

# Best Practices for Leading Inclusive Panels

## On behalf of the iGEM Diversity & Inclusion Committee

*These recommendations are intended to help the iGEM community plan impactful events grounded in diverse perspectives and representation. While this document has been written in the context of panels, many suggestions apply to workshops and other event formats.*

### PLANNING YOUR EVENT

Who is your audience? What should they take away from your panel? By first understanding your panel goals, you will be more effective at inviting diverse speakers and creating an impactful session for everyone.

#### DO:

- ❑ Think of *specific* topics and discussions that engage both attendees and panelists. What information is commonplace vs. new or unexpected? Are there areas subject to lively debate? What are different perspectives or ways of implementing ideas? A diverse set of panelists with varied viewpoints and experiences will make this easy to accomplish.
- ❑ Choose a moderator and discuss what their role will entail. Put checks in place to help them avoid subconscious biases: *for example* decide how the moderator will fairly monitor speaking times of the panelists or pick questions from the audience.

**DO NOT:** Pick a broad or generic event theme, immediately invite the highest-profile speakers, and hope they will say something useful.

### PREPARING FOR A DIVERSE PANEL

Great panelists are often those who are experts, scholars, or professionals as well as those who can share relevant personal experiences. Diverse panelists with unique viewpoints will educate, inform, and inspire a diverse audience. Make diverse representation central to your panel.

#### DO:

- ❑ Recruit panelists with different backgrounds and perspectives: *for example* experts from different disciplines, individuals from inspiring organizations or initiatives, those with underrepresented identities (gender, ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, ability, age, geographic regions underrepresented in iGEM).
- ❑ Aim for 3-5 panelists to give everyone sufficient time to talk. Be sure to ask invited speakers what they would like to discuss and feel comfortable sharing.

**DO NOT:** Invite “manels” with only male panelists or too many people with similar talking points.

### INVITING DIVERSE PANELISTS

With many well-known and familiar faces, it can be hard to seek out new panelists. In the spirit of representation, we must break away from repeatedly inviting those who are always visible.

#### DO:

- ❑ Ask experts, committees, or previous panelists for suggestions in their circles. It is perfectly okay to introduce yourself and the goals of your panel to new connections through a friendly email or LinkedIn message.

- ❑ Look for names across regions in new places: *for example* conference speakers, news article interviewees, academics highlighted in university press releases, and members of organizations outside of well-known institutions or companies.

**DO NOT:** Rely on inviting “go-to” people who are frequently featured - not only does this give fewer opportunities to others to gain paneling experience; it may actually discourage attendees if they have already heard from the same people.

## WHAT IF YOUR PANEL ISN'T “DIVERSE”?

In rare instances, it can be difficult to invite a diverse panel despite your best efforts.

### DO:

- ❑ Acknowledge this limitation: *for example* make a thoughtful statement at the beginning of the event about your intentions and efforts for diversity.
- ❑ Allow underrepresented voices from the audience to contribute to the panel discussion and share their unique experiences.

## RUNNING YOUR PANEL

Unstructured panels can be confusing and unproductive for attendees and panelists alike. Panel organizers and moderators must take responsibility for managing time and flow of the session.

### DO:

- ❑ Schedule and stay on time for brief introductions, panel discussion, and Q&A.
- ❑ Choose a few moderated discussion topics and create a list of questions based on panelists’ experiences. Allow flexibility in conversation where needed.
- ❑ Consider if a Code of Conduct would be suitable for speakers and audience interactions.
- ❑ Where possible, share items - speaker bios, a Code of Conduct, presentation slides - in advance with attendees.
- ❑ Give each speaker opportunities to talk, and politely ask panelists to pause if they are talking for too long. Not every panelist needs to address every question.
- ❑ Use live audience feedback and interaction (*for example* questions, polls, “raise your hand”) to make it engaging and learn what is of interest to those in attendance.

**DO NOT:** Let the panel run entirely unstructured or overtime, or let a few panelists dominate the discussion.

## AFTER YOUR EVENT

After the panel, be sure to thank your panelists for their time and efforts through a courteous email or phone call; personal recognition goes a long way.

### DO:

- ❑ Ask panelists if they are comfortable connecting with attendees that want to follow up.
- ❑ Gather feedback from both attendees and panelists: *for example* - Did they enjoy their participation? Would any changes have made it a better experience? Even if things were not perfect, people appreciate a willingness to listen and improve.

## QUESTIONS? NEED HELP?

Reach out to the iGEM Diversity & Inclusion Committee at [diversity \[at\] igem \[dot\] org](mailto:diversity@igem.org)