DCIF Project – Evaluation Tool 6: Conducting an Accessible Interview

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Tags

Who is this tool for?

High Priority:
- Interviewers

Practical Information:
- Hiring Managers
- Hiring Committee Members

What guidance does this tool provide?
- How to use an accessible and inclusive approach to designing interview questions
- How to facilitate alternative assessments to an interview
- Understanding general tips and considerations for interviewing candidates with disabilities

Take home points:
- When interviewing applicants with various lived experiences, it is important to be prepared and know the best etiquette and communication means to create an inclusive and accessible interview. Please check back on the 'Best Practices' table for more details
- Understanding the purpose of different interview questions can not only help assess the ideal qualifications you are searching but help refrain from asking closed-ended and typical questions. For example, one can ask, 'what interests do you have that relate to this job' instead of the common question 'tell me about yourself?'
- Remember, standard interviews are not the only option. Participating in alternative interview options such as job fairs, mentorship programs, community referrals, and casual conversations can assist applicants with disabilities who do not disclose a disability in this process

Inclusive and Welcoming Interviews for All Applicants

When preparing to interview applicants with disabilities, employers may feel nervous about saying the wrong thing or daunted by a list of 'dos and don'ts.' Remember that it is okay to feel this way – disability confident organizations won't get it right all the time. What matters the most is that you treat others the way that you would like to be treated and be ready and willing to make adjustments to support the candidate's participation in the interview process.

If you are not sure what to do, relax, and ask the candidate to educate you about what assistance they may need. They are the expert and know their disability best.

Best Practices for Interviewing People with Disabilities[1]

Remember that phone and/or virtual interviews, and various online assessments, tests, and forms can unfairly disadvantage many candidates with disabilities. Communicate at every stage that you are happy to offer alternative routes for candidates who need this flexibility if they are to demonstrate their ability to do the job.

Type of Disability:	Best Practices:
People with limited mobility	- When talking to someone in a wheelchair, position yourself so you are at the same level. - Never lean on wheelchairs or touch/move crutches, canes or walking frames, or push a wheelchair, without the user's consent. Enable to keep all supports within reach. - Do not assume ramps solve everything – they may be too steep or too slippery. Check with the candidate. - Unless you know it is easy to move around your premises in a wheelchair, offer to help – and do not be offended if that offer is refused. Many wheelchair users prefer to be as independent as possible
People who are blind or have low vision, sight or vision loss	- Introduce yourself clearly and introduce any other people present, stating where in the room they are located. Indicate any large movements or pauses and let them know when the conversation is ended. - Face the candidate and give them your undivided attention. - Introduce any actions for permission (i.e., "Shall we shake hands?" "May I offer an arm?"). You may then respectfully guide. - If you are guiding a candidate, tell them when steps, stairs, ramps, seats, or other obstacles occur – and whether they are going up or down. - Provide any written communication in an accessible format, having given the candidate the opportunity to tell you what format works best for them.
People who are Deaf or hard of hearing	- Check that the candidate is comfortable with how the communications are working and, if necessary, adjust the room layout. - If the candidate lip-reads, maintain eye contact. Speak clearly and at a reasonable pace. Do not cover your mouth. Sit facing any direct light source (i.e., don't sit with your back to the window as this will cast your face into shadow). If you sense the need, pause, and confirm that you have been understood. - Do not speak until you have the attention of the candidate. - Do not shout!

	● If you have not understood what the candidate is telling you, do not pretend you have. Apologise and ask them to repeat themselves. ● If the candidate cannot understand what you are saying, consider writing it down or using free speech-recognition apps (e.g., Siri for Apple phones, Otter or Live Transcribe) which turn speech into text. ● When qualified interpreter is present, speak to the candidate, not to the interpreter. Remember that an interpreter's job is to translate, not to get involved in the interview.
People who are Deafblind	● Let the candidate know you are there. Approach them from the front and touch them lightly on the arm or shoulder to attract their attention. Do not grab or push, let them know you are offering to escort by guiding their hand to your elbow. ● Many Deafblind candidates need to be guided and will have their preferences as to how they wish this to be done. ● A Deafblind candidate may be supported by a communicator, guide, or interpreter. Remember to speak to the individual rather than to their assistant.
People with facial disfigurement	● Make eye contact as you would with anyone else. Do not stare. Smile if and when you would smile for any other candidate. ● Listen carefully and do not let the candidate's appearance distract you. ● Avoid making judgements about the candidate's talents, skills, or personality on the basis of their appearance.
People with intellectual disabilities	● Begin by assuming that the candidate will understand you. Do not assume you can predict from an initial impression what the candidate will or will not understand. ● Avoid jargon – keep your language straightforward. Explain what any acronyms mean before you use them (this implies for all candidates). ● Respect the candidate's right to have a support person present, but always talk directly with the candidate. ● If extra time is needed to allow the candidate to collect their thoughts and express themselves, extend the length of the interview. ● Ask questions which require direct, simple answers and always check that the candidate has understood you. Consider a more hands-on approach where the candidate can demonstrate how they would, in fact, do what is required. ● Consider offering work trials which give candidates who may not excel at interviews the chance to demonstrate that they can, in fact, do the job.
People with disabilities affecting speech	● Refrain from correcting or speaking for the candidate. Wait quietly while the candidate speaks and resist any temptation to finish their sentences. ● Speak as you usually would. Avoid speaking slowly or too simply unless you know that the candidate's vocabulary is limited. ● If you need more information, break down your questions to deal with individual points that require shorter answers. Consider written as well as spoken information. ● Telephone interviews can seriously and unfairly disadvantage people with speech impairments. ● Remember that stammering is not caused by nervousness. The candidate may appear nervous, but bear in mind that the nervousness is a result of stammering, rather than the cause of it. ● If you cannot understand what the candidate is trying to say, ask them to repeat themselves or, if appropriate, to answer in writing. If the candidate's speech is

	difficult to understand, summarise your understanding of what has been said at key points and ask them to confirm you have understood correctly.
Neurodivergent candidates	● Avoid jokes, exaggerated language, metaphors, abstract or ambiguous statements. ● Try to keep sentences short, using more direct and specific language. Be clear and concise: many individuals will prefer closed rather than open questions. ● Repeat questions clearly and, if needed, in writing. ● Avoid getting distracted by any behaviour that doesn't affect the person's ability to do the job.
Mental health disabilities	● Ensure you have "informed consent" and consider the timing of interview to ensure no further grief or distress is caused. ● Clearly explain the intent of the interview, expectations and provide questions in advance ● Wherever possible, allow the applicant to review and repeat information ● Refrain from directly asking specifics on the applicant's disability

Intersectionality Avatars

Salima: So where are you from?

Taylor: My parents are farmers from a remote little town in Canada. We never had too much money growing up, and I often wore hand-me downs from my older siblings. Lucky for me, none of these clothes were too gender-specific, so expressing my gender as non-binary was smooth-sailing.

Salima: And how did you feel about going for an interview as a bank teller?

Taylor: I was so nervous. I was assigned female at birth, so I knew there could be some strict clothing expectations that I could not fit in with. For example, I hate high heels, I refuse to wear skirts and feminine colors. Putting makeup on is a nightmare for me. Plus, there was the added pressure of wearing suits that I could only buy from Walmart at best.

Salima: Did the interview go well?

Taylor: I felt very much at ease. They were respectful of my pronouns from the beginning. I saw different gender representations within the building. Most importantly, they made it very clear to me that all gender representations were welcome, as long as we looked clean and neat. This helped ease my anxiety and not worry to much if I would be accepted in the workplace culture because of how I looked.

Determining Interview Questions

As interview questions, structures, and styles will vary across roles, employers may struggle with what questions to ask persons with disabilities and how to phrase them. While making retrospective changes to an interview guide is a good starting point, a more effective approach to inclusive interviewing is to develop questions that are accessible to every applicant, regardless of their disability, or whether they have a disability at all.

Types of Questions

Understanding the purpose of different interview questions, and how they are used to assess applicants of all backgrounds will help. Here are some common types of interview questions:[2,3]

Type of Interview Questions:	Why are they asked?
Situational	To give an applicant an opportunity to display their approach to a specific scenario and how they have handled the situation in the past.
Competency-based	To test an applicant's attributes, knowledge and behaviours that would lead further understanding of their career progression within the business.
Behavioural	To assess personable characteristics – how applicants would potentially approach challenging situations. This type of framework showcases their judgement and decision-making skills.

After you determine what types of questions must be asked to assess the knowledge, skills, and potential of each applicant, consider the following tips to enhance your interview guide:

- Steer away as much as possible from factual, close-ended questions that require a yes or no response
- Try to get the candidate talking by using open-ended and behaviour-based questions
- Keep in mind that not all interview questions asked will fall into these distinct three categories
- There is often some overlap in the way questions are asked, and therefore, there may be overlap in the way that they are answered
- Opt for clear and directive questions instead of theoretical questions
- Use clear and plain language when designed interviewing questions (i.e., avoid using euphemisms, acronyms, or idioms in your questions)[4] – For more information on clear and plain language best practices, please visit Communication Tool 1 - An Intro to Accessible Communication
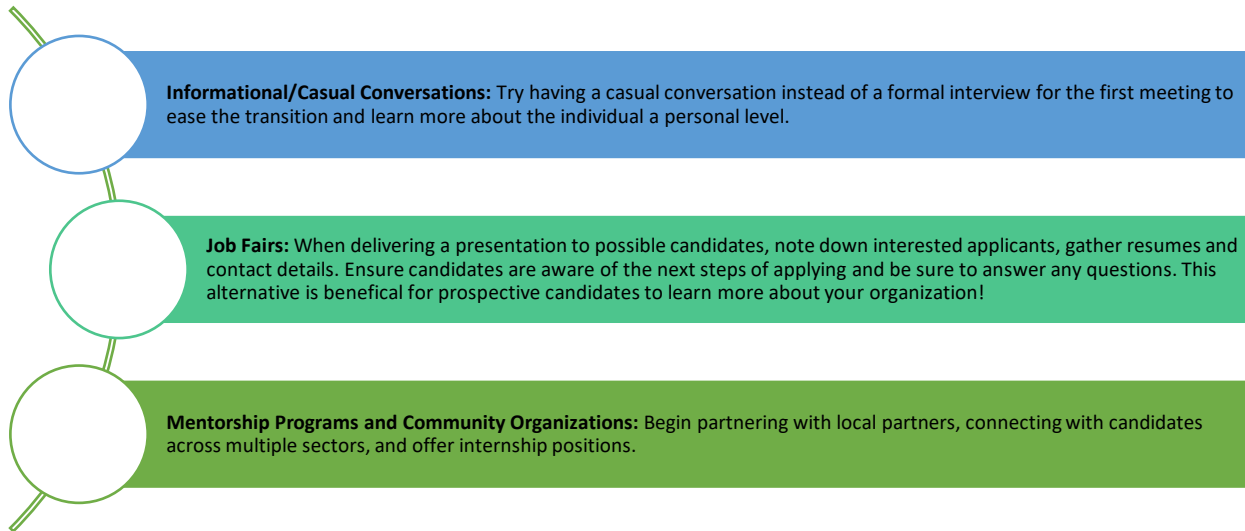
Reframing Typical Questions[5]

The following are examples of how you can reframe typical interview questions to be more direct, detailed, and accessible for all candidates.

Typical interview questions:	Try these instead:
• Tell me about yourself • What are your strengths? • What skills do you think you need improvement on? • What motivates you? • Why are you interested in this position? • Why should we hire you? • Describe your ideal job?	• *What interests do you have that relate to this job?* • *Tell me about previous related work/volunteer experiences?* • *Tell me 1-2 things that you are good at that will help you in this job?* • *In your last job, when were you challenged or not very good at something, what did you to do improve your skills in that area?* • *Aside from making money, what do you like about this job?*

Interviews Are Not the Only Option[4]

If an applicant has disclosed their disability to you during the recruitment process, alternative interview options can be discussed as a reasonable accommodation. Even if an applicant does not disclose, an employer should continue to communicate the alternative options available so that applicants can make an informed choice. Although not intended to be an exhaustive list, the following are examples of alternative interview techniques that employers can use when interviewing any candidate:

Informational/Casual Conversations: Try having a casual conversation instead of a formal interview for the first meeting to ease the transition and learn more about the individual a personal level.

Job Fairs: When delivering a presentation to possible candidates, note down interested applicants, gather resumes and contact details. Ensure candidates are aware of the next steps of applying and be sure to answer any questions. This alternative is benefical for prospective candidates to learn more about your organization!

Mentorship Programs and Community Organizations: Begin partnering with local partners, connecting with candidates across multiple sectors, and offer internship positions.

Working Interviews and Work Trials[6,7]

Working interviews can be very effective at determining whether a candidate can do or learn task-oriented jobs. Here are some variations of working interviews that you can try:

- **Walking Interview**: In a walking interview, you can explain the position and learn about the candidate's skills while you're walking through the workplace. The candidate can also get an idea of the workplace environment and culture.
- **Experiential Interview:** In an experiential interview, the candidate can demonstrate their skills by performing some of the core tasks related to the job. This type of interview emphasizes the candidate's ability to work, and not their conversational abilities. It's also a chance for the candidate to learn more about the opportunity by experiencing the tasks first-hand. A show, do, review, approach works best:
    - The candidate is shown how to do a task
    - The candidate has the opportunity to do the task
    - The candidate is assessed based on how well they perform the task

Pop Up: Consider partnering with a disability community organization and/or service provider to learn more about employment programs to help support work trials and subsidized employment programs.

For longer work trials, where candidates are possibly brought on for longer than a day or more, the candidate must be paid!

To determine whether the working should be paid or unpaid consider these general guidelines:		
Is the candidate performing the actual job duties? **If yes, then paid.**	Are you using this as a less than two-hour test as part of the hiring process? **If yes, then paid**	Are you offering this as a trial period of work (a day, week, etc.)? **If yes, then paid.**

References

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