

DCIF Project – Onboarding Tool 1: Navigating the Negotiation Period

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Who is this tool for?

High Priority:

- HR Professionals
- Hiring Managers

Practical Information:

- Direct Line Managers

Useful to Know:

- Staff in the finance department

What guidance does this tool provide?

- Understanding disability-specific considerations during the negotiation period
- How to develop a job offer that is not only competitive, but represents the disability confidence of your organization

Take home points

- Salary negotiations should be open and honest conversations rather than conversations behind closed doors. Work openly with candidates to create a compensation package that reflects the value they bring to the workplace, and don't forget to include important components like extended health and disability benefits
- When designing a disability inclusive benefits package, pay close attention to determining the objective, selecting different benefits, developing onboarding policies, and how all knowledge is communicated to workers with disabilities
- Even if your organization offers disability benefits, look to go above and beyond requirements to see what more you can offer an employer. Put yourself in the shoes of your workers and think through what supports you can offer them, in addition to insurance, when disability, injury, or illness might impact their ability to work

What do I need to consider before the job offer?

When a hiring committee has narrowed down their decision to the top few candidates, there are important conversations that should happen before an offer of employment is extended.

Fair and Equitable Pay for Workers with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities face a higher risk of low income. If an individual identifies with multiple marginalized communities, this risk further increases.

The 'disability pay gap' is defined as the difference between the average pay per hour among persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities¹. While the disability pay gap can be attributed to a variety of reasons, such as age, occupation, or level of education, employers must be acutely aware of the critical role they play in combating the unfair treatment and compensation of workers with disabilities.¹

When a worker with a disability is equally capable, and brings diversity in thought and perspective into the workplace, why would you pay them any less than someone without a disability?

How can I contribute to closing the wealth gap?

Protecting fair and equitable pay must be built into your policies and practices.

- As workers with disabilities are more likely to be employed in part-time work compared to those without disabilities,² ensure that part-time work is paid at the same hourly rate as full-time work
- Create and communicate a clear policy that compensation for workers with disabilities must not be less than compensation for those without disabilities
- Build out a procedure to annually review the compensation for all workers, but especially those with disabilities, to ensure that your company's pay is in alignment with the industry standard
- When seeking to fill vacancies, look to promote workers with disabilities into management and leadership positions internally before searching externally. For more information, please visit [CD Tool 3 - Determining Advancement Opportunities for Workers with Disabilities](#)

Be open to salary negotiations and engage in productive conversation with the candidate, rather than behind closed doors without the candidate, to reach a solution.

- Understand that people with disabilities were likely underpaid in their past, and pay gaps tend to be even greater for people with disabilities who are also racialized individuals, women, newcomers to Canada, Indigenous persons, and for many others with intersecting marginalized identities²
- As the full-time salary for workers with disabilities can be anywhere between \$2000-\$8000 less than workers without disabilities² – remember, this is for equal work. Recognize your role in closing this gap
- Work openly with candidates to create a compensation package that reflects the value they bring to the workplace, and don't forget to include important components like extended health and disability benefits
 - It is to be noted that extended health and disability benefits should always be included in compensation communication as disability or other concerns may present later in the employment life cycle

- Be transparent with pay as early as possible (i.e., present range of compensation on the job posting), for every level of pay scale in your company

The Importance of Disability Benefit Packages

While a competitive benefits package is essential for attracting and retaining any quality candidate, providing disability benefits may be the difference between securing a top candidate with a disability and losing them to a competitor. If your company does not offer disability benefits, protect your investment in the selected candidate, and identify who you can talk to about changing your insurance policy.

Designing a Disability Benefits Package

Here are four key considerations for designing an inclusive disability benefits package:³

Determine The Objective	Select Benefits	Develop Policies	Communicate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engage in thoughtful discussion with your leadership team and HR department to establish what your organization's objective is for disability benefits ● Ask workers what they want from their benefits package ● Identify anything you are legally required to provide to workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Narrow down the benefits and premiums based on what your company and workers value most ● Develop accessibility requirements or criteria for vendors ● Compare offerings from different insurance agencies ● Ask specific questions (about how they define disability, their eligibility criteria for benefits, etc.) and select the insurance policy that best meets your needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Determine your internal policies for disability leave <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What information do workers need to know about disability leave? ● Are there additional eligibility criteria (e.g., probationary periods)? ● Who will handle requests? ● What documentation is required in the request? ● How will leave be negotiated? ● How will leave be scheduled? ● How will a return-to-work plan be developed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communicate policies and any subsequent changes to all staff members in writing and in alternate formats upon request ● Educate workers about the value of disability benefits ● Provide resources to help workers understand their rights ● Keep an open-door policy so that employees can ask questions or express concerns in a confidential manner about the benefit ● Invite workers to participate in the modification of benefits packages

Be sure to communicate your disability benefits package to applicants and new hires. Onboarding can be overwhelming and important details about disability benefits should be easy to find.

What more can managers do if the company already offers disability benefits?

- While the company may already offer short- and long-term disability benefits, there are other types of disability benefits that provide critical financial support to workers with disabilities in particular circumstances. Talk to your employees and identify what other benefits they need, then bring these concerns to the person in your organization who handles insurance. Consider expanding your offerings to include:⁴
 - **Critical illness insurance:** Critical illness insurance is a form of health insurance that provides a lump-sum payment should you become seriously ill⁵
 - **Mortgage disability insurance:** Mortgage disability insurance may make mortgage payments to your lender if you can't work due to a severe injury or illness.⁶
 - **Long-term care insurance:** Long-term care insurance can provide coverage if you become unable to care for yourself and need assistance to manage daily living activities.⁷
 - **Prescription Drug Insurance:** Prescription drug insurance provides coverage for prescription drugs that are not covered by your provincial health care plan.⁸

- Health improvement programs³ or health spending accounts for flexibility
- Mental health support³
- Check your internal policies to identify who is included -- and who is forgotten -- within your disability insurance policy.
 - Ask yourself “Does the insurance policy exclude certain injuries or illnesses, such as episodic disabilities or mental health conditions? Why? What can be done about this?”
 - Refrain from communicating messaging like “We will only treat you fairly if we have to.” Instead, learn to broaden your definition of disability by working with insurance agents to help protect all employees who are unable to work
- Put yourself in the shoes of your workers and think through what supports you can offer them, in addition to insurance, when disability, injury, or illness might impact their ability to work.
 - Familiarize yourself with the insurance process. Make sure you can explain to the worker what their legal rights are, and accurately describe the available benefits and the company’s specific policies
 - Be sure to discuss potential workplace accommodations, privacy, and a plan for communication
 - Lobby for **employee assistance programs** that can provide support for employees who are stressed or overwhelmed⁹

Early Discussions about Workplace Accommodations

A key part of the negotiation period involves discussions about workplace accommodations. This does not mean that accommodations are recorded in a letter of offer of employment or a contract. Rather, after a candidate accepts a job offer, employers ought to reiterate the organization’s accommodation policy. This way, they can ensure that any agreed upon workplace accommodation can be set up before a worker begins their new role.

Creating safe spaces for open conversation about workplace accommodations as early as possible signals that you are an employer that prioritizes accessibility.

A Starting Point for Determining Accommodations

Often, people with disabilities do not choose to disclose their disability until after they secure a job. By bringing a candidate’s attention to your accommodation policy during the negotiation period, you can begin to discuss what they need to thrive in the workplace after they are appointed. These conversations might cover (but are not limited to) the following:

- Ideal working environments
- Specific technology or equipment
- Flexibility in the workplace
- Time off to attend to disability-related needs
- Personal supports

Intersectionality Avatars

Salima: Where I worked before, I would watch my co-workers gather with their friends and family over Christmas holidays. In my culture, we enjoy such gatherings during Ramadan. So, when I was given the option to move around my holidays and take some time off during Ramadan, I finally felt belonging, seen, and valued. That time with family is invaluable for me and now I get to have it, too.

At the end of the day, the earlier you know how to best support your employee, the better they can perform in the workplace. It's a win-win.

Accommodation Passports Are for Everyone

If your company uses an accommodation passport, it should be shared with all newly appointed workers. An **accommodation passport** acts as a living record to document any agreed upon workplace adjustments between a worker and their direct manager. It is a great tool to streamline the accommodation process so that once accommodations are discussed and agreed upon, a worker does not need to renegotiate their accommodation if their direct manager or job changes.

For more information about accommodations and adjustment processes, and the privacy and confidentiality around medical information, please follow these links to [Accommodations Tool 10- Supporting the Development of Accommodation Passports](#) and [Accommodations Tool 4 - Protecting Workers' Confidentiality and Privacy](#)

References

¹ Longhi, S. (2017). The disability pay gap. *Equality and Human Rights Commission Pay Gaps Research (107)*. Institute for Social and Economic Research: University of Essex.

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-107-the-disability-pay-gap.pdf>

² Morris, S., Fawcett, G., Brisebois, L. & Hughes, J. (2018). A demographic, employment, and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017. *Canadian Survey on Disability Reports, 89-654-X*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm>

³ Open Door Group (2022, March 29). A disability inclusive benefits package. *Accessible Employers*. <https://accessibleemployers.ca/resource/disability-inclusive-benefits-package/>

⁴ Society for Human Resource Management (n.d.). *Managing disability benefits*. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/managing-disability-benefits.aspx>

⁵ Financial Services Commission of Ontario (2018, May 29). *Understanding critical illness insurance*. http://www.fsco.gov.on.ca/en/insurance/brochures/pages/brochure_criticalillness.aspx

⁶ Financial Consumer Agency of Canada (2021, June 28). Optional mortgage insurance products. *Government of Canada*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/financial-consumer-agency/services/mortgages/optional-insurance-products.html>

⁷ Financial Consumer Agency of Canada (2021, July 19). Long term care insurance. *Government of Canada*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/financial-consumer-agency/services/insurance/long-term-care.html>

⁸ Government of Canada (2020, December 3). *Prescription drug insurance coverage*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-care-system/pharmaceuticals/access-insurance-coverage-prescription-medicines.html>

⁹The Canadian Association for Supported Employment (n.d.). *Benefits*. HR Inclusive Policy Toolkit. <https://supportedemployment.ca/hrtoolkit/benefits/>