

TIPS ON PLANNING A PRESS CONFERENCE/EVENT

There is no guaranteed formula to a successful press conference, but some things help. Below are some tips, but the most important factor to get good coverage is for the point of your news conference (message) to coincide with an issue that is on the media's radar (timing).

FIELD

- **The Venue:** find venue and scout it out. Is there parking nearby, many entrances etc? If inside, a small room is better than a large room. Know how the room is set-up (a podium, sound system, good place to hang a banner). If the event is outside, be sure there's space for people to gather, what the best angle is for visuals? Decide on the time of the event.
- **The Venue appendix:** also think about media accessibility. An abandoned warehouse on the outskirts of town may make for good symbolism if the message is about jobs lost, but it may be a logistical nightmare for reporters to get there. As always, it's a judgement call for the organizers.
- **The Crowd:** set a goal for how many people are realistic. Reach out for other organizations in your area, and ask them for lists of contacts. From your lists, organize volunteers (or form some kind of a system) to reach out for more people. Volunteers should call through the lists the weekend before event (or in the case of recess maybe the week before the event and then reminder calls the following week?). Collect e-mails of people to remain in contact until the event, but it is always good to connect over the phone as much as possible. Half the number of people confirmed to be at an event is a good gauge of how many will actually show up.
- **The Speakers:** confirm the speakers and get quotes from them. Figure out the line-up and who will be host/emcee. Make master list of all speakers' contact information, including cell phones
- **Message:** make sure all confirmed speakers know what they are going to say, so one does not repeat what another says. A good way of avoiding this is to ask speakers to keep their remarks to a certain amount of time (in minutes, of course).
- **Materials:** Make props, posters, etc. a couple of nights before hand. Make copies of report when applicable. Are they other related materials you should hand out? Make copies.

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MEDIA

- Reporters: Call from your existing press lists. Or, if you're without a list, call the newspapers and begin a list. Tell an editor what your event is and who might cover something like it. You may be transferred to numerous editors, but stay persistent til you get the right person on the phone. Remember that generally speaking editors & reporters have a little more time to take "cold" calls earlier in the day as, they're not on a deadline then. Best to call between 9-11 a.m.
- Get to know your local Associated Press reporters. When you have an event, call them even before you have an advisory. When you have the "Who, What , When, Where" ask the AP to put your event on the DAYBOOK. This is read by all newspaper editors in your region. Similarly, you may have a Reuters reporter in your area. If so, Reuters also has a daybook.
- Get press release and media advisory finalized and OK-ed by the speakers at least three days before the event. Don't underestimate the time this will take when multiple groups are involved.
- Fax and email out the press advisory to reporters two days before the event (if event is Weds, fax out advisory Monday). Follow-up with phone calls to reporters at print, radio and T.V. stations the morning you send out the advisory and the day before the event.
- Fax the advisory again on the morning of the event and do another round of follow up calls to get final confirmation for the event (hint: call T.V. stations before 9 am since they have meetings to decide what they will do each day at this time and you want your event on their radar BEFORE their morning meeting).
- If for a newspaper it sounds to you unlikely a reporter will come out, call the Photo Editor or Photo Desk and ask if they can send a photographer to the event. Sometimes pictures are better than stories anyway.
- Send out the press release after the event to all reporters on your list (both the ones who did show and the ones who did not). Assign someone who can walk through the statehouse and distribute the press release and other materials to the press offices
- Have sign-in sheet for press
- If reporters you talked with on the phone do not make it out to your event, stay in touch with them and let them know of other opportunities they may be able to write on the subject. More often than not, reporters would like to cover more than they can and take orders from an editor who may have other priorities. But staying in good contact with the reporter is worthwhile because sooner or later, they will need you to write a story.