

Holding a Press Conference

Adapted courtesy of the American Public Health Association.

A press conference provides an opportunity to get coverage for your issue on television, on the radio, and in the paper. However, in order to be successful, press conferences must be well-organized and present newsworthy information.

First Steps

Making news

You will need to provide new and interesting information at your press conference. Suggestions include a coalition of public health organizations and other groups that are publicly calling on policymakers to provide more funding to expand best practices in your community, the announcement of a new program, or the announcement of a "Best Practices" task force to explore opportunities for expanding/adopting solutions.

Location

Your location should be easy for the media to access. Think about the backdrop for television cameras—and about potential weather concerns if outside. Possible venues include the steps of capital building or town hall, your local press club, or the front lawn of a hospital or clinic.

Timing

Timing is very important for press conferences. Make sure that there are no other events happening at the time of your event. Is the Governor giving a big speech? Is there a protest planned that day at the Capitol? The best days of the week for coverage are Tuesday through Thursday. Press conferences work best in the mornings and early afternoons so that reporters can meet their deadlines.

Breaking news

You can have the best-organized press event in the world—and something major can happen and your story will not get covered as everyone rushes to cover this other "breaking" news. Do not get discouraged if this happens. Try to reschedule your event or reach out to journalists on a one-on-one basis to generate a few stories in the days to come.

Publicity

Inviting an audience

To attract an audience for your press conference, you will need to get your partner organizations to mail or e-mail details about the event to their membership lists and encourage them to attend.

Inviting policymakers

If you want to invite local policymakers to attend or speak at your press conference, then you should send them an invitation as early as possible. You should follow up with a phone call.

Inviting media

To invite media to your press conference, you should contact local journalists who are interested in healthcare issues, including health, medical, business, political, and statehouse reporters. Make sure your media list includes television, radio, and print reporters. Send them a media advisory a few days before the event and then follow up with a phone call.

Logistics

Set-up

The set-up for a press conference should include a podium and a microphone for the speakers to use when delivering their comments. Depending on your venue, you can provide chairs for the audience or they can stand (for example, at the bottom of the Capitol steps). If your press conference is indoors, remember to leave space for television cameras at the back of the room.

Sign in

You should have a sign-in table where you can welcome the media and have them fill out a sign-in sheet with their information. This sheet will help you track which media outlets are attending your event.

Visuals

You should consider the visual impact of your event—especially for television cameras. You may want to display a banner behind the speakers with your organization's name on it or put a sign on the front of the podium. In addition, you may want your audience to reflect your issue. For example, if you are having an event about SCHIP, you may want to have children present.

Press kit

You should put together a press kit to hand out to media at your press conference. Contents of this press kit could include fact sheets, a press release, and other background material on your issue.

Media

Expect television crews to arrive up to half an hour early for your press conference to get their equipment set up. In addition, you may want to find a quiet space where outlets can interview individuals separately after the event.

Program

Moderator

You should select a moderator for your press conference that can introduce the speakers and facilitate Q&A with reporters.

Speakers

You should select no more than three people to speak at the press conference. Each of these speakers should have a specific topic to cover—and should have prepared talking points before the event. Other people can be present to answer questions after the press conference.

Agenda

Begin your press conference on time. The moderator should introduce the speakers, and then each speaker should talk for no more than five minutes. If you invite a policymaker to speak, he or she should be allowed five minutes as well. The moderator should then facilitate a short Q&A session with journalists.

Practice

Have a "dress rehearsal" the day before your press conference to make sure the speakers are ready for the event. Communicating effectively about the role of local health departments to your community, including local policymakers, healthcare providers, citizen groups, and your local governmental partners, is critical. Also essential is to step outside your own frame of reference and tailor what you say and how you say it to the characteristics of your audiences. Effective communication is not about you; it is about *them*.