



Tips for Arranging & Conducting a Press Conference

A press conference is a voluntary presentation of information to the media.

- At a press conference, a presentation is given on a particular issue and reporters are allowed to ask questions. It is an opportunity to get your story broadcast on television or radio, published in the newspaper or other print media or disseminated through Internet websites.
- Before the press conference, alert the media through a press advisory of the five W's – who, what, why, where, when – of the things they need to know to decide about tuning into your press conference. Even if someone decides not to attend, your press advisory may pique their interest and lead to them covering your issue, if not immediately, possibly down the road.
- A press conference is an efficient method to publicize your news and raise awareness of your issue and organization, but it must be timely while also fitting with your strategy of actions to promote your issue.
- A press conference must be well-organized and enable your most powerful leaders and allies to make their case. If you hold press conferences too often, or without solid news or a unique angle, reporters will stop coming and not take you seriously in the future.

Steps to consider when arranging a press conference include:

1. **Define your goals.** Before you plan a press conference, be clear of your desired outcomes. Good reasons for holding a press conference might include getting:
 - publicity about your cause, including efforts to solve problems and success stories;
 - widespread media coverage that raises public awareness on an issue;
 - a message to policymakers and public officials about what is wanted;
 - more people involved;
 - an opportunity to showcase the diversity and strength of your organization and your allies.
2. **Clearly state your reason for holding a press conference.** Whatever your goals are, remember that you must have something *newsworthy* to announce, release, or talk about at your press conference. This news has either not been covered in the press yet, there is an emergency, there is an appeal to be made to public officials or policymakers or this is an important new issue that the community should care about and take action on. Examples include upcoming legislation, an important date or anniversary that provides a moment to reflect and look ahead to action, an announcement of a new campaign or a push to mobilize specific communities to get involved.
3. **Decide what message you want delivered through the media.** Outline your demands to a decision maker (someone who has the power to give you what you want). Include

information about what people can do to help and the date, time and place of your next action, such as your group's next meeting or activity.

4. **Locate a venue to hold the press conference.** Find an appropriate place that is convenient and has the facilities you need. Where you choose to have a press conference depends on your needs and the specific circumstances of your situation. For example, you can choose an issue-specific backdrop (such as in front of a government building or health clinic) or in a place that relates to and is important to your issue. Remember, no matter where you choose to hold the press conference, be ready with the proper audio-visual and technical equipment necessary.
5. **Set the date and time of the press conference.** When doing so, take into account reporter's deadlines. For example, the best days of the week to get news coverage are usually Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Check to see if there are previously scheduled newsworthy events that would be competition for your press conference.
6. **Invite the media.** Send a press conference advisory to appropriate local media outlets at least a week before the press conference. Include the five W's – who, what, where, when, why – to give specifics of what the press conference is all about. Indicate who is hosting the press conference and highlight your most interesting speakers, announcing if there will be new information released about your group's work or the issue. Be brief but clear so that reporters are interested enough to call you to find out more. Right away, call reporters and assignment desks to make sure they have seen the advisory, answer questions, offer assistance and identify those who are considering coming. Follow-up with a phone call one-to-two days before the press conference to ask if they plan to come and offer interviews with your spokespeople to those who may not be able to make it.
7. **Invite guests.** Make phone calls and send written invitations to prospective guests you want to have at the press conference, such as other members of your group, allies, and friendly politicians. Make sure to include the name of a contact person so that guests can RSVP to ensure you have enough room to accommodate all of your guests and the media.
8. **Prepare your press conference spokesperson(s).** Generally, it's good to have two to four speakers presenting at a press conference. Rehearse with the speaker(s) to make statements brief and clear and usually no longer than five minutes. The spokesperson(s) should be experienced in the subject so s/he will be able to respond to questions after the statement. Also, note that reporters often will want to interview the spokesperson directly following the press conference privately. Let the press know if the speaker is available for this and prepare him/her with 30-second answers to common questions and quotable, simple messages for print reporters. Help your speaker practice with a video camera or tape recorder if necessary.
9. **Choose a moderator (or facilitator) for the press conference.** You will need someone to control the process and keep reporters on subject. If someone goes off subject, the moderator can assist by returning to the focus of the press conference by saying such things as: "That's an interesting point, but we are here today to discuss..."
10. **Define and practice roles with the members of your group.** It is important that everybody understands his/her role in the event and trouble-shooting scenarios are

considered. For example, what if a reporter asks a non-spokesperson a question or an opponent attends and asks challenging or controversial questions?

11. **Utilize visual aids in the press conference presentation.** Charts, maps, pictures or other props that effectively get your message across can be important additions to the presentation (however, take into account that slide shows are difficult for television, radio and print reporters to use). Remember to have printed copies of any visual aids to hand out to media personnel.
12. **Provide a news release.** This one-to-two page news release should be distributed at the press conference and sent out after the press conference to media outlets that did not attend. Write the news release as if it is the story you want the media to run. Give it a strong, snappy headline. Put your most important information and quotes from your key spokespeople in the opening paragraphs. In later paragraphs, give the supplemental information about your cause and organization that further explains why the news from the press conference matters. Unlike an op-ed, a news release does not need a summary paragraph at the end. Include contact information for your group at the top and bottom of the news release. The news release is one of several pieces for your press kit, which includes more formal statements that the press can use to quote in their articles.
13. **Develop a press kit.** A press kit is background material to provide for press conference attendees and can include your news release, text of speaker statements, fact sheets, biographies of speakers, information about your organization and information specific to news announced at the press conference (i.e., research findings, campaign materials, etc). Your press kit makes it easier for reporters to create and produce their stories. Press kits can be packaged in folders or envelopes and should be distributed as the media enters the press conference. Make sure to include contact information in your press kit so that reporters can ask follow-up questions at a later date.

Steps to consider when conducting a press conference include:

1. **Starting the press conference.** Be ready to welcome television reporters at least 15-30 minutes before the scheduled start of the press conference as they usually require some time to set up their equipment. Meet everyone at the door and ask them to sign a guest book you have already prepared (it is beneficial to have their contact information for continued correspondences and to alert them to future events). Give them your background material and a copy of the news release and direct them to where they should sit or stand.
2. **Running the press conference.** Have the moderator welcome everyone and briefly introduce the speaker(s). Remember that statements should not be longer than three-to-five minutes. If one of your speakers is carrying most of the news to be shared with others adding context and background, your featured speaker could take eight-to-ten minutes. After the speakers are finished, ask for questions. Give simple, brief, and pointed responses to these questions. The moderator should end the question and answer session after important points are made at an appropriate time, and before things have drawn out too long. He/she should summarize key points, adjourn the press conference and indicate that speakers are available for interviews. Then have the moderator thank everyone for coming and tell them where they can find additional information. Try to keep the formal press conference to no more than 30-40 minutes.

3. **Making your statement.** Evaluate carefully how you want your message to come across. Make sure the way you deliver your message is on point and that you are in the most appropriate place. You can maximize your impact for television and radio reporters, plus make it more interesting for print reporters if you think about the staging of your press conference. For example,
- **Television:** Consider the visual impact and ask yourself, “How can we set up our press conference to give reporters a good picture?”
 - Put your speakers in a visually exciting setting that enhances your message.
 - Seat speakers at the front close together so they all fit in the picture.
 - Seat the audience close to the speakers so they are in the picture.
 - Display visual aids and props (especially posters or banners with your group’s logo and relevant slogans on them) clearly.
 - **Radio:** Consider the audio impact and ask yourself, “What sounds would be of interest to radio reporters?” and “What can we do to make things technically suitable for broadcast?”
 - Radio reporters need uncluttered sound with good acoustics and a minimum of background noise.
 - Have a designated, well-prepared spokesperson(s) so everyone is not talking at once.
 - Have prepared statements so the main points can be made clearly. Deliver statements in a conversational tone fitting with the seriousness and emotions of your appeal. Try not to read the statement, rather use notes to present the main points. It is okay if the verbal statements are not exactly the same as the written statements.
 - If you are holding the press conference at a rally or event with a lot of people and noise, try to set up a quiet space away from the action for interviews. Generally, since reporters are less likely than those attending a rally or event to stay for long, consider holding your press conference immediately before or after the rally or event.
 - **Print media:** Consider the verbal impact and ask yourself, “What would we want if we were newspaper reporters?”
 - Use simple, powerful, quotable lines when speaking. And be sure that you can back-up all of your statements with facts. Additionally, if something is not a proven fact, preface the statement by saying such things as, “in my opinion...” or “we believe that...”.
 - Do not bring up anything you are not prepared to discuss. If you are asked questions that you do not want to talk about, reply with such statements as “We are not ready to discuss that matter at this time,” or “Our group has not taken a position on that.”
 - Provide press kits with background material and copies of press statements that can be referenced.