



**Boym
Institute**
GLOBALLY ENGAGED

Best Practices Guide

Women in Public Debate – A Guide to Organising Inclusive and Meaningful Discussions

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Introduction

Modern public debate requires diverse voices to provide a fuller picture of reality and enhance the quality of discussions. Unfortunately, women remain underrepresented in expert panels, media, and public debates. Their perspectives, experiences, and knowledge are not always taken into account, which diminishes the quality of dialogue.

This guide aims to help organizers of debates, panels, and events create more inclusive discussions where women have a real space to voice their opinions. It includes practical tips on assembling diverse panels, building expert resources, and eliminating barriers that hinder women's active participation in public debates. Event organizers, moderators, and participants play a key role in promoting best practices and creating a space where every voice is heard and respected.

This guide was developed in collaboration with WICCI's India-EU Business Council, a networking platform for women in business: <https://indiaeuwomencouncil.com/>.



1. Planning the Debate

1.1. Gender Balance in Panels and Speaker Lists

- Ensure adequate representation of women in discussions – avoid "manels," i.e., panels composed exclusively of men.

Tip: *Some organizations have a rule that their representatives do not participate in debates without female speakers.*

- Try to avoid situations where a woman is the only expert on a panel, as this may reinforce her minority status.
- It is not enough to simply include one woman on a panel to check the diversity box. Token representation can reinforce gender imbalances rather than address them. Ensure that female experts are invited for their expertise and given equal speaking time and prominence in discussions.
- If finding female experts in a given field is challenging, search for them through professional networks, universities, NGOs, or available online databases such as the Baza Ekspertek or the India-EU Binder.
- Consider diversity not only in terms of gender but also location, affiliation, and thematic specialization. It is also important to include participants from marginalized backgrounds.

Remember! *Diverse voices in discussions enhance your debate.*

1.2. Selecting Topics and Language

- Avoid assigning women only to topics related to family, education, or health; highlight their role in traditionally male-dominated fields such as defense, sports, or armed conflicts.
- Ensure neutral and gender-inclusive language – avoid diminutives that may undermine women’s expertise (e.g., using ‘Miss Kate’ instead of ‘President Kate’).
- Keep in mind that gender is not just a binary category - avoid assumptions about gender and pronouns. Ask participants how they prefer to be addressed and respect their pronouns in all communication and event materials. Instead of gendered terms like ‘ladies and gentlemen’, use inclusive alternatives such as ‘everyone’ or ‘distinguished guests’.
- Use gender-inclusive language and consistent titling ‘standards.’

Tip: *To emphasize the presence of women in discussions, use both masculine and feminine forms of nouns (e.g., experts and female experts) or add feminine endings to verbs (e.g., ‘you were’ as ‘byłeś/aś’). Consider neutral terms like ‘person’ or ‘people’.*

2. Moderation and Conducting the Debate

2.1. Equal Speaking Opportunities

- The moderator should ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and comparable speaking time, especially when women are in the minority.
- Prevent interruptions directed at women ('maninterrupting') and patronizing explanations ('mansplaining').
- Allow for various forms of expression – not just confrontational debates but also dialogue-based discussions.

Tip: *Encourage contributions from individuals who speak less often by asking direct questions or implementing a round-robin format to foster inclusivity.*

2.2. Creating a Safe Space

- Establish clear debate rules and foster an inclusive atmosphere – no personal attacks, respect for all participants.
- Respond professionally and firmly to sexist comments or inappropriate behavior.
- Avoid speaking on behalf of women without prior consultation to ensure accurate representation of their views.

Tip: *Avoid proverbs and phrases that reinforce stereotypes, such as 'it's a man's world', 'behind every great man, there is a great woman', 'strong, independent woman', 'ladies first'.*

3. Promotion and Visibility

3.1. Amplifying Women's Voices in Media

- After the event, promote diversity in media coverage.
- Ensure equal representation of women and men in visual and informational materials.
- Present women professionally and appropriately in relation to their role in the debate or event.

Tip: *Before publishing media materials, ensure that women are not depicted in a tokenistic way – for instance, featuring a single woman surrounded by men, which may emphasize her minority status. Women should be presented not just as participants but as experts in their fields.*

3.2. Networking and Mentorship

- Support the development of professional networks among female and male experts by creating spaces for knowledge exchange and collaboration, such as networking opportunities before or after the debate.
- Highlight the importance of role models by promoting women's achievements in specific fields to inspire other women to participate actively in public debate.
- Encourage mentorship as an effective tool for empowering women by connecting them with experienced experts.

Tip: *Showcase the work of female scientists, ambassadors, or researchers to strengthen the image of women as opinion leaders.*

4. Time and Compensation

4.1. Flexibility in Scheduling

- Accommodate flexible scheduling to balance participants' various commitments, making it easier for them to attend events – for example, allowing them to speak at the beginning or end of a debate if needed.

4.2. Compensation for Participation

- Include honoraria for expert panelists or media commentators in the budget.
- Ensure equal pay for all invited experts, regardless of gender.
- Promote transparent compensation policies by clearly communicating honoraria and reimbursement criteria.
- If financial compensation is not possible, cover travel costs or other expenses associated with participation.

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Tip: *If the budget is limited, consider alternative forms of compensation, such as media promotion by the organizer, access to exclusive industry events, or invitations to future paid projects.*

This guide is based on the experiences of women working at the Boym Institute. It serves as a support tool for debate organizers who genuinely want to increase the participation of women, especially female experts, in public discussions.

The goal of this guide is not to exclude anyone but to strive for equal opportunities in public debate. Inclusivity and diversity are not just matters of fairness but also of discussion quality. We believe that implementing these principles will make debates more valuable, representative, and open to diverse perspectives, ultimately making them more engaging and enriching for all audiences.

The Boym Institute Team