Tips to Design and Review Internal Funding Opportunities to Reduce Bias

This report provides tips to eliminate or reduce bias in the selection process for internal funding and awards. Included is advice for designing programs and calls for proposals, structuring review committees and procedures, nominating tips, and training reviewers.

Call for Proposals or Nominations

- Designing Calls
  - Publish review criteria at the time of the call.
  - Establish key eligibility metrics for the submission.
  - Avoid biased language in the guidelines and application.
    - Example: "Nominations are open to men or women fitting these eligibility requirements."
    - Alternative: "Nominations are open to anyone meeting these eligibility requirements."
  - Only ask for relevant information from applicants/nominees (i.e., information that establishes eligibility and addresses the published review criteria).
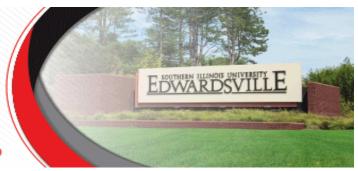
- Advertisement
  - Understand the gender differences in self-promotion and self-nomination.
    - Women and minorities may not view themselves as strong candidates for certain nominations.
    - Therefore, actively seek a diverse and inclusive applicant pool.
  - Advertise internal funding opportunities through the Graduate School in GradNews for graduate student opportunities (graduateschool@siue.edu) and ORP News (siueresearch@siue.edu).
  - Place announcements for internal funding opportunities in newspapers or other communication efforts on campus aimed specifically at under-represented groups.
  - Consider diverse faculty/student groups, associations, listservs, or mailing lists on campus applicable to the call.
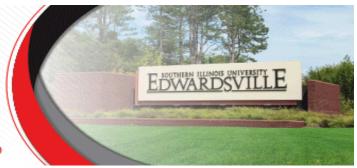   - [Community and cultural organizations on campus.](#)

- ■ Partner for Research Solutions:
  - ● Look to advertise in the platform, [Research Enabled - Funding](#) (if non-SIUE candidates are eligible).
- ■ Request names of qualified candidates from the directors of the Office of EOA or the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Institutional Diversity and Inclusion.
- ■ Consult with faculty or staff of color, women, and other under-represented groups on campus for recommendations for nominations or places to advertise calls.
  - ○ Ensure communications and materials are accessible.
    - ■ Consider if the advertisement should be translated into other languages or if accommodations need to be made (ACCESS).
      - ● Example: "Individuals with disabilities desiring accommodations in the application process should contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Access at (618) 650-2333.
    - ■ Include a diversity statement in your advertisement.
      - ● Example: "All qualified candidates are encouraged to apply, including minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and protected veterans."

- ● Establish Effective Review Criteria.
  - ○ Update scoring systems for specific awards/grants as needed.
    - ■ Periodically evaluate criteria to ensure the equity of the review process.
      - ● Asking questions like: Are you inadvertently relying on unwritten or unrecognized criteria? Are you inadvertently, but systematically, screening out women or underrepresented minorities by doing so?
  - ○ Ensure equitable scoring systems.
    - ■ The review committee members should look over evaluation criteria before looking at applications to ensure their interpretations are in alignment with other members.
    - ■ Once the criteria for evaluation is agreed upon, do not shift from these standards.
  - ○ Use holistic approaches in scoring
    - ■ Identify most to least important criteria and weigh accordingly
    - ■ If overall rankings are used, try to eliminate bias in the scoring process.
      - ● Overall rankings may be subject to strong implicit biases.
      - ● By assessing the most to least important criteria, there may be a decrease in these implicit judgements.

- If overall rankings are used, behaviorally anchored ratings with descriptive statements should be utilized.
    - Create a rubric stating specific criteria for each scoring level.
  - Only ask for relevant information from applicants/nominees.
  - If possible, use a "Double- or Single-Blind" approach.
    - Applicant and reviewer names are kept confidential to one another.
    - The review board or committee directors can anonymize the application for reviewers to focus solely on the merit of the proposal.
    - This approach has been seen to reduce reviewer bias when evaluating proposals and applications.
    - However, extra time and effort from the committee directors is needed to anonymize applications.
  - Use unbiased language and phrases when discussing each application.
  - Only discuss relevant applicant information (i.e., meeting the eligibility requirements, the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, or how the proposal aligns with the evaluative criteria).
  - Honor the confidentiality of the review discussions and processes.

- When selecting committee members, consider the final diversity of the committee:
  - Gather demographic data and use the data when selecting reviewers.
    - Incorporate a diverse composition of members representing different genders, races/ethnicities, disciplinary expertise, and career stages (faculty rank).
  - Be transparent, if possible, by publishing reviewer composition data for applicants to see.
    - This data can include the review committee member's gender, race/ethnicity, rank, or the department they reside.
  - Avoid "tokenism" when selecting committee members by finding willing reviewers with appropriate expertise.

Nominating

- When providing a nomination, consider the following factors:
  - Consider those in your sphere who fit the criteria and key eligibility metrics of the call.
  - Nominate diverse qualified candidates.
    - Provide specific, relevant examples of why they deserve this award/grant/nomination.
    - Focus on their achievements that are relevant to the call.
    - [Tips for writing a good nomination letter.](#)

- When self-nominating, consider the following factors:
  - Keep good records of all award/funding/nomination applications.
  - Assume responsibility for reviewing and understanding eligibility and program criteria.
    - Ask questions if criteria are unclear.
    - Ensure your proposal is complete, or it may result in being returned without review.
  - Ensure your submission is understandable to the review committee.
    - Consider if the reviewers will understand discipline-specific language, or jargon.
    - To make sure the reviewers know you covered all required sections, use section headings from the call.
  - Ask one or more trusted colleagues to review and provide feedback on your application materials well in advance of the application deadline.
    - Be sure to thank them.
    - Offer to review others' applications.

Reviewer Training

- Provide guidance and training for reviewers about bias and evaluation systems.
    - Distribute training materials/resources about bias in review processes to members prior to their participation on the review committee.
    - Before meetings and the review process briefly introduce how bias can affect ratings of applicants.
        - Be aware of your own biases by taking the Implicit Association Test, and encourage committee members to do so as well.
        - Require training or workshops provided by the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.
            - Online Learning Community (access to training materials through BlackBoard).
                - "Is It Bias? Making Diversity Work" workshop.
                - "Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts" workshop.
                - "Gateways to Inclusion: Turning Tense Moments into Productive Conversations" workshop.
        - Invite mentors from the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion to speak with committee members.

- Monitoring reviews
    - Watch for problems or flags in the review process.
        - Examples of flags include resistance to efforts to enhance diversity, members dominating meetings, non-participation among committee members, or incomplete applications.
    - Guidance on how to handle such flags:
        - Resistance to efforts to enhance diversity.
            - Ensure all committee members go through bias awareness training and show a commitment to upholding diversity and inclusion values.
        - When members dominate the committee meetings.
            - Establish committee ground rules for review meetings.
            - Advocate for shared decision-making and problem-solving.
            - Encourage others' participation.
        - Non-participation among members.
            - Establish clear roles and expectations of members.
            - Encourage other members to share their recommendations and comments.
        - Incomplete applications.

- Decide if an incomplete application should be dropped, or if it should be returned for applicants to provide the missing documents or information.
- Make sure that the program guidance is clear on what will happen, and follow that guidance for all applications.
- Explain the program criteria and evaluation measures.
  - Explicitly state that these are the only criteria to consider throughout the review process.
  - Explicitly state to only focus on the proposal/submission.
- Allow adequate time for committees to evaluate applicant submissions.
- Questions to guide the review process:
  - Does the applicant meet the basic eligibility requirements?
  - Does the applicant make a strong argument for the project's alignment with the goals of the program?
  - Does the applicant include all required information?
  - Other questions to consider.
- Confront biases from other reviewers.
  - If a committee member appears to have a lack of integrity in the review process, other members should notify committee directors or chairs.
  - Take responsibility to hold others accountable.
- Make sure that reviewers' comments and scores align.
- Provide constructive, summarized feedback on strengths and weaknesses to all applicants based on the reviewers' comments and discussion.
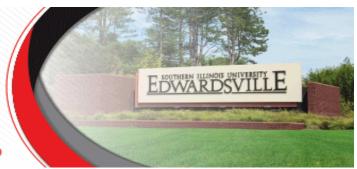
Review Process

Organizing Review Committees
- Consider whether a standing or ad hoc review committee is needed.
- Structure of Review Committee (Standing vs. Ad Hoc):
  - Standing review committees may have standardized, consistent processes and established norms. However, they may be vulnerable to long-standing biases if they do not undergo frequent bias training.
  - Ad-hoc review committees may allow for a changing diversity of perspectives that can benefit the evaluation process. However, additional training and establishment of group processes may need to be implemented.
  - Both types of committees can be effective.
    - To overcome biases in the evaluation process, regular self-assessments to determine if the members are effectively working together and achieving their established goals should be conducted.
    - Committee directors and chairs should ensure all members have completed bias training and other required training before being selected for these committees.
  - Ensure that review committees operate consistently even with virtual processes.
    - Per university guidelines, some review committees and research associates work in-person and virtually (i.e., Zoom, emails, or phone calls).
    - Allow web-access to evaluation documents and applications and schedule review meetings virtually, if necessary.
  - Avoid conflicts of interest (personal relationships).
    - Ask reviewers to disclose relationships with applicants or other potential conflicts of interest before undergoing the review process.
    - If a member of the committee cannot avoid a biased evaluation, they should recuse themselves from this review.

Final Decisions and Assessment
- Allow adequate time for decision-making.
  - Acknowledge all scores and input of reviewers before making the final decision.
  - Avoid having one, single decision maker.
- Have reviewers create a list of their top choices before group decisions.
- Factor in the weighting of criteria.
- Before the final review, briefly introduce how bias can affect ratings of applicants to ensure objectivity of reviewers.

Post-Peer Reviews
- Provide summarized constructive feedback to applicants.
- Collect data on awards/nominations for evaluation purposes.
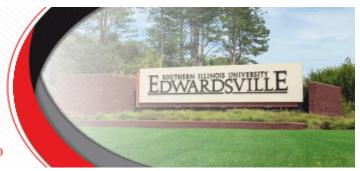- Publicly post the names of those who were awarded.

Seek feedback on the review process from committee directors or chairs
- Were processes equitable?
  - Look at the collected data from past awards/nominations.
  - Review or evaluate decisions and consider whether qualified women and underrepresented minorities are inadvertently affected or rejected.
  - Were subjective criteria measures used when making the final decision?
- Were all evaluations and input factored into the final decision?
- What went well? What did not go well?
- How could the review process be improved?

Important Contact Information for Internal Funding Reviews

- Office of Equal Opportunity and Access (618) 650-2333.
- Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (618) 650-5382.
- Office of Human Resources (618) 650-2190.
- Office of Research and Projects (618) 650-3010.

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