

4 Holding a press conference

When considering whether to hold a press conference, ask yourself whether you have got enough to say. Make sure the story/event/campaigning issue is a strong one and that the people you will put up to front the press conference are articulate enough to speak for 20 minutes or so between them on different angles or topics and to take questions. If the answer is no, then just send a press release out and invite journalists to ring up to do interviews either on the phone or to make appointments to do one to one interviews.

Having made the decision to hold a press conference, you should decide whether you want to hold it 'on camera' or 'off camera' and this should be stated in your press invitation. An 'on camera' press conference is the televised type you will have seen on the news, where the news broadcasters are allowed to film the whole press conference live as it happens. This usually happens in the case of major news stories, crises like disasters, fires, explosions or missing persons or murder investigations. This can be quite unnerving for those taking part and usually film crews and their producers are quite happy to attend 'off camera' press conferences and to do interviews after with the spokespeople on a one to one basis which tends to make for a slightly more relaxed approach. In your invitation ask journalists to book places to attend the press conference. They often will not confirm, but this does give you the opportunity to do a ring around the day before to check if they are planning to attend 'we hadn't heard that you wanted to book a place..' and if you find you have had no response, it gives you the chance to cancel it. There are not many things much worse than a press conference with no media present!

If it is a campaigning or lobbying issue, it is often a good idea to get a non Soroptimist from the affected group, another NGO or charity or an authority figure to share the platform with you and to speak in support. This adds to your credibility and shows you have done your research about the issue. It is also a good idea to have a chairperson who may not speak other than to introduce people on the panel and to keep order. When the statements from the top table have been made the chairperson can invite the journalists attending to ask their question, giving their name and the organisation they represent first. He or she can also make sure no one monopolises the question time.

Prepare the statements in discussion with the people who will speak and draft question and answer briefs to ensure you have anticipated the sorts of questions the journalists will ask. It is always a good idea if you have time, to have a short rehearsal in advance to run through how it will work in terms of who will speak first and you may want to try out a few of the anticipated questions to make sure people are prepared.

If you are running the press conference as part of a bigger event, such as a study day or a friendship weekend, make sure that you time it so you can let the media get the story and get away. Allow time for the press conference in your programme and make sure your speakers know they are being asked to take part. It is usually best to do it beforehand if possible, it ensures your speakers are fresh and not looking at the watches, wanting to get away.