



San Diego County Sheriff

Training Bulletin

William D. Gore, Sheriff

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Implicit Bias

Five years ago "implicit bias" may not have been a common term heard among mainstream society however today it is a term and training standard that has gained significant awareness across a wide spectrum of sectors, especially in the law enforcement profession. As a department it is imperative that we align with procedural justice in order to foster cooperation with community members and the criminal justice system with the end goal of cultivating law-abiding communities.

What Is Implicit Bias

Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner; it can be passively acquired with no conscious awareness. This is contrary to explicit bias which is the conscious attitudes, stereotypes, and beliefs that individuals are aware of and recognize as part of their worldview.

Implicit bias can focus on implicit racial bias or nonracial factors such as gender identity, age, religion, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation.

Every individual possesses implicit bias. It is a universal human condition. And given law enforcement officers' nature of work and exposure to society's negative aspects of human behavior it is critical that we are mindful of our own implicit biases.

A Few Key Characteristics of Implicit Biases¹

- Implicit biases are pervasive. Everyone possesses them, even people committed to impartiality, such as judges.

¹ Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity: State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2015

- Implicit and explicit biases are related but distinct mental constructs. They are not mutually exclusive and may even reinforce each other.
- The implicit associations we hold do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.
- Individuals generally tend to hold implicit biases that favor their own "ingroup," though research has shown that they can still hold implicit biases against their "ingroup."
- Implicit biases are malleable. Brains are incredibly complex, and the implicit associations that have formed can be gradually unlearned through a variety of de-biasing techniques.

Understanding Implicit Bias

Implicit bias involves all of the subconscious feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes that have developed as a result of prior influences and imprints. It is an automatic positive or negative preference for a group, based on one's subconscious thoughts. However, implicit bias does not require hostility or ill will; it only requires knowledge of a stereotype to produce discriminatory actions. With implicit bias, the individual may be unaware that biases, rather than the facts of a situation, are driving their decision-making.²

While conscious, "traditional" racism has declined significantly in recent decades. In policing, implicit bias can result in practices that focus suspicion on some groups and presume other groups innocent.

De-biasing

Research has indicated that even though everyone has implicit biases, they can be reduced through the process of being mindful of what may trigger one's own implicit biases and manage them to not negatively affect one's behavior.

Unconscious negative bias toward a particular group can be reduced through positive contacts with members of that group, and through "counter-stereotyping," in which individuals are exposed to information that is the opposite of the stereotypes they have about a group.²

Lastly, by immersing oneself through a change in "association," implicit biases can be reduced. A common approach is through cultural competency which lends itself to the Sheriff's Department core value of "Diversity" which embraces the strength in the diversity of our employees and our communities.

² United States Department of Justice Community Relations Service: Understanding Bias: A Resource Guide

Additional Resources on Implicit Bias

- [Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity: State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2015](#)
- [Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity: Race in Conversation. Equity in Practice 2018](#)
- [U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service: Understanding Bias: A Resource Guide](#)

The information in this Training Bulletin was provided by the Nadia Moshirian Binderup in Media Relations and Corporal Brent Longfellow at the In-Service Training Unit. If you have expertise in a particular subject and would like to write a training bulletin, please contact Corporal Brent Longfellow at In-Service Training, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]