



# Sharing Your State Department-Sponsored EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE



## You have a unique perspective on the world. Why not share your story?

By sharing your experiences and your exchange program accomplishments, you advance people-to-people diplomacy, and increase understanding of another culture.

### Here are a few ways you can share your story within your community:

- Write an Op-Ed for your local newspaper or an online publication
- Write a Letter to the Editor
- Draft a press release/announcement about your experiences or accomplishments for local newspapers, associations, and other organizations
- Give radio or television interviews
- Start a blog or submit your story to an online publication
- Post about your experience and share others' content about exchanges to social media

## FORMAT

**Op-eds** are as individual as the writer, and you can use that to your advantage. Nothing is more important than grabbing the readers' attention from the start. Quickly get to your main point and state it clearly. Focus on one main point, and support that point with facts and anecdotes. Opinion pieces are supposed to have a point of view, such as why living in and visiting other cultures is important. The best preparation for writing an op-ed is reading a few that have already been published. Generally newspaper op-eds run between 600–800 words; however, specific newspapers may use content of different lengths.

**Letters to the editor** typically follow a basic structure. Start with an attention-grabbing statement or question that leads directly to your main point. Then, support your position with personal experiences, examples, and facts and figures. Lastly, restate your point and suggest some form of action. Letters to the editor typically run between 200-300 words.

**A press release** or announcement is formatted like a finished news article, written in third person and factual. The idea is that the publication can use your text without having to rewrite it. Press releases are usually 4–6 paragraphs and at most are one page of text when printed.

**Blogs** provide the most leeway in style and format. If you start a blog, the key is to post regularly. Otherwise, it is better to submit your story to an online publication that already has an audience.

## WRITING TIPS

**Have a hook:** Tie your story to an upcoming local event, a key date or holiday, or a current story in the news to make it timely and relevant and increase your chances of getting published.

**Draw the reader in:** Anchor your story around personal anecdotes and experiences.

People want to hear your story.

**Avoid jargon:** Writing for media publications is very different from academic writing.

Use plain language.

**Mention State Department:** When you do, you help demonstrate the impact of exchange programs and allow people to know where to go if they want more information.





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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Write a Title That Shows You Made an Impact on Your Exchange

The first sentence should include the “who, what, and when,” so mention your name, your connection to the community, that you completed a U.S. Department of State exchange program, and note dates of your exchange program. An optional second sentence can summarize the impact you made or how your exchange made a difference for you or on the community. Remember to write in third person, so you might start: “John Doe, a graduate of Valley High, returned this month from a year abroad in Morocco on a U.S. Department of State exchange program.”

The next section should cover the details about your exchange program experience. Describe where you stayed, the key things you learned, and the ways you interacted with both your community abroad and your community back home.

The third section is the details about your specific program. You can cut and paste this paragraph by searching your program’s name on either the [exchanges.state.gov](http://exchanges.state.gov) or [eca.state.gov](http://eca.state.gov) websites.

If you kept a blog or want to link to the [eca.state.gov](http://eca.state.gov) website for more information, add it here in one sentence.

Close with a sentence to please contact you for more information; include your email and/or phone.

U.S. Department of State contact for more information:  
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State, [eca-press@state.gov](mailto:eca-press@state.gov), (202) 632–6452

## SUBMITTING/PITCHING

The best way to send your finished product is almost always via email with the text embedded in the body of the email. Do not send attachments unless specifically requested. In your submission, start with a couple sentences explaining that you are submitting an op-ed, letter to the editor, press release, or announcement, as well as the topic. Include your full name, phone number, and city/state. Make sure to include a subject line that identifies your topic or focus.

Consider the audience you want to reach and the best way to capture their attention. There are many outlets that you can approach: newspapers, magazines, organizational newsletters, university media, niche outlets are just a few opportunities available to you. Don’t be afraid to think outside of the box.

Most newspapers or online publications list the submission email address on their website. If you can’t find it, call the publication (Google the publication to get the phone number) and ask for the best way to submit content. Be sure to send it to the correct person or department, or it may never be read.

Many publications require exclusive submissions, meaning you can send your op-ed or letter to the editor to only one outlet at a time for consideration (press releases and announcements can be sent to as many outlets as you like). If you don’t hear back in a day or two, call and follow up to ensure your submission has been received.

If you are interested in a radio or television interview, the same general concepts apply. Research who to send it to and then write a strong pitch, explaining why the outlet’s audience would benefit from hearing your story. You can keep it short. A couple paragraphs will be more than enough for the editor to make a decision. Again, make sure to close with contact information.

Whatever you decide, always promote any stories or articles on social media, and use the #ExchangeAlumni hashtag to join the larger conversation.

**Good Luck!!!**

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