

Guidelines: inclusive recruitment and selection in your study association

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At Utrecht University, it is important that everyone feels at home. Diverse backgrounds, perspectives and identities contribute to and enrich our academic community. This also applies to the study associations and foundations: together, we strive to create a safe and inclusive environment to which everyone can contribute and within which everyone can develop.

This guide on inclusive recruitment for student board members addresses three themes:

- 1) Core principles
- 2) Inclusive vacancies
- 3) Inclusive application and selection procedures

Inclusive recruitment and selection, what is it?

With inclusive recruitment, your study association/foundation becomes a place of equal opportunity. This allows everyone to be themselves and grow towards the best version of themselves. Here, a diversity of perspectives is valuable. The term *diversity* refers to all aspects in which people can differ from each other. For a study association, this is quite a big issue: how do you create an inclusive organisation? But as a board, you can make sure that throughout the process of finding succession – the recruitment and selection process – you take care to ensure that everyone feels comfortable, safe and welcome. *How do you ensure an inclusive process?*

And why is that important? A few reasons...

- As a board, you want to appeal to as many (different) people as possible to apply for a board position;
- Diverse teams are more creative and have higher problem-solving abilities, because team members think and act from different perspectives and experiences;
- Diverse teams are better able to respond to the needs of a diverse group of members, thus expanding your board's field of vision;
- Inclusiveness and safety are important core values within a study association/foundation, and as a board, you take care of them.

Want to know more? Take a look at...

- ✓ [Guide to inclusive job openings \(Intranet\)](#)
- ✓ [CAT: Toolbox Diversity in Education](#)
- ✓ [Knowledge document 'Diverse Recruitment and Selection' \(SER\)](#)
- ✓ [In 5 steps to an inclusive job opening \(KIS\) \[in Dutch\]](#)
- ✓ ['This is how it works' magazine: inclusive recruitment and selection \[in Dutch\]](#)
- ✓ [Erasmus University Rotterdam: inclusive recruitment and selection toolkit](#)
- ✓ [Amsterdam D&I: recruitment and selection](#)

Or contact ...

- ✓ Student Assessor Humanities (studentassessor.gw@uu.nl)
- ✓ EDI working group Faculty of Humanities (edi.gw@uu.nl)



1. Core principles

When looking for succession, you want to present a wonderful candidate board to your study association or foundation. Here, it is important to take into account inclusive recruitment and selection of the candidate board: you want everyone to feel encouraged to apply, and candidates to start working with a good feeling and the right expectations. In doing so, it is important to keep the following key principles in mind.

Core principles of recruitment and selection procedure

- 1) Do not discriminate
- 2) Be honest and transparent
- 3) Be aware of (unconscious) biases

Do not discriminate =

Assess candidates based on suitability for the board position. You make your decision regardless of someone's background or identity; questions that have to do with someone's background or identity – and have no relation to the application process – should not be asked.

Be honest and transparent =

Expectation management is essential, both about the position of a board member and the procedure for finding and selecting them. This is because, in the context of inclusion, it allows candidates to know whether they can meet the requirements, even if, for example, they would be available for a limited amount of time every week or unable to make an excessive time investment due to personal circumstances. Be clear and honest about what the position entails, what a board year looks like and what a candidate can expect from a board year. In addition, be open towards both the candidates and the association about the recruitment and selection process: which steps do you go through until you present a candidate board to the GMA?¹

Be aware of (unconscious) biases =

The recruitment and selection process is often unconsciously influenced by social categorisation and prejudice. This is because how you think about people depends on your own life experiences and beliefs. These (unconscious) prejudices are called (unconscious) biases, which influence the recruitment and selection process. For instance, people think - unconsciously - better about someone if they believe that this person is like them, and less about someone if they believe that this person is different from them. Everyone may occasionally think in a way that involves unconscious biases, but it is important not to let this influence behaviour or decisions. Therefore, be aware of your own perspective and biases so that you can act as objectively as possible in the process.

¹ Note that applying is confidential - but transparency about the process is not the same as transparency about the content of the applications! That information is obviously confidential and remains between the candidates and the people taking the applications (unless the candidates themselves choose to share their application information).

2. Inclusive vacancies

Recruiting new board members starts with defining the profile: *what are you looking for?* It is important that when applicants read the vacancy for a board year at your study association/foundation, they get a good picture of the position, the organisation and the expectations. If you pay attention to diversity and inclusion, you can formulate your vacancy in a way that appeals to all your members/contributors. This often starts with neutral language: specific language can discourage suitable candidates from applying.

Inclusive language

Using inclusive language shows that you respect and value everyone, and that everyone is welcome at your study association/foundation. When writing inclusively, you take into account the person you are talking to or about. Be aware that what is clear language for one person may be hurtful to another, may evoke a feeling of exclusion, or a feeling of not being addressed. For example, there is a difference in how men (often unconsciously) experience and interpret language and how women (often unconsciously) do.

This concerns gender-inclusive language: words like result-oriented, analytical, stress-resistant and independent appeal more to men. Words like careful, communicative, committed, creative and customer-friendly are words women associate themselves with more. Discriminating through language often happens unconsciously, through the use of specific words considered 'gender-coded'².

- Typical 'feminine' words are: connecting, involved, responsible, reliable and helpful;
- Typical 'male' words are: critical, strong, competitive, bold and stress-resistant;
- Typical gender-neutral words are: practical and intelligent

Use inclusive language throughout your vacancy. This revolves around all kinds of considerations in your choice of words. Choose gender-neutral words, even in the job title. And consider: is it necessary to include M/F/X in your vacancy, what does that add to it? But inclusive language goes beyond gender-inclusive language: it is also about stereotypes, for instance. Do not use words and expressions that reason from a normative or hierarchical perspective.

More on inclusive writing...

- ✓ [UU writing guide: inclusive language guideline](#)
- ✓ [The incomplete style guide \(Women INC.\) \[in Dutch\]](#)
- ✓ [Policy & Practice: Inclusive Language Guide \(Oxfam Novib\)](#)
- ✓ [European Union: Inclusive Language in the GSC](#)
- ✓ [Inclusive Language Guide \(APA\)](#)

² [List of gender-coded words](#)



3 core points

To get you started in writing inclusive vacancies, the following three principles are important to consider:

1. Don't discriminate: gender-inclusive language
2. Be clear and concrete
3. Connect with candidates

Pay attention to inclusive language in your job description.

Don't discriminate: gender-inclusive language

How vacancies are written and presented has a major impact on how your members/contributors will consider applying for a board position. For example, if vacancies and positions are described using 'masculine' language, women are less likely to be attracted to the board and the position.

- ➔ Tip: consciously combine male and female words and deploy gender-neutral language to appeal to a broad target audience.
- ➔ Tip: replace words like 'he' and 'she' and 'man' and 'woman' with words like 'talent', 'person', 'candidate' and 'colleague'.

But as a board member, you really need to be stress-resistant, don't you? So can't you include this in the job description without 'excluding' women? Yes, you can. You can describe this characteristic in terms of *behaviour*, and not as a personality trait. Express the requirements as behaviour (something you can learn/perform), rather than 'being' (something you naturally possess). Use words and phrases that outline the atmosphere of your association/foundation and the functioning within the board, such as:

- Collaboration: 'Focused on working with external partners.'
- Team-oriented: 'Performance of tasks is preferably done as a team.'
- Open-minded: 'Within the board, you are open to all kinds of (new) ideas and opinions.'
- Stress-resistant: 'During busy times, you keep a cool head and do the right things.'
- Tackler: 'you know how to follow through and have the courage to make decisions.'

Be clear and concrete

The job description is an important element of recruiting new board members, but this is where (*unconscious*) *biases* can play a role. It is therefore important to pay close attention to clear and concrete language.

- Make requirements more inclusive by referring to behaviours rather than traits.
- Do not use 'organisational jargon' and internal abbreviations: a real no-go within an inclusively worded vacancies.
- Reduce the requirements to the core of the work and also pay attention to the amount of requirements your candidate has to meet. When there are many requirements, fewer people will recognise themselves in all of them. Limit the quantity of requirements to five requirements that are really necessary to fill the vacancy; this way, you prevent good candidates from not responding. Train yourself in being selective: what do you find most important in your new board member? Distinguish between 'must have' and 'nice to have'.

Connect with candidates

It sometimes happens that an organisation adds a personal touch to vacancy announcements. The purpose of this is to give candidates an impression of what kind of environment the candidate is expected to fit into. Examples include:

- 'On Friday afternoons, we go into the pub with the board for drinks.'
- 'We organise fun activities at Sinterklaas, Christmas and Easter.'

By doing so, you certainly appeal to a certain target group, but you also exclude people - unintentionally. After all, what if you don't drink alcohol or celebrate other holidays? Be critical and observant about how this is interpreted, and consider what character is important for the study association/foundation.

In addition, think carefully about the distribution of the vacancy text. It does not necessarily have to be a document! You can also incorporate the information from the vacancy in an Instagram post, a WhatsApp message or a web page. That way, you also reach more people.

- ➔ Tip: *less is more!* Do not make the vacancy too long, but focus on distinguishing the core information and the 'nice to know' information (the 'nice to know' can also be explained during information sessions or in individual conversations).

Diversity statement

Some organisations choose to include a diversity statement in their vacancies. In it, you can describe (concisely!) how your organisation views diversity and inclusion. Utrecht University does it this way:

"As Utrecht University, we want to be a home external link for everyone. We value staff with diverse backgrounds, perspectives and identities, including cultural, religious or ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age. We strive to create a safe and inclusive environment in which everyone can flourish and contribute."

The Faculty of Humanities does it in a similar way:

"The Faculty of Humanities aims to be a place where everyone feels respected and at home. Diversity and inclusion are important core values for us. We recognise that prejudice, discrimination and racism also occur with us and pursue an active diversity policy to contribute to raising awareness, removing prejudice and barriers, and equal opportunities for all."

For more examples of diversity statements, check out [Examples of diversity statements](#).



3. Inclusive application and selection procedures

The motivation letters are in and now it's time for the applications! But... how do you make sure this process is inclusive? It is important to think about what the process will look like beforehand: *planning & preparation = key*. To ensure a good procedure, it is important to think out the process well in advance. This is two-sided: on the one hand, you and the people responsible for the procedure agree on a time schedule: when does the vacancy open and close? When will the applications be taken? When will the candidate board be announced to the association/foundation? On the other hand, this also includes thinking about the profile of the candidate board: what requirements should candidates meet? And what questions will you ask to this end? This way, you judge on the basis of established criteria, and not on the basis of your feelings, for example. You thus think through the recruitment and application process properly, ensuring a fair and inclusive process.

3 core points

To get you started in the application and selection process, the following three principles are important to consider:

1. Composition of application committee
2. Who are you looking for?
3. Preparing for interviews

Composition of application committee

Before you start the application and selection process, it is important to consider who will help decide on the nomination of the candidate board to the GMA. It often happens that within study associations and foundations, the current board is responsible for this process, and thus actually acts as an application committee. But in the working life, it is not at all common to be concerned with your own succession: *you don't rule over your own grave*. So you might want to think about setting up an application committee for your study association/foundation.

An application committee is a committee that nominates a new board to the association at the GMA. This board will be voted on by the general members assembly. The mandate of an application committee is therefore to organise and carry out the process of application and selection. The application committee deals with drawing up board profiles, taking applications and deciding on who makes up a good board.

Who sits on an application committee? A possible composition is, for example:

- At least one current board member;
- At least one former board member;
- At least one member of the Advisory/Supervisory Board;
- At least one regular member/external member/etc.

It is important to remember here that the rest of the current board should not be informed about the content of the applications.

- ➔ Tip: making selection committees diverse increases awareness of differences. People on an application committee can additionally check each other for bias in their assessment of candidates. Consider, for example, gender relations in the committee or representation of different study years.



Who are you looking for?

In selecting candidates, try asking yourself again what you are looking for. Ask yourself what your board needs and which candidate can bring it. Prior to the selection process, it is important to establish the criteria that someone must meet. This way, you can prevent the people taking the applications from relying on gut feelings in their final choice and choosing the person with whom they have the best connection. It is also important to set up an assessment table prior to the interview. This way, you focus more on the job requirements rather than on gut feelings.

Preparing for interviews

How can you ensure that a connection with a candidate or certain assumptions about that person do not play a bigger role than someone's qualities during an interview? Research shows that the main solution to this lies in the structure of the interview. It has been proven that in structured and standardised interviews, *biases* plays a smaller role. Draw up fixed questions in advance that you ask every candidate. You can ask a limited number of additional questions that are not fixed in advance. This allows you to better compare different interviews.

- ➔ Tip: do a 'check' before and after an interview or assessment. Beforehand, take another look at your own criteria: what am I looking for and why? Afterwards, you check whether you have really judged on factual matters and not on your own feelings. A simple and effective method.
- ➔ Tip: *keep a sharp eye!* It is important to stay critical of the process during the application process, but also when making a final choice. During recruitment, selection, interviews and a final choice, keep reflecting on why candidates were selected or rejected, and how those choices came about.
- ➔ Tip: prior to the interviews, ask each other as the application committee if anyone has/knows any biases about themselves: candidate x is from the same village, from the same school, I already know them, I necessarily want to add a certain gender to the group, etc. If you know the biases of each other, you can take this into account: *better to have a conscious bias you can talk about, than an unconscious bias.*

Summary: Inclusive recruitment and selection

Core principles

- 1) Do not discriminate: judge by suitability
- 2) Be honest and transparent: expectation management is essential
- 3) Be aware of (unconscious) biases



Recruitment

1. Make sure you know who you are looking for: what qualities does a new board member need? Think about what information you want and how to obtain it.
2. Draft an inclusive vacancy text: how do you make all your members feel addressed? Think about inclusive language, be clear and concrete and connect with your candidates.
3. Think about which channels you use for your recruitment.



Application

1. Think about who is involved in the application process, and consider diversity within it.
2. Be aware of (unconscious) preferences & biases, even in yourself.
3. Make sure you know what you are looking for in candidates.



Selection

1. Prepare interviews and score candidates based on predefined criteria, not on feelings.
2. Ask all the candidates the same questions.
3. Remain critical of the entire process and reflect on choices made.



Annex A: Sample vacancy³

[name of study association] is looking for new board members!

The moment has arrived: we start our search for succession! After a year of dedicating ourselves to all students [name study], we are looking for new board members for the study association. An opportunity you don't want to miss! Will you become part of board [...]?

What does the board of [name of association] do?

The aim of our association is to promote the interests of members. One way we do this is by promoting contact between members and the study programme. We organise various activities, from monthly drinks to the best parties and from creative workshops to guest lectures. As a board member, you take care of the ins and outs of the association to ensure that everything runs smoothly. Together with your fellow board members, you discuss what is going on within the association, coordinate various committees and work on your own tasks and projects.

The board consists of [...] people, who together take care of the study association. The following positions are available:

- Chair: you will chair board meetings and general members assemblies, be the first point of contact for members and ...
- Secretary: you will take minutes of meetings, keep track of mail and be responsible for contact with members and membership administration.
- Treasurer: you manage the finances, liaise with the audit committee and ...
- ...

Besides your function-specific tasks, you will work on many general board tasks. You will continue the work of your predecessors, but you will have plenty of room to take on your own projects! Good to know: you are applying for a position on the board, not for a specific function.

What do you bring?

As a board member, you know how to take action and have the courage to take decisions. It is also important that you can work well together. No week is the same as the previous one, so it is valuable to be able to work flexibly. Previous committee work (within [name of association]) is a plus.

Practical information

The board position will be filled in the academic year [year], from September to September. It is a [part-time/full-time] board position of approximately ... hours per week. You can therefore study [part-time/full-time] in addition to this. The change of board members takes place in September, but from June onwards we are working on the transfer process (up to a maximum of ... hours per week before the summer holidays). For your work, you will receive a board grant of about €... per month.

Are you a member of [name association] and would you like to be at the helm of our study association for a year? Then apply before [date] by sending a motivation letter of maximum 1 A4 and your CV to [email address]. Do you have any questions, or would you like to know more about becoming a board member? Then come to the board information evenings on [date] and [date] or contact one of the current board members. At [name study association], we want to ensure a safe and inclusive environment for our members, and want to create a space where everyone feels respected and at home.

³ Note! This vacancy is intended to give an idea of how to work out the tips for writing an inclusive vacancy. As a result, the vacancy is fairly long, which is not necessarily desirable. For example, you could choose to omit the function explanation.