



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Guidelines for IGS Events

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Scope

These guidelines apply to both IGS Conferences and to any associated side-events such as site visits.

Why develop an inclusive conference?

- Everyone wants to be included and accepted as they are, with fair and equal treatment, irrespective of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or any other characteristic.
- Including everyone is an unmissable opportunity to increase scientific progress.
- Creating a positive and welcoming environment, where people feel a sense of equality and belonging, empowers them to contribute to their full potential. This supports your goals for a successful event.
- A good conference experience can make a difference in the professional development of the participants and create long-lasting collaborations and opportunities.
- Speaking at conferences raises profiles and builds skills. Providing all members with this exposure may offer wider cognitive diversity within the presenters and be more attractive to audiences. Providing this exposure also demonstrates the value of their contributions and helps to support career progression.
- It is important that early career professionals see a diversity of speakers at conferences, as these can become important role models.
- Inclusive approaches visibly change the conference dynamics, allowing a wider variety of views to be expressed in an open and receptive setting.

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- Opportunities for participating in conferences are not equally available to all. Conferences may inadvertently reproduce systemic inequalities, hence it is important to overcome the barriers for participation and give more opportunities to less privileged individuals (e.g. students or attendees from low-income countries).
- We recognise that there are always lessons to be learnt. Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity cannot be fully achieved, but it is an ambition that conference organisers should continuously work towards.

Organising Committee

- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion begin with the Organising Committee (OC).
- Panels and speakers tend to mirror the teams that create and invite them. Start with a diverse and inclusive team that can create an inclusive event.
- Aim for the OC to have 50% diversity regarding gender, race, age, and other relevant identifiers.
- Include OC members who have diverse networks.
- The experience of people in marginalized groups is especially important; they cannot be replaced by good intentions or second-hand knowledge from people who have not lived through the same experiences. People with disabilities often say: “Nothing about us without us”; the same holds for other dimensions of diversity.
- OC members should have expertise and/or firsthand perspectives on various aspects of accessibility to be part of the team that visits and vets the event venue and hotels.
- A diverse delivery team contributes to a welcoming space because their diversity adds to a sense of belonging for all conference participants. If you have already started assembling an OC, check for gaps and do your best to fill them.
- Ensure that organizers with diverse backgrounds are not restricted to only work on diversity and inclusion aspects; every person should have the freedom to choose which areas of the conference they want to contribute to.
- Consider appointing a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Chair within the OC.
- Collaborate with the IGS’s DEI Committee at key stages of event organization to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach.
- Explore having the Organizing Committee (OC) participate in a dedicated diversity training session to enhance awareness and foster an inclusive event environment.

Resources

- Achieving DEI will require resources. Plan for the costs of any specific measures and tools (e.g. OC member payments, code of conduct training, captioning, accessible software, scholarships).
- Consider subsidised attendance fees and scholarships for people from under-represented markets or groups. When offering scholarships or other grants, make them easy to apply for.

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- Some groups may be marginalised by an inability to transfer funds internationally. Provide alternative payment options (e.g. register in advance but pay on the day).
- Consider reduced registration rates for local attendees when conferences go to underrepresented countries.
- Consider providing Visa invitation letters that include country-specific requirements. (e.g. include the full name, address, contact information and signature of the Organizing Committee.)

Dates

- Identify national holidays or religious festivals that could limit attendance.

Program: Overall content

- Make sure that your content resonates with all attendees and encourage discussions and differing opinions.
- Invite keynote speakers to address the importance of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) regardless of their main topic.
- It is important not simply to give women and minority groups 'some' opportunity to speak at an IGS conference. Organisers should spread diversity among all speaking and presenting roles (keynotes, session chairs, poster presentations etc).
- Consider including a diverse perspective (gender, race, ethnicity, differently-abled), on a range of topics beyond DEI and Human Resources (HR).

Specific DEI sessions

- For specific sessions on diversity, assign a time and location that is prominent enough to guarantee a good audience.
- Consider the branding of diversity sessions and focus on "diversity as a business strategy".

Paper reviews and abstracts

- Papers are a fundamental basis for IGS Conferences.
- Biases in the final list of abstracts begin with self-selection: potential conference participants may not feel confident enough to submit their work, especially to large and prestigious conferences.
- To mitigate such self-selection, pre-submission mechanisms can aid authors to prepare and receive feedback for their abstract (e.g. other Chapter or TC members).
- Allow for abstract submission in both English and the applicant's preferred native language and assign a reviewer who is fluent in that language. Organisers could define a set of accepted languages for abstract submission. The goal should be to judge the abstracts primarily by the quality or relevance of the work, not the quality of English.
- To mitigate self-selection from non-native speakers, consider accepting submissions in several languages.

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- Where possible, anonymize the submission (e.g., double-blind, double-open, or single-blind reviews).
- Abstract reviews can be unintentionally biased when reviewers unconsciously assign a positive or negative value to the names and affiliations of authors—and their perceived origin, ethnicity, gender, or native language. Reviewers should be reminded of such biases in the evaluation process, e.g. to avoid judging more scrupulously the work of people perceived as part of minoritized groups or being kinder when reviewing the abstracts from those perceived as part of privileged groups.
- Examine the final list of selected abstracts to check for diversity.
- Note that self-selection and unconscious bias may be aggravated by the use of video abstracts as an alternative to written ones, affecting people without the resources to create good quality videos, people with disabilities, non-native speakers, racialized people, and people with diverse body types, among others excluded.
- Promote the abstract submission call beyond the usual communication channels, e.g. share calls for papers with organizations that advance people from traditionally marginalized identities, e.g. (in US) Society of Women Engineers, National Society of Black Engineers, American Indian Science and Engineering Society, Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, American Association for People with Disabilities, and Out in STEM.
- Include proposal/paper reviewers and event planning committee members who are diverse demographically, geographically, professionally, and in age, gender, etc.
- Include language in the call for papers/proposals to establish that diverse points of view are valued and sought.

Logistics - Registration

- Registration forms should allow individuals to indicate the need for accessibility-related or other accommodations.
- Provide the option for participants to share their pronouns or titles for name badges. Allow for nontraditional titles such as Mx. or no pronoun or title at all.

Event Communication

Promotion

- Communicate accessibility when promoting the conference, including contact details for more information.
- Be transparent with potential attendees, on what to expect in terms of accessibility.
- Highlight diversity as a theme or priority for the event on marketing materials, communications, and social media. Include a variety of voices in quotes and event highlights.
- Use bias-free language e.g. gender-neutral terminology, such as “humanity” instead of “mankind”, or “spokesperson” or “chair” instead of “spokesman” or “chairman”.
- Publish a link and a summary statement of these guidelines on your event webpages.

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- In any case, try to find meaningful ways to acknowledge everybody's work. Use the conference spaces (e.g., webpage, opening/closing ceremony at the conference, social media) to give proper credit to the people who are making the event possible.
- Be mindful of diversity when publishing photos of events or construction activities.

On the day

- Code of Conduct and DEI Statement on a poster at the registration desk
- Avoid addressing women by marital status ("Miss" or "Mrs.") unless they prefer. Use professional titles, or "Ms" as a neutral form of address.
- Avoid inadvertent gender-specific pronouns (e.g. "each speaker give his presentation").
- Become familiar with the terminology used for disabilities, racialized groups, gender and sexual orientations, terms that are preferred by each group, and the terms that should be avoided.
- Look out for marginalized voices, e.g. in male-dominated environments, men tend to interrupt women more often than they interrupt other men.

Post event communication

- Seek the opinion of event attendees in post-event surveys about the effectiveness of these guidelines in their view, e.g. "Was our commitment to diversity adequately demonstrated at this event?"

Impact assessment

- Gather data to measure the diversity of invited speakers, selected speakers, and attendees. Show the data at the closing session.

Behaviour expectations

- Communicate and enforce the expectation that all participants (attendees, speakers, staff) are to demonstrate fair treatment, mutual respect, and dignity toward themselves and all others.
- Require participants and speakers to agree to a code of conduct during the registration process.
- Equip moderators with strategies for managing Code of Conduct violations.
- Use signage and symbols that indicate diversity is valued and diverse identities are respected.

Presentations, speaker and audience considerations

Speaker diversity

- Keynote speakers are the highlight of your conference. Commit to diversity in keynote speakers to introduce role models for everyone.

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- Strive for 50% diversity in keynote speakers and presenters. A panel discussion (2+ speakers) should have at least one member of an under-represented group.
- For larger panels, target 50% diversity. This ensures equality of thought leadership, and not just visibility of an under-represented person on-stage.
- Do not limit the selection of speakers from traditionally marginalized identities to diversity-related topics. Respect them as experts in their technical disciplines.

How to diversify speakers

- Finding and recruiting diverse speakers will require reaching beyond usual networks, methods, and practices, and may require offering compensation for their help.
- Individuals who represent diverse groups are tapped often, which leads to significant extra work and the possibility of feeling tokenized. People from underrepresented groups may be underpaid in their jobs and expecting them to work for free compounds this problem.
- Research other industry events for diverse speaker ideas.
- When approaching companies for speakers, remind them to consider underrepresented demographics when nominating a representative.
- Look beyond top management executives and chief officers to find capable speakers from diverse backgrounds.
- To increase the likelihood of both speaker diversity and audience attendance, consider pairing seasoned experts with emerging engineers from diverse backgrounds.

Audience considerations

- Provide guidance to presenters and moderators on how to foster an equitable and inclusive session, e.g. host pre-event run-through calls to ensure all their accessibility needs are met.
- Ensure all speakers utilize microphones.
- Provide instructions for presenters/speakers on how to create and deliver equitable and inclusive presentations.
 - Make sure electronic documents are assistive-technology friendly (with appropriate use of alt text for images and graphics).
 - Add audio description to videos.
 - Use high contrast between text and backgrounds.
 - Use colour combinations and graphic representations that are accessible for people who are colourblind.
 - Ensure that audience members use microphones when asking questions.
 - Avoid the use of quick flashing/strobing lights and/or video elements.
 - Encourage the preparation of accessible slides and presentations by providing accessibility guidelines and presentation templates.
 - During a Q&A session, moderators should aim to collect questions from a diverse range of audience members. If a woman is called upon to ask the first question, it may encourage other female audience members to raise their hands.

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- Consider sessions in languages other than English. Promote these sessions among all conference attendees and give them the same importance as the rest of the program.

Logistics – accessibility

Accessibility

- Look for event venues and hotels (including the gala dinner and other evening events) that are accessible to and inclusive of all participants, for example:
 - Accessible parking areas, pathways, and entrances to the building for wheelchair users.
 - Providing transportation options to the venue for people with disabilities.
 - Providing a location and approximate distance for accessible parking.
 - Providing access at the main entrance from a seated position.
 - Posting visible signage that directs people to accessible entrances to the venue.
 - Registration desks should be accessible from a seated position.
 - Childcare services on site, e.g. baby-changing and feeding rooms.
 - Meeting rooms have wide aisles, clear of obstructions to ensure the safety of all participants.
 - Meeting rooms have multiple accessible areas in the front, middle, and back of the meeting rooms to ensure that wheelchair users have a wide range of seating options and can navigate the space freely, even after people are seated.
 - Gender-neutral restrooms.
 - Restrooms are accessible.
 - Prayer rooms available.
 - All elevators are accessible, with buttons that can be reached from a seated position.
 - Elevator buttons have braille/raised number markings and/or audible floor announcements, with clear visual floor indicators.
 - Directional and informational signs are high-contrast and in large print throughout the venue.
 - Elevate speaker platforms in meeting rooms to increase speaker visibility.
 - Speaker podiums have knee space for wheelchair users and adjustable height.
 - Speaker podiums are height adjustable.
 - Alternatives to hand-held microphones for speakers.
 - Venues allow for service animals (e.g. guide dogs), including relief areas.
 - Glass doors and the door frames have strong contrast.
 - Audio induction loops or other assistive listening devices upon request.
 - Reserve seating near the front for individuals who need to be close to the screen, access to sign language interpreters, space where there are minimized distractions.
 - Invisible disabilities (e.g. dyslexia, anxiety, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism) should be accounted for proactively, for example, by providing quiet spaces for privacy and noise-free conversations or providing chairs in open spaces.
 - All platforms (website, registration, abstract submission etc) should be screen reader-friendly and keyboard accessible.

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Reference sources:

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