

How to reduce bias in your hiring process

Research shows that diverse teams are more creative and perform better than teams whose members think similarly. Yet many classic hiring procedures, such as personal referrals and unstructured interviews, encourage you to fill your teams with people who are more like you.



These tips can help make your hiring process less biased—and more likely to build a strong, diverse team.

1. Scrub job descriptions of biased language and requirements that discourage qualified candidates—and be explicit about your inclusion efforts.

When you post a job opening, your goal is to attract as many qualified applicants as possible. Making your job descriptions more inclusive doesn't mean lowering the bar. Instead it means widening the net to give you more opportunities to evaluate talent during the screening, interview, and test-project stages.

Follow these tips to make your job descriptions attractive to more talent:

- **Eliminate unnecessary requirements.** You don't need a diploma from a fancy university (or, in some cases, from any university) to excel in the workplace. Further, [research](#) finds that requirements that don't relate directly to the role's core work can discourage applications from certain groups—like women, even when they're as qualified as other applicants.
- **Run job description language through a bias filter.** Websites and apps such as [Textio](#) can grade your job description and point out potentially unwelcoming language. For example, they might suggest you change “dominate” (which may turn off some applicants) with the more neutral “influence.”

- **Include if a varied work environment (like remote, hybrid, part-time, or flexible hours) can be accommodated.** These increasingly common work configurations attract qualified candidates who might struggle to come to an office every day—like parents (especially single parents), people with disabilities, or those who can't live near the office.
- **Signal a culture of inclusion.** Add a statement about your team's or company's diversity mission. And mention any inclusive perks your company offers, such as childcare benefits, flexible hours, and opportunities to join diversity initiatives.

2. Find more diverse sources for qualified candidates.

Additional sourcing can help you find a broader range of candidates and tap talent pools your competition may be missing. Consider posting the job opening on your personal social media accounts and asking colleagues to do so as well to reach more diverse candidates than professional networking sites like LinkedIn. You and/or your recruiters can also try the numerous US and international job boards specifically for underrepresented people—for example, [Diversity.com](https://www.diversity.com/), [G.I. Jobs](https://www.gijobs.com/) (one of several career sites dedicated to military veterans), and [Women Who Code](https://www.womenwhocode.com/).

Meanwhile, look for diversity-minded managers at your company and work together to advocate for HR to widen its recruitment pools.

3. Put internal candidates through the same process as external candidates.

Internal candidates can be great. You may know their work, they may have valuable institutional knowledge, and they are already familiar with your organization's culture. And hiring them demonstrates to your team that people can grow within your organization.

But internal candidates can also be tricky. Many managers report feeling pressure to hire from within even when they aren't the best candidate, and some managers told us that internal candidates often get an inside track—sometimes skipping a few stages of the hiring process.

Putting internal candidates through the same process as external candidates is the best way to evaluate them and to gather evidence to justify your decision, whether you hire them or not.

4. Remove names and other identifying information on job applications and sample projects.

Names matter. To cite one of many examples, [a study](#) in the US showed that applications with Black sounding names were almost 40 percent less likely to receive a response, compared to identical resumes with White sounding names. (And the jobs Black applicants were offered often had lower salaries and less prestige than those offered to their White peers.)

People reviewing resumes might not be aware that they are unfairly dismissing candidates in this way. It's common to speed past a resume simply because a name is unfamiliar or isn't one we're conditioned to associate with the job title we're screening for.

Taking time to review resumes more deliberately can help mitigate bias. Shield yourself from names and other identifying information on application materials by asking HR to replace candidates' names with initials or identification numbers or to set the hiring software your organization uses to hide nonessential information from everyone on your evaluation team.

5. Learn how the skills and experiences of less-tapped communities may translate to your industry.

Some managers toss aside resumes from military veterans or people from the nonprofit sector or outside industries, assuming those candidates don't have the skills that are needed. But inclusive managers seek to learn more when they don't know the skill sets and experiences of unfamiliar job titles, occupations, and industries.

For example, as part of his recruiting efforts, experienced manager [Shahan Mohideen](#) targeted military veterans. Once resumes started coming in, he asked for help from a veterans' group on LinkedIn, family members who are vets, and veterans in his company. "I apologized in advance and pleaded ignorance," he explains, "and said, 'I need help reading these resumes.'" Efforts like these can help you find hidden talent that other hiring managers miss.

6. Identify the core competencies needed for the role and an evaluation standard for each.

Many managers think they know talent when they see it. And while there's something to that, you should go into an interview looking for more than a general sense of someone's ability. Most jobs have three to five core competencies—and that's where you should focus your evaluation.

To give yourself and your hiring team a shared understanding of what different levels of performance look like for the position you're hiring for—and a common standard of core competencies to evaluate candidates against—it is important to describe the behaviors people do in that role when they work at unacceptable, good, and great levels. (This will also help you create interview questions to gather that information.) You might assign a number of points for each level to help you evaluate later where someone falls on the scale.

For example, for a core competency of customer orientation, you might say:

- **Unacceptable (or 1 or 2 out of a possible 6 points):** Does the minimum to meet customers' needs and shows little interest in establishing relationships with customers.
- **Good (or 3 or 4 out of 6 points):** Seeks to establish relationships with most customers. Asks questions to understand their needs and to get to the root of their problems. Follows through on commitments to customers.
- **Great (or 5 or 6 out of 6 points):** Seeks to deeply understand every customer's perspective and priorities and anticipates customers' needs. Builds long-term customer relationships. Takes a strong personal interest in ensuring customer satisfaction.

For more, see [Determining a role's key competencies](#) and fill out our Hiring: Role Template ([PDF](#) and [doc](#)).

For a list of common competencies, browse our [sample interview questions organized by competency](#).

7. Standardize interview questions based on the position's core competencies.

Standardized interviews give you the same information from everyone—whether it’s an internal candidate you already know, someone you have a lot in common with, or someone who’s a different race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or age from you.

Before your first interview, create a list of behavioral and situational questions to ask each candidate based on the core competencies you are looking for. Behavioral questions focus on what they have done in the past: “Describe the most significant written report or presentation that you’ve completed.” Situational questions present hypothetical situations: “How would you handle a customer complaining that they had received insufficient service?” For more, see [200+ great interview questions](#).

Both types of questions are better predictors of job performance than asking candidates generic questions like, “Tell me about yourself.” Such icebreaker questions can seem innocuous, but they can open the door to bias by leading you to focus on information that may not be relevant to the job.

To maintain objectivity, stick to the same follow-up questions: “How did you approach X?” and “Can you tell me more about that?” and “What were the results?”

FranklinCovey Senior Solution Architect and Inclusion Expert

Daniel Martin shares how he challenges his gut feelings to make better hiring decisions.

8. Diversify and prep your team of interviewers.

A hastily assembled interview team is much more likely to introduce personal biases (or fail to provide healthy challenges to your thinking). To create a team less prone to bias:

- **Assess the gender, age, experience, and ethnic balance of your interview team.** Is it lopsided? Don't overlook the input of remote team members; they'll likely have a unique perspective on what the new hire needs to bring to the team in order to contribute at a high level.
- **Brief your interview team on the steps you've taken and the steps they should take to reduce bias.** Explain that practices like asking candidates the same interview questions about the position's core competencies, taking good notes, having evidence to support their opinions, and using the standard evaluation criteria and scoring systems you created can all help to go beyond surface-level impressions to make fair judgments. (You might even share this article with them.) For more, see [Handling additional interviewers](#) and use our Candidate evaluation form ([PDF](#) and [doc](#)).

9. If possible, use group interviews and test projects.

Research finds [group interviews](#) and [test projects](#) are two of the most accurate predictors of job success. They may take some effort to put together, but once you've developed a process for them, you can often use that process again.

- **Group interviews.** A group interview is when most or all of your interview team is present as a panel and the interviewers take turns asking a candidate questions from a single, predetermined list. Although a group interview requires coordination and can be stressful for interviewees (but should take less time overall), it allows the interviewers to hear the same answers at the same time, keeps interviewers attentive and accountable, and can reduce bias.
- **Test projects that simulate a potential job task.** When every candidate receives the same test, it's far easier to compare their work. And research finds that test projects are better at predicting job performance than any answer to a traditional interview question. For more on the role test projects can play in hiring, see [New manager diary: How do you pick the right candidate for the job?](#)

10. Schedule time right after interviews to fill out evaluation forms.

Even with good notes, everyone's memory of details fades quickly. If possible, build time into the schedule of the interview itself for the interview team to complete evaluation forms based on the standard you created for each core competency in No. 6. If that's not possible, ask the interview team to prioritize evaluations, preferably completing them in the same day. Also ask your team not to discuss the candidates with each other—getting each person's independent evaluation is more likely to lead a fair and more objective decision.

11. Follow the process you've put in place—not your intuition—when making your decision.

“I can't decide between these two candidates, so I'm going with my gut.” Sound familiar?

Unfortunately, this approach makes you highly vulnerable to bias. In close-call situations, it's generally best to rely on the process you've put in place to evaluate interviewees against the core competencies of the position (see No. 6). As much as we might believe that our intuitions about people are uncannily perceptive, they usually aren't as helpful as the evidence we've collected.

To make less-biased hiring decisions:

- **Use the evaluation forms as intended.** You may be tempted to ignore evaluation scores that don't line up with your inclinations (such as, “He doesn't have the highest scores, but I really like him”) or to cherry-pick data to validate a hunch.
- **Be certain any nagging concerns are backed up with evidence.** For example, if one interviewer says, “I just don't feel like they're a good culture fit,” ask them, “What leads you to believe that?” Push for specific examples. A gut feeling is simply not a valid reason.
- **Don't speculate.** If you realize you still have unanswered questions, go back to the candidate and ask. Or ask their references.
- **Make your hiring decision when you're focused and mentally sharp.** This is not an activity you want to struggle through when you're tired, hungry, or distracted. Biases are more likely to guide you when your defenses are down.

12. Don't make assumptions about candidates based on whether or how they negotiate compensation.

Some candidates who receive an offer might think, “It's my duty to myself to ask for more,” while others might think, “I'm just happy to have a job—I don't want to make my new manager angry.” There is no right or wrong, but you might be tempted to judge your candidate unfairly—especially if the candidate is a woman. Women who negotiate firmly can be seen as aggressive rather than shrewd, even when they use the same tactics as other applicants. Set aside the negotiations and concentrate on successfully onboarding your new team member.