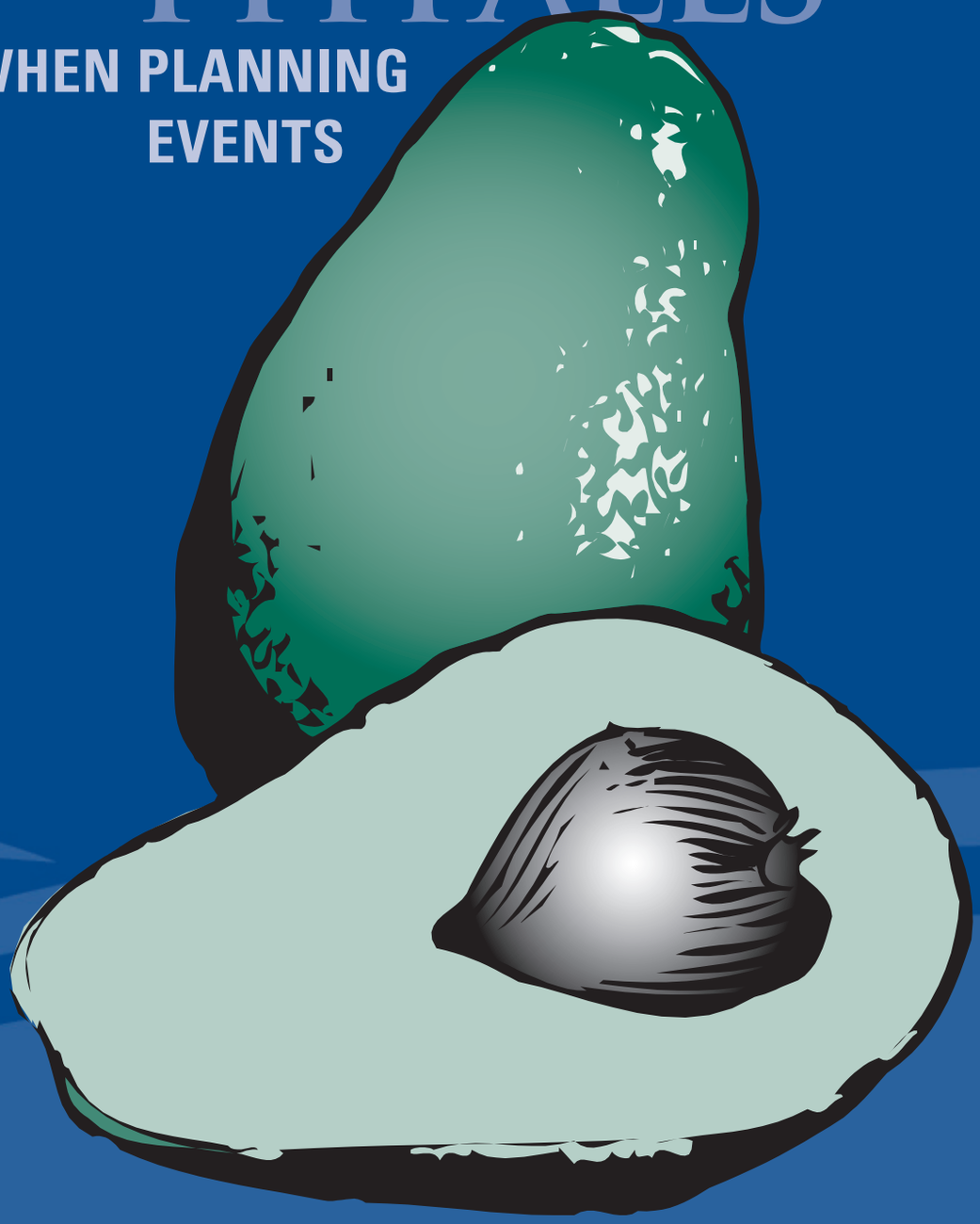
MEDIA EVENTS, PRESS CONFERENCES, AND INTERVIEWS

USDA

AVOIDING PITFALLS

WHEN PLANNING EVENTS



MEDIA EVENTS, PRESS CONFERENCES AND INTERVIEWS

When is a media event or press conference appropriate?

Media events or press conferences are used to convey information and attract attention. They allow you to deliver time-sensitive news to many media outlets at once. Because events involve a lot of time, and because attendance and coverage aren't guaranteed, think carefully before you make a decision to move forward.

What should I consider when deciding whether a media event is warranted?

- Is there a visual element to your news? Keep in mind what will look good in a photo or on TV. (Refer to page 56 for event pictures.)
- Is there an alternative format to deliver your news that would be equally or more effective, such as a press release? Is your event newsworthy, timely, and of interest to the media? (See "Five Components of a Newsworthy Story" on page 44 of the "Media Outreach" section.)
- Will an event offer reporters special advantages, such contact with as experts, officials, and other important local figures?

What are some examples of things that might warrant an event or press conference?

- Formation of new and important partnerships;
- Opening of a new facility;
- Announcement of a new program;
- Release of an important study or survey; or
- Announcement of the receipt of a new grant.

At what time should I plan the media event?

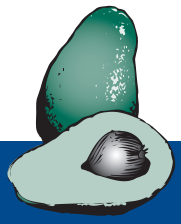
Check your local calendar listings before planning an event to make sure it doesn't conflict with another major media event. The optimal time to schedule a media event or news conference is 10 a.m. This allows time in the morning for the assignment editor to review the story options for the day and to assign a reporter to your event. Remember, TV and radio producers need time to edit the story for broadcast, and newspaper reporters need time to write.

Consider also that your event might be more successful at certain times of the year, for instance when school's out and children no longer have access to a school lunch program, or around the holidays when people are sensitive to hunger issues.

Where should I have the media event?

The location of your event should be relevant to the issue or story being presented. Hold your event in a central location, near the media, to help facilitate coverage. Take the time to scout your location before you choose it, and visit it a few times again before you host your event. Make sure there is nearby parking for news vans, as crews often carry heavy equipment to and from the event site.

Anticipate what equipment will be necessary and make sure there is adequate space for equipment at your location. If you expect cameras or radio reporters, you must have a podium and microphone. In many cases, television and radio reporters tape their own microphones directly onto the podium. Be sure there is room for a table for press releases, statements, and check-in.



- **Outdoor events:** Consider the weather and noise and arrange for an alternate indoor site.
- **Indoor events:** Think about space. You will need room for TV cameras and other media, guests, and your own audiovisual equipment. Know beforehand where electrical plugs and light switches are located.

Whom should I invite?

Consider inviting community leaders, including the mayor, local council members, or notable nutritionists to speak at a news conference. Work with your local food stamp office to select speakers and develop the invitation list. Not only will this make your event more appealing to the media, but it demonstrates that improving nutrition in your area is a community effort.

The media usually take an interest in the human side of an issue. See if you can identify a family that has a positive story to tell about its experience.

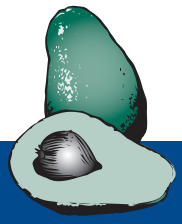
How should I invite the media?

The most common way to invite media to a press conference is with a media advisory (see example at the end of this section). The advisory gives enough details about the event to pique an outlet's interest, but not so many that it gives away the entire story.

Send your advisory to the assignment editor or reporter one to two days before your event. On the morning of your event, follow up with the reporter or assignment editor and be sure to include on-site contact information, such as cell phone numbers and exact site location. Assignment desks often do not know whom they will send until the day of the event.

What else do I need to do in advance?

- Prepare signage such as banners and podium signs that can be placed prominently in front of the cameras and photographers. Be sure to properly position signage (you do not want it blocked by speakers, equipment, etc.).



EXAMPLES OF VISUALS

INFORMATIONAL VISUALS

- Pie charts and graphs from new research, such as charts that show the number of people in your area who are eligible for food stamp benefits, but not receiving them.
- Backdrop, like a large sign with the organization name; or the backdrop might be something that conveys information — like shelves of food at a food bank

SYMBOLIC VISUAL

- A table display of healthy foods to demonstrate the foods that a family of four could buy with food stamps in a month.

- Spokesperson(s): Assign one or two spokespersons, such as the head of your organization or a local dignitary, to speak and/or answer media questions at the event. Brief your spokespersons beforehand and make sure they are approved to speak in front of the press. In addition to having official spokespersons, the media will be attracted to a story that puts a human face on the issue of hunger. Because some people may not want others to know they are using food stamps, approach this issue with sensitivity and prudence. Be sure all your spokespersons speak clearly and are easily understood.
- Prepare an agenda. Decide the order of the speakers, the length of their remarks, and who will act as master of ceremonies. Keep each person's remarks to no more than 10 minutes and plan on having no more than three speakers.
- Prepare your press kits. Include the following in your press kit:
  - ☑ Agenda
  - ☑ Fact sheet
  - ☑ Bios of speakers and interviewees
  - ☑ Copies of any graphs, charts, and other visuals
  - ☑ Photographs
  - ☑ Brochures

- List your event in your local community calendars. See the end of this section for an example. Larger cities also have a local Associated Press (AP) office that you can call. Ask to have your event put on their calendar, known as the Daybook. There is a State-by-State listing of AP bureaus at the end of this section.
- Call the press as a reminder prior to the day of the event.

What should I do on the day of the event?

- Set up a table for media and guest sign-in and press kit distribution.
- Greet the guests as they arrive and provide them with assigned seating and other pertinent information.
- Start on time, even if attendance is sparse.

What should I do after the event?

- Send thank-you notes or letters to the guests and special speakers.
- Follow up with media who were not able to attend — ASAP. Send press kits to reporters who couldn't attend the event. Place followup calls and ask reporters if they are interested in conducting a phone interview with one of the spokespersons.
- Monitor and collect news articles

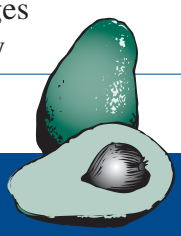
What are some examples of events I could host?

Here are some examples of events to generate coverage of hunger issues and food stamp benefits, as well as simple, inexpensive visuals to use, and spokespersons to offer for interviews.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW STUDY FINDINGS	
LOCATION:	A community center, community or faith-based organization, food bank
INTERVIEWEES:	Head of your organization, mayor, council members, nutritionist, recipients of food stamp benefits
VISUALS:	Graphs and charts

A "DAY IN THE LIFE" GROCERY SHOPPING	
LOCATION:	A supermarket. The idea would be to have local media "shop" for a family of four with a limited budget so they can understand what it is like to buy nutritious food when money's tight.
INTERVIEWEES:	Recipients of food stamp benefits, grocery store manager, nutritionist
VISUALS:	Food, use of the EBT card

COOKING DEMONSTRATION FOR RECIPIENTS OF FOOD STAMP BENEFITS	
LOCATION:	A food bank, culinary school, kitchens at schools, faith-based or community center, supermarket
INTERVIEWEES:	A nutritionist, recipients of food stamp benefits, a local dignitary, a chef from a well-known local restaurant
VISUALS:	Good, healthy food being prepared, a nutrition chart, images of people learning about how to eat well and economically



SAMPLE EVENT SETUP

1

2

Pathmark (Spanish)

3

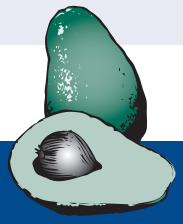
Pathmark (English)

1 An eligibility worker with the United Way of New York City helps an individual at a Food Stamp Program prescreening event in Chinatown.

Photo credit: United Way of New York City

2 & 3 FoodChange eligibility workers hold a healthy cooking demonstration at a local grocery store and provide shoppers with information on the Food Stamp Program.

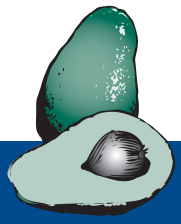
Photo credit: FoodChange

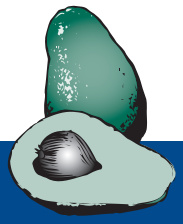


ASSOCIATED PRESS (AP): STATE-BY-STATE LISTING

STATE	CITY	PHONE
AK	Anchorage	(907) 272-7549
AL	Montgomery	(334) 262-5947
AR	Little Rock	(501) 225-3668
AZ	Phoenix	(602) 258-8934
CA	Los Angeles	(213) 626-1200
CO	Denver	(303) 825-0123
CT	Hartford	(860) 246-6876
DC	Washington	(202) 776-9400
DE	Dover	(302) 674-3037
FL	Miami	(305) 594-5825
GA	Atlanta	(404) 522-8971
HI	Honolulu	(808) 536-5510
IA	Des Moines	(515) 243-3281
ID	Boise	(208) 343-1894
IL	Chicago	(312) 781-0500
IN	Indianapolis	(317) 639-5501
KS	Topeka	(785) 234-5654
KY	Louisville	(502) 583-7718
LA	New Orleans	(504) 523-3931
MA	Boston	(617) 357-8100
MD	Baltimore	(410) 837-8315
ME	Portland	(207) 772-4157
MI	Detroit	(313) 259-0650
MN	Minneapolis	(612) 332-2727
MO	St. Louis	(314) 241-2496
MS	Jackson	(601) 948-5897

STATE	CITY	PHONE
MT	Helena	(406) 442-7440
NC	Raleigh	(919) 833-8687
ND	Bismarck	(701) 223-8450
NE	Omaha	(402) 391-0031
NH	Concord	(603) 224-3327
NJ	Trenton	(609) 392-3622
NM	Albuquerque	(505) 822-9022
NV	Las Vegas	(702) 382-7440
NY	New York	(212) 621-1670
OH	Columbus	(614) 885-2727
OK	Oklahoma	(405) 525-2121
OR	Portland	(503) 228-2169
PA	Philadelphia	(215) 561-1133
RI	Providence	(401) 274-2270
SC	Columbia	(803) 799-6418
SD	Sioux Falls	(605) 332-3111
TN	Nashville	(615) 373-9988
TX	Dallas	(972) 991-2100
UT	Salt Lake City	(801) 322-3405
VA	Richmond	(804) 643-6646
VT	Montpelier	(802) 229-0577
WA	Seattle	(206) 682-1812
WI	Milwaukee	(414) 225-3580
WV	Charleston	(304) 346-0897
WY	Cheyenne	(307) 632-9351



REGIONAL/STATE RADIO NETWORKS

ORGANIZATION	CITY	STATE	PHONE	FAX	MAIN E-MAIL
Alaska Public Radio Network	Anchorage	AK	(907) 263-7448	N/A	news@aprn.org
Alabama Radio Network	Birmingham	AL	(205) 439-9600	(205) 439-8390	N/A
Arkansas Radio Network	Little Rock	AR	(501) 401-0200	(501) 401-0367	N/A
Pacifica Radio Network	Berkeley	CA	(510) 849-2281	N/A	contact@pacifica.org
Connecticut Radio Network	Hamden	CT	(203) 288-2002	(203) 281-3291	N/A
Florida's Radio Networks	Maitland	FL	(888) 407-4376	(407) 916-7425	news@frn.com
Georgia News Network	Atlanta	GA	(404) 607-9045	(404) 367-1134	N/A
Radio Iowa	Des Moines	IA	(515) 282-1984	(515) 282-1879	RadioIowa@Learfield.com
Illinois Radio Network	Chicago	IL	(312) 943-6363	(312) 943-5109	N/A
Network Indiana	Indianapolis	IN	(317) 637-4638	(317) 684-2008	info@network-indiana.com
Kansas Information Network	Topeka	KS	(785) 272-2199	(785) 228-7282	info@radionetworks.com
Kentucky News Network	Louisville	KY	(502) 479-2222	(502) 479-2231	N/A
Louisiana Network, Inc.	Baton Rouge	LA	(225) 383-8695	(225) 383-5020	N/A
National Radio Network	Framingham	MA	(508) 820-2430	N/A	N/A
Michigan Radio Network	Lansing	MI	(517) 484-4888	(517) 484-1389	miradio@ameritech.net
Minnesota News Network	Minneapolis	MN	(612) 321-7200	(612) 321-7202	newsroom@mnnradio.com
MissouriNet	Jefferson City	MO	(573) 893-2829	(573) 893-8094	Info@Missourinet.com
Mississippi News Network	Jackson	MS	(601) 957-1700	(601) 956-5228	N/A
Northern Broadcasting System	Billings	MT	(406) 252-6661	(406) 245-9755	nbs@northernbroadcasting.com
North Carolina News Network	Raleigh	NC	(919) 890-6030	(919) 890-6024	N/A
North Dakota News Network	Fargo	ND	(701) 237-5000	(701) 280-0861	dakotanews@qwest.net
Ohio News Network	Columbus	OH	(614) 460-3850	(614) 460-2822	N/A
Oklahoma News Network	Oklahoma City	OK	(405) 840-9489	(405) 858-1435	N/A
Radio Pennsylvania Network	Harrisburg	PA	(717) 221-2883	(717) 232-7612	radiopa@radiopa.org
South Carolina News Network	Columbia	SC	(803) 790-4300	(803) 790-4309	N/A
South Dakota News Network	Pierre	SD	(605) 224-9911	(605) 224-8984	dakotanews@qwest.net
Tennessee Radio Network	Nashville	TN	(615) 664-2400	(615) 687-9797	N/A
Texas State Network	Arlington	TX	(800) 683-5558	(817) 543-5572	tsn@tsnradio.com
Virginia News Networks	Richmond	VA	(804) 474-0000	(804) 474-0167	N/A
Wisconsin Radio Network	Madison	WI	(608) 251-3900	(608) 251-7233	info@wrn.com
West Virginia MetroNews	Charleston	WV	(304) 346-7055	(304) 346-8262	newsroom@wvmetronews.com
United Stations Radio Network	New York	NY	(212) 869-1111	(212) 869-1115	info@unitedstations.com
USA Radio Network	Dallas	TX	(972) 484-3900	(972) 241-6826	newsroom@usaradio.com