



## Case Study: Conference Organizing

A group of committed activists organize a social justice leadership conference. The conference aims to address difficult questions about how to provide access and opportunity to marginalized populations. Social entrepreneurs, academics, policymakers, and other changemakers are invited to attend. To ensure that the conference is inclusive, however, the organizers provide a pay-what-you-can model for registration so that members of the communities they aim to serve can also attend.

The conference starts at 9am each day and runs Wednesday through Friday. Seeking to provide lots of networking opportunities and rich learning experiences, most sessions are held in small rooms that filled up with attendees, limiting access to certain workshops—especially those organized around popular subjects such as fundraising. The professionals attending the conference were excited to meet one another and exchange business cards. To provide safe spaces, time is provided in the schedule for members of marginalized communities, such as a black/people-of-colour caucus, to meet together (without those who do not identify as part of those communities).

After the conference, the organizers receive a complaint. Members of those marginalized communities that sought access to the conference through the pay-what-you-can model did not feel that they belonged and left. They were not always dressed as formally as the other attendees, they had trouble vying for seats in small sessions, and they felt targeted by not looking like the majority of attendees.

(Based on an experience at a conference in 2018.)

*Key takeaway: The same system has different impacts on different stakeholders; you may not be able to see the most important phenomena to someone else.*