Guidelines and Tips for Promoting Diverse Speakers and Panels

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This document was created by SLA's Diversity, Inclusion, Community, & Equity (DICE) Community.

Tips to promote diverse speakers and panels:

- Look beyond your personal network.
    - Ask your networks for names of experts whose voices are typically underrepresented in the topic area
    - Ask those who decline for recommendations (specifically for underrepresented groups)
    - Contact other relevant professional associations (such as veterans, small business association, etc.)
- Ensure you have enough time.
    - Specifically for panels, seeking speakers takes time.
- Ensure you have enough support.
    - Make sure you have sufficient help to find, invite, plan and work with diverse speakers. A diverse search committee is a first recommendation, but not always possible. Make sure whoever is responsible for seeking speakers, that they are committed to diversifying the speaker/panel etc.
- Invite underrepresented individuals.
    - If possible, guarantee participation reflecting demographics of the topic.
- Consider broadening the topic.
    - Think about your topic and the impact it has on communities. Consider prioritizing participation from that community and/or broadening your topic to encourage a wider net.
- Avoid tokenism.
    - Aim for a panel that represents the demographics of the topic.
    - Don't have "diverse" speakers always/only speak about diversity topics. Seeking out diverse representation of speakers only on diversity panels/topics is not being inclusive. This shows a lack of recognition of an individual's range of knowledge and expertise in the field.
    - Don't have the "diverse" members always plan the diversity events. Aim to have inclusive representation and involvement for "all" when planning an event/program.
- Ensure there are resources that support the speaker and panel.
    - Support the panel or speaker with information on the event, logistics, how they can successfully participate, expectations, technology details, etc.
    - For physically-challenged speakers (i.e. wheelchair, cane, blind, deaf, etc.) ensure there are ramps for the stage, room to accommodate devices, a sign language interpreter, closed captioning, etc.
- Organize a practice session.

○ Help the speakers learn the format and offer a practice run-through. Discuss the plan, audience, etc.

If you proceed with an event that is missing key voices, acknowledge those missing voices at the start of the event.

If you are an attendee:
- Have an open mind and be willing to actively listen.
- Not all diversity is visible so even if you do not see diversity, keep an open mind.
- Allow for others to offer their viewpoints if you feel or see only one point of view being expressed.

Why does it matter who is at the front of the room speaking?

The speakers should represent the audience.
A lack of diversity makes individuals feel as if they are not represented and cannot identify with the speaker(s). It is important to include diverse representation including those of underrepresented groups, women, and others. There are many individuals with a wide range of knowledge to share and everyone can feel included.

Our speakers help shape our culture.
We want a more fair representation of our community by the individuals who are speaking about topics within our profession. This is one way to shape our association's culture. We all have different life experiences and different points of view that we bring to the table and we may approach challenges differently. Many experiences are not necessarily being shared. If individuals cannot see or are not heard, issues may go unseen. We should consider whether everyone has the opportunity to speak up. When diverse speakers and contributors influence the direction of the association, this helps the association reach a larger audience and benefits our association overall.

Challenges and Solutions

Challenge #1:
There is a lack of diverse people coming to events, and event planners don't know diverse people who are information professionals.

Solutions:
- Ask people in your network to introduce you to underrepresented people they may know.
- Go out and find those communities in your area – online and in person – or ask people to make an introduction for you to those groups. Form genuine, friendly relationships with community members so that they can help you reach the information professionals in *their* communities.

- Experiment, or invite others to experiment, with meetings at different times, days, and places — sometimes a lack of diversity at an event is a result of only meeting at a time and place that is convenient for a limited group of people.

Challenge #2:
There are diverse, qualified folks in your community but they are not applying to be speakers.

Solution:
- Extend the invitation to folks directly to apply to speak. You can reach out to them in person, by email, over Twitter, etc. They may tell you their reasons they wish not to speak and if they do, listen. The following replies in the next few points can help address their concerns.

Challenge #3:
When invited directly to speak, they said "No" because they think they have nothing to talk about.

- Typically, when a member of an over-represented group of a community knows a little bit about a topic, they feel like they know enough to give a talk about it. They've seen many faces like theirs up on stage before.
- Conversely, when someone from an underrepresented group knows a little bit about a topic, they frequently don't feel they know enough to talk about it. They don't see people who look like them presented as experts. Also, many diverse folks set a much higher bar for "expert" knowledge than other people do.
- Thus, when we ask underrepresented people: "Would you like to apply to speak at our event?" we often get these two answers:
    - "What would I talk about?"
    - "I don't know enough to give a talk" or "I'm not an expert in anything."

Solutions:
- Share that at events, all speakers are encouraged thusly: "don't teach a lesson, tell a story." The story/case study format has a much broader appeal and is much less likely to be outdated or just plain full of inaccuracies. Many people forget the details of how-to talks, but with stories they learn how to learn. And also, everyone's an expert in their own story.
- Ask the person what topics they are passionate about and encourage them to consider a talk about one of those topics.
- Suggest things you know the person could talk about based on what you know about them. Maybe you know that they just created a new theme, or they have a story about their journey learning how to do something.
- Post a list of suggested topics on the speaker application page so everyone has access to inspiration.

Challenge #4:

When asked, the person said "No" because there is no speaker fee.

Solutions:

- Offer expenses plus a reasonable speaker honorarium fee.
- If speaker honorarium fee is not available, offer free registration to the event, caregiving cost, honorarium towards literature/database access/professional development courses or other incentive(s) for the speaker's time.
- Recognize speakers in all promotional materials.

Challenge #5:

When asked, the person said "No" because they don't feel comfortable with public speaking.

- The person has no experience with public speaking, or has had bad experiences with it, and is not feeling comfortable doing it (but does want to).

Solutions:

- Small steps to build confidence are valuable. Suggest that the person speaks first to:
  - the mirror
  - a video camera
  - friends and family
  - small videos on social media, like Instagram and Snapchat stories
  - etc.
- Suggest the person be the moderator of a panel of a topic that they are interested in.
- Invite them to participate with a panel session, either as a moderator or speaker.
- Suggest they interview another speaker on stage or be interviewed.
- Suggest giving a lightning talk. Ten minutes is a great way to start.
- Suggest giving a duo talk with someone who is a confident speaker.
- Remind them that just about every public speaker is nervous, even if they don't look like it!

Challenge #6: Being an Effective Ally: You want to help encourage diversity but you don't know how.

Solutions:

- Consider speaker diversity during the speaker selection process. Some selection committees use blind review, and if you do, at a minimum you should set clear guidelines for what you're looking for in applications. It is worth considering not using blind review, but rather keeping an eye on how many are overrepresented vs diverse speakers.
- Include diverse voices/organizers in the selection committee. This will help ensure everyone gets a fair shake and folks don't feel tokenized when invited to apply.
- Have more than one person in your speaker outreach team. More people looking means more diverse networks and thus a more diverse roster.

- Provide an easy and friendly way for folks to request feedback on pitches, talks, and slides, and to rehearse with you.

Challenge #7:
How can we write our Call for Speakers in a way that encourages a diverse range of applicants?

Solutions:
- Because underrepresented folks don't see themselves represented as "experts" on stage and then often won't view themselves as knowing enough to give a talk, specify in the call-out that speakers don't need to be experts. Say that you're interested in all ranges of experiences, and that everyone's voice is valuable and interesting.
- Encourage stories.
- Encourage submitting talks about anything related to the association or profession that folks are passionate about.
- Post a list of suggested topics on the speaker application page so everyone has access to inspiration.
- Be mindful of using photos throughout the site for your event that show different types of people so that it is clear that a diversity of people are welcomed at the event. Be sure to include them on the call for speakers page.
- Include the Code of Conduct on the call for speakers page to visibly demonstrate a real commitment to diversity and a safe environment for everyone.
- Include a link to your page of accessibility accommodations
- The website should be fully accessible
- Make the use of social media accessible: Capitalize the first letter of each word in your hashtags, use all caps acronyms, put in ALT tags on social media posts, etc.

Sources:

10 tips on how to organize and promote diverse, inclusive panels and keynotes.
https://www.mtu.edu/diversity/council/pdfs/tips-for-diverse-panels-and-speakers.pdf

Input Requested: "Building A Diverse Speaker Roster" Document.
https://make.wordpress.org/community/2018/09/13/input-requested-building-a-diverse-speaker-roster-document/