

## Press relations

### THE PRESS CONFERENCE

The Press Conference brings together several journalists to give them some particular information. It is used as a platform to highlight a topic of current interest and should provide added value. The opportunities for organizing a Press Conference are as numerous and various as those for doing a Press Release.

A press conference is an opportunity for an organization to have direct contact with journalists and to reach all types of media. Its success depends mainly on good public attendance and the smooth running of the program

(quality interventions that are not too long, good speakers, good pacing, etc.), as well as holding it in a good location and at a convenient time. But, just as is true when it comes to a Communiqué, one can never know in advance whether there will be good media coverage, or even, until the last minute, how many journalists will attend. It's a risky event in the sense that it greatly exposes the organization and, as with any communication event, is subject to many factors.

See also the "Press Relations- The Interview" Worksheet.



#### The Preparation

The first thing to do when thinking about organizing a Press Conference is to question its 'usefulness.' Is this topic really so interesting that it merits a Press Conference?

##### ► Is it appropriate?

A press conference asks journalists to set aside a block of time, something that is always precious to them, to get information that is being given to "everyone at the same time" -- something that is contrary to the nature of journalism which is based on the tenet of "seeking the scoop" and "exclusivity". So, if the topic is really more 'of interest' to a select group of journalists or media, then why not choose to do a simple Press Release or an Interview?

##### ► Is it a wise?

Are the speakers competent for participating in this type of event, are they able to respond to the journalists' questions? The speakers can be prepared prior to the event, for example getting Media Coaching, also by thinking about all the possible questions that a journalist might ask and having an answer ready.

##### ► Are the financial resources available?

A press conference can be costly and time consuming to organize given the different elements that may be involved: Room Rental, Technical Equipment (microphones, video project, etc.), decorations, invitations, promotion, making press kits, reception food and drinks and, possibly, transportation fees or gifts for the participants, guests, journalists, etc.

##### ► Define a strategy

The Press Conference should be thought of as a "show" with a "main theme." Ask yourself, "What do the media expect? What content? Prepare a cohesive plan. What formats (technical, casual, spectacular...)? What is the

budget? Which media should be invited? What is the objective beyond getting widespread media coverage?

##### ► Which date?

Avoid some periods such as school holidays, the reopening of schools period (the media usually will not have not gotten back up to their cruising speed); certain days such as Mondays, which is generally a "Recovery from the weekend" day and Fridays, a part-time work day in some Muslim countries and also a day for kicking off an extended weekend.

##### ► What Time?

Avoid certain time slots, too, such as late afternoon or evening (which does not allow enough time for the articles to be completed to make that day's print media deadlines or for that day's evening TV news. Check the local calendar for events happening so that there is no time conflict. You don't want to end up being in competition with a major sporting event or some other organization's (corporate) event.

##### ► What Place?

If the location has some link with the topic, that is ideal. Check on Accessibility for persons with disabilities. Look for a central location. How is the atmosphere, the ambiance, décor? Toilets? Cloak room? Audiovisual equipment? Etc.

##### ► The Invitations:

Who to invite? This is a good opportunity to refresh your media contacts list. When to send? At least two weeks in advance. Send it earlier and journalists are likely to forget. Send

a "Reminder" a few days before the conference to those who did not confirm attendance, and on the day before to those that confirmed. Personalize the invitation for those journalists that you know well.

- ▶ **Who speaks?** In terms of the order of the speakers, if an important public figure is present (for example, a Minister), he or she usually speaks first, followed by the leaders of the organization, then stakeholders. Be mindful of and learn about Protocol. It varies by country. Also, if there is a prominent public figure present, he/she may become the focal point of the attention and/or widen the discussion. Be sure to prepare in advance all the speeches and presentations/interventions. Coordinate with all stakeholders to know who is going to say what to avoid being redundant. Anticipate the questions, including the most controversial.

- ▶ **Prepare a Guest List** in order to identify all the persons at their arrival.
- ▶ **Prepare Name Tags** if needed, for those who have confirmed attendance. Leave some badges blank for others who arrive. The representatives from the organization hosting the press conference/event should also wear a name tag.
- ▶ **Think about signage:** Make sure there are visible signs directing people to where the press conference is taking place (including any landmarks such as buildings, parking, streets, etc.)

## During the Conference

- ▶ **Set time limits. Limit all the interventions** to 30 minutes maximum, if possible, to leave time for questions and interviews. Be clear, concise, and articulate; use a common level of vocabulary. Do not speak too fast. Use anecdotes that capture the audience's attention and memory.
- ▶ Make use of the arrival of the journalists (as part of the check-in) to **refresh your media file**, to check and make sure you have their current contact details. Also, doing a check-in list makes it possible to know who attended and to make draw some conclusions afterwards.
- ▶ **Wait 15 Minutes for any late comers**, at most, before starting the program.
- ▶ **Offer some small gifts** if possible: Pens, notebooks, samples, etc. Be careful not to go overboard. In theory, journalism ethics forbids journalists accepting any kind of gift. In addition, some journalists ask to be paid for writing an article/covering the event. This is something that should be strictly avoided.
- ▶ **Give out the Press Kit at the end.** Provide as many as possible. Also, never send the full press kit to the journalists before the Press Conference –if you, the media will not come.

## Post-Conference

- ▶ **Write and Send** the same day or the next day, a **Press Release** summarizing the conference including, if possible, summaries of the interventions, quotes, etc. This press release could be partly written in advance if the speeches have already been written and approved.
- ▶ **Do not forget to send a Press Kit to those who did not attend**, the same day or the following day.
- ▶ **Manage Journalists' Requests** regarding details, further information, images, requests of interview, products. Anticipate the questions.
- ▶ **Follow up on the media coverage** of the including making a "press book" with copies of articles, web sites screen shots, as well as MP3 audio files and video for radio and TV. This Press-book serves as proof of the results, for the archives and for commercial support.