



Guidance for Diversity on Panels & Speaker Rosters

A resource for planning ACEC-BC events with speaker rosters representative of the diversity we strive for in our industry.



Preface

Commitment

At ACEC-BC, we are committed to advancing equity and belonging in consulting engineering, recognizing the value that diversity brings to the work of our members. This commitment includes consideration for the planning and delivery of ACEC-BC events. **We commit to increasing the visibility and contribution of people from under-represented groups as speakers and panelists in our events and professional forums.**

Diverse perspectives and backgrounds make better panels and speaker rosters, generating more dynamic and engaging discussions, different perspectives, less repetition, and connections to a wider range of lived experiences.

Purpose

This guide has been developed to support ACEC-BC event organizers in the process of identifying and inviting panelists and speakers, providing guidance on how to develop speaker rosters that are representative of the diversity we strive for in our industry.

Tokenism and Diversity

This guide discusses diversity and representation. It is important to recognize that not all dimensions of diversity are visible. It is also important to recognize that different aspects of an individual's identity that contribute to diversity are personal and may not be something they want to share. Even if an individual has shared some aspect of their identity with you, it is not your information to share, and you should be sensitive to allowing that individual the opportunity to choose if they wish to share it with others. When thinking about who to invite to, reach into your network, but don't disclose personal characteristics until you have permission from that individual.

Tokenism occurs when an individual is invited to join a panel or speaker roster as a symbolic effort, rather than being invited because of their valued perspectives and expertise. It is important to consider tokenism when identifying potential speakers, but it is also important to consider how we assess valued perspectives and expertise. These attributes are not solely connected to the person with the most seniority or the most visible role, nor are they connected only to those people who have had similar speaking opportunities in the past. It is not tokenism to ask someone with less experience or less recognized experience to speak on a topic as long as they are genuinely being invited to share their experience, knowledge, and perspectives.

The following steps are provided as guidance to support the development of event panels and speaker rosters that are diverse.

Planning



- Consider your topic and examine how and if it could be broadened to include different perspectives and backgrounds.
- Define event objective and set goals related to representation and diversity. Engage your clients or partners early in this discussion so they understand these goals when you reach out to request speakers or panelists.
- Ensure diversity on organizing team and ensure their voices are included in the planning stage.
- Reexamine criteria used to identify and select speakers or panelists.
 - » Title or most well-known speakers on the topic should not be criteria.
- Be aware of subtle biases that may impact assessment of a speaker's level of expertise or ability to contribute to a particular topic.
- Organize the event to be inclusive such that it is welcoming for speakers and participants.
- Enlist people from equity-seeking groups to talk about topics for which they have expertise. These folks should not solely be approached to speak when the focus of the discussion is related to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Invitation Messaging



When preparing the communications and messaging that will be used to invite individuals to be a speaker or panelist, try to incorporate messages that support your commitment and intentions for the event:


- Share the ACEC-BC commitment to diverse representation in panels and at events (included in this guide).
- Explain that we are seeking knowledge, experience, and perspectives from different backgrounds and a range of individuals.
- Specify that the speakers don't need to be experts, rather that you are interested in a range of experiences and perspectives, and that everyone's voice is valuable and interesting.
- Explain that ACEC-BC has made a commitment to hosting events that demonstrate diversity in the speaker roster or on panels.
- Recognize that not all diversity is visible and that there are many dimensions of diversity, with some being inherent (ethnicity, sex, neurodiversity, etc.) and others being acquired (area of practice, geographical location, culture, etc.).
- Provide invited speakers and panelists the opportunity to contribute to the definition of the topic and/or panel questions, allowing individuals opportunity to focus on what they are passionate about and where they feel comfortable sharing their perspectives and expertise.
- Communicate support for accessibility and accommodations by asking about any needs such as dietary restrictions, special technology requirements, and accessibility, while also asking if each individual has any other accommodations or accessibility needs for participation.

Inviting Speakers

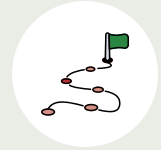


When reaching out to invite individuals or groups to participate on a panel or be part of a speaker roster:

- Use the guidance above to ensure your messaging does not give the impression of tokenism and communicates the commitment to diverse representation on the panel or speaker roster.
- Give yourself enough time and support to find speakers.
- Look for speakers beyond your personal or usual network.
- Recruit panelists with different backgrounds and perspectives, for example: experts from different disciplines, individuals from inspiring organizations or initiatives, and those from equity-seeking groups.
- Ask experts, committees, or previous panelists and speakers for suggestions in their circles.
- Invite people from equity-seeking groups first and ask for their input on who else they suggest could be invited to join the panel or speaker roster.
- As you assemble your panel or speaker roster, evaluate what voices are missing.

 If you need help, the [ACEC-BC team](#) are a great resource to help connect event organizers with a broad range of people.

Preparation



Once your speaker or panel roster is set, check in with panelists and speakers as you prepare for the event:

- Confirm accessibility and accommodation needs for each of your panelists and speakers.
- If applicable, pay or compensate all panelists or speakers equitably.
- Recognize different cultural norms related to compensation and determine what is appropriate for each participant.
- Support panelists and speakers with necessary resources such as providing presentation templates, information about the format and venue, and any other relevant information for the event. Do not assume panelists or speakers will know these details.
- Offer support with preparation of the materials and content.
- If the event is a panel discussion or co-presentation, arrange a time for all individuals to meet and align content ahead of time.
- Organize practice session(s) where people can prepare and gain confidence.

Delivery



When hosting the event, keep in mind a few things to support diverse perspectives to be heard:

- If you lack diversity on your panel or speaker roster, acknowledge it by making a thoughtful statement at the beginning of the event to explain intentions and efforts for diversity.
- Allow under-represented voices from the audience to contribute, particularly if you lack diversity on the panel.
- Allow panelists and speakers to share the aspects of their identity they are comfortable with, as they are relevant to the topic and discussion.

Conclusion

Diversity and inclusion require intentional action and commitment. The purposeful assembly of panels and speaker rosters that reflect the diversity we want to see in our industry is one area of action that contributes to this commitment. A strategic approach to planning, communicating, and selecting a diverse slate of speakers or panelists supports event planners in effectively achieving this goal.

Challenges & Solutions

The following section provides five scenarios that may be encountered by event organizers. With each scenario, guidance is provided to assist organizers in addressing the challenge.

Challenge #1

Event organizers don't have a diverse range of people in their network that they can invite to participate as speakers or panelists.

Solutions:

- » Have more than one person responsible for inviting speakers or panelists so that you are connected with different networks.
- » Ask people in your network to recommend and introduce you to underrepresented people they may know.
- » Ask ACEC-BC staff to help connect you with different networks or to introduce you to contacts they have.
- » Connect with and build relationships with different industry organizations and groups that can connect you with a wider range of potential speakers and panelists.

Challenge #2

When invited to speak, an individual declines because they do not believe they have the expertise or knowledge to share.

Solutions:

- » Explain that knowledge comes in many different forms and different perspectives, including their unique perspective. Share why you invited them to speak.
- » Encourage speakers to consider how they can share their story and personal perspective. For example, if speaking about a particular project, the individual can share their experience and highlights of the work.
- » Ask the person what topics they are passionate about and feel confident about and encourage them to consider how this can be connected to what they share in the presentation or panel discussion.
- » Suggest things you know the person could talk about based on what you know about them.

Challenge #3

The invited individual does not feel comfortable with public speaking or with the role they were invited to fill.

Solutions:

- » Ask if the person would be interested in an alternate role such as session host or panel moderator.
- » Suggest different formats that may be more comfortable such as panel discussions or an interview-type format. Other options include lightening talks or co-presenting.
- » Offer to support preparation by scheduling preparation sessions to discuss content or topics, reviewing presentation content, and holding a practice session.

Challenge #4

The client organization you are working with has provided a speaker roster or group of panelists that is not diverse.

Solutions:

- » Follow up with your contact and discuss the initial communication messages outlining a desire to have diverse representation.
- » Ask the contact if there were challenges encountered in assembling a diverse roster of speakers.
- » Offer to help identify and invite other speakers or panelists.