REACH
Improving water security for the poor

SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY
AND THE ENVIRONMENT

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

Developing inclusive conferences

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FOREWORD

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The School of Geography and the Environment is committed to enhancing diversity and promoting equality of opportunity amongst all our staff and students. As part of this commitment, one of our priorities in 2019 is to promote greater inclusivity at the conferences and events we organise. We want to ensure that our events showcase the diversity of researchers working in our field as well as allowing people of all backgrounds and career stages to participate and feel included, in both the more formal panel sessions and the socialising and networking opportunities.

We have put together this practical guide for event organisers, drawing on examples of best practice from across the university sector and beyond, and responses to our own online survey of more than 230 people working in higher education and the wider public, private and third sectors in 2018/19.

The guide is wide-ranging in its coverage, incorporating sections on pre-event logistics; programme development and speaker selection; encouraging inclusive participation in Q&A sessions and networking events; representing diversity in conference communications; as well as how to prevent and deal with harassment and discrimination during the event and how to support the needs of those with caring responsibilities.

I was particularly pleased to see many of the recommendations in this guide successfully put into practice at a recent international conference on Water Security and Poverty hosted here in Oxford by colleagues from REACH – one of our flagship research programmes at the School.

We hope that this guide will serve as an accessible step-by-step tool to assist organisers of other events, large and small, in promoting diversity of attendance and inclusivity of participation.

"This guide has been designed to be practical not preachy, and to encourage rather than prescribe."

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A 'How-to' guide to help conference organisers promote diversity of attendance and inclusivity of participation at events

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this guide arose whilst planning our own REACH international conference on Water Security and Poverty at the University of Oxford in March 2019, and a desire to make the event more representative of the diversity of people working in the water sector. We were keen to find out what strategies other conference organisers have deployed to make their events more inclusive – not only in terms of the diversity of speakers, but also the ways in which participants are welcomed, respected and involved. Conversations and email exchanges with people working in the higher education sector convinced us that there would be value in sharing our findings with a wider audience, beyond our own department and institution.

In preparing this guide, we spoke to a number of gender and diversity experts from across the UK and around the world, and gathered examples of best practice in making conferences inclusive, from our own experience and that of our colleagues and contacts. We also designed and ran our own online survey of more than 230 academics, researchers and professionals working in the University of Oxford, other higher education institutions and the wider public, private

and third sectors, in the UK and globally. Respondents shared their experiences of attending conferences and offered creative suggestions as to how these events could promote greater equality in speaker line-up, greater inclusivity in audience participation, and greater accessibility in networking opportunities.

This guide contributes to our equality and diversity objectives at the School of Geography and the Environment, as we prepare to apply for a Silver Athena SWAN award. The guide primarily focuses on gender, but we also make recommendations that relate to other aspects of inclusivity and diversity, such as ethnicity, religion and disability.

We believe that it is possible and desirable to organise conferences that are both high quality *and* inclusive, and this was evident in the success of our own REACH Conference in March 2019. Our high-profile international REACH Conference hosted in Oxford was described by several delegates as the most inclusive they had ever attended. By putting the suggestions from this guide into practice, we ensured that half the speakers at the conference were women, half were from

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) background and a third were early career researchers. We asked all session chairs to take a question from a woman or early career professional first, which visibly changed the dynamic of the Q&A sessions, allowing a wider variety of views to be expressed in an open and receptive setting. Our efforts, we felt, increased the visibility of many researchers, energised our audience and provided a benchmark for our own future events.

We hope that the lessons from the REACH conference, as detailed throughout this guide, will serve as an inspiration to other conference organisers. In future, the measure of a successful conference should be not only that it has provided a showcase for cutting-edge work and sparked productive collaborations, but that it has promoted diversity of attendance and inclusivity of participation.

Lastly, we believe that inclusivity is not something that can be achieved fully. Rather, it should remain an ambition that conference organisers continuously work towards, as there will always be room for learning and improvement. There are indeed many lessons

from our own conference, and many ways in which it could have been more inclusive. Equally, whilst we cannot claim to be offering a definitive guide to inclusive events, we hope that the suggestions in this document will be the starting point from which we as a department and others outside can continue to develop ideas and learn from each other's experiences.

REACH is a global research programme funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and led by the University of Oxford to improve water security for the poor in Africa and Asia.

What do we mean by diversity?

Diversity is much more than just gender, race and ethnicity. It includes people of different ages, religions, physical and learning abilities, education levels, and other characteristics of personal identity. In the UK, the Public Sector Equality Duty (part of the Equality Act 2010) requires universities, like other public sector bodies, to consider equality and diversity in their day-to-day work, including the planning of events.

Although diversity is usually defined in terms of certain protected characteristics, individual identities are not separate within ourselves, so it is important to think of people and participants as having intersectional identities that need to be managed appropriately. For instance, a person could be gender non-conforming, a parent with caring responsibilities, and identifying as black: the combination of these various aspects will inform their experience of an event more than just the sum of those categories.

In this guide, we think of diversity not only in the variety of participants involved in events, whether as speakers, organisers or audience members, but also in terms of the ability of all attendees to participate meaningfully in the event and benefit from it – including both in the formal business of the conference or event (being able to contribute to a discussion, and being acknowledged or recognised for contributions to the work or research being presented) and in more informal aspects such as networking or socialising opportunities.

Why focus on diversity and inclusivity?

Many conferences lack diversity, amongst both speakers and participants, and this is a problem for a number of reasons. Diversity improves performance, and drives innovation, by bringing in a variety of skillsets and experiences. Diverse teams are more innovative and produce better outputs. Research by McKinsey found that companies in the top quartile for gender or ethnic diversity were more likely to financially outperform their national industry average. The same principles apply to events, big and small. A diversity of perspectives and people means a wider variety of ideas, discussions, and potential collaborations. Ultimately, this means a better event.

It is important that early career researchers and professionals see diverse examples of professional speakers and leaders in their field. People who have succeeded regardless of their gender, ethnicity, disability, religion or other characteristics of their identity can become important role models for the next generation of professionals.

Equally importantly, it is the responsibility of conference organizers and of the institutions organising conferences more broadly to make everyone feel welcomed, accepted and safe at events.

Gender imbalances in scientific and technological careers have been widely recognised, with women and minority groups particularly underrepresented at senior levels.[1] Underrepresentation of women and minority groups as conference speakers is in part a symptom of the lack of diversity within some fields and industries, but it also serves to perpetuate these inequalities. Events and conferences are often highly publicised occasions, in addition to being very valuable opportunities to advance

[1] See Beede et al. 2011 and EU 2015

careers by networking, increasing exposure and recognition, building partnerships and developing skills. Therefore, if events are not designed in an inclusive manner, they risk reinforcing or accelerating inequalities. Interestingly, recent research by Elsevier has found that women are less likely than men to collaborate internationally and across the academic and corporate sectors on research papers – could organising more inclusive conferences help address this gap?

Our own survey of more than 230 staff working in higher education and the wider public, private and third sectors in 2018-19 confirmed that a lack of diversity at conferences continues to be a concern. Almost 85% of respondents agreed that it is important for conferences to have policies in place to promote greater diversity amongst panel members and other speakers. However, less than one third of respondents (32%) felt that conferences they had attended had been organised in a way that promoted women's participation and exposure.

Who is this guide for?

This guide has been prepared to help organisers create more inclusive events. We have sought to make it relevant to organisers in charge of conference logistics (choosing a venue, structuring conference sessions, organising social events etc), as well as those involved with more strategic decisions

(choosing speakers, conference themes, briefing chairs etc).

In addition, we hope this guide will be relevant to conference participants so they know what to ask for, and how to ensure their needs will be met.

How was this guide developed?

1. Review of literature and best practice related to promoting diversity in events.

2. Consultation with over 15 conference organisers, gender and diversity experts as well as other professionals.

3. Design and analysis of online survey of more than 230 staff at the School of Geography and the Environment (16.5% of respondents), other higher education institutions, and the wider public, private and third sectors in the UK and beyond.

Photo credit: REACH Conference / John Cairns (2015)

PRE-EVENT LOGISTICS

Food, timing, venue and ticket prices are elements that can be overlooked when thinking about the diversity of an event, but which can easily be addressed and make a considerable difference to improving inclusivity. Below we make a number of recommendations:

Choosing a venue

We realise that event organisers often have a limited number of venue options to choose from, and, because conferences can be so costly, most often price will drive the selection process. However, it is worth considering how the choice of venue and accommodation options influences who attends, and ultimately how inclusive and diverse your event is.

1. **Access requirements**

    *   All rooms (including for coffee breaks, networking sessions and meals) should be easily accessible by all attendees. If the conference takes place over different floors, ensure that there are lifts, ramps or other means that allow participants with mobility issues to access different parts of the venue.

    *   Ensure the venue has parking available, not just for those with mobility limitations, but also those who have other conditions that mean that being able to drive to and from the venue will be preferable.

    *   Choose large rooms to allow participants in wheelchairs to access and move around, and access the stage if they are also speakers.

    *   For larger rooms, ensure there is an appropriate sound system with microphones, hearing loops etc.

*   Try to avoid fluorescent lighting and proximity to sources of constant electrical noise such as lifts or air conditioning units, which can be distressing for neurodiverse participants.

*   Make sure that signage (to lifts, rooms, toilets etc) is clear, visible and appropriate.

*   Ensure some chairs are available for any sessions where attendees are expected to stand for long periods (networking, poster sessions etc).

2. **Washrooms**

    *   When choosing a venue, ensure that there are some accessible toilets for attendees with physical disabilities.

    *   Consider having at least one gender neutral bathroom. If you are unable to choose a venue with gender neutral toilets, we recommend temporarily re-labelling some toilets as gender neutral.

3. **Additional rooms**

    *   We recommend booking a venue with small additional rooms that can be used as quiet space (for people to take a break from networking, or to eat alone without feeling awkward), for prayers, breastfeeding etc.

    *   At our REACH conference we provided four additional rooms (one prayer room, two quiet rooms with desks, and one bookable room for private meetings).

    *   If you are not able to provide additional rooms, check with the venue what facilities attendees can use to breastfeed or change their babies (not the toilets).

4. **Venue child policy**

- If you wish to provide childcare on site (eg pop-up crèche) or allow attendees to come with their children, we recommend that you check whether the venue allows children on site. Many buildings have strict policies on allowing access to children on their premises for health and safety reasons.

5. **Location**

- Choosing a venue and accommodation where people feel safe and comfortable is important to ensure participants' safety, prevent any incidents and encourage their participation. This is especially relevant if the conference ends late and participants need to walk between the venue and their accommodation.

- Some conferences (eg. the Critical Management Studies conference 2015) provide lists of recommended taxi companies, including those with women drivers, as well as closed Facebook/social media chats to allow people to buddy up when travelling back to their accommodation after evening events.

6. **Technology**

- Consider providing facilities for livestreaming and/or video recording, so that people who can't attend on the day (eg people with caring responsibilities) can still participate, or access the recording after the event.

"Conferences are large and frequently exhausting for someone with a disability, even if they're ambulatory. Invisible disabilities exist (ie chronic pain). It's especially hard to navigate these large spaces without places to sit down and rest." Survey respondent

Choosing a date and time

1. If possible choose a date that does not overlap with key religious or national holidays, especially for the audience that you are targeting (check this interfaith calendar).

2. If possible, also choose a time that will allow people with caring responsibilities, or those relying on support workers or carers, to attend: for instance, opt for a later start, and an earlier finish. Consider that an annual conference that takes place on the same dates every year risks excluding the same people every year. Ideally, school holidays or mid-term breaks should be avoided as childcare and travel costs can be prohibitive then, especially for early career researchers or doctoral students.

3. Entertainments and networking sessions are key elements of conferences, and provide opportunities for sharing ideas, making connections and building partnerships or collaboration. However they often take place at the end of the day, thus excluding participants with caring responsibilities (often women), or those with certain disabilities who may find conferences tiring. It is thus recommended to schedule at least one networking session and/or entertainments at different times of the day to ensure all can participate (eg one evening, one lunchtime and one day time session).

4. Announce the date and time early so attendees can plan accordingly. This is particularly important for attendees with caring responsibilities or with disabilities who may need to find a helper, a carer, or to organise childcare.

Food, drink and entertainment

Consideration of food and drink options is one area where significant progress has been made over the past few years. One reason for this is that it is relatively easy to address, provided information about participants' needs is collected early. An increasing number of people are changing their diets due to allergies, intolerances, or personal choices. In addition, people of different faiths, people with disabilities, and pregnant women may also have specific dietary requirements.

1. Collect information early about dietary needs and preferences (e.g. during the registration).

2. People with specific mobility or sight impairments might need additional support during breaks, for instance to carry plates of food and drinks.

3. If you are not providing meals or snacks, create a list of restaurants close to the venue that provide vegetarian/vegan/kosher/gluten-free food, or other options.

4. If you are providing a buffet lunch, ensure that dishes/ingredients, or at least allergens, are clearly labelled.

5. Ensure that not all social gatherings are alcohol or bar-centred. Offer alcohol free alternatives for drinks receptions, and caffeine-free/gluten free options for refreshment breaks, and ensure they are labelled clearly.

6. Attendees observing Ramadan will fast from sunrise to sunset. During this period, no food or drink will be consumed during daytime. If breakfast and dinners are provided at the conference, if possible, make arrangements for these attendees to eat at a later or earlier time, or discount the ticket price to allow them to make their own eating arrangements.

7. Consider that round tables for dinner are more conductive to networking and conversation than long tables. If you are making a table plan, ensure that a diversity of attendees can sit together.

Collecting participant information

1. Include a free space on the registration form where attendees are actively encouraged to declare specific needs they might have (ie learning or physical disabilities, dietary or caring needs). Specify that you welcome all guests and (where appropriate) that you will be able to support and cater for these.

2. A growing number of events now include an optional gender-neutral 'Mx' title option on their registration forms. This may be relevant if you are including titles on your name badges, seating plans, or in your email correspondences. Alternatively, consider removing titles entirely for all attendees!

3. Another option is to ask people to indicate their pronouns beforehand, or choose a pronouns sticker on the day or suggest participants write the text on their own badge, so they can self-select their name, pronouns and title(s).

Ticket price

Income is an important area of diversity that is often overlooked. Conferences often end up costing more than anticipated, so budget and finances can be a real headache for conference organisers. If ticket costs need to remain high to ensure the event is financially viable, consider some alternatives that allow participants with different income to attend:

1. Consider creating an event scholarship with a reduced or free ticket.

2. Some conferences recruit helpers, assistants or rapporteurs that help with elements of the conference logistics on the day in exchange for free access to the conference.

3. Unbundle the ticket price, so people can opt out of certain aspects of the conference they would prefer not to pay for or attend (eg dinners, side events, entertainments etc) However, it is important to provide some free networking opportunities within the core conference.

4. People with certain disabilities may need to be accompanied by a helper or carer. Offering their helper or carer a complimentary ticket may be decisive in terms of ensuring their attendance.

5. Consider offering childcare options for the duration of the conference: these can be included in the general ticket or charged ad hoc. If childcare facilities are not available at the venue, consider providing a list of childcare options in the local area.

Photo credit: ECI's 1.5 Degrees Conference / John Cairns (2016)

"Age is a big factor to feeling included and being able to participate. I'm often assumed to be 'just a' PhD student, and people can be very dismissive of speaking to me. When they learn I'm a deputy director, lecturer, and more they suddenly care." Survey respondent

" *Along with gender representation at conferences, I think it is equally useful to rethink the format of conferences to include different types of interactive learning and networking. Having more than the typical presentation or panel to audience is great for including various perspectives from people who might otherwise not feel comfortable to share their knowledge - roundtable discussions, workshops, breakout discussions can help.* " Survey respondent

PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND SPEAKER SELECTION

Women and people from minority groups are less likely to be chosen as speakers in high-level roles (keynote speakers, discussants, opening panels etc).[2] Over the past five years or so, we've seen the emergence of a movement calling out all-male panels (or 'manels'), and as a result an increasing number of conferences are committing to more diversity on panels and among speakers. Similarly, a growing number of male participants are committing to refuse to speak on men-only panels. Although this is an important development, in a sense it is only the tip of the iceberg. Whilst we are mindful of the need to avoid 'tokenism' and positive discrimination, and to ensure that speakers are selected on the basis of their expertise and the relevance of their research, in this section, we consider a number of actions or initiatives that may help to increase the level of diversity among speakers. Like the previous section, it is relevant to conference organisers involved with the logistics of the event; we also think it is relevant to those involved in more strategic decision-making roles about conference framing, structure, and selection of speakers.

Conference structure or format: some reflections

Many conferences are organised with the principal aim of demonstrating excellence to a large audience and showcasing cutting-edge work by leading professionals and academics. The format of choice for this purpose is often the keynote lecture or panel discussion in a large lecture theatre, which is built on the celebration of individual excellence, and may limit participation from under-represented groups.

Recognising that conferences serve other important purposes – fostering collaborations, building skills, raising profiles and supporting career development for a wider group – may justify the adoption of other types of formats that are more conducive to sharing knowledge, generating new ideas and building partnerships, such as small interactive sessions, world cafés or networking sessions, dedicated workshops. Some conferences provide multiple keynote speakers to give voice to different groups.

A diverse conference organisation team or committee

Ensuring diversity within the conference organisation team or committee is important. In addition, as far as possible, each of the conference organisers should be given an appropriate share of duties, responsibilities and visibility.

In their analysis of gender bias at American Association of Physical Anthropologists meetings, Isbell et al 2012 find that the proportion of women participants differs dramatically by the gender of the organiser. Symposia organised by men have half the number of women first authors (29%) than symposia organied by women (64%) or by both men and women (58%). Additionally, women's participation in talks and posters at symposia organised by women is twice that at male-organised symposia (65%).

Making diversity a key target for all sessions

1. Commit to ensuring gender and ethnic or racial diversity on all of your panels, and enforce as a strict policy. At our REACH conference we decided to avoid both all-male and all-female panels, to ensure a diversity of views was presented for all topics. Importantly, women's presentations should not be restricted to speaking about gender issues.

2. It's not just about the opportunity to speak or present, it is also about the role or visibility speakers are given. In other words, even if your conference

[2] See Isbell et al., 2012, Jones et al. 2014 and Sardelis and Drew, 2016

has a diversity of speakers, you should keep track of whether that diversity is spread among all speaking roles: key notes, session chairs, panellists, parallel session speakers, and poster presentations.

3. Due to limitations on numbers of speakers and their more junior positions, early career researchers (ECRs) and young professionals are often not invited to speak despite their considerable contributions to the work or research being presented; as a minimum their contributions should be acknowledged and referenced in presentations. Ensuring the visibility of our ECRs was a key priority at our REACH conference. Nearly a third of our speakers were early career, and two of our ECRs did the closing speech. We also provided additional opportunities to increase their visibility, such as through posters and a photography exhibition to highlight their research. These efforts, we felt, created an inclusive and participatory environment where everyone - speakers and attendees - were welcome and encouraged to engage.

Applying rules to different session organisers

If each session is organised by a separate committee, try to ensure that diversity guidelines and targets are clearly communicated and enforced. Think about a balance between 'stick and carrot' – perhaps offering incentives for session organisers to ensure diversity among speakers. For instance, the World Water Week Conference organised by the Stockholm International Water Institute encourages convenors to host their sessions in an inclusive and interactive way by offering a Gold Standard discount to those who achieve a balanced gender representation and youth representation at their session.

How to ensure more women speakers

1. Recognise and understand the barriers limiting women's participation and explore alternative arrangements that could help address those limitations.

   - In our survey, the top three barriers to ensuring an equal proportion of women and men speakers that respondents selected (out of six options) were "conference organisers tend to select the usual suspects and do not make enough of an effort to find qualified women professionals or researchers" (67%), "women have more caring responsibilities, which may limit their participation at conferences" (65%) and "women are less likely to promote themselves and therefore be selected as speakers" (53%)

   - Do women decline more invitations to speak than men? Some authors find that this is indeed the case,[3] but others[4] find no gender differences in turning down speaking engagements. In our survey, when asked what they think are some of the barriers to ensuring an equal proportion of women and men speakers, "women are more likely to decline offers to speak" was only the fifth most selected option, out of six in total.

   - We all have implicit biases that are shaped by the society and culture in which we live and operate. It may seem harder at first to find women speakers because they are not the usual 'go to', but in most cases, women speakers are not lacking. There are now a considerable number of resources that feature or collect information about women professionals in specific fields. For example, in the water sector, SIWI is
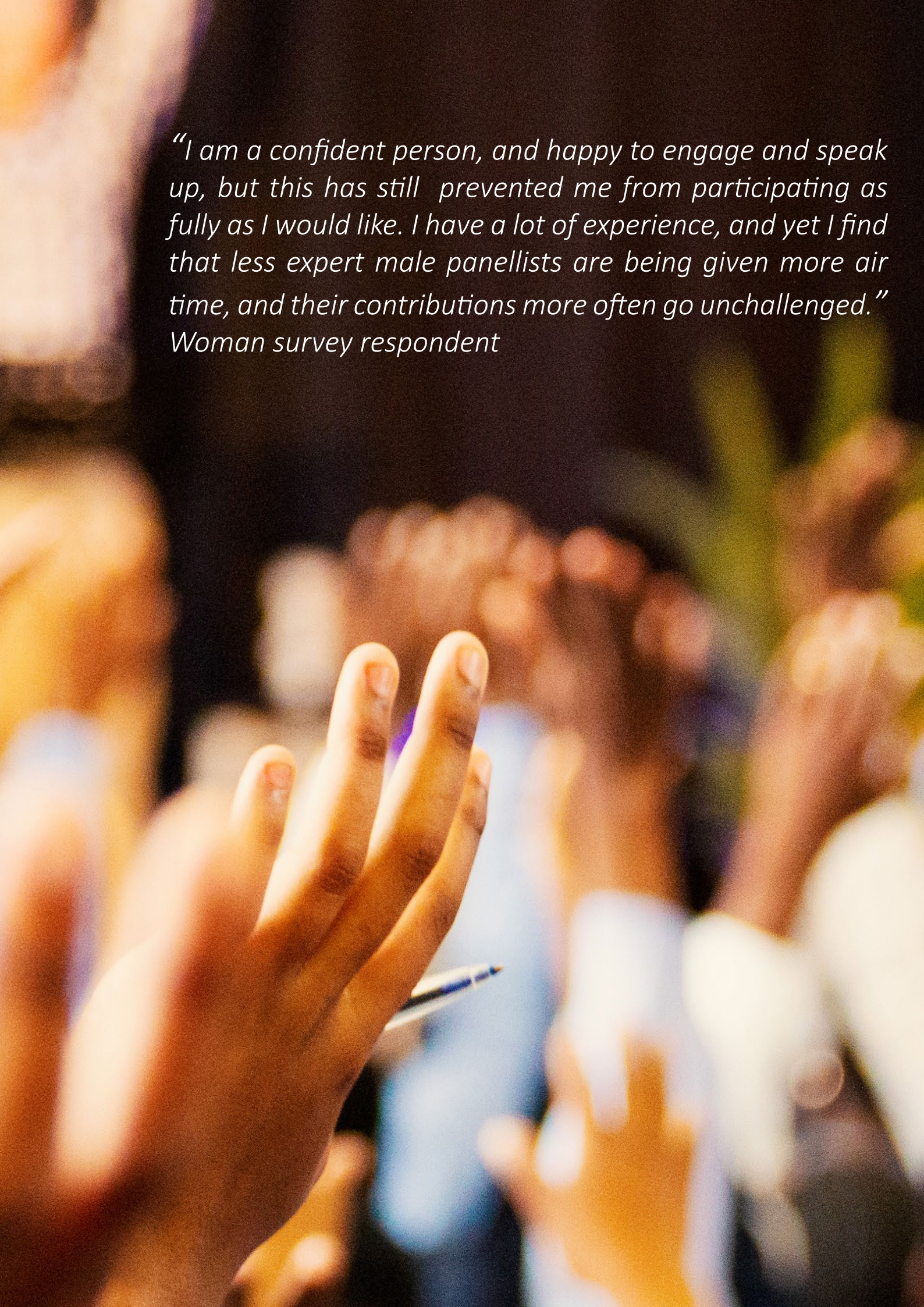
[3] Schroeder et al. 2013;
[4] Nittrouer et al. 2017

hosting a database of women speakers (who can nominate themselves), and there are Twitter lists of women working in water.

2. Broaden your search for potential presenters from under-represented groups, whose work or research would be appropriate for the conference. Then personally invite them to submit an abstract or to give a talk.

3. As our survey highlights, caring responsibilities can be a real barrier to participation at a conference, so you may wish to consider one of these options:

    •   Having bursaries for speakers (men and women) with caring responsibilities – these may be used to cover the cost of nursery or finding a carer, or allowing their child to travel with them;

    •   Offering childcare facilities on site;

    •   Giving speakers as much notice as possible so that they can arrange childcare. Also consider offering scheduling options (ie if they cannot do the breakfast keynote, they may be able to speak at another time during the conference);

    •   See the section on 'Caring responsibilities' below.

4. If selection is made through abstract submission:

    •   Encourage collaborative abstract submissions (as lead authors are often men), welcoming more than one speaker for each submission;

    •   Consider the way you present the call for papers, to ensure that it appeals to and welcomes women;

5. If someone submits a great proposal but does not make it to the conference, consider recommending them for a future event.

Photo credit: REACH Conference / John Cairns (2015)

"*I am a confident person, and happy to engage and speak up, but this has still prevented me from participating as fully as I would like. I have a lot of experience, and yet I find that less expert male panellists are being given more air time, and their contributions more often go unchallenged.*" Woman survey respondent

ENCOURAGING 'INCLUSIVE' PARTICIPATION

One third of respondents in our survey said that they do not feel confident to ask questions at a conference or to network with people who are more senior than they are.

We recommend that conference organisers go beyond ensuring a higher proportion of speakers and participants from a diverse background, and work to ensure all speakers have an equal opportunity to contribute and participate in the conversation, to network and gain exposure. With the move away from all male panels women sometimes feel 'tokenised' – they feel they've been selected merely to ensure there's at least one woman on the panel without ensuring they are an appropriate fit, or being given the space to share their views as much as others on the panel. More generally, it is also important to ensure that the majority of people at the conference who are not giving presentations or sitting on panels can participate fully in the event, whether through Q&A or discussion sessions, or through more informal networking opportunities.

Panel discussions and plenaries

1. The chair should be selected carefully and should be briefed to ensure they give panel members an equal opportunity to speak. The chair should be able to stop panellists if they monopolise the discussion or if they speak for longer than asked to, and to create a space for speakers who are less vocal to share their research, views or opinions. The chair should also have a good grasp of the background, field, research and expertise of different presenters and ask relevant and appropriate questions.

2. If there is only one woman on a panel, try to ensure that they are not consistently last to speak. This should also apply to panellists of BME background, those

who have a disability or who are early career.

3. Consider offering less experienced speakers mentoring or free training or guidelines on how to most effectively present their research or work and handle Q&A sessions.

4. If the panellist or speakers will not be presenting in their native language, it may be worth rephrasing audience questions that use complex or convoluted language. Consider letting speakers know in advance that they can ask for a question to be translated to them in their native language, and that they can respond in their native language.

Q&A session

Research shows that men are more likely to ask a question during Q&As; however this changes if the first question is asked by a woman[5]. Below we suggest some ways to promote greater inclusivity in Q&A sessions:

1. Take a few questions at a time, ensuring there are questions from a diversity of people (participants from different genders, younger audience members, people with BME background etc.)

2. If you are taking only one question at a time, try starting with a woman, a participant from BME background, an early career professional, or a member of minority group. At our REACH 2019 conference we asked our chairs to follow this practice. As highlighted to us by a number of early career researchers (especially women), this helped create an inclusive environment where they felt welcome and encouraged to participate.

3. Prior to the event, encourage a few women colleagues to ask questions

5 See Hinsley et al. 2017, Pritchard et al. 2014.

while they are in the audience, if no other woman raises their hand.

4. Make it clear that no question is too simple or silly, all ideas are welcomed, and the conference is non-judgemental.

5. Provide a means to raise questions (anonymously or not), for example through a phone app like Slido or via Twitter.

6. Consider making transcripts of papers available on the day, to enable fuller participation for people with processing issues who may struggle to follow the spoken word.

Networking sessions

As discussed above, networking is an essential component of most conferences and plays an important role in gaining visibility, building collaborations and supporting career development. However, networking can be a source of anxiety for some conference participants. As one woman survey respondent said: "I am a leading professor in my field and I still feel intimidated. Networking is awful and we need to get away from that idea." Whilst we wouldn't suggest removing networking sessions altogether, we may wish to rethink how they are structured, and it is important to make space for attendees to opt out of them. Providing a framework for networking events or giving them a structure where people have something specific to talk about can be helpful. Some suggestions:

1. Try different formats for networking: for instance as part of a poster session, a 'world café', or an informal 'ask the expert' session.

2. Some conferences have successfully used a traffic light badge system so people can make it clear whether they are happy to network, prefer to be approached by others rather than

'making the first move', or if they would like some quiet space.

3. Share guidelines, training or suggestions on how to make the most of networking sessions.

4. Consider offering attendees the opportunity to see the list of delegates before the event and pre-book short networking meetings to take place during the event, thus eliminating the need for 'small talk'.

5. Consider asking more established academics to act as 'buddies' or mentors who can support and introduce early career academics.

6. Try 'Randomised Coffee Trials': when booking, give delegates the option to sign up to this, and then randomly split them into groups of three people. During one coffee break people come together in these pre-assigned groups to chat and network – thereby eliminating the worry about approaching someone you don't know and/or someone senior, and hopefully sparking some interesting discussions.

7. Think about allocating a specific theme for an overall networking session, or smaller group networking. This would

Photo credit: ECI's 1.5 Degrees Conference / John Cairns (2016)

COMMUNICATING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

We recommend that you communicate your efforts to improve inclusivity and diversity at your conference, by clearly stating why diversity matters, and making all key information accessible on the conference website and via emails prior to the conference.

Before the conference

1. Create a clear equality and diversity statement specifically for the conference or event.

2. Make sure that information is accessible on your different channels – website and social media - and also consider sharing key information and resources in an email or newsletter before the conference. Include full information about the venue, including maps of the layout (eg where toilets and quiet rooms are located) and directions for how to reach the venue on foot, by car and by public transport.

3. We also recommend sending some tips and recommendations to speakers to ensure their presentations are accessible to all. For instance, if slides are provided, speakers could be asked to ensure that they are written in a font and colour that are easier to read for those with dyslexia or other reading/learning difficulties. Another consideration is to ensure a sufficiently large font size and font colour contrast with the background, to help people with visual impairments.

INEQUALTIES & INCLUSIVITY
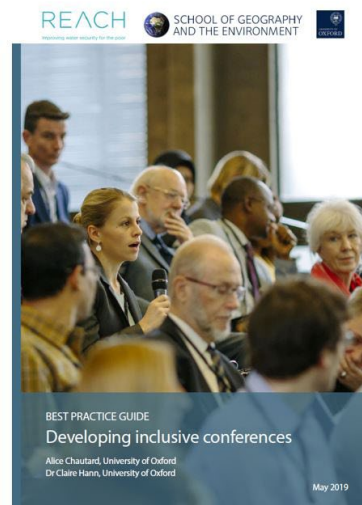
Help to ensure this conference provides space for everyone to engage:

• Allow junior colleagues and women to ask the first questions

• Give equal speaking space to all on panels

• Posters and photo exhibition set-up to give visibility to ECRs: go read, view, and engage with them!

• Respect all views and report any incident (refer to code of conduct)

In their opening presentation at our REACH 2019 conference, the REACH programme directors made a mention about inclusivity and diversity to encourage all attendees and speakers to help create an inclusive, participatory and safe environment.

During the conference

1. We encourage the person who opens the conference to make a statement about the conference's efforts towards equality, diversity and inclusivity, and mention what attendees themselves can do to support these efforts (respect all, adopt an inclusive attitude, report any incidents, etc) - see image above.

2. Make sure the on-site signage is clear and can be accessed and read by all participants.

3. If you hire a photographer or a filmmaker to document the event, we recommend giving them a short briefing to ensure they capture diversity.

After the conference

1. Collect feedback from participants on the inclusivity of the event, and publicise the findings. This will also help you with the planning of your future events.

Prior, during and after

1. Prior, during and after the conference make sure to give (at least) equal visibility to women, young professionals, and people with a BME background or with a disability in all communication materials in print and online (website, twitter, facebook and other social media platforms).

PREVENTING AND DEALING WITH DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

Attendance and participation at conferences depends on delegates feeling safe (from both physical and verbal assault); and safety is closely tied with gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity and characteristics of people's identity. Thus, creating a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment at conferences should be a key priority for organisers. To this end, we encourage conferences to make clear what is, and what is not, appropriate behaviour, and how to report incidents (anonymously) should they arise. Below, we make a number of recommendations that conference organisers can follow to prevent and address incidents of discrimination and harassment.

1. As discussed above, the selection of venue can play an important role here. Venues with accommodation located nearby should be preferred.

2. Develop a code of conduct or a harassment policy that attendees must sign when they register.

   • The code of conduct could detail what behaviour is expected of participants, how to report an incident of discrimination or harassment and how the institution will deal with a complaint. You can read the REACH code of conduct we asked attendees to agree to at our REACH 2019 conference (itself inspired by SIWI's World Water Week Code of Conduct)

   • Consider reminding attendees that these guidelines also apply to social media.

3. Make sure there is a clear process for reporting incidents of discrimination or harassment. We encourage providing more than one way for attendees to report any incident, for instance through an online form, via email, or in person. See an example here of a form developed by the REACH Conference. We also encourage making it available for the victim of an incident and a witness to report an incident.

4. Make sure this process is clearly communicated with the audience (ie in participant booklet, in conference emails and even, if possible, on signs on the walls in the venue).

5. At least one person should be trained to respond to a report of discrimination/harassment (in terms of hearing the potential victim, collecting the report, knowing what the institution's policy is on harassment etc)

6. If relevant, communicate what actions the conference organisers have taken before to effectively address a case of discrimination or harassment.

"Through answering this survey I have thought more about many aspects of conferences and it makes me quite sad to realise that I have seen harassement and discrimination more than I realised." Survey respondent

SUPPORTING ATTENDEES WITH CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

Caring responsibilities can be a considerable barrier to attending and participating at conferences for both men and women - although the responsibility is often largely borne by women. When our survey respondents were asked what barriers prevent an equal proportion of speakers who are men and women, the second most ticked response was "Women have more caring responsibilities". On the other hand, providing childcare at conferences can be a real challenge for organisers due to the associated costs, logistics, liability and the health and safety responsibilities. Besides, crèche facilities are often available for children up to a certain age and are not therefore a solution for parents who have older children or children with specific needs.

Dr Emily Henderson, Assistant Professor at the University of Warwick has done extensive work on the impact of caring responsibilities in academia, looking at academic conferences among other aspects of academic life.[6] In 2018, she produced a policy briefing on 'creating inclusive conferences for academics with caring responsibilities', with key recommendations that are relevant to non-academic conferences too. We have mentioned some elsewhere in this guide (eg giving plenty of notice of conference schedules; avoiding very long days; live-streaming or filming parts of the conference) and others include:

1. Ensure reliable Wi-Fi is available, to help delegates keep in touch with family at home.

2. Offer care bursaries to cover extra care expenses incurred by conference delegates whilst they are away from home – including perhaps bringing a carer with them to look after their children. This will be dependent upon the conference budget and you may need to consider whether offering care bursaries means diverting funding away from other groups who may need financial assistance to attend the conference – eg early career researchers on short-term contracts.

3. Provide space on the registration form for people to specify any care-related requests (as they would for dietary requirements or access needs).

4. Consider offering a day-delegate rate for participants who cannot attend the whole conference because of caring responsibilities.

Photo credit: Quinn Dombrowski

[6] See the 'In two places at once' research project led by Dr. Henderson

Photo credit: ECI's 1.5 Degrees Conference / John Cairns (2016)

What can institutions do to promote diversity in conference attendance?

If we are to ensure that conference speakers and delegates reflect the diversity of professionals working in their field, it is not only the responsibility of conference organisers to make their events inclusive and welcoming, but people's own institutions also have a role to play in making it possible for their staff to attend conferences. This could include:

1. Offering bursaries to cover additional care costs (for children or elderly relatives) incurred by employees with caring responsibilities when attending conferences. An example is the Carers' Career Fund at the University of Oxford.

2. Allowing employees time off from their day-to-day jobs to attend conferences. Given the importance of these events for career development, it is useful to discuss future conference attendance as part of regular appraisal/review meetings between employees and their line managers.

3. Training or mentoring for employees to help them raise their profile, improve their presentation skills, confidence, and so on, in order to increase their opportunities to speak at conferences.

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Acknowledgments

Thank you for reading

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