5 SOURCES OF BIAS IN YOUR
GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

We carry our biases with us wherever we go.

We can't help it. They come from how we're raised, what we learn in various social settings, and our experiences in work and society broadly. Then they're internalized, and it's hard to fully eliminate them even when we're conscious of them.

The danger for bias in the grant application process is similar to any type of bias: that people are treated unfairly because of prejudice, stereotyping, generalizations, or assumptions. In the grants space, it could mean that certain grantees' applications might be judged unjustly or not on the correct parameters.

Why is that bad? A biased application process isn't just intrinsically inequitable, it could result in certain communities not getting the resources they deserve and need from foundations as well as an overall decrease in impact for grantmakers. In other words, bias reduces the quality of our collective work in the grants field.

While it's nearly impossible to completely eliminate bias, what we *can* do is be educated and aware of bias and build grant application processes that address it thoroughly. That's what we hope to do with this infographic: offer some challenging biases that are inherent to almost every grant review process (in other words, you are not alone) and pitch some solutions your way.

From issues around the size of funding requests and reviewer conflicts to gender and race bias, savvy grantmakers can better understand how these behaviors will affect their review processes and make adjustments to minimize their impact.
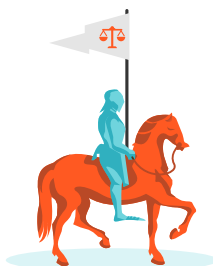
Battling Bias

A Visual Guide to Bias in Your Grant Review Process

While some are harder to address than others, tackling sources of bias starts with being aware and proactive, coming up with solutions before they become problems.
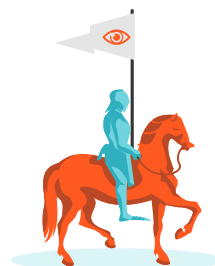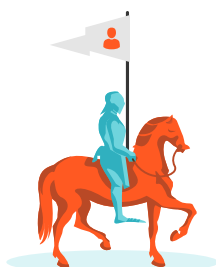
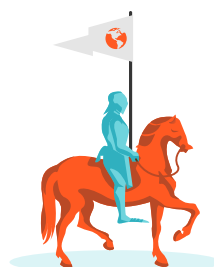## The 5 Horsemen of Grant Review Bias
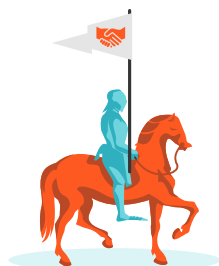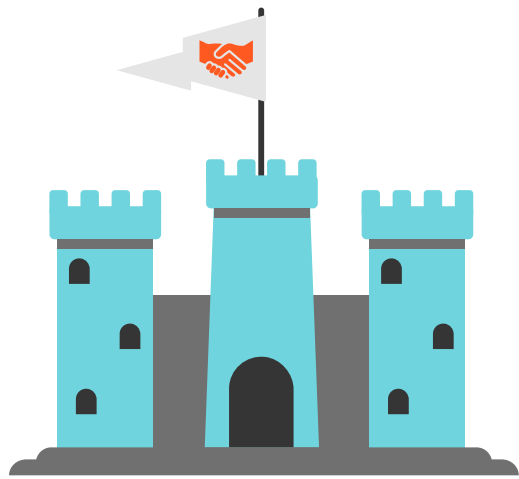
Affiliation Bias

Conflict of Interest Bias
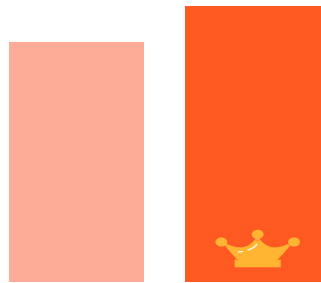
Structural Bias

Gender & Sexuality Bias

Race & Ethnicity Bias

Affiliation Bias

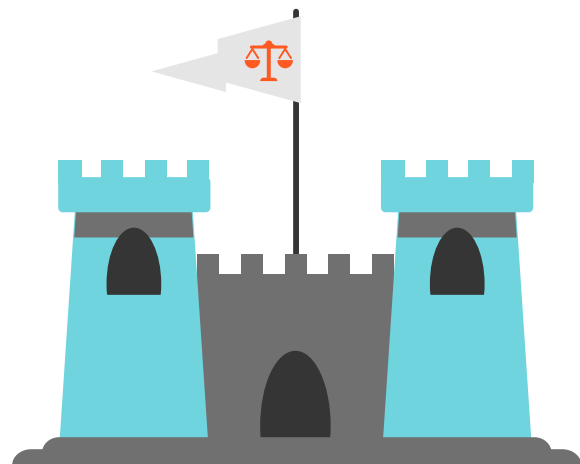Reviewers tend to favor top-ranked institutions (and the individuals from them) at rates **up to 15% higher.**

Conflict of Interest Bias

Applications are **4X more likely** to receive a high score when connected with the reviewer.

Structural Bias
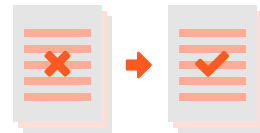
The **vast majority** of first-time grantseekers now resubmit before being funded.

15%

85%

1989

30%

70%

2019

● **received funding upon first submission**

● **resubmitted before receiving funding**

Gender & Sexuality Bias

Women are **30% less likely** to be funded compared to men.

% successful

40

30

20

10

0

2014-15   2015-16

Stage 1
calibre of research

2014-15   2015-16

Stages 2 and 3
quality of research
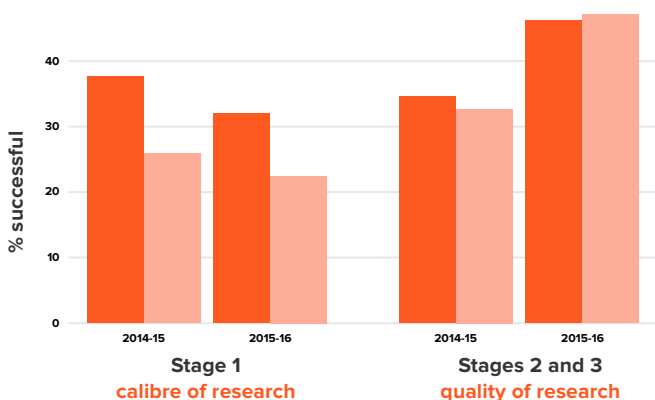
● **Male**

● **Female**
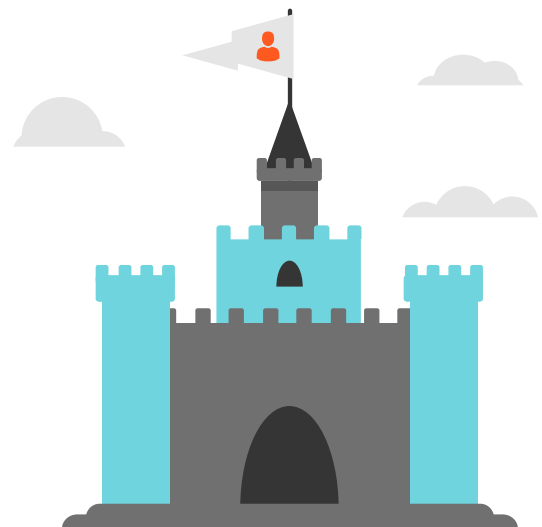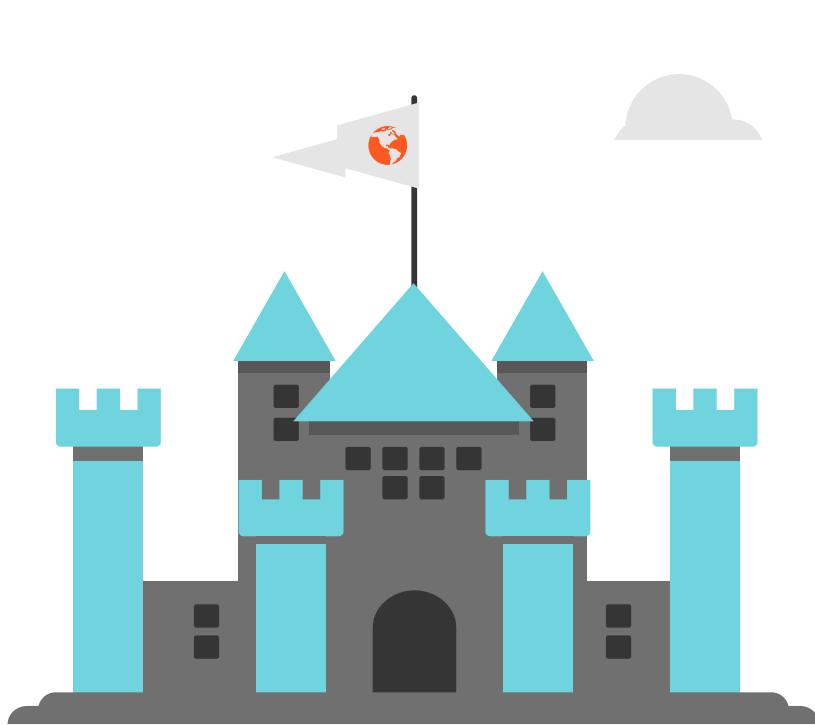
Race & Ethnicity Bias

Research shows that black and African-American applicants receive awards at a rate of **up to 13 points less** than other races.

source:
https://ucd-advance.ucdavis.edu/sites/main/files/file-attachments/bisson_advance_roundtable_presentation.pdf

% Award Probability

| | Black or African American | Asian | Hispanic | White | Full Sample |

How to Improve
the Peer Review Process

There's a great deal that grantmakers can do to improve the grant review process. From addressing implicit bias at the individual level and insisting on a blind review process to improving data collection and making better use of available grant submission software tools (like Submittable), grantmakers have tools to battle bias—and win.
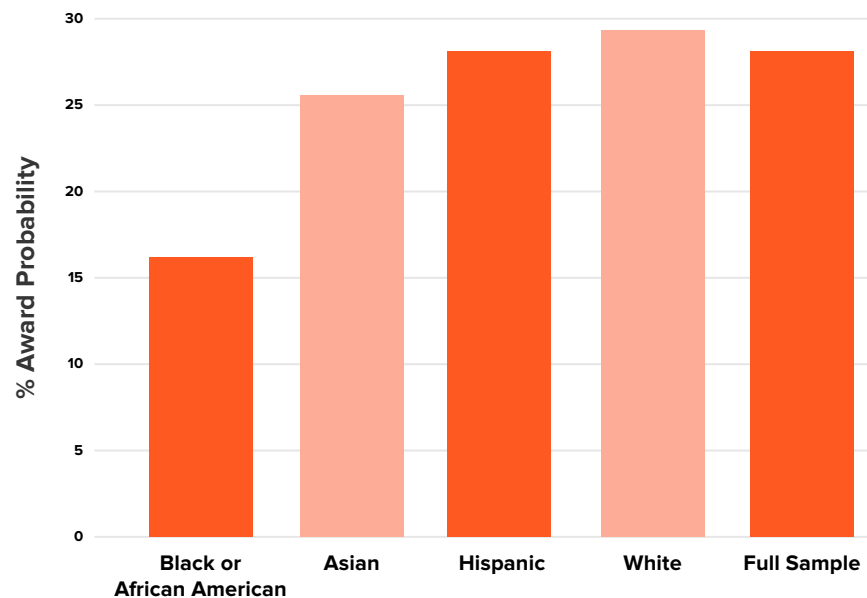
Implement an anonymous review process
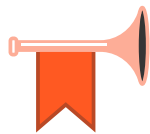
Consider an open review process

Collect data to measure possible bias

Use data tools to analyze bias

Take action to address bias at the individual level

Offer training and mentorship to reviewers

If you're not careful with how you structure your grant review process, you could inadvertently skew the results, which in turn can skew your mission. Build against bias, or else continue forward knowing that your grants management system is not selecting the best grants for your organization.

EXAMPLES OF BIAS DURING THE APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

Digging in a bit deeper, some of the examples of bias in review processes are quite telling.

In 2017, Google and Tsinghua University ran a study that showed single- and double-masked reviewer resulted in a better allocation of papers to qualified reviewers, while review that included the names of researchers and institution showed a clear bias toward already-established researchers and famous institutions.

Other studies in Switzerland and Canada showed reviewers favoring applicants with whom they have some sort of connection. In the Swiss study, reviewers were four times more likely to give candidates a higher score when they had been nominated by the applicant to serve as a reviewer.

A 2010 study from Georgia State University demonstrated bias against new science investigators applying for grants instead favoring applicants that had resubmitted their proposals. This study showed evidence of a thirty-year evolution in which the grant review process became arbitrarily weighted against newer applicants.

Another study out of Canada's Institutes of Health Research showed that women had a 30% lower chance of getting their project grant funded when gender was considered as part of the grant application. Gender bias is still very real and needs to be accounted for in every grant review process, each step along the way.

ELIMINATING BIAS FROM YOUR GRANT REVIEW PROCESS

If internalized biases permeate everything we think and do, how can we possibly make a grant review process that is fair and equitable? The answer largely lies in implementing a combination of education and technology.

- **An anonymous review process** can fight against all five types of bias—and making both the reviewer and the reviewed anonymous can go even further to make certain the best grants win.
- On the other hand, an **open review process** that discloses more information to the authors, reviewers, organizations, and even greater community can add transparency to the process—and transparency is a wonderful tool in the fight against discrimination.
- **Collecting and analyzing data** related to your grants process can also stamp out bias. If you discover you're not often choosing grants that would impact certain neighborhoods, or that you're not funding women—you have a specific type of problem that you can fight against and correct for.
- **Address bias on the individual level** so that everyone on your team is on the same page. In most cases, bias and discrimination are unconscious, and specific members of your review team can hold specific biases. Individual training can help amend these issues, while choosing a diverse group of reviewers in the first place can also reduce bias.
- **Offering training and mentorship to your team** can stop bias before it starts. Besides using technical tools to prevent bias from ever entering the picture, education and awareness are perhaps the two most important aspects of solving the issue throughout your grants review process. When people are made aware of their own biases, they can correct for them more easily.

Putting these strategies into practice, grantmakers can begin to develop an unbiased review process that ensures as much fairness for all applicants as possible. With a grant application review tool like Submittable, building a review process with greatly reduced bias is made simple.

Learn even more about reducing bias in the grants space with our **Tactical Guide To Reducing Bias In Your Grant Application Review Process**.

Submittable

submittable.com | (855) 467-8264