

## Part 4

# Get Noticed

### Plan a News Conference

There may be times when a news conference or media event is the best way to broadly convey important information about your project, program or coalition agenda to the media.

News conferences offer the opportunity to reach numerous reporters from television, radio, print and trade press at a single event. News conferences *can* be resourceful, efficient and exciting, and they can increase interest in your story. They can even take advantage of the natural competitiveness of the media, increasing the prospects of your story being covered.

**Caution:** Consider a news conference *only* if you have interesting, newsworthy and timely information to announce.

A news conference can be the most appropriate way to:

- announce the formation of a local or regional green industry coalition
- launch a new public education/information program
- announce receipt of a major grant to fund water conservation activities
- release an important survey or study
- publicize a “state-of-the-industry” report in reaction to water restrictions
- achieve critical goals or milestones.

But before you decide to hold a news conference or media event, ask yourself the following:

- Is this story newsworthy, timely and of interest to news-reporting organizations?
- Are there alternative methods of delivering the message that would be equally or more effective (i.e., news release, local media appearances)?
- Will holding the news conference offer reporters special advantages, such as interesting visuals, one-on-one interviews and hearing directly from experts, key elected officials and other important figures?

## Find a Location

Once you've determined that a news conference is the best way to publicize your message, you need to find the right location. It's a key consideration to any media event, and it must be easily accessible and provide an appropriate backdrop for your message. Some potential locations to consider include:

- coalition headquarters or the office of a coalition partner
- facilities that are easily accessible to the media, such as a hotel with meeting rooms, a local press club, water utility, department of environment, agriculture, local agricultural extension service or other identifiable location that will visually demonstrate the message of your news conference.

## Arrange the Accommodations

The location you choose must have adequate space for the following:

- media and other invited guests
- television cameras, enabling easy access to electrical outlets
- audio-visual equipment such as screens, overhead projectors, laptop table for PowerPoint demonstrations.

In addition, at the front of the room or designated location, you will need adequate space to set up these essentials:

- podium
- microphones
- mult box (i.e., an electronic device that allows several broadcast media microphones to receive a voice feed at the same time.)

## Choose a Day

Which day of the week is the smartest choice for a news conference or media event?

**Important:** Avoid Mondays and Fridays

Many reporters will not commit the first day of their week to attend an out-of-office event. On Fridays, they are completing assignments, and most are on deadline, maybe even for the following week. If you release news on a Friday, it will probably fall in the Saturday paper or weekend television news segment, reaching only a limited number of readers and viewers.

You should also avoid weekend news conferences. They just don't work. Reduced staffing at all media outlets will limit your coverage, and weekend assignment editors are difficult to reach.

## Select the Time

Time of day is another key factor to consider. A morning news conference is preferable and provides the best opportunity for a full day's coverage in broadcast media, including the noon news broadcast. It also reduces conflicts with afternoon print deadlines. When possible, a news conference should begin between 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. and last no more than one hour.

**Note:** Respect deadlines. Start on time; the number of people in attendance should not be an issue. Your first point of concern is keeping the media on schedule and giving them what they need to get *your* story “in the works.” The only exception might be the arrival of a dignitary who is essential, or the drawing card, for your event.

## Select Your Speakers

Your coalition spokesperson should be the primary speaker at the event. Otherwise, you must designate someone who is knowledgeable and prepared to answer questions from reporters.

- Create a set of brief talking points, no more than 10 minutes in length, to highlight the primary reason you are holding the news conference.
- Integrate visual aids, if possible, such as large charts, maps, graphs or photos that will be visible from anywhere in the news conference area.
- Consider providing a statement or copy of the speech to reporters after the news conference.
- Have a dry run at least a day before to anticipate possible questions—and even uncomfortable scenarios.

## Who's Attending?

### The Media

If you want your ultimate audience to be the general public, then invite all the media sources in your area, including

- newspapers, dailies and weeklies
- radio stations
- television stations
- trade press (if located in your area).

For newspapers in particular, your list may include environmental reporters, as well as business and garden/lifestyle reporters. If there's news that will affect commercial real estate or management companies, include those “beat” reporters as well. Ultimately, the media outlets will decide who will actually cover the story, but it's best to notify as many different editors and reporters as possible who have a relevant tie to the story about your media event.

## Other Guests

Your news conference is, obviously, for the media. But it's also important to involve other community members. It promotes good will and can help get the word out about your announcement. For that reason, you may also want to invite

- community association leaders
- business leaders with relevant interests from the community
- elected officials from your city, county and state (if they are not going to speak, they should be recognized during the news conference)\*
- public affairs officers from relevant city, county and state agencies who can help disseminate information throughout their agencies, agency newsletters or media outlets
- retailers and wholesalers of your products and/or services.

## Announce the Event

Prepare a media advisory, one page in length, that provides just enough information to capture media interest—but not so much that you give away your story before the news conference. Provide the name and affiliation of anyone who will be available for interviews.

As a rule of thumb, your advisory should always include the following information:

- who
- what
- when
- where
- why.

You should mail, e-mail or fax your media advisory to newsrooms and “daybooks” in your city. You can address it to “News Assignment Editor,” “Business Editor” or “Environmental Editor,” but it is better to send it to a specific person in each newsroom. This makes follow-up confirmation receipt easier. Most newsroom assignment editors will tell you they have it and “it’s on the books,” but few will guarantee that a reporter will be there, although some may indicate interest.

Be sure to designate someone to make follow-up calls. First, faxes are notorious for “getting lost” in the newsroom, and you may have to resend them. Second, calling gives you an opportunity to encourage attendance at the news conference and to ask if the reporter is interested in scheduling an interview with your spokesperson(s) following the event.

\*Mere recognition applies *only* to city or county council members and state legislators. If you invite a mayor, state cabinet member or head of state (governor), you should invite that individual to speak.

In some cases, calling can give you an idea of how many people will attend the event. Television newsrooms will not know until just hours before the event if they will be present.

**Remember:** You are competing against other news that could break at any time, such as a fire or major accident. Don't be discouraged if an unexpected news story takes precedence. Yours may still get coverage, but without videotape of the news conference. You can always follow up with television or radio station news desks by delivering a media kit and offering a telephone or in-person interview.

## Compile a Media Kit

The generally accepted form of distributing information at a news conference is with a **media kit**. Information is typically presented in a folder, but also making it available in electronic format can increase the likelihood of its use. The essential elements of a media kit include the following:

- a news release containing the key information presented at the conference
- fact sheets or background materials that amplify the content of the news conference, provide context and give the reporter basic, factual information helpful to understanding the issue and developing a story
- copies of any prepared statements, graphs, charts or other substantive information presented at the conference
- biography or background information on key spokespersons
- photographs of key spokespersons or other graphics to increase the possibility of a picture accompanying the story.

After the event, messenger copies of the media kit to reporters who usually cover the topic but were not able to attend.

## Get PR Support Online

Check out the press pages of your national association. They often will have news releases and/or industry fact sheets that will save you from re-inventing the wheel. Most associations encourage members to utilize their national press efforts as a resource.

## Additional Resources:

### Web Sites

- International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). ([www.iabc.com](http://www.iabc.com))
- Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). ([www.prsa.org](http://www.prsa.org))

## Budgets and Logistics

### Establish a Budget

Be sure to consider the potential costs associated with the following:

- room rental
- chairs and podium, if additional
- tables for refreshments and/or event registration
- microphone set-up (e.g., traditional, lapel clip-on or wireless)
- photographer and related photo costs such as duplication
- media kit materials—production, printing and copying
- audio-visual needs and materials (e.g., banners, charts, slides, mult box\*, videos, telephone hook-up for radio stations, etc.)
- light refreshments, coffee, pastries
- signage (i.e., directional, event and/or podium).

### Determine the Logistics

Once you've selected your location, address these details to prevent snags on the day of the event:

- arrange the room to facilitate a comfortable flow of traffic
- establish room arrangements with your staff, hotel or site facility management
- provide directional signage that's easy-to-read and follow
- ensure adequate parking onsite or at nearby parking lots; *be sure* to include parking instructions in your media advisory
- create your agenda, designating who will speak first (Limit speakers to no more than five to eight minutes each; total event time should not exceed 30 minutes.)
- include the acknowledgement of dignitaries in remarks and on the agenda
- compile media kits to offer at the registration table
- provide a sign-in sheet or staffed check-in to encourage guest registration.

\*"Mult box" (electronic device allowing several broadcast media microphones to receive a voice feed at the same time)

## Tips for a Successful News Conference

### Day of the Event

- Arrive at least one hour before the event, even earlier if you have to set-up or supervise the set-up of equipment, banners, chairs, podium, podium sign, etc.
- Meet with the speakers at least one-half hour before the event and have them familiarize themselves with the facilities, attend to any last-minute details and relax for a few minutes before the event begins.
- Assign someone the “greeter” role, instructing that person to meet guests as they arrive, direct them to the sign-in table and see them into the conference area. The greeter should be able to answer most questions the attendees may have. Alert your greeter to keep an eye out for dignitaries and immediately direct them to the person in charge, who will then introduce them to the event spokesperson.
- Start the news conference on time.
- Designate an official to welcome the media and briefly mention why the purpose of the news conference. This person should acknowledge VIPs and key speakers, introduce the spokespersons and let the media know who will answer questions at the conclusion of the presentation.
- Have the moderator request that reporters identify themselves by name and media outlet during the question and answer period.

### Conference Post-Mortem

- Evaluate attendance and the quality of the news conference.
- Request feedback from non-partisan attendees.
- Assess the quality of the presentation and include a critique of the spokesperson and audio-visual materials.
- Follow-up with key media who were unable to attend.
- Monitor the media for coverage.

## News Conference Checklist

### Facility

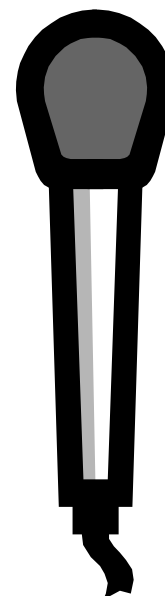
Assess the event location prior to booking and on the morning of the event.

- Site satisfactory
- Space adequate
- Accessible for physically disabled
- Parking available
- Outdoors—grounds in good condition

### Equipment

Test all equipment before and on the day of the event. Allow time for replacement and know whom to contact about equipment problems.

- Microphone/speaker(s)
- Podium (may have a microphone built-in)
- Platform/stage
- Visual equipment (e.g., laptop, screens, easel, charts)
- Heat/air (i.e., where controls are/how to adjust if necessary)
- Video/audio recording equipment, including “mult box”
- Seating
- Registration table
- Sign holders



### Materials

- Signage (in addition to that of the facility)
- Sign-in sheets
- Name tags for special guests and speakers
- Media kits (i.e., folders with news releases, fact sheets, graphs, charts and other relevant material); bring some extras
- Pads and pencils
- Participant materials (e.g., extra set of talking points, releases, background information, etc.)
- Telephone service and Internet dial-up if needed

### Staffing and Set-up

- Speakers
- Greeters
- Staff on-hand and in-place
- Photographer
- Refreshments
- Clean-up