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Guidelines for Promoting Equity and Inclusion in Scientific Events and Other Meetings

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Abstract:

Scientific meetings and workforce development are integral aspects of fostering collaboration and attracting diverse talent. However, many institutional, financial, and social barriers often make them inaccessible to scientists from diverse backgrounds. We provide these guidelines aiming at an equitable representation of the scientific community and diverse participation in scientific meetings. We acknowledge promoting equity and inclusion is an ongoing task and invite continual feedback from the public on our recommendations.

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Why Equity and Inclusion Matter:

- Research¹ provides compelling evidence that diversity unlocks innovation and drives market growth—a finding that should intensify efforts to ensure that executive ranks both embody and embrace the power of differences.
- McKinsey's latest report² shows that the business case diversity remains robust and that the relationship between diversity on executive teams and the likelihood of financial outperformance has strengthened over time.
- Attracting and retaining diverse talent is crucial for scientific advancement and for ensuring that benefits from scientific advancement are accessed equitably across societal barriers³.
- Reducing institutional barriers to recruitment and advancement within science benefits all.
- Science is a public good and science accessibility is essential towards maintaining a positive relationship with the public.
- Missing out on potential contributions to science from a significant part of the population because of characteristics such as gender, race, sexuality, religion or economic background is, at the most simplistic level, a waste of opportunities and resources.

General Principles:

Inclusivity in scientific meetings starts with diverse representation among the organisation team. This will increase diversity between invited speakers, in turn attracting more diverse participants.

- Acknowledge the intrinsic imperfection of the status quo and that work needs to be done to increase inclusivity and diversity.
- Prioritize the involvement of the broader community, not only EDI activists, in increasing diversity and inclusion.
- Prioritize curiosity for how your conference may need to shift to be inclusive instead of defensiveness for the status quo.
- Prioritize accessibility of the physical (or digital/hybrid) space from the get-go.
- Acknowledge that we carry unconscious biases every day, and that imperfection is intrinsic to the process of improving inclusion. *Even if you follow these guidelines exactly, harm of some sort may still occur during a scientific meeting.* Respond to it appropriately and embrace the experience as an opportunity to practice accountability, receive feedback, and learn beyond what is outlined here.

¹ <https://hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation>

² <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>

³ <https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/feature/Reasons-why-diversity-in-STEM-is-important>

Planning the Meeting: Key Considerations

Where to Start:

- Make the organising committee representative along dimensions including career stage, race, gender, economic class, and other axes of identity.
- Emphasize the need for accessible meeting venues, both physically and virtually, to accommodate a diverse group of attendees.
- Post announcements in diverse environments and formats.
- Ensure people with caretaking duties (ex.: caring for children, elderly people, etc.) can attend events/meetings by providing necessary facilities (ex.: child care) or grants (ex: for hiring caretakers, for travelling with caretakers, etc.).
- State code of conduct for conference participants ⁴.
- Clear chain-of-command, i.e. an organizational structure that documents how each member of an organizing team reports to one another, to prevent and ensure efficient assessment of breaches in the code of conduct.
- Encourage all people involved in the event/meeting organization to follow the steps outlined in these guidelines.

Clarity on Language Use:

- Use gender-neutral language (e.g. “they” instead of “he/she”, or the equivalent in the *lingua franca* for the meeting) whenever possible.
- Explicitly invite submitted contributions from gender, racial, and cultural minorities within science.
- Include a place for participants to indicate accessibility requirements, in the registration form to the conference.
- If accessibility considerations have been taken into account (e.g. wheelchair access, visual and hearing-impaired accommodations, childcare facilities, scholarships), name them in the program solicitation and affirm the desire for members who require such accommodations to attend.
- Invite feedback on accessibility, including before the conference

Accessibility Considerations:

- Ramp accessibility and accessible restrooms for wheelchair users (including stage, if they are presenting), and assistance if the conference venue is badly connected to the accommodation.

⁴ <https://www.valamis.com/hub/code-of-conduct>

- Facilities and staff for childcare, chronic diseases, or sensory overstimulation. For example, access to quiet, private space during the conference, which could be used as a mother's room or space for people with chronic diseases to lie down, or a place to recover from overstimulation.
- Audio/Visual impairment assistance:
 - live transcription, closed caption, sign language interpreters, screen reader accessible website, reminding the audience to use a microphone to ask questions,
 - require speakers to prepare a presentation with these facilities in mind (i.e. closed captioning) before the conference,
 - meeting rooms with an induction loop if possible,
 - printed session schedule available electronically in large print and if possible Braille - tactile writing system.
- Allergy/Vegetarian/Vegan/gluten-free/Kosher/Halal/low salt food options.
- Financial assistance for those who need help getting to and attending the meeting.
- Transportation options to and from the meeting venue.
- The conference website should offer information on presentation accommodations (i.e. closed captioning) as well as facilities, and organisers should make this resource known to speakers and participants.
- Create a plan for accessibility problems that may arise during the conference. Make sure major organizers (General Chairs, Logistics, Registration, SVs, etc) have contact information for an Accessibility Chair or other responsible person who can make arrangements for accommodations, and know which of the venue staff should be contacted. (locked/faulty door, malfunctioning lift, etc).
- If possible provide gender-neutral restrooms in addition to or instead of binary-gendered restrooms.
- A quiet place should be reserved where people can gather for social conversation, for people who are hard of hearing or who find the main area overstimulating.
- If an attendee requires an assistant to accompany them at the conference, this assistant should not have to pay the full conference fee. A suggested alternative is to have them pay for a 'meal-only' fee if they will be eating at the conference.
- For people with attention impairments, provide slides and/or video recordings (neurodivergent conditions or people with mental-health-related impairments). Notice that not all may disclose due to stigma, so it is generally a good practice to provide this as complementary material (as well as make it known to people attending that this material will be provided, possibly before the event).
- Develop an outreach/promotion plan that reaches communities that are traditionally excluded in scientific meetings.

Selecting Presenters and Participants:

- Try to create a broad network by reaching out to a variety of institutions
- Encourage organizers to consider a diverse range of criteria when selecting speakers to maximize the diversity of the speakers.
- Take into consideration cognitive biases when choosing speakers. And, if possible, consider having a diverse group of people evaluating the candidates, as this can minimize cognitive biases affecting the selection process.
- Make use of online resources highlighting researchers from minority communities⁵ and cooperating with EDI Working groups who could suggest resources.

Interacting with Participants Ahead of the Meeting:

- Integrate pronoun information collection and name-spelling and name-pronunciation options for inclusivity, as well as possible accessibility needs.
- Provide clear communication to conference participants and speakers about the schedule, accommodations, and transportation well in advance of the event.

During the Meeting: Creating an Inclusive Space

Goals:

- Emphasize the need to create an inclusive atmosphere during the meeting.
- Emphasize the desire to improve the inclusiveness for future meetings so that participants are encouraged to give feedback.

Steps:

- Structure decision-making to include everyone and moderate Q&A sessions with awareness of inclusion.
- Encourage organizers to consider the meeting schedule's impact on diverse attendees.
- Notify participants if you plan to record, so they can take that into account.
- Notification should be given in advance if social events include flashing lights and noises, which can trigger seizures - a sudden, uncontrolled burst of electrical activity in the brain.
- Encourage participants to act in alignment with an inclusive atmosphere by practising respectful communication, countering affinity bias (i.e. sitting and talking with new people), alternating between using their voices and making space for others, giving credit appropriately, using pronouns correctly, and informing the conference organizers if an issue emerges.

⁵ <https://include.ug.edu.pl/>

For Stand-Alone Workshops or Meetings:

- Avoid, if at all possible, scheduling on cultural and religious holidays, on weekends, and outside of standard work hours.
- Ensure microphones and speakers are available and accessible to make sure voices can be heard by everyone.
- Plan activities to help participants connect. Recognize that an important aspect of meetings is the connections made and relationships built—and that everyone should be included in this exchange. Sober (non-alcohol-centered) activities should also be included.
- Provide an opportunity for people to volunteer contributions that allow time for people to consider (not “spur of the moment”), in a low-pressure setting where a quiet or a less-confident voice may volunteer.
- Encourage workshop participants to explore opportunities for post-workshop mentorships with those they met in the workshop.
- Is this location subject to legislation that is anti-LGBTQ+? If you must have a meeting in this location, have anti-discrimination protections in place for attendees.

Assessment

Align assessment goals with the need for continuous improvement in equity and inclusion. Solicit feedback from meeting attendees soon after the meeting. Encourage organizers to collect participant feedback on inclusivity goals during the meeting. Suggest data collection on participation, considering who asks questions and how often, as a reflection of the inclusive culture.

Steps ⁶:

Before the meeting:

Set goals for equity and inclusion, for example:

- Representation of different identities, career stages, or institutional affiliations in different sessions.
- Quantity and quality of interactions of a diverse group of people in the sessions.
- Targeted percentage of different identities’ participants (e.g. percentage of women participants; percentage of early career participants; etc).
- Prepare to collect data on participants (e.g. gender, race, Country, career stage) within the registration process. Data should be stored anonymously and for statistical purposes only. This will inform the assessment of how inclusive and diverse the conference is and may help re-addressing issues for future events.

⁶ *INCLUSIVE SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS: WHERE TO START*, Angie Pendergrass, Jane Zelikova, James Arnott, Hazel Bain, Rebecca Barnes, Jill Baron, Kuheli Dutt, Miriam Gay-Antaki, Rebecca Haacker, Emily Jack-Scott, AJ Lauer, Aisha Morris, Deb Morrison, Anne-Marie, Nunez, Heidi Steltzer, LuAnne Thompson, March 2019 ([link](#))

During the meeting:

- Collect feedback from participants about equity and inclusion goals (e.g., add questions about equity and inclusion to session or program evaluations).
- Consider collecting data on participation, e.g., who asks questions⁷ and how often different people speak.

After the meeting evaluation:

- Which goals were met? Which goals were not met?
- What worked well from the organizers' perspective? What fell short?
- What worked and did not work from participant perspectives? What information might be missing?
- Share this assessment publicly, if possible.

Conclusion:

These guidelines aim to promote a holistic approach to equity and inclusion in scientific meetings. We hope that these will support the development of a diverse and inclusive scientific workforce and community in the field of quantum technologies and other STEM fields.

Additional Sources for Support and Inspiration:

- Guidelines for events to promote diversity were created in the framework of the CARLA project ([link](#))
- Guideline for accommodations in remote conferences <https://accessigchi.com/accessible-remote-attendance/>
- Guideline for accommodations for in-person conferences <https://www.sigaccess.org/welcome-to-sigaccess/resources/accessible-conference-guide/>
- Guidelines by the International Labour Organization for the promotion of equity at the workplace [link](#)
- Ana Belén Sainz 2022 *Quantum Sci. Technol.* 7 044004 DOI 10.1088/2058-9565/ac82c4 <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/2058-9565/ac82c4>
- Directory of quantum information scientists <https://inqlude.ug.edu.pl/>
- List of cognitive biases: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cognitive_biases

⁷ Davenport, J.R.A., M, Fouesneau, E. Grand, A. Hagen, K. Poppenhaeger, & L. L. Watkins (2014). Studying Gender in Conference Talks — data from the 223rd meeting of the American Astronomical Society. arXiv.org. <https://arxiv.org/abs/1403.3091>