



MEDIA OUTREACH TOOLKIT

FOR COABE MEMBERS



OUR MISSION

COABE's mission is to lead, equip, and empower the field of adult education, inspiring transformative growth in every adult to achieve their full potential.

OUR VISION

COABE's vision is to see that adult education is recognized as the catalyst for empowering individuals, strengthening families, and enriching communities.

Your successes and the strengths that adult basic education bring to individuals, families and communities is easily overlooked by the news media and elected officials. To help you be your program's best advocate, COABE has assembled the following Media Outreach Toolkit. These tools and templates are designed to make it easier for you to offer story ideas, submit "op-ed" opinion pieces, and garner editorial and columnist support. This COABE Media Outreach Toolkit will help you showcase students, staff and programs to help policymakers and the public understand the value that you deliver every day.

The COABE Media Outreach Toolkit includes:

Meeting with editorial boards and columnists – Newspaper editorial boards and columnists can write important opinion pieces validating your need for additional funds to maintain, strengthen, or increase access to services.

They can also highlight a compelling story about the difference you make in individuals lives. It may be easier than you think to set up this meeting. Ask for an ed board meeting or invite a columnist to coffee or to visit a class so you can build a relationship.

Writing and submitting an op-ed – Newspapers often want to give a voice to their community. Op-eds – so called because they traditionally appeared opposite the editorial page – are powerful tools for bringing attention to Adult Basic Education programs or challenges in your city, state, or region.

One national example, which was timed to coincide with COABE's Spring 2016 Congressional Day, is an op-ed from COABE president Tom Nash which we placed in *The Hill*, one of the daily and online newspapers that reaches all senators, members of congress, and Capitol Hill staff. You can read it at: <http://www.coabe.org/oped-in-the-hill/>

Pitching a story profiling students, teachers, or administrators to local media – It's a good idea from time to time to let policymakers, funders, and the public in your area know what great work you're doing and either directly or indirectly seek support.

One of the best ways to do that is by sharing success stories of students, teachers, administrators and programs – as many of you already do. Captivating individual stories are often the best way for the media to give readers or viewers a compelling or emotional connection to the importance of any type of program, including Adult Basic Education.

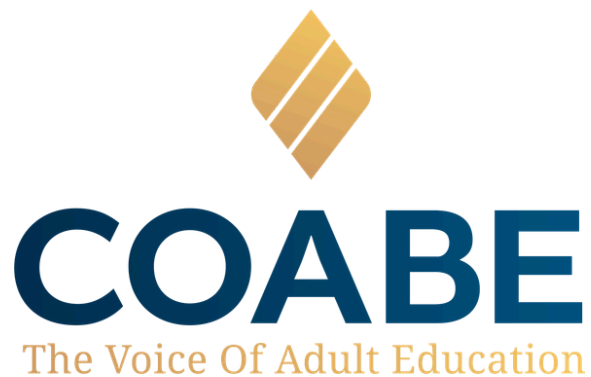
Writing a press release to share updates about your programs – Press releases allow you to share information about potentially newsworthy developments in your programs like new partnerships, new classes being offered, moving locations or expanding, and much more. Some online outlets and some smaller newspapers may even publish them in whole or part – no complaints if they want to use your words!

WIOA Fact Sheet – The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act impacts many COABE members' programs. This fact sheet can be a helpful resource to educate reporters, elected officials, or others.

Program Fact Sheet – Use this template to make a fact sheet about your own programs, or to check the content of brochures and material you may already have. You can send it or bring fact sheets to meetings with reporters or elected officials.

We hope this toolkit helps you share your success and advocate for your programs and students. And feel free to share your successes – the stories that are written by and about you – with us. Send them to info@COABE.com

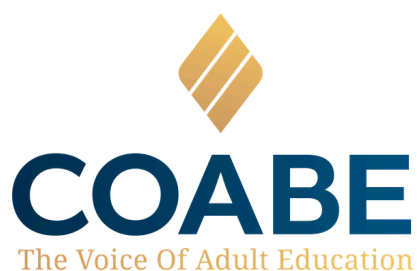
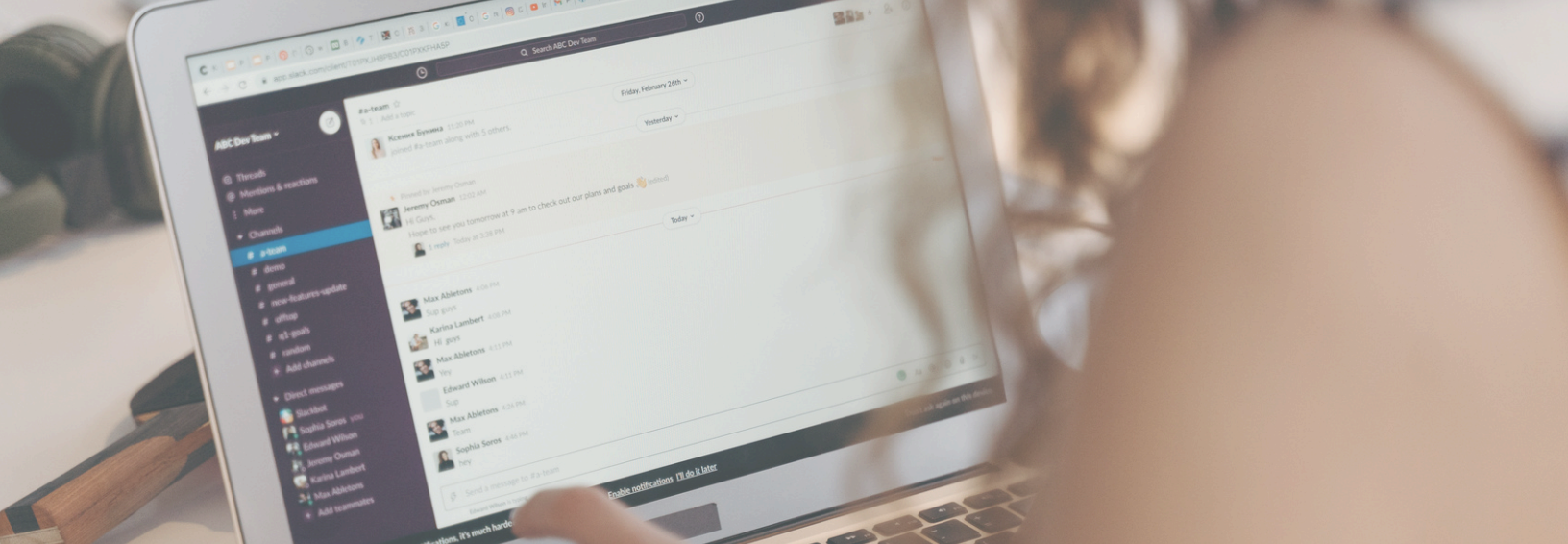




Section 1: Media Outreach

- Reaching out to the media
- Writing Op-Eds
- Sharing Adult Learner Stories with the Media
- How to Write a Press Release
- Fact Sheets





Reaching Out to the Media

Lead Equip Empower With resources from [The Op-Ed Project](#)

Tips for Requesting a Meeting with a Newspaper Editorial Board

Most newspapers around the country have editorial boards that hold meetings with individuals and organizations in the community to discuss topics and issues to which they might advocate or call attention.

You can contact your local paper's editorial board to request a meeting and seek to persuade them to write about:

- The need for more funding in adult basic education
- The need for more teachers in adult education
- How adult basic education is playing a vital role improving the lives of local citizens, yet can do so much more to strengthen families and our community



Email Example

Dear XXX,

I am writing on behalf of [ORGANIZATION].

As a [TEACHER / ADMINISTRATOR ETC] of adult education for more than two decades, I've seen thousands of adults in [NAME CITY] who never learned to read. These individuals struggle to hold down a job, can't use the internet, or do simple math. At [INSERT PROGRAM], we are working to turn their lives around, giving them the tools to succeed in today's world. You and the [PUBLICATION] can help us make an even bigger difference in [CITY NAME].

We're turning as many adults as we can away from the cycle of poverty, crime, and dependence on public assistance, which inevitably dog those who can't read or handle numbers or use modern tech to solve even simple problems. Successful adult education programs are essential to our community's economy, wellness, growth and quality of life. Kids do far better in school and in life when parents read and can do even simple arithmetic.

[INSERT LOCAL STATISTICS DEMONSTRATING NEED & SUCCESS]

In short, I/we would love the opportunity to meet with you and your board and tell you more about the progress we are making and the impact adult education programs have on our city, as well as the addressable, urgent, unmet basic needs of so many other adults around us.

We welcome [NEWS ORGANIZATION NAME's] education, poverty, and community reporters and other editors to join us, at your discretion.

Sincerely
[etc], XXX

Phone #
Email address



Tips for Conducting an Editorial Board Meeting

You may have only 10–15 minutes with the editorial board, so you need to be prepared to make a case quickly and persuasively. These pointers can help you organize your thoughts. Most importantly: think locally. Motivate the board to stand up for adult learners, teachers, and programs.

Find a partner

It can be helpful to take someone with you. This can add more first-person strength to your argument, such as an adult student who turned their lives around through education, or an influential leader in your community. If you do, make sure they know they are there to support your arguments, not to plead for their own causes.

Rehearse

Prior to the meeting, time and rehearse your presentation so that you are ready to clearly and persuasively state your position. Pay particular attention to framing your argument in terms of the public interest. Also, be aware of opposing arguments and prepare to answer them. If you bring a partner, rehearse together and determine which points each of you will make.

Be prompt, polite, and respectful

Get to the meeting early and dress professionally.

The “Leave Behind”

Leave behind a concise handout, stating your case and providing examples of how your program is improving the community, including how many students are served annually, demographics, programs, services and their impact, etc.

Thank them

Be sure to thank the editorial board for their time before you leave.

Follow Up

Be sure to write a short follow-up note or email thanking the editorial board for hosting your visit. Offer to clarify remaining questions; invite them (if you haven’t already) to come see your or other adult education programs in action and meet local adult learners and teachers.

Developing Your Presentation

Introduction:

This newspaper should take a stand in support of local/regional adult education programs and call for more funding to improve the lives of citizens here, to reduce strain on social services, build families, and to strengthen the economy and fabric of our community overall.

Main Point: There is an urgent need for Adult Basic Education

- Over 30 million adults in the United States do not have a high school diploma. [Add local statistics to bring the story home to them.]
- Adults without a high school diploma are more than twice as likely to be living in poverty as high school graduates and over three times more likely to be unemployed than adults with college degrees.
- A mother's education level is the greatest determinant of her children's future academic success, outweighing other factors, such as neighborhood and family income

Main Point: There is a funding problem

- Give an idea, statistically and/or anecdotally, of how many adults need basic education services to succeed and how many are being served now.
- Give details of a waiting list if there is one; explain how lack of night or weekend or neighborhood locations impact the ability to serve the community; etc.
- Include any data you have on funding needs.

Conclusion:

We urge you [the newspaper] to

- Speak out in favor of funding more programs
 - Be specific about which ones: federal, state, local, private
- Encourage more educators to get involved in adult basic education

Be prepared for questions:

At the end of your presentation, ask the editorial board if they have any questions or concerns. They may be interested in hearing about some relevant statistics or a few stories about real people who rely on your services for opportunities to learn and grow. They may cite other competing budget priorities in these hard times. Be prepared to defend adult basic education in that context.

After the Visit

Spread the Word

If an editorial does run, call, email, or write a thank-you note and encourage many in your network to write letters to the editor in support of their position (or, if necessary, in opposition!). Post the editorial on your organization's website, and share with friends and colleagues via social media. Send it to COABE so we can share it as well!

Be Persistent

If an editorial doesn't immediately run, call the most receptive person at the next "media opportunity." For example, two weeks before the state budget deliberations or National Adult Education & Family Literacy Week. If the Editorial Board decides not to take a position on your issue, ask them to use an op-ed written by you.



How to Encourage Newspaper Columnists to Write About Adult Education

Pitching columnists is very different than pitching reporters or asking for editorial meetings.

Who to pitch?

Large papers in major cities will have a staff with multiple columnists who write about education, jobs, state and federal funding, and other issues. Some may specialize in education, community affairs, poverty, or other aspects addressed by your programs and pertaining to all of the issues adult basic education touches. Smaller regional papers might only have one or two general columnists. Look for columnists who have taken your position or written favorably about similar subject matters.

Plant a seed.

Columnists are story tellers. They're generally less data-driven than reporters; give them a real-person example or two to capture their attention.

You don't need to tell a columnist the "whole" story in your first note or call. Intrigue them. Show them the tip of the iceberg so they'll want to see – and show – what's hiding in plain site or hidden below the surface.

Check your timing.

Are there current events which the columnist's words might help influence? On the flip side, if a columnist is writing story after story about, say, an issue with the highway department, you might want to pick a different moment to propose they look at adult education. Read up on what they're covering before you reach out.

Keep it short.

Columnists get a LOT of email. Approach them as if you are doing them a favor, giving them the tools to write about something really important which is in their wheelhouse.

Follow up.

It is okay to follow up from your initial outreach, but be realistic. Taking "no" for an answer to one query might open a path open for another approach later.

Email Example

Dear XXX,

I saw your column (LAST MONTH / WEEK / ETC) about [TOPICS] and wanted to tell you about XYZ.

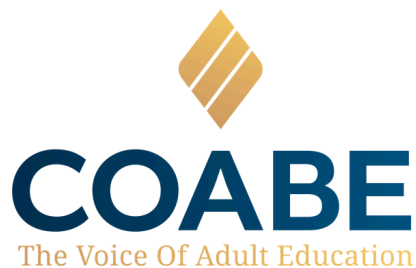
I know you are passionate about educational programs in our community. You and your readers might want to know more about how programs such as PROGRAM NAME for adults makes an impact on our communities that is as critical as what happens in K-12 classes. I also think your readers would be interested to know more about [INSERT YOUR PROGRAM].

[INSERT ONE OR TWO LOCAL STATISTICS DEMONSTRATING NEED, SUCCESS, BACKLOG, ETC.]

I see it firsthand, as a [YOUR JOB] in the adult basic education field, with more than X years' experience. There are some wonderful success stories for you to hear, as well as some sad examples of where CITY/AREA is failing those who may best benefit from a hand up (and not a handout). I would love the opportunity to [SPEAK WITH YOU / MEET WITH YOU / SHOW YOU / INVITE YOU TO OUR EVENT].

Looking forward to hearing from you,

XXX



Guidelines for Writing & Submitting Op-eds to your Local Newspaper or News Outlet

Lead Equip Empower With resources from [The Op-Ed Project](#)

Tips for Opinion-Editorial (Op-Ed) Writing

1. Be provocative

News outlets want to stir minds on their opinion pages. Give them a reason to select your piece for publication.

2. Be informed

Take a look at the paper and its website before you write. Do they routinely publish opinion pieces in print (generally on or next to the editorial page)? Weekdays? Sundays? How many per day, and about how long are they? Does their website or other local/regional/professional websites publish guest opinion columns? Know what's possible before you start to write.

3. Be concise

While maximum op-ed lengths vary by newspaper, most generally range around 500 to 600 words (two double-spaced pages or a little more). Online guest opinion columns can sometimes run longer. Check with your paper's opinion editor, or look online or in the paper for guidelines. Most editors don't have the time or inclination to shorten a piece for you.

4. Be timely

Move quickly if your opinion piece is in response to a news event; give lead time if you're writing timed to an upcoming event.

5. Be sure

If you're speaking on behalf of COABE or the educational institution you work for, make sure you have the authority or permission to speak for your group. If you're speaking as an individual, ask that the newspaper indicate this if they're including your group affiliation.

Sample Language: *Jane Smith is an administrator of the Tampa School District. She has worked in adult education for the past twenty years.*

6. Be clear

Use straight talk. Avoid jargon. Use acronyms sparingly if at all, and explain any which an average user wouldn't recognize. Some say the average newspaper reader reads at an 8th grade level. As adult educators, you should have a strong handle on the ability to do so. (At the same time, don't talk down.)

7. Be respectful

Never underestimate your reader's intelligence or overestimate his or her level of understanding. Recognize that your average reader is not an expert in your topic and that the onus is on you to capture her/his attention and make your argument stick.



8. Be proactive

Don't just criticize; suggest solutions and ways forward.

9. Be responsive to input

Have a friend or colleague read your op-ed before you submit it – ideally someone who's not already familiar with your ideas. If they tell you, "I don't get it," don't argue and say, "Well, it's perfectly clear." It's clearly not.

10. Be flexible

Remember that a good idea may have more than one news hook; if the idea is important enough it can have many. So keep an eye out for surprising connections and new news hooks – the opportunity may come around again.

Questions for Op-Ed Writers

1. Why should readers trust you?

Are you authoritative on your topic? Are you accountable for your expressed position? Can you provide evidence of your expertise? You don't need to have a famous name, a big title, or a fancy degree, but you do need to be well positioned to speak on your topic and be able to convey it.

2. Can you back up what you say?

Is your argument based on evidence – solid material and logical building blocks that will be acknowledged as credible even by those who may disagree with your interpretation?

3. What's new?

Is your argument different, particularly original in the way it is delivered, or is it backed up by substantially new information or reporting? What is compelling about its contribution to the conversation?

4. So what?

Why should everyone else – including those of us who are not experts in your area – care?

5. What's the difference between being “right” and being “effective”?

Does your language tend to write off the people who would disagree with you, or do you employ empathy and respect in the pursuit of changing minds?

6. How will your ideas and arguments contribute to the conversation, and be helpful to your audience?

Do you see your knowledge and experience in terms of its potential value to others?

Who to Pitch your Op-Ed to

Most newspapers want to give a voice to their community, so you'll generally have the best success reaching out to a local news outlet or one that covers your state or region. If you have a truly novel program, student or teacher story, you can also consider national, professional or trade publications in print or online – though recognize the bar is much higher for acceptance. Most newspapers designate one editor, editorial board member or staffer to review and choose op-ed submissions. The name and contact information are often included on the op-ed page or the editorial page, or maybe on the newspaper's website. Look also for instructions on length and where/how to submit (usually email). Best bet if you're not sure: call and ask.

How to Pitch an Op-Ed

How do you get someone to listen to you in the first place?

How do you establish credibility, capture interest, and convey the immediate relevance of your point of view quickly and decisively? Pitching can happen in lots of ways, but very often it is done by email.

An effective email pitch answers these basic questions:

- Why now? What's the news hook? Why is this worth reading at this moment?
- So what? Why should people care?
- Why me? Why am I the best one to write this piece?

A pitch should also include:

- Your idea in a few lines
- Your credentials – only those that are relevant
- The finished piece pasted below your pitch
- Your contact information (email, phone number)

Aspects of a successful pitch:

- Timely
- Well written
- Brief and clear
- Conveys expertise
- Unexpected point of view

Follow Up – If the editor responds:

- Thank your editor. Even if they said “no.” Remember that “no” can be the beginning of a conversation that can eventually lead to “yes.”
- If they published you, thank them not for showcasing you but for giving space to the ideas and issues.

Follow Up: If there is no response:

- Have a time limit. If your idea has a very short shelf life, you might give an editor a day or less to respond; if it's evergreen, a week or two or more. Then send a follow-up email to the editor saying that you'd still like to run your piece in their publication, but since the piece is timely, if you don't hear from them by the end of the day (week, whatever) you will assume they have passed, and you'll be submitting your op-ed elsewhere.

Note: Most national newspapers will not consider your piece if you submit to more than one paper at the same time.

Basic Op-Ed Structure

Note: This is not a rule! Just one way of approaching it.

Length: Check with your newspaper, but limits are generally around 500–600 words (2 double-spaced pages). Online-only opinion pieces sometimes run longer.

Lead (or “Lede”): Tie the opening sentence to a recent event or news story, or offer a surprising or controversial opening.

Thesis: Statement of argument – either explicit or implied.

Argument: Based on evidence (such as stats, news, reports from credible organizations, expert quotes, scholarship, history, first-hand experience)

- **1st Point**
 - o evidence
 - o evidence
 - o conclusion
- **2nd Point**
 - o evidence
 - o evidence
 - o conclusion
- **3rd Point**
 - o evidence
 - o evidence
 - o conclusion

Note: In a simple, declarative op-ed (“policy X is bad; here’s why”), this may be straightforward. In a more complex commentary, the 3rd point may expand on the bigger picture—historical context, global/geographic picture, mythological underpinnings, etc.—or may offer an explanation for a mystery that underpins the argument— eg., why a bad policy continues, in spite of its failures.

“To Be Sure” paragraph (in which you pre-empt your potential critics by acknowledging any flaws in your argument, and address any obvious counter- arguments.)

Conclusion: (often circling back to your lede) Finish strong. Leave readers with a full understanding of your issue and position. Drive home your argument with a lasting thought or call to action about the issue at hand.

Basic Op-Ed Structure / Template

The following points serve as an outline for an op-ed about adult basic education – customized for the audience in your region:

1. Statistic on adult literacy in Texas.
2. Example of a Dallas-area student in need (or, perhaps on waiting list if significant) – perhaps the TALAE Dallas region student of the year (ESL or HSE)?
3. Expand to show a national problem (where does Texas rank, etc., good or bad) etc.
4. Teachers and administrators from Dallas, all of Texas and across the US gathering in Dallas this week to talk about the growing need and about programs that are working to improve adult literacy.
5. Solutions – highlight a Dallas area program that's working – perhaps the TALAE Dallas region teacher of the year? Or Vivian Shelton from Irving Schools, runner up for COABE national adult teacher of the year.
6. Include advance quote from Neil Bush or mention his appearance on behalf of the Texas-based Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. Update on or mention the foundation's ongoing Adult Literacy Prize (just about reaching one year into a three-year program for \$7M in prizes to develop viable adult-ed learning mobile applications – as of this February, 109 teams from 15 countries are competing)
7. Transition back to explaining how these developments are another 2 yrs out.
8. Discuss what readers can do to help.

Frequently Asked Questions about Op-Eds

Q: Why are they called “op-eds”?

A: Newspapers traditionally have run guest opinions on the page “opposite the editorial page.” Online media sometimes refer to similar pieces as “guest opinions” or other similar terms.

Q: Where should I submit?

A: You’ll generally have the best success reaching out to a local newspaper or one that covers your state or region. That said, if you think you have a great story to tell or a strong opinion to share, there’s nothing wrong with submitting to a national outlet like the New York Times or the Washington Post or a professional or trade journal. (Just remember that thousands of other people think they have great stories and strong opinions, too). Tying your story to a news event (known as a news “peg”) or to something a newspaper has written about or editorialized can help with placement. Note, though, that an op/ed is different than a “letter to the editor.” Some news outlets will publish a small number of op-eds in print and a larger number of “guest opinions” online; check with your paper to see if you need to submit separately.

Q: How long should I wait to hear back from an editor? (What do I do if I don't hear back from an editor?)

A: If you have plenty of time (that is, if your idea is evergreen or, e.g., pegged to an event a month away), you might give an editor a week or more before you check in. However, if your idea has a very short shelf life (pegged to breaking news or a news hook that will only be good for a few days) you need to check in fairly quickly – within 48 hours, or perhaps even within 24 hours. The trick is to be appropriate, not demanding. You might write a follow up email telling the editor you are checking in on the status of the op-ed you submitted, and hope they are interested in running it; however, since the news hook is timely, if you don't hear from him/her by the end of the day (week, whatever), you will assume they have passed and you'll be submitting your op-ed elsewhere. The key is to be polite and not presumptuous – remember that editors are busy and juggling lots of ideas at once. If your idea is timely and good for their readers, they will appreciate you checking in.

Q: Can I submit to multiple outlets at the same time?

A: It’s not a good idea. Most newspapers will not consider your piece if you submit to more than one paper at the same time. You’re somewhat on your own to honor that rule. If you burn an editor once, you might not be “invited” back again. Better to submit sequentially to

multiple outlets; make different versions or have different authors contact other media if you feel it's important to reach out simultaneously to several.

Q. How often can I submit?

A: As often as you want. Many outlets will not publish the same author more than once every few months. Also remember, for most op-ed pieces there exists a brief but strong window during which editors would be most interested in the topic you discuss. While constantly submitting a piece about, for example, funding for a specific reading program might ultimately get you noticed, it's more likely to get you ignored and shut out. Like in any professional conversation, pick your moments. Plan submissions carefully pegged to specific news hooks. Listen carefully to the feedback (including silence from the editors, which can signal that what you are submitting is too far off base).

Q. Can I submit multiple op-eds to the same person?

A: If your op-ed was declined but that editor provided you with useful feedback, you can submit a revised op-ed or different topic piece to the same person – provided you have a good, timely idea that would appeal to that editor/outlet. You don't want to pepper an editor with bad ideas and thereby earn a reputation as someone who is not useful/generative.

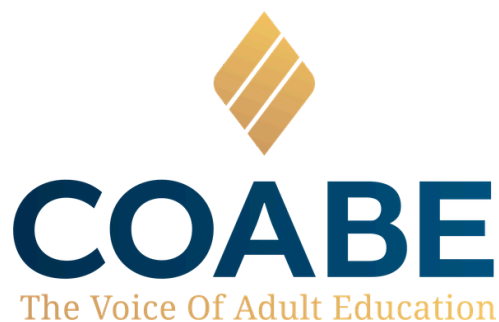
However, if you have had a successful experience with an editor, the best strategy may be to continue your conversation with that editor, try to pitch as many good ideas as possible, learn as much as possible about what s/he is looking for in an op-ed, and see if you can collaborate on additional pieces.

Q. My piece wasn't accepted. What now?"

A: First off, relax. Even the best, most experienced writers receive rejections constantly. "No" is devastating when you think it is the end of a conversation. It's no big deal when you realize it can be the beginning of a conversation that leads to "yes."

So, take rejection as experience, and run with it. Consider why your piece wasn't accepted and focus on improving those areas. If the editor responded to you personally, thank him/her, and see if you can find out what would have made your piece more valuable, and whether there are other ideas they would be interested in hearing from you on in the future.





Sharing your Good News:
Tips for “Pitching”
Student, Teacher,
Administrator & Program
Success Stories to Local Media

Lead Equip Empower

Sharing Your Good News

NOTE: If you are looking for adult learner success stories to share from your state, check out our [Educate and Elevate](#) site where adult learner stories are organized by state. You can even submit your own adult learner success story to be featured on our website.

It's a good idea from time to time to let policymakers, funders, and the public in your area know what great work you're doing, and either directly or indirectly seek support.

One of the best ways to do that is by sharing success stories of students, teachers, administrators and programs – as many of you already do. The media thrive on telling individual stories; they just don't always know where to look or where to find them.

That's where a brief “pitch note” comes in. Crafting the right pitch can capture the attention of reporters and editors in your community and encourage them to find out more and tell the story in their words (or borrow some of yours!).

It's usually best to keep things short in a pitch note. Give enough to “hook” a reporter or editor's interest without telling every detail. (If you have lots to say, consider attaching a longer note or a news clipping, or include a link to a website or other item.)



COABE
The Voice Of Adult Education

SAMPLE EMAIL TO “PITCH” AN ADULT LEARNER SUCCESS STORY

These can be particularly powerful during graduation time
and at back-to-school season!

Dear XXX,

I'm writing to share an *[incredible/powerful/unusual/etc.]* story about Jane Doe, a *[description of who the student is: young adult, single mom, 50-year old etc.]* who has *[just/recently/etc done something interesting: graduated, earned a high school equivalency, won an award, been hired for a long sought after job, etc.]* right here in *[neighborhood/city/region/state]*.

A short second paragraph should tell more about the person, why it's interesting, where he/or she is from, etc.

Your third paragraph should put the story in perspective: [Student Name] was one of XX adults in our area who can't get jobs because they can't read. OR... In our area and across the country, as many as one in 6 adults can't read, either at all or well enough to even read a job posting ad. (etc.)

In your fourth short paragraph, offer to help the reporter tell their story, along the lines of: I'd be happy to put you in touch with [STUDENT], as well as the teacher[s] [and/or leaders of program name] who helped [him/her] turn [his/her] life around.

You can reach me at *[your contact info.]*. I look forward to telling you more about this amazing adult student.

Sincerely,

XXX



SAMPLE EMAIL TO HIGHLIGHT A DEDICATED ADULT EDUCATOR, SOMEONE WHO IS RETIRING, ETC.

Dear XXX,

I'm writing to share a story of an educator who [is making/has made] a difference in the lives of many adults in [neighborhood/city/region/state].

[If appropriate: Since XXX OR For more than XXX years] [Name] has helped hundreds/thousands get jobs, raise families, and help build our region with by offering them a basic tool: learning to read [or add, to work in our English-speaking area, etc.]. She/he has done that as a [full-time/part-time/etc,] adult learning instructor at [program details].

A short third paragraph should tell more about the person and what they've accomplished.

Your fourth paragraph should put the story in perspective: [Teacher/administrator name] is one of [dozens/hundreds/etc.] teachers in our area who specialize in helping adult students get ahead. [IF APPROPRIATE:] These instructors are often paid far less than K-12 teachers; many say they [OR name says he/she] teach adults as almost a "calling." [etc.]

In your fifth short paragraph, offer to help the reporter tell their story, along the lines of: I'd be happy to put you in touch with [TEACHER/ADMINISTRATOR], as well some of the students [he/she] has helped and inspired [OR get you into one of his/her basic skills classes].

[AS APPROPRIATE: As the director/administrator of that program, etc.] I can also give you good perspective on the urgent and unmet needs for adult basic education here.

You can reach me at [your contact info.]. I look forward to telling you more about this amazing teacher.

Sincerely,

XXX

SAMPLE EMAIL TO CALL A REPORTER'S ATTENTION TO A PROGRAM

Dear XXX,

I'm writing to share a story of a program that's making a real difference in the lives of *[many/hundreds/thousands/etc.]* adults here in *[neighborhood/city/region/state]* who don't know how to read, handle basic number skills, or even do simple problem-solving in this day and age.

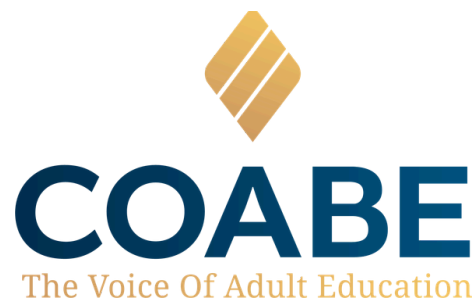
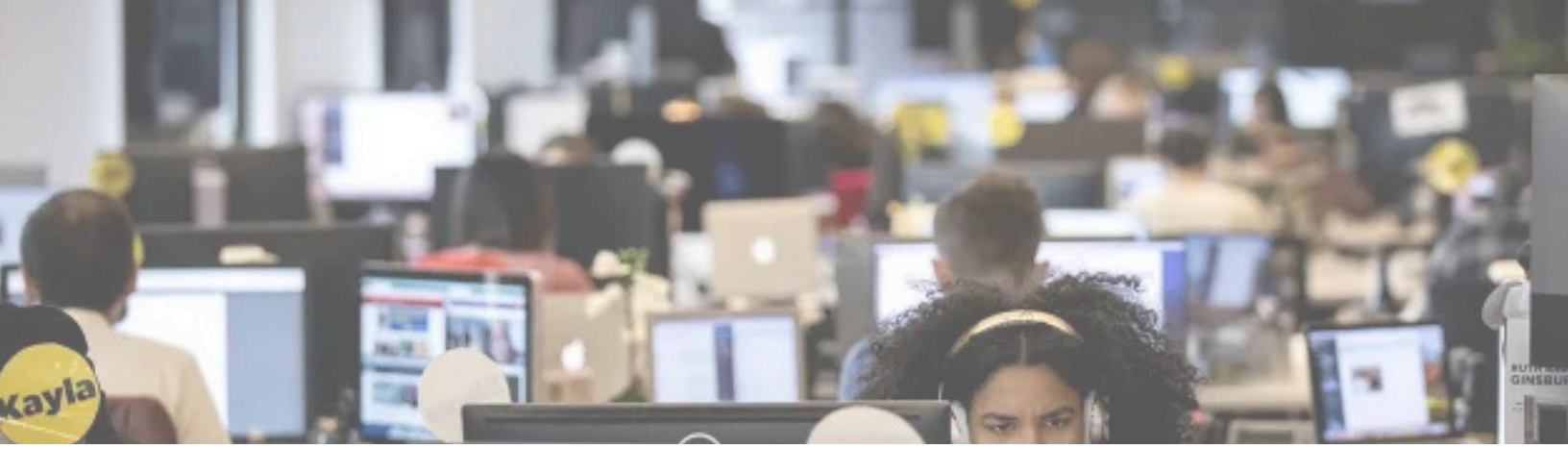
Your short second paragraph should give a one-or two-sentence description of what your program does, who it serves, and where it is.

Give a reason why the reporter should take note now: This program, which has helped more than XXX adults since XXX, is now threatened by a loss of funding. The *[state/city council/school board/etc.]* votes next month on a budget which has stripped XX from the adult ed programs, putting even more adults in our area on waiting lists to master the basic skills they need to get a job, or help their kids with homework, or get out of public assistance and stay clear of the legal system. [ETC.]

In your fourth short paragraph, offer to help the reporter tell their story, along the lines of: As you tell the story of the upcoming vote [etc.] I'd be happy to show you a program that's working wonders, [AND/OR] connect you with adult students who have moved on from barely surviving to amazing lives, [AND/OR] some of the teachers who often consider their work more of "a calling." As the *[director/administrator]* of that program, I can also give you good perspective on the urgent and unmet needs for adult basic education here.

You can reach me at *[your contact info.]*. I look forward to telling you more about this amazing *[and threatened/successful/etc.]* program.





Guidelines for Drafting an Effective Press Release About Adult Basic Education

Lead Equip Empower

Tips for an Effective Press Release

While writing essays and research and class presentations may be familiar territory for many to write and to teach, knowing how to turn out an effective news release can be baffling. Here are some tips drawn from proven experience with additional guidelines and templates from PRNewsWire, eReleases and others.

Keep in mind when deciding to write a release that the proverbial 5W's and an H apply both to your material and to your release itself:

- **WHO** is making news – ***and who wants to hear about it***
- **WHAT** is intriguing or different or newsworthy in your story – ***and what do reporters or others need to know***
- **WHEN** did or will your story happen – ***and when do you tell reporters***
- **WHERE** did the story happen – ***and where will readers be most interested in it***
- **WHY** did the focus of your story happen – ***and why do you want people to know about it***
- **HOW** did it happen – ***and how can you best spread the word.***

Assessing

Try answering these questions when you sit down to write your next press release:

- Is your angle different from other similar stories and/or does it offer a unique perspective?
- Does your message contain new information, even if it's about an old subject?
- Can your message bring light to a problem or issue, or, conversely, provide a resolution to a problem or issue?
- Does your message carry emotional weight with bloggers and other readers?
- Does your message involve or quote a famous or high-powered person?
- Does your message impact the geographical location or environment of the reader base?
- Is it interesting just to you and your colleagues who already know about it? Or will others, either general public or specialists in your field, want to know as well?

Understand the nature of your news. Is it about something or someone local (Local always “sells” best!) Is it something new that affects readers or viewers or the community at large? Is it a unique or “human interest” story? Just, as reporters note, they’re not in the business of writing about all the airplanes that land safely in a given day (just the one that doesn’t), reporters and editors may be less likely to care about 20 students starting an adult ed class than they are about one student who is starting (or finishing) an unusual or unusually challenging path to adult learning.



Writing

- Put yourself in the reader's shoes. Get to the point. Hook them quickly with something interesting, showing them why should they read on
- Write in third person. Don't say "I" or "we" unless you're using it in a direct quote.
- Brief is best: Try to keep your release one page or less (400–500 words).
- Reporters and editors who may get dozens or hundreds or more releases per day – if they open your email at all – will give you maybe 10 or 15 seconds to catch their eye. Get to the point. Don't lose a reader's attention at the start with things like "so-and-so from-such-and-such-is proud to announce that next Tuesday..." You'll lose them.
- Avoid sales-pitch language and tons of adjectives, both which lose credibility in the eyes of readers.
- Keep your own opinions out of it.
- Write without using a lot of industry jargon; don't assume that everyone who's reading it will know what you're talking about.
- Proofread! Do your own careful review to avoid embarrassing errors – especially in a story about adult literacy. Consider having a colleague or friend proofread your release; many of us somehow skip over mistakes we make that are glaring to others. Don't rely wholly on software spell-checkers. (But you know that!)
- Some news outlets (especially online ones) may run your release exactly as it's written; others may use it as more of a tip-sheet to write their own. Don't be annoyed if they rewrite your prose (in fact, be glad that they've taken it).
- "AP Style" is the "bible" if you have grammar or style questions. You can often find AP stylebook answers online through Google or other search engines.

Optimizing

- Identify and use keywords that searchers are likely to use when searching for news like yours – but be natural about it. Loading a release with buzzwords just to catch Google’s attention gets you nowhere.
- Use appropriate keywords in the headline and body of your release, but don’t overstuff. Remember, search engines are known to change the rules when it comes to using keywords, so make sure you follow the most current search engine guidelines.
- Include or provide links to photos, videos, or graphics and other multimedia elements.

Distributing

- Find out who’s best to receive your news. Ask who covers education or local schools, for instance, if you don’t already have a contact. You can often find that out with a Google or other online search, too.
- Some releases warrant wide distribution; others just a small list. Know the outlet you’re talking to. Don’t write the CBS station in town and suggest a story for a show that airs on the ABC channel. (Sounds silly, but it happens all the time).
- Pick up the phone to follow up; a human touch is sometimes the key difference between a release that gets missed because of a spam filter, and a release that gets noticed. At the same time, don’t become a pain in the reporter’s neck. Don’t call to say “did you get my e-mail” when a simple read-receipt on your email will do the trick. And while reporters are always “on deadline” these days thanks to the demands of the internet, it’s common courtesy – and common sense – to be conscious of an outlet’s standard deadlines. Don’t call and ask to talk to the anchorman when he’s two minutes from going on the air... or to chat leisurely with a reporter about a story next week when she’s “crashing” to get her big scoop of the day into the paper.
- If you’re sending an item about an upcoming event, make sure you find out the publication’s cutoff times. Feature-length stories generally need more time to develop than a straight “Fifteen adults from 19 to 79 years of age are getting their high school equivalency degrees on Friday” piece.
- Pay as much attention to the subject line of your email as you do to the lead (or “lede” as its usually spelled in journalism circles.) Catchy if you can, but informative and honest.
- Some reporters won’t open attachments for data security or time reasons. When possible, include your release in the text of an email yet also provide a PDF attachment for those who may want to print, forward or file it. If your mail and attachment become too large, replace large multimedia elements with links. Reporters tend to delete large items first to make room in their inboxes.

Format for a press release courtesy of eReleases (adapted)

Press releases tend to follow a standard format as it makes it easier for readers to get the details they need in an efficient way. But before you can just churn one out, you need to do a little prep work. As you start to write your press release, come up with the creative angle first. Take off your sales hat and think about it from the reader's perspective: Why should I care, and what makes it special? Once you have your angle, then state the facts which support the news as objectively as possible. This will help give your press release the right tone and allow you to fit it more easily into the accepted format.

The standard press release format includes the following:

1. **Headline:** brief attention-grabbing statement summarizing the news.
2. **Subhead (optional):** secondary statement(s) which builds on the headline and further fleshes out the message.
3. **Dateline:** the city where the news is originating (or taking place), the state if not obvious and the date of the release.
4. **Lead or introductory paragraph:** first paragraph of the release which generally answers the who, what, when, where and why questions; in other words, the facts.
5. **Body:** additional paragraphs which provide supporting material and further details (i.e., direct quotes, relevant background information, statistics, etc.) - as well as the Call to Action (e.g., Download, Learn More, Purchase).
6. **Boilerplate:** short paragraph giving information about the issuing company or organization.
7. **Source:** the company or organization issuing the release.
8. **Media contact information:** at minimum, the name, phone number and email address for the PR or media relations contact who can answer any questions about the release.

Almost everyone who reads your mail will do so on a computer screen, tablet or smartphone – so format your release with that in mind. Forgo the traditional style of centering headlines on the page; keeping everything flush left makes it far easier to read on a phone. And instead of cluttering up the top with contact information, put that at the end. Don't make readers scroll past it to get to the meat of your story, while anyone who wants to find you for more information will take the extra time to scroll down.

Press Release Template:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (or EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE Friday,
April 15, 2016 at 6pm CDT)

Press Release Headline Here in Title Case

*Optional subhead here, usually in sentence format, often in italics
and smaller font to offset it from the main headline.*

CITY, State Abbrev. **[if not obvious]** (Date) EXAMPLE: Arlington, TX (April 15) --The opening sentence is the most important element in a press release where you should succinctly summarize what is being announced. The opening paragraph should clearly get the reader's attention through a strong hook while providing or teasing the most important facts.

A press release generally consists of three to six paragraphs where you provide relevant facts and information a reporter should use to write a story. The most important information should be listed first, with the least important information appearing in the final paragraph. Each paragraph should consist of three to six sentences written in the third person. You should maintain an objective tone. Avoid hype and Excessive Capitalization which can make you sound like you are shilling for a commercial product. Try to stay to about one page; never go over two. The average press release consists of 500 words or less

"A great press release should include a great quote from a company executive or industry expert," says eReleases President Mickie Kennedy. "An important thing to know about quotes is that the media generally won't use them unless they are evocative, fresh or state something in a way that would be very difficult to paraphrase. To ensure your quote finds a home in a story based on your announcement, avoid cliches or generalizations."

Be sure to spell check your press release and fact check any facts or statistics in your press release. You should check your grammar as well. Read your press release aloud to ensure there aren't any obvious errors. Lastly, it's a good idea to have a trusted friend and/or colleague read your press release.

A press release can be used to announce a new or updated product. Other press release topics can include a partnership with a company or organization, as well as being issued an industry award. For additional press release topics, visit: <http://www.ereleases.com/prfuel/press-release-topic-ideas/>. As you just saw, you may include a url in your press release.

[The traditional journalist's symbol for END"]



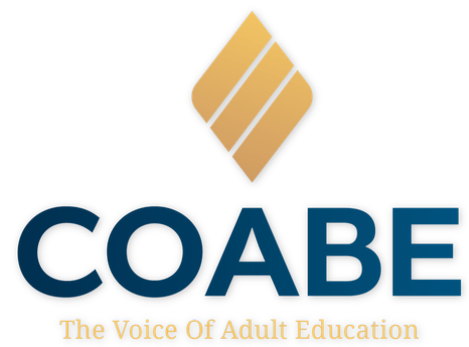
About My Organization (optional)

A boilerplate is a short paragraph that explains the identity of a company and what it does. Boilerplate is optional, but it doesn't hurt to have one to help identify your business. Think of boilerplates as a thumbnail sketch of your company that provides a little background information to the press. Once you've written a boilerplate, you can use it in all of your press releases. It's often displayed in smaller font than the main text. Optionally, include a website address. Find out more at www.COABE.org

Media information:

Name of Media Contact Title of Media
Contact Company Name or Organization
Represented Contact Phone Number
Contact E-mail Organization Website URL





WIOA Fact Sheet

Our Mission: Inspiring Educators so Adults Succeed and Communities Thrive

FUND ADULT ED

WIOA Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

The Vehicle for federal funding of adult education in the United States is the Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA).

Title II Funds Service Providers in Communities

WIOA Title II (“Adult Education and Family Literacy Act”) aims to help adults acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to obtain employment, become full partners in the educational development of their children, improve economic opportunities for their family, and aid in the transition to postsecondary education and training.

Title II includes funding for grants that help states and localities offer services. It also includes National Leadership Activities.

AN INCREASING NEED

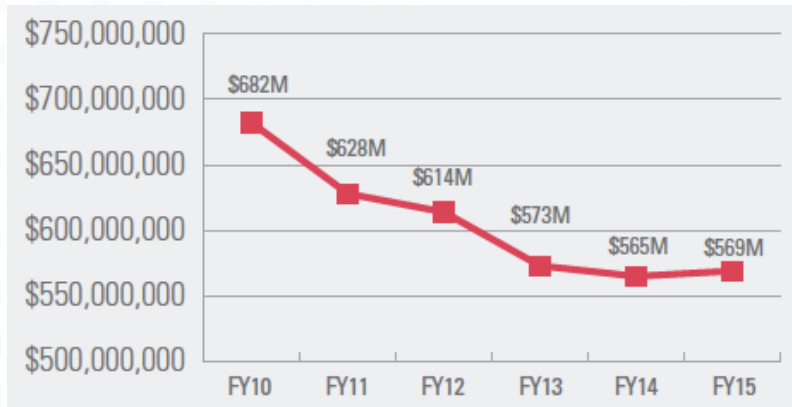
- There are 36 million adults in the United States with limited English, reading, or math skills – but federally funded adult education programs serve only 1.5 million of them.
- Today, waiting lists exist in almost every state.

STATE GRANTS FROZEN

- Adult Education State Grants have declined by nearly 25% since 2002, when adjusted for inflation.
- The President’s proposed budget for FY 2017 would freeze state grants at the already low level of \$582 million.

FUNDING FEARS: MONEY DECLINING

Federal Funds Declining – Despite the Need



Source: NSC analysis for federal appropriations, FY 2010-2015. Figures adjusted for inflation

In a bipartisan vote in 2015, Congress authorized \$635 million for Title II funding. However, the President’s FY 2017 proposed budget requests only \$606 million for grants and national leadership activities.

The funding difference between the authorized funds and those in the President’s budget could educate more than 36,000 adults.



COABE

The Voice Of Adult Education

Fact Sheet Template

**Our Mission:** Lead, Equip Empower**Building a local fact sheet**

Regardless of whether you have strong statistics, you can always build a fact sheet based on individual powerful success stories.

Organize short thumbnail anecdotes of teachers and students on one or two pages.

Landscape of Adult Basic Education in Your Area

You don't need to have all the answers! But thinking these through in advance will help when you reach out to influencers, like media, in your area (on your timetable or theirs!).

Knowing most or some of these data points will also help shape your arguments for any op-eds you might write or emails you might pitch to journalists.

This information will also help make any meetings you hold with policymakers more impactful. Consider putting your strongest and most meaningful numbers together on a one-page fact sheet.

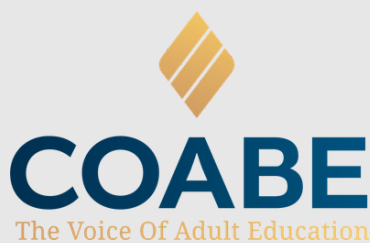
Population: Adult Learners Served in Area X

- The number of adult learners being served currently
- The number of teachers and programs in your area
- The number of adults in need of services (and not currently being served)
- Number of students served over time (the last year, the last decade, etc.,)

Demographics of Learners

- Age
- Race
- Gender
- With kids
- Single parents
- English as a new language

TRANSFORMATION OF ADULT EDUCATION



State or Community Statistics

- High school dropout rates & numbers
- High school equivalency certificates earned
- Demand for entry-level workers

Access to Adult Education Services

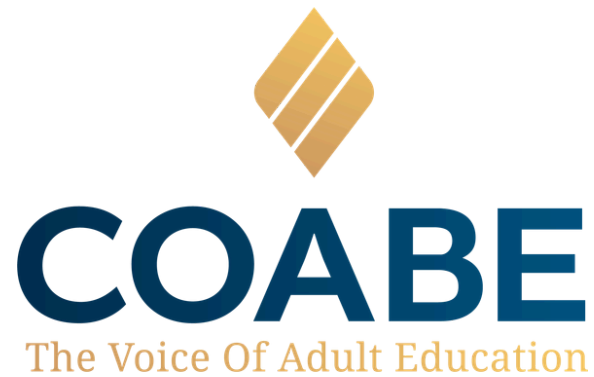
- Waiting lists? How large?
- Facility shortages or concerns? Why?
- Teacher shortages? Salary, other concerns?
- Resources (materials, text books, etc.)?
- Ability to meet needs for day, evening and weekend classes?

Funding

- How much is spent annually on adult education in your program (if public information) or area? Per student (or full-time equivalent)?
 - How much is spent annually on K–12 education? Per student?
 - How much is spent annually on social services or legal system (incarceration, etc.) for adults?
 - What are the major sources of adult education funding in your area?
 - How much is federal, state, local, non-government?
- Are target numbers available for better or full funding?

Our Educators

- Average/typical length of time teaching adults
- Full-time, part-time mix
- Average adult-ed teacher salary in the area (or range if meaningful)
- Average K–12 teacher salary (if comparison is meaningful)
- Comparison to other area salaries, other professions



Section 2: Media Ready

- Interview Preparation
- Storytelling Guidance
- Factsheet Template
- Practice Q&A
- Outreach Template
- Resources and Links
- Appendix





Interview Preparation

Media interviews don't have to be intimidating—even if it's your first time. With just a little preparation, you can share your message clearly and confidently. Whether you're on the phone with a reporter or speaking on camera, these do's and don'ts will help you stay focused, professional, and true to your story.

Remember: *You don't need to be a polished speaker—just a passionate one. The goal is to inform, inspire, and represent adult education with heart and honesty.*

Do:

- Know your 2–3 key points.
- Lead with impact—why should this matter to the public?
- Use human stories and concrete examples.
- Speak in plain language.
- Bring printed stats and learner quotes if allowed.
- Pause and think before answering.
- Smile and use open body language (for TV/video).
- Ask who else will be interviewed and if it's live or recorded.
- Practice out loud! Even five minutes helps.

Don't:

- Get pulled off-message.
- Use jargon (e.g., “WIOA Title II”) unless you explain it.
- Criticize individuals—focus on systems and solutions.
- Guess the facts—say “Let me get back to you with the correct number.”
- Don't feel pressured to answer everything. It's okay to say ‘That's outside my area, but I can connect you with someone.’

You were invited to speak because your voice matters. You're not expected to know everything—you're here to tell the truth about your work and your learners. With practice and preparation, you'll not only feel more confident, you'll make a stronger impact every time you speak.



Storytelling Guidance

Stories are the heart of any message—and adult education has some of the most powerful stories to tell. Whether it’s a learner achieving a dream or a program overcoming barriers to serve more people, storytelling helps the public understand the real-world impact of adult education.

You don’t need to be a professional writer to share a compelling story. Just follow this simple structure to bring your message to life in a way that resonates:

The Anatomy of a Strong Learner Story:

Challenge: “Before I enrolled, I couldn’t help my kids with homework.”

Turning Point: “I found a local adult learning center and signed up.”

Transformation: “Now I have my HSE and a job as a pharmacy tech.”

Why It Matters: “Adult education gave me confidence and stability. I have a job that supports my family and the skills to help my children in their educational journey.” Use stories with permission. Ask learners for quotes or let them co-tell their story when possible. Consider pairing a staff member and learner together for joint interviews—this often makes both feel more confident.

COABE has a collection of adult learner stories available on our 6-time award-winning campaign website Educate & Elevate and Faces of Adult Education.

Beyond Learner Success

While learner stories are powerful, they’re not the only stories worth telling. You might want to share how your program adapted during a crisis, launched a new partnership, or helped someone move from student to volunteer or staff. If it demonstrates resilience, growth, or community impact—it’s a story worth telling.





Factsheet Template

Sometimes the most powerful tool you can leave behind is a one-page snapshot of the facts. A well-designed fact sheet supports your message long after the interview ends. It gives reporters something to quote, refer back to, and share with editors or colleagues.

Use this template to create a quick, clear overview of your program and the broader impact of adult education. You can print it out for in-person interviews or email it afterward with a thank-you note.

Adult Education Fast Facts

- 43 million U.S. adults read at or below a third-grade level.
- Every \$1 invested in adult ed yields up to \$60 in increased wages and social savings.
- Adult learners are diverse: parents, immigrants, returning citizens, older workers.
- Programs include: literacy, numeracy, digital skills, ESL, HS, career pathways.
- Funding covers only a fraction of the need—many programs rely on volunteers and donations.

COABE has national and state fact sheets available on our Educate & Elevate website.

Why It Matters

Facts build credibility and context. When paired with strong stories and a clear message, they show that adult education isn't just inspiring—it's essential. A good fact sheet can turn a five-minute interview into a full article, op-ed, or future feature. Keep it handy, and always follow up with it!



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The Voice Of Adult Education

Practice Q&A

Preparing for questions is one of the best ways to feel confident in a media interview. Sometimes reporters will share questions in advance, but often, you'll need to think on your feet. The more you understand the outlet's audience and typical tone—local news vs. policy podcast, for example—the better you can anticipate what they'll ask.

Below are a few common questions you may hear in interviews, along with sample responses. These answers are just a starting point—the most powerful responses combine facts and personal stories. Don't forget to return to your message triangle when shaping your answers.

Sample Questions & Answers

Q: Why do adults need help with reading or math?

A: There are many reasons—systemic inequities, interrupted education, language barriers. What matters is that they're coming back to learn, and that's something we should celebrate and support.

Q: Isn't that what high schools are for?

A: Ideally, yes—but adult education gives people a second chance. Our systems failed some learners. This is how we lift everyone up, including their children and communities.

Q: How is this different from job training?

A: Adult education is often the foundation—reading, writing, and English skills—that make job training possible.

Q: What's the biggest barrier you face?

A: Funding. Demand is high, but we don't have the capacity to serve everyone. We need more investment and visibility.

Q: Why should we invest in English classes for immigrants?

A: Learning English helps people work, parent, and engage in their communities. It strengthens our local economies and civic life.

Final Tip

There's no perfect answer—just an authentic one. Stay calm, speak with heart, and always bring it back to the real lives impacted by adult education. With a few facts, a compelling story, and a clear message, you'll leave a lasting impression.



Outreach Template

Media coverage doesn't happen by chance—it starts with a strong pitch. Reaching out to local reporters or editors can feel intimidating, especially if you've never done it before. But local news outlets are always looking for uplifting, community-based stories—especially ones that show people overcoming challenges and making positive change.

Use this template to craft a short, compelling email that gets to the heart of your story and invites a conversation. Feel free to adapt the language to fit your tone or the specific outlet you're contacting.

Pitch Email to Local Media

Subject: Local Adult Learners Achieving Big Dreams—Great Story Opportunity

Hi [Reporter's Name],
I'm reaching out to share a powerful local story: adult learners in [Your City/County] are achieving their HS, learning English, and starting new careers—despite tremendous odds. Would you be interested in speaking with a program leader or learner from [Your Organization]? We'd love to connect you with someone who can speak firsthand about the challenges and triumphs of adult education.

Thank you for considering!

[Your Name]
[Title, Organization]
[Phone, Email]

Final Tip

Don't be afraid to follow up. If you don't hear back after a few days, it's perfectly okay to send a polite follow-up email or call the newsroom. You're not bothering them—you're offering a meaningful local story that deserves to be told. For more detailed information about reaching out to the press, explore COABE's Media Outreach Toolkit in the first section of this document.



Resources & Links

You don't have to go it alone.

Whether you're preparing for an interview, gathering data to support your message, or learning how others are successfully engaging with the media, the resources below offer trusted information, tools, and examples. Use these links to dig deeper, build your confidence, and stay aligned with the broader field of adult education.

Educate & Elevate

COABE's award-winning national campaign showcases success stories, state-specific impact data, and other tools. Share this site with reporters or policymakers to demonstrate the national reach and value of adult education.

Faces of Adult Education

A collection of learner and program stories submitted by COABE members. Use this to find compelling, real-life narratives or to encourage your learners to share their own stories.

U.S. Census Bureau – Education Data

Reliable national and state-level statistics on adult education levels—great for grounding your messaging in publicly available data.

National Skills Coalition

Find up-to-date research, talking points, and policy briefs related to workforce development and adult education. These materials can help strengthen your media messaging with credible stats and national context.

U.S. Department of Education – OCTAE

Explore official information about adult education programs, federal priorities, and funding under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Useful for background, data sourcing, and staying informed on policy language.





Appendix

This section is designed to help you put the toolkit into action. You'll find templates, worksheets, and space to personalize your messaging. Whether you're prepping for an interview, crafting your own talking points, or collecting learner stories, the tools here give you a head start. Feel free to copy, adapt, and share with your team or partners.

Use the Appendix to make this toolkit your own—and to turn preparation into confidence.

Appendix A: 2026 COABE Talking Points about Adult Education

This appendix provides up-to-date, ready-to-use talking points tailored for conversations with media and social media outreach. Use these to ensure your voice is consistent, focused, and aligned with COABE's current priorities—whether you're meeting with a media outlet or posting online. Access these talking points [here](#).

Appendix B: Message Triangle Blank Template

A practical template designed to help you craft your own core message, supporting points, and real examples. Use this tool during interview prep or message development to stay clear, concise, and impactful when speaking about adult education. Add more rows as needed.

Message Triangle Template

Use this to stay grounded in your core message during interviews:

Core Message	Supporting Point	Real Example
Adult education transforms lives	Many adult learners achieve HSEs, new careers, or citizenship	
It's essential to our workforce	54% of U.S. adults read below a 6th-grade level	
It deserves more attention and funding	Funding is still below pre-2008 levels	