

Checklist for an Effective Press Conference

I. Introduction

Media events include press briefings, photo-calls, and press conferences. They are held when a press release is not sufficient and there is a need to give more detailed information to the media and to receive and answer questions. A press conference may be a planned event or one called at short notice in response to a crisis. It will be a comparatively simple and informal occasion and hospitality will be minimal, such as a 'thank you' drink at the close. It may be held in your organisation's offices or at a hotel.

Whether planned or in response to a crisis a successful press conference involves planning before, during, and after the event.

The following checklist will give you a few tips for organising an effective press conference.

II. Reason

- A big, newsworthy story.
- New information relating to a big story being followed by the media.
- A statement on a controversial issue.
- Participation of high profile speakers or celebrities.
- Release of important new findings or research data.
- Launch of a major new initiative.
- Announcement of something of local importance

III. Location and Set-up

- A central well-known location, convenient for journalists, and appropriate to the event.
- Avoid large rooms that give the appearance that few people attended.
- Make sure the noise level of the room is low.
- Reserve space at the back of the room for television cameras, possibly on a raised platform.
- Ensure light and sound systems are in working order.
- If possible, have phone and e-mail at hand and Wifi connection available.
- Make sure there is a podium and a table long enough for all spokespeople to sit behind.
- Consider displaying large visuals, such as graphs, logos or charts.
- Prepare a "sign-in" sheet for journalists.
- Determine if you wish to serve coffee, cool drinks, or light snacks, following the event.

IV. Timing

- Hold event in the morning of a work day so reporters can meet deadlines.
- Check that you are not competing with other important news events the same day such as elections, budgets, government statements, major sporting events etc. All these will impact on the amount of airtime/column inches that are available and may result in your press conference not being covered.
- Start the event on time — avoid keeping journalists waiting.

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- If you distribute material prior to a news event, use an embargo to prevent journalists from publishing before the event. Alternatively wait until the event to release information to create an element of suspense.

V. Possible Materials

- News release.
- List of news conference participants.
- Executive summary of report.
- Case studies and stories.
- Fact sheets and graphs.
- Biography and photos of speakers, and copies of speeches.
- Consider putting all the printed materials together into one “press kit”.

VI. Inviting Journalists

- Keep an up-to-date mailing list or database of journalists.
- Make sure you know who the health and social affairs correspondents are.
- Monitor which journalists are reporting on health.
- Focus on getting the most influential media to attend.
- Remember to invite international and foreign media if appropriate
- Get your event in journalists’ diaries seven to 10 days before the event.
- Always make a follow-up call to check that the right journalist has received the information.
- Consider providing general, background briefings to important journalists prior to the event, without disclosing to them the details of your news story.
- Consider offering “exclusive” angles on the story to key media.

VII. Preparing Speakers

- Select appropriate speakers.
- Select strong speakers who are charismatic, articulate and authoritative.
- Brief speakers carefully on the main message of the event.
- Prepare speakers in advance on how to answer difficult questions.
- Try to hold a meeting to brief all speakers before the event.
- Ideally, each speaker should present for only three or four minutes.
- Have each speaker make different points, while still focusing on the main message.
- Make sure that each speaker makes one or two important points.
- Keep speeches short and simple, aimed at a general audience and avoid technical jargon.
- Select a moderator who will manage questions from the floor after the presentation.
- Encourage lots of questions. Keep answers short. Reiterate main messages and do not introduce new issues.