

Equity-Mindedness and Interrupting Bias¹

What does it mean that a process should be “Equity-Minded”²?

Being equity-minded is a theory for catalyzing sustained change that, by design, engages with socio-historical context and facilitates equity-focused inquiry aimed at moving beyond culturally conditioned assumptions allowing for evidence-based decision-making processes.

There are several principles that undergird this reflexive process:

1. Clarity in language, goals, and measures is vital to effective equitable processes.
2. “Equity-mindedness” is the guiding paradigm for language and action.
3. Equitable practices are designed with an understanding of socio-historical context (Ex. historic underrepresentation).
4. Enacting equity requires a continual process of learning, gathering and evaluating data, questioning assumptions, and making evidence-based decisions a regular practice.

What are some practical ways to be equity-minded and interrupt bias in recruitment and selection³?

BEFORE BEGINNING THE SEARCH

- Where do we want our/this department/scholarship/program/research to be in 5, 10, or 20 years?
- What new competencies, knowledge, and behavioral skills are emerging in this discipline area?
- What perspectives and experiences are we missing? How will we know if it is missing?
- How will this position contribute to our goals as a department/school/center and/or future functions?
- Do we have resources to mentor faculty members who demonstrate potential but still need experience?
- How do commitments to *valuing difference* contribute to the success in, and success of, this role?

WRITING THE JOB AD

- What qualifications must the person have to succeed in this role?
- What qualifications might enhance their success and impact?
- Are there people who could succeed in this role but who wouldn't meet our qualifications? Are there other ways of doing this work or experience sets that are transferable?
- Are we reflecting a range of interests, backgrounds, and experiences in our description of the position, school, and institution?
- Have we described the position's role, its impact, and how it contributes to the goals of the school/department?
- Have we demonstrated how valuing difference is important to the role?

WHEN RECRUITING

- What groups do we tend to miss attracting to our candidate pool, and where might we find them?
- Whom can we ask to recommend strong potential candidates interested in supporting our goals and mission through valuing difference and inclusive excellence?
- Will each search committee member contact colleagues seeking recommendations, and then personally invite those potential candidates to apply? Will all faculty in the school do this?
- Have we previously been successful in reaching colleagues and candidates from demographically diverse backgrounds this way? If not, how can/should we recruit differently?

¹ Resource – State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review, [Kirwan Institute](#)

² Adapted from USC's Rossier Center for Urban Education, <https://rossier.usc.edu>

³ Adapted from Anne Gillies, Oregon State University, for Chronicle of Higher Education

BEFORE INITIAL REVIEW OF CANDIDATES

- Does our applicant pool match the labor market availability? If not, where or how can we reach those we've missed? Should we extend our timeline?
- Have we agreed on screening criteria for each qualification?
- Have we budgeted enough time to discuss each applicant thoroughly?
- Do we require factual job-related reasons when we reject a candidate?
- Have we agreed to build the case for advancing each qualified candidate before identifying deficits?

AFTER INITIAL REVIEW OF CANDIDATES

Note: When reviewing applicant demographic characteristics from the applicant tracking system this should be done using the pre-programmed report by personnel supporting the search process that are not actively engaged in the selection. Mid process analysis requires communication from the committee to search supporters (typically in Human Resources) as to the current status of applicants.

- What facts support our decisions to include or exclude a candidate? Where might we be speculating?
- How do the demographics of our shortlist compare with our qualified pool, and with the labor market availability?
- Have we generated an interview list with more than one underrepresented finalist?
- If a high percentage of candidates underrepresented in the discipline were weeded out, do we know why? Can we reconsider our pool ensuring we've consistently and objectively applied our criteria, or extend the search and conduct additional targeted recruitment to generate qualified candidates?

How do we ensure the committee can be effective in interrupting bias?

While who is on the search committee is important, how committee members interact and work together is just as important for interrupting bias and making the selection process more effective and impactful overall, especially in emerging or interdisciplinary fields.

There are several factors that should be considered:

1. **Psychological Safety** or an individual's perception that the committee is a safe place for taking an interpersonal risk. In short they feel confident that no one will embarrass or punish anyone else for speaking up, asking difficult questions, or offering new ideas and approaches.
2. **Structure and clarity** on the expectations of the committee, its individual members, and on the process (at least in concept) for fulfilling expectations.
3. **Dependability** of committee members to reliably participate in the process and perform responsibilities.
4. **Impact** or the subjective judgement that the results of one's service or committee contributions are making a difference in the decision-making process and seeing that one's participation is contributing to the goals of the department/school/institution/field.

Understanding that psychological safety is one of the most important factors to consider for interrupting bias and encouraging engaged participation – especially when committee members are *experiencing difference* - how do we foster psychological safety⁴?

1. Model respect and honest communication.
2. Model curiosity and frame discourse as a moment for learning.
3. Model humility and acknowledge your own fallibility.

⁴ Adapted from re:Work's Tool based on the research of Amy Edmondson, <https://youtu.be/LhoLuui9gX8>