



ALBA Guidelines for Organizing Inclusive Conferences

(I) Why organize a diverse conference

What does your conference say about who is welcome in your community?

Conferences are spaces that promote visibility and provide opportunities for networking and research collaborations. It is critical for scientists, particularly students and early career researchers, to grow in the field with diverse role models. Conference organizers have an opportunity, if not responsibility, to organize diverse and inclusive meetings.

(II) How can you promote diversity and inclusivity in conference organization

Diversity and inclusion should be considered as a core component of each conference, and not simply as a box to check.

1. As an organizer

Establish a diverse and gender-balanced programme organizing committee. Do not have only one person from a minority group, as that might make them uncomfortable to speak up. Change the composition of the committee routinely to encourage diverse viewpoints. Make sure that committee members are committed to diversity and inclusion.

Start organization early. Inviting people from different countries and time zones with different visa requirements for panels, committees, lectures takes more time, effort, preparation and coordination than inviting speakers who are well known to you and have been invited previously. It can also take more effort to ensure that registration or abstract submission deadlines or event dates don't coincide with major events for a specific group (e.g., major religious celebrations, beginning of school year, early career grant submission deadlines, etc.). In case of conflict, consider moving the deadlines.

Develop a speaker policy. The policy should aim for balance and representation with respect to gender, ethnicity, geographical distribution, level of seniority, scientific approach and field of work. Maintain a database of potential speakers categorized according to field of neuroscience, position, gender, country of work and country of origin. Diversify your speaker line-ups and replace speakers who decline the invitation on a like-for-like basis, that is, replacing a woman who declined with the next ranked woman, early-career for early-career, etc. Consider assessing symposium proposals on their contribution to diversity (that is, how well the symposium meets the stated EDI criteria) in addition to scientific merit; this helps proposers to focus on this aspect while putting together a panel of speakers. If unsatisfactory, ask proposers to amend their line-up to improve diversity. Do not resort to tokenism, be mindful of conveying that perception.

Maintain conference metrics and report the data. Transparency and accountability are critical. Maintain, and report, a running total of the diversity in speakers and abstracts accepted, including statistics on gender balance, ethnicity, geographical representation and subject coverage. This will establish baseline data and enable the continuous monitoring of future progress of diversity efforts.

Blind reviewing of abstracts for oral and poster presentations. Anonymize the abstracts, removing identifying information, so that they can be evaluated on the basis of the title and abstract alone. Establish a diverse, gender-balanced pool of reviewers. Be transparent about selection procedures, posting this information on the conference website.

Be family (and carer) friendly. Be mindful that not all countries follow a Saturday-Sunday weekend model. Organizing a conference or event during a weekend might make it more difficult for parents to attend and might disproportionately affect women. Consider providing on-site childcare facilities and/or childcare grants that cover childcare costs incurred by participants or speakers of the meeting.

Aim to increase inclusivity and accessibility. Accessibility means much more than venue access ramps. Check the conference venue well ahead of time to see whether the networking events are planned in spaces where there's no seating, or whether the toilets are a long walk away from the conference rooms, or whether there are rooms dedicated for nursing mothers or prayer. Reduce or waive registration fees targeted at disadvantaged groups. Both early-career researchers and researchers from the Global South often have difficulty funding trips to attend conferences. Cater to restricted diets if possible.

Set up a mechanism for complaints and evaluations to be heard. This entity should be gender balanced and competent enough to broach uncomfortable conversations on harassment or bullying.

Organize equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) events. These can take the form of talks, panels discussions, networking socials or mentoring events. They should be an integral part of the main programme and not organized as an afterthought or after-hours. Give them the importance they deserve, schedule them in priority times and heavily publicise the event to increase visibility and attendance.

Improve visual messaging. Intersectionality and visuals can shape the perception of the conference and community at large. To support diverse and inclusive design efforts when developing promotional materials, use visual resources that provide stock images featuring diverse representations of people. When publishing photos from the event, represent accessibility, diversity and inclusion in the imagery.

2. As an invited speaker, panelist, or moderator

When you are asked to participate in or moderate a panel or give a keynote address, request information from the conference organizers about the other panelists or speakers. Let the organizers know that you expect diversity to be represented, and that you will have to decline the invitation if you are going to be one of many others representing the same perspective or majority demographic (also known as an "Inclusion Rider"). If you are unable to participate, request the organizers to select replacements on a like-for-like basis.

(III) Resources

Gender Bias in (neuro)science: Facts, consequences, and solutions

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/ejn.14397>

Women at the Podium

<https://www.nature.com/articles/npp2015320>

BiasWatchNeuro

<https://biaswatchneuro.com/information-and-links/>

Conference Diversity Distribution Calculator

<http://aanandprasad.com/diversity-calculator/?groupName=women&numSpeakers=20&populationPercentage=30>

500 Women Scientists Guide to Organizing Inclusive Scientific Meetings

<https://500womenscientists.org/inclusive-scientific-meetings>

WiNRepo tips for conference organizers and other directory users

<https://www.winrepo.org/tips/>

Guidelines for Organizing a Diverse & Gender-Balanced Conference/Workshop

<https://synergy.st-andrews.ac.uk/bio-equalityanddiversity/diverse-conferences/>

How to organize and promote diverse, inclusive panels and keynotes

<https://www.mtu.edu/diversity/council/pdfs/tips-for-diverse-panels-and-speakers.pdf>

How to Make Professional Conferences More Accessible for Disabled People

<https://blog.ucsusu.org/science-blogger/how-to-make-professional-conferences-more-accessible-for-disabled-people-guidance-from-actual-disabled-scientists/>

How to Make Virtual Conferences Queer-Friendly: A Guide

<https://sites.google.com/view/queer-in-ai/diversity-guide>

The Diversity Charter

<https://diversitycharter.org/considerations-for-event-organisers/>

What It Will Take to Improve Diversity at Conferences

<https://hbr.org/2019/09/what-it-will-take-to-improve-diversity-at-conferences>

Speaker Rider for Meaningfully Inclusive Events

<https://opennews.org/projects/speaker-rider/>

Inclusion Rider for Tech Conferences

<https://medium.com/@fox/inclusion-rider-for-tech-conferences-6493ca91009>