

NEWS CONFERENCES

Before planning a news conference, decide if what you want to announce is really breaking news. Don't let the Junior League talk you into holding a news conference to announce their recent book donation if you don't think your local media is going to be interested in covering it. If you think that, for political reasons, you need to hold a news conference that the media might not be interested in, turn it into a special event. Invite staff and library supporters, have a speaker, and serve refreshments. That way, when the press doesn't show, the Junior League members present won't be disappointed. You are still celebrating their donation!

If you do have something of high news value to announce, such as the appointment of a new library director, a news conference may be the best tool for making the announcement. Choose a time and location convenient for the members of the press to attend. For example, don't schedule a news conference one hour before deadline at the daily paper and expect an article to appear that day, or at 5 p.m. and expect the story to be on the 6 o'clock news. Be sure there is parking available for the press at the location you choose and plenty of outlets in the room for the videographers to plug in their lights.

Announce your news conference as far in advance as possible. You can mail or fax a news release or, depending on the time frame, make personal phone calls. Include all pertinent information in your release, but save some "news" for the news conference. For example, tell them that you are going to announce the appointment of the new library director, but save the "who" for the news conference.

Rehearse your news conference. Have each participant show up an hour early and walk through the way that you will conduct the conference. Ask participants a few of the questions you anticipate being asked at the news conference so that they can begin to think through their answers.

After the news conference, different media outlets may want varied angles on the story. Think about this before the news conference. Identify staff to work with reporters from different stations and newspapers. Take camera crews to different areas in the library so that each media outlet gets a unique angle on the same story.

One final note on the news conference—use it sparingly! Li-

Tips for a Successful News Conference

- Start on time. If you have planned your news conference for 10 a.m., start at 10 a.m., particularly if any media representatives are there. Don't wait for Channel 5 to arrive if Channel 2 and 10 are already there.
- Develop a script and follow it. Make sure that everyone involved in the news conference has a copy of the script and understands his or her role. A quick walk-through prior to the event will help to ensure this. Don't deviate. If you announce at the beginning that questions will be addressed at the end, do that even if reporters try to ask questions while you are making your prepared presentation. It is your news conference and you want to maintain control of it.
- Keep it short. The prepared part of your news conference should never take more than 15 to 20 minutes, and the entire event with questions should not exceed an hour. Again, this will help you maintain control, particularly if you are dealing with a controversial issue.

libraries aren't police departments. They shouldn't have many stories that demand news conferences. If you do have something "hot" to announce, such as the outcome of a censorship challenge, schedule a news conference. For other news and information, use such tools as news releases, public service announcements, and newsletters. Don't demand that the press show up at a specific time and place if the "news" doesn't warrant it. Use other times when the media might already be in attendance (for example, library board meetings, city council meetings, and special events) for such activities as accepting donations from generous community groups.

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