



NRPA Quick Guide: Reducing Implicit/ Unconscious Bias During Interviews

Introduction to Quick Guides

As professionals entering into a DEI journey, the first barrier we often confront is: Where do I begin?

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) — and sometimes Justice — work is hard. It takes time, asks us to confront uncomfortable topics and requires change. To add to those challenges, we may be met by others who don't understand "why," prefer to stay in their comfort zone and resist change. Some of us have community and agency support, and some of us are still looking for allies.

Quick Guides are designed for all park and recreation professionals, but especially for those who may have limited support and are looking to make tangible, meaningful changes in their communities and places of work. We believe individuals can make profound, positive changes and these guides are available to give individual professionals the benefits of the NRPA community. Quick Guides are tools to help you address specific areas where DEI principles can be incorporated in parks and recreation by providing background, research, considerations and examples.

Quick Guides consider that each agency, community and approach is unique. They provide ideas and paths to implementation on a variety of topics and have been created by a team of dedicated NRPA members from all over the country, who reached out to their extended networks to compile multiple perspectives and solutions. Each Quick Guide focuses on a specific area to provide a clear and comprehensive resource.

Back to the original question, the NRPA DEI Network adopted the Quick Guides project to give you an answer — You can start here! Our vision is that you will find a Quick Guide that speaks to you, one that falls within your area of influence, or one that addresses an inequity or barrier that exists in your community. Utilize that Quick Guide to, well, guide you through the process. Be on the look out for more Quick Guides — Events and Program Naming, Inclusive Hiring Practices, Starting a DEI Committee and Sports Policies.

Thank you for all that you do and deciding to start somewhere.



Purpose

This guide is designed to assist interviewers and hiring managers with developing or refining strategies to mitigate implicit bias, or unconscious bias, during interviews. By raising awareness of implicit bias and providing practical steps to address them, this guide aims to promote fair and inclusive hiring practices within organizations.

Why Are We Doing This Work?

- To foster a fair and supportive environment
- To ensure everyone has equal opportunities and representation
- To enhance overall societal well-being by valuing differences and incorporating diverse perspectives

Background

Implicit bias in interviews refers to the unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that influence an interviewer's perception and evaluation of a candidate. These biases are automatic and often stem from cultural, social and personal experiences, leading interviewers to make judgements based on factors, such as race, gender, age or appearance, rather than the candidate's qualifications and abilities. For instance, an interviewer might unconsciously favor candidates who share their own background or underestimate the competencies of individuals from underrepresented groups. This can result in unfair hiring practices and a lack of diversity within organizations. Additionally, implicit bias can lead to potentially excellent candidates, who do not fit the interviewers' implicit preferences, being overlooked.

Being mindful of implicit bias during interviews is essential, as the unconscious prejudices can significantly influence hiring outcomes. Implicit bias can lead to unfair treatment of candidates and an undermining of the organization's diversity and inclusion efforts.

To ensure a fair and effective interview process, it's important to keep the following goals in mind:

- Candidates should be evaluated based on qualifications, skills and potential to contribute to the organization rather than irrelevant factors, such as race, gender, age or background.
- The interview process should provide all candidates with an equal opportunity to showcase their abilities and suitability for the role, regardless of any preconceived notions or stereotypes.

Promoting a diverse and equitable hiring process is essential for several reasons:

- **Innovation and Creativity:** Diverse teams bring a wide range of perspectives, experiences and ideas to the table, fostering innovation and creativity. By embracing diversity, organizations can tap into a broader pool of talent and drive innovation within teams.



- **Better Decision Making:** Diverse teams are better equipped to make well-informed decisions. When individuals with different backgrounds and viewpoints collaborate, they can offer unique insights and challenge groupthink, leading to more robust and effective decision-making processes.
- **Enhanced Employee Engagement and Satisfaction:** Employees are more likely to feel valued and engaged when they see themselves represented in the workplace. A diverse and inclusive environment fosters a sense of belonging, leading to higher levels of employee satisfaction, retention and productivity.
- **Improved Customer Relations:** In a diverse society, it's essential for organizations to reflect communities they serve. By hiring a diverse workforce, organizations can better understand and connect with their customers, leading to improved customer relations and loyalty.
- **Legal and Ethical Obligations:** In many jurisdictions, promoting diversity and equity is not only a best practice, but it also is a legal requirement. Organizations have a legal and ethical obligation to provide equal opportunities to all candidates and employees.

Implicit biases can manifest in various ways during interviews, including stereotyping, the halo effect, confirmation bias and affinity bias. Definitions for different types of implicit bias can be found on [page 10](#) of this guide.

Steps to Reduce Implicit Bias During Interviews:

Creating bias awareness during interviews involves several crucial steps for an organization to ensure fairness and equity in the hiring process. Here is a structured approach:

- 1 Acknowledge the Existence of Bias:**
Start by acknowledging that biases exist in everyone — including the interviewers — and that they can unconsciously influence decision making. Everyone possesses some form of bias, as it is a natural human tendency to gravitate toward individuals who share similar characteristics or backgrounds. Implicit bias is not an act of malicious intent but rather a common psychological phenomenon, which is essential to understand in order to mitigate its effects on decision-making processes.
- 2 Educate Stakeholders:**
Provide training sessions or workshops for hiring managers, interviewers and other relevant staff members on the different types of biases, their impact on decision making and strategies to mitigate them. For ideas on how to educate stakeholders, please refer to “Talking Points” on [page 6](#).
- 3 Develop Standardized Interview Processes:**
Establish structured interview protocols with standardized questions and evaluation criteria to ensure consistency across candidates.
- 4 Review Interview Questions:**
 - Carefully consider the language, content and structure of all interview questions. All questions should be based on specific skills, experiences and qualifications required for the job. Avoid questions that are irrelevant to the role or that may elicit biased assumptions. For examples of potentially biased interview questions and ideas for questions that are more appropriate, please refer to “Outcomes” on [page 7](#).



- Avoid leading questions.
- Use inclusive language that does not favor or discriminate against certain groups.
- Balance competency- and situation-based questions.
- When formulating questions, consider how candidates from diverse backgrounds or with different experiences might interpret them. Strive to ensure questions are equally accessible and relevant to all candidates.
- Avoid personal or intrusive questions.

5 Promote Diversity in Interview Panels:

Form interview panels that include diverse perspectives and backgrounds to minimize the influence of individual biases and foster a more comprehensive assessment of candidates.

6 Provide Resources and Tools:

Equip interviewers with resources, such as bias awareness guides, checklists or decision-making frameworks. These tools can help assist in recognizing and addressing biases in real time during interviews.

7 Mitigate Stereotyping:

Encourage interviewers to focus on the qualifications, skills and experiences of candidates rather than making assumptions based on stereotypes or preconceived notions.

8 Offer Implicit Bias Training:

Conduct specialized training sessions specifically focused on understanding and addressing implicit bias, including interactive exercises and case studies to illustrate real-world scenarios.

9 Encourage Reflection and Self-Awareness:

Encourage interviewers to reflect on their own biases and how they may influence their perceptions and judgements of candidates, fostering self-awareness and mindfulness during the interview process.

10 Implement Blind Evaluation Techniques:

Consider implementing blind evaluation techniques, such as anonymizing résumés or conducting blind auditions, to minimize the impact of demographic information on initial screening and assessment.

11 Establish Accountability Measures:

Hold interviewers accountable for adhering to bias awareness guidelines and evaluating candidates based on meritocracy and job-related criteria rather than subjective biases.

12 Monitor and Evaluate Progress:

Regularly assess the effectiveness of bias awareness initiatives through feedback mechanisms, performance evaluations and outcome metrics related to hiring diversity and equity.

13 Continuously Improve Practices:

Actively seek feedback from stakeholders, monitor industry best practices and adapt bias awareness strategies as needed to continuously improve the organization's interviewing practices.



Opportunities and Challenges



Opportunities

Recruitment:

Review job recruitment strategies to ensure organizations are recruiting a diverse workforce. Post open positions in a variety of locations and job-search sites that are specifically designed to recruit a diverse workforce. Include words in the recruitment materials such as, “We are committed to building a diverse and inclusive workplace.”

Culture:

Utilize recruitment and interviews to select candidates who align with and support the organization’s commitment to DEI. One way to assess whether candidates align with these values is to include an interview question such as, “Can you provide an example of how you’ve actively contributed to creating a more diverse, equitable and inclusive environment in your previous roles?”

Policy Updates:

Review departmental policies and procedures for potential implicit bias and equity barriers in conjunction with interview strategies to ensure they are as fair and equitable as possible. Implicit bias will likely exist in other aspects of the policies and procedures of the organization; as the hiring managers become more aware of biases, new opportunities for growth will arise. Foster an inclusive and diverse workplace as the organization embraces the more diverse team it has created through transparency and a less biased interview process.



Challenges

Awareness:

Individuals may not be aware of their own biases or how biases can influence their decision making during interviews. Furthermore, implicit bias operates at a subconscious level, making them challenging to identify and mitigate. Even individuals who are committed to fair and equitable hiring practices may unknowingly harbor biases that influence their decision making.

Time and Resources:

Implementing strategies to mitigate biases — such as training sessions, structured interview processes and data tracking — requires time, resources and commitment.

Subjectivity in Evaluation: Despite efforts to standardize interview processes, evaluating candidates remains inherently subjective.

Societal Influences:

Biases are often deeply rooted in societal attitudes, cultural norms and systemic inequalities. Addressing implicit bias in interviews requires not only organizational efforts but also broader societal changes to dismantle ingrained biases and promote equity.

Despite these challenges, organizations can make meaningful progress in addressing implicit bias in interviews through a combination of awareness raising, training, process improvements and ongoing commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. If you or your agency are unable to implement every strategy in this guide, consider starting with one or two key strategies to reduce implicit bias.



Talking Points

Approach all conversations with respect and empathy for different points of view. When educating stakeholders, such as management, directors and Human Resources (HR), be prepared to identify the benefits of change. Talking points about the benefits of updating hiring practices and resources to make positive changes could include:



Alignment with Organizational Goals:

- Highlight how this quick guide aligns with the organization's broader goals of fostering Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI).
- Emphasize that implementing these practices supports the organization's mission, values, and legal or ethical obligations regarding fair hiring.
- Highlight that an agency with diverse staff can better connect with the full community through representation.



Enhancing Talent Acquisition:

- Explain how reducing implicit bias can help attract and retain top talent from diverse backgrounds.
- Note that a fairer interview process will uncover a broader pool of qualified candidates, leading to stronger, more innovative teams.
- Along with diversity of race and culture, hiring managers who are aware of implicit bias are more open to diversity of thought and will hire candidates who will bring new ideas and perspective to the agency.



Cost Efficiency and Productivity Gains:

- Highlight that improving hiring practices can reduce turnover rates and associated costs of rehiring and retraining.
- A diverse workforce — selected through an unbiased process — often results in higher employee engagement, leading to increased productivity and retention.



Building a Positive Employer Brand:

- Share how adopting unbiased interview practices can enhance the organization's reputation as an inclusive employer.
- Discuss how a more structured and unbiased interview process creates a positive experience for candidates. Candidates who feel they were evaluated fairly are more likely to view the organization favorably, even if they are not selected for the position.
- A positive employer brand can attract a more diverse and high-quality applicant pool and improve public perception.



Reducing Legal and Compliance Risks:

- Advise that biased hiring practices, even when unintentional, can lead to legal issues, including discrimination claims.
- Implementing these practices can help HR demonstrate a proactive commitment to fair hiring, reducing the risk of litigation and reputational damage.



Data-Driven Decisions:

- By adopting these practices, HR can move toward more data-driven hiring decisions that are less influenced by unconscious biases.



Step-by-Step Implementation:

- Assure HR that changes to hiring practices can gradually be implemented.
- Suggest starting with a few key strategies, like bias awareness training or standardizing interview questions, making the process manageable and less overwhelming.



Support from Industry Best Practices:

- Point out that this quick guide has been developed by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), and it reflects the industry's best practices.
- Position updating the interview and hiring process as an opportunity for the organization to lead by example and adopt practices recommended by professionals in the field.



Human Resource's Role in DEI Leadership:

- Position HR as a key leader in driving DEI initiatives within the organization.
- Implementing strategies to reduce implicit bias in interviews can showcase HR's commitment to fostering an inclusive culture and set the tone for the entire organization.

Outcomes

The following section provides examples of interview questions that may unintentionally introduce bias, along with improved alternatives that aim to reduce implicit bias. These revised questions focus on specific, job-related skills and experiences, ensuring a fairer assessment of all candidates.



Question: "Tell me about yourself."

- **Better Question:** "Can you describe a recent project where you successfully used your skills to solve a problem relevant to this role?"
- **Reasoning:** The original question is vague and may lead to bias based on how a candidate talks about their personal background. The better question is specific and focuses on relevant skills and experience, reducing the potential for personal bias.



Question: “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

- **Better Question:** “What are your professional development goals, and how do you think this role can help you achieve them?”
- **Reasoning:** The original question can unintentionally introduce bias, particularly against candidates who may not fit traditional career progression paths. The improved question focuses on the candidate’s goals in a way that aligns with the role, allowing for diverse career trajectories.



Question: “What is your biggest weakness?”

- **Better Question:** “Can you tell us about a time when you received constructive feedback and how you used it to improve your performance?”
- **Reasoning:** Asking about weaknesses can prompt rehearsed and uninformative answers. The alternative focuses on the candidate’s ability to grow and adapt, providing a more concrete evaluation of their potential. Additionally, asking about weaknesses can trigger imposter syndrome creating self-doubt within the candidate.



Question: “What is your favorite holiday tradition and why?”

- **Better Question:** “Can you describe a work situation that showcases your strengths and how you used them to contribute to the team’s success?”
- **Reasoning:** The first question might be seen as confusing or irrelevant, particularly across cultural lines. It might also favor candidates comfortable with abstract or playful thinking. Additionally, the question may introduce cultural bias, as not all candidates may share the same holidays or traditions, potentially making them feel excluded or uncomfortable. The revised question focuses on tangible work experiences, providing a clearer assessment of the candidate’s strengths.



Question: “How do you feel about being assertive in meetings?”

- **Better Question:** “Can you provide an example of how you contributed to a team discussion or decision making process?”
- **Reasoning:** The original question assumes a cultural understanding of assertiveness, which may vary. In some cultures, assertiveness is not as valued or expected in the same way. The better question asks for a specific example, allowing the candidate to demonstrate their communication style without assuming a particular cultural norm.



Question: “Can you tell me about a time you had to think outside the box?”

- **Better Question:** “Can you describe a situation where you had to find a creative solution to a problem at work?”
- **Reasoning:** The phrase “think outside the box” is idiomatic and may be confusing or meaningless to candidates from different cultural backgrounds. The better question avoids jargon and clearly asks for a concrete example of creative problem solving.

For further examples, please see the Additional Information and Resource sections of this guide.



Additional Information

[Implicit Bias \(Unconscious Bias\): Definition and Examples](https://simplypsychology.org/implicit-bias.html)
(simplypsychology.org/implicit-bias.html)

[Project Implicit Social Attitudes](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/)
(<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>)

[The Similar-to-Me Effect](https://thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/psychology/the-similar-to-me-effect)
(thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/psychology/the-similar-to-me-effect)

Resources

[Cosumnes Community Service District Bias Awareness for Interview Panel Members](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1okHs4tGNRcPomp5_E0vwllsVJTgjkpkG/view)
(drive.google.com/file/d/1okHs4tGNRcPomp5_E0vwllsVJTgjkpkG/view)

[National Institute of Food and Agriculture – Understanding Implicit Bias Training](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pr7rboJKR4A)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pr7rboJKR4A>)

[University of Washington Checklist for Interviewing/Hiring Committees](https://hr.uw.edu/talent/hiring-process/checklist-for-interviewing-hiring-committees/)
(hr.uw.edu/talent/hiring-process/checklist-for-interviewing-hiring-committees/)

[VA Bedford Healthcare System Hiring Toolkit](https://va.gov/files/2022-06/VABEDHCS%20Hiring%20Toolkit%20vF_2220616.pdf)
(va.gov/files/2022-06/VABEDHCS%20Hiring%20Toolkit%20vF_2220616.pdf)

[UCSD Dos and DON'Ts of Participating in an Interview Panel](https://coe.ucsd.edu/_files/L3%20240321%20DOs%20and%20DONTs%20of%20participating%20in%20an%20Interview%20Panel%201.pdf)
(coe.ucsd.edu/_files/L3%20240321%20DOs%20and%20DONTs%20of%20participating%20in%20an%20Interview%20Panel%201.pdf)

[Bias: Avoiding the Unavoidable – Sample Training](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KFrKp1Jbm3C3WyoqlkhNTK8f58UIRvgs/view)
(drive.google.com/file/d/1KFrKp1Jbm3C3WyoqlkhNTK8f58UIRvgs/view)

[Yolo County, California Library Bias Awareness for Interview Panel Members](https://yolocountylibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/71/2021/03/Bias-Awareness-for-Interview-Panel-Members.pdf)
(yolocountylibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/71/2021/03/Bias-Awareness-for-Interview-Panel-Members.pdf)



Glossary of Terms

This glossary provides a starting point for understanding DEI terminology. It is essential to keep learning and engaging with DEI topics to foster inclusivity and equality.

For further guidance, please [visit the Equity Language Guide \(nrpa.org/siteassets/nrpa-equity-language-guide-10-21-2021.pdf\)](https://nrpa.org/siteassets/nrpa-equity-language-guide-10-21-2021.pdf).

Affinity Bias: Favoring candidates who share similar backgrounds, experiences or interests (also known as similarity bias).

Attribution Bias: Attributing a candidate's successes or failures to internal characteristics (such as intelligence or work ethic) rather than external factors (such as luck or opportunity), leading to unfair judgements.

Beauty Bias: The tendency for people to favor others who are perceived as physically attractive over those who are perceived as less attractive. This also can include judgment based on clothing and personal style.

Confirmation Bias: Seeking out information that confirms existing beliefs or stereotypes about a candidate while ignoring contradictory evidence.

Contrast Effect: Comparing candidates to each other rather than evaluating them against the job requirements, leading to inconsistent evaluations.

Halo Effect: Allowing one positive trait or impression to disproportionately influence overall impressions of the candidate. Conversely, "Horns Effect" allows one negative trait to disproportionately influence overall impressions of the candidate.

Imposter Syndrome: A persistent believe that one's success is underserved, accompanied by self doubt and fear of being exposed as a fraud. Despite evidence of competence, those with imposter syndrome attribute their achievements to luck or external factors. It affects people of all backgrounds, but it is more often experienced by women and minorities. It can cause anxiety and impact interview performance.

Name Bias: The tendency for individuals to make judgements or assumptions about a person based solely on their name. People tend to prefer names that are recognizable and/or are easy to pronounce. This can also include bias associated with pronoun usage.

Recency Bias: Interviewers may disproportionately weigh recent events or information, such as the candidate's most recent job experience, rather than considering the candidate's overall qualifications.

Stereotyping: Making assumptions about a candidate based on characteristics, such as gender, race or age. Assumptions based on stereotypes can be positive or negative, but both cases introduce unfair biases into the selection process.



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