

Suggestions for improving Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity and Accessibility of Challenger Conferences

- Challenger EDIA Working Group, January 2022

- updated January 2024 to reflect the Society's adoption of a code of conduct for meetings

These suggestions are based on discussions during Challenger EDIA Working Group meetings. These suggestions are especially important when reinvigorating in person meetings – a lot of work has been done, for example, by the UK Polar Network on how to make online conferences accessible, and now attention needs to turn to doing the same for in person events. Think carefully about whether an event or conference should be online or in person; whilst online conferences can improve inclusivity in some respects and reduce travel and carbon emissions, there is a clear motivation to hold in person meetings to improve networking and job opportunities for ECRs.

Hybrid events are a possibility, but it's very hard to do these well without making it a two tier system of those who are there and those who are not; hybrid meetings are also expensive to do well as very good IT kit is needed to make it work.

For in person events...

Remember that being on a conference organising committee is in a privileged position – use that responsibility wisely.

Remember that there's a difference between accommodations and accessibility. We want to be aiming for accessibility! Below taken from Beth Rosier (UKRI/NERC) Accessible presentations guidelines:

Accommodation means only providing content designed for people with disabilities when it is requested. For example, a person with a visual impairment attends a class with worksheets printed in a small font that they can't read. They have to explain their disability in order to ask for a large print handout, and if this isn't available then they have to go without the resource provided to their peers.

Accessibility means making things accessible for people with disabilities all the time. People with disabilities can be sure that they can access content, and know that it was designed by people who anticipated that they would be a part of it and wanted them to be a part of it, as well. Continuing the example above, an accessible class would provide additional large print handouts or just make all the handouts large print by default.

Think carefully about accessibility, and don't leave it to the last minute. We suggest organising a subgroup of the organising committee to focus on EDIA within the conference from the start.

Include EDIA relevant material into registration/abstract submission process, including links to unconscious bias training and advice for making presentations more accessible (*"This is what we're doing... and this is what you can do..."*). In addition, update the website advice on poster/talk guidelines – perhaps use UKPN guidelines as a basis:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VOw_-r5kxlz0nln0N2qeEY2Rq1sDhbbo/view?usp=sharing

e.g. use of colour bars/scales (Nuñez et al., 2018)

<https://www.color-blindness.com/coblis-color-blindness-simulator/>

<https://theconversation.com/five-maps-that-will-change-how-you-see-the-world-74967>

e.g. use of inclusive language

<https://www.totaljobs.com/insidejob/gender-bias-decoder/>

<http://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com/>

e.g. use of alternative text

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/accessibility-guidelines-alt-text-what-you-need-know>

e.g. consideration of attendees with Dyslexia

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/creating-a-dyslexia-friendly-workplace/dyslexia-friendly-style-guide>

Also in the abstract submission stage give the option for slightly longer talks at conferences for those that might need it:

<https://www.bas.ac.uk/blogpost/make-sure-stammered-voices-are-heard/>

Disseminate the Challenger Society's code of conduct for meetings to all attendees, preferably before the conference as well as during it.

https://www.challenger-society.org.uk/code_of_conduct

Encourage authors to use a logo/sign on their talks and posters showing whether it is acceptable for others to take photos of their work and post it on social media.

For example, similar to those used by EGU:

https://egu23.eu/about/egu_general_assembly_rules_of_conduct.html

Or these:



Be aware of gender balance in roles across the board, including Chairs, keynote speakers, poster presenters, other speakers and other contributors.

Integrate EDIA issues into key events. Give guidance for plenary speakers about integrating some aspects of EDIA issues into their talks (suggestions include talking about their career paths, lived experiences, EDIA initiatives that they have been involved in).

Strongly encourage the use of pronouns in badges, abstract booklets, posters, talk slides

etc, and explain why the use of pronouns is important. Note that not everyone will want to disclose their pronouns, and undisclosed pronouns should not be assumed. Use this as an opportunity to normalise gender neutral language in these spaces – “they/them”, “the scientist”, “the author”, etc...

Encourage open question asking in sessions that resembles online ‘chat’ functions, rather than just requesting questions from the audience at the end of each talk (in the traditional ‘hands-up’ approach), perhaps using software such as Slido or Twitter. This could be made easier through the use of a Chair and Co-Chair (see below). Suggest taking the first question (live or online) from an ECR.

Consider appointing a Chair and a Co-Chair (or two Chairs), one of whom is an ECR. Provide Chairs with advice on how to chair in an equitable and fair way e.g. the importance of ECR inclusion and accessibility.

Think about venue accessibility, including making sure that there is good access to get there (including public transport, not just driving) and that the venue itself has good accessibility (ramps, elevators, induction loop systems, etc.).

Think about accessibility of conference dinners, which are important for networking at all career stages, but may not be feasible for some attendees especially if such tickets are not claimable, or some people don’t have the personal finances to cover the cost. Consider having the dinner costs included in the registration fee (making them claimable by most if not all institutions).

Consider encouraging more student or ECR-led conferences/sessions, to help train people for running accessible conferences.

Gather diversity information of delegates/attendees/presenters. Make sure to think carefully about wording, and always have a “prefer not to say” option, and use “Not listed” rather than “Other” (Jaroszewski et al., 2018). The aim is to put the focus on the people who wrote the form (for not putting in the option), rather than othering the people filling out the form.

Additional information and advice:

https://egu2020.eu/about_and_support/accessibility_and_inclusiveness.html

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1r3FNVK5983NZswNYCf2ipMyr6hsJcWvx5XKQw3qf60/edit>

References:

Jaroszewski, S., Lottridge, D., Haimson, O.L. & Quehl, K., (2018). "Genderfluid" or "Attack Helicopter" Responsible HCI Research Practice with Non-binary Gender Variation in Online Communities. In Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, pp. 1-15.

Nuñez, J. R., Anderton, C. R., & Renslow, R. S. (2018). Optimizing colormaps with consideration for color vision deficiency to enable accurate interpretation of scientific data. *PloS one*, 13(7), e0199239

Stefanoudis, P. V., Biancani, L. M., Cambronero-Solano, S., Clark, M. R., Copley, J. T., Easton, E., ... & Glover, A. G. (2021). Moving conferences online: lessons learned from an international virtual meeting. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, 288(1961), 20211769