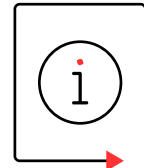# PREREVIEW

OPEN GRANT REVIEWERS

BIAS REFLECTION GUIDE

WHAT IS IT AND WHO IS IT FOR?

This Bias Reflection Guide is a tool for anyone tasked with evaluating the quality and fit of a grant proposal, either as an internal or external reviewer.

From here on, we will refer to **"you"**, as the reviewer and reader of this guide.

Regardless of who you are, we want you to recognize that as a reviewer of someone else's grant application, you have the power to influence how the funder views the relative and absolute merits of the proposal, to provide feedback that refines the proposal, and – at least in part – to influence whether the project receives funding. With this power comes the responsibility of identifying, acknowledging, and fighting biases and assumptions you may bring to the process.

This guide is meant to help you think deeply about the ways assumptions, beliefs or biases may be affecting your assessment of applications you accept to review. It is NOT intended to pinpoint the precise assumptions or beliefs that you may hold; instead, it is meant to provoke some reflection and set your mind on the primary goal of reviewing: *Provide objective and constructive feedback to the applicants to improve the quality of the grant proposal and the projects themselves*.

This work is adapted from the **Open Reviewers Bias Reflection Guide** (*Foster et al., 2021*), a tool for anyone who is reviewing a research manuscript before or after its publication. It contains elements and strategies from the interventions and primers of the Open & Equitable Model Funding Program, as well as grant review resources and materials openly available.

HOW SHOULD YOU USE IT?

We recommend reading through this document at least once before you receive a grant application to review or, if you already accepted and received it before you read it for the first time. Then you can read it again once your review is complete

Start by reading through the "Common Biases and Assumptions in Grant Peer Review" section. While you read through those statements, think about how the content and their implications may or may not impact how you select and/or review a manuscript. Let your thoughts wander a bit outside of the strict meaning of the statements and notice where your mind brings you during this exercise. Take time to reflect on these statements and take notes if you can. Reflection means simply observing your thoughts without judgment.

If you suspect these statements and ideas affect your review process of the manuscript, know that you are not alone! These are common ideas and sentiments that we hold in many situations and spaces, including science.

Once you have read and taken the time to reflect upon these statements, move onto reading the "Guided Reflection" section.
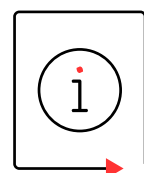
Reflection means simply observing your thoughts without judgment.

COMMON BIASES AND **ASSUMPTIONS** IN GRANT PEER REVIEW

Below you will find some of the most common biases in the grant review process. As you read them, we invite you to reflect on how these statements influence your criteria when evaluating an application.
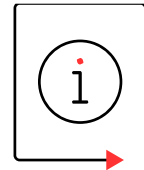
1 Knowing the applicant's gender leads me to feel more critical in my review of the proposal.

2 Knowing the applicant's ethnicity, and/or country of origin leads me to question the accuracy and reliability of their work and therefore, be more critical in my review of the proposal.

3 The respected reputation of the applicant's home research/work institution helps me feel confident in the quality of the proposal.

4 The country in which the applicant's research/work institution is located makes me feel confident in the quality of the proposal.

5 As a respected leader in the field, the applicant's reputation helps me feel confident in the quality of the proposal.

6 The low number of participants in a proposal indicates a low level of collaboration. This leads me not to trust the quality of the proposal.

7 The applicant is at a senior stage of their career and therefore is likely to be very experienced. Knowing this helps me feel more confident in the quality of the proposal.[1]

8 The applicant is at an early stage of their career and less likely to be dedicated to traditional methods and practices. This instills mistrust in the approach and quality of the proposal.

9 The applicant's writing style is dissimilar to my understanding of professional writing or how a proposal should be written. This leads me to feel less confident in the quality of the project.

10 Finding several grammatical errors in the proposal makes me question the quality and feasibility of the project.

[1] IMPORTANT NOTE: There are circumstances where, depending on the program and its objectives, the amount of experience in a field may not be determinant to the success of a research project, for example, when the field itself is new. We recommend always reading the program's goals and objectives to identify if this is the case, or get in touch with the program staff if necessary, to clarify.

GUIDED REFLECTION:
THE IDEA-R2 METHOD

While reading through the statements in the "Common Biases and Assumptions in Grant Peer Review" section, you may have thought that some ideas sound very familiar, while others not at all. The first step is to identify how our own biases and assumptions may interfere with an objective evaluation of the manuscript. Once these are identified, we can begin the work needed to alleviate their implications and eventually eliminate them altogether.

To help with this process, we created what we call *IDEA-R2 (IDentify, Evaluate, Add, Reverse, Rephrase)* 2, a method to help you think critically about the biases and assumptions that you may have identified as familiar while reading the statements above.
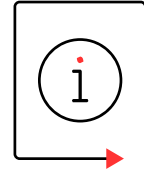
The first step is to **identify** how our own biases and assumptions may interfere with an objective evaluation of the manuscript.

IDEA-R2

IDentify/**E**valuate   **A**dd   **R**everse   **R**ephrase
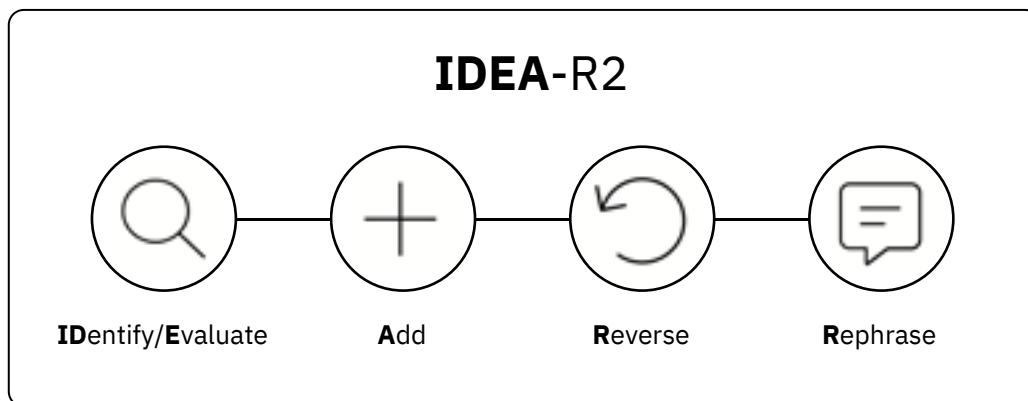
Start by reviewing the biases and assumptions that resonated with you in the previous section. For each of them, take the following next steps:

One by one, *identify* why you or someone else may have this bias or make this assumption, and *evaluate* whether these conclusions are backed up by a logical rationale.

Then *add* "absolute" words in your statement (e.g., "never", "always", or "guaranteed"). How confident are you in the rationale behind those conclusions now that they contain these absolute words?

Now *reverse* your thoughts and see if these new thoughts sit well with you, or are more logical or overall more accurate.

Finally, *rephrase* the statement to be more inclusive of new considerations you may have thought about during this self-reflection.

2 From Foster, A., Hindle, S., Murphy, K. M., Saderi, D. (2021). Open Reviewers Bias Reflection Guide. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5484052 - PREreview (CC-BY 4.0)

Here is an example of what this may look like:

Statement: *The applicant's country of origin is from a region known for having a lot of background and experience in the field of interest of the program. Knowing this helps me feel more confident that the anticipated results and impact of the proposal are viable*
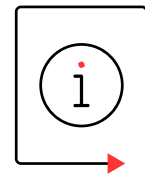
Identify: Why does the applicant's country of origin lead me to believe that the anticipated results and impact of the proposal are viable?

I know this applicant's country of origin is renowned in my field and has been acknowledged by the community for a long time, so I think they typically produce quality work.

Evaluate: Is this logical? Is there a rationale that supports the notion that country of origin translates into "this work is trustworthy"?

A country with a long history and leadership in the development and implementation of projects and analyses over several years, having gained the "respect" of the global community may be an indicator of future success. The likelihood that this specific proposal is likely to generate novel and/or impactful outcomes.

Add: Is this always true? Let's place "always", "guarantee", or "never" into the statement:

Does the applicant's country of origin always mean or guarantee that the anticipated results and impact of the proposal are realistic and achievable? Does the applicant's individual experience is co-related to the reputation of their country of origin or that aspects of their application could never be questioned?

Reverse: Are there situations I can think of where not knowing the applicant's country of origin would influence the quality of this proposal?

There are many factors that could influence a proposal's revision. For example, when the applicant is from the same region or country of origin as the reviewer, it could be a tendency to provoke certain empathy, before revising the application in depth. If you did not know the country of origin from the applicants' or the applicant's home research/work institution, would you still feel the same with your review?

Rephrase: Take what I have learned and rephrase.

Although the applicant's country of origin's reputation and experience in the field may correlate with their ability to execute this proposal, it is not something I can take for granted. I should remember that experience and reputation of a community or country do not necessarily mean that I can make assumptions about the proposal's quality and that the individual experience of the applicants in the field of the matter could be a more significant aspect to consider in the assessment.

Repeat this process!

Bias and assumptions are ingrained, so you should walk through this process every time you notice these thoughts.

You can use the next template paragraph to identify additional potential biases during your review process:

> The applicant/organization is _____insert applicant's/organization's characteristic_____ and therefore is likely to be _____insert the potential bias_____. Knowing this helps me feel more confident that the objectives and expected outputs of the proposal are viable/ will have more impact.

This guide is only a piece of a toolkit to help grant reviewers in their grant review process, being the first of a series of six steps. We recommend you to fully read the Open Grant Reviewers Guide to follow the next steps, and to use the "Writing a grant review-print out" template to structure and compose your grant review in depth.
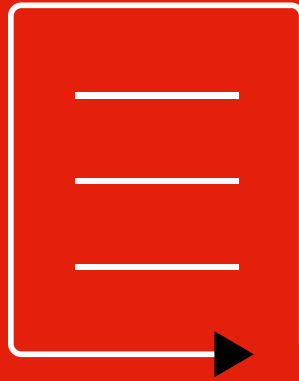
PRE REVIEW

REFERENCES

Foster, A., Hindle, S., Murphy, K. M., Saderi, D. (2021). Open Reviewers Reviewer Guide. *Zenodo*. **https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5484087**
Foster, A., Hindle, S., Murphy, K. M., Saderi, D. (2021). Open Reviewers Review Assessment Rubric. *Zenodo*. **https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5484072**

A NOTE FOR THE READER

Do you have constructive feedback on this tool? Do you want to talk about your experience using/reading through it? Do you have suggestions on how to improve it? We want to hear it all and engage the community in content creation! So please, if you have the time, consider emailing us at **community@prereview.org.** Thank you so much!

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

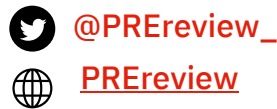## CITE THIS WORK AS

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Find out more about the **Open Grant Reviewers** program. **#OpenReviewers**

PREreview is a fiscally sponsored project of **Code for Science and Society.**

🐦 **@PREreview_**

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CATALYZING CHANGE IN PEER REVIEW THROUGH EQUITY, OPENNESS, AND COLLABORATION