

EDI Practices for Designing Inclusive Scholarship Programmes

Overview

The analysis of the Techne application process revealed structural, linguistic, and cultural barriers that can inadvertently disadvantage applicants from marginalised or underrepresented backgrounds. The findings highlight the need for scholarship providers to embed equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles at every stage of design and delivery.

Key EDI Practices Identified:

1. Language and Terminology

- Simplify and clarify wording in application forms, avoiding jargon, technical academic terms, or institutionalised phrasing that may alienate applicants with less prior exposure.
- Provide clear definitions of criteria such as “research excellence” or “impact,” recognising that different communities may demonstrate these through diverse experiences.

2. Application Structure and Weighting

- Give greater weighting to the originality and potential of the research proposal rather than prior educational achievements or institutional prestige.
- Reconsider linear formats that privilege chronological, uninterrupted career or educational paths, and explicitly acknowledge non-linear trajectories (e.g., career breaks, community experience, activism, or non-traditional routes into academia).

3. Transparency of Process

- Publish detailed guidance on how applications are assessed, including anonymised examples of successful proposals from varied backgrounds.
- Offer clear timelines, expectations, and feedback mechanisms to reduce the “hidden curriculum” of application writing.

4. Reviewer Guidance and Training

- Train peer reviewers to identify and mitigate unconscious bias, particularly around language use, institutional affiliation, and career breaks.
- Encourage a holistic approach to applicant assessment that values lived experience, community engagement, and potential for contribution alongside formal credentials.

5. Accessibility and Support

- Provide targeted pre-application workshops, writing support, and mentorship for applicants from underrepresented groups.
- Ensure the application platform itself is accessible (digitally inclusive, mobile-friendly, and supportive of assistive technologies).

Conclusion

Embedding these practices ensures that doctoral scholarship programmes move beyond formal equality statements toward tangible inclusivity. By addressing unconscious bias in language and structure, rebalancing assessment weightings, and creating transparent, accessible pathways, scholarship schemes can better support talented individuals from marginalised backgrounds and communities, thereby enriching the diversity and impact of the research landscape.