

Promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Search Process

WittKieffer is committed to promoting the leadership representation of people from different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives and facilitating the development of equitable and inclusive workplaces, where people can thrive while bringing their full authentic selves to the achievement of organizational goals.

WittKieffer views different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives broadly and in the context of the client organization and the communities it serves. This includes but is not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and ability.

We encourage all clients to be thoughtful about diversity, equity and inclusion throughout their search processes. This document contains strategies that search committees can deploy to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in hiring. Our consultants can collaborate with you to evaluate strategies that may be best for your organization and how to implement them effectively.

Implicit Bias

The implicit biases we all possess can impact our decision making during the hiring process. During recruitment, it is useful to understand why these biases exist and common ways they manifest in our assessment and evaluation of candidates.

Our brains make fast, unconscious judgments to save time and energy. There is a lot of value this mode of processing information brings to our everyday lives. One downside is that implicit biases – from our direct or indirect experiences – can creep into our decision making and can be difficult (but not impossible) to counterbalance.

Common types of biases include:

- **Halo Bias:** where an overall impression of a person influences how we feel and think about their ability to perform the role (e.g., the person is charismatic, so they must be a good leader).
- **Primacy Bias:** where we place more emphasis on initial information about a candidate rather than equally relevant information we learn later (e.g., focusing on the school an individual attended more than their work experience).
- **Affinity Bias:** where we favor people who are like ourselves, having similar interests, backgrounds and experiences (e.g., favoring someone who worked while attending college because you did).

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- **Confirmation Bias:** where we tend to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs (e.g., assessing someone's interview performance stronger than it actually was because you expect candidates from Ivy League schools to be great in interviews).
- **Conformity Bias:** where we do something or agree with others primarily because others are doing it (e.g., you advocate to move a candidate forward in the process because the rest of the search committee members like the candidate).
- **Fundamental Attribution Error:** where we over-attribute actions to the person versus the situation in which the person functioned (e.g., we assume reference feedback about an abrupt leadership style is the individual's default style versus related to a time of crisis that their organization was experiencing).

By recognizing we all have common types of biases, we can be more intentional to bring our best decision making to the hiring process.

Search Committee Roles and Responsibilities

Those involved in the search process, whether via a formal committee or other format, have an important role to play in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion.

Consider designating a committee member to be explicitly responsible for supporting the intentional use of equitable selection strategies and keeping equity issues at the forefront of the search process. For example, this person may be responsible for letting decision makers know when implicit bias may be creeping into the evaluation of candidates.

Ask everyone to refresh their familiarity with implicit bias. WittKieffer can provide a facilitated session for those that may be newer to the topic. Or, you can leverage the following self-study materials for those already well versed:

1. Implicit Bias Overview Video - American Bar Association (n.d.). [The neuroscience of implicit bias](#) [Video, 21:11 min].
2. Implicit Association Test (IAT) on Harvard University's Project Implicit® website: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>. The site hosts 17 different IATs, so align group members with which assessments to take.

Leadership Profile

As we describe your organization, it is important to include your organization's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion and any tangible examples of that commitment (e.g., active membership with appropriate organizations, recognition for DE&I, employee resource groups).

Limit the number of required qualifications when possible. This not only helps WittKieffer identify the broadest pool of candidates but also ensures that candidates feel comfortable pursuing the position. Qualified, diverse candidates often self select out of consideration when they do not feel they meet all of the requirements for the role. Listing more preferred qualifications rather than required qualifications increases the likelihood that more women and people of color will apply.

WittKieffer will limit the use of gender-specific pronouns and other language that may covertly set an exclusionary tone in your leadership profile.

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Evaluating Candidates

Create a consistent and objective method to assess candidates. Research has shown that implicit biases can cause the use of different standards for different candidates. Having one documented standard identified in advance can help keep judgments focused on the most important criteria for success in the role. Applying those standards to search-related documents, like a leadership profile or evaluation rubric, helps decrease bias in the search process. If a search committee elects to use an evaluation rubric or scorecard to assess candidates, it is important to include a criterion for judgment of a diversity statement that may be provided by the candidate as part of the application package.

Take the time to review presented candidates in detail before making a decision to advance or eliminate them from consideration. Avoid focusing too much on one element of their background.

After interviews, best practice indicates raters should document their own impressions and ratings of candidates prior to discussing with others to combat conformity bias. Of course, following discussion, people's opinions may sway, but it is important that each individual's opinion has been captured in writing so that it is not lost in the discussion.

When discussions of multiple candidates begin, let all the viewpoints regarding each individual candidate come out before starting to compare candidates. This focuses the assessment of candidates against the requirements of the role first.

Consider using selection assessments in your process. These tools provide objective data points about candidates and are validated under the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures to ensure they do not produce adverse or disparate outcomes.

Interviews/Site Visits

Ensure you are creating a welcoming experience. You have invited candidates to your organization and, like a guest in your home, you would want your guest to feel welcome and comfortable. While you are evaluating candidates, they are evaluating you, too.

Develop interview questions in advance and be as consistent as possible for all candidates. The interview should include questions that provide insight into the candidates' knowledge and understanding of DE&I in prior roles, and their ideas for advancing DE&I in the specific role for which they are being considered. Our consultants will work with you on appropriate interview questions, as well as a rubric to evaluate the candidates' responses if you desire.