

Addressing Unconscious Bias in Hiring

When it comes to hiring, the average hiring manager or hiring team would likely say they don't discriminate against applicants or candidates in the hiring process. That is because our biases often don't show up in explicit and obvious ways. Bias tends to show up as a series of smaller decisions that we rationalize through our assumptions and perceptions. These biases are implicit—they are unconscious and tend to inform our decision-making whether we want them to or not. On average, humans make 1 decision every 2.5 seconds. Imagine how many decisions you're making throughout the hiring process alone! The candidate selection process is the primary area where crucial decisions are being made in the hiring process and it is where bias tends to show up the most.

What is this resource?

This resource is meant to address the individual unconscious biases that inform the hiring systems we create and the candidate selection process. Remaining unaware of these biases and their impact on our decision-making can contribute to the lack of representation of individuals from marginalized communities in the workplace.

Who is this resource for?

- Hiring Leads, Hiring Teams, HR leads, DEI leads
- Organizations that want to make their hiring processes more equitable.
- Organizations with DEI-related hiring goals as a part of their overall DEI organizational strategy.

Note: Limited staff capacity? Consider skipping the first two exercises and using the Organizational

What will you gain through this resource?

- An assessment of your current knowledge and understanding of underrepresented identity groups.
- Identify opportunities to learn more about the communities you aim to recruit from.
- Reasons why candidates from underrepresented groups are excluded or discriminated against in the hiring process.
- Common candidate biases and solutions to address them.
- An organizational gaps analysis of your organization's hiring strategy and systems including:
 - Identifying priorities and areas that require focus.
 - Opportunities to increase inclusion and equity within the hiring process.
 - Gaps in the capacity of the hiring lead/team, as well as the capacity of the organization, and opportunities for other staff to get involved.

Exercise 1: Underrepresented Community Bias Assessment

Activity Time: 45-60 minutes

When it comes to identities or communities that we aren't a part of, many of our assumptions come from the experiences we have had engaging with those groups. Our assumptions might also develop from our media consumption and how that identity group is portrayed in what we watch, hear, and read. Our assumptions can also be influenced by the perception of that community by those closest to us. Knowing how we perceive other communities can uncover biases we might have that influence hiring practices and decision-making.

Instructions

Below you will find a list of some of the traditionally underrepresented groups in the workplace—this is by no means an exhaustive list. **Please select one identity or community that you do not identify with. Respond to the reflection questions that follow.**

Note: If you have identified gaps or opportunities to learn more to better respond to the questions, consider returning to this activity once you have done more research.

Underrepresented Job Seekers

- Older and Experienced workers
- Refugees and Immigrants
- LGBTQIA+ Community
- People with disabilities
- Veterans
- Working Parents
- Formerly incarcerated people
- Black community
- Hispanic and Latinx community
- Indigenous and Native American community
- Asian American and Pacific Islander community
- Women

Underrepresented Community Bias Assessment

1. What do we already know or believe to be true about this community?_
2. Are we aware of the challenges this community faces?_
3. Is this a community I/we have considered when thinking about diversity representation and inclusive practices?_
4. What are the unique challenges this community faces in the hiring process?
5. What can our organization do to better hire and support this community?_
6. Is our organization ready to support a new hire from this community?
7. What could we do to create a supportive environment for a new hire from this community?
8. What are our sources for data on the needs of this community?_
9. How can we engage this community to be a direct voice in innovations and solutions that will guide my hiring practices?_
10. How can we be a better advocate for this community?

Exercise 2: Uncovering Unconscious Candidate Bias

Activity Time: 45-60 minutes

According to Hiring for Diversity (Woods, Tharakan), below are the top reasons why candidates are disqualified from the hiring process. Although these are just some reasons for candidate discrimination, it is a helpful snapshot of what kind of assumptions we might make when selecting people to interview. Each reason on this list can be easily rationalized as a worthy and justified reason not to choose a candidate. Understanding common areas for candidate discrimination can make us aware of our biases or misguided preferences that lead to less diverse workplaces (and less inclusive work cultures).

Pause and Reflect

*What do you notice about this list?
Anything surprising?
What are the top reasons for candidate disqualification at*

Common Reasons Job Seekers are Discriminated Against

- **Age**
- **Gender**
- **Gaps in employment**
- **Unimpressive LinkedIn profile**
- **Education or institutions attended**
- **Too much time at one employer**
- **Too little time at any employer**
- **Lack of industry experience**
- **Not “visibly” diverse**
- **Need for visa sponsorship**

When we lean into rationalizing hiring decisions based on assumptions, it is often out of a sense of urgency or a need to make decisions quickly in order to move to the next phase of the hiring process. We can lose out on the opportunity to hire an awesome new team member and make progress towards our DEI hiring goals because we didn't take the time to be curious and to learn more about the challenges and barriers to success that impact the community we're trying to recruit from.

Let's say you receive a resume where the candidate has only spent 1-2 years at their last three employers. Based on this work history, you might assume that the candidate is not dependable or they are inconsistent, they might leave the organization after a year or two, or perhaps they are 'less skilled' since they have not stayed at employer long enough to develop them. In reality, this candidate might have had unique experiences based on their identity that contributed to the varied work history. What barriers or challenges has this person endured throughout their career that might contribute to having a short-term job history? And a crucial question is—is a varied work history a necessary or useful factor to consider when choosing a new hire?

Case Study: Green 2.0 Study on BIPOC Environmental Staff at Work

A 2018 Green 2.0 study uncovered why and how BIPOC staff are being pushed out of environmental organizations ([Leaking Talent, 2019](#)). The study found that turnover rates for BIPOC staff were 34% higher than white staff across multiple industries. The participants also overwhelmingly reported a lack of equity in employee development, evaluation, compensation, and promotions. ***This uncovered that BIPOC staff at environmental organizations are more likely to find new employment in favor of a better work environment and better benefits.*** Any combination of these experiences could lead to a more varied work history, an unimpressive LinkedIn profile, or a lack of industry experience due to lack of professional investment.

A Note on Retention

The Green 2.0 study also uncovered an important nuanced finding—racism negatively impacts both the hiring AND retention of BIPOC staff. Not only is discrimination causing less diversity within the applicant pool, it is also conscious and unconscious biases that are gravely impacting the work experience of staff of color once they join the team. This study shows that it is just as important to invest in a DEI hiring strategy as it is to invest in the experience of the new hire once they have joined the organization. If you consider your overall hiring process, a retention strategy is the crucial final step to ensure continued progress toward your DEI goals and the well-being and success of that new employee.

Pause and Reflect

How can you invest in the leadership and retention of new staff members who are from underrepresented identity groups? How can you create a more welcoming and inclusive work environment for the new staff member?

Instructions

Below you will find the top biases that occur during the candidate selection process.

Please review the definition of the candidate biases below and how to address them. After each definition and solution, respond to the reflection questions below:

- How have I (HR Lead, Hiring lead, or Hiring team) made hiring decisions using this type of bias as a rationale in previous candidate selection processes?
- How has this type of bias been incorporated into our hiring practices or policies?

Top 6 Types of Candidate Bias

What is the bias?	How can we address it?
<u>Affinity Bias:</u> To favor those who share similar interests or background as you.	Focus on 'culture add' versus 'culture fit'. Try writing down the similarities between you and the candidate to name the specific biases you may have.
<u>Affect Heuristics Bias:</u> Taking mental shortcuts or going with your 'gut feeling.'	Use an objective scorecard and assess your gut. Write down the reasons you are or are not interested in a candidate.
<u>Attribution Bias:</u> Using an observation to determine a candidate is unfit for a job.	Don't make assumptions and ask clarifying questions as appropriate.
<u>Confirmation Bias:</u> Drawing conclusions based on your personal beliefs and prejudices rather than merit.	Create a list of pre-determined, skills-based questions ahead of the interview.
<u>Conformity Bias:</u> To act similarly to the people around you regardless of your own beliefs, succumbing to peer pressure.	Do not allow interviewers to see each other's feedback until they have written their own.
<u>Contrast Effect Bias:</u> Comparing candidates to one another instead of measuring their skills and potential success at the organization.	Space out interviews rather than scheduling them back-to-back. Write down feedback as soon as you complete the interview. It is also recommended to hire for multiple positions at the same time to decrease candidate favoritism.

Exercise 3: Organizational Assessment

Activity Time: 60-120 minutes

Now that you have considered the common ways that our personal biases influence the hiring process, the final activity is an opportunity to consider the implications for your organization. This organizational assessment can serve as a starting point to establish an action plan to update your overall hiring strategy. As you respond to the questions, consider specific policies and practices that could be addressed like compensation and benefits packages, employee professional development policies, leadership/promotion opportunities, etc.

Instructions

This exercise is an opportunity to brainstorm ideas, identify gaps in capacity, and uncover opportunities to increase equity and inclusion within your organization's hiring process.

Please do your best to respond to the following questions.

Organizational Hiring Strategy Assessment

1. How can you build a more inclusive and inviting organization and internal work culture at your organization?
2. Does the hiring lead feel supported by the team/organization in diversity hiring efforts?
3. Do your broader team members know how they can contribute to growing diversity at your organization?
4. Is the specific priority for diversity hiring understood across your organization?
5. How is inclusion incorporated into your hiring approach so that hires are immediately culturally supported before, during, and after hiring?
6. How has equity been infused into the full range of your hiring process?
7. Where can you expand your diversity sourcing?
8. How can you write more inclusive job descriptions?
9. Where can you minimize candidate selection bias?
10. How can you develop more fair and structured interviews?
11. How can you retain and advance underrepresented team members?

Note: Consider also reviewing the accessibility of your hiring practices and policies. Are there barriers that you can pro-actively address to make the process more inclusive and welcoming for more applicants (for example, changing the interview location to one with access to an elevator)? TREC recommends adding a page to your website where anyone who engages with your organization can request accommodation. A link to that page can be included within all job postings.

Reflection Questions

- What themes emerged? Were there any surprises?
- What was uncomfortable or challenging?
- What did you learn from this exercise?
- Where do you see the greatest need to increase representation in your organization?
- Where do you believe, tactically, you have the greatest opportunity to first implement this work?

Additional Resources

Green 2.0 Reports

- [Leaking Talent, 2019](#)
- [Diversity Derailed, 2016](#)
- [The 2020 NGO & Foundation Transparency Report Card](#) - *data collected from the 40 largest NGOs and 40 largest foundations on the number of women and people of color on their full-time staffs, senior staffs, and boards*

Articles & Books

- [13 Common Hiring Biases to Watch Out For](#) – Harver Article
- [What Does a Truly Equitable Recruiting Process Look Like?](#) – American Alliance of Museums Article
- Hiring from Diversity by Arthur Woods and Susanna Tharakan
- The Big Book of HR by Barbara Mitchell
- Diversity in the Workplace by Erika Nielsen Brown

TREC Resources

- [Developing an Inclusive Culture](#) – 60 min webinar
- [Working Across Generations](#) – 60 min webinar
- [Anti-Blackness and Conservation: Dismantling Anti-Black Racism in Conservation](#) - 70 min webinar
- [Addressing Equity in Compensation](#) – 60 min webinar
- [Recruiting, Hiring, and Onboarding Staff](#) – 60 min webinar

Sources

- Hiring from Diversity by Arthur Woods and Susanna Tharakan
- [Green 2.0: Leaking Talent](#)
- [Green 2.0: Diversity Derailed](#)
- [Society for Human Resources \(SHRM\)](#)
- Psychology Today