



How to Hold a Media Event

Define Your Goals

Know your goals before you begin planning a press conference. Some possibilities include:

- Getting more people involved in your movement
- Gaining publicity and media coverage of your problem
- Sending a message to decision-makers
- Showing the strength of your group

Know your objective, and tailor your message and the format of your event to it. Having a press conference with only experts speaking and inviting trade journals won't send a strong message to politicians; but including community voices and turning out a large crowd of supporters and the 6 o'clock news will have a strong impact.

Types of Media Events

- Press Conferences
- Protests
- Street Theater
- Actions (Banner-hangings or civil disobedience)
- Public Hearings

Image Is Everything

Choose a compelling venue for the backdrop of your event. Photos of your speakers standing in a conference room won't push your story to the front page, so think about more dramatic backdrops. Perhaps the steps of the state capitol or a closed-down manufacturing plant. If you will be holding your press conference indoors, bring signs, graphs or enlarged photos to help tell your story. Be sure that there is no visual clutter directly behind the speakers.

Choosing Speakers

Choose just a few speakers, and coordinate your message and talking points so that each speaker can offer something unique. A few things to think about:

- **There isn't time for everyone to speak.** Just choose 2-4 representatives.

- **Try to include different perspectives.** Balance an ‘expert’ speaker to present the facts with a voice from the community who can tell the story.
- **Keep it short.** Each speaker should only have 6-8 minutes so that there is plenty of time for questions.
- **Coordinate your message.** Decide on a central message ahead of time and decide what parts of the story each speaker will tell. Don’t let your speakers repeat each other’s points!
- **Keep it simple.** Reserve the detailed information for fact sheets in your press kit. Stick to a simple, easily quotable message to ensure that the story is told in **your** words and not paraphrased by the reporter. A short, pithy statement is more likely to make it in.
- **Choose a moderator.** Choose someone to facilitate the event and keep questions on-topic.
- **Practice.** You will be taken more seriously if the event runs smoothly and all speakers are ready to answer questions succinctly. Brainstorm possible questions ahead of time, and practice your answers. Practice moderating and the transitions between speakers. The fewer surprises, the more confident you will be.
- **Be available.** Let media know if speakers will be available after the press conference for one-on-one interviews.

Preparing the Press Kit

Prepare a press kit with background materials that reporters can take with them. Include:

- Agenda with the names and titles of all speakers
- Biographies of all speakers
- Press release about the event
- Relevant background information such as press clips, reports with summaries, available photographs, etc

Inviting Media

- **Create a media list** two weeks before the conference. Think about journalists who have written articles on similar topics. Get the phone number and email for the assignment or news editors of your local papers.
- **Send out a Media Advisory a week before** the press conference. This is a What, Where, When, Who memo to let the media know about the event. Most journalists prefer email correspondence but will not open attachments, so be sure to paste your Advisory in the body of your email.
- **Begin calling reporters the day before your conference.** Offer to resend the advisory, and make sure that it has been placed in the ‘Daybook’ of your local papers and the local Associated Press Bureau.



- Send materials first! Don't call a journalist if you have not sent them your media advisory.
- Keep your pitch short (under 30 seconds)
- Make it sexy and exciting. Tell the reporter why your story is timely. Why should they run the story this week and not next month?
- Call in the morning, around 9 or 10am, when they are not working on deadline.
- Always offer to resend the Media Advisory. Have your email open when you call and be ready to resend the Advisory immediately.
- Write down your talking points ahead of time.
- Build relationships. Offer news leads, or praise for other articles even if you are not pitching a story.
- Always assume that you are 'on the record'
- **Follow up** with interested reporters the morning of the press conference.

Running a Press Conference

- Choose a time that is media-friendly. Try to hold events in the late morning so that reporters can get the story out that afternoon. Don't try to compete with other major events. Hold your event mid-week to get the most coverage.
- Arrive early to greet media. You should be completely set up and ready to welcome journalists at least 15 minutes before the start time. Camera crews need extra time to set up.
- Have a media sign-in sheet so that you can capture contact information of any press.
- Start on-time. Reporters may have another assignment to get to, so don't keep them waiting on stragglers. You can always offer a quick one-on-one interview after the conference for reporters who arrived late.
- Think about the picture. Seat speakers close together so that they can all fit in a single photograph and seat the audience near the speakers so that they are seen in photos as well.
- Display your group's sign behind the podium, or posters with your issues if you are hosting the conference indoors.
- Think about props. Perhaps a jar of murky contaminated water, or gas masks if you are talking about air pollution. Be creative!
- Plan an action that will bring out supporters (and signs!) to dramatize your message.
- Remember that you will need plenty of time for questions. Assume that questions will take more time than your speaker's statements.
- Follow up with reporters that afternoon. Send out an email and let them know if you have photographs of the event available. Offer written statements from the speakers if available. Some media that may not attend the conference will still write a story if a press release, photographs and text from the speakers is made available.

