



Bias Awareness Training for Volunteer Grant Reviewers

Introduction

- The City of Portland has adopted 3 goals focused on advancing racial equity: We will end racial disparities within city government, so there is fairness in hiring and promotions, greater opportunities in contracting, and equitable services to all residents.
- We will strengthen outreach, public engagement, and access to City services for communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities, and support or change existing services using racial equity best practices.
- We will collaborate with communities and institutions to eliminate racial inequity in all areas of government, including education, criminal justice, environmental justice, health, housing, transportation, and economic success.

PCL uses the city's definitions of Equity, Racial Equity, and Diversity.

- Equity is achieved when one's identity cannot predict the outcome. Racial Equity is when race does not determine or predict the distribution of resources, opportunities, and burdens for group members in society.
- Diversity includes all the ways in which people are different, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from one another.

Equity in the Levy's Grant Review Process

As one strategy to address equity in the grant review process, PCL asks that reviewers consider their issues of bias in scoring applications. Application scores are an important part of the review process. Levy staff rely heavily on these scores when making funding recommendations and the Allocation Committee carefully considers the scores in making their funding decisions.

We know that grant reviewing is not scientific. PCL recognizes that public grant processes have their own biases, however we have structured our process informed by equity practice in grantmaking to the extent possible. As such, we ask that you be aware of how your biases can impact the review process.

PCL has adapted the following information for PCL volunteer grant reviewers; material came from the City of Portland Bureau of Human Resources' Bias Awareness Training for Interview Panel Members.

What is Bias?

First, it's important to understand what bias is, and why we all have bias. Bias is often regarded negatively. Biases come naturally 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. There are two types of bias, explicit and implicit.

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. This is important for grant reviewers to understand because without awareness we cannot know if we are acting on hidden bias.

Implicit bias is problematic in the grant review process because we are unaware of certain preferences or attitudes. Use every opportunity to consider your reasons for a particular score and challenge your thinking. Reflection and questioning are needed to identify and mitigate hidden bias.

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.

A reviewer might say “Programs that use evidenced-based program models are always the best investment.” This statement is an example of explicit bias. The speaker states a known preference. In the context of grant evaluation, a reason this bias is problematic is because not all evidenced-based program models are culturally responsive.

Examples of Bias

To reduce the chance of making a poor decision in the grant review process, reviewers must make a conscious effort to recognize biases, both implicit and explicit, and mitigate them. Below are examples of bias which may be explicit, implicit, or both:

Average/Central Bias: Scoring all applicants the same, or giving most applicants the middle rating (e.g., a 3 on a 5-point scale).

Contrast: When you compare/contrast one applicant against another rather than comparing applicants against the stated criteria, you may get skewed results.

Cultural Noise: Cultural noise occurs when an applicant provides socially acceptable responses – telling the reviewer what they believe the reviewer wants to hear – rather than factually-based responses.

Halo Effect / Devil Effect: The reviewer favors the applicant due to one good or positive trait or characteristic, sometimes despite several negatives (halo effect). Alternatively, the reviewer allows one negative trait or characteristic to be a disqualifier (devil effect).

Knowledge-of-Predictor: When a reviewer has foreknowledge of an applicant organization or program and allows that knowledge (good or bad) to influence scoring.

Leniency: A reviewer who tends to give inflated ratings and who is not critical enough.

Recency: A bias toward the applicant whose proposal you read most recently because it is the freshest in memory.

Conclusion

Be aware of your biases as you review and score applications. Recognizing your biases, using the score form, creating notes and assigning scores as you review applications will help mitigate bias. Keep in mind that applicants will receive copies of all completed score forms. They expect reviewers to use the scoring criteria, and they’ll look to comments or notes left by reviewers to help understand the scores given to their applications. They expect us all to work toward mitigating our bias in this process.