



GENDER & ESPORTS TOURNAMENTS: BEST PRACTICES RECOMMENDATIONS

More and more organizations are recognizing the need to make sure their esports events are inclusive and welcoming to diverse participants. This includes not only players, but also spectators and employees. When organizing a tournament you may mostly be focused on the players but keep in mind that you are producing an event that will not only have a (hopefully) diverse set of employees working on it, but also an audience that will bring with it a range of experiences. Making sure you are setting up a structure for fair and inclusive events is key to building the esports space.

Depending on the event, different processes and approaches will need to be in place, though there should always be a baseline goal of creating a non-harassing environment. With this in mind, we offer the following sets of best practices and recommendations for esports organizers. These were drawn up after extensive conversation with a variety of experts, esports organizers, players, and other stakeholders.

Codes of Conduct and Enforcement

It is important to keep in mind that different contexts will require different interventions. That said, all events, both online and off, should have two key elements in place: 1) a Code of Conduct, and 2) a mechanism for reporting and enforcement.

Codes of Conduct are a guideline of values and behaviors that you expect from all participants and staff. They signal what is expected, prohibited, and valued by an organization. They help frame who is welcome and what civil participation should look like. The absence of a Code of Conduct often alerts people that a space may not be safe for them).

AnyKey has developed the following, which can be adopted freely:

AnyKey “Keystone Code”

Compassion: Treat others as you would be treated; consider the perspectives of others.

You value the diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and opinions of others, even when different from your own. You appreciate that all viewpoints come from the life experiences of fellow human beings. You understand that online interactions impact real people in real ways, both offline and online.

Integrity: Be honest, be committed, play fair.

You behave honorably and honestly. You take responsibility for your words and actions. While playing games, you honor the rules and spirit of honest competition.

Respect: respect all other humans, teammates and competitors alike.

You respect everyone regardless of their background, identity, physical appearance, or beliefs. Even in competitive gaming where “trash-talk” is common, you are a good sport and respect opponents as fellow human beings, keeping the banter to the game, not ever making it personal.

Courage: be courageous in competition and in standing up for what is right.

You have the courage to moderate your own behavior, speak out against harassment, and report violations by others. You do not tolerate harassment or hate speech of any kind, even when you are not directly involved.

For reference, harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- Hate speech, offensive behavior, or verbal abuse related to sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, disability, physical appearance, body size, age, or religion.
- Stalking or intimidation (physically or online).
- Spamming, raiding, hijacking, or inciting disruption of streams or social media.
- Posting or threatening to post other people’s personally identifying information (“doxing”).
- Unwelcome sexual attention. This includes, unwelcome sexualized comments, jokes, and sexual advances.
- Advocating for, or encouraging, any of the above behavior.

We do not tolerate harassment or hate speech in any form. Anyone violating these rules in our related communities and spaces will be dealt with at the discretion of activity organizers and stream moderators, and may include being banned from online channels and/or removed from events. If you observe harassment against someone, say something!

Codes of Conduct should be public and widely visible. Publishing a Code of Conduct in your event program, having up as signage, and posting on your website are all good ways of getting the message out. Depending on the event you may even consider having participants formally agree to a code (for example, players in a tournament). A Code of Conduct serves to outline the values behind an organization or community, and provides a guideline for positive behavior.

Codes of Conduct should be included for online spaces, in addition to the established Terms of Use/Service and tournament rule set. Online spaces are not exempt from the need for a Code of Conduct and indeed often they are some of the most important tools for long-term community management.

Be creative to make sure the Code of Conduct is seen by everyone. Consider, for example, having it as a pop-up notification or required click through. Twitch has a number of tools (including their built in auto-moderator



tool) that you should be familiar with and use. Their “chat rules” tool which allows you to specify channel rules of behavior and makes participants click an “I agree” button has been shown to have a “statistically significant reduction in timeouts and bans” (Twitch, 2017).

If you broadcast online via Twitch, use moderators and moderation tools. At the minimum, the built-in AutoMod feature can help you manage the chat. Set it to at least “level 2” (which removes sexually explicit language, hate speech, and abusive language) or “level 3” to cast a broader net. Bringing on moderators will help manage the chat, proactively set the tone for the space, educate viewers about your Code of Conduct, and typically provide help with utilizing additional technical moderation bots.

Reporting and enforcement is a crucial component to Code of Conduct adoption. Once you have published a Code of Conduct you must make sure it is clear to participants how they can safely and confidentially let an organizer know if there is a problem. Our recommendation is that you designate someone on the event team who will be responsible for making sure a Code of Conduct is in place (e.g. a Community Manager) and structuring a reporting and enforcement plan. See the link in our resources list here for a very helpful set of processes that your designated Code of Conduct representative should be familiar with. Additionally, make sure all team members are authorized to reach out to this person and refer incidents to them. Codes of Conduct without a mechanism to follow-up concretely remain simply symbolic.

CODES OF CONDUCT

Public and widely visible.

Included for online spaces.

Accompanied by reporting and enforcement mechanisms, including for online spaces.

Language Guidelines

Esports can offer unique challenges due to its international, multi-lingual, and cross-cultural nature. The following are best practice recommendations regarding English language communication issues you may encounter:

- Use the term “woman” or “women,” rather than “female.” Generally speaking, “female” refers to a biological sex assignment at birth while “woman” is a more identity-inclusive term.
- Be inclusive to all women, both those who gender identify with the biological sex they were assigned at birth (“cis”) and those who do not (“trans”). In most instances simply saying “women” is sufficient, but if you need to specify further, phrases like “open to all women, cis and trans” are recommended.
- “Trans” and “transgender” should be used as an adjective only, i.e. “trans women” or “transgender women” (not as a noun).
- Adaptive pronoun use is one method of being inclusive. Relying on what people prefer is key. When you’re unsure, if someone identifies as non-binary, or if a preference, the pronouns “they/them” are valuable to use. It is also okay to ask if you are unsure, though do so in a way that doesn’t single out any individual person. For example, you might try introducing yourself with your preferred pronouns, regardless of whether you identify as cis or trans. Or, ask all participants for their preferred pronouns, not only people that you believe may be gender non-conforming.

LANGUAGE TIPS

Use “woman” or “women” (versus female).

“Trans” and “transgender” is an adjective, not a noun.

Use preferred pronouns. “They/them” are helpful and acceptable options.

Advertising & Press

While it's often easy to simply think of young (white) men as the target market for esports, recognize that at this point the audience for competitive gaming is much more broad; indeed women and people of color have always been a part of the scene. Make sure you are representing the wide range of people interested and involved in esports. Images and promotional material that include women, people of color, and generally diverse audiences not only represent the reality of esports fandom and participation, but also help build and grow those audiences.

Given how player and team narratives provide some of the most compelling promotional opportunities for esports events, consider including stories that highlight, for example, the women who may be involved in making an event possible. This ranges from players to hosts, observers, and administrators. Images and press around your event can powerfully signal to people they are welcome and valued to your organization. Avoid stereotypes and instead highlight authentic experiences and participants.

REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Diverse representation reflects actual practice and helps grow audiences.

Make sure your press, advertising, and coverage shows diverse participants and stories.

Diversity in Tournament Organizing

Beyond the ethical value of equitable representation, more and more businesses are coming to realize diversity helps drive creativity, innovation, further attract top talent, and is tied to working smarter and increased financial returns (Forbes 2011, McKinsey 2015, Harvard Business Review 2016). Esports can learn from these changes happening in the larger business sector. Assembling a diverse team of tournament organizers, administrators, and event production staff and talent with a wide range of professional and cultural backgrounds is crucial in creating good tournaments.

Organizing and event production requires smart planning, as well as on-the-fly problem solving and creative solutions, often in high-pressure situations. Possible paths of execution, and imagined possibilities for future development and growth, are directly shaped by the people “at the table.” A diverse team of staffers can pull from a larger set of possible paths and, in the case of problems, offer creative solutions.

Fostering diversity within the team of administrators can broaden the set of perspectives being used to execute a complex production, and also increase the likelihood that mistakes will be caught or anticipated. It can help organizations innovate to build, not just maintain status quo. Diverse teams are better positioned to look for emerging opportunities, unconventional paths, and innovative scenarios.

DIVERSITY IS AN ASSET

Diversity is tied to creativity, innovation, attracting top talent, working smarter, and increased financial returns.

A diverse group “at the table” producing events is a resource for problem-solving and trouble-shooting.



Inclusive Women's Tournaments

Though many of us are working toward a future in which gender does not play a role in who gets in, stays, and thrives on the esports playing field, we currently face real challenges to meaningful participation. As a result, AnyKey is supportive of women's tournaments that help build up and foster competitive women in the scene right now. While we continue to tackle cultural and structural issues around barriers to participation and work toward a future where they are not needed, these tournaments are currently an important measure to keep talented players "on the field."

It is critical to recognize, however, that these tournaments should be for *all women, cis and trans*. Regardless of what it says on your passport or ID, at AnyKey we believe in a policy of "you are who you say you are."

Anyone who self-identifies and lives as a woman should be able to participate in any women's tournament.

We understand some will be concerned that this leaves events open to being grieved by trolls. But the costs and risks in preserving outdated models of gender are too high, especially for trans women who already bear a disproportionate burden. It is also important to understand that other high stake situations – such as admission to women's colleges and universities – have already moved to a model in which ones declared gender is what matters. If these spaces can be oriented to the dignity and self-determination of *all* women, esports certainly can as well.

In our conversations with stakeholders in this space there is often a distinction made between what can be supported in low-stakes, no money online tournaments versus professional matches with prize pools. At the pro-level there are sometimes concerns about being "court proof" and limiting legal liability. We encourage all event organizers to think about creative approaches to upholding a principle of "you are who you say you are." We offer a variety of suggestions that can be taken up in specific contexts.

Gender identity

Use "you are who you say you are" as a guiding principle when managing questions of gender identity. Anything that varies from this must be carefully and cautiously argued for. Resist letting a fear of trolls drive you to make policies that set up unreasonable barriers to entry and unfairly shift the burden to authentic players rather than those undermining the integrity of the tournament.

Events should take up the most expansive set of practices possible given any actual, and not just imagined, formal jurisdictional constraints. This also includes being attuned to anti-discrimination laws or policies that may actually *prohibit* making distinctions between cis and trans participation.

INCLUSION GUIDELINES

"You are who you say you are."

Legal ID's are insufficient. Be expansive and creative in inclusion policies. Offer verification alternatives.

Griefing behavior around gender policies is treated as a form of cheating as it disrupts the fundamental integrity of fair competitive play.

Set high penalties so that people think twice before grieving gender policies.



Avoid “gender investigation” as much as possible. Much like with a Code of Conduct, we suggest designating a point person on the local organizing team to be educated on these issues so they can sensitively respond to cases that require additional nuance or care.

While legal ID can be one mechanism of expressing the principle of “you are who you say you are” it has serious limits. A 2014 Amnesty International report noted that, “many countries require you to have a psychiatric diagnosis, lengthy hormone treatment and medical surgery which will leave you sterile. In some cases, you are not allowed to be married, and you may also have to be a certain age (over 18).” Additionally, the costs of changing legal ID may be prohibitive for some. Relying on online legal ID is thus clearly a flawed model to building inclusive events and should not be used as the sole mechanism for gender identification in tournaments.

Provide alternative methods for verifying a player’s self-identification. These can include:

- **Video chat/conversation** between a player and a designated trained point person on the administration team. Do not rely on appearance or voice (which can get tied up with stereotypes) during these conversations, but instead explore things like declared pronouns or other contextual markers.
- **Well established self-identification on social media.** Social media is frequently used for self expression and as a form of identifying oneself within their social networks. If an individual can point to at least two social media accounts that have been consistent about their identity this could be sufficient evidence.
- **Notes from a doctor or therapist** can be another optional way of addressing this issue, but be aware that there are still financial and access barriers to this path for some people. There are also important criticisms about the ways these paths may medicalize or pathologize the process trans women and men have to go through so they should also be used with caution and care.

When possible, use your technology to facilitate self-determination. Online tournaments in particular may benefit from systems that allow people to note their gender and you may consider ways to use this designation fruitfully (i.e. if you’ve previously declared you are a woman on the platform, you can participate in women’s tournaments).

High penalties as deterrent

One of our strongest recommendations is to reframe concerns about trans inclusion in a way that puts the burden on those who break the rules of participation. Violating gender requirements should be thought of as a matter of cheating and grieving that fundamentally undermines the integrity of esports and fair competitive play. As such, should be met with punishment, including potentially a lifetime ban from the platform. The consequences of bad behavior should be the prime site of attention rather than building more barriers to inclusion against trans players. Set up a system where people are motivated to carefully consider the costs of trolling & cheating.

For esports organizations that take on clients (such as game developers) to run a tournament, seek out a commitment from that company that such violations are viewed as not only against the integrity of the tournament and the game/platform as a whole. Things like loss of accounts or game access as a whole may provide sufficiently high penalties as to dissuade abuse.



When incidents occur, make sure the focus is on the offenders. Use infractions as an opportunity to reiterate a public commitment to inclusive communities.

Conclusion

Though esports has now been around for a number of decades, the last several years alone show the tremendous potential for growth. As participants – from players to audiences – expand, organizations should be aware they will need to adapt to make sure they are meeting the diversity of those increasingly invested in the scene. Innovation, creativity, and many other benefits can be found through valuing diverse and inclusive participation.

Organizers should also keep in mind that the women/people of color/LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual) who have long been active in your competitive gaming space are some of your best resources to help that growth. In addition to the above recommendations, we strongly encourage organizations to look to these people in their own scenes for the diverse set of talent, insight, and expertise they hold.

Esports is at an exciting, but also pivotal, moment. Addressing and valuing the reality of the diverse participation within gaming is crucial to building a stronger industry and community. AnyKey looks forward to continued work with partners and allies in this venture.

Resources

Reporting and Responding to Harassment,
GeekFeminism Wiki

http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Conference_anti-harassment/Responding_to_reports

Resources for Allies, GeekFeminism Wiki

http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Resources_for_allies

How to Use AutoMod, Twitch

<https://help.twitch.tv/customer/portal/articles/2662186-how-to-use-automod>

Setting Up Moderation For Your Twitch Channel,
Twitch

<https://help.twitch.tv/customer/portal/articles/2662186-how-to-use-automod>

National Center for Transgender Equality

<http://www.ncrights.org>

Media Reference Guide on Covering the
Transgender Community, GLAAD

<https://www.glaad.org/reference/covering-trans-community>

Glossary of terms, GLAAD

<https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>

Women's Colleges with Trans-inclusive Policies,
Campus Pride

<https://www.campuspride.org/tpc/womens-colleges/>

PFLAG

<http://pflag.org>

Esports Code of Conduct, Sverok

<https://sverok.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/An-esports-Code-of-Conduct-1.pdf>