



BIAS AWARENESS GUIDE

For Northwest Regional Education Service District Interview Committee Members

This guide is provided to train interview committee members internal and external, who are participating in an interview process for a Northwest Regional ESD position.

Introduction

As the largest of Oregon's 19 education service districts, Northwest Regional ESD serves the educational needs of students and families of Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook and Washington counties. In partnership with the communities we serve, Northwest Regional Education Service District improves student learning by providing equitable access to high-quality services and support.

Northwest Regional Education Service District is an equal opportunity employer. We are committed to building an inclusive community and an environment free from discrimination, harassment and retaliation. We are proud to be an antiracist organization. We work to understand how racial ideology is manufactured and how it impacts the lives of our staff and those we serve.

In line with our commitment to disrupting systemic racism, we acknowledge that research shows that Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and women are significantly less likely to apply for some positions, believing they must meet every qualification as described in the job description. At NWRESD, we value representation, and we are most interested in finding the best candidate for the job. The District is implementing a number of strategies to create an inclusive work environment that recognizes the diversity of all of its employees. Every NWRESD employee deserves a work environment that values and utilizes the unique perspectives, skills and knowledge of each member of its workforce, and a workplace that is free from unlawful harassment, discrimination, or retaliation based on race; national or ethnic origin; color; sex; religion; age; sexual orientation; gender expression or identity; pregnancy; marital status; familial status; economic status or source of income; mental or physical disability or perceived disability; or military service.

Oregon Educators Equity Act

The State of Oregon is committed to ethnic-racial equity and therefore it is the goal of the state that the number of diverse educators, including administrators, employed by school districts and education service districts shall be approximately proportionate to the number of diverse children enrolled in the public schools of this state.

We believe if our workforce mirrors the student and family population we serve, then our organization will be better able to provide role models for students of color, better understand the needs of our students and families of color, and make better decisions on behalf of our families and students of color. Increasing the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of our organization increases the cultural responsiveness of our organization.

Reducing Implicit Bias in Hiring Practices

In order to ensure culturally responsive hiring practices, it is essential to address the issue of bias in employment candidate selection. Interviewing is one of the most important processes in hiring. In addition to conducting interviews by a panel of diverse participants, Northwest Regional ESD is providing bias awareness training to interview members.

One of our goals is to make organizational changes that will disrupt the tendency to use stereotypes as shortcuts when evaluating and selecting candidates to interview and hire. We all have biases, they are not generally an indication of our beliefs and values, and more likely to influence and show-up in quick decisions when issues are ambiguous or when we don't have enough context or information.

What is Bias?

First, it's important to understand what bias is, *and* why we all have biases.

Bias is often regarded negatively. For the purpose of this discussion, we speak of bias in the context of partiality, preconceived notion, and predisposition. The reality is that biases naturally come from our brains' use of schemas. A schema can be described as a template of knowledge. We use schemas to process the information that bombards our senses every moment of every day. This is simply a way for us to sort information into categories that make sense to us. We have schemas about objects, processes, and other human beings.

For example, our brain uses a schema to assign the category of "chair" to an object based on its flat seat, back, and legs, even though the chair might be plain wood or lavishly upholstered. We may have a negative bias about plain wood chairs because we have had the uncomfortable experience of sitting in one for an extended period of time. We have a schema for the process of ordering food at a restaurant: we know what it means when a smiling person hands us a laminated document with descriptions of various dishes and prices. And, by observing assorted traits, we use schemas to naturally assign people into categories such as age, gender, race, and role.

There are two types of bias, explicit and implicit. Both types of bias include stereotypes and attitudes.

Stereotypes are traits that we associate with a category. These associations may arise from direct personal experience or they might be relayed to us through stories, media, and culture. "Elderly people are frail" is an example of a stereotype.

Attitudes are overall evaluative feelings that are positive or negative. If we meet someone who graduated from the same university, we will tend to feel more at ease with that person.

What is implicit bias?

By definition, implicit biases are those we carry without awareness or conscious direction. It is the result of our human brains using schemas to organize information into categories. Most of the work our brains do occurs on the unconscious level. Implicit bias does not mean that we hide our prejudices. We literally do not know we have them and they are generally not an indication of our beliefs and values.

This is important for interviewers to understand because without awareness we cannot know if we are acting on hidden bias. Implicit bias is also referred to as hidden or unconscious bias.

What is explicit bias?

In contrast, explicit bias means that we are aware that we have a particular thought or feeling. It sometimes also means we understand the source of that thought or feeling. If you have an explicitly positive attitude toward chocolate, you consciously endorse and celebrate that preference.

Why do both types of bias matter in the interview process?

Implicit Bias in the Interview Process

Implicit bias is problematic in the interview process because we are unaware of certain preferences or attitudes. Use every opportunity to consider your reasons for a particular rating and challenge your thinking. Talk over your reasons with other interviewers. Try to avoid using the terminology of a candidate being a “better fit” over another candidate(s). Without this reflection and questioning, we cannot identify hidden bias and eliminate it.

Explicit Bias in the Interview Process

How many times have you heard this before? “I always look for a candidate who makes direct eye contact. People who don’t look straight at you don’t make good employees in the long run.” This is an example of explicit bias. The speaker is stating a known preference. In the context of candidate evaluation, the reason this particular bias is problematic is because in many cultures, direct eye contact is considered to be very rude and to be avoided whenever possible.

Examples of Bias

In order to reduce the chance of making a poor decision in the interview process, raters must make a conscious effort to recognize biases, both implicit and explicit, and eliminate them. Following are examples of bias which may be explicit, implicit, or both.

Average/Central Bias

Rating all candidates the same, or tending to give all candidates the middle rating (e.g., a 3 on a 5 point scale).

Contrast

When you compare/contrast one candidate against another rather than comparing candidates against an ideal, you may get skewed results. Example: a candidate appears stronger than they should because they followed two weak candidates. Evaluating the candidate against the qualifications and competencies will help mitigate this bias.

Cultural Noise

Cultural noise occurs when the candidate provides socially acceptable responses – telling the interviewer what they believe the interviewer wants to hear – rather than factually-based responses.

First Impression

Many people think they can accurately assess someone within the first few minutes of meeting them. Making up your mind so soon is a bias that corrupts overall judgment.

Halo Effect / Horn Effect

The interviewer favors the candidate due to one good or positive trait or characteristic, sometimes despite several negatives (halo effect). Alternatively, the interviewer allows one negative trait or characteristic to be a disqualifier (horn effect).

Knowledge-of-Predictor

When an evaluator has foreknowledge of how the candidate has performed on another test or interview and allows knowledge of previous performance (good or bad) to influence rating.

Leniency

A rater who tends to give inflated ratings and who is not critical enough.

Nonverbal Bias

Body language, eye contact or lack thereof, etc. Consider cultural differences and avoid overemphasizing nonverbal behavior in responses. See also “Business Etiquette” in the next section.

Recency

A bias toward the candidate seen most recently because he/she is the freshest in memory. This is why you should always write down notes or scores immediately and score all candidates against the “ideal candidate” qualifications and competencies.

Similar-to-Me

This occurs when an interviewer identifies with the candidate on a personal level instead of evaluating based on job-related criteria. For example, many people will subconsciously favor a candidate with whom they share a characteristic, hobby, alma mater, opinion, etc.

Stereotyping

As previously described, this bias happens when the rater makes an assumption about a candidate based on race; national or ethnic origin; color; sex; religion; age; sexual orientation; gender expression or identity; pregnancy; marital status; familial status; economic status or source of income; mental or physical disability or perceived disability; or military service. Stereotyping is influenced by both implicit and explicit bias.

Other Considerations

What other candidate characteristics must we be aware of?

Extrovert vs. Introvert:

50% of all humans are introverts. Extroverts may tend to perform and relate better to interviewers even if they are not as qualified as other, more introverted candidates.

Communication Styles:

Circular vs. linear; direct vs. indirect; emotionally expressive vs. restrained, etc.

Business Etiquette:

Nonverbal behavior: handshakes, distance, gestures, eye contact, or women wearing pants vs. a dress or skirt.

Social Values or Norms:

Individualistic vs. collectivistic; competitive vs. cooperative; authority-oriented vs. democratic.

REMINDERS

- Bias may occur intentionally or unintentionally. Be aware of how bias may affect your decision-making during the interview process.
- Recognize your biases, then eliminate them.
- Be as objective as possible.
- Focus on content.
- Dispel first impressions.
- Rate candidates against job competencies or an ideal candidate profile – not against one another.
- Justify your decisions and be able to articulate your reasons.

10 STEPS TO COUNTER IMPLICIT BIAS IN HIRING

1. Don't rush. Our biases are more likely to show up when we hurry or are experiencing stress.
2. Openly discuss stereotypes about different groups to surface unconscious assumptions. Cultivate knowledge of differences. A "colorblind" mentality increases implicit bias because of the mental effort to suppress stereotypes.
3. Have interviewers take an Implicit Association Test (IAC) on-line to acknowledge their own biases prior to screening or interviewing applicants. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>
4. Reduce ambiguity as much as possible when assessing candidates. Bias is more likely to show up when we're making a judgment call based on vague criteria.
5. Take time to be deliberate in decision-making and unpack biases along the way. Talk about the reasons behind preferring or dismissing a candidate.
6. Identify and remove distractions or anything that may increase stress in the decision-making environment. For example, ask the interview team to turn off their phones and not look at any calls or emails between interviews.
7. Increase exposure to stigmatized groups and actively pursue counters to stereotypes. Practice thinking about messages or people that counter stereotypical roles.
8. Remove testing requirements or reduce the weight of testing. Stereotype threat research has shown when a person is asked to perform and that performance is tied to a stereotype for their group, they will experience anxiety and not perform as well as they could. Therefore, some people of color don't do well with testing not because they don't know the information, but because of the mental labor of trying to prove the stereotype wrong.
9. Have someone of a similar racial background or same gender on the committee if possible. Even one other person reduces the threat of representing *all* people from a stigmatized group.
10. If someone speaks English as a second language or comes from a group stereotyped as "inarticulate", recognizing the pressure of articulating their perspectives in an interview may make it more difficult to speak clearly or choose precise vocabulary. Avoid jargon so as not to increase this pressure.

This training has been adapted from the City of Portland – Bureau of Human Resources