

Mitigating Unconscious Bias

SMALL GROUP FACILITATOR GUIDE



Air Force Diversity and Inclusion Division (AF/A1DV)

FACILITATOR TEACHING STRATEGY

Time: 60 minute minimum (not restricted); if feasible, it is encouraged additional time is programmed to consider group size and maximum participation and to ensure the dialogue reaches a sense of closure.

Facilitation Method: Video/Guided Discussion

Required Support Material: Air Force “*Neurons & Narratives*” Video

Objective: The intent of this discussion is to expand the participants existing knowledge of unconscious bias and encourage use of strategies to decrease susceptibility to its impact.

Prior to facilitating this discussion, ensure you review this guide in its entirety; all material identified in “Required Support Material” and the sequence of events highlighted below.

Pay particular attention to the following areas:

- 1 – Areas identified as “**Say**” can be paraphrased or read verbatim.
- 2 – Discussion questions can be read and/or paraphrased to fit the requirements of the group.

Guided Discussion Sequence of Events:

*Ideal group size is between 12-15 participants.

Part I, Introduction. This 10-minute discussion is intended to foster an environment where all participants feel accepted, respected, and free to share their beliefs without fear of negative consequences. All participants should be encouraged to participate. Facilitators are responsible for managing pace/length of introductions to remain within the prescribed time window.

Part II, *Neurons and Narratives* Video (18-minutes). This block is intended to level set participant knowledge for the upcoming discussion. Facilitators are encouraged to watch the video more than once prior to delivering the guided discussion. This enables facilitators to gain a deeper understanding and be prepared to answer participants’ questions.

Part III, Group Discussion. This discussion segment explores how participants have experienced bias and how they’ve been biased to others. If necessary, facilitators may re-phrase questions to foster productive conversation. Facilitators should ensure that the discussion remains on topic. As you facilitate this discussion, you may use additional questions to help connect the conversation to concepts presented in the video. Your questions should be geared to help align the dialogue to the provided anticipated responses.

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Facilitator Note: For virtual delivery environments, recommend conducting a systems check with all participants (i.e. mic and video) prior to initiating session. Consider establishing rules of engagement for virtual environment. (Participants mute mic when they are not speaking to reduce feedback, requesting participants’ utilization of “raise hand” feature, etc.)

PART I: INTRODUCTION (10 Minutes)

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

1. Inform group that you request an introduction consisting of them sharing something unique about themselves that no one may know.
2. Provide participants about 2 minutes to organize thoughts.
3. After 2 minutes, facilitators will lead off with conducting a brief introduction.
NOTE: *Set pace for other participants by ensuring introduction is no more than 30 seconds. Introductions should include: Name/Rank, Duty Title/Section, and something unique about yourself.*
4. Then proceed with allowing all participants to introduce themselves to the group.

SAY: *Thanks for taking a moment to allow all of us to get more familiar with one another. Now let’s take a moment to view an 18-minute presentation regarding unconscious bias. Many of the key points may surface in our follow-up discussion, and I encourage you all to think about how these concepts impact you and your relationships with others.*

PART II: Neurons and Narratives Video (20 Minutes)



Play video, *Neurons and Narratives*

SAY: *The previous video offers some great insight regarding how unconscious bias manifests when interacting with people. In addition, we all understand that we have an opportunity to mitigate, which is to reduce, the harmful effects of unconscious bias. Now, let’s take a moment to discuss your thoughts and explore your experiences with unconscious bias.*

PART III: Group Discussion (30 Minutes)



ACTIVITY

SAY: *As we engage in this discussion, I want to encourage you all to participate in the discussion. Please remain open and respectful of one another as people share their experiences.*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Facilitator Note: Examples have been provided to help break silence and spark conversation.

ANTICIPATED RESPONSES

ASK (3 Minutes): What other rules of engagement should we establish as we proceed with the discussion?

Responses will vary upon experiences of participants

Example: “We need to be open to discussing topics of race and racism.” Or “We need to strive to share the air time and not dominate the discussion.”

ASK (7 Minutes): What biases have you experienced and how have they affected you?

Responses will vary upon experiences of participants

Example: “As a woman, I have noticed that when I offer comments or ideas, they are often ignored. However, when a male team member makes the same statement a few moments later, I notice that others are much more receptive.”

SAY: *As we saw in the video, no one is immune to bias; however, there are strategies that we can leverage to mitigate its negative effects. The first step requires us to “Acknowledge” we all have biases.*

ASK (5 Minutes): So why may acknowledging we have bias be difficult?

Example: “For me, believing that bias is “bad” causes me to want to deny or self-justify my position - rather than trying to understand what might be occurring.”

- We may perceive that having bias is bad versus a human condition
- May believe that “good” people are unbiased and immune to it

SAY: *Often we notice in different situations, such as training courses or holiday parties, that we may often seek out others who we feel comfortable with and/or who are “like us”. One way to help us explore diversity is to engage with others we may not know very well.*

ASK (5 Minutes): How might engaging with others who are different than us help in reducing unconscious bias?

Example: “Before joining the military, I did not get outside of my hometown very often. And in my hometown, many people looked just like me. However, my first assignment was overseas in Japan. This experience really challenged the stereotypes I had of others who did not originate from the U.S. and helped me gain a deeper understanding of other cultures.”

- Provides us access to new information sources
- Creates opportunities to form new personal and professional relationships, thus discovering how much we have in common with others

SAY: Open, honest feedback is a key to help us become aware of our biases so we can continue to learn and grow as professional Airmen. With this in mind, let’s consider how creating a “safe space” helps us work together to become more inclusive.

ASK (5 Minutes): How can we create a “safe space” to help foster an understanding of our biases so we can do something about them?

Example: “I have to really pay attention to what’s happening. And seek to understand others while withholding my interpretations and judgments.”

- Actively listen and exercise emotional intelligence
- Be vulnerable and admit our lack of knowledge
- Show empathy and support for each other

ASK (5 Minutes): How does taking action to address our biases impact mission effectiveness and readiness?

Example: “If people feel included and valued, they’ll stay with us and not separate.”

“We value different ideas and don’t fall victim to groupthink.”

- We create an inclusive environment where all members are able to make their fullest contribution to the success of the group, and where there are no unnecessary barriers to success

- Our actions and behaviors help establish the organizational culture.

SAY: *As we close, I want to thank each of you for being supportive in this learning experience. This was a necessary and important conversation. As you recall in the video, we are all impacted by unconscious bias. It is a human condition and not a disease to be cured from. Our call to action is to make the unconscious -- conscious -- so we can address bias head-on and take the necessary steps to be more inclusive in our approach.*

Finally, let’s be clear – one single training event is not the “cure all”. We must continue to engage in self-reflection and explore opportunities to learn from the experiences of others on our team. We all have a stake in creating the culture we need.