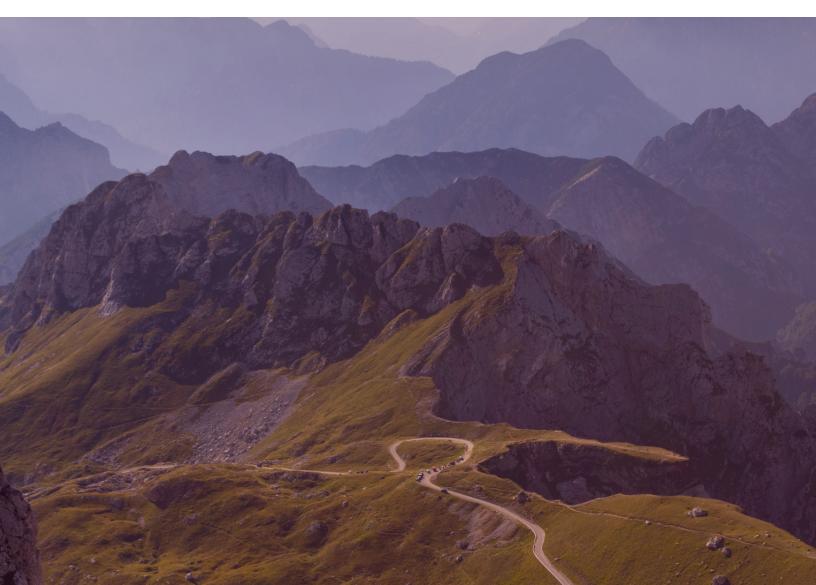
Speak Up 2020 Redesigning Tech Conferences With Women in Mind



Table of Contents

- ³ COVID-19 Update: Speaking Up in a Virtual Space
- 4 Introduction
- 6 Audit Findings
- 8 Survey Findings

- 17 How Companies Can Drive Change
- ²² The Future of Women in Tech
- 23 Methodology
- 23 About Ensono



COVID-19 Update: Speaking Up in a Virtual Space

When we conducted this survey in December 2019, we couldn't have known that a few months later, the COVID-19 pandemic would transform day-to-day life around the world — including how tech conferences are run. A few of the conferences whose 2019 events we audited in this report, such as South by Southwest, have been canceled altogether for 2020. But many other conferences, including TechCrunch Disrupt and Dreamforce, have instead gone virtual for the first time.

As we translate what were once in-person conference experiences to online spaces, we shouldn't lose focus on the importance of diversity and inclusion. Our report highlights how small changes to in-person events — such as swapping out an uncomfortable barstool for a skirt-friendly chair — can make an enormous difference to the comfort and confidence of female conference attendees. While taking events online avoids uncomfortable conference facilities designed for the "default male," they're hardly a panacea for sexism in tech. Virtual meetings suffer many of the same problems as in-person ones — for example, women are just as likely to be <u>talked over by men</u> in both scenarios. As a result, many of the recommendations for action in the last section of this report still apply to virtual conferences. In some cases, we've highlighted considerations specific to virtual events so it's clear how companies can apply our advice right now.

In recent months, global Black Lives Matter protests have drawn attention to ongoing prejudices and systemic racism in our society. The tech industry is no exception: Our survey results revealed women of color are more likely to experience both race-based and gender-based discrimination at conferences. Companies cannot ensure the safety and comfort of female employees of color unless they work to foster racial inclusion alongside gender equality. Building better reporting mechanisms for racial discrimination and harassment, as described on <u>page 11</u>, is a good first step — but companies should also solicit feedback from their employees to understand how they can better support women of color.

In general, this "year off" from in-person conferences is an opportunity for companies to think through how they'll support women at future live events. The pandemic has challenged many companies to transform their operations in ways they never thought possible — now it's time to take advantage of that spirit of change and innovation to reimagine women's tech conference experiences.



Meredith Graham

SVP, Culture and People Experience Ensono

Introduction

In the more than two years since #MeToo went viral, tech conferences have made progress in addressing what many perceive as a serious gender gap. For example, after failing to include any women-led keynotes in its 2017 or 2018 lineup, the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) finally invited women to give <u>4 out of its 9 keynotes</u> in 2019. And in late 2019, Shoptalk, a major retail conference, announced it would require <u>all speakers in its 2020</u> <u>lineup</u> to be female. Keynote representation isn't everything — for many women, their experiences at booths, breakout sessions and networking events may be more important to their careers. But putting more women onstage is still a promising sign and shows movement toward greater inclusion.

However, are these few conferences examples of a broader trend or exceptions to the rule? In this year's Ensono 2020 Speak Up report — a follow-up to our inaugural 2019 Speak Up research report — we objectively measure tech conferences' progress toward equality.

Specifically, we audited the same 18 major tech conferences from around the world, diving into three years of speaker data and comparing it with the 2019 Speak Up report data. We also surveyed 500 women from the U.S. and U.K. who attended a tech conference in the past 12 months.

Evaluating women's experiences

This year, we also wanted to better understand women's experiences at tech conferences, both on and off the keynote or panel stage. Do they feel supported and confident — in a good place to network with and learn from other attendees? Or do microaggressions, inconveniences and even outright harassment sap their energy and self-assurance?

To this end, our audit also collected data on the availability of mothers' rooms and other amenities focused on women. In our survey, we asked respondents for examples of design features that made them feel unwelcome or uncomfortable at conferences. We collected quotes from respondents about their experiences and what made them want to come back again — or stay away for good.

Survey respondent experience

"It made me uncomfortable to not have a lot of women in the room."



A focus on women of color

While women of all backgrounds can suffer discrimination, minorities are especially vulnerable. In both the audit and the survey, we dove deeper into the experiences of women of color at tech conferences. For example, for the first time our audit looked at the number of women of color giving keynotes at tech conferences.

Some of what we found was encouraging — more women of color are getting public platforms at tech conferences. However, our survey found that women of color are still more likely to encounter discrimination at conferences, whether it's race- or gender-based.

59% of women of color said they experienced discrimination
at a tech conference, compared to only 43% of white women.

What companies can do

The results show us that while tech conferences are making progress in some areas, they still have a long way to go to achieve true parity for women, especially women of color. The ultimate responsibility for change lies with conference organizers themselves, who could for example set targets for representation on panels and in keynotes. However, there's still a lot that companies can do to make their female employees feel more confident and supported as they attend these events. That's true even as more conferences go virtual in the wake of COVID-19.

By focusing on not just the number of women they send to conferences, but the quality of their experiences while they're there, companies can have a transformative impact on gender in tech. In the second half of the report, we recommend four actions companies can take to drive real, positive changes to the tech conference experience, whether in person or online.

Survey respondent experience

"Equipment such as projectors and screens were too high up for most women to reach."



Katherine M. Gordon 🤣 @katgordon

One of the only women on this San Jose to Las Vegas flight for #CES2020.

1:46 PM · Jan 7, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Retweet 37 Likes



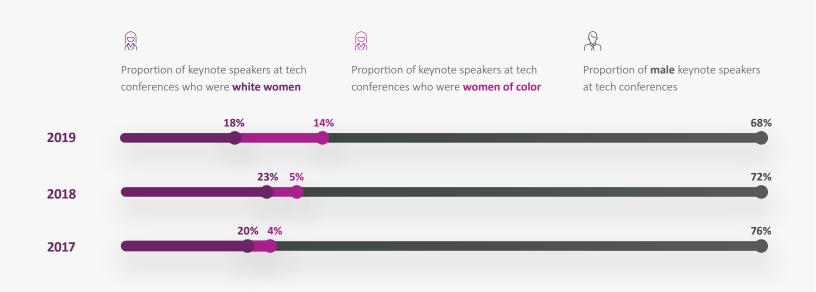
Audit Findings

The results of our audit suggest that tech conferences are making some progress on increasing representation for women. While "representation" encompasses everything from who sits on panels to who leads training sessions, the number of keynote female speakers is a particularly important measure of women's visibility in the conference space. That number has risen slowly since 2017 — and the percentage of keynote speakers who are women of color jumped from 5% in 2018 to 14% in 2019.

Most of this increase is due to the European website and conference series, The Next Web (TNW). In 2019, 42 of TNW's speakers were women of color, up from just nine in 2018. This change is partly responsible for the overall increase in representation for women of color in 2019. If TNW is excluded from the analysis, the proportion of keynote speakers who are women of color drops from 14% to 9% — still an improvement over 2018, but not quite as dramatic.

Survey respondent experience

"I find that working mothers are not taken seriously."





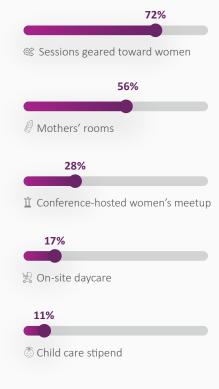
Conferences can still improve women's experiences

While most conferences include sessions specifically geared toward women, they lag in providing other features that make it easier for women to attend conferences, such as mothers' rooms. These gaps matter because they make it harder for women to attend conferences in the first place. They also affect women who do attend, making it harder for them to make the most of their conference experiences.

"These gaps matter because they make it harder for women to attend conferences in the first place."



Proportion of tech conferences with amenities for women



Survey Findings

Diversity and inclusion is about more than just the number of faces of a certain color or gender on stage at a conference. It's about whether various groups of people feel welcomed and comfortable in a given space and are able to confidently participate and make the most of the experience. It's also about building a diverse pipeline of talent at every level, from junior employees attending keynotes to senior executives delivering them.

Our survey found that while conferences have made some progress toward the inclusion of women and women of color in speaker lineups, they have a ways to go when it comes to making those groups feel like they belong at conferences as much as men do.

What is design bias?

When we say women are the victims of "design bias," we mean that many products and services in the world aren't designed for them.

Too often, creators of products or services take the male body as representative of humans in general — the so-called "default male." Design bias takes a toll on women by making it more tiring, difficult and inconvenient to perform the same tasks that men do.

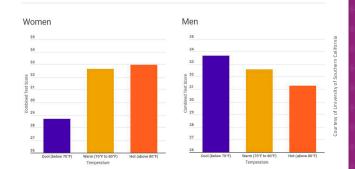
For example, a 2019 study found that women <u>perform worse</u> on various cognitive tasks when the room temperature dips below 70°F, while men perform better. This difference could actually make it more difficult for women to perform at work. Many offices use a <u>standard for air temperature</u> that's based on the preferences of an average male, several degrees colder than what's optimal for women's cognitive functioning.

Conferences have design bias problems of their own. Barstools used for onstage seating put skirt-wearing panelists at risk of <u>a wardrobe malfunction</u>. Microphones designed to clip onto a suit lapel are <u>awkward to attach to a dress</u>. Distractions like these add up over time, making it harder for women to get the most out of their conference experiences.



A CollegeHumor video labeled office air conditioning "women's winter."

Office temperatures impact men, women differently



n. In the "hattle for the ti

A <u>2019 USC study</u> found that when temperatures drop below 70°F, women perform significantly worse on tests.

Conferences aren't designed for women

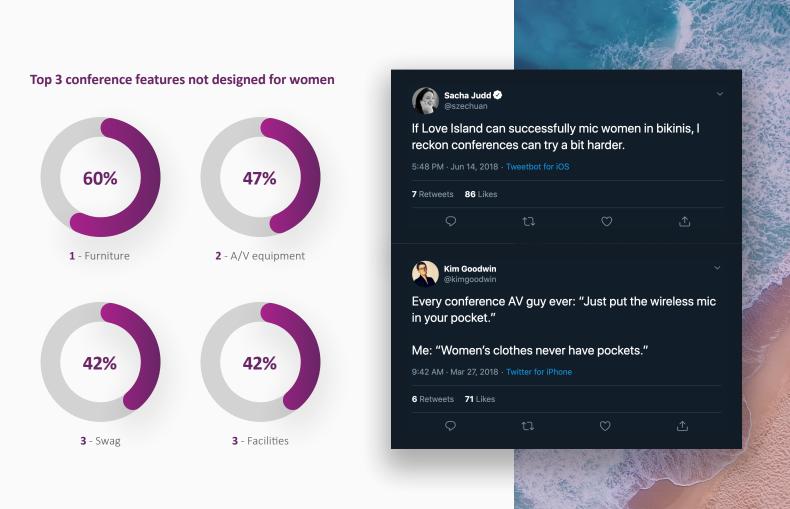
Our survey found that, despite making some strides in increasing representation for women panelists and speakers, conferences are still rife with design-biased features that make it more taxing and less comfortable for women to attend.

Unsurprisingly, our data reveals that furniture and A/V equipment are at the top of the list. (As mentioned previously, barstools and clip-on microphones don't pair well with skirts and dresses.) Women also mentioned podiums and projectors sized for much taller men and bags of swag that weren't meant for women.

The focus on A/V equipment may be one reason female keynote speakers were more likely to experience design bias, compared to female attendees in general. It's hard to forget the experience of fumbling with a microphone that won't attach to a dress or struggling to reach a high projector or screen.

Survey respondent experience

"They had women handing out goody bags, and they refused to give me one as they were for 'businessmen.""



We began the 2019 Speak Up report with a <u>tweet</u> about the lines for women's restrooms at tech conferences being depressingly short. But in this year's survey, some women reported attending conferences where there were no women's restrooms at all.

Overall, a lack of facilities for women remains a pain point. Only 24% of survey respondents said they've been to a conference with on-site nursing rooms, presenting a challenge for nursing mothers. And only 21% have been to a conference with gender-neutral restrooms, which excludes nonbinary and gender-nonconforming people from the conference experience as well.



71% of women who have given a keynote

say conferences are not designed with women in mind, compared to 61% of women overall.

Survey respondent experience

"There were no ladies' restrooms."



Something serious for 1sec. Every ladies room I've been in was near empty. Although I'm grateful for the gender inequality that affords me quiet, empty bathrooms at these conferences, I'd take a long line at ladies room instead for a change #AWSreInvent #reInvent #reinvent2017







Conferences lack actionable guidelines for reporting misconduct

As standards for professional behavior continue to evolve, codes of conduct are becoming more important. By laying out clear guidelines for how conference attendees should and should not treat each other, these documents, drafted by conference organizers, remove ambiguity about appropriate behavior.

In the 2019 report, we found that while more conferences were publishing codes of conduct, they weren't doing enough to publicize them. This year's study shows signs of progress, revealing that conferences are taking the need for explicit standards of behavior more seriously.



60% of women have attended a tech event with a formal code of conduct statement.

Only 20% of women were unsure if any conferences they've attended had a code of conduct statement, compared to 49% in 2019.

84% of women believe that organizers adequately publicize their policies.

Survey respondent experience

"I was sexually harassed in the most aggressive fashion at one specific conference three years ago, and the after effects left me feeling very insecure about my safety at these events."

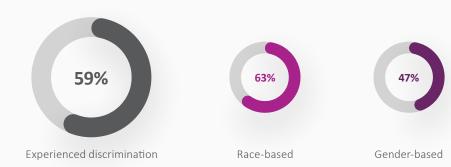


However, there's one area where codes of conduct could be improved: Conferences need clearer guidelines on how to report misconduct. According to our survey, about one-third of sexual harassment incidents go unreported, in part because victims and witnesses aren't sure how to do so.

To be effective, codes of conduct must specify reporting methods — and ideally, include a provision for anonymous reporting. Sadly, nearly half of sexual harassment victims and witnesses in our study didn't report because they were afraid of retaliation from other conference attendees. Allowing for anonymous reporting will protect victims and witnesses and may increase reporting rates.

These same reporting mechanisms must work for other forms of discrimination too. Women of color were more likely to face discrimination due to their race than due to their gender. It's necessary to address racial discrimination and provide safe mechanisms for reporting it to make women of color feel welcomed at tech conferences, too. "Allowing for anonymous reporting will protect victims and witnesses and may increase reporting rates."





Why don't women report sexual harassment?



Representation matters

Companies should keep pushing to send more women and people of color to speak at conferences. While it's not the only form of representation that matters, the lack of women in highly visible roles like keynotes and panels creates a negative feedback loop, especially for women of color. The absence of diversity onstage at tech conferences makes women less likely to engage with the content presented — and less likely to come back to the conference next year.

30% of African-American and Latina women said a lack of diversity
among speakers would keep them from attending future conferences.

80% of women of color said they were the only woman of color on a panel.

Companies that give women the opportunity to attend tech conferences could also improve retention — particularly for women in technical roles. Eighty-two percent of women with a technical title said they're more likely to stay with their company longer if they're sent to more tech conferences. That's an important consideration as companies are increasingly looking at how they can not just recruit, but also <u>retain employees from diverse backgrounds</u> for the long term.

Survey respondent experience

"The speakers were not from a diverse background. Therefore, no one addressed diversity in the tech industry."

Neha Sharma @hellonehha

Immigration officer: what is the purpose of visit.

Me: MS ignite

IO: oh!! It is so great to see a female. 95% males come for the tech conf.

Me: yeah, tech do have this issue. I am going to mention this that even immigration team is able to notice.

IO: yes, please.

#msignite 11:42 AM · Nov 3, 2019 · Twitter for Android

328 Retweets 2.9K Likes



However, companies may not be doing all they can to address this need. Most women believe their companies are more likely to send a man to a tech conference, and many blame unconscious bias — <u>social stereotypes</u> that people form without knowing it.

Unconscious biases against women may include the perception that they're less technically skilled or less effective as leaders. For women of color, both racial and gender biases may intersect, creating even deeper disadvantages.



61% of women say their company is more likely to send a man to a tech conference than a woman.

49% of those women say it is due to unconscious bias, and 32% say it is blatant discrimination.

Studies show that unconscious bias is <u>pervasive and hard to root out</u> — but companies have a duty to try. They can keep an eye out for these biases by collecting data on which employees they send to conferences and then segmenting that data by gender, race and so on. Hard data can help identify patterns the company needs to correct. "Most women believe their companies are more likely to send a man to a tech conference..."



Female keynote speakers aren't immune

We often associate sexual harassment with power imbalances. In the workplace, we assume harassment will come from executives or managers, and that junior employees with little power will be the targets. However, studies actually show the opposite: Female managers are actually more likely to be harassed than female employees. Having a higher profile and more power makes women more vulnerable, not less.

Unfortunately, our study found a similar trend in harassment at tech conferences. Despite their higher profiles and greater clout, female keynote speakers actually experience sexual harassment more frequently than women attendees in general.

Women who have given keynotes are also more likely to have experienced discrimination of some kind. Contrary to popular belief, workplace harassment and discrimination for women doesn't necessarily get easier as they raise their profiles and advance in their careers — it may get harder in some respects.



39% of women who have given keynotes said they've experienced sexual harassment at an event, compared to 29% of women overall.

62% of women who have given keynotes say they've experienced discrimination at an event, compared to 48% of women overall.

Survey respondent experience

"I have frequently been ignored or assumed to be a secretary or personal assistant because I am female. Men have talked directly to the male accompanying me even though he is my subordinate."

Most common types of discrimination experienced by female keynote speakers





Gender-based discrimination



Discrimination based on sexual orientation

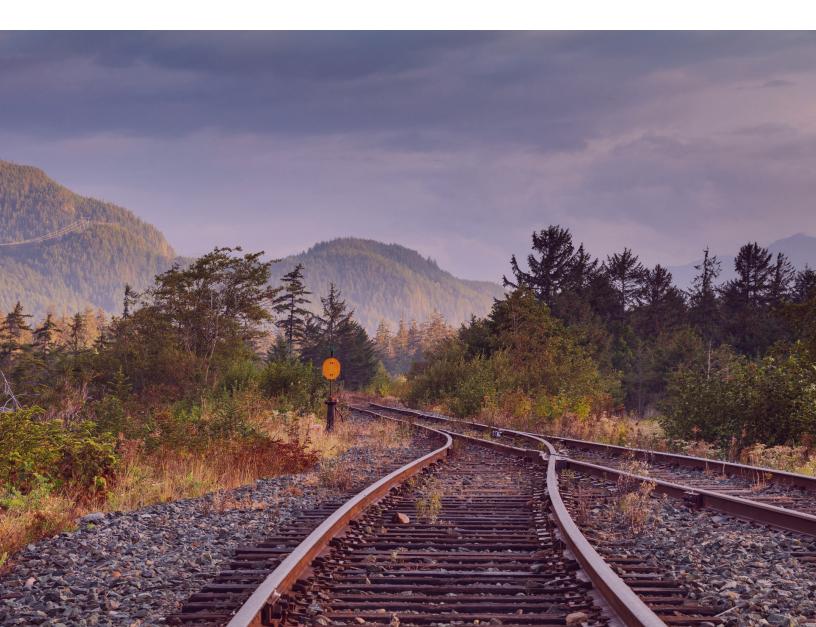


It's not clear whether women who speak at conferences are more likely to be harassed or discriminated against just because they're more visible or if there are other forces at work. Whatever the explanation, it's worth noting that women speaking on panels or giving keynotes need support at tech conferences as much as attendees do — especially since women are often assumed to be in junior roles, regardless of their actual status.

While increasing representation of women at tech conferences is important, it's not enough to ensure equitable treatment. Additional measures are required to ensure that female attendees at all levels get the respect they deserve.

Survey respondent experience

"One of the organizers thought I was there to refill coffee — I was actually giving a keynote."

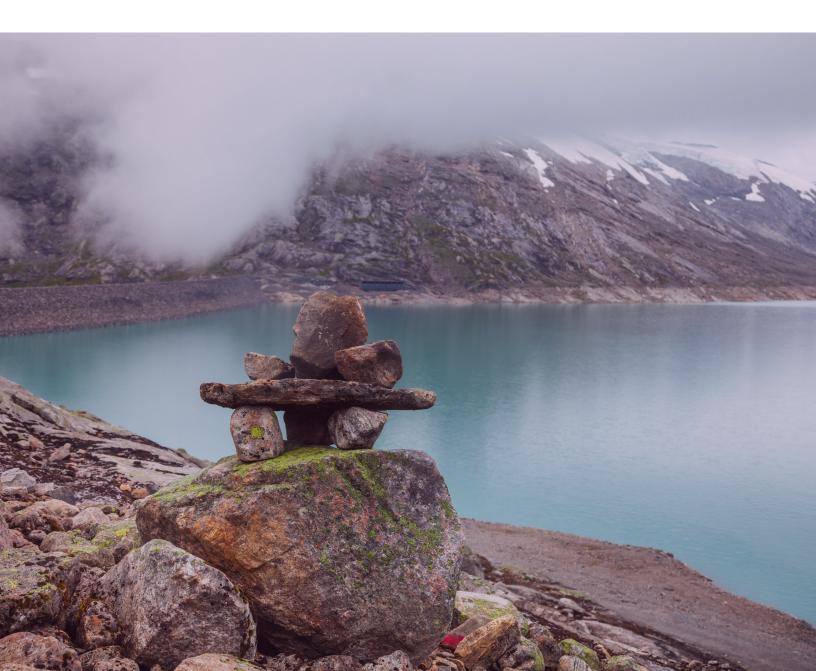


How Companies Can Drive Change

Conference organizers are the only ones who can designate more mothers' rooms, rent smaller podiums and address allegations of sexual harassment and discrimination at their events.

But companies certainly aren't powerless. As a result of last year's Speak Up study, we offered recommendations to help companies get more of their female employees to speak at or attend tech conferences. This year, we're suggesting four significant ways companies can improve female attendees' conference experience, whether it's virtual or in person.

1	Use the voice of the market
2	Vet conferences and offer candid feedback
3	Provide clear mechanisms for reporting misconduct
4	Empower employees to support each other



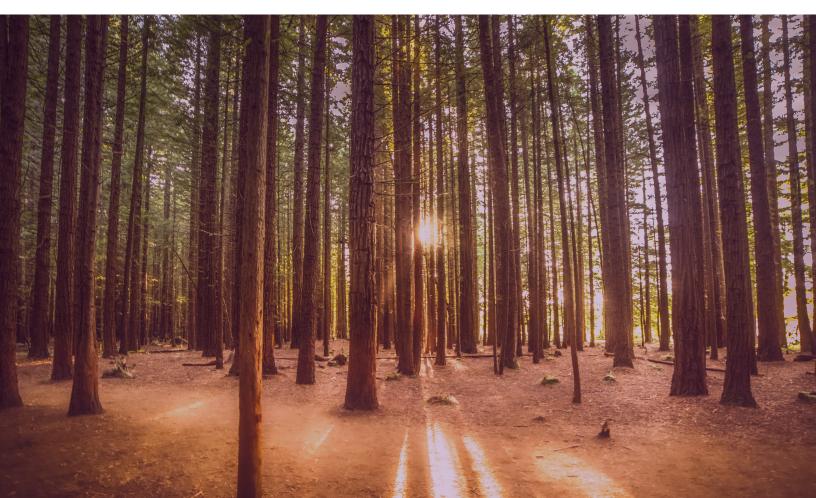
Use the voice of the market

The conferences covered in our audit welcome more than 1 million total attendees annually — many of them from large tech companies. These companies have enormous leverage in the market, and some of them also run large conferences themselves. If they're really invested in driving change forward, they should use that leverage to improve conference experiences for women.

For example, a big tech company could lay out **clear guidelines for the amenities**, features and services they expect conferences to deliver for women, **such as mothers' rooms or child care stipends**. For virtual events, they could set out guidelines for representation and etiquette that they expect organizers to follow. They could also enforce consequences by refusing to send employees to conferences that do not meet those standards.

This kind of "voting with your feet" has already worked on a smaller scale. In 2019, the male director of the National Institutes of Health announced <u>he would no longer participate in</u> <u>all-male panels</u> at conferences. But with the force of a multi-billion-dollar company (or two) behind it, these sorts of demands will likely have more power. Smaller companies can also have an impact, particularly if they join together to make their voices heard.

"[Companies] could also enforce consequences by refusing to send employees to conferences that do not meet those standards. "



Vet conferences and offer candid feedback

In many cases, biased design features like uncomfortable chairs and too-tall podiums arise because conference organizers simply don't realize that attendees are affected. Companies can address this by soliciting feedback from employees after they return from a conference. When a female speaker has a problem with a conference feature designed for the "default male," her employer should proactively share that feedback with conference organizers. It may be possible to address the issue quickly and easily.

Companies can also vet conferences for female-friendly features and amenities in advance. This allows them to better prepare their attendees, if needed. It can also exert a subtle form of pressure on conference organizers. If representatives from dozens of companies proactively ask whether the conference provides mothers' rooms, conference organizers will likely make mothers' rooms a higher priority. While it's unlikely many in-person conferences will move forward this year, now is a great time to start planning for 2021.

Companies should not underestimate the size of the task. A best practice would be to designate a specific diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) resource to collect and share feedback on conferences. Currently, 58% of respondents said their company had a DEI initiative. If companies want to effectively address women's experiences at conferences, they should invest in internal resources as well.

In addition, companies should remember that change starts at home. The same biases that can check women's confidence at conferences may also be present in the offices where they work every day. Companies should vet their own facilities and equipment for "default male" design features or the lack of female-friendly ones — and take swift action to correct any issues they see.

"If companies want to effectively address women's experiences at conferences, they should invest in internal resources as well."



Provide clear mechanisms for reporting misconduct

Our survey results reveal that women who experience or witness sexual harassment and discrimination are often unsure how to report it. Companies can and should use the voice of the market to press conferences for clearer reporting mechanisms. For example, they could ask conferences to print emergency numbers and other important info on the back of ID badges to ensure accessibility or to publicize etiquette rules for virtual meetings.

Attendees need to know where to go to report bad behavior and what will happen if they do — including how they will be protected from retaliation. Having a clear understanding of the process and the potential implications can help foster a feeling of safety and control that's likely to promote higher rates of reporting.

Companies can also take action by arming conference attendees with the information they need to report misconduct to the company HR department, at the very least — after which HR would handle the complaint. Whatever the course of action, there needs to be real consequences when there is a credible claim of sexual harassment or any type of discrimination. For example, a company might refuse to send attendees to a conference that didn't deal with allegations effectively.

"Attendees need to know where to go to report bad behavior and what will happen if they do..."

Badges aren't just for ID

At the 2019 Microsoft Ignite conference, attendees were offered<u>badges</u> that displayed how much human interaction the wearer was comfortable with as well as their preferred pronouns.

One attendee, a woman with autism, said the badges felt like "<u>a wave of inclusion for people whose needs usually</u> <u>go unnoticed.</u>" She noted that the social side of conferences can be a challenge for neurodivergent people like herself, who may feel overwhelmed by big, noisy crowds.

These badges exemplify how simple changes can help conference attendees define boundaries and set clear standards of behavior.

Wade Rockett @waderockett

The Microsoft Ignite conference has pins indicating how social you want to be. They've already run out of "only talk to me if you know me" and "don't talk to me ever" and that's hilarious.



Empower employees to support each other

While a company's HR department or DEI group can be helpful, they usually won't be present at the conference to offer in-the-moment support. Instead, they should educate employees about how they can support each other at conferences — including during informal interactions like networking events.

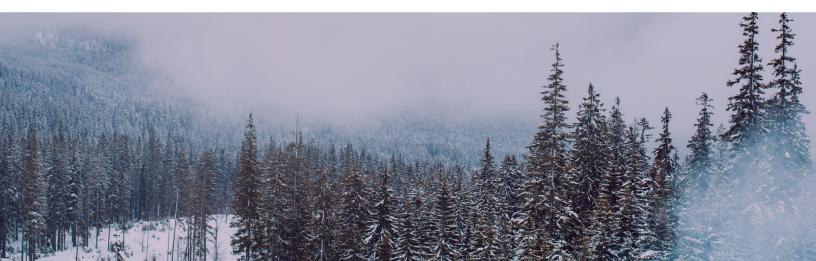
For example, female aides in the Obama presidential administration adopted a practice they called "<u>amplification</u>." When one woman made a good point, another woman would repeat it and "amplify" it, giving credit to the original speaker. This helped ensure women's voices were heard and also made it less likely that male colleagues would get credit for their ideas — an unfortunate, but common problem, even <u>in virtual events</u>.

Teaching strategies like this empowers employees of all genders to support women in discussions as well as gender nonconforming people, people of color and other members of marginalized groups. <u>Eight in 10 tech companies</u> currently offer some sort of gender sensitivity training. These curriculums can easily be adapted to include these strategies as well as content reinforcing the company's own code of conduct for proper behavior at conferences and virtual events.

For women just starting out in tech careers, a conference is an incredible opportunity to build their brand and expand their professional network. Companies should ensure these women have opportunities to polish their presenting and networking skills, for example by participating in smaller side talks or appearing at their companies' booths. That might mean rotating out more experienced presenters to make room for new faces — but it's worth it to build a strong pipeline of diverse talent for the future.

Back at the office, female executives should support a culture of speaking up and speaking out by sharing their own experiences publicly at events or one-on-one with colleagues and direct reports. These conversations should be more than just an opportunity to vent — though that's important too. Female leaders should recommend clear courses of action or ways to address bias or discrimination women experience in the workplace. **Everyone has a stake in improving gender equality, but to really move the needle, women must support women**.

"Eight in 10 tech companies currently offer some sort of gender sensitivity training."



The Future of Women in Tech

Unconscious bias against women isn't a problem that will be solved overnight. Stereotypes about women exist throughout our broader culture, and most people absorb them at a very early age. When groups of children are asked to <u>draw pictures of scientists</u>, almost threequarters draw a man — signaling that most people's biases are formed long before they step into the workplace.

Companies won't be able to undo this sort of conditioning overnight. However, they can take concrete steps to ensure the women they send to tech conferences feel safe and supported and have options to address any negative experiences they encounter. They can invest in internal resources that vet conferences and transmit attendee feedback. And they can equip their employees with the tools they need to support each other at conferences, whether in person or online.

If they do, not only will more women attend conferences — they'll also be more likely to come back. More women will stand onstage as keynote speakers or sit as panelists (hopefully not on uncomfortable barstools). And maybe then the next generation of children will grow up with more female scientists, researchers and engineers — and move the needle a little further toward equality.

"Companies won't be able to undo this sort of conditioning overnight."



Survey Methodology

81% of respondents held a technical role in their organization.

Age

18-23: **10%** 24-38: **54%** 39-53: **28%** 54 and older: **8%**

Ethnicity

White: **64%** Hispanic or Latina: **8%** Black or African American: **14%**

Seniority

Entry level: **9%** Middle manager: **32%** Senior manager: **23%** Director: **18%** Native American or American Indian: **1%** Asian / Pacific Islander: **11%** Other: **2%**

Vice President: **5%** Senior Vice President: **4%** C-suite: **8%**

Audit Methodology

Conferences audited

Adobe Summit AWS Summit UK CeBIT Consumer Electronics Show (CES) Digital Enterprise Show Dreamforce Dublin Tech Summit Future Decoded Google Cloud Next IFA InfoSecurity Europe Mobile World Congress Oracle OpenWorld RSA APJ South by Southwest TechCrunch Disrupt The Next Web Trusttech

About Ensono

Ensono helps IT leaders be the catalyst for change by harnessing the power of hybrid IT to transform their businesses. We drive digital transformation by enabling increased agility and scalability through the modernization to public cloud. Our broad services portfolio from mainframe to cloud, powered by an intelligent governance platform, is designed to help our clients operate for today and optimize for tomorrow. We are award-winning certified experts in AWS and Azure and recognized as Microsoft Datacenter Transformation Partner of the Year. Ensono has nearly 2,000 associates around the world and is headquartered in greater Chicago.

Visit us at www.ensono.com.

ensono