

## #POD23 REVIEWER TRAINING SCRIPT

### MODULE I: The POD NETWORK REVIEWER TRAINING

Thank you for volunteering to serve as a Proposal Reviewer. You are all about to undertake the review of hundreds of proposals that have been submitted for this year's conference. The POD Network and the conference team thanks you, and are deeply grateful that you are joining us on the journey to make this year's conference a huge success.

This conference's proposal review process uses anonymous peer reviews in which the author's identities are masked from the reviewers, and the reviewer's identities are masked from the authors. Generally, an anonymous review is understood to reduce prestige-based bias; yet evidence for the effectiveness in reducing other kinds of bias is limited and mixed.

This training and its reflection activities have been developed to align with best practices for conferences. It is also one way that the POD Network aims to address systemic bias and structural racism at the organizational level. We hope that this training will help prepare you for your respective roles as Proposal Reviewers.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This training is intended to help ensure that proposals are consistently scored, and that feedback to proposal authors is transparent and constructive. In this training, reviewers will:

- identify bias, microaggressions, and negative and/or dismissive comments, and
- recognize and provide constructive feedback that are grounded in the review criteria and the POD Network values.

You will also have an opportunity to practice these skills through the exploration of reviewer feedback and the examination of sample proposal reviews. You may also choose to complete the supplemental worksheets and a quiz associated with this training.

### MODULE II: THE POD NETWORK MISSION & VALUES

As you may know, the POD Network exists to provide professional development and a community of practice for scholars and practitioners of educational development, and to serve as a leading voice on matters related to teaching and learning in higher education.

The image on the screen are three interconnected circles that depict the POD Network's values and commitments. Specifically, the POD Network strives to be collaborative and collegial. The value of equity discusses how the POD Network strives to be transparent and inclusive with ongoing efforts to promote equitable access and involvement, eliminate systemic inequities that result from biases, and supporting members in advancing social justice. Finally, the third circle represents evidence – the POD Network strives to ground practices and decisions in evidence, adapt and reuse proven methods and innovate to improve upon prior work. Diverse forms of evidence, a variety of inquiry methods and theories are recognized as valuable and essential. Thus, the values of collaboration, equity and evidence should undergird your thinking and approach as you rate each proposal.

### **MODULE III: PROPOSAL REVIEW CRITERIA**

As a reviewer, you will be prompted to rate the proposal across six themes. First, does the proposal support and advance POD's mission and values of collaboration, equity and evidence.

Another theme for review is evidence. You will be rating how the concepts and materials are explicitly connected to research dealing with teaching, learning, or practice. This includes qualitative and quantitative methods, interdisciplinary and methodological approaches, reflections and experiences, participatory practices, community knowledge, Indigenous and/or other ways of knowing.

In terms of applicability and transferability, we want to know if the idea, topic, or practice is relevant to the field of educational and/or organizational development and whether the session is likely to be applicable and/or transferable to other institutions and programs. Similarly, for the theme of innovation and insightfulness, does the session offer fresh information and/or describe innovative or creative practices.

The fifth theme, session alignment, you will be rating whether the proposed session activities - meaning those that are guiding the questions and interactions – are aligned with the session outcomes and if the session supports the participant's full engagement.

This year, you will NOT be assigning a numerical rating to how the proposed session advances and advocates for equity and inclusion. RATHER, you will share your perspective about whether the author's work meets expectations, needs revisions, or does not meet expectations. In the next slide, we will discuss this in more detail so you feel supported in rating this theme.

Rating a proposal can be a difficult process. For some of you, proposal reviews can be anxiety-provoking, you may feel hypervigilant, self-critique or self-policing your language might be heightened, or you may feel discomfort and unsure of yourself. THAT IS OKAY – be gentle with yourself.

The conference team hopes that this rubric will help provide a clear direction of how to accurately assess and rate the proposal. Let's now breakdown how to use the rating scale. You will use a rating scale of 1 to 4. Specifically,

- 4 is excellent, meaning there are no concerns or questions
- 3 is good. This implies that there are a few minor concerns or questions; however, they will not be an impediment.
- 2 is fair, meaning that you have concerns or questions about the item that should be addressed if the proposal is accepted for the conference; and
- 1 which represents poor, namely that there are significant concerns or questions about the item which MUST be addressed if the proposal is accepted for the conference.
- Should you choose to use a rating of not applicable, it will NOT get factored into or diminish a proposal's final score.

Upon conclusion of your review, you will be prompted to share your final recommendations – whether you recommend that the proposal be accepted, accepted with reservation, or rejected. Now this can be quite tricky because the tendency is to accept all proposals as HIGH. So, let's see if we can provide some further insight on what will help the conference team make a more informed decision based on your review.

If the batch of proposals you are assigned are of high-quality, it should be reflected in how you have scored the proposals. An "accept" means that the proposal has an average score of 3 or higher. For example, if your ratings are mostly 4s, your comments to the authors should illustrate that the proposal is excellent and why you believe so.

Now let's discuss what you should do if you have reservations about a proposal. Reservations should be addressed in your comments to the authors and **MUST** also show up in your ratings. For example, if the authors have not addressed the implications of their work, you should rate applicability and transferability with a designation of 2 or 1. If a proposal receives consistent 1s and 2s, or all 2s, it should be earmarked in the rejection category, and quite importantly, be articulated clearly in the comments to the authors, as well as to the conference committee.

Finally, it is noteworthy to share that the conference team's vision is to facilitate a consistent review process. As such, an audit is conducted at the conclusion of the review process whereby reviewer comments are flagged if they are problematic - meaning if there are negative/dismissive comments or microaggressions or if the audit identifies that the reviewer's scores seem inconsistent with the comments they have made on the proposal, a member of the conference team will reach out to you with an opportunity to revise the comment/rating. We will provide you with guidance on how to reword the review constructively. We value our community and want to ensure that lift each other up through this process.

## **INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES**

As mentioned, you will **NOT** be assigning a numerical rating to how the proposed session advances and advocates for equity and inclusion. The POD Community expects that all sessions apply several baseline approaches for equity and inclusion. The image on the screen are several interconnected hexagons. Presenters will need to establish their own positionality in approaching the topic, cultivate authentic and respectful interaction, call-in participants who share biased viewpoints, ensure proper pronoun usage, and for online session, presenters will encourage attendees to use the hand raise feature to reduce confusion and cross talk. POD also expects that presenters include diversity of representation in images, support neurodiversity through accessible presentation practices, provide multiple ways for participants to engage with each other and the content, unpack acronyms and avoid jargon to reduce misunderstanding or possible alienation, and be mindful of their pace in speech and delivery of the content.

You may be asking, so what are we assessing if these are baseline expectations? Good question! The proposal should address how the presenters plan to support all participants, particularly those who historically and contemporarily may not feel a sense of belonging across identity, ability, and perspective. This is the first time we are attempting this approach whereby we're asking reviewers to help the conference team identify where additional support may be needed. Based on the proposal, do you feel the session meet expectations, meaning the DEI considerations shared are intentional and thoughtful), or do you believe they need revision, as in the authors would need less than one hour of dedicated time. Or perhaps you feel that the proposal does not meet expectations and will require substantive revision. In essence, you will be helping flag any proposals where authors may need additional support or resources on presenting inclusive sessions. The conference team has developed tips and suggestions in this area that we will distribute to presenters.

Another area we'd like to be more consistent in the review process is to identify sales and solicitation of materials or consulting work. Session presenters are permitted to use materials they have created and to refer to consulting work that they do, but neither materials nor services may be offered for sale during the session. Proprietary materials should not be used as the primary presentation material but may be included in a list of resources or bibliography. Pre-conference workshop presenters may receive permission to charge an additional fee for materials (such as books), to be collected with the conference registration fee. Should you have concerns about a particular proposal, there will be a checkbox where you can flag this concern to the conference committee and state your rationale for doing so.

## **THE AUTHOR(S) & THE REVIEWER(S) EXPERIENCE**

Proposal authors put time, energy, and effort into expressing their work. When authors submit their proposals, there is a degree of uncertainty of whether the proposal will be accepted - this may be grounds for emotional exposure and bring up fears of rejection. For some authors, submitting a proposal can be a vulnerable act and receiving feedback may lead to anxiety and stress. It is important for you to remember that vulnerability takes courage – proposal authors are showing up, making their work seen, even if it was tough to do so while being terrified about what reviewers might see or think.

As a reviewer, your sensitivity to the author's experience goes along way and likely, you've been on the other side as the author yourself! Using tact and being mindful of your tone are paramount. Be kind. Have compassion. And remember that the goal of providing feedback is to strengthen and improve the author's work. By doing so, you are helping to build a stronger POD community where everyone can flourish and the field of educational development can move forward. Later in this training, we will take a deeper dive on HOW to provide constructive feedback.

## **MODULE IV: WHAT ARE BIASES & MICROAGGRESSIONS?**

The normative stance in the Global North is often white, middle-class, able-bodied, cisgender, and heteronormative – the legacy of colonization and oppressive herstories have brought these notions of the “norm” into the Global South, privileging the knowledge, experiences, dispositions, and feelings of these groups and classifications. This normative stance and the concepts of whiteness often shape our biases, and may show up in terms of aggression or insulting others.

While it is beyond the scope of this training to unpack concepts of coloniality and whiteness, being aware of your biases and how they might influence the language you use is a critical first step towards providing constructive feedback. Most people have good intentions and do not want to cause harm when providing feedback. So as to ensure that we are all on the same page on how to provide an appropriate review, this next section of the training will briefly highlight some cursory definitions about biases and microaggressions. You will then have an opportunity to practice identifying problematic language in sample reviews so that you can be more self-aware with your feedback.

As you may know, biases is a disproportionate weight in favor of or against an idea or thing; they are closed-minded, prejudicial, and unfair. Biases can be innate or learned. People may develop biases for or against an individual, group, or a belief. We will discuss unconscious bias in more detail shortly.

Microaggressions, which can be broken down into several types such as microinsults, microassaults, or microinvalidations are commonplace daily verbal, nonverbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or insulting messages to the target person or group. They can be intentional or unintentional. Unintentional microaggressions are rooted in the unconscious or implicit bias. Microaggressions are often invisible.

These definitions are based on the foundational work of Derald Wing Sue and more recently, Sue and Spanierman's publication on Microaggressions in Everyday Life. Within the POD community and the educational development space, writ large, authors such as Drs. Cheung, Ganote, and Souza have also championed the dialogue on microaggressions and microresistances.

## **UNCONSCIOUS BIAS & RATER ERRORS**

Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.

There are several common rater errors that may perpetuate unconscious biases. This includes the Halo Effect, which is the tendency to make inappropriate generalizations about the author's content or intent. Another common rater error is Leniency, which is the tendency to evaluate all proposals as outstanding and to give inflated ratings rather than true assessments of the proposal. Central Tendency, on the other hand is the tendency to evaluate every proposal as average while the Strictness rater error is the tendency to rate all proposals at the low end of the scale by being overly critical.

Two other common errors that reviewers may make is the First Impression Error or the Similar-to-Me-Effect Error. The first is the tendency to make an initial favorable or unfavorable judgment about the proposal and then ignore subsequent information that does not support this impression. The Similar-to-Me Effect is the tendency to more favorably judge proposals perceived as similar to yourself and your scholarly work. To minimize these errors, you need to ask yourself, am I basing my rating on the content in the proposal or am I making judgments based on my own perceptions and generalizations about the author's work? Questioning whether you are rating the authors' proposals solely on their own merit or comparing them to other proposals will also help to reduce reviewer biases.

Rating a proposal is NOT a place for imposing your personal opinions. Focus on the content that has been provided, not what you wish you had included if you were the author. Gender-based bias and ableism is particularly problematic. Being attuned to the authors use of language may be particularly helpful - have they used patriarchal, masculine associated, cis-gendered or ableist words or constructs and if they have, how can you draw attention to this in a constructive way? Later in the training, we will discuss how to write constructive feedback.

## **MODULE V: DISCLAIMER**

The next section of this training will include identifying bias, racial microaggressions, dismissive and/or negative comments, and deconstructing reviewer comments. The content includes words and phrases that should be avoided, as well as examples of microaggressions or discriminatory comments that have been used historically to oppress certain people or groups. These may cause distress to people who have experienced discrimination on the basis of their identity.

We understand that many of the issues in this next section are personal and emotive for many people. While naming microaggressions and discriminatory or oppressive comments is necessary to deconstruct them, we recognize that this can take a toll on those directly affected. Please prioritize your wellbeing if you experience discomfort while engaging in this next section of the training material.

## **IDENTIFYING BIAS & RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS**

How people experience the world is valid, even if those experiences are outside the reviewer's worldview. One of the ways we know this is because there are SO many ways to understand and practice inclusive teaching. Your role as a reviewer is to recognize and value that there is a spectrum of ways of knowing, pedagogies, methodologies and positionalities.

You will now have an opportunity to practice identifying bias and racial microaggressions through the exploration of sample reviewer feedback.

We ask that you take a few minutes to review the five statements that will appear on your screen shortly. Then, please select at least two of these statements and reflect on how they are problematic and why. The statements are as follows:

1. Your proposal is about Black, Indigenous, & People of Color yet you seem to draw from literature that focuses primarily on the experiences of Black students. Draw from more inclusive sources and determine your target audience.
2. Historically marginalized educational developers' experiences in TLCs are an important topic. I'm excited to attend your session – we have much to learn from the presenters, especially from recommendations.
3. Could be better developed. Please provide evidence of how these specific marginalized groups relate to the work of educational developers. You might want to take an intersectionality approach - it would strengthen the session.
4. It would be worthwhile for POD members if this session on faculty of color experiences could also address allyship.
5. While the experiences of Indigenous students are timely and a unique topic, I am not sure it's transferable to all campuses.

After you have completed this activity, I will attempt to briefly unpack these statements so that you can carry your learnings forward as you conduct your reviews.

At this time, you should press pause on the video and write down your reflections. When you are ready, please press play to continue the training.

## **DECONSTRUCTING REVIEWER COMMENTS - THEMES**

Some of the central themes in these statements is the notion that the work of equity and inclusion should be executed by People of Color or diverse others, and that the beneficiaries of such work are often good-willed white allies who want to implement recommendations offered by People of Color, and that white people and their experiences are the norm or basis of expertise and credibility.

Let's deconstruct this a bit further.

Using phrases such as "it would be worthwhile," such as in statement 4 or "more inclusive sources", such as in statement 1 are likely to be poorly received as offensive, undermining, or demeaning. In other words, the experiences and narratives of faculty of color is not a worthwhile topic of its own merit unless allyship is addressed.

Another theme in these statements is an assumption about how intersectionality does or does not operate in marginalized groups or among ignored peoples. Statement 3 seems to also imply a mis-reading of intersectionality. It is important to remember that authors have limited word count restrictions in which to communicate their ideas, thus, requesting that proposal authors provide evidence is not particularly useful and may in fact, be harmful to the recipients.

Statement 5 is also particularly problematic because it implies that the experiences of a marginalized group, in this case, Indigenous students, is not of concern to all campuses. This statement "others" Indigenous students and demonstrates the reviewer's potential ignorance of the forced removal of Indigenous Peoples from their land, upon which most North American universities and colleges are built.

People of Color, Black, Indigenous, People of Color, Asian people, Latinx, and other groups are often lumped together and used as a foil to what is normal, i.e., white. If a proposer chooses to focus on one minoritized or marginalized group, this is just as valid as a more universalized

cultural approach, which often has so many exceptions as to render it useless. In fact, a focused look at a particular experience may offer more opportunities for everyone's learning.

Statement 2 is also highly problematic. The use of the word "we" reinforces the sense that the proposers are on the outside of the organization and that they need to teach white colleagues, who are on the inside. Let's say that the proposal authors are NOT part of a minoritized group or among historically ignored people, the use of "we" is still exclusionary because it is likely to be interpreted as an "inside group". Maybe this statement could be reframed as "Historically marginalized educational developers' experiences in TLCs are an important topic. I'm excited to attend your session, it would benefit everyone in the POD Network community."

We hope you found that helpful. It is certainly not an exhaustive list of the themes prevalent in these comments, nor does it debunk every aspect of what is problematic. But it is a start into unearthing systemic issues that sometimes creep into reviews and we just want you to be aware and conscious of how it happens.

## **MODULE VI: PROVIDING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK – HELPFUL TIPS**

The next section of this training will feature how to provide constructive feedback. Much of these helpful tips are based on the findings of Lubienski's work, which were based on the analyses of the American Educational Research Association, AERA conference context on how reviewing conference proposals differs from that of journal articles.

On the screen there are two text boxes. This is to illustrate that you will be requested to provide two types of feedback - feedback to the proposal authors, which will be shared with them, and feedback to the program chairs and session coordinators, which will only be shared with the conference committee.

Reviewers should assume the author's claims have merit. As a reminder, the goal of a review is to not show how much you know; it's to look for ways to strengthen and improve the author's work by providing clear and insightful reviews. What this typically means is a couple of thoughtful sentences to the author and a few sentences to the program chair and session coordinators.

Comments can be extremely heartening or disheartening. It is important to note that unconstructive feedback may further alienate marginalized or ignored people. Even reviewers who recommend rejecting a proposal can provide helpful encouragement to the author. The reviewers who are most helpful to authors do five specific things.

- First, good conference proposal reviewers focus on the most important, substantive issues when writing comments to the author.
- Second, the most constructive reviews balance critique with positive comments.
- Third, if you find yourself getting passionate while reviewing, you may need to pause and reread your reviews. Reviewers should not let their own research agenda or pet peeves serve as their dominant lens. In a similar vein, reviewers should not automatically dismiss proposals for lack of perceived fit with the conference theme.
- A review that is clear and carefully constructed not only is helpful to the author but also enhances the author's confidence that the review process was carefully executed by knowledgeable reviewers. Therefore, it is critical that you proofread your review before you click submit.
- You may be tempted to assign a high rating to each category by default with a recommendation of acceptance unless you have very grave concerns. Although this may seem encouraging to authors, it does not help the authors or the program chairs

understand the proposal's strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, overuse of high ratings makes it difficult for session coordinators to efficiently rule out weaker proposals and focus on those that merit further consideration. Reviewers should strive to vary their ratings both within and across proposals to indicate where a proposal is strongest, what aspects could be improved, and which proposals should (and should not) be included in the conference program.

Let's now shift our focus on how to provide thoughtful feedback for the program chairs and session coordinators.

It is not helpful to say "see notes to authors" or write lengthy comments that repeat the comments that have already been made to the author as it only adds to the chairs and the coordinators reading load. Rather, your feedback should:

- Be brief – a summarization of the study's focus and contribution, as well as a brief explanation of why you recommended acceptance or rejection of the proposal. Also, the comments to the program chairs can be quite frank and straightforward.
- Secondly, comments should be consistent with the content of the overall review. For example, a reviewer should not tell the author, "This is an interesting proposal," but then tell the chairs, "This work has already been done."
- Third, reviewers should feel free to make specific suggestions about the presentation format.
- Finally, reviewers can alert the chairs and coordinators to any other pertinent issue.

### **IDENTIFYING NEGATIVE AND/OR DISMISSIVE COMMENTS**

Now that you are more familiar with how to provide constructive feedback, let's take a moment to put it into action.

In this next activity, you will be asked to identify the negative and/or dismissive comments in several reviewer statements. Then, we ask that you select at least two of these statements and rewrite them constructively.

It may be helpful to imagine that you are in a conversation with the proposal authors themselves. What would you say? How would you encourage them? Sometimes it's much more difficult to share critique in-person but that's exactly what you should be thinking about as you rewrite these statements – it's not about hiding behind an anonymous comment, it's about having a growth orientation to your feedback and a mindset of development, openness, and humility. So, figure out how to say things in a way that motivates and inspires the authors to bring out their best work and don't forget to clearly communicate how their work connects to the POD Network's values of collaboration, equity and evidence.

I will now read the statements that you are being asked to reflect on:

1. This is useful, but the modeled techniques are not particularly novel and are already in many facilitators' toolboxes.
2. This is such an important topic - I'd hate to see it excluded. But if it's done poorly it's potentially damaging.
3. The approach and practice may be a viable one for our times but you may wish to offer several richer references. Only 2 works are cited and both are dated despite their relevance.

4. Polling, brainstorming, and think-pair-share can be pretty shallow activities for a lot of very educated and experienced people, so I encourage presenters to think more carefully about what exactly they hope participants will walk away with, and identify more challenging activities for the session.
5. I think that the instrument and the session could be valuable. I have reservations about the rigor of content and the thoughtfulness behind the plan for delivery.

You should now press pause on the video to complete this brief activity. After you have completed your reflection, please press play to continue with the training.

## **DECONSTRUCTING REVIEWER COMMENTS**

There are several trigger words in these statements, such as “not particularly novel”, “offer richer references”, and “if it’s done poorly” - all of which are condescending and likely to deflate the recipients.

Additionally, personal judgements have no place in reviewer feedback such as suggesting that the content “lacks rigor”, the plan for delivery is “not thoughtful”, or that particular methodologies are “shallow” for educated people. The latter further implies that the proposal authors are inexperienced and not highly educated given that they have opted to use polling, brainstorming or think-pair-share.

In the case of statement 3, it is never appropriate to put the author down for “dated work”. There are ALWAYS ways to communicate that current scholarship has the potential to strengthen the proposal.

Statement 2 is particularly harmful because the reviewer makes grand assumptions that the content will be poorly presented and bases their recommendation on this false pretense. The irony of this reviewer’s feedback is that the comment itself is “damaging” - it’s poorly thought through and insensitive.

In statement 1, we need to ask ourselves, whose toolbox matters? Perhaps individuals newer to the field of educational development could benefit from the modeled techniques proposed by the authors. And, as we grow and have more experiences, we hear things differently so there’s always something to add to your toolbox, even if the techniques are well known to you because we’re listening to it differently than we did before.

There are so many ways to deconstruct these comments – maybe you found even more ways than mentioned here. This concludes the formal portion of the reviewer training.

## **THANK YOU**

We wanted to take a moment to thank you for being an integral part of the Annual Conference’s success. We couldn’t do it without your hard work, commitment and dedication to the POD Network. So, thank you for all that you do and for your time and energy participating in this training.

This training was developed and audio-narrated by myself, Pamela Roy, as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Consultant to the POD Conference Committee. And, in Consultation with the 2021, 2022, and 2023 POD Conference Teams & the 2021, and 2023 AdHoc Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. These members include, in alphabetical order: Janet Cape, Jess Clawson, Lynn Eaton, Kristin English, Teresa Focarile, Christopher Grabau, Claudia Cornejo Happel, Carol Hernandez, Chad Hershock, Hoag Holmgren, Heeyoung Kim, Antonia Levy, Tammy McCoy, Mandy McGrew, José Muñiz, Jerod Quinn, Cheryl Richardson, Artineh Samkian, Carol Subiño Sullivan, German Vargas Ramos, & Tonya Whitehead.