for a press release, 1-2 for an advisory, plus bullets) should have facts, background information and, ideally, quotes from event participants or spokespeople. Keep the content to no more than one page for an advisory and two for a release.
8. **Signal the end.** Put “###” at the end of the release, centered.



MEDIA ADVISORY

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CUTTING AMERICAN VALUES: AS CONGRESS VOTES ON BUDGET RESOLUTION, MEET THE REAL PEOPLE HURT BY DWINDLING FED PROGRAMS AND CRUEL CUTS

They used to be homeless, jobless, without child care, until the government stepped in. And now they're poised to lose their footing again.

WHAT:	Hill briefing and launch of report, "Faces of Austerity 2.0: How Budget Cuts Continue to Make Us Sicker, Poorer, and Less Secure"
WHEN:	Wednesday, October 25, 2017 12 – 1:30p.m.ET
WHERE:	Capitol Visitors Center Room 201A&B First Street NE, Washington, D.C.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As the Senate looks to vote on a budget resolution this week, federally-funded programs keeping Americans safe, healthy and educated are bracing for even more devastating cuts to already stretched-thin budgets. On **Wednesday, October 25**, individuals representing public health, child care, housing, natural resources and job training programs will appear on Capitol Hill to show how continuous budget cuts over the years have all but killed efforts getting Americans out of poverty and back on solid ground.

The briefing coincides with a report released by NDD United that day. "Faces of Austerity 2.0: How Budget Cuts Continue to Make Us Sicker, Poorer, and Less Secure" tells the stories of those who continue to be hurt most by Washington's failure to protect the programs that keep us healthy, safe, and educated. In 2013 – the same year of the government shutdown – NDD United released its first "Faces of Austerity" report chronicling how the Budget Control Act and sequestration hurts programs that help Americans. The most recent report goes deeper into the impact of the budget cuts and follows up with many of the programs profiled four years ago.

Speakers at the briefing include:

- **Melissa Armas**, Mother and Volunteer, ParentVoices CA, Chula Vista, CA, for whom subsidized child care was a lifeline after a layoff and beginning single parenthood
- **Michael Gritton**, Executive Director, KentuckianaWorks, Louisville, KY, whose program trains Kentuckians for "middle-skill" jobs with career potential
- **Joseph Hill-Coles**, Community Navigator, Youth Services, Inc., Philadelphia, PA, a formerly homeless man helped off his feet by Project HOME
- **Jim Northup**, Former Superintendent, Shenandoah National Park, National Park Service, Luray, VA, on our abandoned national parks
- **Ashley Webb**, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Illinois Association for Behavioral Health, Springfield, IL, on combating the opioid crisis

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Sample Press Release



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CUTTING AMERICAN VALUES: AS CONGRESS VOTES ON BUDGET, MILLIONS HURT BY DWINDLING FED PROGRAMS AND CRUEL CUTS

They used to be homeless, jobless, without child care, until the government stepped in. And now they're poised to lose their footing again.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As the Senate looks to vote on a budget resolution this week, federally-funded programs keeping Americans safe, healthy and educated are bracing for even more devastating cuts to already stretched-thin budgets. Gathering at the Capitol Visitors Center today, individuals representing public health, child care, housing, natural resources and job training programs briefed Congressional staff on how continuous budget cuts over the years have kept Americans in poverty, damaged our environment and cut core government functions including meat inspection, air traffic control and disease prevention.

The briefing coincides with a report released by NDD United today. “Faces of Austerity 2.0: How Budget Cuts Continue to Make Us Sicker, Poorer, and Less Secure” tells the stories of those who continue to be hurt most by Washington’s failure to protect the programs that keep us healthy, safe, and educated. In 2013 – the same year of the government shutdown – NDD United released its first “Faces of Austerity” report chronicling how the Budget Control Act and sequestration hurts programs that help Americans. The most recent report goes deeper into the impact of the budget cuts and follows up with many of the programs profiled four years ago.

“We as a nation are standing at the precipice of disaster,” said Emily Holubowich, Co-Chair, NDD United and Executive Director of the Coalition for Health Funding. “Congress has cut discretionary programs to such a bare-bones level that many critical programs have closed offices, cut workforce or have been forced to completely shut down. That means we’re less equipped to control and treat widespread drug abuse. That our national parks can’t be maintained. That our food may be less safe.

“We’re all trying to do more with less, but Congress’s cuts to core government services are hurting us all. That’s why more than 2,000 organizations in NDD United are standing together to demand that Congress invest in these programs and make America a safe place for our kids and our future,” he continued.

Just a tiny fraction of our federal budget goes toward supporting everything our government does outside of the military, Social Security and paying down the interest on the national debt. Everything from preventing disease to protecting the environment to protecting public safety is considered “discretionary funding,” and that portion of the budget is at its lowest level in 50 years. Yet Congress is poised to make even deeper cuts.

Speakers at the briefing testified to the ways in which government-funded programs had changed their lives. Melissa Armas, a single mother who was able to take advantage of a program for subsidized child care, said of the program, “EES gave me the help I needed to get on my feet. Policymakers in Washington should know how critical these programs are to keeping parents working. Even more importantly, I know that Leila is getting the

education and social interaction with her peers at EES, which will set her up for life. Every parent should have that peace of mind.”

Congressional staff also heard from **Michael Gritton**, Executive Director, KentuckianaWorks, Louisville, KY, whose program trains Kentuckians for “middle-skill” jobs with career potential; **Joseph Hill-Coles**, Community Navigator, Youth Services, Inc., Philadelphia, PA, a formerly homeless man helped off his feet by Project HOME; **Jim Northup**, Former Superintendent, Shenandoah National Park, National Park Service, Luray, VA, on our abandoned national parks; and **Ashley Webb**, Prevention Program Manager, Illinois Association for Behavioral Health, Springfield, IL, on combating the opioid crisis.

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Tips & Templates: Op-eds and Letters to the Editor

Op-eds (originally short for "opposite the editorial page" although often taken to stand for "opinion editorial") are a great way to get out your message. They're not to be confused with newspaper editorials, which are written by the publication's editorial board and express the opinion of the Ed Board. Op-eds offer readers an opportunity to take a news story of the day and offer their unique take. They typically run approximately 600-750 words and, unlike letters to the editor, are not written in response to another article in the paper, although they do key off current news.

Letters to the Editor (LTE) are useful because they allow NDD United or your organization to respond to a news story or offer commentary on an event even if you cannot get a story pitched or Op-ed placed. In larger outlets, it can be quite difficult to place an Op-ed, so an LTE is a good option there. LTEs are usually a bit formal. They include a clear reference to the article they are in response to, and they are short – about 150-200 words. Once published, LTEs can also be circulated via social media and to key audiences to promote the issue and your organization. The template language below is merely suggested. Be sure to identify an article to which you are responding and modify based on your organization's need and issue platform.

Sample Op-ed (Oct 2017)

It's easy to tell ourselves that the actions Congress takes in Washington don't really have impact beyond the Capitol dome. And in some cases, that's true—they re-named a post office? Honored the special achievements of the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team? Sure, fine, go ahead and tune out. But the federal budget being considered this week by the U.S. Senate, which sets funding for all government programs in fiscal year 2018, is one action Congress will take this year that has implications for all Americans—and not in a good way.

Just a tiny fraction of our federal budget goes toward supporting everything our government does outside of the military, Social Security and paying down the interest on the national debt. Everything from preventing disease to protecting the environment to protecting public safety is considered "discretionary funding," and that portion of the budget is at its lowest level in 50 years.

That's because in an attempt to reduce the deficit, lawmakers have made dramatic cuts to these programs, even though experts across the political spectrum agree they aren't a driving factor behind our nation's fiscal challenges.

For this miscalculation, ordinary Americans are paying the price.

Melissa Armas was seven months pregnant when she was laid off from her job in San Diego, California. After taking some time to care for her newborn, Leila, Melissa went back on the job market. She qualified for subsidized child care through EES, a Child Care and Development Block Grant-funded care center.

"EES gave me the help I needed to get on my feet. Policymakers in Washington should know how critical these programs are to keeping parents working," says Melissa. "Even more importantly, I know that Leila is getting the education and social interaction with her peers at EES, which will set her up for life. Every parent should have that peace of mind."

At that time, Melissa was one of the lucky ones. During the Great Recession and the years following, California's Child Care and Development system was subjected to almost \$1 billion in funding reductions.

During that time, when in many cases they were needed most, the state lost 100,000 subsidized childcare slots. While the state has taken steps to increase resources, they have not made up for those losses.¹

The Senate budget makes things even grimmer for families like Melissa’s, reducing the amount of funding available for things like subsidized child care, a rarity despite the fact that, once parents are given the ability to get back on their feet, they’re able to contribute more to the economy as well as provide for their families.

And that’s the point: The cuts may not help the economy, but they have certainly hurt the lives of millions of Americans—those who rely on federal programs that fund job training, child care, law enforcement, and more. These cuts are dragging down our economic recovery, hampering business growth and development, weakening public health preparedness and response, reducing resources for our nation’s schools and colleges, compromising federal oversight and fraud recovery, hindering scientific discovery, eroding our infrastructure, and threatening our ability to address emergencies around the world. Simply put, these cuts are bad for the country and are not sustainable.

That’s why NDD United, which represents more than 2,000 organizations spanning interests as varied as education, public health, infrastructure, and law enforcement, is calling on Congress to work together to raise the budget spending caps and restore funding to these programs that keep America healthy, safe and secure. If we can’t count on Congress to protect our families, what exactly are they doing?

LTE Template

Dear Editor:

On ___[date]___ the ___[name of paper, italicized]___ published a story titled, ___[title, italicized or in quotes]. ___[name of journalist]___ notes that ___[summary of point you are commenting upon].

[2-3 sentences bolstering/refuting/arguing the point].

[2-3 sentences making your own statement about the issue].

Sincerely,

[Name, Title, Organization, City, State]

LTE Sample

Dear Editor:

I was interested to read “(Title of story on report),” about a new report highlighting the devastating effects that recent cuts to federal funding have had on communities across the nation.

As the director of a health clinic, I see these effects every day. Our own funding has been cut dramatically in the last several years, resulting in fewer patients served, and fewer services offered. That’s a big problem for the growing number of our patients who rely on our clinics for basic health care needs. The worst part? Most don’t connect the dots that Congress is to blame for our reduced services, through their inability to agree on a budget solution and their continuous cuts to programs we need most. It’s time for Congress to realize that by making dangerous cuts to programs we all rely on, they’re preventing us from making America safer for our kids and our future.

Sincerely,

(NAME OF SIGNER)

¹https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/rrnetwork/pages/76/attachments/original/1452644405/Child_Care_Funding_and_Enrollment_Reductions_160112.pdf?1452644405



Tips & Templates: Social Media

Social media is becoming increasingly crucial to generating engagement and visibility for your issue and organization. In addition to being the glimpse into your work for the public and your coalition partners, it can be a low-cost, low-effort way for you to advocate, drive support, and be part of a viral echo chamber on the need to reinstate and raise federal funding for public health initiatives.

Tips on Using Social Media to Advocate

1. **Create Your Echo Chamber.** Prior to launching your advocacy campaign or report, make sure you have “liked” on Facebook and “followed” on Twitter all those people and organizations with whom you have key relationships including coalition partners, allies, affiliates, members, federal agency partners, experts, journalists, etc.
2. **Rough Plan.** Sketch a rough plan of when and what you’ll be posting throughout the week. Keep the plan flexible so you can react to and hook the posts to any relevant news of the day or week.
3. **Stay Concise.** Draft your posts ahead of time, again, with room to tweak on the spot. Twitter requires posts to be 140 characters or less but it’s best practice to keep them to 100-120 characters so others can re-tweet you and add their own 2 cents. With Twitter – forget proper grammar or style while Facebook posts can be a little bit longer and formal but the shorter the better.
4. **Hashtag and Tag It!** Using hashtags is simply a way to categorize your posts and allow users to follow and join the discussion. Use the campaign hashtag in all Tweets and Facebook posts (hashtags are new to Facebook but slowly catching on) about the campaign. Put a hashtag in front of other key words you may use – with no spaces to relay the message to those searching the larger issues. Engage someone or an organization in the conversation by typing the @ symbol followed by their handle or name.
5. **Engage Your Followers.** Make sure at least one of your posts during the campaign calls on followers to take action on your issue whether it be to share a story, sign an online petition, send a letter to Congress through your digital mail program, or sign up for your weekly newsletter. This also allows you to collect information from supporters.
6. **Use Visuals.** Statistics show that using infographics and memes tend to increase followers’ engagement with posts (likes, shares, comments, re-tweets, etc.) and effective ones help get an important and complex point across, minus all the jargon. Have them professionally designed or easily create one using a stock photo, graph, or visual from a report with text added.
7. **Collect the Stats.** Document your campaign’s success and learn for the next one by collecting your engagement statistics. Try to sum your new followers on each platform; how many times you were “re-tweeted” or “shared” and calculate a cross-section of the types of activity your campaign generated.
8. **Don’t stop!** Keep your Facebook and Twitter pages updated to show you are a go-to source for information on your issue and keep your captive audience captive. Outside of your issue campaigns and big events, share facts (new and old) about your issue; re-tweet your partner

organizations' new work; link your followers to helpful resources; and provide fact-checks to any opponents' new work.

Sample Facebook and Twitter Posts

Facebook:

- Like and Follow our partner on the federal budget NDD United on Facebook to learn more about the Americans featured in their new report *Faces of Austerity 2.0: How Budget Cuts Continue to Make Us Sicker, Poorer, and Less Secure* and how federal budget cuts affected them and their communities. Rep. Steny Hoyer is confirmed to participate and others have been invited. NDD United will share the live stream WEDNESDAY, OCT. 25th at 9:30 AM. <https://www.facebook.com/NDD-United-533930649983654/> [thumbnail image w/ title should appear]
- Public programs help Americans who are facing homelessness, unemployment as well as working families seeking childcare and those who are seeking treatment for substance use disorders. Public programs support natural resources and vital infrastructure like our water systems. But when Congress makes budget cuts to these programs, it makes us less secure and hurts Americans who need them the most. Read why in @NDDUnited's new report: "Faces of Austerity 2.0: How Budget Cuts Continue to Make Us Sicker, Poorer, and Less Secure" www.raisethecaps.org [thumbnail image w/ title should appear]
- Recent cuts to **_(issue)_** funding have caused devastating consequences to **(5-7 words explaining consequences of cuts)**. Read more in our featured story in the @NDD United's new report: "Faces of Austerity 2.0: How Budget Cuts Continue to Make Us Sicker, Poorer, and Less Secure" www.raisethecaps.org [thumbnail image w/ title should appear]

Twitter:

- .@NDDUnited 's new report details devastating effects of cuts to vital programs #CutsHurt #RaisetheCaps www.raisethecaps.org
- Cuts to **_(issue)_** puts families & communities at risk! #CutsHurt #RaisetheCaps www.raisethecaps.org
- Cuts to **_(issue)_** have reduced **_(item)_** by **_(# or %)_** since **_(year)_**. #CutsHurt #RaisetheCaps
- Retweet if you agree that #Congress should stop playing games and #raisethecaps www.raisethecaps.org
- .@MOC, You're only hurting America's working families with #budgetcuts #RaisetheCaps www.raisethecaps.org
- Cuts in funding will be devastating for Americans from all walks of life. It's time #Congress gets to work to #RaisetheCaps #CutsHurt
- #AfterSchoolPrograms #Jobs #ChildCare #Housing are some of many things that get cut if you don't raise the spending caps @MOC #RaisetheCaps
- .(MOC), cutting critical services is NOT the answer to cutting our deficit. #Raisethecaps before we hurt innocent Americans

**MOC = Member of Congress