

Press invitations and conferences

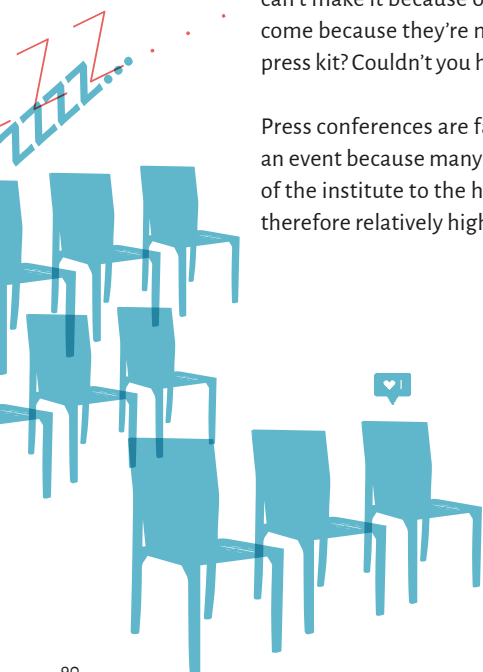
IV. CHANNELS OF SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

by PATRICK MICHAELY

What researcher doesn't dream of making a groundbreaking scientific discovery and publishing it in a prestigious journal after years of hard work? So why not have the institution's press office quickly call a press conference to announce to the assembled press members how the discovery came about and what the future implications of the discovery will be for the research discipline, the institute and, of course, the researcher's own career?

However, press conferences are a double-edged sword and there is a clear risk of failure. Journalism has changed a lot in recent years and journalists rarely have time to leave their desks. It is therefore vital that press conferences are only held if they are really relevant to the journalist and if the press conference is of real value to them. There is no guarantee that a press conference will be a success. Many factors have to be taken into account and not all of them can be directly influenced. What do you do if a member of the press can't make it because of their schedule, or worse, doesn't want to come because they're not interested? Is it necessary to send out a press kit? Couldn't you have left it at that anyway?

Press conferences are fairly laborious. They have the character of an event because many people have to be involved, from the head of the institute to the hall technician. The organisational effort is therefore relatively high.



However, a successful press conference is always beneficial to the host institution. The presence of a reasonable number of representatives from the press ensures a guaranteed response from the press, unlike a press release that is simply sent out and has to compete for attention with many other stories in the newsroom. The press conference also provides an opportunity to place the project presented in a wider context and to allow various participants – such as the director of the institute, project partners or even political representatives – to have their say. Very often, after the official part, personal statements are taken that enhance the topic.

If the spokesperson has good contacts with the press, this can help. But some scientists have also cultivated their contacts with the press beforehand and have been able to arouse their interest in the project. In any case, it is important to consult with the spokesperson well in advance.

The decisive factor, however, is probably that the topic presented has sufficient relevance to the press and that the press conference offers clear added value. This could be the groundbreaking research itself, or the presence of a high-level politician who is using the project as an opportunity to explain their research policy. If it is too obvious that the event is just rehashing or repeating what has already been announced in detail in the invitation, it will not be interesting enough for many members of the press. In this case, a concise press release will suffice.

So think twice before calling a press conference. But don't be afraid to make contact. It is always in the interest of journalists to publish a good story.

Recommended reads:

- ♦ World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe. (2017). *Strategies used by journalists during interviews or press conferences: World Health Organization vaccine safety supporting document*. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/345934>