



Tips for Inclusive Conferences and Panels

Why do people go to conferences? Learning about what's going on at the cutting edge of the field? Developing new collaborations? Being better at what they do?

Evidence shows the best way to do this is to have a mix of different ideas and perspectives. But the reality is too often this mix isn't there – for example we tend to skew towards males over females, White over Black Asian or Minority Ethnic, older over younger and those without a disability – hidden or visible – over those with. And who we saw at the last conference or panel is who we tend to think of for the next one. So, some brilliant voices never get heard, and the cycle is never broken as the role models never change.

So how do we change this, without compromising on quality? Here is a guide on how to make your conference or panel more equal and diverse.

Before the Conference

- Sign the [pledge](#) not to participate in single-sex panels and share on social media and encourage your peers to follow suit.
- If asked to be a speaker on panellist at a single sex event, suggest a knowledgeable female alternative (but make sure you highlight to them it's their talent not their gender alone that's prompted the approach!)
- Put forward yourself as an alternative speaker or panellist (if you are a woman or from a minority group).

If you are a **conference organiser**, ways to actively seek a high quality but gender-balanced, diverse panel include to:

- Ask around a bit for suitable women, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, younger people and people with disabilities, as these may not be names that first spring to mind.
- Look at the papers cited by some of the people you've thought of to find some women and people from minority backgrounds who work in the area.
- Search for your topic and see what women and people from minority backgrounds have written on it.
- Invite some less famous speakers (studies have shown that women often need to have done a lot more than men to be considered successful, in many cases as a result of implicit bias).
- Ask all speakers and panellists about their access needs, as well as participants (as they may well have hidden disabilities you are not aware of).
- Ask first about the availability of women, people from minority groups or disabled people and fit the event around them.
- Consider whether you could offer or facilitate funding for those who cannot otherwise attend – and ask more famous people if they can self-fund. (If they're offended by the question, you don't want them at your conference).
- Include diverse teams in conference planning – e.g. a better gender balance among conference planners is associated with a better gender balance among speakers.
- Understand why people say no and see if you can accommodate their needs – e.g. offer childcare, seats for parents with infants near the back, the option to join online

or view a video recording if they can't travel, "buddying up" or coaching if they've not previously presented, materials in a different format.

- Promote guidelines – e.g. a simple statement – “we think it's important that we give everyone a chance to be represented as a speaker, and that the diversity of our society is represented in the diversity of our speakers” and prepare for pushback.
- Depending on the topic there may already be a “switch list” of alternative speakers or panellists who self-identify as non-male and/or non-White – examples are [RenewableUK](#), [Great charity speakers](#), [Diverse Environmental Leaders](#) (US) and [Diverse ecologists and evolutionary biologists](#)
- Widen the net for attendees by promoting it beyond your usual channels.
- Allow for gender neutral prefixes or no prefixes on registration forms and badges.

If you are **asked to be a speaker**:

- Request that the organisers confirm who the other panellists/ speakers /participants are (if not obvious from the invite) and enquire how diversity and gender-balance will be achieved.
- Explain that as a condition of acceptance, the expectation is that there will be both men and women speakers to ensure inclusive perspectives and insights.
- Offer suggestions for interesting speakers that might round out the panel.

During the Conference

If you are a **conference organiser**:

- Use [mentimeter](#) to enable any smart phone user to raise questions in their own time without having to put up their hand, but forewarn participants and set some ground rules about questions.
- Ensure that people's preferred pronouns are used throughout.
- Chair the conference so that women can ask their question first, then alternate (this is a proven method to buck the trend of 2:1 questions asked by men versus women).
- Brief your key speakers to do the same.
- Bring voices into the room via virtual media and having the audience vote electronically on questions posed by panellists.
- Use [Women 4 Oceans gender balance bingo tool](#) to identify good behaviour to reward and bad behaviour to call out.

If you are **asked to be a speaker and find yourself on a single-sex panel** you could:

- Only take questions from women in the audience as only men have had a chance to speak on the panel (or vice-versa if it was a female only panel).
- Recruit an expert you know from the audience.
- Add an empty chair.
- Leave the room!

After the Conference

- Share the conversation on the importance of diversity to your success on social media.
- Name and shame bad practice such as single gender panels (e.g. [allmalepanels.tumblr.com](#))
- If you've been to a conference that has failed to address diversity in the past, tell them you won't be attending again unless they change their approach.