



Scholarship Selection Committee Member Handbook

Contents

1. Welcome	2
2. Role and Responsibilities of a Scholarship Selection Committee Member.....	2
3. Conflict of Interest.....	3
4. Applicant Privacy and Confidentiality	3
5. Bias.....	4
6. Evaluation Process.....	5
7. Interview Process.....	6

1. Welcome

On behalf of the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, thank you for committing your time and insight in support of our scholarship program. Donors who have established scholarship funds within the Foundation trust that their charitable wishes are carried out today and in the future. We take this privilege and responsibility seriously. Because we are a public charity and certified as meeting national Standards for U.S. Community Foundations, we are required to comply with IRS requirements and best practices for operating excellence. The scholarship committee guidelines outlined in this handbook reflect both areas and our responsibility to our donors.

We are grateful for your involvement in the scholarship recipient selection process. As a committee member, you have an important role in helping the Foundation keep the process effective and objective. Your preparation and presence at the committee meeting(s) is critical.

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2. Role and Responsibilities of a Scholarship Selection Committee Member

Each committee uses specific scholarship eligibility criteria assigned to that scholarship while reviewing applications. Recommendations for recipients are made based on that eligibility criteria within the available amount for awards. A committee member's role is to:

- Review each application in accordance with the established selection process.
- Rate the applications based on the established eligibility criteria.
- Attend the committee meeting (if applicable) prepared and ready for discussion to determine recommendations.

Every scholarship has specific eligibility criteria. It is your duty as a volunteer to understand the criteria and base your selection recommendation on it.

3. Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest is a situation in which a committee member's past or current relationship with an applicant has the potential to undermine the impartiality and objectivity of the review process. It can occur when the action of a committee member recommending a scholarship award results in a direct financial benefit to the committee member, or a person closely related to them.

Committee members must be able to make prudent decisions on behalf of the scholarship without real or perceived influence caused by a conflict of interest. All committee members must adhere to the relevant policies of the Community Foundation as they may be adopted and amended from time to time, such as the Foundation's conflict of interest and confidentiality policies. All committee members must refrain from participation in the award process in a circumstance where they would derive, directly or indirectly, a private benefit if any potential grantee is selected over others.

The Foundation's conflict of interest procedure for scholarships ensures that all students are treated equally in the review process and that no committee member with a relationship to an applicant, other than a professional one, influences the decision about the application. All awards are to be given objectively, based on the eligibility criteria and without regard to factors not contained in the application.

Committee members with a past or current familial or other significant relationship with an applicant or applicant's family, other than professional, may not participate in assessing, discussing, or voting on the application. All conflicts must be disclosed prior to the committee deliberations. Committee discussion should be restricted or redirected if there is indication of improper influence for or against an applicant.

Examples of non-family relationships that might pose a conflict of interest:

- You babysat the applicant frequently when they were younger.
- You were the coach for the applicant's sports team.
- Your child is close friends with the applicant.
- Close relationships with the applicant's family members, such as godparent, being in a wedding party, or spending time/holidays together.

Family relationships that pose a conflict of interest include:

- Parents/Guardians
- Children/Stepchildren
- Grandparents
- Grandchildren
- Spouse
- Siblings
- Aunts/Uncles
- Nieces/Nephews
- Great grandparents
- Great grandchildren
- First cousins
- Spouses of all the above

4. Applicant Privacy and Confidentiality

All committee members must maintain the confidentiality of private student information. Protecting the privacy of student's personal information is required by state and federal regulations. The Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region and its committee members may not disclose, divulge, and/or share any applicant information.

To encourage free and open discussion by the committee, and to protect the applicants' privacy, all information, conversation, opinions, and materials presented to selection committee members shall be treated as strictly confidential. At the end of the selection process, all copies of application materials should be destroyed.

5. Bias

Bias is an inclination of temperament or outlook; a systematic error introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others. In other words, bias is a mistake in reasoning, or remembering, often occurring as a result of holding onto one's preferences and beliefs regardless of contrary information.

Defining bias:

- Favorable or unfavorable attitudes or beliefs about a group that informs how we perceive or interact with members of that group.
- Typically based on traits, such as race, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation.
 - It is a bias to immediately *disapprove* of people just because they display a certain trait, like those listed above.
 - It is also a bias to have an unfair *preference* for people with certain traits.

There are two main types of bias:

- Conscious/Explicit Bias
 - Often what people think when they hear the word "bias"
 - Traditionally expressed directly, noticeable to other people
- Unconscious/Implicit Bias
 - Social stereotypes and associations about groups of people that individuals form outside of their own conscious awareness
 - Can manifest into anything from subtle microaggressions to outright physical or verbal harassment
 - May not be aware of these biases

The Community Foundation has taken steps to lessen ways bias can affect the selection process by reducing the visibility of applicants' identifying information in the application, including:

- Removing applicant related information such as demographics, contact information, and pictures
- Instructing applicants to block out personal information on their attachments and to avoid including demographic information in their responses
- Building clear eligibility criteria points in Scholarship Profiles
- Building online evaluation forms customized to each specific scholarship with instructions in evaluation questions

Committee members can do their part in reducing the amount of bias in their evaluation process by:

- Increasing their self-awareness and understanding their own explicit and implicit biases affecting their judgement
- Examining their conclusions and pausing their reaction: why is this applicant making me feel this way, why am I drawing this conclusion, am I making assumptions or hasty decisions based on partial evidence?
- Not rushing through the evaluation process and taking breaks when tired
- Reviewing the whole application to form a holistic picture before making a recommendation decision
- Actively participating in the committee meeting conversation and sharing their thoughts regarding potential bias, including both negative and preferential biases

6. Evaluation Process

The Foundation is committed to being equitable in the assessment of scholarship applicants. Where they come from, what their experience has been, and what resources have been available to them throughout their lives can make a difference in how they approach their application. These are factors that should be considered when evaluating applications.

Equitable does not necessarily mean equal. A student with a 4.0 GPA who does not work is not the same as a student with a 3.0 GPA who works and takes care of a family member. All applicants will have their own story and face their own types of adversity. Committee members are encouraged to consider how that adversity has helped or hindered each applicant as an individual.

When reviewing the applications to form a holistic picture of the applicant, committee members should:

- Support all students.
 - The Foundation supports all applicants in their pursuance of post-secondary education regardless of legal status, place of origin, race, religion, sex, ethnicity, disability, etc.
- Think long term.
 - Will the scholarship have a greater impact (either on the applicant or the community) with one student versus another?
 - What are the goals and aspirations of the applicants?
- Practice impartiality, fairness, and objectivity in the evaluation process.
- Look for the ideal candidate for the scholarship, as outlined on the Scholarship Profile.
 - Understand the eligibility criteria, preferences, and priorities.
- Follow the (online) evaluation form in rating the applicants.
 - The Community Foundation's online applications have built-in evaluation forms. These forms contain questions that match the eligibility criteria of the specific scholarship the form is built for. Reviewers might see more information about the applicants than what the specific eligibility criteria is for the scholarship they are assigned to. To eliminate bias, reviewers should base their evaluation on the questions on the evaluation form only.

7. Interview Process

During an interview, it is important to:

- Help applicants feel comfortable by explaining why the interview is being conducted.
- Be sensitive when wording questions and avoid asking about personal issues or matters that do not affect scholarship eligibility.
- Only ask questions related to the scholarship eligibility criteria and the student's application.

Below is an interview outline intended to be used as a resource while interviewing scholarship applicants. The outline is designed to make the interview process efficient and consistent.

1. Introduction

- a. Committee member introductions
- b. Applicant introduction
- c. Explaining the interview process, reason, and notetaking purpose
- d. Recap the eligibility criteria and give a brief introduction of the scholarship

2. Structuring the Interview

- a. Start with easier questions to break the ice and get the candidate talking, even if the questions were already answered in their application, such as: "What are your plans for college/the upcoming fall?"
- b. As a committee, choose several questions that will relate to the specific eligibility criteria of the scholarship.
 - i. **Only ask about financials if the scholarship considers financial need.**
- c. Decide whether one committee member will ask all questions or if each committee member will take turns asking questions.
- d. Ask the same questions of all candidates interviewed to be equal, consistent, and fair in your evaluations.

3. Potential Questions for Candidates

- a. How would you describe yourself to someone who did not know you?
- b. What words would your family and friends use to describe you?
- c. What has influenced your choice of your educational path?
- d. If you could pick one area you could improve on, what would it be?
- e. When you feel overwhelmed by your studies, what do you do?
- f. What have you learned from your extracurriculars/community service/work history?
- g. What personal achievement are you most proud of and why?

4. Closing

- a. Discuss the selection process and let the candidate know they will receive a notification of the committee's decision soon. Recap any next steps.
- b. As a committee, end the interview with wrap-up questions:
 - i. Is there any other information you would like the committee to know about you?
 - ii. Do you have any questions for the committee?
- c. Thank the candidate for taking the time to participate in the interview.