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The Fine Art of the Letter to the Editor

The classic letter to the editor can be satisfying to the writer and thought-provoking to readers. When it includes a call to action and is reposted to reach targeted audiences, we can see a gem of advocacy in action.

The rules for publishing letters to the editor are usually strict: normally the letter may be no more than 250 or so words, cannot include inappropriate content, and must be respectful (as opposed to comments at the bottom of online articles that tend to be caustic). But within those limitations, there's plenty of room for inspiration. And impact.

The *Arizona Daily Sun* in Flagstaff, **Arizona**, recently published a very good example by Mark Cox, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Flagstaff & Williams. Cox did three things in his three-paragraph letter. First, he articulated the inspiration of nonprofit innovation – “I have the honor of witnessing the difference people can make in their communities firsthand every day” – and explaining that his organization “had to step up in any way we could to be there for our kids, families and communities.” Next, he identified a problem – the uncertainties of the nonprofit being able to continue providing critical services without additional financial support. He closed with a call for readers to take a specific action to help solve the problem, “Please tell your elected officials: Nonprofits support us in times of need, let’s support them in theirs.” See [Nonprofits support communities, it's time to support](#)

[them](#), Mark Cox, *Arizona Daily Sun*, Nov. 21, 2020.

A letter to the editor of the *New York Times* made similar points from a national perspective, Tim Delaney of the National Council of Nonprofits alerted readers that nonprofits have become besieged by people seeking help during the pandemic. In identifying the problem, he explained that “many nonprofits themselves are struggling to survive as those increasing demands bring increases in costs when revenues are declining,” mixing in a warning that more nonprofit layoffs and reduced services, will result without congressional action. His call to action stressed, “The White House, the Senate and the House owe the American people the same commitment to Covid relief that nonprofits are showing every day. Get back to the negotiating table, and don’t stop until a deal is done.” See [Covid Relief for Nonprofits](#), Tim Delaney, *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 2020.

These are just two examples of the many letters to the editors, op-eds, and other communications that nonprofit leaders have issued to illuminate the increasing needs of the nonprofit community. They show that simple and succinct messages in the local newspaper can get the point across, and enlist the help of newspapers in the advocacy efforts to improve communities. And when forwarded via email or tweet to congressional delegations, letters to the editor can help get elected officials on board as well.