RECRUITMENT

TOOL 1: IDENTIFYING COMMON ACCESSIBILITY BARRIERS IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TOOL 1: IDENTIFYING COMMON ACCESSIBILITY BARRIERS IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Who is this for

High priority
- Recruiters
- Talent Acquisition Mangers

Practical Information
- Direct Line Managers

Useful to Know
- DEI and HR Professionals

What guidance does it provide?

- How to identify disability-specific barriers in recruitment process and implement changes to enhance accessibility

Take-home points

- Making recruitment barrier-free for employees with disabilities brings significant benefits for organizations, including improved access to talent, cost savings, enhanced performance, reduced legal and financial risk, and improved reputation
- Understanding barriers such as unwelcoming messages, web inaccessibility, discriminatory evaluation and overall poor communication can still persistent even if accommodation needs are not requested

Barriers in the Recruitment Process

Making the recruitment process barrier-free for people with disabilities brings significant benefits to any organization. These benefits include enabling equal access improved access to talent, cost savings, reduced legal and financial risk, improved reputation, and more.

By developing a recruitment process that focuses on the strengths and skills of the applicants, you gain access to the widest pool of talent, and market yourself as an accessible and inclusive business. This not only enhances your reputation among job seekers and current workers, but also improves your corporate image and standing with Government.

Most recruitment processes are not accessible to persons with disabilities and adjustments will likely be necessary. Requests for accommodations can be a useful signal that some of your policies and practices are not created to provide accessible supports to workers with disabilities. However, remember that barriers may exist even if no applicant requests an accommodation.

Unwelcoming Messages [1]

A business's messaging does not always communicate their commitment to disability equality and to employing people with disabilities. This makes it needlessly difficult for applicants with disabilities to make informed career decisions.

- You want to clearly communicate your commitment to employing and developing people with disabilities. Here are some ways to ensure your outward messaging is disability inclusive:

✓ Check job advertisements for discriminatory language

✓ Ensure language used does not imply negative assumptions about disability

✓ Include information about your disability employment policies (e.g., accessibility, inclusive workplace, or accommodation policy)

✓ Communicate your willingness to provide workplace accommodations

✓ Show that you are disability confident through a frequently asked questions page for applicants with disabilities

✓ Cite workplace awards you have received in recognition of a disability-friendly workplace

✓ Use worker or partner testimonials to demonstrate your inclusive workplace culture

✓ Use brand-building, awareness-raising marketing focused on your approach to disability

>

Inaccessible Web and Online Recruitment Processes [1]

Commonly used recruitment platforms (i.e., company websites, job boards, recruitment agencies) used for online job applications do not typically incorporate accessibility features such as alternative text for images, good colour contrast, compatibility with screen readers, alternative formats, etc. As a result, people with disabilities do not have full access to content and functionality of the website.

- Here are some tips for creating accessible recruitment platforms:
  ✔ Determine and use internal accessibility standards when selecting a platform (either job boards or company own platforms). For more information, please see Recruitment Tool 4 - Selecting Accessible Platforms for Recruiting the Best Talent
  ✔ Use the most accessible web design software available (e.g., Microsoft accessibility features, Monsido Web Accessibility, etc.). Keep in mind that technology is frequently changing – it is best practice to stay abreast new updates to provide the most accessible software to applicants.
  ✔ Ensure that every suggested software or application is pilot tested by users or focus groups of people with different types of disabilities
- Invite people from cross-disability communities to participate in paid consultation regarding the accessibility of your recruitment platform
- Provide web accessibility awareness training for workers and suppliers involved in web design, maintenance, and content development
- Gather feedback from applicants who have applied online by using a voluntary anonymous survey

Discriminatory Evaluation [1]

The increasingly use of online tests, automated resume scanners, and other artificial intelligence technologies to screen applicants prior to in-person interviews are likely discriminatory. While accommodations can be made for applicants with disabilities during in-person and virtual assessments (i.e., interviews), adjustments are more difficult to implement if companies rely on automated evaluation processes.

- To ensure you do not inadvertently discriminate against applicants with disabilities:

✔ Ask all applicants early in the recruitment process to describe what adjustments they need to be evaluated fairly and convey your willingness to make such adaptations
✔ Provide a detailed description of the recruitment process so applicants can anticipate their accommodation needs at any stage of the process
✔ Present alternate options for commonly used psychometric tests such as situational assessments. Skills and aptitude are better predictors of candidate's future performance than reliance on extensive educational qualifications.
✔ Adjust automated technologies to deactivate certain features that inherently screen out applicants with disabilities (e.g., flagging applications for spelling or grammatical errors is a barrier for people with cognitive disabilities, verbal language barriers, non-verbal individuals, and people with English as a second language)
✔ Make offline examinations and applications available

For more information about discriminatory evaluation, please see Performance Management Tool 6 - Unpacking Performance Discrimination and Poor Performance

Poor Communication

If an employer is ill-equipped to communicate effectively with applicants with disabilities, the applicants become unfairly disadvantaged. Accessible and effective communication is one of the most important ways in which recruiters distinguish themselves from other organizations. Employers who can communicate well with people with disabilities are better able to respond to the individual needs of every applicant.

- Here are some steps you can take to enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of your communication:

✔ Provide alternate forms of communication and information (e.g., written or large text, Braille materials, audio, or plain language) in a timely manner
✔ Include details of the application process (i.e., contact information, timelines, types of assessments) and clearly detail your willingness to deliver workplace accommodations
✔ Train and equip HR and IT professionals in disability etiquette and accessible technology for both online and in-person recruitment processes [1]

Aria Ahmad

My name is Aria. I was born with Cerebral Palsy, and I have a Doctorate and Post-Doctoral training in Interdisciplinary Approaches to Literature. A few years ago, when I was visiting family Canada, I was given an opportunity to deliver a series of speeches for Persian-based communities and diasporas through the University. At this time, a professor offered me a job as a visiting scholar.

Upon completing my term as a visiting scholar, I applied for my Permanent Resident status in Canada during the COVID-19 Pandemic and began my employment journey in Canada. I am a well-qualified person who has worked in both voluntary and paid positions in Persian communities in Canada, as well as university contexts. Nonetheless, the biggest barrier I have faced is hearing "Oh you have a PhD, you are overqualified for this job," whilst simultaneously hearing "Oh you do not have Canadian experience, you're not qualified for this job." I understand that employers want people to be integrated into their company, but how can an immigrant have a meaningful job when they are facing barriers such as the lack of Canadian experience or not having the 'right' experience?

In the past two years, I applied to over 300 positions across various sectors in hopes of finding meaningful employment. The journey has been frustrating and draining for me – I have limited mobility and am not able to apply to many positions that have physical work requirements. When job applications progress to interviews, I have to make the personal decision about whether to disclose my disability. As soon as employers discover I am a person with a disability, my job applications typically get rejected for the most ridiculous, de-humanizing reasons. For instance, I applied to be a translator at an international company and made it through the first few rounds of assessment. As soon as I disclosed, I was rejected because I apparently 'lacked proficiency' in my native language, Farsi. My PhD and Post-Doc is in the Persian language. When I followed up with the employer, they backtracked and said that there were some internal problems with their hiring committee. They said they only thing they could do was to allow me to re-apply for similar positions, and this was already 6 months after I had originally applied.

Aria Ahmad (Cont'd)

I question the current mechanisms in place when hiring for new roles. What kind of situation are we placing people of colour, people who are visible minorities, especially newcomers, when we have this kind of biased work and employment perspective? All of this shows me that we need to move forward to something like a blind resume, or a new system of interviewing people without asking questions that can lead to biases.

Currently, I work as an Operations Manager and helped bridge employees and different levels of staff within the company to ensure all projects are running smoothly. I am proud to work for a company that is forward thinking with accessibility and an employer who is accepting of disability. I understand the frustration with disclosing – from biased perspectives to the ableism we experience in the workplace. But we have rights, we can get help from professional organizations who can facilitate accommodations. Making the situation better is about asking for help without hesitation, shame, or feeling like another. The difference between Canada and other countries that have dictatorships is that here, you can object. You can ask for change, and push for it. It is our duty to make a better world for people with disabilities – not only for ourselves, but for others too.

Create a Recruitment Timeline

Traditional recruitment timelines tend to be quick and streamlined. With limited periods of time to secure candidates, recruiters may not consider hiring people with disabilities based on the assumption that the process may be lengthier.

Recruitment timelines should not be rushed; they need to reflect a realistic approach to finding the most suitable candidate for the job.

Having a pre-planned recruitment timeline is not a bad thing – quite the opposite in fact! However, by applying a timeline in a structured or rigid manner, employers miss out on the opportunity attract qualified candidates with disabilities.

If you want the best talent, recruitment timelines need to be flexible. You must legally think of an applicant who requires more time to submit their application because your system is not compatible with their screen reader, or an applicant who requests an American Sign Language interpreter to attend an interview. Flexibility also allows recruiters to offer skill-based assessments across 2-3 days rather than traditional 30-minute interviews to determine the suitability of an applicant's skillset. These are all reasonable adjustments that enable persons with disabilities to compete fairly.

Create a Talent Pipeline Management driven strategy approach to ensure you have a pool of prospective candidates prior to fill a position. By extending your search and recruitment time, the more likely you are to find a wider range of applicants for current and prospective job positions. Taking more time will make it more likely you will get a good job fit - matching the right person to the right job.

Providing Accommodations During Recruitment

Many applicants with disabilities may be hesitant to disclose during the recruitment process because they fear it may impact their hiring prospects. As an employer, focus on these key concepts to show candidates that your workplace is inclusive, and you are committed to accessibility during the recruitment process:

Make your accommodation policy known across the recruitment process

Communication of your accommodation policy can occur at the following times:

When writing the job advertisement

When contacting candidates to schedule interviews

During or after the interview

When hiring the candidate

Understand that accommodations allow candidates to compete fairly on the basis of their skills and potential
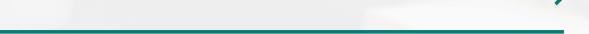
- Encourage recruiters to keep an open mind when selecting candidates
- Understand that reasonable adjustments help candidates with disabilities compete fairly
- Consider removing pre-employment psychometric tests or AI-powered measures to determine candidacy as these are often inaccessible and inadvertently screen out candidates with disabilities
- Consider bypassing standardized policies or procedures (e.g., in-person interviews)
- Tolerate processes for recruitment that may take longer, to allow employees with disabilities access to equal opportunities
- Provide recruitment materials in alternate formats

CREATE INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE JOB POSTINGS AND INTERVIEWS

Accessible Job Posting - Checklist

✓ **Use Clear and Simple Language:** Write the job description using straightforward language, avoiding jargon, acronyms, or complex sentences. This ensures that the posting is easily understood by a wide audience, including those with cognitive disabilities.

✓ **Include an Accessibility Statement:** Clearly state that your company is committed to diversity and inclusion. Mention that accommodations are available during the application process and provide contact information for requesting these accommodations.

✓ **Describe the Essential Functions:** Focus on the main essential job functions and necessary qualifications rather than how tasks are typically performed. This allows candidates to envision different ways they might accomplish the work.

✓ **Use Accessible Formatting:** Ensure the job posting is accessible to screen readers by using a simple layout, proper headings, and alt-text for images. Avoid using images or PDFs as the primary format for the posting.

✓ **Mention Flexibility Options:** Highlight any flexible working arrangements, such as remote work or adaptable schedules. This can be crucial for candidates with disabilities who may need accommodations.

✓ **Use "You" Language:** Write the job posting in a conversational tone, using "you" language. For example, "You will manage..." or "You will be responsible for...". This makes the content more engaging and directly speaks to the candidate, making them feel included and considered.

Accessible Pre-Interview - Checklist

✓ **Describe the Structure of the Interview:** Clearly outline the interview format, such as the length of the interview; (e,g., 30 minutes), the number of questions (e.g., 5-7 questions), and the opportunity for the candidate to ask their own questions. Providing this structure helps candidates feel more comfortable and prepared.

✓ **Offer Multiple Communication Options:** Provide candidates with different ways to communicate throughout the process, such as email, phone, or video calls. Ensure any communication platforms used are accessible, and offer alternative formats if needed, like large print or text-based communication.

✓ **Ask About Accommodations Early:** When inviting candidates for an interview, proactively ask if they require any accommodations. This demonstrates your commitment to inclusion and allows you to prepare in advance to meet their needs.

✓ **Train Interviewers on Disability Awareness:** Ensure that all interviewers are trained on disability awareness, including understanding different types of disabilities and how to interact respectfully. This includes being aware of unconscious biases and focusing on the candidate's skills and qualifications.

✓ **Ensure the Interview Environment is Accessible:** Whether the interview is in-person or virtual, make sure the environment is accessible. For in-person interviews, this includes having accessible entrances, restrooms, and seating. For virtual interviews, ensure the technology platform is accessible to those using assistive devices.

✓ **Provide Clear Instructions and Expectations:** Clearly outline the interview process, including the format, length, and any specific tasks or assessments. Providing this information in advance allows candidates to prepare appropriately and reduces anxiety.

Case Example [2]

A person who wants to apply for a job contacts the hiring manager and says: "The online application won't work with my screen reader" or "I keep getting timed out during the test." You may need to ask for additional information about the barriers the applicant is experiencing to better understand what accommodation solutions can be offered. A manager may choose to bypass the standardized recruitment process and invite the applicant to send in their application via email or in print. They should provide an accessible version of the test being used to assess the applicant or allow the applicant to bypass this step of the recruitment process.

REFERENCES

[1] Suter, R., (n.d). Barrier-free e-recruitment recruiting disabled people online: An employers' forum on disability guide to making your online recruitment accessible. Employers Forum on Disability.

[2] Job Accommodation Network (n.d). The JAN workplace accommodation toolkit. https://askjan.org/toolkit/index.cfm