



KAAAC Advocacy Toolkit

How to Prepare a Press Conference

What is a Press Conference? A press conference is a voluntary presentation of information to the media. In a press conference, you decide what information is presented, how it is presented, and who presents it. It is an opportunity to get your story on TV, radio or in the paper. To hold a press conference you contact the media, pick a time and place, make a presentation and respond to reporters' questions

Define your goals

Before you plan a press conference you should be very clear about your goals. Being clear about your goals will help you do a better job of planning the press conference. Some good reasons for holding a press conference might include:

- to get publicity about your efforts and problems;
- to get widespread media coverage;
- to send a message to a decision maker about what you want;
- to get more people involved in your organization;
- to develop the skills of your members;
- to show the strength of your group.

Whatever your organizational goals are, remember that you have to have something newsworthy to announce, reveal, or talk about at your press conference.

Major steps for setting up a press conference

- **Clearly state a good reason for holding a press conference:** the news you are going to reveal has not been covered in the press yet, or there is an emergency, or an important new issue.
- **Decide what message you want to deliver through the media.** Outline your demands to a decision maker (someone who has the power to give you what you want). Include information about what people can do to help, and the date, time and place of your next action.
- **Work out the location of the press conference.** Find an appropriate place that is convenient and has the facilities you need. Where you choose to have a press conference depends on your needs and the specific circumstances of your situation. Dramatize your position by choosing a good backdrop. If you decide to hold the press conference indoors, be ready to provide technical assistance for reporters, such as phones, microphones, enough light, etc.
- **Set the date and time of the press conference,** taking into account reporters' deadlines. Usually the best days of the week to get news coverage are Tuesday through Thursday. Check to see that there are no competing news events already scheduled at the time of your conference.



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- **Invite the media.** Send a press conference advisory to appropriate local media outlets at least a week before the press conference. Follow up with a phone call two days before the press conference to make sure that everyone received the advisory. Call them the day before to remind them about the event.
- **Invite guests.** Make phone calls and send written invitations to prospective guests you want to have at the press conference, such as other members of your group, allies, and friendly politicians. available after press conference. Prepare your speaker with 30-second answers for radio or TV, and quotable, simple messages for print reporters. Help your speaker practice with a video camera or tape recorder.
- **Prepare your spokesperson(s)** to deliver your message. Generally, it's good to have just one or two speakers during a press conference so people don't talk on top of each other, or mix the message. Rehearse with the speaker(s) to make statements brief and clear and usually no longer than ten minutes. The spokesperson should be experienced in the subject so s/he will be able to respond to questions after the statement. Often reporters will want to interview the spokesperson. Let the press know that the speaker is available after press conference. Prepare your speaker with 30-second answers for radio or TV, and quotable, simple messages for print reporters. Help your speaker practice with a video camera or tape recorder.
- **Choose a moderator** (facilitator) for the press conference. You will need a person to control the process and keep reporters on the subject. If someone goes off subject, the moderator can return the focus by saying such things as: "That's an interesting point, but we are here today to discuss..."
- **Prepare background materials.** Reporters and guests may wish to have a copy of written statements or a press release. You can prepare a packet of factsheets, charts or graphs.
- **Practice roles with the members of your group.** It's important that everybody understands his/her role in the event. Think about what will happen all the way through the press conference, and how it will look to reporters. The key question to ask is "what if..?" (What if reporters ask a non-spokesperson member a question? What if your opponents show up and heckle?)
- **Prepare visual aids.** Charts, big maps, pictures or other props will help get your message across. However, slide shows are difficult for TV, radio and print reporters to use.

Starting the press conference

Be ready to welcome TV reporters at least 15 minutes before the beginning of the conference. They usually need time to set up their equipment. Meet everyone at the door and ask them to sign in a guest book you've already prepared (you may need their addresses for the next event). Give them your background material and a copy of the press statement. Start the press conference as close to on time as possible and certainly not later than ten minutes after the scheduled time, to respect those who came on time.



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Running the press conference

The moderator welcomes everyone and briefly introduces the speaker(s). Remember that statements shouldn't be longer than 10-15 minutes. After the speakers are finished, ask for questions. Make your answers simple, brief, and pointed. A little bit of humor will enliven the press conference, too. Good visual aids make your story more interesting, so be creative. The moderator should end the press conference before things drag out too long. After your important points are made, step in and conclude the proceeding. Thank everyone for coming and offer additional information they can get in your office. Thank them for keeping readers, viewers, and listeners informed about this important community problem.

Making your statement

Think through how you can get your message across through the statement and the set-up of the press conference. You can maximize your impact differently depending on whether you expect TV, radio or print reporters to come.

Television: visual impact

Think: "How can we set up our press conference to give reporters a good picture?"

- Seat speakers at the front close together so they all fit in the picture.
- Seat the audience close to the speakers so they are in the picture. It's good to have children and elderly people on camera.
- Display posters or banners with your group's name, issue and demands written on them.
- Bring props (jars of murky water, gas masks).
- Plan to have an action during the conference with movement and a lots of people and signs to dramatize your message.

Radio: audio impact

Ask: "What sounds would be of interest to radio reporters?" "What can we do to make things technically suitable for broadcast?"

- Radio reporters need uncluttered sound with good acoustics and a minimum of background noise.
- Have a designated, well-prepared spokesperson(s) so everyone is not talking at once.
- Have a prepared statement so the main points can be made clearly, but it sounds better if it doesn't sound like you're reading it! Practice making a statement from notes.
- Only the designated spokesperson(s) should speak to the media during the press conference.
- Singing or chanting make great sound .
- If you're holding the press conference at a rally or event with a lot of people and noise, set up a quiet space away from the action for interviews.



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Print media: verbal impact

Ask: “What would we want if we were newspaper reporters?”

- Provide a press packet with background material.
- Pass out copies of press statements.
- Use simple, powerful, quotable lines when speaking.
- Don't say anything you can't back up with facts. If something is not a proven fact, but you are sure it is true, preface the statement by saying such things as, “in my opinion” or “we believe. . .”.
- Don't bring up anything you are not prepared to discuss. If you are asked questions that you don't want to talk about, say “We're not ready to discuss that matter at this time,” or “Our group has not taken a position on that.”