

Recommendations for achieving gender balance at conferences taking place at the PRBB

Gender unbalance amongst conference speakers is a common problem. It has many potential causes and also many consequences, such as lack of visibility and networking opportunities for women scientists.

To ensure gender balance amongst speakers in the seminars and conferences organised at the Barcelona Biomedical Research Park (PRBB) premises, the [PRBB Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee*](#) provides the following recommendations.

Recommendations for achieving Gender Balance in Conferences

1. Approve and implement a Conference Equity Policy and Code of Conduct

The **Equity Policy** should state that conference organisation committees and invited speakers must comprise equal numbers of men and women. Exceptions: if a field has a very low number of either gender, the conference organisation committee can review to determine if lower numbers are acceptable among speakers.

The **Code of Conduct** should be a set of rules to ensure delegates feel safe during conference proceedings by reassuring participants that inappropriate behaviour is not permitted. All conferences must be inclusive and enjoyable for everyone, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, physical appearance, nationality or religion.

A **Conference Safety Officer** might be appointed to enforce the conference policy and code of conduct. Participants should be able to easily contact the person (email, whatsapp, or similar).

2. Be transparent

Be pro-active publicizing both the Policy and the Code of Conduct on the conference webpage and on any communication with the attendees.

3. Establish a balanced and informed Program Committee

Make sure that those inviting and selecting the speakers are familiar with the conference equity policy and that the program committee itself is diverse, informed,



and gender balanced. Consider offering gender equity training or advice to the committee.

4. Ensure an unbiased abstract selection process

The selection of short talks should not make up for an unbalance of invited speakers. To help avoid biases and increase diversity, the selection of talks could be done blind/anonymously and reviewed from several diversity levels: gender, career stage, hosting affiliation and country.

5. Avoid any all-male panels

Make sure that no session has only men as speakers. If you are not aware of any women that would fit to the programme, ask some of the invited men to specifically suggest women from their network. If a conference with the same or similar topic was organised in the years before, the invited participants from that earlier edition could also be asked to join in the efforts to gender balance this year's programme. This has the effect of finding more women speakers, but also to disseminate your equity efforts. There are also a number of [lists and databases of women experts](#) in different fields.

Start with inviting the women first. Don't leave the task to fulfill the quota to the end of the organisation.

Include women and men in the reserve list, in case offers are rejected.

6. Actively support women at the meeting

In fields where women are a very small minority, consider the introduction of a voluntary mentorship session to introduce senior women scientists to younger female colleagues or first-time conference attendees. This might help them to maximise their return from the conference, and make them feel comfortable socializing and networking.

7. Include diversity and equity sessions in the programme

Are gender and/or sex aspects relevant to the scientific topic of the conference? If so, try to cover this in the programme of the conference.

If they are not, but there is a gender unbalance in the field, consider having a focus group session about diversity and equity to increase awareness of the topic. Ensure that perspectives of individuals directly affected by conference planning are understood and appreciated.

8. Be Family-Friendly

Consider childcare / nursing facilities as a conference service, and advertise this pro-actively. Consider to offer travel support for partners or nannies to attendees who would otherwise not be able to accept conference speaking invitations. Consider organising some of the social activities at family-friendly times.

Provide networking opportunities such as poster sessions not only during the late afternoon or evenings. Especially for virtual conferences, participants continue to be involved in family life during the days of the conference. Late conference sessions will be missed out by those who have to pick up children from school or similar. A poster session in the morning starting from 10am can be a nice opportunity to catch up.

9. Collect and report the data

Collect data about the number of women and men attending conferences as invited speakers, as selected abstracts, as chairs, as attendees - you can ask about gender during the registration process in an inclusive way (women, men, non binary, prefer not to say).

How do the percentages compare over the years? If the same conference/seminar series has been running for a number of years, collect historical data.

Report the data to see how well the conference, speaker series, or symposium meets its stated policy goals.

10. Take the Pledge

As an individual, there are also things you can do. When you are invited to help organise, attend, or speak at a conference, ask to see the conference speaker policy before you accept. If there is none, suggest to have a look at the ones other conferences have used. You could also ask to see the list of invited speakers and if there isn't a reasonable gender balance, recommend a woman colleague. You can also reject being part of all-men panels.



References:

Ten Simple Rules to Achieve Conference Speaker Gender Balance. Jennifer L. Martin. PLoS Comput Biol. 2014 Nov; 10(11): e1003903.

Example of Code of Conduct (The Turing Way): https://github.com/alan-turing-institute/the-turing-way/blob/master/CODE_OF_CONDUCT.md

Example of Code of Conduct and Conference Policy (Imperial College London): <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/equality/governance/policies/conference-policy/>

ACSC Gender Balance Policy (Wellcome Genome Campus)

Blog article: Blood, sweat and success: Implementing a gender balance policy (Wellcome Genome Campus)

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*The PRBB EDI Committee is formed by members from:

- Centre for Genomic Regulation (CRG)
- Hospital del Mar Medical Research Institute (IMIM)
- Department of Experimental and Health Sciences, Pompeu Fabra University (DCEXS-UPF)
- Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal)
- European Molecular Biology Laboratory – Barcelona (EMBL Barcelona)
- Institute for Evolutionary Biology (IBE: CSIC-UPF)
- Barcelona Biomedical Research Park (PRBB)