



Inclusive Recruitment and Hiring

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INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT AND HIRING

Hiring practices that are inclusive for persons with disabilities have two main characteristics:

- Reasonable modifications or adjustments are made for qualified applicants.
- Actions are taken to minimize unconscious biases that can create unintended barriers.

These practices are a cornerstone of a comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy and signal a commitment to equitable opportunities for all potential employees.

Part 1: Recruitment: Reaching and Attracting Diverse Talent

To attract a wider pool of talent, actively demonstrate your company's commitment to inclusivity and use a range of channels to reach candidates.

1. Demonstrate Your Commitment to Diversity

- **Review Your Public Presence:** Your company's website, images, and language should be inclusive, reflecting a workforce where people from all backgrounds—including various races, genders, ethnicities, and abilities—belong.
- **Ensure Web Accessibility:** Consider accessibility throughout your website by integrating alternative text descriptions for images, offering downloadable job postings in accessible formats (e.g., screen reader-compatible PDFs), and using clear language.
- **Build Your Team's Understanding:** Help your management and hiring teams get comfortable with the range of disabilities to create more accessible recruitment practices. The two broad categories are:
 - **Visible disabilities:** Conditions that are easy to observe or when a person uses an assistive device (e.g., using a cane or wheelchair).
 - **Invisible disabilities:** Conditions that are not immediately apparent but can make everyday activities challenging (e.g., chronic pain, learning differences, mental health conditions). For more information visit THRC's [Invisible Disabilities](#) tool.
- **Use Marketing and Public Relations:** In your company marketing, highlight successes you have had with including persons with disabilities and other underrepresented groups in your business.

2. Create Inclusive Job Postings with Accommodation Statements

To reflect best practices and comply with legislation, employers should ensure their employment practices are accessible for all individuals. Explicit statements signal to all candidates, including those with disabilities, that you are a welcoming employer committed to equity.

- **Use welcoming language:** Avoid phrases like "must be able to" or "fast-paced environment" that might be seen to close off any possibilities for accommodation and discourage qualified candidates from even applying.
- **Use clear language:** Common software tools can help you measure the reading level of your materials – some people will benefit from written information that is easier to process.
- **Focus on qualifications:** Clear, concise postings ensure the focus is on skills and experience, reducing unconscious bias. Emphasize the tasks and responsibilities, regardless of *how* the work gets done. For example, "You will be responsible for operating equipment to load and unload goods. Training will be provided on all equipment. Reasonable accommodation will be made upon request."
- **Include an accommodation statement:** Employment standards require clear notifications for persons with disabilities about the availability of accommodations. Here are some samples:

Example 1:

[Company Name] is committed to providing accessible employment practices, in compliance with relevant legislation. Applicants are asked to make accommodation requests to [Company Name] and we will make every effort to ensure that those requests are met throughout the recruitment process.

Example 2:

[Company Name] is an equal opportunity employer committed to diversity. We are committed to providing employment in accordance with applicable human rights legislation and accessibility regulations. Assessment and selection materials or processes used during the recruitment process can be made available in an accessible format to applicants with disabilities, upon request. If contacted for an interview, please advise the Recruiter if you require disability-related accommodation.

Example 3:

[Company Name] believes in and is committed to promoting diversity in our workforce. We do not make hiring or employment decisions based on race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family status and record of offences. We are committed to providing reasonable accommodations and will work with you to meet your needs. If you are a person with a disability or other characteristic that means you might require assistance during the application process, please don't hesitate to reach out! We celebrate our inclusive work environment and welcome members of all backgrounds and perspectives to apply.

3. Diversify Your Recruitment Sources

Employers can attract persons with disabilities and other diverse talent by expanding their outreach.

- **Partner with diversity-focused associations:** Disability-specific organizations can be a potential source for recruitment. Similarly, partnerships with groups representing other diverse communities can broaden your talent pool.
- **Use targeted job boards:** Posting jobs to websites and community agencies that serve persons with disabilities and other underrepresented groups can give your company a great start.
- **Looking for contacts?**
 - Visit the THRC [Connector Tool](#), an online database of organizations that can help employers build more inclusive workplaces.
 - Actively use your own **networks and contacts** – people within your company can help you to spread the word more widely.

4. Learn from Experience

- **Track your results.** Use a system that will help you to:
 - Identify gaps and new opportunities for outreach and recruitment
 - Save time and costs for future accommodation requests
 - Engage with important stakeholders about your efforts – internally to the company and also externally
- **Create** a basic record-keeping system such as:

	1 (date)	2 (date)	3 (date)	4 (date)
Occupation being hired for?				
How did the candidate hear about the job?				
Was the candidate from a diverse population?				
Was an accommodation requested?				
Was an accommodation made and if so what?				
Was the candidate hired?				
Other comments				

Part 2: Selection: The Inclusive Hiring Process

An inclusive hiring process is thoughtfully designed to mitigate bias and focus on a candidate's abilities.

Getting Started: Designing an Inclusive Process

Before you even post a job, consider the design of your entire hiring process to minimize the impact of unconscious biases. While this guide focuses on disability, the principles of mitigating bias—such as focusing on skills and standardizing your practices—help to create a fair process for all candidates, regardless of their background.

- **Define essential functions:** Consider the essential functions of the position and how they might be performed with reasonable accommodation – for disability or for other barriers.
- **Consider a range of disabilities and other challenges:** Think about both physical and non-physical disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, neurodivergence, mental health challenges) and how they might interact with job duties. Consider other characteristics that could create barriers, such as religion or family status.
- **Consult experts:** If needed, consult with accessibility specialists or occupational health professionals.
- **Challenge your thinking:** Ensure you base hiring decisions on qualifications and the ability to perform the job with accommodation, not on a disability or other personal characteristic.
- **Design fair assessments:** Design assessments to be reflective of core job-related skills and knowledge. Be prepared to allow for reasonable accommodation and keep track of accommodations for future reference.
- **Standardize interview protocols:** Review interview questions for unintended biases or unclear language. Consider inclusive practices like providing questions in writing, allowing candidates to refer to notes, and ensuring the interview location is accessible, quiet, and welcoming.

Step 1: Pre-Screening

When reviewing résumés and applications:

- Focus on skills and qualifications relevant to the job, remaining open to transferable skills that candidates might bring from previous, seemingly different jobs.
- Only question gaps in employment history when directly relevant to the role. Gaps and part-time work can be common among candidates with disabilities and others who have faced systemic barriers.
- Screen applications based on skills and qualifications, not on assumptions about limitations. To give more opportunities, try to **screen in, not screen out**.

Step 2: Preparing for Testing and Interviewing

- **Initiate the accommodation conversation:** During initial contact, ask candidates if they require any accommodation for the testing or interview process. Make efforts to encourage them to feel comfortable to self-identify.
- **Seek candidate input:** When a candidate discloses a disability, seek their input to determine appropriate accommodations. Some examples of accommodations are:
 - Accessibility software for knowledge tests
 - Added time for skills tests or performance trials
 - Providing written versions of interview questions
 - Sign language interpretation or real-time captioning
 - Screen readers or amplified headsets
 - Opportunity for additional breaks
 - Allowing a service animal to be present
- **Provide clear information:** When scheduling an interview, provide clear information on the process, location, and accessibility options. Be prepared to give the information in different formats, such as in clear language written form, visually through diagrams and photos, or in discussions that give candidates the chance to ask questions. Give an outline of the selection process and provide clear information on the testing and interview approach – this will be helpful to candidates who might face mental health or cognitive challenges as well as those who might be less familiar with Canadian employment practices.
- **Assemble a trained interview panel:** Assemble an interview panel of people who have completed bias-aware training that covers a range of diversity dimensions, including disability, race, gender, and other protected grounds. Members should be comfortable with challenging colleagues to uncover unconscious biases.

Step 3: Conducting Interviews and Testing

- **Avoid assumptions:** Avoid making assumptions about how a visible or invisible disability—or any other aspect of a person's identity—may affect a candidate's ability to perform job functions.
- **Inform applicants of their rights:** If an applicant discloses a disability, inform them that they have the right to be accommodated to the point of undue hardship.
- **Avoid probing questions:** Do not ask questions about a candidate's disability, personal life, or background unless it is **directly related to the essential functions of the job**.
- **Maintain a standard:** Assess each applicant against the same established requirements using a consistent rating system.

- **Permitted questions:** When interviewing candidates there are questions you can and can't ask. Ensure staff involved in the interview process are well versed in which is which.

Do you know what questions can be asked during an interview?

Permitted questions ✓:

- Do you require any accommodation to meet the requirements of this job?"
- "How would you perform this particular task?"
- "If we made [example] adjustment, would that meet your needs?"

Prohibited questions ✗:

- "Do you have any disabilities or medical conditions?"
- "How did you become disabled? What is your diagnosis?"

Step 4: Conducting Reference Checks

- **Focus on work performance and skills;** avoid asking questions that could reveal a candidate's disability or other personal information. Do not inquire about medical history.

Step 5: Making an Offer

- **Involve HR:** Involving HR from the beginning is advisable for guidance on legal requirements and documentation.
- **Use a Formal Offer Letter that includes a clause about accommodation:** This formalizes your commitment and sets a positive, inclusive tone for the new employee's experience with your company. For example: *"We are committed to creating an inclusive workplace and are happy to discuss any reasonable accommodations you may need to be successful in this role."*
- **Maintain privacy:** Assure the candidate that any information they share about their disability or need for accommodation will be kept confidential according to relevant privacy laws.

Legal Considerations

Understanding Reasonable Accommodation and Undue Hardship

In Canada, federal, provincial, and territorial legislation requires employers to provide **reasonable accommodation** for all protected human rights grounds, including disability, **both for the job and during the hiring process**. This is a requirement unless it would cause **undue hardship** to the employer.

- **Reasonable accommodation** refers to modifications or adjustments that are practical and don't create significant risks or financial burdens.
- A person with a disability is not required to disclose their disability if they can perform the job duties without accommodation.

What is undue hardship? Most accommodations are free or inexpensive. Undue hardship relates to:

1. **Cost:** If the cost of an accommodation would impact the sustainability of the business or change its essential nature.
2. **Health and safety:** If an accommodation request could cause risk, cannot fully protect the employee, or does not allow for the full functioning of job duties.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

If we accommodate some applicants, is that unfair to other applicants?

No. If an applicant requests reasonable accommodation for their disability or other protected human rights ground, it is leveling the playing field, not creating an unfair advantage. Accommodation means removing barriers, not changing standards or requirements.

I have safety concerns about hiring someone with disabilities, what should I do?

First, distinguish between safety-sensitive occupations and general safety concerns. If an applicant has disclosed a disability and you are concerned about safety related to the essential duties of their job, your legal duty is to explore what reasonable accommodations can be made.

A candidate is insisting on accommodations that would constitute undue hardship. What do I do?

If you have offered reasonable and flexible accommodation and the individual refuses it or insists on unreasonable accommodations, you may have met your legal duty. You should seek legal or expert advice before making this decision.

I want to hire someone with a disability, but the cost of accommodation would be too expensive. What do I do?

Remember, most forms of accommodation have little or no cost. Explore all available options, as new approaches and innovations are being created regularly. If needed, look into funding and support available through government and local agencies—THRC's [Connector Tool](#) is one place to start. If, after exploring all options, you are unable to meet the candidate's needs because of undue hardship, you may have exhausted your legal duty. Remember to document your efforts and why it would cause undue hardship.