

Avoiding Implicit Bias: Guidelines for ASA Selection of ASA Appointees, Award Recipients, and Nominees for Offices

(Note: This document was originally approved by the ASA Board of Directors in November 2011 and was updated November 2018. It is closely based on a similar document developed by the Mathematical Association of America. The ASA acknowledges and thanks the MAA for allowing its use.)

The ASA gives awards to recognize excellence in teaching, research, and service. We choose speakers for meetings who are excellent expositors. We nominate for election leaders who are knowledgeable, effective professionals. Those selected are regarded as role models, so it is important that the selection process recognize a diverse group that reflects the breadth of the Association membership and of the profession. Diversity in recognition gives visible evidence of the Association's commitment to equity. While selection committees strive for fairness in making selections based on established criteria, studies have shown that unconscious, unintentional assumptions can sometimes influence judgment -- a phenomenon known as *implicit bias*. For instance, data gathered across many professional societies show that women do not receive recognition at a rate commensurate with their numbers in the profession. While the reasons are unclear and deserve further study, implicit bias may be one possible factor. The following guidelines may help selection committees avoid implicit bias.

Composing committees and cultivating nominees

- **Appoint diverse selection committees and committee chairs.** Everyone is expected to advocate for diversity in appointments. Diverse committees provide access to a wider set of networks from which to cultivate nominations and suggestions, and several recent studies have shown that more diverse groups with a greater breadth of perspectives make better decisions. Committee members and chairs from underrepresented groups may cushion against unintentional stereotyping.
- **Generate a large and diverse pool of nominees.** Selections are based on established criteria, so this step is crucial to ensuring that the pool of nominees contains as many eligible candidates as possible (especially those whose work is outstanding but less well-known). Where the list of possible nominees is not constrained to a relatively small group (as in a set of articles appearing in a specified journal), selection committees should continue to invite nominations with notification of their deliberations in *Amstat News*, in ASA e-news, on the ASA website, and in other appropriate places. Increasing awareness among all ASA members has the side benefit of increasing interest and making the selection process more transparent and inclusive.
- **Publicize among underrepresented groups.** When appropriate, encourage such groups to make nominations (e.g., COWIS, the Committee on Minorities, SACNAS, as well as institutions that are exemplary in their support of women and minorities).
- **Periodically review and discuss practices for building a pool of nominees.** Examine lists of nominees, short-lists of nominees, and winners of awards for historical patterns with an eye towards gender or other under-represented groups.
- **Periodically review the description and guidelines.** Attention should be paid to the language used to describe the award (e.g., are the words used associated more often with males than females?) as well as restrictions that could disproportionately affect certain groups (e.g., do age limits affect women who take time off to raise a family?). For suggested changes, make recommendations to the executive director, who will forward them to the appropriate committee council.

Selecting recipients

- **Discuss the process and criteria that will be used to evaluate nominees *before reviewing nominations*.** Develop a rubric that matches published criteria before reviewing any dossiers. Research has shown that *implicit bias* can enter via unintentional "criteria-shifting" after nominees are discussed.
- **Consider including those whose qualifications are strong but whose work may be less widely known.** If prestige is considered important, it should be included in the prioritized list of criteria. If a letter of recommendation from an eminent scholar or leader will be given more consideration than a letter from a less well-known society member, nominators should be informed of this.
- **Look for hidden gems.** Pay special attention to suggestions from atypical sources. Some nominators have lots of experience and are pros at writing letters of recommendation; others are not. Take the time to look carefully at every nomination.
- **Make a personal list of top nominees *before hearing the recommendations of any other members*.** This avoids the undue influence of one member and ensures that the list of viable nominees is as large as possible before discussion begins.
- **Create short lists via *inclusive* rather than exclusive methods.** For instance, select candidates that are outstanding, rather than finding reasons to eliminate candidates from consideration.
- **Ensure that every committee member's voice is heard.** Do not let any committee members remain silent.
- **Take adequate time to decide.** Research has shown implicit bias is mitigated when committees have time for thoughtful reflection and discussion, instead of making snap judgments.
- **Avoid potential conflicts of interest.** Often candidates are so well-known that associations with selection committee members are unavoidable. In all discussions, committee members should make clear any connection they may have with a person under consideration and come to a decision that is agreeable with other committee members with respect to their participation in further discussions.