

Guidelines for Organising Press Conferences and Briefings

The Federal Board of Revenue



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Introduction

A 'Press Conference' is a meeting organised for the purposes of distributing information to the media and answering questions from reporters. Normally the press conference is led by the organisation's executive management or their appointed press liaison. Given the media's limited resources, it may be difficult to attract major media attention to a press conference unless the organisation has a truly unique or newsworthy announcement to share. Press conferences can also be issued in response to addressing public relations issues.

Hold a press conference when you have:

A newsworthy story

New information relating to a big story being followed by the media

A statement on a controversial issue

Participation of high profile speakers or celebrities

Release of important new findings or research data

Launch of a major new initiative

Announcement of something of national importance

Advantages of Press Conferences / Press Briefings

- **Credibility:** The physical presence of a briefer and his willingness to meet the issue head on leads to a much more credible presentation.
- **Uniformity:** All media get the same information at the same time.
- **Expression of concern:** A briefer represents the face of FBR, which shows more concern than an impersonal news release, especially in situations where there is new taxation or a case of a major tax evasion.
- **Complexity of material:** Where material is technical or complicated, the news briefing makes the subject matter more easily understandable. The question and answer session that accompanies a news briefing saves time in call-backs by news reporters needing clarification.

Organising a Press Conference

Invitees

- **Star Quality:** To maximize media attendance at your news conference, it is beneficial to have at least one high-profile personality participating (e.g. Federal Minister, Chairman FBR, Member FBR). It is important to plan ahead and give enough notice to your invited participants.
- **Diversity:** It will be important to show a cross-section of participants. This will demonstrate that the issue is a concern to everyone. Try to enlist participants from other relevant ministries, organizations, business and civic organizations. Strive for ethnic and gender diversity among participants.

Location and Set-Up

- A central well-known location convenient for journalists and appropriate to the event. Better still use a location that is also visually interesting for the media.
- **Visuals:** Use visual aids at your news conference. Consider displaying large visuals such as graphs, logos, or charts.
- Avoid a room which is too large and gives the appearance that few people attended.
- Make sure the noise level of the room is low.
- Reserve space at the back of the room for television cameras, possibly on a raised platform.
- The right equipment: microphone, electricity, podium something for the microphone to sit on or attach, speakers desk.
- Arrange a press table: This is where reporters sign in and pick up materials. One person should be assigned to welcome the reporters and do the registration .
- If you need a permit for the location, get one.
- If it is an out door location make arrangements in case it rains.
- All participants should stand together behind the mike or podium so that everyone is in the picture.
- Make sure that visuals are not placed too high so as to be out of the picture, or too low so as to be blocked by the participants.
- Reserve an additional quiet room for radio interviews following the press conference.
- Ensure light and sound systems are in working order.
- If possible, have a fax and phone available.

Press Kit

A Press kit is generally described as a pre-packaged set of promotional materials of a person, company, or organization distributed to members of the media for promotional use. They are often distributed to announce a release or for a news conference.

In the case of FBR, the press kit should be a pre-packaged set of materials distributed to members of the media during press conferences and press briefings to assist in generating correct and favourable news reports presented in the print, broadcast, internet or word of mouth to the mass audience. There are many items that can go into a press or media kit, depending on the situation, the audience or the use. Here are some ideas about what to include in FBR press kit:

- Backgrounder on FBR
- Fact sheet listing specific features and statistics of FBR
- A press release detailing the current news the media kit is sent in reference to
- Media contact information (FATE wing)
- Photos or other images (high resolution) of key logos and products.
- A CD, DVD, software title, video, etc. as appropriate for the sender of the release
- List of frequently asked questions: This helps the editor determine what questions to ask you in an interview or what to include in the article. This will also assist your spokesperson to give programmed answers.

Note: The press kit is also a key tool to send out your 'Message' and 'Strategic Message' to the general public. Remember that a message – is designed to motivate people to do something and a strategic message – is tied to the mission of the organisation and comes from the organisation and comes from its strategic goals.

- Make sure there is a podium and a table long enough for all spokespeople to sit behind.
- Decide if you wish to serve coffee and tea, or light snacks, following the event.

Timing

- Try to hold the press conference Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. Avoid Mondays and Fridays. If at all possible, hold the event between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm. Earlier than 10:00 am is hard for reporters to make. After 2:00 pm is sometimes too late for evening news. 10:00 am or 11:00 am are the best times—because many noon newscasts will include the event.
- Work out a timetable to ensure that everything is ready when it is needed.
- Check that you are not competing with other important news events on the same day.
- Start the event on time – avoid keeping journalists waiting.
- Distribute material prior to a news event: you can use an embargo to prevent journalists from publishing before the event.
- Wait until the event to release important information to create an element of suspense.

Possible Materials

- Media release and press kits (see next box).
- List of press conference participants (who is on the panel and their titles).
- Copies of speeches.

Inviting Journalists

- You can invite by phone or by fax or post, but a telephone call first is always a good idea for ensuring that important papers find the right journalist.
- Find out which journalists report on issues relating to your event or issue.
- Keep an up-to-date mailing list or database of journalists.
- Focus on getting the most influential media to attend.
- Consider inviting international and foreign media if the topic warrants.
- Get your event in journalists' diaries 7 to 10 days before the event.
- Always make a follow-up call after the invitation has gone out to check that the right journalist has received the information.
- Consider offering "exclusive" angles on the story to key media.
- If you already know some journalists well, involve them early and fully.

Getting the Media's Attention

- Write a media alert that will serve as your announcement of the news conference/event to the press. Be sure to include who, what, where, when and why. Keep it short! Make sure to include a contact name and phone number.
- Fax: One day before the event, all area media outlets should receive the advisory (e.g. newspapers, media organisations, TV stations and radio stations). It is best to fax the release directly to each outlet early in the morning.
- Follow up: One day before the event, call the assignment editors to confirm fax transmission, and make sure they know about the event. Talk it up as much as possible to encourage coverage! Many TV stations do not make their assignments until the day of the event. It is worth calling the TV assignment editors again between 8:30 am and 9:00 am the day of the event.

Preparing Speakers

- Select appropriate speakers (this seems obvious, but sometimes people are asked to speak because they have certain positions, not because they are good at speaking and know the issues). Select strong speakers who are articulate, authoritative, engaging, and clear.
- Brief speakers carefully on the main message of the event.
- Prepare speakers in advance on how to answer difficult questions.
- Who's next? Determine the order of speakers in advance. It is preferable to have each person come to the microphone and introduce him/herself. Remember to distribute a speakers list to the press as well as the speakers themselves.
- Offer to provide speakers with question and answer material.

- Try to hold a meeting to brief all speakers before the event.
- Short and sweet: Each speaker should keep remarks short – ideally, each speaker should present for only 3 or 4 minutes (if there are a lot of speakers, each may only be able to speak for 2 minutes, or so). The overall length of the news conference should only be 20–30 minutes (including Q & A period).
- Not all participants need to speak. Ask groups to send a representative, even if he or she does not wish to speak–this aids in showing the depth of support.
- Speakers should distribute copies of their statements to the media. If they are ready in advance, they can be included in the press kits. If not, they can be placed on the press table.
- Have each speaker make different points.
- Make sure that each speaker makes one or two important points only.
- Keep speeches short and simple, aimed at a general audience and avoid technical jargon.
- Select a moderator who will manage questions from the floor after the presentation.
- Encourage lots of questions.
- Keep answers to questions short.
- Often the press will ask questions which they may direct specifically to one speaker. If not, the chairperson of the conference should be prepared to answer any questions that come up. If they ask a question that you cannot answer, don't be afraid to say you're not sure and get back to them later.
- Reporters often want one-on-one interviews with speakers after the Q & A period. This is your chance to clarify or cover information not brought out in the Q & A.

Before Speaking

- Know your audience
- Anticipate interests, concerns and questions
- Consider the latter in preparation
- Prepare your presentation
- Develop a strong introduction
- Develop a maximum of three key messages
- Assemble your supporting data
- Prepare audio-visual aids
- Practice
- Prepare for answering questions
- Anticipate what questions will arise
- Prepare answers to those questions
- Practice questioning and responding

Follow-up

- Within a few hours of the conclusion of the press conference, fax or deliver information to important journalists who were unable to attend.
- Make sure the switchboard of your organisation is advised on where to direct follow-up calls from journalists.
- Gather press clippings of the coverage which results from the press conference and distribute this to important coalition partners and policy makers.

- After the event, send a good quality photo to the newspapers in your region. Include the basics of the event, such as the "who, what, when, why, where" information, highlight any special happenings and the successes. Think of it as a news brief or mini-story.

Press Briefing

A press briefing is a meeting called by an organization, to inform the press about a certain topic. In fact it is a smaller form of a press conference however the scale of both the audience and briefers is reduced. Such briefings are useful to:

- Get out a specific message
- Explain complex or technical matters
- Reach a large number of media interested in the same subject matter area.

The Opening Statement

A strong opening statement sets the tone for the press briefing or news briefing and is crucial in attempting to establish trust and build credibility. The elements of a strong opening are:

- Introduction
- A statement of personal concern
- A statement of organisational commitment and intent
- A statement of purpose and plan for the meeting
- Key messages and supporting data
- A maximum of three "take-home points"
- Information to support the key messages
- Conclusion
- A summarizing statement

Total time for all presenters should be 15 minutes or less. Do not have too many presenters. Three is usually sufficient.

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