



NEOGOV

REDUCING PUBLIC SECTOR HR'S
BIAS BLINDSPOTS

2020

DIVERSITY HAS BECOME A BUZZWORD

For HR, the subject of workplace inclusivity has increasingly taken on importance, but bridging the gap between an organization's diversity mission statement and actual equity in hiring is not always cut and dry. In fact, researchers at Northwestern, Harvard, and the Institute for Social Research in Norway found in 2017 that **White candidates received more callbacks than their equally-qualified Black and Latino counterparts by 36% and 24%, respectively.** For public sector and higher education HR, it is critical that the organizations that serve our communities are an accurate reflection of them.

Facing the often uncomfortable fact that most people – including hiring committees and managers – fall victim to various forms of implicit bias is the key first step in improving diversity in workforces. Implicit bias, which refers to the frequently unconscious assumptions people make based on information like a person's name, race or ethnicity, gender, age, or home address, can unduly impact the employment prospects of minority candidates.

In our current era, we are learning every day how systemic change is needed to give all members of society a fair shot at success, especially during the hiring process.



A 2018 study from North Carolina State University's Poole College of Management found that taking steps to foster diversity made companies more innovative.



HR'S VITAL ROLE IN REDUCING BIAS FOR HIRING COMMITTEES

One way to reduce the risk of discrimination in hiring is ensuring someone from the HR team stays involved throughout the entire hiring process. HR is likely to have their finger on the pulse of where the organization is lacking or falling behind when it comes to representation, as opposed to a hiring manager who is only thinking within the scope of their hiring needs. HR acting as a go-between with the applicant and hiring committee gives the organization an opportunity to both prioritize diversity as well as prevent any biases before they inadvertently disqualify a candidate.

BLINDING THE APPLICATION PROCESS TO REDUCE BIAS

Blinding personally identifiable information (PII) is the process of stripping resumes, certifications, portfolios, or any other documents submitted during the application process of any information that could potentially impact the candidate's chances of being fairly evaluated. This helps ensure that anyone reviewing resumes or selecting candidates does so based on qualifications and not on things that have no bearing on the job, like a person's name. Only after the hiring committee has selected the best candidates based on their merits is the PII made available.

There are even more extreme measures some progressive organizations are experimenting with to level the playing field. When hiring for fellowship positions, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), a nonprofit in Arlington, Virginia decided not to ask job applicants for their name, address, college name, or graduation date on their resume. Instead, they assigned each candidate a number and referred to them that way until people were brought in for interviews.

IMPLICIT BIASES ARE PROVEN TO HURT WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

Skeptical about the importance of blinding PII? The National Bureau of Economic Research's landmark study *Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal?* found that candidates with "White-sounding" names over "Black-sounding" ones were twice as likely to get a callback. According to Harvard Business School, this has led to an uptick in minority candidates feeling compelled to change their names on their resumes.

*"Black and Asian candidates who changed their names on their resumes received a **25% and 21% increase in callbacks, respectively, for 'White-washed' resumes.**"*

HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

There isn't just racial or ethnic bias at play, either – research published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that hiring managers of both sexes were doubly as likely to hire a male candidate over a female one. All of this evidence proves that biases can come from any number of PII factors, and that they do indeed prevent minorities from moving ahead even when they are qualified for a position.

*"Minorities are at an even **greater risk for discrimination** when applying with a pro-diversity employer because you're being more transparent, but those employers have the same rate of discrimination."*

PROF. KATHERINE A. DECELLES, ROTMAN SCHOOL OF
MANAGEMENT, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



IDENTIFY WHICH PII TO OBSCURE AND WHY

While eliminating bias from the screening process may sound impossible, restricting PII can be surprisingly effective. By hiding certain signals that can be used to assume demographic or socioeconomic categorization, you can force hiring committees to focus only on relevant information about whether a candidate is a good fit for a role.

Below, we'll dive deeper into the kind of information that has little to no bearing on a candidate's qualifications, but could possibly interfere with their chances of being hired. From there, you can decide which information you need to collect for logistical purposes (e.g., contact information) but can keep hidden from others during the evaluation process.

NAME	An application containing specific types of names (e.g., that “sound White” or “sound Black”) may evoke assumptions not only about a person's ethnicity or race, but also gender and/or socioeconomic status, according to a 2017 UCLA study.
ADDRESS	This field presents an opportunity for implicit bias based on someone's presumed socioeconomic status. An address in Beverly Hills, for example, may get preferential treatment over one from a more working class neighborhood. The area someone lives can also lead to assumptions about race or ethnicity.
GENDER*	Gender statistics are important to track to keep organizations equitable, but as we've already noted, female candidates are at a disadvantage regardless of whether the hiring manager is male or female.
ETHNICITY/RACE*	This information is also critical to an organization's tracking of how diversity is reflected in their applicant and employee pools. However, similar to gender information, it can backfire if it's disclosed too early in the vetting process by creating implicit bias.
DATES OF EMPLOYMENT / EDUCATION	Ageism is another form of implicit bias that may come into play when years are used for key dates on resumes (e.g., “Ohio State University, Class of 2016” or “Payroll Administrator from 1995-1997”).
EDUCATION INSTITUTION NAME	Seeing a well-known college or university on someone's resume may encourage a reviewer to make a snap judgment about someone's qualifications, weighted more heavily than overall experience. There are also Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and all-female colleges that can be used to infer someone's race or gender. If your open position requires a certain degree, consider collecting the more anonymous information about a person's highest completed education.

**Generally obtained from optional self-reporting of the candidate, but can still present an opportunity for bias.*


HR HAS THE POWER TO

MAKE MEANINGFUL IMPACT

Deciding what information to blind, why, and how should be done judiciously, with HR taking into close consideration where the organization may need to improve in terms of representation. Best practice dictates that the blinding of name and address at minimum can help increase a minority candidate's chances of obtaining an interview. Using a talent management system that uses artificial intelligence to identify and blind PII can automate the process, which can save HR time.


Starting with this small change to how you screen potential employees is the first step in rooting out systemic discrimination at your organization. By routing only pertinent candidate information to those involved in hiring decisions, you can increase the likelihood that they'll base their judgment on experience and skill, rather than what can be gleaned from a name or neighborhood.

Besides being the right thing to do, there's another reason to celebrate diversity – studies have shown that a diverse workforce leads to more innovation that can propel the organization forward.



“Diversity jolts us into cognitive action in ways that homogeneity simply does not.”

PROF. KATHERINE PHILLIPS, COLUMBIA
BUSINESS SCHOOL



Interested in doing even more to eliminate implicit bias from the recruitment process? Contact NEOGOV to hear about our product suite that can help you by blinding applications, as well as help you analyze the diversity of your applicant and employee pools for a more equitable workforce.

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