

A 7-step guide to writing an op-ed for local news outlets on the impact of the Trump administration's federal science cutbacks

This template is designed to help you share your story about the direct impact of the Trump administration's cutbacks to federally funded science, as illustrated by the Partnership for Public Service's new tool, [The Cost of Cutting American Science](#). Use this guide to explain the federal funding you received, what has changed after a year of cuts, and why public servants and the services they provide remain critical to your community. Customize every bracketed section with your specific details.

Before you write: Your personal experience is your most powerful asset. Editors receive hundreds of expert op-eds. What they rarely get is a firsthand account from someone whose life has been impacted by current administration policies. Write from that place. Name your loss. Then connect it to the wider stakes.

Word count: 500-700 words (aim for 600)

HEADLINE

Localize it:

Your headline should make clear who you are, where you are from and what is at stake. Keep it under 13 words, if possible.

***Example:** In [city/county], Federal science cuts aren't abstract – they're costing jobs, research and our future*

***Example:** When [organization] loses federal grants, [city/county] loses more than paychecks*

***Example:** The fallout from Washington's workforce cuts has reached [city/county]'s labs, hospitals and economy*

SECTION 1: The hook – approximately 75-100 words

Goal: Open with a scene, not a statistic.

Drop the reader into a specific moment: the phone call delivering bad news, the lab going dark, the park ranger packing up, the clinical trial that was canceled, the lack of food safety inspections, a public health crisis made worse by the lack of support. Use sensory detail –

a date, a place, a name. Resist the urge to explain first. Show, then let the significance land. Avoid throat-clearing ("I am writing today because...") Don't open with a grant number or policy acronym. If you can't think of a scene, ask: What was the worst single day of this experience?

SECTION 2: The funding – approximately 75-100 words

Goal: Describe the funding you had and why it made a difference in your life and/or the lives of Americans.

Describe the federal funding your organization or agency received, what it made possible and the partnership it represented between your community and the federal government.

What to include:

- Specific numbers: dollar amount, number of people served, staff funded, programs supported
- What that partnership with the federal government meant in practice – what it enabled you to do that you could not do alone

Example:

For [X] years, [organization] received \$[X] annually through [grant/program]. That funding paid for [X staff positions/specific programs or services]. It allowed us to [do something specific – serve X families, run X program, maintain X service]. That grant wasn't charity – it was a partnership. The federal government invested in [city/county], and our community invested back.

SECTION 3: The cut – approximately 75-100 words

Goal: Name the cut and who made it.

Briefly state **what program, funding or protection was eliminated or reduced**, and by whom. One or two concrete facts are enough – a dollar figure, the number of positions lost, a deadline missed, services denied. Keep it factual and spare. This is the "what happened" bridge between your personal story and the argument ahead.

Name the agency: National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Park Service, etc.

Attribute clearly: "The administration's decision to..."

SECTION 4: The argument – approximately 100-150 words

Goal: State your argument in one sentence.

This is the spine of your piece. Choose **one** of these central themes, or combine two if they are inseparable in your case:

Public health and safety: These cuts cost lives, delayed diagnoses, untreated addiction and missed outbreaks.

Economic turmoil: Dismantling research infrastructure destroyed jobs, innovation and U.S. competitiveness.

Environmental irreversibility: Degraded parks, polluted water and lost species cannot be restored by a future budget line.

Democratic accountability: Science is a public trust – cutting it without debate betrays the people it serves.

State your argument plainly by the fourth paragraph. Readers should be able to quote your thesis in one sentence.

SECTION 5: The evidence – approximately 100-150 words

Goal: Show this is bigger than your story.

Expand from your experience to demonstrate the **scale of the problem**. Name two or three specific groups or communities also affected – patients in paused clinical trials, rural communities losing clean-water monitoring, researchers leaving the country, forest communities deprived of fire management staff.

You can also cite big-picture findings from [The Cost of Cutting American Science](#), such as:

- Some 84% of Americans agree that government should fund basic scientific research.
- Federal science project grant funding decreased by 24% between 2024 and 2025.
- The number of federal employees working in science agencies decreased by 117,840 between September 2024 and February 2026, accounting for 41% of the total federal workforce reduction during that period.

SECTION 6: The counterpoint – approximately 75 words

Goal: Acknowledge the other side, then dismantle it.

In one short paragraph, **name the administration's rationale** (deficit reduction, federal overreach, redundancy) and then explain why it fails in your case. This approach shows intellectual honesty and neutralizes the easiest attacks on your piece. Don't spend more than two sentences here, just enough to show you've considered it.

"Proponents argue... but this ignores..." is a clean structure. Don't strawman, name the real argument even if you disagree with it.

SECTION 7: The conclusion – your ask – approximately 75 words

Goal: End with a specific demand, not a lament.

Strong op-eds close with a **clear, actionable ask**. Tell Congress, state legislators or the public exactly what you want them to do. Then, end on a human note. Return briefly to the person or moment from your opening to bring the piece full circle. This emotional bookending is what readers remember.

Avoid ending on despair – anger or resolve lands better than grief. Last sentence: Make it short and memorable. Under 15 words if possible.

Example:

Public servants are behind some of our greatest scientific advances. But today, decades of progress are being dismantled by reckless cuts to funding and the federal workforce that are harming Americans and our communities, weakening our economy and jeopardizing our standing as the world's leading innovator. We must protect these vital investments and restore funding to [X].

SIGN-OFF

Include the following at the end of your op-ed:

- [Your full name]
 - [Your title and organization name]
 - [City, state]
 - [Email address]
 - [Phone number—for editor use only]
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TIPS FOR PITCHING

Getting your op-ed published takes the same care as writing it. Editors receive dozens of submissions a week. These tips will help yours stand out.

1. Exclusivity

Only submit to one outlet at a time. Inform them it is an exclusive submission. If you don't hear back within 5–7 business days, follow up once, then move to the next outlet.

2. Localize aggressively

Editors at local papers want local specificity. Name the street. Name the program. Name the neighborhood. Generic op-eds get passed over. Yours should be something only you could have written.

3. Lead with the human, not the policy

Your pitch email should open the same way your op-ed does – with a story or a person, not a funding figure. Hook the editor the same way you hook the reader.

4. Keep your pitch email short

Two to three sentences: who you are, what the piece is about, why it matters to their readers right now. Paste the op-ed below the pitch or attach as a Word document, whichever the outlet prefers.

5. Know your outlet

Research the outlet's op-ed page before submitting. Note the outlet's typical word count, format and submission contact. Address your pitch to the opinion or op-ed editor by name, if possible.

6. Follow submission guidelines

Many outlets have specific requirements for op-eds (word count, format, exclusivity statements). Check the outlet's website before submitting and follow the guidance exactly.

7. Targets to consider

- Local, daily or weekly newspapers
- Regional news sites and digital outlets
- Local TV or radio station websites with opinion sections
- Community and neighborhood newsletters
- Your organization's own blog or newsletter (if not picked up elsewhere)

Questions? Contact our press team at press@ourpublicservice.org for help localizing this template, finding data on the Federal Harms Tracker or identifying the right submission contacts in your region.