BEST PRACTICES FOR ORGANIZING AN INCLUSIVE EVENT OR CONFERENCE

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Planning for Inclusivity
- Consider diversity needs from the start of event planning, not as an afterthought
- Diversity includes racial, ethnic, gender and sexual identity, religion, physical ability, career stage, socio-economic status, caregiver responsibility, regional location, etc.
- Create a diverse organizing committee and arrange for inclusivity training for the whole team
- Designate a team member to oversee all Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) aspects and another to receive and process accessibility and accommodation requests

Participation
- Aim for diversity across all participatory roles, such as
  - Organizing committee, staff, volunteers
  - Keynote, invited and contributed speakers, poster presenters
  - Panel members, session chairs, performers, emcees
- Offer registration fee, transportation or housing subsidy for financially disadvantaged attendees
- Consider live streaming and recording the sessions for remote participants

Program Development
- Ensure the agenda has regular health breaks
- Incorporate workshops, social activities and networking events to mix up the format
- Consider an interactive EDI workshop but recognize that it will only attract a fraction of the attendees, especially if it is in parallel with other sessions
- Schedule an EDI talk during the highest profile plenary session to ensure the largest audience
- Give speakers and poster presenters clear guidelines for preparing accessible visuals

Code of Conduct
- Develop an EDI statement, a code of conduct and an anti-harassment policy and plan
- Highlight the statement, code and policy on the website and in the printed program
- Provide a system to report conduct concerns, *e.g.,* anonymous online form or staff with distinctive badges
- Give session chairs guidance on how to conduct the sessions in an inclusive manner, *e.g.,* select a woman for the first question, shut down inappropriate comments

Website and Registration
- Follow accessibility guidelines for the website, the advertising and any printed materials
- Require agreement of the code of conduct in the registration process
- Provide gender-inclusive options for preferred pronouns, *e.g.,* Mx, or include a blank field
- Include option for private (as opposed to shared) hotel room (do not ask for any justification)
- Include a free-form field for special accommodations requests and follow up with requestor
- If clothing will be provided as swag, include a field for requested size and fit, *e.g.,* loose
- Include a section on self-identification to help with reporting and post-event evaluation

EDI Accommodations
- Childcare needs
- Private space for breastfeeding, prayer, counselling, etc.
- Facilities for service/therapy animals
- ASL interpretation or Real Time Captioning, note-taking, reserved seating, assistive device rental
- Dietary restrictions and allergies; scent-free environment

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Choice of Venue
- Safe location, with good exterior lighting and transit connections, and a variety of housing options
- Wheelchair-accessible stage, rooms, hallways, bathrooms, elevators, parking and drop-off area
- Gender-inclusive bathrooms. If none, designate one as such with signage and advertise it
- Sound system to accommodate hearing impairments
- Quiet, effective and adjustable temperature/humidity control

Catering
- Label foods by ingredients to accommodate dietary restrictions and allergies
- Offer self-service water and caffeine-free beverages, labelled accordingly
- To keep things simple, consider offering a fully vegetarian menu, with some vegan and gluten-free options
- Many folks consider environmental impact before attending an event; incorporate eco-friendly practices, such as avoiding straws and using a waste-free caterer; most hotels offer this option for a modest fee

Social Events
- Mix up the schedule for social/networking events so they are not all at the end of the day
- If you decide to offer alcohol at a social event, make sure
  - that non-drinkers feel welcome and have access to a variety of delicious non-alcoholic drinks
  - that everyone feels safe; have a plan to deal with intoxicated guests
  - to limit the amount of (free) alcohol available via tokens or tickets (no open bars!)
  - to provide some food and unlimited water in self-serve containers

Event Welcome
- Use non-gendered language, *e.g.,* "Welcome everyone" instead of "Welcome ladies and gentlemen"
- Include a land acknowledgement, as appropriate, and an inclusive environment statement
- Mention locations of washrooms, accessible entrances, emergency exits, services, special food requests, conduct concern reporting system, etc.
- Emphasize the importance of using microphones and staying on schedule
- Encourage attendees to fill out anonymous post-event evaluation forma

Evaluate Success
- Post the evaluation form on the website and send the link by email to all participants
- Inquire about catering, handling of accommodation requests, services provided, etc.
- Provide a free-form field to solicit general feedback
- Ask for suggestions for potential improvements and make note for your next event
- Consider criticism (constructive or otherwise); respond with kindness and an apology, if merited
- Review registration statistics and compare to your original diversity goals

Additional Resources
- https://inclusionlens.yorku.ca/
- https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/inclusive-meetings.html
- https://geekfeminism.wikia.org/wiki/Conference_anti-harassment/Policy
- https://reachwater.org.uk/resource/best-practice-guide-developing-inclusive-conferences/
- https://www.socialtables.com/blog/event-planning/accessibility-guidelines/
- https://medium.com/@mxsash/how-to-build-a-better-alcohol-culture-at-your-tech-conferences and-events-9e1cce7179c0

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