

Scoring instructions and bias awareness handout

PCEF Committee meeting 11.24.20

After eligibility and technical review screening, each scoring panel will be assigned 10 applications to review along with a packet of instructions and information to complete the review.

The applications will be grouped by project type as much as possible. However, there will be grant type variation; e.g. a scoring panel could be assigned 10 clean energy grant applications, three large, four small and three planning grants. Each scoring panel will have one PCEF staff lead who is both a member of the scoring panel and the person responsible for collecting information, logistics, check-ins etc.

Getting started

- 1) Make a plan, you have 10 applications and around three weeks to complete your independent review. Some applications will take more time to review than others. We estimate that on average an application will take around 2-3 hours to read and score. Think about how many applications you need to get done per day to complete them all.
- 2) Log in to the application review portal, you should see a list of applications with unique identifier numbers that match those on the cover sheet for your review panel. If you see application IDs that do not match contact the staff lead for your panel.
- 3) Select an application to review, we recommend you review all of one type of grant (e.g. all planning grants, then all small grants, then all large grants).
- 4) Open the appropriate scoring table guidance document; the scoring criteria are in the review portal but it will be helpful to refer to the guidance document during your review. Note that not all criteria apply to all applications, you will only be able to provide a score for the criteria that apply to the application you are scoring.
- 5) Read through the application once without scoring, make notes in the review portal. If you make notes on paper please either enter into review portal or send a scanned image to the staff lead for your panel.
- 6) Review all attachments submitted as part of the application, make notes in the review portal
- 7) Score each relevant criterion on a scale of 0 to 4 using whole numbers, if you give a score of zero please make a note of the reason(s). Note that some of the scoring criteria are formulaic and will be entered by staff.
- 8) When you are done scoring hit the button to submit your scores.

Scoring the applications

- Each criterion can receive a score of 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4. A middle score would be 2 and a top score would be 4.

- Use only whole numbers, no partial points.
- Each of the scoring criterion has guidance describing what no points, partial points, and full points should reflect. Familiarize yourself with this guidance and make sure you are comfortable in your interpretation.
- Try not to compare applications to each other or rank them in any way. Remember, you are only seeing the 10 applications your scoring panel is reviewing. There are other scoring panels with other applications which you have no knowledge of.
- Don't be afraid of low or high scores. Sometimes we have a tendency toward the middle, really think about the scoring guidance and where the application fits.
- Review the ways to identify and interrupt bias in the bias section of this packet.

Clarifying questions: Take note of any clarifying questions you want to ask the applicant. Clarifying questions are limited to those which will not provide additional information and are purely to improve understanding of what has already been provided. For example, if an applicant wrote about a project they were a partner on to demonstrate their experience and qualifications a clarifying question might be to ask what their role was on the project if that was not clear. Asking to hear more about the project would NOT be a clarifying question. Clarifying questions will be collected from scoring panel members by the staff lead for each scoring panel, screened for appropriateness and sent to the applicant.

Bias awareness

The use of grant review panels supports PCEF's commitment to equity and transparency in a number of ways. First, having a minimum of three reviewers helps to ensure that one person's perspective does not have an undue influence on application results. Second, the review panel composition includes diversity of gender, race, and experience in order to encourage a broad set of perspectives when assessing an application. Third, all reviewers participate in a training about bias and how it may affect the application review process. This handout summarizes key information from the training about potential bias in the grant review process.

PCEF asks all reviewers to recognize the role that bias can play in application reviews and consider how their biases may influence their application reviews. This handout has been adapted from the City of Portland Bureau of Human Resources' Bias Awareness Training for Interview Panel Members and Portland Children's Levy Bias Awareness training materials.

What is Bias?

To begin, it's essential to understand what bias is and recognize that we all have biases. Bias can be positive or negative – for example, you may be predisposed to think favorably about someone based on where they went to school (positive bias) or unfavorably about someone based on their accent (negative bias). Biases are a natural result of the way our brains work to

quickly process information in the moment. Being aware that we all have biases is an important first step to recognizing what those biases are and attending to their potential impacts.

Biases may be explicit or implicit. By definition, **implicit biases** are those we carry without awareness (also called unconscious bias). Most of the work our brain does occurs on the unconscious level. These biases are tricky because we literally are not conscious of them. An example of an unconscious bias might be an assumption that the head of the company or doctor is a male. In this case, you might believe that women can hold this position, but your default thinking is male. In contrast, **explicit biases** are those we are aware that we hold, though we may not be aware of that they are a bias. An example of an explicit bias could be a belief that credentials demonstrate competency or that looking someone in the eye shows character. In this case, your conscious belief about something biases your interactions.

Examples of Bias in Grant Reviews

There are a number of ways that bias can show up when reviewing grants. Some of the most relevant to the PCEF grant review are below.

- **Writing skills** – A common bias is to assume that the quality of someone’s writing is reflective of their intelligence or competence. However, someone for whom English is a second language may be less proficient with grammar and spelling yet perfectly qualified to do the work proposed, while the opposite might be true for someone with high English proficiency (especially if the author was a hired grant writer). Related to the use of language are potential biases regarding the use of certain words. For example, what assumptions might you make about the writer when they use, or fail to use, certain words (e.g., Latinx or gender-neutral pronouns).
- **Belief in the “right” way to do something** – Your experience might lead you to believe that the way you do things or were instructed is the “right” way. Yet, there may be other ways that are valid, particularly in different cultural settings.
- **Assumptions about capacity** – Assumptions based on the size or demographic characteristics of an organization about their capacity to do the work. This could include, for example, thinking certain populations are skilled in particular areas such as construction or engineering, or that small organizations don’t have the ability to execute large projects.
- **Assumptions about non-profits** – It’s not uncommon for people to have an image of nonprofit organizations as scrappy, low budget operations and/or that they are not as competent as for-profit organizations. This may create an expectation that wages should be low, budgets should be small, and capacity or ability is weak.
- **Overvaluing some characteristics** – A reviewer may favor an applicant due to their performance on one or more “good” or “positive” traits or characteristics, sometimes despite several negatives (halo effect). Alternatively, the reviewer may allow one or a few

negative traits or characteristics to outweigh the positive (horn effect).

- **Familiarity** – A reviewer that has knowledge of an applicant organization or program may be influenced by this familiarity, allowing what they know (or think they know) to influence scoring positively or negatively.
- **Similarity** – When an applicant shares characteristics that the reviewer identifies with this can lead to assumptions about abilities that may not be accurate.
- **Letters of Support** – Applicants may include letters of support or agreement but that is not a requirement. As you review proposals, keep in mind a potential bias of favoring applicants that have submitted letters of support or partnership.
- **Comparing and contrasting** – This occurs when the reviewer compares or contrasts one applicant against another rather than comparing applicants against the stated criteria.
- **Scoring** – This can occur when a reviewer tends to be overly lenient (too generous with scores), critical (too restrictive with scores), or neutral (mostly lands in the middle).
- **Recency** – A bias toward the applicant whose proposal you read most recently because it is the freshest in memory.
- **Confusion about equity** – Equity is achieved when outcomes are not predicted by identity or zip code. Equity is about fairness. This is different from equality, which refers to sameness. For example, when serving up a holiday pie an equity lens might serve portions differently to a two-year old vs a college athlete while an equality lens might think everyone should get the same portion. When centering equity, it is important to consider how scoring might be affected by what we think that means or we think it should be achieved.

Mitigating Bias in Grant Reviews

Being aware of our biases – whether implicit or explicit, positive or negative – is key to making the review process as fair as possible. Your contribution is so important. As you review applications consider potential biases, learn to recognize your biases, adhere to the scoring rubric, take notes along the way to help foreground assumptions and mitigate bias, and use every opportunity to consider your reasons for a particular score and challenge your thinking.

In addition, as you begin and conclude each application review, please review the following:

- **Slow down** – Biases are shortcuts our brain developed to save time. One of the best ways to interrupt bias is to slow down and aim to consciously surface the assumptions or norms that may be impacting your evaluation.
- **Best practice** – When considering best practice, are you trusting organizations that are representative of their communities to know how to engage with their communities and do their work even if it's different from your idea of best practice?

- **Writing skill** – Are you scoring an applicant lower or higher based on their writing ability?
- **Capacity, competence, and cost** – Are you considering an applicant more or less qualified based on the size or demographic characteristics of their organization, your familiarity with the organization, or their similarity to you? Have your assumptions about non-profits affected your views about what the applicant can or can't do or what the budget should be?
- **Neutrality** – Have you accurately and consistently applied the scoring rubric to all applications? Have you favored or disfavored some applicants because of their performance on one or more trait or characteristic? Has your familiarity with an applicant (individual or organization) positively or negatively influenced my scoring? Have you been comparing one applicant to another?
- **Scoring** – Has your scoring been overly lenient (too generous or easy), critical (too restrictive or harsh), or neutral (mostly lands in the middle). Did your scoring change with time or are you confident that a "3" provided to the first applications is equivalent to a "3" given to later applications?
- **Clarifying questions** – Are you asking clarifying questions of one applicant that you are not asking of similar applications? Are you asking an applicant to prove something that you're not asking others?
- **Second look** – Once you have scored all the applications give them a fresh eye to consider whether you may have changed your scoring tendencies over time (e.g., gotten more generous or strict with your scoring) or treated some applications differently.