

# HOW TO HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE



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## What is a press conference?

A press conference is a public event where an individual or organization shares important news with journalists through a public statement and Q&A. Often used to announce major updates, respond to crises, or launch campaigns, press conferences help generate timely media coverage and shape public understanding. With the right preparation, they're a powerful way to share your message and engage a wider audience.

Organizing a press conference may seem daunting, but grassroots community groups do it all the time—and so can you. With thoughtful preparation and a clear message, anyone can hold a successful press event that gets attention, engages the media, and amplifies their cause.

## Why should I hold a press conference?

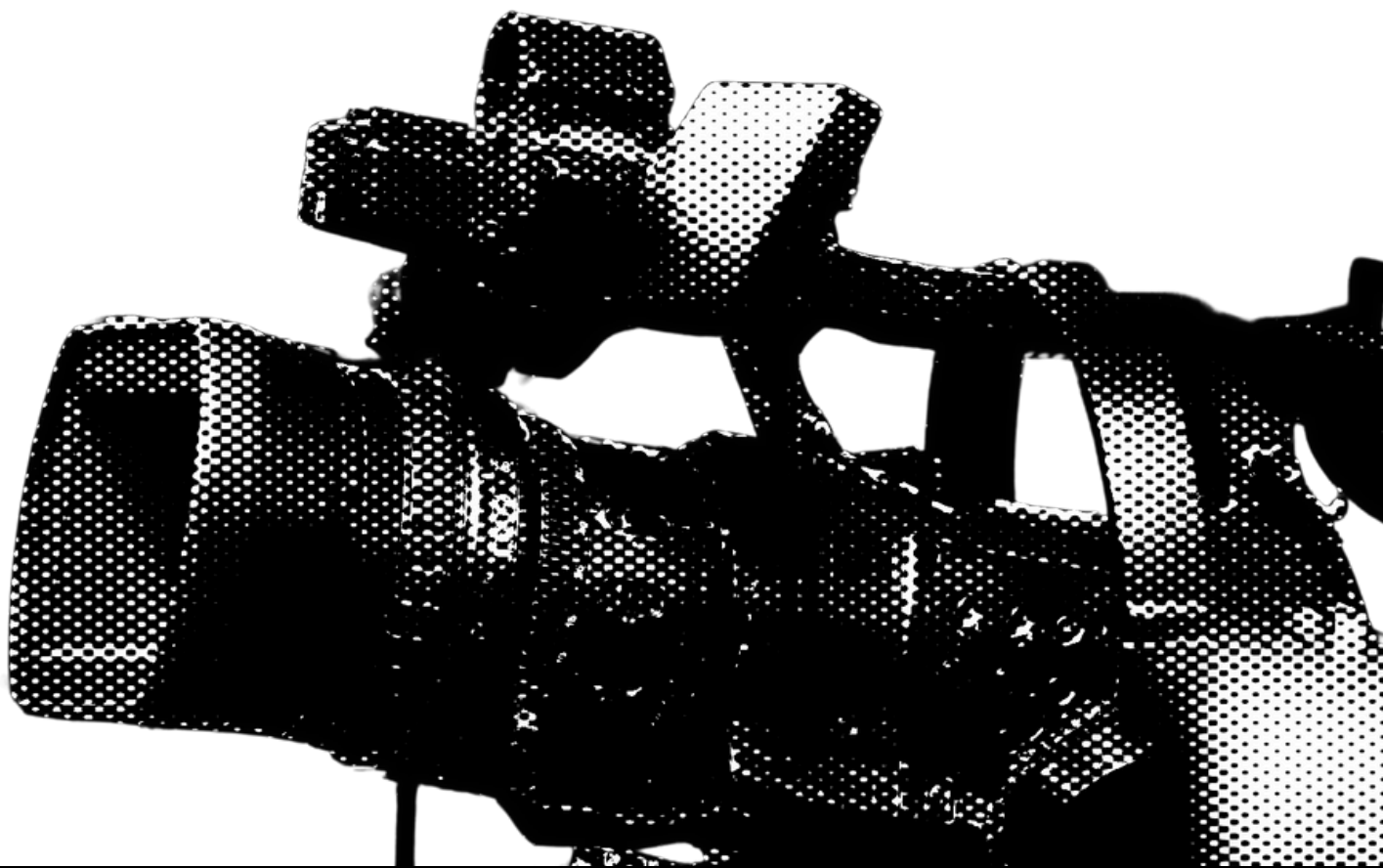
A press conference is a powerful way to share timely, newsworthy information with the public through the media. Unlike a press release, it allows for real-time interaction with journalists—offering space to provide more detail, respond to questions, and emphasize key points. Press conferences are best reserved for major announcements, such as breaking a big story, introducing new research, responding to controversy, launching a major initiative, or featuring high-profile speakers. When well-executed, they not only generate valuable media coverage but also signal the importance of your message and boost morale within your organization.

# HOW TO HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE

## When should I hold a press conference?

Press conferences should be used selectively to preserve their impact and maximize media interest. They are most effective when announcing timely, newsworthy developments—such as a major campaign launch, urgent response, or coordinated action across organizations.

To increase your chances of coverage, choose a weekday morning for your event, ideally Tuesday through Thursday, which are typically slower news days. The best window is between 10:00 and 11:00 a.m., giving reporters enough time to file stories for noon or evening newscasts without conflicting with tight deadlines. Avoid Mondays and Fridays, and always begin on time out of respect for journalists' schedules.



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## Where should I hold my press conference?

The right location can transform your press conference into a visual, emotional, and strategic message. Ideally, the site should not only be accessible—it should reflect the struggle, lift up frontline voices, and make the media feel the stakes.

- **Pick a Site That Tells the Story:** Ideally, the site should not only be accessible—it should reflect the struggle, lift up frontline voices, and make the media feel the stakes. For example, choose a place tied to the issue—polluted neighborhoods, flood zones, clinics, schools, or government buildings.
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- **Prioritize Accessibility:** Make sure the site is easy to reach by car or transit. Ensure there's parking, especially for media vehicles and equipment.
- **Keep Sound and Lighting in Mind:** Avoid noisy areas (traffic, construction, overhead aircraft).
- **Size the Space Right:** Avoid huge rooms that look empty. A packed, energetic crowd creates a stronger impression.



# HOW TO HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE

## Using Visuals at Your Press Conference:

Visuals can greatly enhance your press conference by reinforcing your message and making it more memorable for reporters and audiences. Use large-format posters, banners, signs, community art, or charts behind speakers to create a compelling backdrop. Organizations may also display banners with their logos or have speakers wear organizational or campaign t-shirts to boost brand recognition and unify the team visually.



Photo Credit: Gabe Castro, Washington D.C. Climate Strike, October 22, 2021..

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## Preparing the space

A well-prepared space can make or break your press conference. Use this step-by-step guide to ensure your event is smooth, professional, and press-ready.

- **Confirm Technical Needs:** If your event is indoors, check for working outlets and test all equipment—microphones, speakers, and lighting. Make sure Wi-Fi is available, and have a phone or email contact ready for last-minute coordination. Decide if you'll use a podium or mic stand, and ensure there's a stable place for the microphone.
- **Arrange the Speaker Area:** Set up a podium or table long enough to accommodate all spokespeople. Position everyone so they can be seen clearly together in camera frames. If you are using visuals like charts, posters, or logos, make sure they're placed at eye level so they're not blocked by participants or lost in the frame.
- **Set up for media:** Designate a space where journalists can check in, collect materials, and ask questions. Assign someone from your team to act as the "meeter and greeter" to welcome members of the press and help them get oriented. A sign-in sheet or attendance pad should be available to track who attends. Consider preparing and making available materials that may be helpful to the media, such as fact sheets, graphs, reports, press releases, or copies of any speeches being delivered.

# HOW TO HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE

## Alerting the media

To get media attention, send a brief media advisory about a week before your press conference to assignment editors, news directors, and reporters. Follow up by phone a few days later, the day before, and the morning of the event to boost coverage chances.

### Learn how to create a media advisory

Use this link to read our Media Advisory Guide.



## Selecting and Preparing Your Speakers:

- **Selecting Speakers:** Choose speakers who are compelling, credible, and ideally, directly impacted by the issue at hand. Their stories carry weight. At least one high-profile participant—such as a tribal leader, medical professional, local official, or respected activist—can help attract media attention and lend legitimacy. But don't stop there. Aim for a broad cross-section of speakers from different sectors, and prioritize racial, gender, and economic diversity. Even if some participants don't speak, their presence sends a strong message of collective concern and deep community support.

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- **Grounding Speakers in the Message:** clear, unified message is essential. Brief all speakers in advance on the event's purpose and main narrative. Each should focus on one or two key points—lived experience, expert insight, or a call to action. Avoid jargon or overly complex explanations; the audience may include reporters, officials, and neighbors unfamiliar with policy. Keep language simple, emotional when appropriate, and rooted in real-life impacts. If possible, hold a prep session to coordinate content, refine talking points, and practice handling tough questions, building confidence and cohesion.





# HOW TO HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE

- **Keeping It Short and Impactful:** To maintain attention and ensure everyone gets heard, keep the entire event brief—ideally 20 to 30 minutes, including time for Q&A. Each speaker must strictly adhere to their time limit (2–4 minutes, depending on the total number of speakers). Encourage speakers to write down their statements and provide printed copies to the media. These can be included in press kits or placed on a media table.
- **Create a program/order of speakers:** Clearly list each speaker and the sequence of their remarks. Sharing this program with speakers ahead of time ensures everyone knows their allotted slot, helps the event stay on schedule, and can be included in the press kit or on the media table for press.



# HOW TO HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE

- **Facilitating a Strong Q&A:** Assign a moderator to guide the Q&A and help it stay focused and respectful. Encourage questions from reporters and the public, but keep answers concise and grounded in your core message. If a question is directed to no one in particular, the moderator or host should be ready to step in. Avoid introducing new issues—use every answer to circle back to your main themes. If no one knows the answer to a question, it's okay to say so and promise to follow up. After the Q&A, be prepared for one-on-one interview requests. These can be great opportunities to clarify key points or offer deeper insights.
- **Guidance for Speakers:** Let speakers know they don't have to answer questions they're unprepared for or don't want to address. In short: stay on message. Reporters may seek controversy or frame your issue in ways that don't reflect your work accurately. Remember, reporters are not our enemies, but they are not our friends either. Never share anything you don't want in the news, and don't take the bait to comment on unrelated individuals or controversies. Answer the question you want them to ask, not the one they ask, and always reinforce your core message.



# PRESS CONFERENCE CHECKLIST

## 3-4 Weeks Out

Select a date	
Begin searching for potential speakers.	
Begin searching for a moderator for the Q and A portion	
Begin searching for a location	
Build your targeted media list.	

## 2 Weeks Out

Finalize and confirm your speakers	
Finalize and confirm a moderator for the Q and A portion	
Finalize location, including a back-up indoor location if your event will be outside.	
Begin creating visuals for the press conference	

# PRESS CONFERENCE CHECKLIST CONT'D

## 1 Week Out

Finalize media advisory and press kits	
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## 5 Days Before

Send out news advisory to all outlets.	
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## Day Before

Follow up with media one final time	
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Print and assemble press kits	
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Assign someone from your team to act as the "meeter and greeter" to welcome members of the press and help them get oriented.	
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# PRESS CONFERENCE CHECKLIST CONT'D

## Day Of

Set up a podium or table long enough to accommodate all spokespeople.

Set up visuals at eye level so they're not blocked by participants or lost in the frame.

Set up a space where journalists can check in, collect materials, and ask questions. A sign-in sheet and printed press kits should be ready for distribution if needed.

Hold your press conference!

## Day After

Collect all clips.

Update your media list with any new contacts you made