

Preparing for an Accessible Interview



Disability
Confidence

Who is this tool for?

High Priority:

- Interviewers
- Hiring Managers
- Hiring Committee Members
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Useful to Know:

- DEI and HR Professionals

What guidance does this tool provide?

- How to determine accommodation needs prior to an interview
- Understanding important accessibility considerations when planning in-person interviews



General Considerations

Depending on the industry, company, position, and even the candidate, the interview process will vary. This tool will help hiring managers and interviewers navigate the pre-interview process smoothly, think through accessibility considerations, and prepare for an inclusive and welcoming interview experience for all candidates.

Before using the rest of the tool, here are some guiding principles to keep in mind:

- Treat all candidates with the same mannerisms, respect, and courtesy¹
- Keep in mind that candidates may require additional support in certain areas (e.g., allow assistants such as translators, job coaches, etc. to accompany an individual in an interview)
- Account for differences in communication and presentation styles. For more information, please visit [Communication Tool 3 - Exploring Diverse Types of Communication](#)
- Ensure the candidate is comfortable with a panel-group interview, or determine if a more personal interview is preferred
- Most importantly, create a positive experience for all candidates. Help them feel comfortable with the process, allow them to ask questions, and maintain clear and consistent communication rather than providing generalized explanations or instructions



Bank

“Imagine trying to book an Airbnb but the host didn't describe any of the amenities in the listings. They then ask you if you'd like anything else for your booking. Do they have internet? Linens? Without knowing what to anticipate, it's hard to know what to ask for. For job interviews, build trust and relationship through transparency and share what the interview will include. With the structure shared, your candidate can more comfortably ask about accommodations to remove potential barriers in the interview design.”

Jennifer Popkey,
Diversity and Inclusion Talent Partner,
TD Bank Group

Determining Accommodation Needs



Once you have narrowed down your list of candidates, the next step is to schedule and confirm an interview time and place. If a candidate has already self-disclosed their disability, requested an accommodation, or communicated that they will need additional support through a job coach, mentor, support person, or animal during the recruitment phase, managers must prioritize the deployment of appropriate accommodations prior to the interview.

Employers have the legal duty to accommodate, to enable job candidates with disabilities to compete fairly in the interview process.



Salima:

"I felt a mix of emotions when I received the invitation for a face-to-face interview. I was overjoyed to get this opportunity, but at the same time, past experience has shown me that as soon as the interviewers seen my service dog or the hijab on my head, their expressions would change. Right off the bat, some employers would say that they could not accommodate my service animal in the workspace. Others would ask a few questions out of courtesy, but then politely show me the door.

But in this case, the invite openly listed possible accommodations that were already in place, such as wheelchair accessible entrances and bathrooms. They also asked what other accommodations I might need before even meeting me! My eyes teared up on reading this because it is so rare. They were going above and beyond of what I expected.

When I went for the interview, there was a cushion and a bowl of water right next to my seat for my guide-dog. When I had to show my computer skills at the office, they had made sure the right accessibility software was readily installed for me to clearly read the text on screen. The final gesture that won my heart was when they showed the prayer room!

As an employee, anyone would want such a positive environment to not only maintain but to grow and succeed."



Once you have narrowed down your list of candidates, the next step is to schedule and confirm an interview time and place. If a candidate has already self-disclosed their disability, requested an accommodation, or communicated that they will need additional support through a job coach, mentor, support person, or animal during the recruitment phase, managers must prioritize the deployment of appropriate accommodations prior to the interview.



Case Example 2

A person applies for a position online and is asked to take part in a telephone interview. The person sends an e-mail asking that the interviewer call via teletypewriter (TTY) or the Video Relay Service as an accommodation in the interview process. In response, she is told that she is unsuitable for the position because the position involves making telephone calls to customers. The employer may be found to have failed in its duty to accommodate. Also, the applicant has been denied an opportunity to demonstrate her ability to meet the essential duties of the position. This is discriminatory.

Remember, there is no set formula for accommodation. Each person's needs are unique and must be considered individually. The provision of accommodations should not negatively impact the timing of a candidate's interview -- it is essential that accommodations are implemented quickly and efficiently so the candidate can fully participate in the evaluation process in stride with other candidates.³ To conduct an accessible and inclusive interview:

- Ensure accessibility is proficient in all services:
 - Certify physical accessibility of the interview site
 - Prepare for allowing a service animal in an interview
 - Ensure online and telephone services are accessible, functioning, and all costs are covered
 - Follow disability etiquette when using TTY, Video Relay Services, and other online-services
- Adapt the assessment process to be more flexible. Some adjustments that you can make include:
 - Only focus on soft skills if they are necessary to the performance of essential duties of the job
 - Challenge yourself to move away from typical social expectations (e.g., everyone makes eye contact)
 - Instead of looking down on gaps in resumes and instead, ask candidates to explain how their other achievements make them the best candidate for the job
 - Accept processes for assessment and hiring that may take longer, to allow employees with disabilities access to equal opportunities

Case Example:

An applicant with a hearing difficulty does not ask for accommodations for the interview, but you notice immediately that he is missing some of what you are saying to him. You might want to let him know that it appears he is missing some of what you are saying and ask him if there is anything you can do to improve communication.

What if a candidate does not disclose?

- Interviewers are not legally allowed to ask questions that would require the candidate to directly disclose a disability. If the candidate chooses to disclose their disability or requests an accommodation, ensure that the adjustments are put in place prior to the interview.⁴
- Refrain from asking any questions, talking, or hinting about the candidate's disability or health. If you have doubts about a person's ability to carry out an intrinsic function of the job, simply ask how they would do it.⁵

For all candidates, including those whose disabilities may not be visible and those who may not feel comfortable disclosing, ensure that the availability of accommodations is communicated throughout the entire recruitment, interviewing, and hiring process. We also recommend that you share information about the inclusive culture at your organization. This can create the space for genuine conversations about how disability is viewed in the workplace.



For more information regarding the accommodation processes, please visit [Accommodations Tool 7 - Breaking Down The Accommodation Process](#).

For more information on adopting a universal design approach, please visit [Built Environment Tool 1 - Understanding the Building Blocks of Inclusive Design](#).



Planning for an Accessible Interview

Accessibility requires planning – both for your role as an interviewer, and when providing important instructions and descriptions of the interview process to the candidate. When businesses are upfront about the interview process, they make it easier for the candidate to identify potential barriers as well as make suggestions for barrier removal.⁶



What should I provide ahead of time?⁷

1. Provide an interview itinerary

Interview itineraries not only allow candidates the opportunity to prepare ahead for their interview, but also inform them of any expectations (e.g., dress code). Employers should provide detailed information about the expected interview duration, and offer flexibility with dates, times, and lengths to be mindful of disability-related factors. In addition to demonstrating good professional etiquette, this shows that you are an open-minded employer who is committed to accessibility.

2. Prepare a list of interview questions

Put together a list of potential job-related questions that you may ask the candidate and share it with the candidate at least one day in advance. It is a reasonable accommodation to provide interview questions in advance – with more time and space to prepare, a candidate can:

- Brush up on skills that may need practicing before the interview
- Recall more meaningful experiences to highlight the best evidence of their capabilities

Interviews are not memory tests, but evaluations of whether a candidate's skills and experiences are the best fit for the vacant role.

3. Provide materials in alternate formats

Applicants may request that you provide materials in alternative formats such as Braille, large print, or electronically. If the candidate requires this accommodation, send materials at least one day in advance. Make the necessary arrangements to ensure that their interviews take place on the same timeline as other candidates' and their evaluations are not delayed.

- Keep in mind that assistive technologies (i.e., text to speech, screen reading, magnification software) may also be needed
- Ensure technologies are set up and details on how to use the technologies are also provided in advance

For more information on assistive technologies, please visit [Accommodations Tool 9 - Unlocking the Potential of Assistive Technology](#)

4. Be clear about who will be in attendance

Communicate to the candidate who from the organization will be attending the interview so there are no surprises. For some candidates who request accommodations, you could reduce the size of interview panels so that the process is less overwhelming. To make sure the candidate can ask any questions before and after the interview, provide contact information for the interviewers.

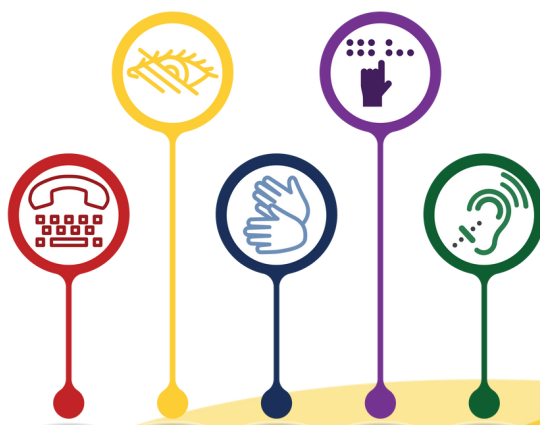
After this information has been provided, engage in an open dialogue with the candidate and ask:

- What do you need to attend the interview (e.g., adjustments, accommodations, a support person, etc.)?
- How can you best showcase your skills and qualifications?
- What can we do to make the interview process more accessible?

Preparation also needs to include your staff by:

- Informing your key organizational staff who will be a part of the interview process (e.g., reception, administrative positions)
- Ensuring front office staff learn how to greet and interact with candidates with disabilities appropriately

For more guidance on communication, including language and disability etiquette, please visit [Communication Tool 1 - An Intro to Accessible Communication and Communication Tool 2 - Understanding Disability Etiquette](#)





Azra Kaplan,

Project Coordinator at a Disability Organization

I am a neurodivergent, queer, immigrant woman and mother. I use English and French at work which are my second and third languages respectively. I am non-religious, but I was brought up in a Muslim culture. All of these aspects of my identity are considered to be prone to societal oppressions within the Canadian and Quebecois contexts.

A few years ago, stuck in a dead-end job that I took no pleasure from, I wanted to find new ways to earn money. I realized, unless I added a Canadian school onto my resume, I would have difficulty convincing potential employers that my past international experience and diverse skills could be transferred into their workplace. I studied a one-year diploma program at a Montreal University despite already holding a Master's degree. In other words, I had to subscribe to the idea that an advanced degree I had acquired outside of Canada was deemed not good enough.

My diploma opened new doors for me, but it took two years of part-time jobs and incessant interviews until I finally landed my current position. The interviews were discouraging, to say the least. One interview after another, I would present myself, explain all my knowledge, and try to build a connection only to receive a rejection e-mail a few weeks later.

I could not understand why it was not working. Living at intersections of identities, pinpointing what was it was about me that was not working for recruiters was tough. Was it because I was missing cultural cues that I was not aware of? Was it really due to my French not being up to par, as one interviewer later informed me, when I asked for feedback? Or was it because I had disclosed that I was practicing French on a daily base thanks to my Francophone girlfriend? There was also the fact that when a meeting lasted longer than 20 minutes, I felt the need to move around, and found it hard to concentrate. It wasn't until later on in my journey that found out that I am neurodivergent. Could that have played a role? Or was it simply because I am a woman and to prove that I am as good as a man, I needed to perform twice as well as a male counterpart, as many women find themselves obligated to do?

A few years ago, a racialized woman with an invisible disability reached out to me after another failed interview. She was present there as a third-party jury. She said that my interview was, in fact, very good and she wanted to offer me a position at the organization where I work now. Since then, my intersecting identities have proven to be nothing but advantageous in my job. My background offers me a multitude of ways to approach and think about an issue and helps me find solutions that bring diverse people together in a safe and inclusive manner.





From my experiences, I want to tell employers that when interviewing, do not make decisions simply because of a gut feeling you may have towards someone. Very often, that feeling may just be the comfort of finding a person with a very similar life path. Instead, go by the resumes the candidates have submitted and the information their responses actually contain. Also, understand that people, especially neurodivergent people or those who have had traumatic experiences, will not be themselves during an interview process where they are clearly being judged. So please bear in mind that the person you are seeing at the interview is not necessarily the person that will be working with you.

My final advice is to give the types of people you never had around you – a chance, and enjoy the richness that your decision brings in the long run.



Where should the interview take place?

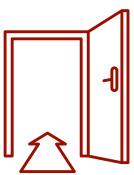
When interviewing people with disabilities, it is important to consider the environmental factors that may influence one's ability to deliver their best performance and show an employer they are the right candidate for the job.



Conducting Accessible In-Person Interviews

Select a location that is the most accessible for all candidates as your starting point. Recognize that the needs of everyone will vary, and what is accessible for one candidate may not be accessible for another. Be sure to ask clarifying questions to better understand what physical environment will best support the candidate's success during the interview.

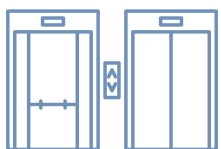
Here are some key considerations to keep in mind:



Entrances:¹

Applicants need direct entrances for accessible access. If the weather in your region elicits snow, ice and/or hail, ensure entrances have been cleared of all debris.

Some candidates, such as people using wheelchairs, will not be able to maneuver through snow and ice. This can lead to safety hazards.



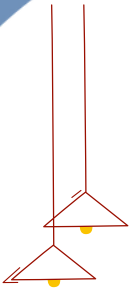
First Floor:¹

Hosting an interview on the first floor is preferable. If the interview space cannot be on the first floor, the location must be physically accessible to the candidate (e.g., access to the stairs or an operational elevator).



Washrooms:¹

Be able to instruct a candidate as to where accessible washrooms, drinking fountains, and other key facilities are located. Closer proximity enables easier access to all facilities.



Lighting:⁸

Select a location with adequate lighting so the interviewer and interviewee's faces are brightly lit. This helps individuals who lip read or use facial cues. In addition to conducting interviews in a well-lit room, make sure there are limited visual distractions and clutter, and there are no flickering lights. Natural light is preferred to fluorescent/overhead lights.

Some candidates such as people on the autism spectrum, may prefer dimmer lighting, as bright lighting can be over-stimulating.



Noise:⁹

Select a quiet location so that the interviewer and interviewee can converse without distractions. A noisy background can introduce barriers to hearing and focusing.



Physical Space:^{7,10}

Select a location with ample space so that the candidate may use and maneuver their wheelchair or other assistive devices or aids, including support persons, interpreters, or service animals. Ensure seating arrangements are adaptable and will allow the candidate and interviewers to see and hear each other clearly.



Scent:¹⁰

Ensure that interviewers refrain from wearing perfumes or scented personal care products for the interview. Scents can be distracting and may set off physical reactions in others.



Navigation:⁴

Choose accessible interview locations with accessible parking. Send clear and detailed instructions with an easy-to-read map including public transportation routes and parking options, along with the names and job titles of the people the candidates will meet the day of the interview.



Evacuation Plan:¹

Be aware of the evacuation plan, including refuge points and procedure. Provide this information prior to the interview in case of emergencies.



Take home messages

- Inclusive interviewing involves designing an interview process that recognizes potential barriers and biases, and focuses on removing or mitigating the impact of these during the process
- This can include strategies such as stating that accommodations are available when inviting applicants to the interview, ensuring that interviews are held in an accessible space, and carefully composing a hiring committee with diverse and intersectional expertise to reduce individual bias
- Ensure that all accommodation requests from applicants are treated confidentially and respectfully

