Report

Using Narrative CVs:

Identifying shared objectives and monitoring effectiveness

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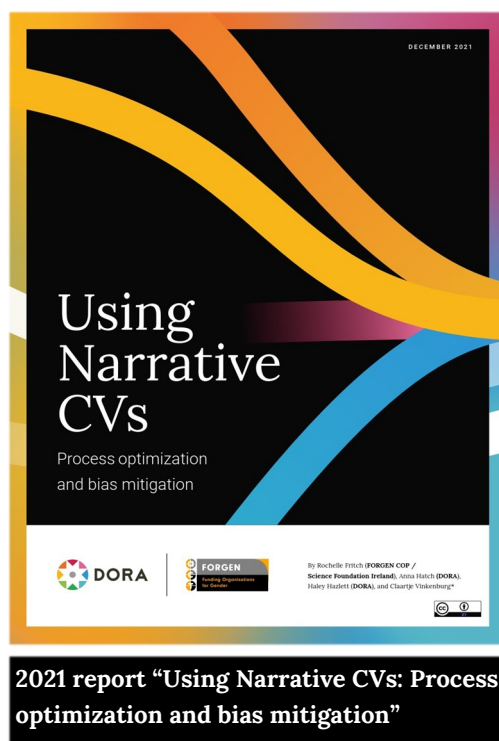
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Background

2021 report "Using Narrative CVs: Process optimization and bias mitigation"

Narrative CVs aim to support a more holistic approach to grant evaluation by asking applicants to provide qualitative evidence of research outcomes and achievements in a concise, structured format. The introduction of narrative CV elements like the National Institutes of Health (NIH) biosketch or a fully narrative CV like the Royal Society's Résumé for Researchers have led to increased integration of narrative CVs for grant evaluation by funding organizations, including the Dutch Research Council, Science Foundation Ireland, Luxembourg National Research Fund, the Swiss National Science Foundation, and UK Research and Innovation. Capitalizing on the community momentum and interest in further examining the merits and areas for development of narrative CVs, the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Funding Organisations for Gender Equality Community of Practice (FORGEN CoP) hosted a workshop for research funding organizations in September 2021 to optimize their use for grant evaluation.

The resulting short report contained the following recommended actions:

- **Build a foundation** to support the use of narrative CVs by creating a shared definition and list of objectives for what it hopes to achieve.
- **Focus on training** for reviewers, applicants, and staff at funding organizations.
- **Monitor the effectiveness** of narrative CVs to continually optimize their utility as a tool for research assessment.

In February 2022, DORA organized a second workshop "Using Narrative CVs: Identifying shared objectives and monitoring effectiveness" in partnership with the FORGEN CoP, Science Foundation Ireland, the Swiss National Science Foundation, and UK Research and Innovation. The aim of the workshop was to develop a shared definition for narrative CV and create a list of common objectives for its use in grant evaluation. The online workshop took place on two occasions to accommodate global participation, and more than 180 individuals from over 50 funding organizations in more than 30 countries registered for the events. To support alignment of values and collective action towards the iterative adoption of narrative CVs at funding organizations, we worked with attendees to discuss a shared definition for the narrative CV, generate a list of common objectives for its use in grant evaluation, and identify ideas to support the optimization of narrative CVs as a robust tool for research assessment.

Key takeaways

A shared definition

While a variety of styles of narrative CVs are being used for grant evaluation, such as the [NIH Biosketch](), the [SNSF SciCV](), and the [Royal Society's Résumé for Researchers](), a shared definition has not been widely established, likely due in part to the wide variety of terms and formats used for a narrative CV. We proposed the following definition, which was initially developed by the DORA funder discussion group at the December 2021 DORA funder discussion meeting and presented at the February 2022 workshop, where it was refined based on participant discussion.

The group defined narrative CVs as:

"A narrative CV is a type of CV format that
provides structured written descriptions
of academics' or researchers' contributions and
achievements that reflect a broad range of
relevant skills and experiences."

Common objectives

Clear objectives for the use of narrative CVs in grant application evaluation can support their optimization through experimentation. Three common objectives were identified through group idea generation, consolidation, and a prioritization survey at the February 2022 workshops. They include:

1. Increase the **recognition** of a wider range of research contributions
2. Increase **fairness** in grant funding decisions
3. Increase **flexibility** for researchers to demonstrate contributions

Identifying five ideas for optimization

Five ideas for how to optimize, evaluate, and iterate on the use of narrative CVs emerged from exercises held during the workshop.

The discussions underscored that significant interest is building from research funding organizations in using narrative CVs as a qualitative method for research assessment. This is in part due to their potential to support a research culture that nurtures and values research achievements without the use of misused proxy measures of quality, such as journal impact factors.

This collaborative effort has identified the following five ideas for optimization:

1. **Start small.** Analyze the outcomes of pilot interventions before making decisions about widespread policy changes. Where possible, compare your outcomes with those of other funders to gain a richer understanding of contextual nuances and share good practice.
2. **Check objectives are being met.** Establish priorities you want to focus on. An internal comparative study can determine whether a narrative CV format aligns with your objectives and fulfills its mandate to support the recognition of a broader range of research outputs.
3. **Monitor implementation.** Surveys, interviews, and focus groups can help determine whether applicants, both awarded and unawarded, and evaluators are effectively learning to prepare and evaluate narrative CVs.
4. **Promote equity.** Using this format could benefit some more than others, such as non-native speakers or members of underrepresented groups. In designing studies, it is important to apply an intersectional lens (e.g. gender and race/ethnicity; gender and country of origin; etc.) This could also include applicant's current institutional affiliation and researcher support available from that institution.
5. **Embrace experimentation.** Develop intentional, carefully planned experiments to evaluate the impact of new practices and, where possible, use randomized control trial design specifications. This includes all aspects of the implementation of a narrative CV, such as format, context and processes for use, and training and support to facilitate use. Experimentation and results can also be used as a mechanism to routinely review and update policies and practices.

Print or share the accompanying quick-reference guide on the next page (page 6).

IDEAS FOR OPTIMIZATION

Five things to consider to optimize, evaluate & iterate on the use of narrative CVs

Start small

Analyze the outcomes of pilot interventions before making decisions about widespread policy changes.

Where possible, **compare your outcomes with those of other funders** to gain an understanding of contextual nuances and share good practice.

Check objectives

Establish priorities and **check they are being met.**

An **internal comparative study** can determine whether a narrative CV format aligns with priorities and fulfills its mandate to support the recognition of a broader range of research outputs.

Monitor

Monitor implementation.

Surveys, **interviews**, and **focus groups** can help determine whether applicants (both awarded and unawarded) and evaluators are effectively learning to prepare and evaluate narrative CVs.

Promote equity

When designing studies, **apply an intersectional lens**.

This might look like taking the following into account:

- Gender *and* race or ethnicity
- Gender *and* country of origin

Embrace experimentation

Develop intentional, carefully planned experiments to evaluate the impact of all aspects of a narrative CV, such as **format**, **context** and **processes** for use, and **training** and support to facilitate use. Where possible, use randomized control trial design specifications. Review and update processes on a **regular basis** as necessary.