

Maximize Media Attendance: Hold a Successful Press Conference

It is appropriate to hold a press conference when you have significant hard news to release and want to convey it to a broad audience. A successful press conference depends on being well-organized and presenting your news clearly and concisely.

THE LOGISTICS

- ▶ **Pick an easily accessible site.** Your location should be convenient for the media to access and, when possible, relevant to the news you have to announce. (For example, a press conference on a new hospital policy on Plan B emergency contraception might be held in front of the hospital.) There should be enough space for the anticipated number of reporters, as well as any invited guests. Remember to obtain a permit in advance, if needed. Post signs to guide people to the press conference area.
- ▶ **Hold it at the right time.** Timing is very important for press conferences. The best choices for coverage are usually Tuesday through Thursday, in the late morning or early afternoon (between 10 am and 2 pm), so that reporters can meet their deadlines. Avoid competing with other events happening at the same time as your event. Contact your local Associated Press wire bureau to find out what is on its “daybook” — a listing of events happening in a particular area on a particular day.
- ▶ **Make it visual.** Consider the visual impact of your event — especially for photographers and television cameras. Display a banner behind the speakers and on the podium. Be sure these are easy to read and on message. Where appropriate, use the NCJW and Plan A logos.
- ▶ **Create a media-friendly set-up.** The set-up should include a podium and, typically, a microphone for the speakers to use when delivering their comments. Depending on your venue, you can also provide chairs for the speakers and/or attendees. Be sure the media have an unobstructed view of the speakers. And if the press conference is indoors, remember to leave a clear space and access to electricity for television cameras at the back of the room.
- ▶ **Have an audience.** If space permits, invite your allies to attend, so they can be part of your work and also help share your message. Think about including other organizations or prominent individuals in the press conference to add appeal for the media.

THE MEDIA

- ▶ **Invite the media.** For daily publications, send out a media advisory via email and/or fax three to four days before the press conference. Make sure to include wire services (such as the Associated Press and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency) that have daybooks. For weekly publications, it is helpful to send information a few weeks ahead. And for all media, be sure to place a reminder call one or two days before the event.
- ▶ **Prepare take-away materials.** Prepare a press kit to hand out to media representatives at the event. Contents of this kit could include the Plan A fact sheets, a press release (if appropriate, or the media advisory), NCJW Action brochures, biographies of the speakers, charts, *NCJW Journals*, or Plan A campaign brochures. Avoid overwhelming the media with too much paper — include only vital information that a reporter must have to write his or her story. And be sure to include contact information for someone who can be reached after the event to answer any follow-up questions.
- ▶ **Greet the media.** Secure a table where you can welcome media representatives and have them complete a sign-in sheet with their contact information. This sheet will help you track which media outlets attend and provide easy access for any follow-up. It is important to have everything ready at least 30 minutes prior to your press conference. The media will often arrive early to set up equipment and review the press kit.

THE PROGRAM

- ▶ **Use a moderator.** You should select a moderator who can introduce the speakers and facilitate a Q & A session with reporters. The moderator can also control the process and keep reporters on the subject. If a reporter digresses, the moderator can return the focus by saying such things as, “That is an interesting point, but we are here today to discuss...” The moderator should also be prepared, in a subtle and polite manner, to ask speakers who run past their allotted time to wrap up.
- ▶ **Prepare your speakers.** Usually, you should select no more than two to four people to speak. Each speaker should relay a specific part of the message — reporters do not need or want to hear multiple speakers repeating the same things. Speakers should practice prior to the press conference so they are well prepared and able to stay on message. Speakers should share their statements with one another in advance if possible.
- ▶ **Have an agenda.** Start promptly. It is unprofessional to keep the media waiting. The moderator should introduce the speakers, and then each speaker should talk for two to five minutes, depending on the number of speakers. Keeping the speakers to a short amount of time

will help ensure they stay on message. The moderator should then facilitate a short Q & A session with journalists. The entire press conference should not last more than one hour, including the Q & A. Therefore, the presentation portion should be 20 to 30 minutes long.

- ▶ **Arrange individual interviews after the conference.** Reporters often want one-on-one interviews with speakers after the Q & A period. This is a chance to clarify or cover information not brought out in the Q & A. However, speakers need to continue to stay on message and keep their answers short and direct.
- ▶ **Follow up.** Make sure someone is available to respond to questions that reporters might have after the press conference ends and that you provide reporters with a phone number that they can call if they have any additional questions. Send thank-you notes to attendees, reminding them whom to contact for further information. And distribute press kits to key media representatives who were unable to attend.