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## Diversity Corner

Please visit our [Diversity Corner Archives](https://babta.org/Diversity_Corner_Archives) ([https://babta.org/Diversity\\_Corner\\_Archives](https://babta.org/Diversity_Corner_Archives)) page to view previous posts.

### Unconscious Bias in Travel Management: The Hidden Factor Shaping Business Travel

In today's global business environment, travel management plays a critical role in employee experience, cost control, and organizational culture. While companies have made strides in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), one often overlooked factor continues to influence travel programs: unconscious bias.

#### What Is Unconscious Bias?

Unconscious bias refers to the automatic judgments and assumptions we make about people based on background, identity, or past experiences—without even realizing it. In travel management, these biases can subtly shape decisions about policy, supplier selection, and traveler support.

#### Where Bias Shows Up in Travel Programs

##### 1. Travel Policy Design

Policies are often built with a "one-size-fits-all" mindset. This can unintentionally disadvantage:

- Older travelers who may need more comfortable accommodations
- Employees with disabilities requiring accessible rooms or transportation
- Women or solo travelers who may prioritize safety differently

A rigid policy may save money on paper—but at the expense of traveler well-being.

## **2. Supplier Selection**

Preferred airlines, hotels, and ground transportation providers are typically chosen based on cost and volume. However, unconscious bias can lead to:

- Overlooking minority-owned or diverse suppliers
- Ignoring safety records or inclusivity practices
- Favoring familiar brands instead of more inclusive alternatives

A more intentional sourcing strategy can align travel programs with company DEI values.

## **3. Traveler Experience**

Not all travelers experience business trips the same way. Bias can impact:

- Assumptions about who is “comfortable” traveling internationally
- Lack of support for LGBTQ+ travelers visiting restrictive regions
- Insufficient guidance for employees traveling to unfamiliar or high-risk destinations

Inclusive travel programs recognize these differences and provide tailored support.

## **4. Approval and Opportunity Bias**

Who gets to travel for high-visibility meetings or global assignments? Managers may—without realizing it—favor:

- Employees similar to themselves
- Those perceived as “low risk” or “easy travelers”

This can limit career growth opportunities for diverse talent.

## **Why It Matters**

Unchecked unconscious bias in travel management can lead to:

- Lower employee satisfaction and engagement
- Increased travel risk and safety concerns
- Missed opportunities to support DEI goals
- Reduced productivity and retention

On the other hand, inclusive travel programs create a sense of belonging and ensure all employees can perform at their best—wherever work takes them.

## **How to Build a More Inclusive Travel Program**

### **1. Audit Your Policies**

Review travel policies through a DEI lens:

- Are accessibility needs addressed?
- Is flexibility built in for different traveler profiles?
- Are safety considerations inclusive of all genders and identities?

## **2. Diversify Your Supplier Base**

- Partner with diverse-owned travel vendors
- Evaluate hotel and airline inclusivity practices
- Include DEI criteria in RFP processes

## **3. Provide Traveler-Centric Support**

- Offer pre-trip guidance tailored to destination risks
- Include safety tools and resources for vulnerable travelers
- Allow flexibility for accommodations that meet personal needs

## **4. Train Managers and Travel Teams**

Awareness is key. Provide training on:

- Recognizing unconscious bias
- Inclusive decision-making
- Equitable travel opportunity distribution

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## **5. Leverage Data Responsibly**

Use travel data to identify patterns:

- Who is traveling—and who isn't?
- Are certain groups underrepresented in business travel?

Data can reveal hidden inequities and guide better decisions.

### **Looking Ahead**

As business travel continues to evolve, organizations have an opportunity to rethink what a "successful" travel program looks like. It's no longer just about cost savings and efficiency—it's about equity, safety, and experience.

Addressing unconscious bias isn't a one-time initiative; it's an ongoing commitment. By embedding inclusivity into travel management, companies not only support their people—they strengthen their culture and performance.