

TIPS FOR Planning a News Conference

SafeRoutes
National Center for Safe Routes to School



TIP SHEET

One common way of engaging the media is to host a news conference to announce news-worthy information regarding your Safe Routes to School program. News conferences are a great way to announce new developments in your Safe Routes to School program and maximize the efficiency of your time – you can speak to the media simultaneously as opposed to doing many separate interviews.

Deciding Whether to Hold One

Before you launch into planning the news conference, conduct a good analysis of whether you really need the media to physically be on site to receive the information you would like to convey. If you can obtain good media coverage by simply sending out a news release or a press kit, you might want to rethink your decision to hold a news conference. If the media's on-site presence is essential to getting good coverage, use the following guidelines for holding a good news conference.

Preparation

Develop the media list to identify who should be notified of the news conference. This list should include reporters who cover the subject matter of the news conference, for example reporters who cover education or health-related stories.

Determine time and location. Pick a room or location with plenty of lighting and enough space for the news media, their crew and equipment. If your news conference is going to be held outdoors, make sure to develop a contingency plan in the event of bad weather. It is typically best to schedule a news conference on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday in the mid-morning. Try to keep the news conference to 30 minutes, including the question and answer portion.

Secure the speaker(s) for the news conference. Including a prominent or high-ranking member of your organization can increase the media attention you receive, but make sure the individual is knowledgeable enough to answer the media's questions.

Tie-in with creative and meaningful events. Make your news conference exciting by incorporating fun, creative and meaningful event ideas. For example, if you're announcing the launch of a Walk to School program, hold your event at a park close to a local school, encourage children and parents to meet at the park and walk together following the news conference.

Invite the media. Once the details are finalized, distribute the news alert or media advisory containing the details of your news conference. This document should be typed, kept to one page in length and include the following: What – brief summary of news conference; Who – information on speakers; Where – including any specifics on parking or access; When – Date and time; and Significance; information on why the media should attend.

Practice, practice, practice. Anticipate questions the media will ask and prepare the speaker with talking points. If possible, conduct a run-through the day before the event.

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Materials

Develop a press kit to accompany your news conference. Suggested materials for the press kit include:

- News release
- Speakers statement
- Speaker bio
- Backgrounders
- Fact sheets

Incorporate visuals into your news conference. Large printouts of charts, graphics or program logos make a great visual element for the media to use.

Logistics

Check in. Provide a check-in area for media to sign in. It is a good idea to capture who attended the news conference. This can also be an area where you pass out press kits and offer any assistance to the media.

Think about access to the building where the news conference is being held. Ask questions such as; Are there access restrictions to the location of the news conference? Are there parking considerations that the media will need to be made aware of? Think about any potential hurdles to the media attending your news conference and seek solutions to those hurdles.

On The Day

Record the news conference on video or audio if possible. This will be a great resource to make available on a Web site and offer to media who were not able to attend.

Start on time. Respect the time of those attending and make sure to start the news conference on time.

Cover the phone. Make sure that someone is covering the phone number that was included on the media materials. Even if the news conference is outside of the office, it is important that someone with knowledge of the news conference details can answer at that phone number.

Follow Up

After the news conference, follow up with any media that did not attend. They still may be interested in the story. Use the press kit to provide information.



For more resources and information on Safe Routes to School, please visit the National Center for Safe Routes to School Web site at www.saferoutesinfo.org.