

## **\*\* PRESS CONFERENCE \*\***

2 hours, 15 minutes  
One or two facilitators  
Five to twelve participants

### **BACKGROUND:**

Participants should be familiar with strategy and tactics prior to taking part in this session.

“Icebreaker: Press Interviews” is recommended for this session.

### **PURPOSE:**

For participants to plan and prepare for a press conference.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- (1) To define what a press conference is;
- (2) To set goals for the press conference;
- (3) To decide the key points for the press statement;
- (4) To learn tips on visual impact, audio impact and verbal impact at a press conference.
- (5) To develop a press conference agenda
- (6) To target media to attend the press conference
- (7) to develop a list of logistics for the press conference
- (8) To get people to volunteer for tasks
- (9) To practice telephoning media personnel to attend the press conference.
- (10) To practice a press conference; and,
- (11) To set a date for a dry run of the press conference.

### **METHODS:**

- (1) What a press conference is {5 minutes}

Ask the group “What is a press conference?” Some key points to bring out are:

- It is an opportunity to get your story in the media
- You contact the media, pick out a time and place, make a presentation to the media and respond to the questions of the reporters
- A press conference is voluntary presentation of information to the media—you decide what information is to be presented, how it is presented and who presents it.

Before going on to the next section, ask a participant to define a press conference and make sure he/she articulates it satisfactorily.

- (2) Goals of the press conference {10 minutes}

Have the participants take a few minutes to think of the goals for the press conference. Ask them for their responses and list the responses on newsprint. Keep the goals fairly simple. Some reasons for holding a press conference might include:

- To get publicity

- To get statewide media coverage
- To get our target to respond to our demands
- To get more people involved in our organization
- To show the strength of our group

Then explain that a press conference is a tactic. For all tactics, you should have a clear target and clear demands. Ask the group, “Who is (are) your target (s)? (If necessary, remind them that a target is someone who can give you what you want.) List the responses on newsprint.

Then ask, “what are your demands” (If necessary, remind them that demands are things you want your target (s) to do.) List the responses on newsprint.

(3) Key points of the press statement {10 minutes}

Based on the goals, targets and demands they have chosen, ask, “what should the key points of your press conference be?” List the responses on newsprint.

(4) Press conference tips {15 minutes}

An important consideration when setting up a press conference is how to create the best visual, audio, and verbal impact. The facilitator should ask the group to think about each of these and come up with ideas for their press conference. Record the responses on newsprint.

a. Visual impact: Ask the group to imagine that they are TV cameraperson (s) attending the press conference. Ask, “What would be of interest to these persons?” A photographer is looking for the best picture. Ask the group, “How could you set up your press conference so it would make a good picture?”

Sample responses:

- Seating arrangement with speakers at the front, seated close together so they all fit in the picture.
- Posters with the group’s name, issue and demands written on them.
- Props such as jars of murky water, gas masks, etc.
- Audience seated close to the speakers so they are in the picture, with some children and elderly people next to speakers to enhance the emotional impact.

b. Audio impact: Ask the group to imagine that they are radio reporters attending the press conference. Ask, “What would be of interest to radio reporters?” They would be looking for things that sound interesting and exciting. Ask the group, “What could you do to make things technically suitable for broadcast (uncluttered sounds with good acoustics and minimum of background noise)?”

Sample responses:

- Have designated spokesperson(s) so everyone is not talking at once; spokespersons should be well prepared.
- Have a prepared statement so main points can be made clearly (but it is better not to just read it!).
- Use simple, powerful, quotable lines when speaking

- Only the designated spokesperson(s) should speak to the media during the press conference.

c. Verbal impact: Have the group imagine they are newspaper reporters. “What would you want if you were newspaper reporters?”

Sample responses:

- Press packet with background material
- Pass-out copy of press statement

d. Ask participants what libel and slander are. Some key points to make are:

- Slander is a false and defamatory oral statement about someone; libel is a false and defamatory written statement about someone.
- The rule of thumb is: Don’t say anything you can’t back up with facts.
- If something is not a proven fact, but you are sure it is true, preface the statement by saying such things as , “ in my opinion” or “it seems like” or “it appears that...”
- Don’t say anything you are not prepared to discuss. If you do not want to talk about something, say such things as, “We’re not prepared to discuss that matter at this time,” or, “ Our group has not taken a position on that matter.”

[Take a 5-minute break here.]

(5) Press conference agenda {10 minutes}

Ask the participants to come up with an agenda for the press conference. Write this on newsprint and post it for use in planning logistics and preparing for the role-play.

(6) Media targets {5 minutes}

Ask the participants to name what specific media they want to attend the press conference and why they want each one. Make a list on newsprint.

| <b>MEDIA</b> | <b>WHY</b> | <b>Who will contact</b> |
|--------------|------------|-------------------------|
|              |            |                         |

(7) Press conference preparations/logistics {10 minutes}

The facilitator should help the group come up with a list of logistics that must be done before the press conference. Be as specific as possible: bring coffee and water, get tables and chairs, write press statement, copy things for press packet, contact the press, meet the press the day of the conference, spokesperson, etc. Write these on newsprint.

(8) Volunteers to do tasks {15 minutes}

After you list the logistics and preparations on newsprint, ask who will do them and write their names beside the tasks.

(9) Practicing telephone calls to media {10 minutes}

Have the person who volunteered to contact the press act out a phone call to one of the media contacts. The facilitator should be the media person and try to get out of

coming. This way the telephone-er will have to be convincing, making the press conference sound so interesting and newsworthy that the press won't want to miss it. Have the caller evaluate his/her performance; then ask the other participants for their comments.

(10) Practicing the role play {40 minutes}

The facilitator should explain that the group will do a practice run of the press conference. Assign everyone to the roles they will have at the real press conference, with the exception of one or two people who will help the facilitator(s) play the role of the media. Tell the participants they have 10 minutes to set up everything. Meanwhile, those acting as the media will leave the room. Tell the participants to act as though it is the real thing and that they should work on content as much as format. During the 10 minutes, the facilitator and others playing the media should come up with a list of questions.

Here are some samples:

- Why did you decide to have a press conference?
- What is the group's position on (something they have not taken a position on)?

In the role play, the facilitator, should try to trip up the spokesperson with leading questions, ask about the group, disrupt the planned agenda, and take control away from the group. The facilitator should not dominate or destroy the role-play, but point to places that could cause trouble. Also, the facilitator should ask non-designated spokesperson (s) a question. (25 minutes)

After the role-play, ask the main participants to critique their performance, then ask the other observers. The facilitator should also point out things that might be improved. In evaluating the role-play, refer back to the agenda and to the goals for the press conference. Also refer to the tips and see if there are good visual, audio, and verbal impacts. List on newsprint important points to be remembered or acted upon. (15 minutes)

[Please note: The facilitator should make sure that the participants are aware that the press folks may ask for individual interviews after the formal presentation. Discuss how to handle such interviews. Also, the participants should know that if they explain an answer poorly during the press conference, or don't have all the facts straight, they can approach individual media people after the formal presentation to clarify and answer. ]

(11) Review and plan {10 minutes}

Choose a date when you want to have the next meeting to do a dry run of the press conference. Review the list of tasks and make sure everyone knows what they are supposed to do by the next meeting. Set a tentative date, time, and place for the press conference so that media can be contacted, sites, reserved, etc. The "practice" press conference should be as close to the real thing as possible. This means having the press statement and press packets ready to be presented and distributed, bringing the posters and props, etc.

**PRODUCTS/OUTCOME:**

1. A participant can articulate what a press conference is;
2. A list of goals of the press conference;
1. A list of key points of the press statement;
2. A list of tips on visual, audio, and verbal impact at the press conference;
3. An agenda for the press conference;
4. A list of the media desired at the press conference;
5. A list of tasks to be done;
6. A list of volunteers who will do the tasks;
7. Practice calling the press for the press conference;
8. Practice doing a press conference; and,.
9. A date for a dry run of the press conference.

**MATERIALS:**

Newsprint, markers, easel, tae, extra paper, pens, and a list or directory of area media. (Optional: a sample press packet).

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