

Guide for hosting accessible and inclusive events

MPI for Psycholinguistics Diversity & Inclusion Committee

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Feedback on these tips is very welcome. There is a living googledoc version of this document that you can leave comments and suggestions on [here](#), or email your ideas to caroline.rowland@mpi.nl

1. Logistics planning

1.1. Start early

Setting up a truly accessible and inclusive event takes time! And money. Think about how you'll finance this and if necessary where to apply for money to support your event.

1.2. Set up a diverse organising committee

No matter how well informed we are, we all have blind spots when it comes to realising what difficulties people might have attending an event. A diverse committee is less likely to schedule an event on the same date as an important religious or cultural holiday or at an inaccessible venue, and will be more likely to be able to predict the different needs people might have.

1.3. Choose guest speakers with inclusion in mind

Avoid [manels](#), this goes without saying. But consider other aspects of inclusion as well. For example:

- Choose speakers from under-represented communities if possible
- Consider excellent early career researchers as guest speakers, rather than just big names
- Think about inviting people who research under-studied languages, communities, cultures, who work outside Western Europe and North America ...

There is a list of resources to find potential speakers [at the end of this document](#)

1.4. Venue

- If possible make it an **online/hybrid event**. Since the covid pandemic, a lot of organisations have gone back to in-person events. This is understandable because many people missed the excitement of travelling, making new connections and

discussing talks and posters over coffee. However, online/hybrid events are much more [accessible and inclusive](#), and have less impact on the global climate. Online and hybrid events are harder to organise, no doubt about it. But they are worth it. At MPI we have all the technology necessary to host online and hybrid events. MPI's Technical Group will facilitate and support you to provide online/hybrid events

- If you can't make it a hybrid/online event, provides some resources for people who can't attend in person or who can't attend all of the event (e.g., provide pdfs of poster presentations, archive the talk videos and make them available to all registered attendees etc.,)
- **For in-person events**, if you're not hosting the event at MPI, choose [a venue that promotes diversity and accessibility](#). Ask questions such as:
 - Do they promote diversity in their own work?
 - Do they have sufficient parking for people that cannot use public transport?
 - Do they have gender-neutral toilets?
 - Are they wheel-chair friendly? Are they easy to navigate for blind and visually impaired people? Do they provide accessibility support?
 - Are they easily accessible by (wheelchair-friendly) public transport?
 - Are there quiet rooms (e.g. for people sensitive to noise), prayer rooms, breastfeeding rooms, etc available?
 - Consider the building's evacuation procedures (e.g. are there wheel-chair friendly evaluation routes, visual alarms for deaf participants etc).

1.5. Timing

Think carefully about dates and times. Try to avoid religious holidays (a list can be found [here](#)) and cultural holidays (e.g., summer holidays happen at different times in different countries) and think about start and end times (when do parents/caregivers have to pick up their children). For online/hybrid events, think about how to make it easier for people in **other timezones** to attend. To facilitate inclusion of those in the Americas and Asia, at MPI we ran the [Many Paths to Language](#) workshop in two timezones and we ran the [Lplus winter/summer school](#) in three. This meant long days for the organisers, and a lot of complex timezone planning (using [this indispensable tool](#)). But the difficulties were outweighed by the amount of engagement from attendees from a wider range of countries, discussing a large number of different languages.

1.6. Travel

- Make sure that your timeline allows participants sufficient time between abstract acceptance and the conference itself to apply for and secure a visa (and appeal if the visa is at first rejected).
- If possible, set aside a budget to pay travel and accommodation expenses for students, researchers from under-represented countries (and in fact, anyone else who might need help to attend). Advertise this scheme early—at the same time as advertising abstract submission—so that people have time to plan.
- For in-person events,
 - Provide information to support travel; e.g. local public transport websites, taxi companies, most important traffic rules etc.

- encourage people to travel by train if possible since this helps reduce the carbon costs of conferences. Provide them with tips on planning long distance travel by train (e.g. <https://www.seat61.com/>).
- Encourage people who have to travel by plane to donate to environmental organisations or carbon offsetting sites (see e.g., <https://www.founderspledge.com/research/climate-and-lifestyle-donations-and-offsetting>)
- For in-person/hybrid events, consider offering or encouraging colleagues to set up **satellite venues** like this [one](#), so everyone doesn't need to travel 1000s of miles just for a couple of days.

1.7. Accessibility

- See 1.4 above for venue accessibility.
- Consider what accessibility provisions you will provide as standard. For example, written materials should always be provided in easily readable form (see communication section above)
- Consider booking **sign language interpreters** as standard. If participants have to ask for sign language interpretation, this adds an extra barrier to participation. If your audience may use a variety of sign languages, book [international sign](#) interpreters. If you cannot book sign interpreters as standard, make sure you provide it on request (see Communicating with participants). At MPI_NL we use [Overseas Interpreting](#) to provide interpretation, usually into International Sign. Here is a useful [guide for organisers working with interpreters](#) and a useful [guide for speakers working with interpreters](#)
- Provide **captioning as standard in online events**.
 - For **live** online events, buy a good automated caption service. At MPI_NL we use [rev.com](#) for our Zoom webinars, which provides a live automated transcript as the speaker talks. It's not perfect but it's good enough for people to follow. (Note that captions are NOT a substitute for hiring a Sign Language interpreter. However, it can help participants follow what is being discussed (e.g., non-native speakers of English have told us they find them helpful when following talks).
 - Consider asking speakers to pre-record talks, and then arrange for manual subtitling. This is labour-intensive, so consider paying for a service (Overseas Interpreting provide this service). YouTube also provide a free [automated captioning service](#) but note that when you upload content to YouTube, you also give YouTube the right to use your content "[for the purpose of operating, promoting, and improving the Service](#)" so don't upload talks without the speakers' permission, and without making them aware of this!
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- Consider providing **free/cheap childcare** during the event to combat the '[baby penalty](#)'. If possible, come to an arrangement with a local provider to provide a childcare service. If not, can you set up a babysitting team? If possible, host the babysitting service on site. Here at MPI_NL we have quite a lot of baby-friendly rooms in the babylabs!

- Consider what you will need to do to ensure that everyone can **engage in every part of the conference** (Q&A, discussions, posters as well as the talks). For example:
 - What provision is there for deaf participants, people with a stutter or a speech or language disability to enable them to ask questions and contribute to discussions?
 - How can you avoid crowded poster sessions that are inaccessible for wheelchair users?
 - How can you encourage junior researchers to ask questions? At MPI we have a policy of taking questions from junior researchers first, but this doesn't always work because asking 'the first' question can be scary. So consider adding another opportunity later on for junior researcher questions.
 - If there are multiple parallel sessions, is there enough time for people with mobility issues to move between sessions?

1.8. Chairing/hosting

- **Provide chairs/hosts for each session.** If possible, have two people—one to focus on logistics (e.g. running to get the technician if the computer blows up) and one to focus on timing, taking questions, etc. Think about choosing diverse chairs/hosts, and junior scientists, as they may be more approachable to other junior scientists or minorities.
- **Train chairs/hosts** on how to create a lively and engaged session while remaining in control. There are lots of online guides on this, just like [this one](#) (see also our [guide](#) for webinars). Talk to them about the measures you'd like to see put in place to [encourage women and junior researchers to ask questions](#) and how to [prevent one person dominating the discussion](#).
- Make sure that **all** speakers use a **microphone**, even people asking questions in Q&A sessions. Even people with a loud voice! This blog explains why very nicely: <https://rockymountainada.org/news/blog/why-microphone-matters>
- In online and hybrid events, **remote audience members** can feel disengaged. At MPI we have put together a [guide](#) for hosts to make webinars more interactive.

2. Communication

2.1. Event Promotion

- Ensure event promotion materials are inclusive and accessible. Some tips are here: <https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/advice-support/how-do-i-make-my-cine>

[ma-inclusive-and-accessible/tips-for-producing-accessible-marketing-and-publicity-materials/](#)

- Always use [inclusive language](#).
- Widely advertise the accessibility provisions you will provide as standard, and the fact that other accommodations will also be made available on request (and make it clear that people can request these on registration)

2.2. Registration

- Open registration early to ensure you have enough time to organise requested accessibility requirements.
- Include, on the registration form, a box for people to make their accessibility requirements known. For example, blind and visually impaired attendees may ask to receive presentations in advance, deaf attendees may ask for sign language interpretation, wheelchair users might need information to plan their travel etc.
- Set a deadline for registering accessibility requirements but plan for the fact that some people won't meet this. Make contingency plans for late comers with accessibility needs!
- Contact people who have registered accessibility requirements immediately to discuss what they need and how you can provide it.

2.3. Practice session

- Book a practice session for speakers and invite the sign interpreters
- For online events, this shouldn't be too far in advance of the event (e.g. Zoom updates regularly and settings sometimes change because of this!)
- For in-person events, this could be on the morning of the first day. As well as checking all the tech works, encourage the sign interpreters to discuss with the speakers how to make interpretation easier (e.g. don't talk too fast!)

3. Code of Conduct and Attendee Guidelines

Develop a code of conduct that determines how participants in the event are expected to behave. There are some useful (albeit broad and generic) guidelines here:

https://www.asaecenter.org/resources/articles/an_plus/2019/october/why-and-how-to-develop-an-event-code-of-conduct.

It is also a good idea to provide some guidelines for attendees and presenters on how to get the most out of the event, especially in the case of online/hybrid events. An example is here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Wrc8GkU5hUwu5LY-kqcvYdPzw89RWVycsHE2qLdUJm4/edit>

In addition, think about providing speakers and chairs/hosts with guidelines for using inclusive language, avoiding stereotypical illustrations/pictorial language, and avoiding

discriminatory, sexist or derogatory statements regarding diversity, minorities or inclusion. MPI_NL has its own inclusive language guide.

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4. During the event

- Set up an easily accessible **registration desk** staffed by at least three people. On the desk, have an easily accessible list of people who need accessibility requirements (they may find it difficult to speak up at a busy registration desk without prompting).
- If possible ensure the desk is **staffed at all times** (or provide an emergency phone number and email address clearly visible on the desk) so that people can report problems and you can solve them immediately.
- Make sure you know where the first aiders and **first aid** kits are!
- Ask chairs/hosts/speakers to make themselves known at the beginning of the day, so you know they're present!
- Assign a **troubleshooter**, whose job it is to make sure nothing goes wrong (e.g. If some event rooms are upstairs, what will you do if the elevator breaks—are there multiple elevators?). Make sure all participants know who the troubleshooter is and how to get hold of them (e.g. a phone/text number).

5. After the event

Invite participants to give feedback, either via a survey or free text. Include questions about whether accessibility and diversity needs are participants have been met and encourage suggestions for changes for future events.

6. Other useful resources

Here's a collection of some other useful online resources. Feel free to add to these:

Resources to find potential speakers (collated by the Donders Diversity and Sustainable Science committee)

- [WISDAT - Royal Holloway, University of London](#) (Women in science)
- [Women in Neuroscience Repo \(winrepo.org\)](http://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](#)
- [List of experts on language acquisition](#)

Guides for planning accessible and inclusive events

- <https://researchwhisperer.org/2021/12/21/planning-accessible-online-conferences/>