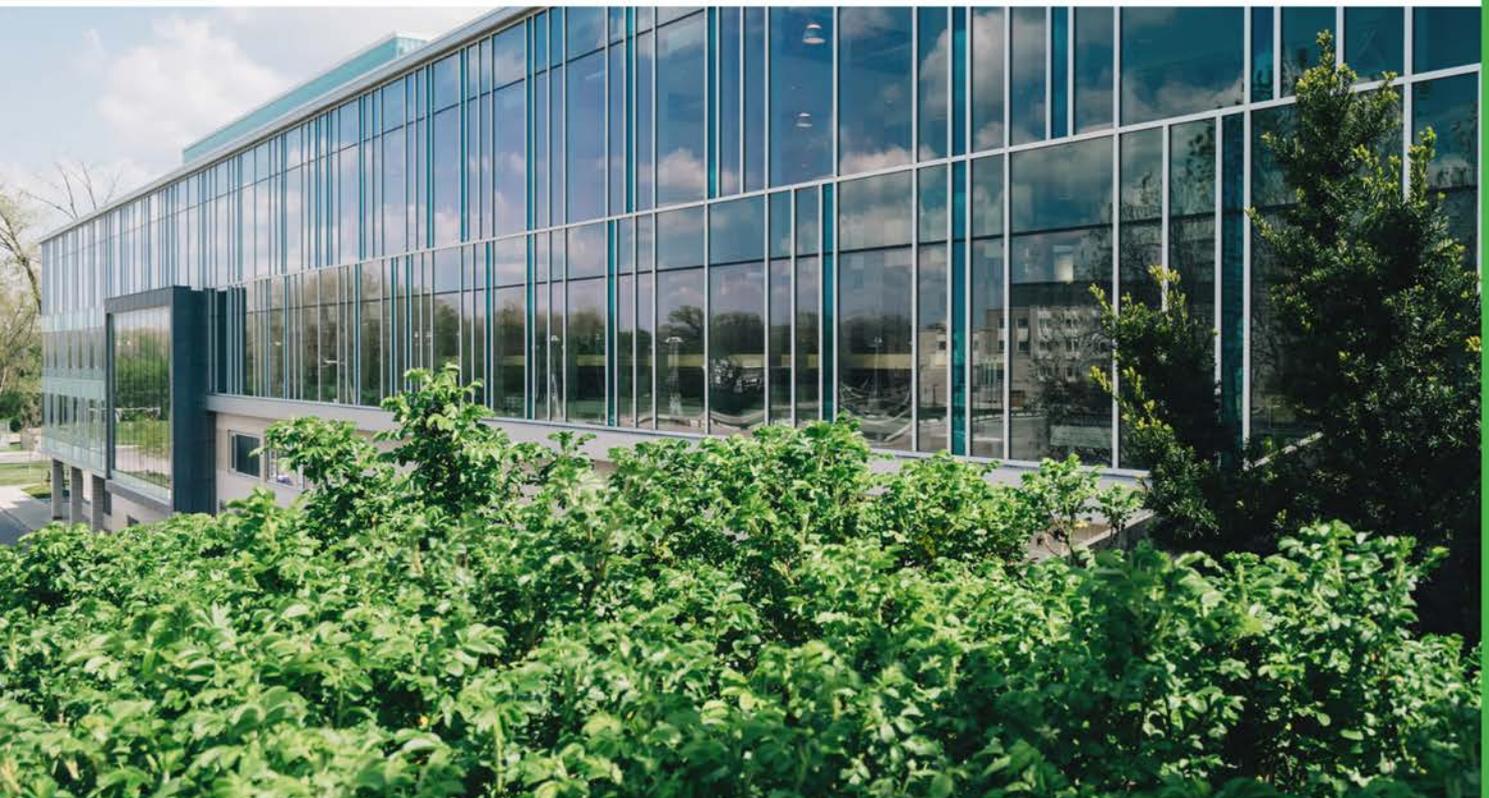




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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

FUTURE LEADERS COUNCIL | APPROACH TO DEI



Presented to
ICCA Board of Directors

Presented by
Future Leaders Council

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Executive Summary

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) considerations are increasingly shaping the organisation and experience of international meetings and events.

The Future Leaders Council (FLC) analysed various definitions within the meetings industry and conducted an in-depth study of eight congresses held in different regions worldwide. This study identified best practices, commonalities, and opportunities to enhance DEI initiatives within the industry. Throughout this paper, we present our recommendations based on key findings and our vision for a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive meetings industry.

Our key findings include:

- There is no one-size-fits-all approach to DEI initiatives.
- Definitions and implementations vary significantly around the world.
- Data collection is crucial for communicating initiatives and building on previous experiences.
- Resources remain one of the biggest challenges.
- Structural changes are essential for improving DEI.
- Communication of successful projects and case studies can inspire future events.

The researched congresses were carefully selected for their DEI approaches and are listed below, including the meeting location, the association, the association’s acronym, and the year the meeting took place.

Association	Conference	Abbreviation	Association HQ	Meeting destination
World Parkinson Coalition (WPC)	World Parkinson Congress 2023	WPC 2023	New York, USA	Barcelona, Spain
International Advertising Association (IAA)	IAA World Congress 2024	IAAWC 2024	New York, USA	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Pediatric Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery	8th World Congress of Pediatric Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery 2023	WCPCCS 2023	n/a	Washington DC, USA
International Solid Waste Association (ISWA)	ISWA World Congress 2023	ISWA2023	Rotterdam, The Netherlands	Muscat, Oman
South African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI)	SAACI Annual Congress 2023	SAACI Congress 2023	Johannesburg, South Africa	ADDO Wildlife, Eastern Cape, South Africa
European AIDS Clinical Society (EACS)	19th European Aids Conference 2023	EACS 2023	Brussels, Belgium	Warsaw, Poland
World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA)	World Indigenous Tourism Summit 2023	WITS 2023	Perth, Australia	Perth, Australia
Society for the Neural Control of Movement (NCM)	The 33rd Annual Meeting Society for the Neural Control of Movement (NCM)	NCM 2024	Victoria, Canada	Croatia 2023- Panama City 2025



Definitions

The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) acknowledges DEI as key Advocacy pillars. Aligned with ICCA, the FLC believes the way we work and the strategy we follow shows our real commitment to DEI.

We recognise that globally, a commitment to DEI is particularly crucial for the international meetings and events community, as our sector serves as a global forum for uniting people from diverse cultures, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds. The success of any business event often hinges on the inclusivity, representation, valuation, and welcoming atmosphere experienced by participants.

Through this paper, we have delved further into the role DEI plays in event success, as we aim to foster a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive sector through knowledge sharing, promotion of best practices, and highlighting inspirational examples.

The American Library Association defines DEI as:

“DEI stands for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. It refers to a set of principles and practices aimed at creating workplaces, communities, and societies where everyone, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances, feels valued, respected, and empowered to participate fully.”

In the context of the meetings and events ecosystem, the FLC defines DEI as:

DIVERSITY: Diversity encompasses all facets of event attendee variation, including social identities and group differences. This includes but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, creed, color, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual identity, socio-economic status, language, culture, national origin, religion/spirituality, age, and (dis)ability.

EQUITY: Equity embodies fair and just practices and policies that foster an environment where all event participants can flourish, including delegates, speakers, and suppliers. Unlike equality, which assumes uniformity of experiences, equity acknowledges and addresses both historical and present-day structural inequalities. True equity is achieved by ensuring that everyone has equitable access to opportunities from the outset.

INCLUSION: Inclusion denotes an event community where every individual is valued, respected, and empowered to fully engage and achieve their potential. While diversity is essential, it alone does not guarantee inclusivity. A business event may be diverse yet lack inclusivity. Therefore, sustained efforts to cultivate inclusive environments are indispensable to ensure attendees are empowered to participate fully.

For further consideration, the FLC acknowledges the topic of DEI's place under the umbrella of sustainability. The sustainability and longevity of our industry is dependent, in part, upon how well congresses and conventions are welcomed into their host communities, by the cities and their residents themselves. It is also dependent upon the satisfaction of the meeting delegates and association members, which tend to align with the trending social causes of the day. By positioning DEI in relation to the theme of sustainability, we aim to assert the topic's necessity as a consideration in all meeting planning and execution moving forward.

At the World Indigenous Tourism Summit 2023 (WITS), diversity meant showcasing a wide range of Indigenous cultures, languages, traditions, and peoples in tourism. Equity ensured fair treatment, access, and opportunities for all, providing equal economic opportunities within the tourism industry. Inclusion fostered an environment where everyone felt valued and empowered by involving all voices in tourism-related decision-making processes.

Resources

In the context of DEI, resources play a vital role in facilitating understanding, growth, and education-driven change. These resources encompass a broad range of materials, programs, partnerships, and initiatives aimed at promoting diversity, ensuring equity, and fostering inclusivity.

They can provide essential support for associations, conferences, and organisations seeking to create environments that embrace diversity and challenge biases. By offering educational materials, training programs, and community initiatives, these resources can empower event professionals to learn about different perspectives and views, ultimately driving tangible progress toward a more equitable and inclusive community.

It is also necessary to allocate financial resources in support of DEI initiatives within business events. This may include funding for diverse speakers, accessibility accommodations, DEI training programs, and community engagement efforts.

As an example, the Society for the Neural Control of Movement (NCM) is committed to ensuring that the diversity of the scientific field is well represented in society governance and in the programming of both the annual meeting and the official satellite meeting. Adequate representation of women is required of all proposed workshops. In addition, NCM strives to achieve greater diversity among international scientists, and underrepresented minorities. The Society for the NCM has implemented various funding initiatives to support diversity and attendance at its annual meetings. They offer meeting support grants that cover complimentary registration and provide \$500 in travel support, with additional funds available upon budget review. Over \$20,000 has been allocated for travel funding in 2024. NCM also offers family support grants to help attendees manage family commitments during the meeting, with funding requests typically ranging from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

Also, 19th European AIDS Conference (EACS) has assigned a specific budget with the support of sponsors, for providing the possibility to individuals to join the conference, that otherwise would not have had the financial resources to join.

Partnerships are established to collaborate with external organisations, diversity-focused associations, community groups, and minority-owned businesses to enhance DEI efforts. These collaborations can provide access to expertise, networks, and resources, thereby amplifying the impact of events.

Potential partnerships could be with:

- Professional Associations
- Diversity-Focused Nonprofit Organizations
- Local Community & Activist Groups
- Universities and Educational Institutions
- Corporate Diversity Networks
- Diverse Media Outlets
- Government Agencies
- Cultural Institution

Resources

Other resources may include online forums and event manager-led discussions, designed to educate and support DEI initiatives while implementing inclusive practices.

The following are examples of such resources available online:

1. "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity for Event Planners"

- "Empowering event planners to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusivity."
- Resource: Eventsforce, Link: [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity for Event Planners](#)

2. "DICE - Diversity & Inclusion in Conferences and Events"

- "Promoting diversity and inclusion in conferences and events."
- Resource: DICE, Link: [DICE - Diversity & Inclusion in Conferences and Events](#)

3. "Diversity, Equality, Inclusion: Your Events"

- "Exploring diversity, equality, and inclusion in event planning."
- Resource: Cvent, Link: [Diversity, Equality, Inclusion: Your Events](#)

4. Event Inclusivity Guide"

- "A comprehensive guide to event inclusivity."
- Resource: Eventbrite, Link: [Event Inclusivity Guide](#)



Measurement

Measuring DEI within an event is pivotal to ensuring its alignment with the fundamental values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Based on the desk research and case studies on the aforementioned events, the measurement of DEI is normally conducted through internal evaluation and attendee feedback.

Internal Evaluation: Evaluating the efficacy of DEI initiatives within events entails conducting internal assessments. This process may include monitoring metrics concerning diversity in speaker selection, attendee demographics, provision of accessibility accommodations, and adherence to DEI policies.

Attendee Feedback: Gathering input from event attendees through surveys, focus groups, or interviews is essential for understanding their experiences with DEI initiatives. Feedback on the inclusiveness of the event environment, the relevance of DEI content, and suggestions for improvement can provide valuable insights for future event planning and decision-making.

However, would that be sufficient?

Proficient measurement not only furnishes event organizers with valuable insights into the event's impact but also facilitates the identification of areas necessitating refinement. The following delineates a structured methodology for assessing DEI within events:

Specific Objectives & Metrics according to Event: At the outset, it's crucial to define clear objectives and metrics. Within the event's context, a precise definition of diversity, equity, and inclusion is necessary, alongside the establishment of Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) goals. Basic metrics, such as attendance demographics, participant feedback, speaker diversity, representation in promotional materials, and accessibility accommodations, should be clearly outlined.

Ample Data Collection: Data collection procedures should be methodically carried out before, during, and after the event. Employing various tools like surveys, registration forms, and observational methods helps gather relevant information regarding attendee demographics, experiences, and perceptions. It's essential to prioritise the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents to create a conducive environment for candid feedback, especially on sensitive topics.

Analysis: A comprehensive analysis of the amassed data is indispensable for evaluating the event's DEI performance. Delving into patterns, trends, and disparities across diverse demographic cohorts enables a nuanced understanding of the event's inclusivity. Evaluation criteria should encompass the accessibility of the event to individuals with disabilities, its inclusiveness of marginalised communities, and the equitable treatment of all participants.

Measurement

Solicitation of Feedback, especially Qualitative Feedback: Additionally, the solicitation of feedback from participants and stakeholders via post-event surveys or focus groups is integral. Qualitative insights garnered through these mechanisms furnish invaluable perspectives on the participant experience and offer pragmatic suggestions for improvement. Engaging with community organisations and affinity groups augments this process by affording diverse viewpoints on the event's DEI endeavors.

Reporting & Benchmark: Moreover, benchmarking the event's performance against industry standards and best practices serves as a yardstick for evaluating its efficacy. Comparative analyses vis-à-vis analogous events or initiatives facilitate a holistic assessment of relative success and areas necessitating enhancement. Seeking external validation or certification from DEI organisations underscores the organisers' unwavering commitment to these principles. Reporting on the event's DEI metrics can be used to hold the organiser accountable for future meeting editions.

There are many frameworks and structured metrics developed by Boston Consulting Group, Harvard Business, and McKinsey to measure the DEI progress of organisations. In which, can be comprehended and applied to the event itself. EMMC has recently developed metrics for the Event Industry, and yet encourages the organisers to continue to find ways to seek more visually diverse representation.

In conclusion, the meticulous measurement of DEI within an event entails meticulous planning, rigorous data collection, astute analysis, and robust stakeholder engagement. By adhering to this methodological framework, event organisers can effectively evaluate and augment their endeavors to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion within their events.

The NCM has developed a robust framework for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), which includes:

- **Structured Feedback Collection:** Regularly gathering and analyzing feedback from attendees to assess the inclusivity of their events.
- **Strong Code of Conduct:** Enforcing a comprehensive code of conduct to ensure a respectful and harassment-free environment.
- **Continuous Monitoring and Reporting:** Implementing ongoing monitoring mechanisms to track DEI progress and transparently report findings to the community.

Variety of Initiatives

During research, the FLC uncovered a robust variety of initiatives that support our given definition of DEI. Through internet research and semi-structured interviews, the eight congresses the FLC explored revealed some common approaches that we present as best practices and inspiration for the ICCA community. Below is a survey of DEI initiatives associations employed during their congresses, as well as in preparation and in the follow-up for the event.

Removing Financial Barriers: In order to benefit from an association's in-person event, the delegates have to first get there. Scholarships and other forms of financial assistance are an excellent way to ensure an association's entire membership base is able to access the educational content and networking benefits that are vital to the association's field. The cost to register for a congress can be a significant barrier to some professionals and the diversity of a global association's membership base also suggests members are working with diverse budgets. In the spirit of inclusivity, congresses may elect to make access to the event more equitable by offering reduced rates or funding sources for certain delegates.

Reducing Registration Rates: One such example from the research is World Congress of Pediatric Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery's (WCPCCS) efforts to facilitate global participation. By aligning registration fees for their 2023 event in the United States with the World Bank's classification of countries by income groups, the congress was able to boast representation from 101 countries around the world.

Another example of ensuring participation of certain groups is continuously reduced membership fees, not only from participants of low-income countries, but also inclusive of the next generation by reducing membership fees for students & young participants, which is exemplified by EACS.

Scholarships & Supplemental Funding: The WCPCCS took the idea of equitable access one step further by establishing a support fund for attendees from low- or middle-income countries (LMICs) [source]. The fund was leveraged to subsidise the registration fees of those for whom the typical rate would pose a barrier to entry. This effort was significant not only because it boosted geographic representation at the event, but because it aligned with the congress' central call to action of "highlighting the global inequities in pediatric and congenital heart care" [source].

To truly tackle an issue that affects people around the world, it is imperative to assemble a globally representative group of people while ensuring everyone has relative access to the event.

Another group to approached the idea of equity at the registration stage was SNCM. The association supported three separate funding pathways for attendees who faced barriers to registering due to the cost of attending the event.

The NCM Diversity Fellowship is intended for graduate students, post-docs, and faculty and covers the cost of registration plus a travel stipend. Registrants must apply, and fellows are awarded support based on their perceived contribution to the diversity of the congress' meeting attendees. Diversity is defined by SNCM as under-represented groups by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and persons with mental or physical disabilities, and those from developing countries facing financial barriers. A separate fund, the Predominantly Undergraduate Institution Fellowship, is SNCM's effort to be more inclusive within the academic discipline they serve. By applying, institutions receive a stipend that can be used for faculty registrations or travel [\[source\]](#).

SNCM's third funding mechanism is the most unique of the three. The Family Care Grant supports attendees who, by traveling to the congress, incur extra expenses for the care of their family members. The fund can be employed at the meeting or at home and is inclusive of care for children, elders, and those with disabilities [\[source\]](#). Of all the funding sources the FLC reviewed, this example stood out for its consideration of the whole person, acknowledging that demographic factors are not the only barriers attendees may face. Supporting the choices of the association's members is another way to support DEI principles while fostering a supportive learning and networking environment.

Also, EACS is providing scholarships to ensure participation and has created different possibilities for international and national attendees with the support of their sponsors.

Event Programming: It is important to design events with the principles of DEI in mind, all the way down to the content of the congress. The session topics, takeaways, and delivery of the programming are worth considering from the attendee's point of view. Many of the associations the FLC profiled had interesting approaches to their programming.

Content: The educational content at a congress is typically already quite vast; the diversity of topics to cover within a single field of study is boundless. Indeed, many associations rightfully celebrate the depth of interdisciplinary content present at their events, as well as the inclusion of delegates who are stakeholders of the group's main subject area. However, there is still room to grow in this space. A number of the groups analysed by the FLC have approaches to content that are worth noting.

Patient inclusion was a topic brought to the forefront during EACS's congress, as they are always actively considering involving people from public health institutions, the patients and members of the community, scientists, clinicians, and basic health experts. The idea of giving patients more agency in the direction of their care within this medical discipline is a vote for the patient's self-determination. The goal of including patient voices when discussing the direction of the field is to create more equitable outcomes when it comes to the treatment of the disease and patient experience and to gain a better understanding of the reality of living with AIDS.

IAA's World Congress, too, took the role of expanding its content quite seriously. In response to this imperative, the Congress dedicated an entire day to a comprehensive program focused solely on DEI initiatives, branded for delegates as #TheDEIDay [\[source\]](#). This strategic decision underscores the organisation's commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where individuals from all backgrounds feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute fully.

Diversity of Speakers: It is not only the content that is delivered that matters, but also the manner in which the content is delivered. Welcoming and promoting diverse speakers allows attendees access to different viewpoints, backgrounds, and experiences. With a diverse lineup, an event's educational content can truly inspire and engage attendees. This consideration of DEI principles could be seen in all the researched events.

For SAACI's event, for example, the selection of speakers and panelists focused on representing a broad range of identities and perspectives, tracking demographic characteristics, and inviting speakers from diverse backgrounds. Included in the event lineup were events industry experts, but also South Africa's youngest CEO, an expert on AI from the technology industry, and an ex-captive of Al-Qaeda, who shared how his ordeal matured his views on inclusivity [\[source\]](#). To ensure this commitment to diversity was a benefit to the association overall, they tracked the demographic characteristics of their speakers and measured their results against organisational goals such as the effectiveness of their outreach efforts.

It was not only the content at IAA's #TheDEIDay that was carefully considered. The event's DEI program encompassed a diverse range of topics, including but not limited to, promoting equal opportunities, combating discrimination, amplifying underrepresented voices, and implementing inclusive policies and practices. The 45th IAAWC Organising Committee ensured that the speakers invited struck a balance in gender, racial background, geographical region, working background, age groups, etc. which sparked meaningful dialogues among the attendees [\[source\]](#).

Involving Local Stakeholders: As DEI is perceived differently around the globe, a key factor is considering the needs of the local community in the destination where the event is taking place. Engaging and leveraging the experience and knowledge of the local community during the congress can also be an opportunity for event organizers to tap into the intellectual capital of the region. Just as associations should feature local experts in their speaker lineups, so too should they consider how the general public can positively impact the event.



Public Participation: Conferences have the right to keep a closed-door policy for their meetings. But some, like those whose fields concern subjects that could impact anyone, like those by associations in the medical field, may find it beneficial to involve the public in some way. Groups like WCPCCS and WPC, for example, invited patients to register for their congresses as attendees and speakers, so that they could access the educational content and help inform their community of medical professionals.

An earnest effort of inclusion, however, will aim to reach as many local beneficiaries as possible. Another medical group, EACS opened up the session 'Empowering communities and clinicians for harm reduction and mental health' by the European Aids Treatment Group allowing the general population their sessions free of charge. In doing so, the individuals who stand to gain the most from the conversations had during the congress are welcomed and included in those very conversations.

Engaging Local Institutions: In addition to the public, EACS also engaged local associations and community groups for both their legacy programming and educational sessions. The Sex Workers Alliance is a local nonprofit that supports a community at a higher risk of being infected by HIV/AIDS. EACS chose to include this group in the congress by giving them exhibition space free of charge, meaning they could spread their message to those who stand to benefit from it most. As a less-resourced, nonprofit group, this allows them to reach their stakeholders more equitably. The Sex Workers Alliance was also invited to organize an educational session themselves, meaning the voice of those on the ground, handling not only the medical, but social and economic factors that come into play when someone is infected with the disease. Congress attendees were thus able to consider those diverse perspectives through a specifically local.

The SAACI congress also saw collaboration with local institutions within the region, offering colleges and universities access to the congress programme and networking sessions. This allowed students the opportunity to learn more about the events industry while building the network that will be so vital to their future careers.

In another example of the congress inviting its stakeholders to take part in forming the direction of the event, the WITS committee engaged with local elders, TAFE lecturers, Australian Culinary Federation mentor chefs and the Western Australian Indigenous-inspired Djinda Ngardak Programme to create cultural culinary sculptures as table centrepieces for the event's Gala Dinner. Where practically possible, the organising team incorporated Indigenous suppliers, artists and people throughout the conference to uphold the values of WITS [\[source\]](#). It is worth noting here that of the programmes we profiled, WITS is the only congress that explicitly mentioned working with diverse suppliers. This is a key opportunity for other groups that we discuss further along in this report.



Attendee Experience: It is up to the event organizer and association to decide what level of interaction attendees will have with a congress’ DEI efforts. Different fields will have different approaches to this broad category of initiatives, as demonstrated by our profiled groups, below.

Accessibility: Of the events we reviewed, most brushed over the accessibility features of their congresses. Many mentioned wheelchair ramps and other basic mobility accommodations, but the information was difficult to find on their websites. NCM stood out as one group whose planner shared features for a wider group, including a parenting room for families, during an interview with an FLC team member.

From our firsthand experiences, it is our assumption that while congresses are making more robust accommodations for attendees, the associations do not see the value in communicating those options. It is becoming increasingly more common to see a sensory room for neurodivergent individuals, or non-binary restrooms for gender-fluid attendees available at conferences. These are best practices but simply did not come up in our research. In an interview, it was also indicated that the accessibility features of a venue were not taken into consideration and would not be a decision-making factor in the venue selection process.

One further accommodation that stood out is EACS’ very pointed effort to further include Russian and Ukrainian attendees by offering simultaneous translation for sessions most relevant for them. EACS identified these regions as areas where there is a high prevalence of HIV. In response, they lowered the barrier to accessing information that aims to reduce instances of the disease by ensuring it was delivered in the attendee’s first language [\[source\]](#).

Inclusion: Efforts to incorporate higher numbers of relevant stakeholders into a congress are also worth mentioning. During WITS, organizers settled upon the idea of having the experts in Indigenous tourism - the Indigenous people themselves - create an immersive cultural dance evening. All attendees of the congress were invited to take part and highlight their local customs. This decision meant the Indigenous communities around which this conference was designed were included in the co-creation of the event, allowing for a more authentic representation of the cultures it was meant to celebrate. And the inclusive spirit of the meaning allows all attendees to participate, not only those who helped plan it.

The WCPCCS looked outside of the walls of the convention centre when considering the best ways to include more stakeholders. The group worked with Heart University, the Congenital Heart Academy, and the World University of Pediatric and Congenital Heart Surgery as educational partners. Through this collaboration, over 300 of the event's lectures were made available online free of charge. This partnership is rooted in principles of equity and inclusion and means physicians, nurses, and healthcare workers around the world will have access to potentially lifesaving information shared and discussed by conference delegates.

Another innovative approach of EACS to shed light on life with HIV and their experience was the organisation of the "Positive Art Exhibition." Artists living with HIV were invited to submit their work, which was created between 2019 to 2023. They were encouraged to submit art with HIV-related themes and artists had the possibility to remain anonymous. An international jury then chose the artworks to be displayed at the conference, where participants could vote on their favorite. At the closing ceremony, the winners were announced and received monetary prizes [\[source\]](#).



Engaging the Next Generation

Of the DEI initiatives aimed at enriching the attendee experience, those most often cited by the groups we researched involved engaging young professionals. Associations often give their next generation of talent a platform within their membership through committees or through educational resources tailored specifically for individuals new to the field. Congresses are another potential stage from which associations can support and celebrate the diversity of experience and age that represents their field.

SAACI's congress, for example, held a DEI-based session that focused primarily on the need to bring more youth into the industry. Notably, the discussion included the voices of young professionals, including one FLC member. The session ended by engaging the audience to be more inclusive within their own organisations, plus a call to action for SAACI to include more youth at next year's congress [\[source\]](#).

WITS, too, included a session in their congress as part of a Youth Symposium. Attendees saw presentations from young people working in tourism alongside Indigenous elders and industry champions of young people from within the tourism industry [\[source\]](#)

It is worth mentioning here that of the eight congresses researched by the FLC, the two whose subject areas interact with the tourism and events industry were those with the strongest initiatives around youth engagement. One other notable effort is by ISWA, whose Young Professionals Group hosts an annual online conference around knowledge sharing, collaboration, and innovation [\[source\]](#). However, because this conference is separate from the group's annual congress, it cannot be fully included in this group of initiatives.

Also, EACS is providing its Young Investigators a platform. They have built their own network and educational programme, aimed at further including the next generation of scientists. In addition, they offer reduced registration and membership rates for this group [\[source\]](#).

Leveraging Legacy & Charitable Giving

Instilling DEI principles into the meeting is essential for associations moving forward. It is also increasingly more important that associations consider the impact of their events on the host destination through a longitudinal lens. Legacy projects with long-term, outcomes-based goals can help associations achieve their vision for DEI by supporting a cause related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the event destination. For smaller-scale initiatives, associations can implement an activity related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) or submit a donation to a charitable cause. Below are a few examples from our research set.

Legacy Projects

Among the groups we researched, WPC's project, "Parkinson's Ready ~ Barcelona," was a standout in terms of legacy and DEI [\[source\]](#). The project focused on a major challenge for people living with Parkinson's disease (PD): travelling comfortably and safely. In the months leading up to the congress, WPC worked with a local host to train city leaders, public transportation workers, service industry workers, and the general public on the accessibility issues people with PD may face. The project sought to ensure the host destination was ready to host delegates with disability issues for the congress but also to leave a lasting legacy of accommodation for anyone who faces barriers related to mobility and other issues like those caused by PD. Overall, the association and its congress improved the life of those with PD in the host destination, meaning the destination is now one that is inclusive of those with diverse mobility needs. By bringing the public into planning sessions and training, the community now has a deeper understanding of the particular issues those with PD face while travelling, and they likely were exposed to a culture they hadn't previously had many opportunities to interact with. It is an outstanding case study that proves that making a situation more equitable for even one demographic can help remove barriers for others who share some of those same characteristics and struggles.

Charitable Giving

The WCPCCS leveraged some of its social programme, plus a few extra talented physicians, to host a benefit concert during the congress. For two consecutive nights, The Baby Blue Sound Collective performed two shows at iconic venues within the host destination, donating proceeds to two charities whose missions are closely tied to that of the association [\[source\]](#). The jazz ensemble consists entirely of association members from three different countries, and both shows sold out for maximum impact to their selected charities.

EACS showed its dedication to making a meaningful impact on the host destination by hosting an impressive eight activations during the congress, meant to drive awareness and funding to important charities and institutional partners. Some, like the "Living Free with HIV" run and the "Drag Queen in Heaven" gala allowed attendees to socialize while financially supporting medical advancement. A movie screening, city bus activation, and a projection of a giant red ribbon onto buildings in the city centre drove awareness of the cause while allowing the public to learn about the cause as well. And "HIV_week@WUM" and the Mobile Harm Reduction Service meant attendees could go out into the community and engage directly with the students who will one day become colleagues, and the direct beneficiaries of their work - the patients [\[source\]](#). The inclusive spirit of all these events is evident, as each seeks to bring diverse groups of people together in support of medical advancement that may affect each person differently but requires each individual to engage with their community to succeed. Though the group did not have a framework for tracking the last impact, the depth of impact that this slate of activations will have on the destination means EACS' congress will leave a legacy on the destination, at least in name.

Communication

Scientific conferences often employ specialized terminology that may not be familiar to the general public. To effectively communicate DEI initiatives and disseminate knowledge, it is crucial to use language that centers on the audience, enhancing clarity and understanding.

The way we refer to DEI initiatives is fundamental, as it can gradually transform societal attitudes. Providing simultaneous translation at conferences can be instrumental, especially for populations that are particularly vulnerable or still facing significant challenges. For example, at the European AIDS Conference (EACS), sessions are translated into Russian and Ukrainian to address the high HIV prevalence in these countries. This approach extends to translating various guidelines, ensuring accessibility and comprehension.

Consistent, transparent, and open communication is essential for all stakeholders, including attendees. In training sessions, providing trainees with several essential tips significantly enhances their ability to support attendees with special needs. Tailored training prepares them to handle likely scenarios effectively, fostering better communication and support.

It is equally important for the general public to recognize the significance of DEI initiatives. This awareness fosters broader knowledge and support, enhancing community engagement in these efforts.

For instance, the World Parkinson's Congress 2023 aimed to boost awareness and understanding of Parkinson's disease among the general public. The public relations efforts succeeded in translating scientific knowledge into practical information for the public. This not only enhanced Barcelona's reputation as a welcoming city for people with Parkinson's but also showcased its commitment to inclusivity.

The Society for the Neural Control of Movement is dedicated to advancing its DEI strategies. By continuously analyzing membership demographics, NCM adjusts its strategic plans to better represent diverse groups, especially in presentations and discussions at its annual meetings. Looking forward, NCM is exploring ways to expand its DEI initiatives, including increasing funding for broader participation and enhancing the inclusivity of its events. These steps aim to make each meeting a welcoming space for all, promoting a diverse and enriched dialogue in the field of neural movement control.

Effective communication was pivotal in fostering DEI at the World Indigenous Tourism Summit 2023. The organizing committee worked closely with partners to engage diverse Indigenous communities through various channels, including social media, official websites, and traditional media. This strategy, coupled with immersive cultural experiences, promoted an inclusive and culturally safe environment, enabling meaningful dialogue and collaboration in advancing global Indigenous tourism.

1. Use of Accessible Language:

- Scientific conferences often use specialized terminology that may not be accessible to the general public.
- Emphasizing people-centered language in DEI communications enhances clarity and understanding.

2. Importance of Terminology:

- Properly defining terms related to DEI initiatives can transform societal attitudes over time.

3. Simultaneous Translation:

- Essential for inclusivity, especially for vulnerable groups or those facing significant challenges.
- Example: At the European AIDS Conference, all sessions are translated into Russian and Ukrainian due to high HIV prevalence in these regions, extending to guideline translations.

4. Open and Transparent Communication:

- Critical for engaging both attendees and stakeholders effectively.
- Training sessions equip trainees with tips to better assist attendees with special needs, tailored to likely scenarios.

5. Public Awareness of DEI Initiatives:

- Important for the general public to recognize and support DEI efforts, enhancing community engagement and spreading awareness.

Challenges

One of the most crucial challenges in identifying and ensuring a successful rollout of various DEI initiatives is obtaining resources, ranging from dedicated staff, collaboration with partners, marketing, outreach, and budget allocations. To include more strategies, additional steps such as diversity in supplier selection, community engagement, cultural competence training, and further development of inclusive policies would be necessary.

When training is necessary, challenges also include coordinating with diverse stakeholders and ensuring the training is tailored to their roles. This is addressed by involving local partners, conducting surveys, and customizing training content. These relationships will hopefully lead to more collaboration in the future, creating more innovative DEI projects to generate social impact.

An example where a conference's potential impact is restricted by time is EACS, which offered special sessions alongside the congress, providing national societies a platform and opportunity to present themselves and the work they are doing. However, there is usually more interest than available slots, which leads to the organizer's suggesting a collaboration with another society.

Another issue specific to congresses is the need to comply with industry standards. The European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (EACCME), for example, places certain limitations on inviting the public to conferences. The goal of regulations set by bodies like these is to ensure conferences remain places for disseminating knowledge and scientific content, not for selling something, like pharmaceutical products. As a consequence, in most cases the solution is to close exhibitions and scientific content to the broader public. Associations then see reduced profit potential from registration and fewer opportunities for making outreach with local communities.

Politics can be a challenge considering each association's role to be there for all of their members and to be as neutral as possible. Depending on the congress topic, opening up to the public can be challenging in certain destinations around the world. Openly speaking about DEI and related issues can offer the threat of a backlash or in some cases even a law against publicly thematising certain issues. With the example of EACS 2023 in Warsaw, the congress chair encountered challenges with the local government when she went to schools throughout the city to educate students about AIDS prevention which did not align with the interests of the government at the time.

In an interview, the organizers of the 45th IAA World Congress stated that one of the challenges encountered in implementing a DEI Day was the diverse understanding of DEI among participants stemming from their various backgrounds. Given the multifaceted nature of DEI, individuals bring unique perspectives shaped by their cultural, societal, and personal experiences. These distinct viewpoints led to differing interpretations of what constitutes diversity, equity, and inclusion, potentially hindering cohesive dialogue and action. Addressing this challenge requires a concerted effort to foster mutual understanding and alignment on DEI principles, and ideal IAAWC made space for by opening a platform for exploring diverse viewpoints and promoting a culture of respect and inclusivity where all voices are valued.

Lastly, in regards to scientific session content, an overly strong focus on DEI can prove to be a challenge. Whilst it is highly encouraged to have a gender balance within boards, panels, and sessions, a concern is this becoming the predominant factor when choosing speakers more than their actual expertise in a certain field. In European conferences the gender balance is already largely achieved, however, there is still plenty of room for improvement to involve diverse ethnicities.



Learnings & Plans for The Future

In navigating the complexities of promoting DEI within associations, it becomes evident that there is simply no one-size-fits-all solution.

Each context presents unique challenges and opportunities, necessitating tailored approaches to effectively address diverse needs and circumstances. As we delve into the intricacies of implementing structural changes, fostering collaboration, and driving impactful initiatives, it is crucial to recognize the nuanced nature of our endeavors. From communication strategies to collaborative partnerships and monitoring frameworks, our efforts must be adaptable and responsive to the diverse contexts in which we operate. By embracing this diversity and embracing flexibility, we pave the way for more inclusive and sustainable outcomes.

The need for structural changes

The journey of implementing structural changes within associations, as demonstrated through the example of EACS, underscores the intricate nature of adaptation and the pursuit of representative and gender-balanced leadership, both of which necessitate a considerable amount of time and a firm grounding in the association's constitution. Despite initiating efforts as early as 2013 to overhaul the board and ensure representation from all corners of Europe while also striving for gender parity, the process has proven to be a prolonged endeavor, with restructuring efforts still ongoing for certain committees as of the year 2024.

Importance of communication

Effective communication serves as the cornerstone of any successful initiative, particularly in the realm of DEI. It is not merely about disseminating information; it is about fostering understanding and generating buy-in from stakeholders at all levels. Within the context of the exposed programs, the impact of communication goes beyond mere awareness—it cultivates a sense of ownership and investment in the program's objectives. By articulating the tangible benefits of DEI initiatives to the broader community, we not only garner support but also catalyze meaningful action. This underscores the need for targeted communication strategies that resonate with diverse audiences and convey the relevance and importance of our endeavors in addressing societal challenges.

Best practices manual

The creation of a comprehensive best practices manual represents a pivotal step towards institutionalizing learning and fostering continuous improvement. Beyond serving as a repository of past successes, this manual is a dynamic tool for equipping participants with the knowledge and resources they need to navigate the complexities of DEI initiatives. By distilling key learnings, successful strategies, and practical insights into tangible case studies, we empower trainees to apply best practices in real-world scenarios. Moreover, the manual serves as a guidepost for host destinations, offering actionable recommendations and frameworks for implementing and supporting DEI projects effectively. Through the dissemination of best practices, we not only amplify the impact of our initiatives but also cultivate a culture of innovation and excellence within the broader DEI community.

Collaboration

Collaboration lies at the heart of transformative change. It is not merely about pooling resources; it is about leveraging collective expertise and perspectives to tackle complex challenges. The sourcing and hiring of event suppliers is a major element in the development of a congress. These businesses - general contractors, housing companies, caterers, photographers, and more - are beneficiaries of the economic impact that events bring. By selecting businesses owned by or that are employing a majority of women, minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, veterans, differently-abled individuals, and other underrepresented groups, the association makes an explicit effort to support diverse communities. Fostering economic growth in the destination ensures the positive impact of the congress is distributed more equitably.

Through collaborative endeavors, we harness the synergies of diverse stakeholders, maximizing our collective impact and driving sustainable outcomes. Whether it's forging partnerships between organizers, engaging local communities, or collaborating with governmental and non-governmental entities, the power of collaboration cannot be overstated.

Our research yielded a disappointing lack of consideration for this important step in organizing a congress. Whether the cause for this missing information is a lack of perceived value in promoting the choice to source diverse suppliers or a homogenized selection of businesses, it is worth mentioning that this crucial step should be considered when an association drafts its DEI initiatives.

By fostering a culture of trust, transparency, and mutual respect, we create an ecosystem where innovative solutions flourish, and barriers to inclusion are dismantled. Moving forward, nurturing and strengthening these collaborative partnerships will be essential to advancing our shared vision of a more inclusive and equitable society.

Shift in perspective

The initiatives undertaken have not only catalyzed tangible change but also precipitated a profound shift in perspective among key stakeholders. Beyond recognizing the economic benefits of DEI initiatives, destinations now acknowledge their intrinsic value in fostering social cohesion and community well-being. Events serve as more than just economic drivers; they provide platforms for dialogue, understanding, and collective action. By reframing events as catalysts for positive social change, we empower destinations to embrace their role as agents of transformation. This shift in perspective not only enhances the sustainability of DEI initiatives but also fosters a culture of empathy, respect, and solidarity within communities.

Monitoring and evaluation

Establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework is essential for gauging the effectiveness and impact of our initiatives over time. This entails collecting comprehensive data on key performance indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, from diverse stakeholders. By tracking progress and outcomes against predefined metrics, we gain valuable insights into the efficacy of our interventions and identify areas for improvement. Moreover, longitudinal studies allow us to assess the long-term sustainability and scalability of our initiatives, ensuring that our efforts yield lasting benefits for communities. Through rigorous monitoring and evaluation, we not only enhance accountability and transparency but also drive continuous learning and improvement, ultimately advancing our collective mission of promoting DEI.



**For inquiries,
contact us.**

