# Best Practices for Minimizing Implicit Bias During the Applicant Review Process

**Office for Inclusion and Equity**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Accept the fact that we are all subject to the influence of bias and assumptions</th>
<th>• Open your mind and consider alternate views or approaches to examining applications</th>
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<td>2. Don’t try to suppress your bias and assumptions from your mind</td>
<td>• The more you try to suppress a thought, the more you can actually reinforce it and therefore unintentionally increase bias in your evaluation</td>
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<td>3. Before reviewing the applications, take time to develop well-defined criteria, prioritize the criteria, and create evaluation tools that are clearly aligned with the criteria and only the criteria</td>
<td>• Well-defined criteria focus attention on the merits of all applicants and on the degree to which they meet the criteria • Prioritizing criteria before reviewing applications can prevent committee members from unintentionally placing greater value on the qualities of a “favored” applicant and less value on the credentials of other applicants</td>
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<td>4. Calibrate your committee by discussing how individual committee members define each evaluation criterion</td>
<td>• Discuss and develop consensus regarding: o What constitutes excellence in research and/or teaching? o What factors would you look for in evaluating a candidate’s commitment to diversity and inclusion? • Criteria discussions provide greater clarity regarding preferred qualifications and highlight subjective nature of definitions of excellence</td>
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<td>5. Don’t rely on a presumably “objective” ranking or rating system to reduce bias</td>
<td>• Practice alone will not eliminate bias because each assigned score may be subject to bias • Develop pool of acceptable and qualified candidates; compare, contrast, and then consider candidates’ different strengths • Evaluate applicants on different scales such as one for teaching, one for research, one for leading commitment to diversity, etc.</td>
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<td>6. Slow down and spend time evaluating each candidate’s entire set of application materials</td>
<td>• At thorough review stage spend 15-20 minutes per candidate • Slow down and focus on each candidate as an individual • Consider all elements of application rather than focusing on any one</td>
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<td>7. Recognize that nuanced, hidden bias can exist in reference letter language</td>
<td>• For example, adjectives used to describe male and female candidates can be based on gender stereotypes such as men are successful and women are nurturing.</td>
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Selected Resources:


“Avoiding Unintended Gender Bias in Letters of Recommendation (Case Study 1),” by Lecia Barker, National Center for Women and Information Technology.
| 8. Rely upon inclusion rather than exclusion strategies in making selection decisions | • Making decisions using exclusion rather than inclusion strategies results in a larger pool of applicants remaining because evaluators make more careful and deliberate choices when deciding whom to include |
| 9. As committee members, periodically pause and evaluate your own judgments and self-correct if necessary | • Good to check in throughout the review process and definitely important to check in before finalizing the shortlist  
  • Are you consistently relying on the criteria developed for the position?  
  • Are you inadvertently, but systematically, screening out women or applicants of color?  
  • Are assumptions about possible family responsibilities and their effect on a candidate’s career path negatively influencing your evaluation of a candidate’s merit?  
  • Are candidates from institutions other than the major research universities being under-valued?  
  • Are you evaluating some applicants on the basis of promise or potential rather than on evidence of accomplishments and productivity?  
  • Are women and people of color subject to different expectations? |
| 10. Be able to defend every decision for advancing or eliminating a candidate and be able to provide evidence based on the job criteria and the information in the applicant’s materials | • When you hear “he is such a star” or “she is not a good fit,” ask the individual to explain their use of the term and support it with evidence linked to the job criteria  
  • “Not a good fit” is often used to express vague, intangible “vibes” which often reflect unconscious biases |
| 11. Raise awareness of your implicit bias and the common shortcuts that lead to biased assessments | • Consider which common shortcuts (cloning, snap judgments, good fit/bad fit, negative/positive stereotypes, elitist behavior, wishful thinking, euphemized bias) you use  
  • Identify which best practices are the most effective for you |

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