

HOLDING A MEDIA EVENT

- Develop a media list. Get names, addresses, phone and fax numbers for key members of the media. Keep an extra set of mailing labels ready for quick use and update the list regularly.
- Radio news departments may have only one reporter who possibly does all interviews by phone. If you don't know who covers your issues at larger media, call the newspaper or TV news and ask. Sometimes "beats" overlap. You may send the release to the labor reporter, for examples, but also to the education, health or government reporter, newspaper city editor, and TV and radio news directors as well. Better to send too many than to miss the appropriate one.
- Find out deadlines. Observe them. Stories often don't get used because they are sent to the media too late to cover an event or too long after an event has occurred. Reporters on deadline can be under considerable stress, so that's no time to call for a friendly chat.
- Pick a convenient site and time for reporters that avoid deadlines and rush-hour traffic. Mid-morning or early afternoon is good.
- Sometimes outdoor sites are the most attractive, for example in front of an appropriate well-known public building. Then TV crews don't have to bother with artificial lights. But you have to risk changes in weather and unexpected noise.
- Indoors, know beforehand where the electrical plugs and light switches are. Be able to turn off air conditioning if the fan noise interferes with sound recording. Unplug phones so they don't ring while you're talking. You probably won't need a microphone or sound amplifier. However, you will need a podium so TV and radio reporters can attach their own microphones.
- Make sure reporters get your "Five W" press release advisory at least two days before the news conference. What you mail or fax is very similar to a press release. The main difference is that rather than incorporate the "Five W's" in narrative, sentence form, simply list --- like on a party invitation --- the Who, What, When, etc.
- Call each reporter to confirm receipt of the release and ask if they plan to attend. Target certain reporters for special nudging, even up to the last minute.
- For reporters who do not attend, arrange for speedy fax or hand-delivery of your news conference handouts
- While you need a press release for reporters, the press release also serves the important purpose of being a guide to follow in making your verbal presentation. Essentially follow the points in the press release. Read it over many times before the news conference and then speak from notes or highlighted sentences in the press release. Usually, five minutes is plenty of time for an opening presentation.
- Practice saying the main points that you will keep coming back to, regardless of where reporters' questions seem to lead.

PRESS KITS

Press kits can be handed out at a news conference or any other event when background information about the health center is needed. The kit can be a simple folder, ideally with the health center's decal on the front if you have one. Contents should always be on health center letterhead with a contact name and phone number. The press kit may include some or all of these:

- A news release
- A copy of the spokesperson's statement
- A fact sheet on the issue at hand
- An agenda of your event with correct names and titles of participants * Copies of any charts and graphs helpful in making the union's point
- A fact sheet on the health center
- Relevant news articles or other materials that will help the media understand the issue
- biographical paragraphs about the health center's leaders or speakers

PLANNING PRESS CONFERENCES

Send your message to the media, particularly TV, with a well-organized press conference to highlight a special event (a voter registration drive) or a specific local news angle (a voter's poll on community issues affecting children) IMPORTANT: Don't call a news conference if you don't have significant news. The media does not want to spend time on a "no-news" story and it will be difficult to get their attention in the future when you do have a newsworthy event. Focus media attention on your message by being prepared:

- State the facts concisely.
- Invite community leaders to the press conference to show support for the event or issue.
- Have the specifics—fact sheets, data—in writing as backup source documents for the media.

Steps to Take

- Decide on the message you want to get across.
- Plan the amount of time that will be devoted to statements and questions.
- Select a moderator, spokesperson, experts and community leaders who will speak.
- Determine the press you want to invite. Remember that you might want to target reporters you don't normally have contact with, e.g. political writers or family page feature writers. Also remember to invite local foreign language representatives of cable, community radio and television and print media.
- Avoid dates that conflict with other major scheduled news events. If possible check with major candidates' campaign offices to avoid having to compete with events they might be staging. In major cities, Saturday or Sunday press conferences can be especially effective. They are often slow news days, thereby maximizing your chances for good newspaper and television coverage. More newspapers are sold on Sundays than any other day of the week, but there are fewer TV news viewers on Saturdays and Sundays.
- Remember that the best time to hold a press conference is between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. Find out what the key media deadlines are in your area and plan accordingly. The best time for an afternoon newspaper is not necessarily the best time for a morning newspaper. However, there are times that are useful to both.
- Make certain you have an adequate amount of space and adequate lighting for TV cameras. Choose a place convenient for the media.
- Invite all the candidates running for a current office to be in your audience or former public official to stress the importance of what you're doing for kids and families and members of other allied organizations to your press conference. An important office holder often draws press to the event, while members of other groups lend credibility to your efforts.
- Make sure the speakers know their subject. They should be prepared to make one major point (envision the headline the next day), and a thousand supportive points. It never hurts to be over prepared. Beforehand, it is helpful to practice answers to likely questions. Whenever possible,

hold your briefing sessions for the speaker on the day before the news conference. The last thing you want is a speaker who is taut as piano wire because he was cramming information until the last moment.

- Mail a press advisory with the pertinent information.
- Follow the mailing with a phone call a day or two after it should have been received. On a breaking story, be sure you call each of the major media outlets on your list. You want to give the press as much time as possible, but sometimes you can only give a couple of hours notice. Make sure you speak with a key editor or reporter if you are on a short time schedule. Be aware of one risk when putting out a press advisory announcing that your organization will make a major statement or unveil some significant project in a few days. In competitive news areas, a good newspaper may try to break your story the same day it receives notice of your press conference. An aggressive reporter or editor may decide not to wait until your press conference to find out what the big news is all about. Reporters love nothing more than breaking a good story ahead of their competition. So, once you put out the word that you're about to make a major announcement, be prepared to fend off questions from curious reporters. This could be good, because news conferences are most useful for broadcasters, and television often follows news reports that have hit the morning newspaper.
- Prepare press kits with fact sheets about your campaign, information about the participating organizations and contact names.
- Arrange the room, leaving enough space in front and on the sides for TV cameras. Make sure you have enough chairs, tables, lighting, electrical outlets, a podium and microphone, if needed. Radio and TV reporters will want a place to anchor their mikes near the speaker. Make sure the room is open about 30 minutes early so TV crews can set up.
- Prepare appropriate and attractive visuals. Imagine how your news conference will look to a television viewer. Don't place your speaker in front of a sunny window; she'll appear as a silhouette. Similarly, don't camouflage the speaker against a distracting background. Do consider hanging your banner or sign behind the speaker to reinforce your message. You may also want to flank your speaker with other members of your coalition as a show of solidarity and substance. Avoid having too many speakers, however.
- Start planning for the news conference as soon as you know you have a newsworthy activity that is appropriate for release at a news conference.
- Send press alerts four to five days before the press conference.
- Notify the press usually two or three days before the event.