



Identifying Implicit and Explicit Bias in Jefferson County's Comprehensive Master Plan: An Area Plan Toolkit

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Purpose

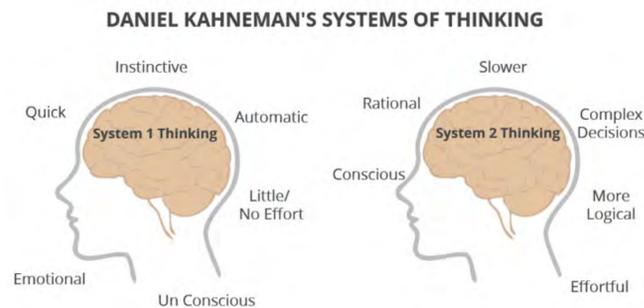
The purpose of this Capstone project is to develop a toolkit document that can be used by the client to ensure that Area Plan updates do not contain bias or lead to inequitable outcomes. This Capstone project will employ the toolkit to analyze the Jefferson County South Plains Area Plan. Achieving a better understanding of implicit and explicit bias will result in tangible changes to planning policy within Jefferson County. While this is just a first step, the toolkit will create a foundation to address bias and inequity in all future regulations, plans, and procedures.

Methodology

In order to create an effective and informational bias toolkit for Jefferson County, an array of secondary background research was the main source of data. The toolkit draws from research into other jurisdictions' efforts to address bias and inequities in planning documents and engagement processes, including Portland, Minneapolis, and Seattle. Additional research, screening of the South Plains Area Plan utilizing the toolkit, and final recommendations address two categories of bias: content (what the area plan is saying), and word choice (how it is being said). Brief analysis and recommendations addressing bias in the community engagement process are also included in the full report in order to look at the entire process from drafting to engagement to adoption of policy.

What is bias?

Bias is an unconscious trait caused by the human need to categorize individuals and find patterns in order to quickly process information. Using previous life experiences, automatic processing occurs using very little conscious thought and allows humans to carry out multiple tasks at once. This mental effort becomes biased when our associations categorize others based on preconceived stereotypes.



Implicit bias is the subconscious and automatic perception, preference or attitude towards a group of people because of previous experiences, or system 1 thinking. Explicit bias is a conscious preference or attitude towards a particular group, or system 2 thinking. An individual may not be aware that they hold an implicit bias and act on it unintentionally. Both types of bias can lead to negative behavior towards others when they affect our actions and decisions.

Figure 2. Mitigate Bias with IMPLICIT Tactics

- I** ntrospection: self-analyze your own prejudices and biases
- M** indfulness: increase mindfulness by meditating and reducing stress to reduce pressure
- P** erspective-taking: consider the point of view of someone being stereotyped
- L** earn to slow down: pause before interactions to reduce unconscious behavior
- I** ndividualization: evaluate based on personal characteristics and not those of a group
- C** heck your messaging: change your language to embrace differences
- I** nstitutionalize fairness: support diversity at the organizational level
- T** ake two: reducing implicit bias takes time and effort; look for new ways to improve

Bias in land use policy

Racial segregation within land use planning was not a byproduct of other decisions; rather, it was the intention. Policy prevented groups of people from owning or buying property based on race. This created major segregation within an area, pushing minorities into small, specific neighborhoods where they were allowed to live. Primarily white neighborhoods were given access to the best public resources, such as parks, schools, transportation, employment, and health care because of increased funding and priority land use. This has created a legacy of continued residential racial and economic segregation and a lack of access today based on historic neighborhood locations. While explicitly biased and racialized zoning was made illegal in 1917, exclusionary zoning and policy still exist, perpetuating residential racial and economic segregation. Urban planners need to continue to acknowledge the history of discrimination within the field and create inclusive and actively anti-racist urban spaces by removing biased housing and land use policies. Even if the policies that historically created the exclusion no longer exist, the systemic racism these policies reinforced remain and the outcomes are still with us.

Identifying and Eliminating Bias in Word Choice

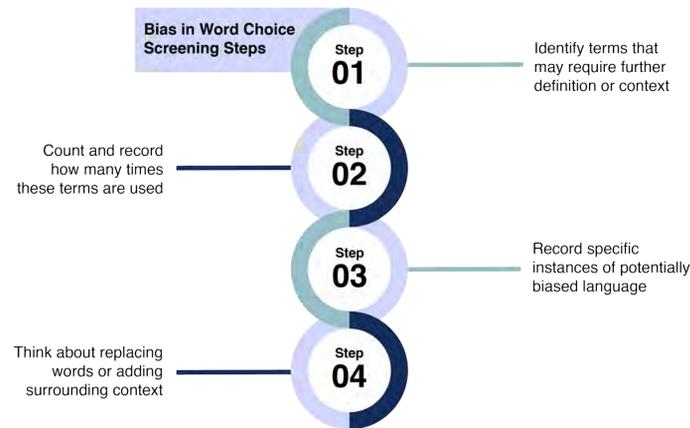


Table 1. Sample of South Plains Area Plan Biased Word Choice Screening

Page	Flagged Language	Comment
Page 5	In the absence of a specific recommendation for a property, the compatibility of proposed land uses should be evaluated for each specific case.	Provide a definition or context for compatibility. What makes something compatible?
Page 7	Redevelopment of under-utilized and/or under-valued property should be encouraged to emphasize primary jobs, such as professional and medical office.	Provide a definition or context for encouraged. How is it being encouraged?
Page 15	Rezoning to multi-family or non-residential uses could be supported when such uses can be sited in suitable or appropriate locations. Suitability should be evaluated in terms of overall project density, degree of visibility, potential for screening and buffering, and degree of scarring or disturbance.	While this example contains a flagged word, it provides specific ways in which suitability is evaluated and should be used as a model example

Table 2. Sample of South Plains Area Plan Biased Words and Number of Occurrences

Sample of Potentially Biased Words	Number of Occurrences
Adequate	3 times
Appropriate	19 times
Character	16 times
Compatible	19 times
Consider	28 times
Encourage	8 times
Suitable	3 times

Recommendations: Reducing Bias in Word Choice

- Create an internal list of terms, starting with those in Table 6, to be clearly defined or given more context within policy documents to reduce potentially biased interpretation
 - Prioritize using the words consistently and accurately based on the definitions to improve accountability
 - Provide accountability for how the idea conveyed by the term would be achieved
 - While this is an advisory document, providing context to terms can appropriately reduce bias
- Incorporate a glossary at the end of every document or where to find a glossary of terms to provide definitions for a public audience
 - A detailed glossary of hard to define and technical terms will help readers better understand what something means and reduce confusion
 - Readers may not understand the connection between the Comprehensive Master Plan and an Area Plan and that the glossary is located only within the CMP

Identifying and Eliminating Bias in Policy Content

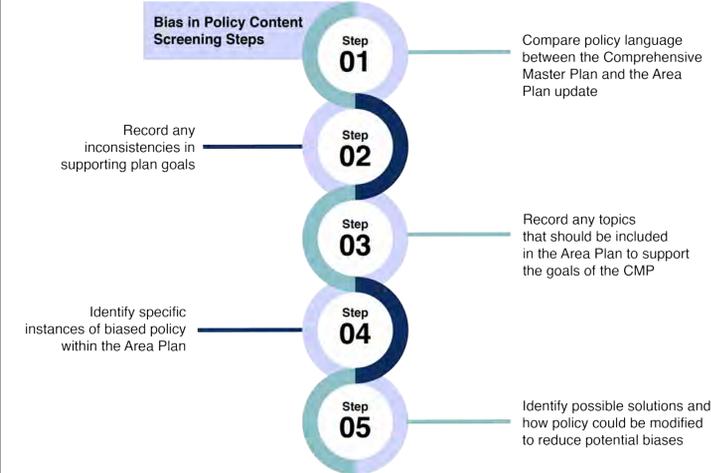


Table 3. Policy Topics and Number of Occurrences within the South Plains Area Plan and Comprehensive Master Plan

Policy Topic	Number of Occurrences in South Plains Area Plan	Comments	Number of Occurrences in Comprehensive Master Plan	Comments
Equity/ Equitable	0 times	Explicitly equitable policy should be woven throughout the document	2 times	Only used to define sustainability and support floodplain policy, should be woven throughout.
Sustainable/ Sustainability	0 times	Sustainability has a strong link to equity and should be present	15 times	This topic has a dedicated section with clear ideals and is also part of a supporting vision for the entire document
Affordable Housing	1 time	Affordable housing is only actively encouraged in the Southwest Plaza Activity Center	18 times	Affordable housing policy in the CMP is well defined and encouraged

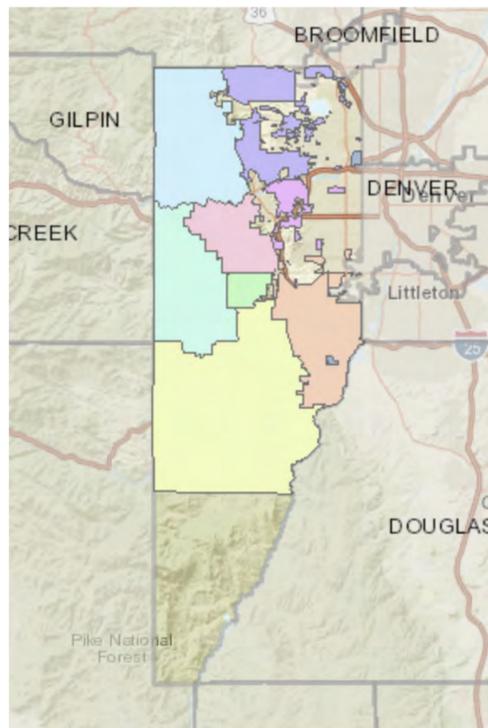
Table 4. Sample of South Plains Area Plan Biased Policy Screening

Page	Flagged Policy in South Plains Area Plan	Comment/Question/Solution
6	There should be locations for commercial goods and services within a reasonable distance of a supporting residential land use, while at the same time ... transitioning to uses that are needed or more desirable in the future	Could this wording lead to gentrification? What classifies something desirable or undesirable? Think about the connections between word choice and policy content
7	Emphasis should be on employment uses that pay, on average, higher than the median salary such as general and medical offices, hospital, financial institutions, retail and wholesale facilities, light manufacturing, research and development, some multifamily residential, and flex space.	This language is biased against employment opportunities that are not higher than the median salary and may reduce the diversity of local resident employment and demographics.
14	In the future, growth should be accommodated by promoting well planned and well executed residential neighborhoods, while ensuring the character of existing residential areas is protected.	How is character protected and how is this protection ensured? Is this always equitable or can it be used to keep people out?

Recommendations: Reducing Bias in Policy Content

- Incorporate an equity lens into every internal and external document moving forward, even if it appears duplicative
 - Address the commitment to equity within a dedicated section in each plan
 - Restate and reinforce the importance of equity throughout policies within each document
- Include more purposeful, defined language when writing policy on topics such as affordable housing, as there is a greater likelihood of implementation and more equitable outcomes
 - Write policy to be actively equitable and anti-racist, not neutral
 - Area Plan language should explicitly support the goals of the Comprehensive Master Plan policies
- Develop benchmarks to assess policy outcomes over time
 - It is not enough to just add unbiased language, but make sure it is leading to equitable results
 - Conduct Equity Impact Assessments and utilize tools to ensure outcomes support the entire community
- Host internal workshops for staff to better understand the prevalence of implicit bias and how it can affect individuals personally and professionally
 - Partner with community groups to build community capacity and hear from different perspectives

Jefferson County, CO Boundary Map



South Plains Area