

Best and Worst Practices in Economics Departments: A Workshop for Chairs

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TODAY'S GOALS

This workshop gathers chairs of economics departments across the country so that each participant can

- share needs and strategies with others in their position
- engage with relevant AEA resources
- walk away with a set of **concrete, welfare-enhancing actions to take** when they return home

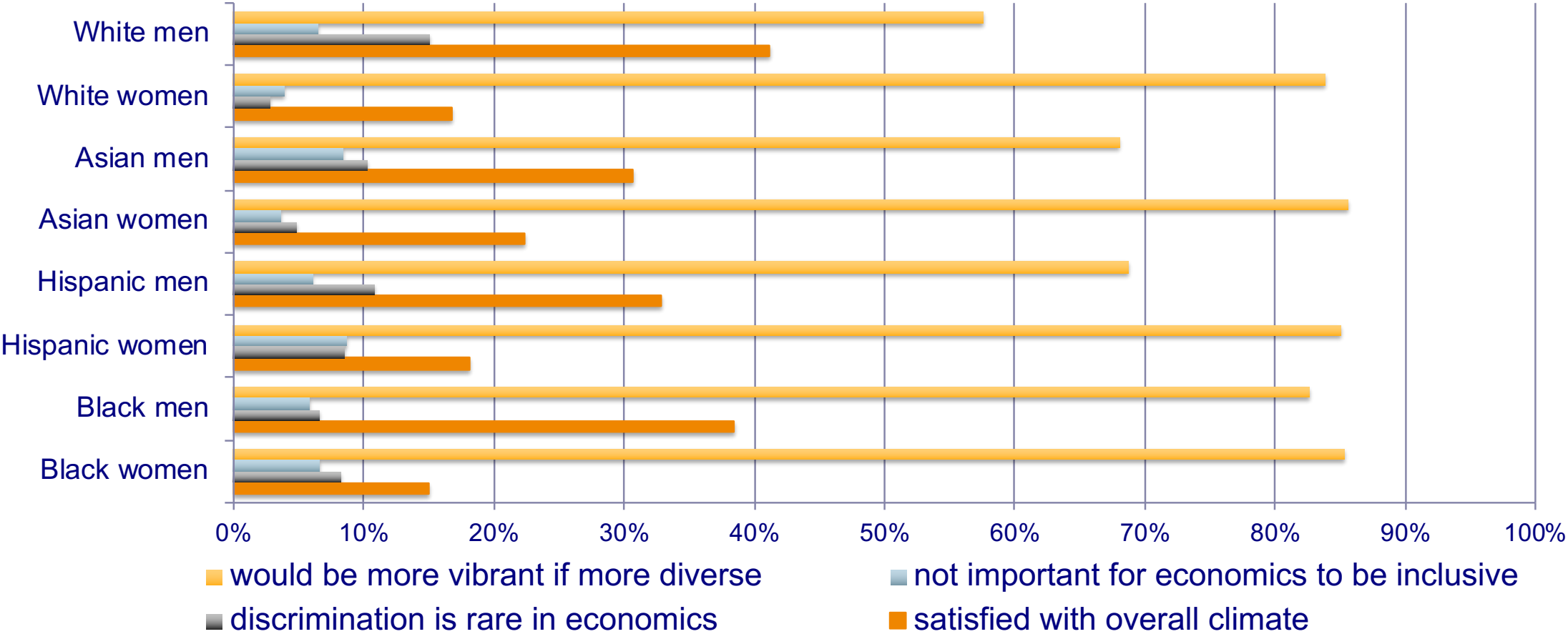
PART 1: PROBLEMS AND MOTIVATION

- Some aggregate indicators of suboptimal practices in economics
- The aggregate effects of suboptimal practices in economics
- Examples from participants

(PART 2 will be SOLUTIONS AND CONCRETE STEPS)

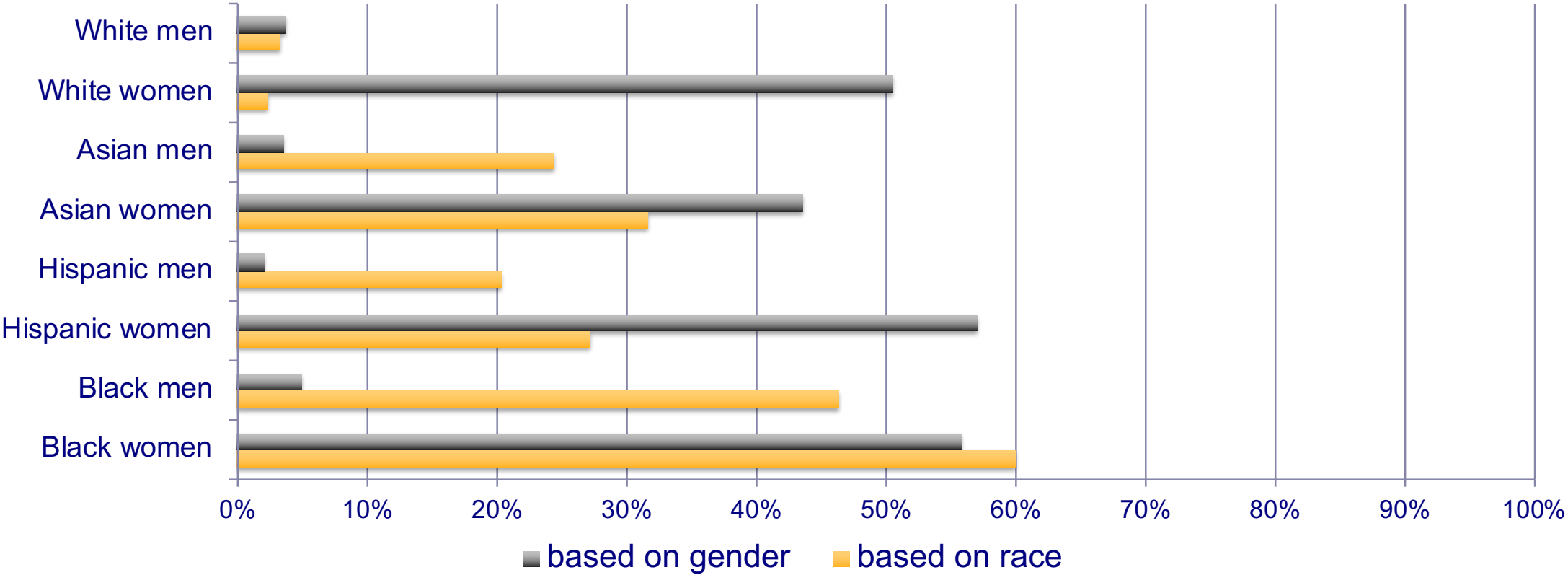
Some aggregate indicators of suboptimal practices in economics

Views on the economics profession

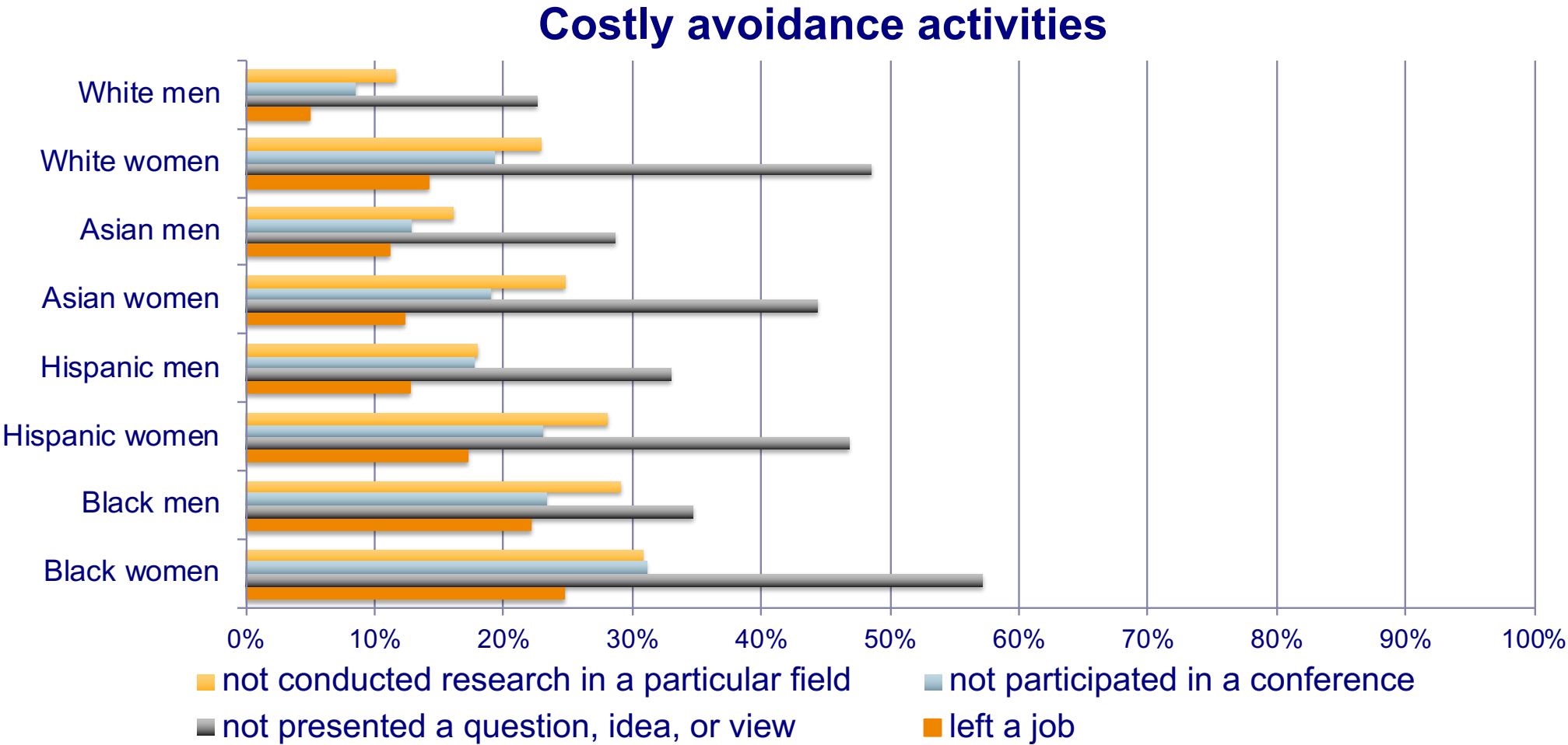


Some aggregate indicators of suboptimal practices in economics

Experiences of discrimination or unfair treatment in economics



Some aggregate indicators of suboptimal practices in economics



Some aggregate indicators of suboptimal practices in economics

Disproportionately few members of Economics departments are women or members of historically underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups

	U.S. Population	Postsecondary Faculty across all fields	U.S. Government Economists	Postsecondary Faculty in Economics
Percent Women	51	48	36	26
Percent URM	34	14	13	9

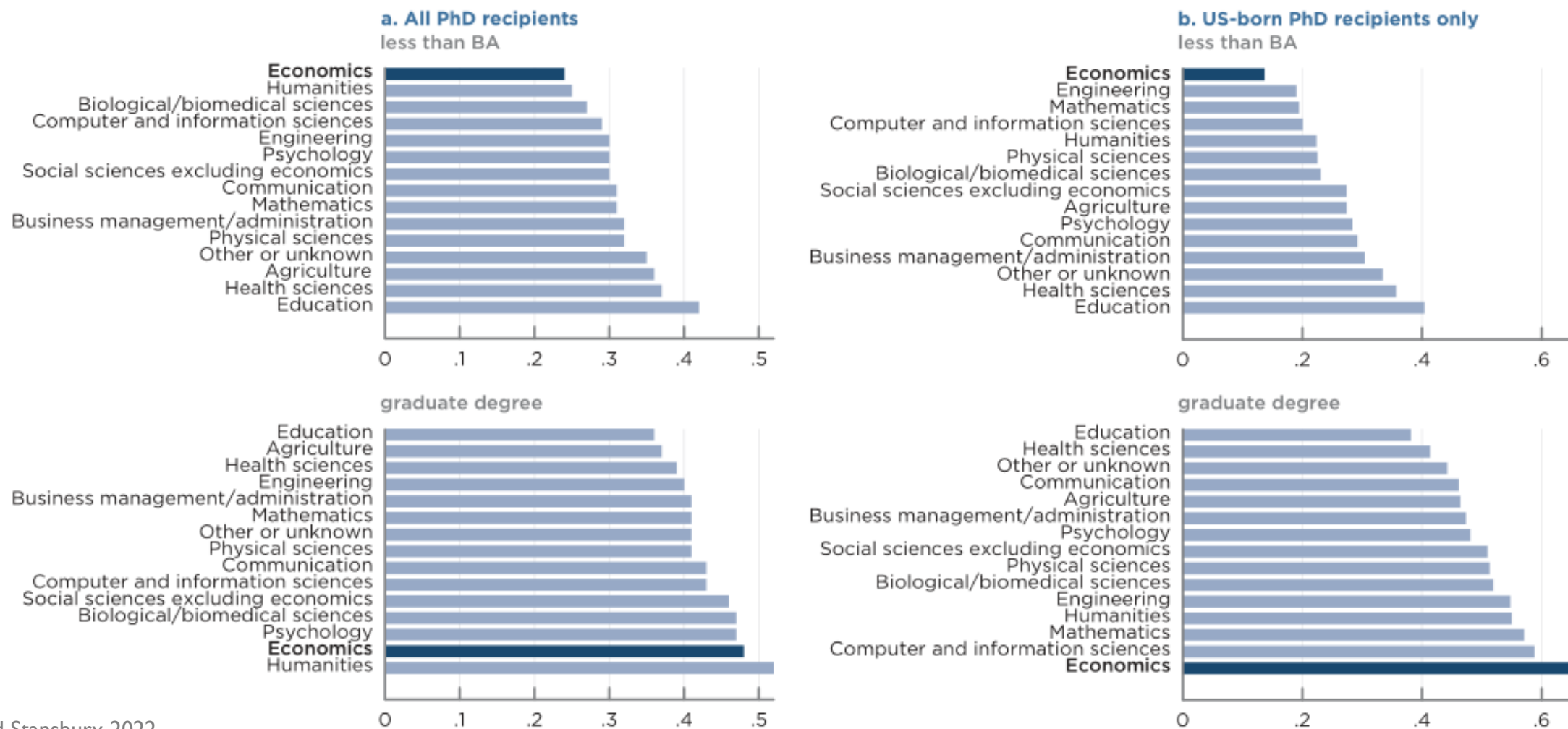
URM identifies members of historically underrepresented minority groups in the U.S. (Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, Native American and Indigenous).

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; OPM FedScope; www.federalreserve.gov/aboutthefed/economist-and-research-assistant-diversity-data.htm, NCES/COE <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/csc/postsecondary-faculty> ; UAQ (response response rate was 36.4%)

Some aggregate indicators of suboptimal practices in economics

Disproportionately few (many) economists come from low (high) SES backgrounds

Highest level of parental education of US PhD recipients in different fields, 2010–18 (share)



The aggregate effects are far-reaching. Suboptimal practices in economics harm (individuals and)...

➤ the allocation of talent

Hsieh, Hurst, Jones, and Klenow (2019, *Econometrica*) estimate that up to 40% of aggregate growth in U.S. market GDP per person between 1960 and 2010 is explained by improved allocation of talent as discrimination and barriers to occupational choice for white women, black men, and black women fell.

➤ how effectively we work together

e.g., Woolley et al. *Science* 2010; Hong & Page *PNAS* 2004; Phillips, Northcraft & Neale *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 2006; Hoogendoorn, Oosterbeek & van Praag *Management Science* 2013; Levine et al. *PNAS* 2014; Freeman & Huang *Journal of Labor Economics* 2015

➤ the education we deliver to our students

e.g., DiversifyingEcon.org and many others

➤ the development of economic knowledge and policy insights

e.g., Chattopadhyay & Duflo *Econometrica* 2004; May, McGarvey & Whaples *Contemporary Economic Policy* 2014; Malmendier, Nagel, & Yan *Journal of Monetary Economics* 2020; Bayer, Hoover, Washington JEP 2020; Owen & Temesvary *Journal of Banking & Finance* 2018

What are your experiences in economics departments?

What are your examples of worst (or best) practices?

PART 2: WHAT CAN DEPARTMENT CHAIRS DO?

Key takeaway:

You are not alone.

There are a multitude of research projects, resources, and concrete steps to help you build a more productive and equitable department.

What is appropriate behavior?

AEA Code of Professional Conduct

Adopted April 20, 2018

The American Economic Association holds that principles of professional conduct should guide economists in academia, government, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector.

The AEA's founding purpose of "the encouragement of economic research" requires intellectual and professional integrity. Integrity demands honesty, care, and transparency in conducting and presenting research; disinterested assessment of ideas; acknowledgement of limits of expertise; and disclosure of real and perceived conflicts of interest.

The AEA encourages the "perfect freedom of economic discussion." This goal requires an environment where all can freely participate and where each idea is considered on its own merits. Economists have a professional obligation to conduct civil and respectful discourse in all forums, including those that allow confidential or anonymous participation.

The AEA seeks to create a professional environment with equal opportunity and fair treatment for all economists, regardless of age, sex, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, health condition, marital status, parental status, genetic information, political affiliation, professional status, or personal connections.

Economists have both an individual responsibility for their own conduct, and a collective responsibility to promote professional conduct. These responsibilities include developing institutional arrangements and a professional environment that promote free expression concerning economics. These responsibilities also include supporting participation and advancement in the economics profession by individuals from all backgrounds, including particularly those that have been historically underrepresented.

The AEA strives to promote these principles through its activities.



AEA Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, and Retaliation

*As stated in the **AEA Code of Professional Conduct**, the AEA seeks to create a professional environment with equal opportunity and fair treatment for all economists, regardless of age, sex, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, health condition, marital status, parental status, genetic information, political affiliation, professional status, or personal connections.*

The AEA does not tolerate harassment or discrimination in any of its activities. Unacceptable behavior includes but is not limited to:

- Solicitation of emotional or physical intimacy despite expressions or indications that it is unwelcome
- Solicitation of emotional or physical intimacy accompanied by real or implied threat of personal or professional harm
- Intentionally intimidating, threatening, harassing, or abusive actions or remarks (both spoken and in other media)
- Prejudicial actions or comments that undermine the principles of equal opportunity, fair treatment, or free academic exchange
- Deliberate intimidation, stalking, or following
- Harassing photography or recording
- Sustained or aggressive disruption of talks or other activities that undermine free academic exchange
- Physical assault (including unwelcome touching or groping)
- Real or implied threat of physical harm

It is also a violation of this policy to retaliate in any manner against a person who reports or files a complaint alleging harassment, discrimination, or retaliation prohibited by this policy or who assists in the investigation of such a report or complaint.

Individuals violating this policy may be subject to disciplinary action. The AEA reserves the right to take such actions, including, but not limited to, removing an individual from participating in an AEA activity without warning, prohibiting an individual from participating in any future AEA activities, terminating an individual's AEA membership, and notifying an individual's employer.

The AEA views it as the responsibility of each individual member to be proactive in helping to mitigate or avoid harm when the member witnesses any unacceptable behavior.

Appropriate behavior is expected at all times and in all venues
and includes responsibility for own actions and for promoting appropriate behavior more broadly.

GENDER ISSUES IN ECONOMICS

Gendered Language on the Economics Job Market Rumors Forum[†]

By ALICE H. WU*

Women are underrepresented in math-intensive fields (Ceci et al. 2014; Kahn and Ginther 2017), and analysts have noted that the representation gap is as large or larger in economics than in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields on average (e.g., Bayer and Rouse 2016). Among various mechanisms that have been proposed to explain this gap,¹ one that seems particularly relevant but that has not yet been evaluated systematically, is the role of an unwelcoming culture that reinforces stereotypical beliefs of men as an in-group in the field and women as an out-group (e.g., Tajfel and Turner 1986; Tonso 1996).

This paper attempts to assess the existence of

issues. Anonymity presumably eliminates social pressures that constrain participants' speech in other public settings, leading to a record of postings that reveal what participants believe but would not otherwise openly express.

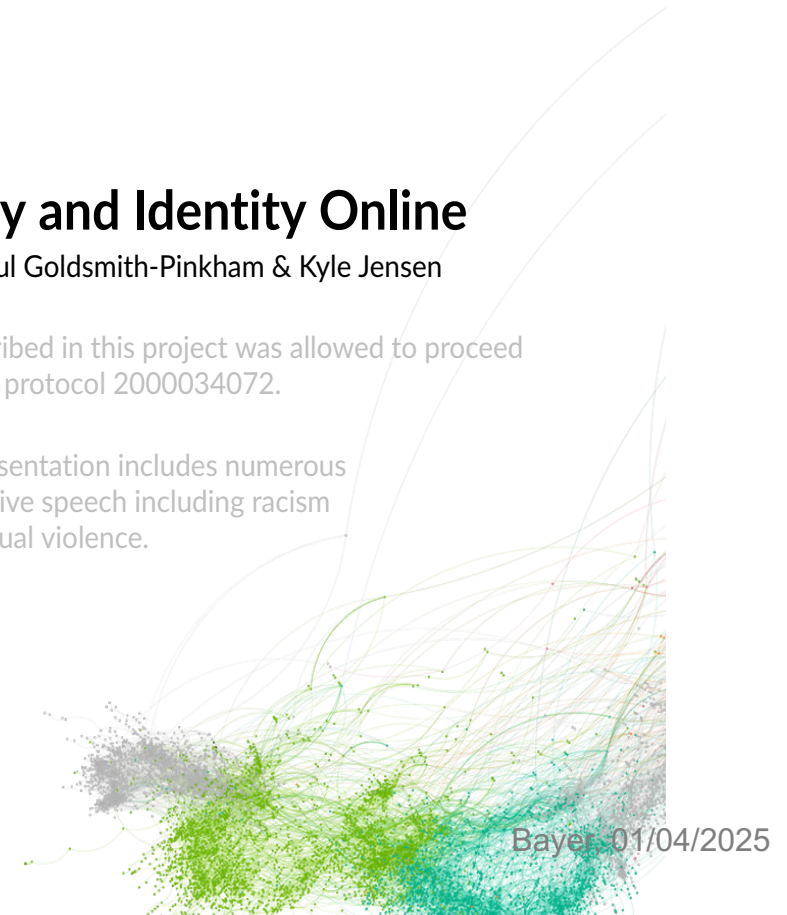
I use a Lasso logistic model to measure gendered language in EJMR postings, identifying the words that are most strongly associated with discussions about one gender or the other. I find that the words most predictive of a post about a woman (*female* words) are generally about physical appearance or personal information, whereas those most predictive of a post about a man (*male* words) tend to focus on academic or professional characteristics. Despite some inter-

Anonymity and Identity Online

Florian Ederer, Paul Goldsmith-Pinkham & Kyle Jensen

The analysis described in this project was allowed to proceed by the Yale HRPP, protocol 2000034072.

Warning: This presentation includes numerous excerpts of offensive speech including racism and threats of sexual violence.



Bayer 01/04/2025

What steps can a department chair take?

[aeaweb.org/resources/best-practices](https://www.aeaweb.org/resources/best-practices)

grounded in research and specific to economics



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Resources

[EconTrack Job Market Information Board](#)

[EconSpark Discussion Forum](#)

[AEA Formal Complaint Procedures](#)

[AEA Ombudsperson](#)

Best Practices for Economists

[Introduction](#)

[Conducting Research](#)

[Serving as Colleagues](#)

[Working with Students](#)

[Leading Departments and Workplaces](#)

Best Practices for Economists

Building a More Diverse, Inclusive, and Productive Profession



This site presents best practices for economists in four areas of professional conduct. **Click on the buttons to find practical suggestions for implementation and supporting research and resources.**

Please cite this resource as: Bayer, Amanda, Şebnem Kalemli-Özcan, Rohini Pande, Cecilia Elena Rouse, Anthony A. Smith Jr., Juan Carlos Suárez Serrato, and David W. Wilcox. 2019. *Best Practices for Economists: Building a More Diverse, Inclusive, and Productive Profession*. American Economic Association. <https://www.aeaweb.org/resources/best-practices> (accessed <date of access>).

[Introduction](#)

[Download Best Practices Brochure](#)

Conducting Research

1. **Organize conferences, seminars, and visitor programs that are inclusive.**

Each conference, panel, seminar series, or other forum should feature a diverse group of economists.

2. **Ensure that the conferences and seminar discussions you host are constructive.**

Setting and enforcing rules of responsible behavior by attendees at conference and seminar presentations can increase the quality of the intellectual exchange.

3. **Provide equitable access to journals.**

Ensuring that boards of editors at journals are diverse, that high standards of ethical and equitable behavior are set, and that referees adhere to them may help reduce biases in the editorial process.

4. **Read and cite diversely; think inclusively.**

Citing a diverse set of authors on syllabi and bibliographies and finding value in alternative research approaches can improve your research and the discipline.

5. **Share research opportunities broadly.**

Seeking diversity when identifying research assistants and potential collaborators can help counter existing biases.

Bayer, A., S. Kalemli-Özcan, R. Pande, C. E. Rouse, A. A. Smith Jr., J. C. Suárez Serrato, and D. W. Wilcox. 2019. *Best Practices for Economists: Building a More Diverse, Inclusive, and Productive Profession*. American Economic Association.
<https://www.aeaweb.org/resources/best-practices>

Serving as Colleagues

1. **Discuss and enforce a code of conduct.**

Establishing rules for unbiased conduct facilitates important conversations, sets clear expectations, and creates a more productive and inclusive environment.

2. **Be an effective bystander.**

Signaling a willingness to listen and to speak up when you observe inappropriate behavior helps set norms for fair conduct.

3. **Be a good mentor.**

Improving your mentoring skills encourages those around you to do the same. A more supportive environment attracts better colleagues and creates productive work relationships.

4. **Create room for your colleagues' work-life choices.**

Supporting one another's need for fulfilling professional and personal lives improves mental health and productivity.

5. **Meet your colleagues where they are.**

Valuing differences helps individuals, and the profession, thrive. There is no set profile of what an economist should look like, and there is no rulebook for what constitutes economics research.

Working with Students

1. **Use outreach to counter stereotypes about economics and close other information gaps.**

When faculty proactively offer information about the breadth of the field of economics, more students from underrepresented groups study economics. Simple changes can help students who are less familiar with academia.

2. **Offer course content that is relevant for diverse students.**

Students come to our classes with a wide range of life experiences and interests, but standard economics curricula often fall short of engaging diverse students.

3. **Use effective and inclusive classroom techniques.**

Active learning and other evidence-based pedagogical approaches are effective, inclusive, and straightforward to implement. These techniques have especially large benefits for members of underrepresented groups.

4. **Build a sense of belonging for all students.**

The extreme demographic imbalances in economics departments present an unhealthy environment and an unlevel playing field. When students from underrepresented groups receive explicit and implicit messages that they belong in the field, their performance and persistence improve.

5. **Help your students understand and enjoy the learning process.**

When students and faculty understand that abilities are developed through education, effort, and experience, academic performance improves, satisfaction increases, and race and gender gaps narrow.

Leading Departments and Workplaces

1. **Implement a structured and fair recruiting process.**

Adopting best practices in recruiting can increase the diversity of candidate pools and decrease the influence of human biases on hiring decisions.

2. **Conduct promotion, tenure, and annual performance reviews in a transparent and equitable manner.**

Being transparent about the criteria that will determine evaluation outcomes, and thinking carefully about what those criteria should be, can reduce the biases that taint evaluation processes.

3. **Implement an inclusive process for admitting and developing graduate students.**

Departments can structure their admissions and advising processes to identify, recruit, and develop a much wider range of talent.

4. **Create an inclusive, constructive culture and deal firmly with instances of exclusion, harassment, discrimination, and disrespectful treatment.**

Clear and consistent communication about expectations for behavior and firm action when those expectations are not met can help establish a positive, productive, and inclusive culture.

5. **Structure your meetings and workplaces to be inclusive.**

Inclusive procedures and practices can increase productivity, avoid marginalizing certain voices, and ensure all members of the community have access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.

>> [Learn more](#)

Best Practices for Economists

Ensure that the conferences and seminar discussions you host are constructive.

Setting and enforcing rules of responsible behavior by attendees at conference and seminar presentations can increase the quality of the intellectual exchange.

How to Implement

- Develop a set of guidelines for your department and/or conference series. As an example, refer to the “[Guidance for a Constructive Culture of Exchange in MIT Economics Seminars](#)” (MIT Department of Economics 2019).
- Mitigate power dynamics in seminars. For example, if a powerful person dismisses a good question from a junior, female, URM, or less-connected person, help to flatten the power dynamic by asking to hear the answer to that question.
- Repeated interruptions or refusals to accept an answer to a question should also be addressed. If it is not possible to do so during the seminar, follow up immediately afterward and explain how destructive the behavior is.
- Track how you and your colleagues behave. As a model, see the [statistics collected in World Bank recruitment seminars](#) (Ozler 2019).
- As a participant, your primary objective in attending a seminar is to learn from the speaker. You can also collaboratively help the speaker improve the quality of their scholarship. The objective should never be to prove that you are the smartest person in the room.
- Recognize the needs of different-abled economists when planning conferences. Ensure venues are accessible to those with visual and mobility impairments. Provide captioners to aid people with hearing disabilities, and make sure presenters use microphones when available to ensure proper delivery of captioning services.

Research and Resources

The economics profession is infamous for its aggressive seminar culture. “An adversarial and aggressive culture within academic economics is often advanced as a causal force in women’s stalled progress in the profession, though its impact is difficult to quantify. Economics seminars, for example, have a reputation for being particularly hostile environments. The culture of an academic discipline can have gendered implications if women either fail to fully adapt to the culture or if they receive differential treatment as a result of it” (Lundberg and Stearns 2019).

New efforts to collect quantitative data on seminar dynamics suggest that women are treated differently than men (e.g., Modestino, Dupas, Niederle, and Wolfers 2019; Ozler 2019). These findings are consistent with a striking disparity recorded in the recent AEA professional climate survey (Allgood, Badgett, Bayer, Bertrand, Black, Bloom, and Cook 2019): 91 percent of respondents agree that men are respected within the field, while 41 percent overall (and only 16 percent of female respondents) agree that women are respected. The hostility and lack of respect can be detrimental to both the field and its practitioners; for example, to avoid possible harassment, discrimination, or unfair or disrespectful treatment, 40

The AEA Best Practices pages offer practical suggestions for implementation and link to a multitude of relevant AEA resources and beyond

Leading Departments towards Better Practices

The following slides present an array of good first steps for department chairs to take.

What actions will you take this year?

Leading Departments towards Better Practices

1. Share the [AEA Code of Professional Conduct](#) (or your department's own code) and the [AEA Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, Retaliation](#) with all faculty and graduate students in the department, and communicate to them the importance of appropriate behavior at all times, including in the workplace, at gatherings outside business hours, and in anonymous online postings.
2. Read and bookmark the [AEA Best Practices for Economists](#).
3. Share the [AEA Best Practices for Economists](#) with all faculty and graduate students in the department, and recommend that they read and bookmark the resource and select one personal action item.
4. Enlist two other department members to help digest, prioritize, and act on the [AEA Best Practices for Economists](#) within your department.

Leading Departments towards Better Practices

5. Attend at least one workshop led by the [AEA Ombuds Team](#).
6. Contact the [AEA Ombuds Team](#) if a relevant question or concern arises.
7. Review your department's recruiting process and structure it to align with best practices (<https://www.aeaweb.org/resources/best-practices/leading-departments#p1>).
8. Ensure each junior faculty member in your department has at least one mentor and point mentors and mentees to helpful resources (<https://www.aeaweb.org/resources/best-practices/serving-as-colleagues#p3>).

(5-8 of 12)

Leading Departments towards Better Practices

9. Create a spreadsheet that tracks the allocation of service work in the department and use it to ensure an equitable allocation among department members (<https://www.aeaweb.org/resources/best-practices/leading-departments#p5>).
10. Gather and review information on salaries, promotion, and tenure and work to make these processes more transparent and equitable (<https://www.aeaweb.org/resources/best-practices/leading-departments#p2>).
11. Start preparing your department to apply for the [AEA Award for Outstanding Achievement in Diversity and Inclusion](#).
12. Commit to taking the following step(s) to create a more productive and equitable department.
[enter your steps here]

(9-12 of 12)

Leading Departments towards Better Practices

Individually,

- Read over the sample steps. Also reflect on what you do well.

With your table,

- Discuss the benefits and barriers of taking action.

With the large group,

- Share insights and questions.

diversifyingecon.org/chairs/