



RNA Canada RNA

Guidelines for conference and event organization

These guidelines align with the **RNA Canada ARN - Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy**.

They have been developed based on the guidelines by University of St. Andrews on committee and speaker diversity:

<https://biology.st-andrews.ac.uk/edi/diverse-conferences/>

The **purpose** of these guidelines is to apply best practices in organizing conferences and events according to principles of inclusiveness and accessibility considering barriers faced by different groups. By applying the procedures outlined here, RNA Canada ARN aims to be a safe and welcoming place for all people where all members and partners are respected.

1. Establish a diverse and gender-balanced organizing committee.

The program committee should be a diverse, informed, and balanced committee. A minimal target is that there should be at least one person, and ideally at least two persons, of different gender amongst the organizers (as it is often more difficult for a lone voice to speak out), and with similar representation from ethnic minorities. In general, program committees should strive to represent the composition of the RNA Canada ARN membership (see website).

2. Develop an overt speaker policy.

A balanced program is much more likely to be achieved if this is made an explicit target. The organizing committee is encouraged to develop a speaker policy regarding the invited speakers and the acceptance of abstracts. The policy should seek to achieve

balance and representation with respect to ethnicity, gender, geographical distribution, level of seniority, scientific approach, and other defined characteristics as appropriate in the context of a specific event. That policy may specify, for example, that the organizing committee sets out to achieve equal or alternatively, no more than 60% of speakers representing one characteristic. While some fields have a strong ethnicity and gender bias in their audience, the aim should be (if parity is not feasible) to reduce the field-wide bias in the balance of speakers.

3. Make the policy visible.

The organizing committee is encouraged to announce the speaker policy prominently, for instance, posting it for everyone to see on the conference or workshop website, on social media, in the conference booklet, or on the conference poster. The organizers should be prepared for explaining that achieving diversity is not inconsistent with a high-quality program. Most participants at scientific meetings very much welcome an explicit commitment to equality and diversity in the conference organization. In addition, individuals with protected characteristics (e.g. 2SLGBTQIA+, disability, those with caring responsibilities) will be more likely to attend/present at conferences that demonstrate that they are a welcoming space for them, in turn enhancing the ability of such individuals to succeed in academia. It is particularly important that the policy is made visible at the time of the meeting.

4. Compile a database of potential invitees.

Each conference or workshop has several distinct prominent roles, including plenary or keynote speakers, long-talk and short-talk speakers, poster presenters, session chairs, the introducers of speakers, selectors and presenters of prizes, and the presenters of opening/closing addresses. Conference organizers should make participation as wide as possible and ensure invited slots are diverse and gender-neutral. It is recommended to brainstorm with fellow organizers, to invite suggestions, and to engage with relevant colleagues (especially, but not limited to minority ethnic or female) colleagues asking them for nominations, in order to compile a database of potential invitees. It is worth writing down all the roles that require filling, and compiling a list of possible candidates for each.

5. Collect the data.

Throughout the process of sending invitations and receiving acceptances, as far as possible keep a running total of the diversity (e.g. career stage, gender balance, ethnicity, etc.) for each role.

Some roles (e.g. conference speakers) may be filled through the submission of abstracts. Make sure that the abstract submission process collects voluntary data on gender, and any other relevant identity characteristics (e.g. ethnicity, disability, specific needs), so that you can use this information in the selection of the program and in providing a safe and welcoming event for all attendees. If participants are asked for this information, and particularly if they are given the opportunity to state any specific needs, they are more likely to have the confidence to attend, knowing their characteristics have been considered.

6. Grade the abstracts blind if possible.

If the abstracts are to be graded for quality, it is good policy first to anonymize the abstracts, removing identifying information, so that they can be graded on the basis of the title and abstract alone. Ideally, each abstract will be rated by multiple independent reviewers, and it is important to establish a diverse pool of reviewers. The mean grades can be used to rank the abstracts for their suitability as potential talks. The organizers can then put together a program that balances quality as reflected in the rankings with ethnicity, gender, career stage, geographical location and other relevant characteristics. It is important to remember that the grading process is imperfect and should be used only as a guideline rather than a rigorous assessment of quality. The organizers are likely to face some difficult decisions in how they balance quality and protected characteristics, but should bear in mind that it is often difficult to estimate the quality of a talk on the basis of a short abstract submitted months before the meeting. For this reason, speaker policy targets can generally be achieved, without sacrificing conference quality, if the organizers select the top-ranked submissions from the minority group, irrespective of the absolute grades allotted. Finally, the organizers are encouraged to be explicit about their selection procedures, posting this information on the conference/workshop website.

7. Replace like for like.

Usually, some offers of speaking opportunities will be declined, and for example, invited women may be more likely to decline than men. Likewise, individuals from other minorities may experience high demands on their time as perceived “representatives” of various groups. In order to maintain a balanced program, as far as possible, it is helpful to select replacement speakers on a like-for-like basis (i.e. replacing an early-career speaker who declined with the next ranked early-career scientist, etc). It is useful to hold a pool of potential speakers in reserve, so that vacant slots can be filled rapidly.

8. Be diversity friendly.

a) Support caregivers.

Some scientists have primary caring responsibility for children, the elderly, or the sick and disabled, which can limit their ability to travel and to attend conferences. If possible, state explicitly on the conference website, and in the invitation letter, that the conference is ‘family friendly’ and that ‘participants’ children are welcome, provided appropriately supervised’. If resources are available, you can offer support for partner travel, or pay for childcare, for attendees who would otherwise not be able to accept conference/workshop speaking invitations. Many conferences offer free drinks, but you could instead choose to spend that money on childcare.

b) Feature diverse participants.

Featuring images of ethnic minorities, women and other underrepresented researchers on the conference website, poster and booklet, and ensuring that they are represented in any conference photograph, will also help to create an inclusive and diverse atmosphere.

c) Consider diverse religions when selecting dates and food.

Choosing the dates of the meeting so that they do not clash with major religious holidays (e.g. Ramadan, Hannukah) will also help to promote diversity. Securing access to multifaith areas (e.g. for prayer), and providing foods suitable for all faiths will be appreciated.

d) Promote accessibility.

The organizers should be prepared to accommodate diverse needs of participants in order to make the event as accessible as possible. The venue should be physically

accessible for all participants, and accessible facilities should be easily identifiable.

Speakers should be encouraged to prepare accessible presentations that enable everyone to see well, hear well, and understand the information presented. Detailed recommendations for accessible presentations are provided in appendix 1.

For guidance on planning inclusive meetings, organizers are invited to review these resources:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/inclusive-meetings.html>

9. Report the data.

Accountability is an effective policer. For each protected characteristic, briefly summarize the numbers of speakers and participants in each role on the conference website or booklet, ideally on the same page as you outline your policy and procedures.

10. Acknowledge the land and engage with local Indigenous communities.

At the beginning of a conference, organizers are expected to acknowledge the traditional ownership of the land where events take place (e.g. using [Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory | CAUT](#)), and they should conduct research to know about the local territories (e.g. at <https://native-land.ca/>). Organizers are encouraged to engage with local Indigenous communities to open major events while actively acknowledging and recognizing Indigenous contributions.

11. Promote equality in questioning.

In order to promote visibility of all participants at the conference, it is best practice to give session chairpersons guidance to promote equality in questioning. For example, choosing a woman to ask the first question often encourages participants from diverse backgrounds to also raise questions. Alternatively, the conference chairs could choose to begin each discussion period with questions by trainees.

12. Publicly share and apply a ‘code of conduct statement’

Each conference should have a ‘code of conduct’ statement, ensuring zero tolerance for inappropriate behaviour and a procedure for reporting incidents. A recommended example for a ‘code of conduct statement’ can be found in Appendix 2.

13. Organize equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) events.

At the conference, the importance and the mechanisms to equity, diversity and inclusion should be actively promoted by engaging participants in educational opportunities such as talks, panels discussions, networking socials or mentoring events. These events should be carefully planned by a dedicated committee, the organizers should consider inviting dedicated speakers for the event, and the timing of the event should promote wide participation.

Prepared by the RNA Canada ARN EDI Committee (Ute Kothe, Michelle Scott, Samer Hussein, Laura Keffer-Wilkes, Muhammad Riaz Khan, Jennifer Porat) in February 2024

Appendices:

- 1. Preparing and delivering an accessible presentation**
- 2. Conference Code of Conduct**

Appendix 1:**Preparing and delivering an accessible presentation**

These recommendations are based on advice by the Canadian Chemistry Conference and Exhibition:

By following simple guidelines, you can ensure that no one is left out. Accessible presentations are inclusive to all and respect every attendee's needs.

When preparing your slides for your talk or your poster:

- 1. Make text and visuals big enough to be read even from the back of the room.**
For oral presentations, we recommend not using font size smaller than 30.
- 2. Use a sans serif font face, such as Calibri or Arial.**
These font faces are easier to read from a distance. The letters appear less crowded for people with dyslexia.
- 3. Minimize the amount of text on each slide and poster.**
This should keep the focus of the audience on what you are saying, rather than just reading. If following the first guideline and using a larger font size, this won't be an issue.
- 4. Make certain that colour is not the only mean to convey your information.**
People who have low vision or are colour-blind might have some difficulty grasping the information.
- 5. Be mindful of having sufficient contrast between colours.**
This includes having sufficient contrast between the text and colour of the background, and between colours in graphs. We recommend using a white background with black text. While this choice seems very boring, it provides the highest contrast in colour for most room settings. Regarding graphs, avoid yellow, lime, and cyan colours, as these colours are hard to see from far

depending on the lighting condition in the room. Similarly, avoid combining green and red to convey information, as most colour-blind people have difficulty distinguishing between these colours.

6. **For oral presentations, be mindful when using motion or animations.**

While animating a block of text in an oral presentation might help the audience to engage with the content, flying letters and/or images from all corners can be very distracting for some people. You should always ask yourself: will the motion make the information easier to understand? If the answer is no, you should probably refrain from using it.

7. **Make your graphic as simple as possible, avoid presenting complex charts or tables, and don't forget to add a meaningful legend.**

People might get lost trying to understand unnecessary information, which ultimately will lead to disengagement with the content you are presenting.

8. **Provide bullet point summary of takeaway messages/claims conveyed by graphics.**

This summary will keep your audience engaged and improve understanding of the content.

When presenting your work as an oral presentation or a poster, you can make sure it is accessible to all by following these simple guidelines:

1. **Speak clearly.**

By reducing your speech speed, your audience can better understand you and keep up with your presentation.

2. **Use simple language.**

Avoid the use of jargon, acronyms, and idioms to ensure people outside your field of research can engage and learn from your presentation. When avoiding it is impossible, make sure to briefly define the non-obvious terms.

3. **For oral presentations, use a microphone.**

You should use a microphone, even if you are in a small room. Using a microphone will allow everyone in the room to hear you clearly. Don't forget that if you ask: "Can everyone hear me OK?," some people might be uncomfortable saying they cannot.

4. **For oral presentations, we recommend that you enable the subtitle feature in PowerPoint (or in other presentation software).**

The use of subtitles will allow people who are hard-of-hearing to follow your presentation.

5. **For oral presentations, describe pertinent parts of graphics, tables, schemes, chart, and videos before playing them.**

This simple action will help people with lower vision to grasp the information you are trying to convey.

6. **Cover all displayed text.**

It doesn't mean you should read your slides or poster word for word. However, you should cover all the information provided on your slides or poster.

7. **For poster presentations, avoid crowding around a poster.**

If you see already that several people are in front of a poster, you should consider coming back to it a bit later. There are many more to look at during the conference. Clustering of people in front of a poster is blocking the passage for others.

Appendix 2:**Conference Code of Conduct**

The members of RNA Canada ARN in accordance with federal, provincial and local laws are committed to providing a welcoming, safe, and inclusive environment where each member can progress and reach their full potential, regardless of age, ethnic origin, gender, religion, disability, linguistic choice, sexuality and/or socio-economic status.

This community is committed to maintaining a respectful environment and has a zero-tolerance policy against harassment and discriminatory behavior at all its events. Participants, including researchers, research assistants, postdoctoral fellows, students, and exhibitors, must show respect and consideration for each other and the local community.

Consistent with the mission, commitments and policies, the purpose of this Code is to define the professional conduct of all individuals. All participants attending the conference are expected to comply with this Code of Conduct.

Compliance with the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion are further outlined in the RNA Canada ARN - Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy including possible consequences in cases of non-compliance.

Expected behavior

All participants agree to:

- Treat all participants with respect and consideration, valuing the diversity of views and opinions
- Demonstrate courtesy, respect, and cooperation
- Communicate openly with respect for others, focusing on ideas rather than individuals and providing positive feedback and criticism
- Be attentive to their surroundings and to fellow participants
- Comply with the rules and policies of the conference site
- Notify the organizers if a dangerous situation or a person in distress is noticed

Unacceptable behavior

All participants agree to refrain from unacceptable behavior including but not limited to:

- All forms of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or discrimination
- The threat, harassment, or personal attack of any participant
- The use of traditional or social media to target individual actions of conference attendees in a way that could harm their privacy or reputation
- Verbal comments related to gender, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, height, race, religion, linguistic choice, country of origin
- False or misleading statements or activities that could be perceived as defamatory by any participant or organization present at the conference
- Loss of civility, for example shouting, personal attacks or insults, throwing objects or other displays of temper
- Inappropriate use of nudity or sexual images in public spaces or in presentations
- Unwanted physical contact with others or threats of such contact
- Sexual harassment or harassment based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, disability, or sexual orientation
- Recording or photographing the presentation of another participant without her/his/their explicit permission

Reporting Breaches or Violations

Violations of this Code of Conduct must be reported to one of the conference organizers.