

Three Approaches to International Student Inclusion in Conferences

Summary: There are many ways to include international students into your conferences. Below are three approaches that have been utilized across the country to better include international students, increase engagement and produce more spiritual fruit through local and regional conferences. Three considerations and discussion questions are provided to aid your discernment of the best approach for your context.

Three Considerations

Your best approach will likely be determined by three major considerations:

1. Staff and/or student leadership availability
2. Number or percentage of international students in region
3. Regional dynamics and rhythms

Three Approaches

Approach	Integration	Global Track	ISM Conference
Description	Adapt any existing conference to make space for international students	Create a track that parallels the other tracks or runs adjacent to the main conference	Host a Focused Ministry student conference for internationals as a separate conference
Works Best When...	International students already feel they belong in their chapters and/or already attend other regional events	The structure for tracks already exist and/or the student numbers are too small for a stand-alone event	A significant percentage of international students are in ISM-specific chapters and there are dedicated ISM or Multinational staff available to host the conference
Strengths	Works for any region, any conference or size of event	Provides separate space that caters specifically to internationals while still giving domestic and international students opportunities to interact	Offers the highest level of adaptation to meet the unique needs of international students, especially non-Christians, while also creating a catalytic environment for growth in participation
Challenges	Preparing the speakers and key leaders, especially those with less exposure to internationals, to manage the diverse needs well	Equipping majority domestic staff and students to welcome international students well by adapting shared spaces and content	Resourcing the conference adequately with time, leadership and finances to execute well while also integrating the conference into the rhythms of the region or area

Examples

Integration

1. **"Reverse hospitality."** Internationals are invited to provide food or snacks from their home country (Northwest)
2. **International Leadership.** Worship team or upfront leadership is at least 1/3 international students (Surf & Turf)
3. **Breakout Groups.** Groups are created based on the generational identity (e.g., 4th generation or more, 2nd generation, 1.5, generation, TCKs (Third-Culture-Kids), etc. (AAM conference)

Global Tracks

1. **Parallel Tracks.** A separate track for internationals is created that integrates into the larger conference flow (Lakes and Plains)
2. **Multinational Track.** A track that explores global and Biblical themes and includes both international and domestic students
3. **Language-Specific Track.** Mark manuscript study for Chinese-speaking students (Greater LA)

ISM Stand-Alone Conference

1. **International Getaway.** The International Getaway annually hosts 100+ students from 30 countries and includes a cultural showcase and cross-cultural skills training where international students (and an intentionally small group of American students) lead alongside staff (Central)
2. **International House Party.** started by InterVarsity (now a separate organization) has been hosting international house parties for 40 years.
3. **Focused Ministry Student Conference.** Host a fun getaway for international students (Lakes and Plains) or an entire conference focused on the students' specific needs

Questions for Discussion and Discernment

1. What percentage of the international chapter *members* typically attend conferences?
2. Evaluate your "culture of welcome" at your conferences. How are you specifically welcoming students from other countries? How might the students' chapters or campuses have less visible resistance or hostility (politically, racially or otherwise) towards internationals and how could that knowledge inform how to welcome international students well?
3. What staff or student leadership do you have at your disposal as you prepare for the conference?
4. What are the intended dates for the conference? Are there any major holidays for Chinese, Hindu or Muslim students that might conflict?
5. What tracks do you intend to offer? Are any of them geared towards non-Christians, people of other faiths or second-language learners? If "leadership" is taught, is there an acknowledgement of various cultural styles of leadership?
6. Given your answers to the above questions, is any one conference approach a clear path forward? If not, please reach out to ask for a one-time or ongoing consultation with ISM.
7. What does your region or area stand to lose or gain by this approach? What can be done beyond the conference to increase the welcome to international students?