

# RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE PRESS CONFERENCE

Yes, you, too can put on a press conference, complete with speakers, cameras, and all the trimmings. Press conferences are not just for public officials; they can be an effective and powerful way to communicate a message.

Remember that press conferences are visual events. If you are making an announcement or calling attention to an issue without a “visual,” such as compelling speakers or crowds, then you may want to consider writing a press release rather than devoting time to putting together a press conference.

## GENERAL PRESS CONFERENCE LOGISTICS:

The entire press conference should last no longer than 30 minutes and should follow a format similar to the following:

1. Introduce Speakers and Agenda – 3 minutes
2. Speaker 1 (e.g. Elected official) – 3 minutes
3. Speaker 2 (e.g. Local youth) – 3 minutes
4. Speaker 3 (e.g. President or Spokesperson of organization) – 3 minutes
5. Question and Answer (make sure this section is moderated by someone who can answer difficult questions and direct media questions to the right person)

## PUTTING TOGETHER A PRESS CONFERENCE:

Pick an accessible location and a convenient time.

- ✓ The availability of local media varies. Generally, most reporters have afternoon deadlines, so it is best to do press conferences in the morning.
- ✓ Be sure to choose a location that is easy to get to and highlights the topic you are addressing, such as your local park. (Make sure to get all the necessary permits beforehand.)

Invite speakers.

- ✓ Aim to have around three speakers—you don’t want the press conference to run too long.
- ✓ When choosing speakers, make sure they reflect your issue, represent different constituencies, and are visuals themselves.
- ✓ For example, if you are organizing a press conference around a clean-up event in your park, speakers you may want to consider are: elected officials or important city officials, the president of your organization, important community members, an impassioned volunteer or local children who use the park.

Contact the media well in advance.

- ✓ As a general rule, send out (fax if possible) your Media Advisory at least four days in advance; however, this may vary depending on the media outlet and their specific printing deadlines (*see tips on writing a press advisory and release*).
- ✓ Practice your pitch to the press and follow up the fax with personal phone calls to reporters and editors.
- ✓ Try to get specific commitments from reporters that they will show up on the day of the event.

### **Make reminder calls**

- ✓ Call reporters the day before or the morning of the event to confirm their attendance.

### **Prep speakers**

- ✓ Remind your speakers of the key “talking points” you hope they will cover.
- ✓ Ask them to keep their presentations brief.
- ✓ Each speaker should talk for no more than 3 minutes.

### **Have visuals.**

- ✓ Put your logo on the podium and have large banners and crowds behind the speakers.

### **Create a press sign-in area and press kits.**

- ✓ Sign in reporters and hand out press kits at the beginning of the press conference.
- ✓ **Press kits** should include a copy of the **press release** (see *sample*) with quotes from speakers, copies of each of the speakers’ statements and bios, and any other pertinent information on the topic.

### **Media follow up.**

- ✓ Make follow-up calls and fax press releases and pictures from the event to reporters who did not attend.
- ✓ Just because a journalist doesn’t attend your press conference, doesn’t mean that he won’t write a story on it.
- ✓ It’s also a good idea to check in with reporters who did attend the press conference to ask them if they need more information, and to find out if they are running the story.

### **Track coverage.**

- ✓ Clip all articles and record any live coverage on television or radio.
- ✓ Use copies of articles to promote your organization to the community, elected officials or funders.