



Mayors Wellness Campaign

Put your community in motion.

Holding A Press Conference

There are times when a press conference or media event is the best way to broadly deliver important information about the Mayors Wellness Campaign (MWC) to the press. Press conferences and media events offer the potential for reaching many reporters from newspapers as well as television and radio stations at a single event. Press conferences can be an efficient way of telling your story and they can be exciting as well. They heighten interest in the story and may even reinforce the natural competitiveness of the press, increasing the prospects of your story being covered.

All of this is predicated, however, on having interesting, newsworthy, and timely information to announce. If the event does not live up to its billing, reporters probably will not cover it, and it will be much harder to bring them out for a subsequent event. Therefore, consider the following points in deciding if you should hold a press conference:

- Is this particular MWC story newsworthy, timely, and of interest to news-reporting organizations?
- Are there better means (press release) of delivering your message that would be equally or more effective?
- Does the press conference offer reporters special advantages, such as interesting visuals and hearing directly from experts, key officials, and other important figures?
- As a final word of caution, be mindful that successful press conferences involve a great deal of time and effort and should not be undertaken without good reason. Even with a strong MWC topic and story, you cannot guarantee press attendance.

Where to Hold a Press Conference

Once you have decided to hold a MWC press conference, you must determine where it should be held. In considering the location, be sure it is easily accessible to the media. Your local municipal building is always a good choice, as it is generally centrally located and the press is accustomed to going there.

On occasion, however, you will want to have a press conference or media event at a location that is directly related to the MWC topic, such as a school, senior center, local business or at a local park.

Certain needs will have to be met wherever the press conference is held:

- The area must have space to accommodate the media and guests.
- If you expect television coverage, there should be sufficient space to set up cameras, and easy access to electrical outlets (unless it is an outdoors event).
- For an outdoors event, an “inclement weather” alternative location should be in place.
- What Day and Time are ideal for a Press Conference or Media Event?

When planning a press conference, the day of week and time of day are important considerations. In general, avoid Mondays and Fridays. Few reporters are willing to commit to a Monday event. Like many people, they prefer to begin the week in the office and often have meetings scheduled that day. Friday typically is a wrap-up day, with reporters and editors rushing to complete assignments against both the day's and week's deadlines.

It is preferable to schedule a press conference in the morning, because this offers the best opportunity for a full day's coverage in broadcast media. It also reduces conflicts with afternoon print deadlines. When possible, a press conference should last no more than one hour and begin between 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. Respect deadlines. Start the event on time, even if few people are in attendance.

Weekend press conferences are not a good idea, because the media will have greatly reduced staffs. Further, it is generally difficult to reach weekend staff before the event, because many are not available during the week.

Who to Invite to the Press Conference

Your media "universe" depends on the size of your municipality. Obviously, the larger your area, the more print outlets, radio and television stations will serve you. But all New Jersey municipalities are served by some media outlets.

How to Invite the Media to a Press Conference

The most common way to invite reporters to a press conference is with a media advisory. The advisory provides reporters with enough information to decide if they should attend the press conference, but not enough to make them feel they have the full story. If participants are available for interviews, state that in your advisory. Fax, mail or email the media advisory one week before the event to give editors time to assess the story and make decisions about coverage. In some cases, you may want to invite more than one person, such as a metro reporter and a health or lifestyle reporter. Both may have an interest in the story, but from different perspectives.

It is important to make follow-up calls a day or two before the event, for several reasons. First, faxes are notorious for "getting lost" and you may have to resend. Second, calling gives you an opportunity to sell the press conference to the reporter, and to ask if he or she is interested in scheduling an interview with your spokesperson(s) following the event. The goal is to generate interest in your topic. Finally, calling may give you an idea of how many people might attend the event.

What Materials to Give to the Media

Generally, you should distribute a press kit at a press conference or media event. Some key elements of a press kit include:

- A press release containing the key information presented at the conference

- Fact sheets or background materials that will amplify the content of the press conference, provide context, and give the reporter basic, factual information helpful to understanding the issue and developing a story
- Copies of any prepared statements, graphs, charts, or other substantive information presented at the conference
- Biography or background information on key spokesperson(s)
- Following the event, it is a good practice to deliver copies of the press kit to reporters who cover the topic but could not attend

How to Prepare Your Mayor or other Spokesperson for the Event

It is a good practice to have a primary spokesperson for your MWC press conference or media event. In most instances, that should be the Mayor. Whoever is selected should be prepared for the event and ready to answer reporters' questions.

To assist in that effort:

- Develop a brief statement — less than 10 minutes is a good rule-of-thumb — and a set of “talking points” that focus on your key messages
- Consider using visual aids such as poster-size charts or overheads. If you produce visuals, they should be clear and easily understood, and visible from any point in the press area
- Anticipate questions and prepare clear, brief answers
- Provide the statement, “talking points,” and Q&As to your Mayor or other spokesperson and anyone else who might be answering questions. (Note: Do not distribute talking points or Q&As; they are for internal use only)
- Schedule a rehearsal. You may want to have several people there to give it the feel of the actual event, and you may want to videotape it to assess and improve the presentation
- Decide how questions will be handled. If more than one person is involved in the presentation, it is a good idea to have a moderator who is knowledgeable about the participants and can call on the best person to answer each question

After the Press Conference

- Consider sending thank you notes to the VIPs who attended
- Distribute press kits to key media who were unable to attend
- Monitor the press for coverage

Ten Quick Tips for a Successful Press Conference

1. Plan ahead. At least two weeks before the event, talk about what you want to do and how you want to do it.

2. Tell your MWC team about your ideas; get ideas from other stakeholders and decide on the message you want to get out.
3. Prepare props, posters, banners and a press kit.
4. Organize a list of reporters you plan to contact about your news conference.
5. Write, email and fax a media advisory.
6. Write the statement you plan to make at the press conference.
7. Finalize all details. Write a news release.
8. Call reporters to remind them about the press conference.
9. On the day of the conference or event, arrive early to situate speakers, organize materials, etc.
10. After the conference is over, deliver copies of your news release and statements to any reporters who were not able to attend.