France: Good Inclusive Practices in Video-conferences and Video-panel

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Abstract. The *Women and Physics Committee* of the SFP (The French Physical Society) proposes a guide to any video-conference organizers in order to improve inclusive practices. This guide presents 9 recommendations. We recommend that the Women Physicist's Committee in all national Physics Societies have similar initiatives for "gender fair" video-conference and video-panel.

INTRODUCTION

The health crisis that the world has been going through since the end of 2019 has imposed a profound transformation of communication modes. Video-conferencing has become a tool of our daily life with a multitude of different software. Over the past year, we have had time to familiarize ourselves with these techniques and it is time to question our practices.

If the format of video-conferences is different from that of traditional conferences, gender bias is still present but differently expressed. This is why we thought it would be useful to combine the charter for gender fairness in conferences (1) presented in the ICWIP in 2017 by V. Pierron-Bohnes as France team leader with a specific practical guide. The aim of this guide is to raise awareness of certain biases and to propose solutions so that practices change before they become habits. The following nine recommendations are described in the guide and illustrated with examples and advices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To Ensure Diversity

Considering the question of parity from the beginning of the construction of the scientific program of the event is a necessary condition to reach a fair representation of women among the invited speakers. Therefore, the female speakers identified in the tentative program should first be invited, and if some decline, the board will revise the panel of invited speakers until the set objective is reached. The fair representation of women on evaluation panels is now mandatory, and most conference organizing committees are also often very attentive to this. To avoid always asking the same women to sit on these panels or committees, it is important to ensure that there are equal lists of experts. Some organizations (such as the CNRS) have such lists. It is also possible to contact the Femmes & Sciences association, learned societies (the Women and Physics Commission of the French Society of Physics has a list of women speakers by discipline) or to consult the website https://expertes.fr

2. To Enable Women to Attend Conferences

It has been shown that when women work from home, they have less access than men to a private workspace and find it more difficult to escape from family constraints. Care should therefore be taken with the timing of video conferences. If these meetings are to be held synchronously, then school hours should be preferred (8.30am - 4.30 pm in France). If possible, asynchronous meetings should be organized. For example, for conferences, it is possible to ask speakers to record their speech. A Q&A session can be organized synchronously, taking care to ask the questions that have been sent in beforehand. The synchronous conference sessions can be organized either during school time or in the evening if a strict lockdown is taking place. For reasons of fatigue and the organization of workspaces at home, programs on half days may be preferred to full days (2). The hybrid mode (audience split between face-to-face and remote) should be avoided. Firstly, it creates two levels of meetings and therefore a form of discrimination. Secondly, it has been shown that women travel less than men to traditional conference formats. A hybrid mode could lead to an increase in this imbalance.

3. To Strengthen the Women's International Visibility – The Hybrid Format

The hybrid format (audience shared between face-to-face and distance learning) may have some advantages in its simplest form (face-to-face audience and a multitude of individual connections) or in a "cluster" form (one connection is shared by a group in the same location). However, it also presents a strong risk of discrimination. Firstly, it creates two levels of meetings. Above all, it has been shown that women travel less than men to conferences in the traditional format. A hybrid mode could lead to an increase in this imbalance and to the appearance of conferences with most of the male audience in person and most of the female audience at a distance.

For these reasons, the hybrid format is not recommended. However, if a conference is to be held in a hybrid format, the organization must take particular care with the following points:
- Selection criteria: the proportion of women in the room should correspond to that of the discipline.
- Chairing: separate and coordinated chairing for the room and for the online conversation should be favored.
- Poster session: posters should be visible to the remote audience and the possibility should be given to ask questions to those who present them.
- Social events: ensure that both audiences can meet at social events and during breaks.

4. To Support Women's Participation

In the specific case of videoconferencing, it has been shown that women more than men do not have access to a personal workspace at home, and have additional household or family tasks. It is important to discuss with the invited speaker during the first contact and to anticipate these obstacles by proposing solutions (3).

5. For an Equal Distribution of the Word Between Men and Women

Unlike a face-to-face conference, several moderators should be appointed with different functions:

- The first person should have the control over the microphones and open only the microphone of the person who is speaking. This person should ensure that the first question is asked by a woman (see point 6)
- The second person should monitor the thread of discussion and relay the questions asked in writing.
- The third person should keep track and check that the floor is not given more to men.

6. To Support Women's Voice

At the beginning of the meeting, the rules on speaking should be define explicitly and enforce them (e.g. keep the microphones locked until the floor is given). This is because men are more likely to speak without permission, whereas women are more likely to use the "raise your hand" option and wait for the moderator to give them the floor. It has been shown that without specific controls, the effects of hierarchy and status are amplified during video-conferences (4). To ensure that the tools are mastered, a "warm-up" could be organized at the very beginning of the session during which the whole audience is invited to raise their hands.

7. To Encourage Women to Ask Questions

In academic STEM seminars, women ask fewer questions than men (5). It has been shown that ensuring that the first question is asked by a woman, or at least prioritizing a request to speak by a woman, increases the proportion of questions asked by women over the whole Q&A session.

8. To Improve

A gender observer can be appointed by the organizing committee to take notes during the event. Conducting a survey to get feedback on the organization is also a good way to promote more equality.

9. To Avoid Bias During Assessment panel

The panel can be trained about biases (6) before the audition or, at least, see some videos. One of the key points is to decide on clear and formalized rules so that all candidates benefit from the same selection process. The chairperson of the panel is responsible for ensuring that these rules are respected. Video-conference juries do not always allow the candidate to see the members of the panel. However, it is very important to establish a link, even if only visually, in order to speak easily. One solution is to prepare a list of general questions that can be asked to all candidates at the very beginning of the assessment (before the discussion on specific topics). This methodology helps to start the interaction with the panel in a reassuring way.

CONCLUSION

We recommend that the Women Physicists' committees in all national Physics Societies have similar initiatives so that all physics video-conferences soon become "gender fair"! You are welcome spreading this guide in your own country, upload it on https://www.sfpnet.fr/uploads/tinymce/FemmesetPhys/Good-practices-guide.pdf

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