



# NEWS CONFERENCES

MEDIA ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

Hold a news conference when you have something to say that is new, can be enhanced visually and through charismatic spokespersons. An old newspaper adage describes the difference between an item that is newsworthy and one that is not: "Dog bites man is not a story but man bites dog is."

Applying this philosophy to your issue can help determine whether or not a news conference is appropriate. Remember, if you hold a news conference and no one comes, you may lose face with those you have recruited as spokespersons, as well as with the press.

Be sure to use good audiovisual materials to enhance your information. Charts, graphs, pictures, and other visuals should be large enough to be seen from a distance. They should deliver the point you want to make in effective and attractive ways.

Examples of reasons to hold a press conference include:

- Opening of a new senior center.
- Launching of a new campaign to help seniors with a specific opportunity.
- Celebration of Older Americans Month with celebrity older Americans.

In general, press conferences should be called by larger organizations that are prepared and equipped to deal with the media.

## STEPS FOR HOLDING A PRESS CONFERENCE

- **Getting the word out:** Announce the conference with a media advisory or a news release, but hold the important information for the event itself. The advisory should be sent out 3 to 5 days before the event to give the media enough time to schedule a reporter to cover it. Then send a reminder 2 days before the event. Follow up on the advisory with a phone call the day before to insure media attendance. This is when your media inventory and media relations become crucial. Be sure to call reporters who have shown an interest in or covered your issue in the past.
- **Place and time:** Make sure the location you choose will accommodate the media (i.e., has a sufficient number of electrical outlets, good lighting, and enough space). The news conference should be held early in the day to give the media time to develop and edit their stories. Monday through Thursday are usually the best days for hard news coverage. If television and radio reporters attend the conference, plan on the camera and sound crews arriving well before starting



time to set up. They may want to tape some brief interviews with your speakers before the news conference begins. Allow extra time with your spokespersons for interviews before and after the conference.

- **Spokespersons:** Feature good speakers who are issue experts or community leaders. Always ask, is this person interesting enough to watch on TV or listen to on the radio? Before the news conference, discuss the agenda with your speakers, explain the questions they might anticipate, and practice the answers they should provide. Develop talking points that communicate your main messages. Make sure that each speaker is addressing a different topic and not repeating information given by another speaker. (See "The Messenger Is as Important as the Message" and "Media Interviews.")
- **Materials:** At the event, distribute media kits that include an agenda, background information on the issue being addressed, brief bios of your speakers, and other materials that support your issue. (Click here for "Developing a Press Kit.")