Donders Institute’s Diversity and Sustainable Science
Best Practices for Conference Organization

1. Making a Panel and Inviting Speakers

When setting up a conference, talk, or symposium, it is important to keep diversity in mind. Scientists from underrepresented communities and groups face increased discrimination when it comes to “getting a seat at the table.” An essential step we should take is to reserve a seat for these groups when setting up our conferences and talks. Race, gender, physical or sensory disability status, and sexual orientation minority groups are important ones to consider (though not the only ones).

Below is a list of resources where you can find potential speakers:

- **WISDAT - Royal Holloway, University of London** (Women in science)
- **Women in Neuroscience Repo (winrepo.org)**
- **500 Queer Scientists Visibility Campaign : 500 Queer Scientists**
- **Diverse speakers in STEM lists (google.com)**
- **ALBA Network, Towards diversity and equity in Brain Sciences | Alba Network**

More and more conference organizers are becoming aware of the lack of balance in symposia and panels and will consider diversity a plus for your submitted proposal. As a rule of thumb, you should try to invite as many non-males (e.g., females, trans and non-binary) as males (for which many of the above sources can help) and take into account at least background if possible (country, nationality) and sexual orientation (again, the above resource).

2. Location and Accessibility

When determining a location for a symposium or talk, make sure that the room, or location is accessible and suitable for people with physical or sensory disabilities and difficulties, or neurodiversities. Many steps can be taken to make sure the conference or talk is accessible to all people. When advertising for the conference/talk, make sure to explicitly mention which facilities are available. This might encourage more people who would otherwise be unsure whether to attend that there is a place for them. Some things to consider:

- Make sure there is an accessible elevator on site
- Designate a space for wheelchair users in rooms where talks are held, and easy access entrances/seats for people with limited mobility.
- Health limitations: Especially now, some people who may be immune compromised may not be able to attend large conference or talks. Consider hybrid talks or live streaming where possible.
- Along the same vein, neurodiversity should be considered within the space. Try providing low stimulation or quiet zones for people to decompress when needed.
- Hiring interpreters if necessary (See next tips on giving presentations)
- Check whether your location allows for support animals, and if so, make sure to state this in your invitations.
3. Giving a Presentation

When giving a presentation, keep in mind the following:

- Pronouns are powerful. To demonstrate allyship, you can add your personal pronouns in your title slide, or in your name on online platforms such as Zoom or Teams.
- When setting up a talk or presentation, always use gender neutral pronouns (i.e., they/them), unless you’re referring to a specific population (for example, a study specifically relating to gender).
- Accessibility to those with hearing impairments and non-native speakers: Live captions or prerecorded captions can be very helpful for those with visual or auditory impairments. Additionally, non-native speakers may find it easier to follow a conversation with captions. Live captions are possible in newer PowerPoint versions, and in Microsoft Teams.
- In the case of prerecorded captions, do not feel pressured to maintain 100% synchronicity with the subtitles. Some deviations can be expected. What is important is that the message of your talk remains the same though.

4. Accepting an invitation as a speaker

When invited as a speaker, one should verify whether the lineup of speakers is sufficiently diverse, and if not, one can:

- Bring this to the attention of the organizers in a positive manner (for example by indicating the aforementioned resources)
- Consider passing their invitation to a scientist of a certain minority.
- Highlight the contributions of important minority researchers to the field.