

AFTER IT IS DONE

- Document what was said during the briefing, including all media questions.
- Transcribe comments as soon as possible and review material for misinformation.
- Monitor media coverage to ensure your messages were accurately disseminated.
- Follow-up on requested information.

NEWS BRIEFING CAUTIONS

- Avoid the perception of “parental ground rules” when explaining the process for the news conference.
- Identify the participants.
- Thank the reporters for their assistance.
- Stay “in character,” remain professional and do not take tough questions personally.
- If you do not know, say so and defer.
- Ensure all participants are fully briefed on past statements, including media questions and answers.

NEWS BRIEFING GUIDE

THE NEWS BRIEFING — A POWERFUL TOOL



When properly planned and executed, a news briefing or news conference can be a powerful tool to assist you in communicating the messages you want disseminated to the public. A poorly planned and executed event, however, can quickly deteriorate into chaos, causing your messages to be lost, allowing speculation and misinformation to prevail, and resulting in the loss of public confidence in your ability to handle the crisis.

This guide contains information that can help you in planning and presenting effective briefings, thereby ensuring your messages are clearly communicated to the public.

You never know when a crisis will occur, so keep a copy of this guide in a handy, easy-to-access place for quick reference prior to any news briefing or news conference.

BRIEFING OR CONFERENCE WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

News briefings and news conferences are basically handled the same way. The difference is that a news conference often deals with multiple topics and is usually more formal. A news briefing often deals with a single topic and is usually less formal. The planning, execution and follow-through are essentially the same for both.

BRIEFING CHECKLIST

Before Briefing

- Determine location
- Determine time
- Prepare facility
- Announce news briefing
- Prepare media kits
- Prepare participants

Open Briefing

- Greet media — thank for coming
- Provide introductions, with names, titles and agencies
- Give information on briefing procedures

Introduction

- Deliver brief situation update
- Open for questions and answers
- Remain calm, in control, helpful

Close Effectively

- Summarize, reiterate key points
- Acknowledge actions to be taken
- Advise time of next briefing
- Close and leave room
- Use moderator as barrier

After Briefing

- Document what was said, including media questions
- Monitor media coverage
- Actively correct media inaccuracies
- Debrief all participants
- Follow-up on unanswered questions

Created by



Decision and Information Sciences Division
Risk Communication Program
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A ready reference to help you
remember how to organize and
conduct an effective news
briefing or news conference



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ONLY HOLD A NEWS BRIEFING IF THERE IS SIGNIFICANT NEW INFORMATION

WHEN TO HAVE A BRIEFING

A news briefing or news conference can be an effective way to disseminate vital information rapidly to the public. It allows a spokesperson to address all of the media at once and to set up a timetable for when updated information will be available. This can often help manage and reduce the number of media inquires.

It is important to remember to only use a news briefing for important events or significant new information. Do not hold a briefing just to state that there is nothing new to report. At the same time, do not hold important public safety information for a news briefing; release it as soon as possible.

WHO DOES THE TALKING

The most senior official of the organization should be the primary speaker. If multiple organizations are involved, the official from the agency with lead responsibility in the event should be the primary speaker. The PIO/PAO from the lead agency should manage the news briefing and oversee preparations.

All speakers should be briefed on anticipated questions, relevant issues and stagecraft immediately prior to the start of the briefing. Elected officials can often act in a calming capacity, assuring the public that everything is being done to resolve the situation and get things back to normal. Other participants should only talk about their agencies and their areas of expertise or responsibility.

NEWS CONFERENCE FACILITY

- When possible, hold your news briefing indoors for a controlled environment. Outside, wind, insects, sunshine and noise can distract you and the public from what you are trying to communicate.
- Make sure the room is large enough for all participants, including reporters and cameras.
- Have clear ingress and egress for your speakers so they do not have to walk through gathered reporters.
- Stations providing live coverage will lay cable from their trucks to the news conference location; most carry 500 to 1000 feet of cable.
- An audio Mult Box should be made available; this eliminates the microphone tree and provides clearer audio.
- Avoid the rear-podium reversal-shot by using a backdrop or wall. If you must hold the briefing outside, set it up near a building wall or bring in a vehicle to provide a backdrop.
- The camera location should not be significantly higher or lower than the speakers. A low platform at the back of the room with a clear shot of the speakers is best.
- Make sure the physical environment is controlled. Broadcast lights are hot and you do not want speakers sweating on camera.

WHOM TO INVITE AND WHEN

Invite all agencies with a stake in the event to attend the briefing. When notifying the media, be sure to invite wire services and non-English news outlets. Make sure there is enough time for the media to arrive and still meet their deadlines. Try to find out if broadcast media will cover it live.

PREPARE THE PARTICIPANTS

- Determine ahead of time who will speak about what, making sure speakers stick to their areas of knowledge.
- Rehearse key messages in sound bites of 10-12 words for ease of understanding.
- Practice stagecraft and “handoffs” by showing speakers how to leave the microphone and allow another speaker to step up in a smooth fashion.
- Remind speakers not to touch the microphones, tap on the podium or hunch if the microphone is low.
- Have participants always look at the person speaking, since the cameras can be focused on them at any time during the briefing.
- Brief elected officials, policy makers and technical experts on their roles.
- Let speakers know what media are present and if any of the reporters have prior issues or agendas.
- Inform participants of any anticipated issues or questions from the media.
- Remember that media liaisons are an excellent source of information regarding what issues reporters are interested in and what questions they are likely to ask.

VISUALS AND HANDOUTS

Maps — Maps are excellent for showing where things are or highlighting travel paths. Make sure the maps are non-reflective. If referencing a map, the speaker should not step away from the microphones but should have another participant act as a pointer. Make sure that copies of all the maps used are available to the media.

Fact Sheets and Background Material — Media packets should be prepared ahead of time with enough copies for the media and all briefing participants. The packets should be distributed as the media arrive. Fact sheets are concise, bullet-point informational pieces and can include current activities, actions the public should take, shelter lists, agencies involved in the response, etc. Backgrounders can help the media “fill out” the story by providing detailed information on past events, agency history or issues relating to the event.

Roster of Speakers — Handouts at the news conference should always include a list of speakers, their titles and the agencies they represent.

WHAT NOT TO WEAR

Between 70 and 90 percent of communication is non-verbal. What you wear can affect how you are perceived by the public. If your agency has a uniform, wear it. Uniforms convey authority and expertise and lend credibility to what you say. If you are with a non-uniformed organization, wear clothing appropriate to the situation (i.e., a suit in an office, working clothes at a disaster site, etc.). Hats can cast shadows over the eyes. Never wear sunglasses. If glasses are needed, wear non-reflective lenses and avoid photo gray lenses. Avoid clothing with high-contrast colors or “busy” patterns. Avoid large, shiny jewelry.