



Office of the
Merit Commissioner

Upholding Fair Hiring in the BC Public Service



Special Study

INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICES

2024

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MESSAGE FROM THE MERIT COMMISSIONER

Increasing staff diversity to better represent the diversity of the workforce and of clients is a goal for many organizations.

Two ways to increase representation are to attract a more diverse pool of applicants and to support them through a merit-based selection process through "inclusive hiring practices." Inclusive hiring practices are strategies used by hiring managers and organizations to create hiring processes that are more likely to encourage qualified applicants from diverse backgrounds to apply and be able to fairly participate in a hiring process. Attracting more diverse qualified applicants can help achieve a more diverse workforce that better represents British Columbians.



As the Merit Commissioner of British Columbia, I am sometimes asked by organizations to comment on inclusive hiring practices. Specifically, I am asked to advise on how to hire more inclusively; to comment on how inclusive hiring practices align with a merit-based process as required by the *Public Service Act*; and to share my observations as to how the BC Public Service is doing regarding inclusive hiring. Each of these questions is an impetus for this special study.

Hiring is an important responsibility, and continuous learning and reflection are part of being a good hiring manager. Asking questions is an important step to learning and improving hiring processes. This special study was created to contribute to the emerging conversation about how to increase representation in the workforce.

Inclusive practices are more and more a part of conversations about healthy and productive workplaces. Many organizations are encouraging hiring managers to consider their processes thoughtfully: from carefully evaluating what qualifications to include in the job profile, to the wording of the job advertisement, to communication about the job selection process, and to the design of assessment methods. The Canadian federal government has gone so far as to mandate this kind of “pre-work” for hiring managers before all staffing actions are commenced.

This special study of inclusive hiring practices aims to provide insight into emerging practices, as well as to remind hiring managers and organizational heads that many foundational practices in a merit-based process also contribute to—and indeed are essential to—inclusive hiring.

The first section provides a review of existing studies related to inclusive hiring. This is a growing area of research; currently, research studies focus on gaps in representation and diversity strategies more broadly, with only a small number of studies examining the effectiveness of specific inclusive hiring practices.

It is also important for hiring managers and organizations to be aware of the core principles and practices essential to merit-based hiring that must be considered when looking to encourage more diversity in qualified applicants. Therefore, the second section, “Foundations of Fairness: The Merit Process and Inclusive Hiring,” provides a brief overview of these core principles.

The third part of this special study, “Inclusive Hiring Practices: A Survey of Emerging

Recommendations and Practices,” describes five categories of inclusive hiring practices that are currently being recommended by advocates for different equity groups.

To assist hiring managers with a practical tool, a fourth section provides “Questions for Hiring Managers.” This tool gives a list of prompts for hiring managers to consider important practices, both “foundational” and “new.” It is my hope that these prompting questions may help hiring managers navigate the requirements of a merit-based *and* inclusive hiring process in their individual circumstances.

Finally, this special study also comes at a time when the Office of the Merit Commissioner is able to observe some inclusive hiring practices in the audits that resulted from our [annual merit performance audit](#). The final section shares some observations about inclusive hiring practices from randomly selected competition files audited over the past several years. Appendix A contains comments on the use of “preference statements” for organizations who hire under the *Public Service Act* (the Act), and Appendix B lists relevant readings and a bibliography.

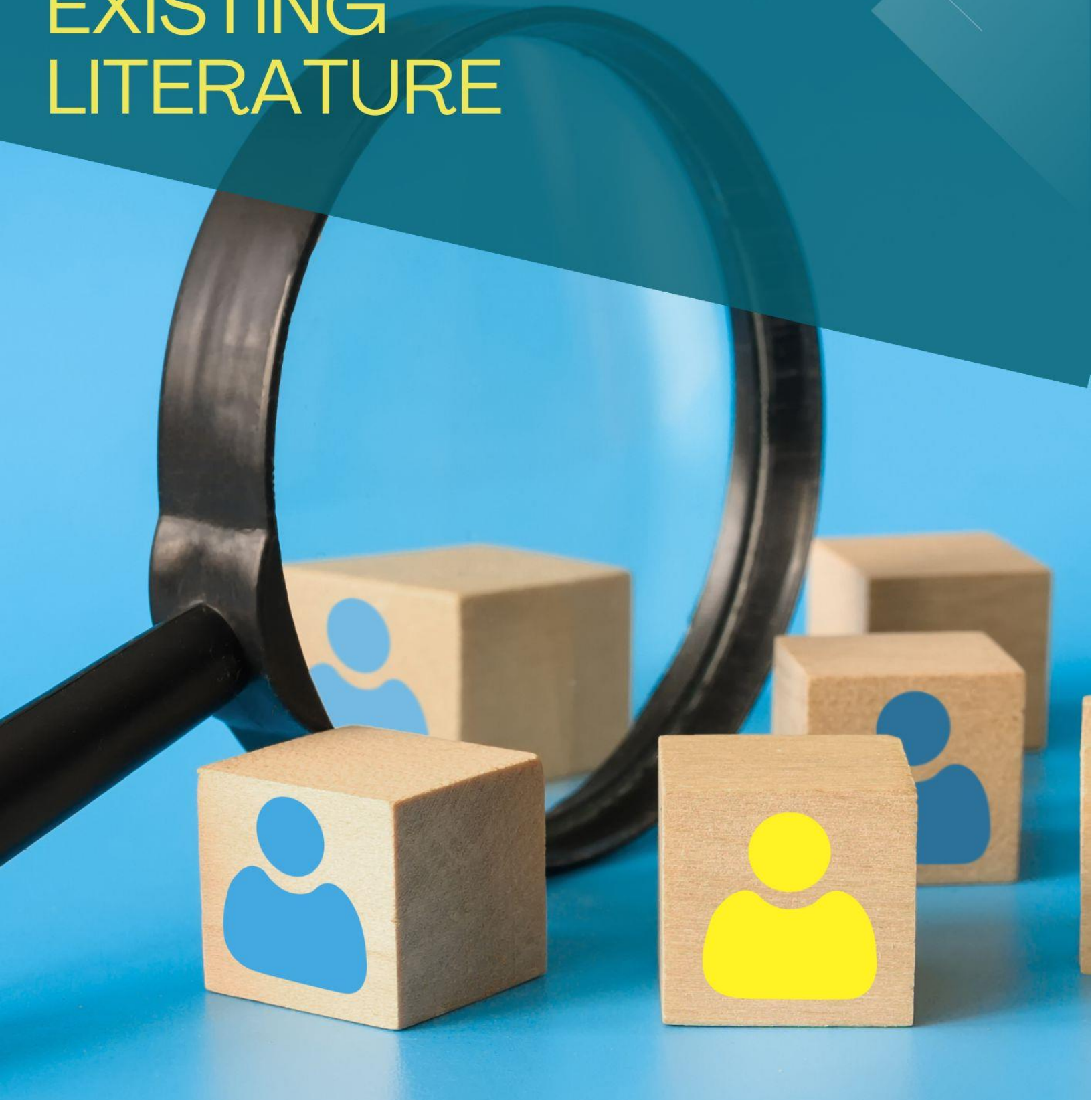
One area that this special study does not discuss in detail is preferential or limited hiring (for example, limiting applicants to members of one equity group). Appendix A does include some observations about the use of “preference statements” in BC Public Service competitions from the past two audit years. However, separate mechanisms exist, under the Act and BC’s *Human Rights Code*, to govern when employers may use preferential or limited hiring. The focus of this special study is on encouraging and supporting diverse qualified applicants to apply and be supported in a fair hiring process, rather than on limiting applicant pools.

I would like to thank my team at the Office of the Merit Commissioner for their dedicated work on this special study, which provides valuable guidance as hiring and selection processes evolve in today’s public service and sectors.

David McCoy
Merit Commissioner
Province of British Columbia

This special study of inclusive hiring practices reminds hiring managers and organizational heads that many foundational practices in a merit-based process also contribute to—and indeed are essential to—inclusive hiring.

INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICES: REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE



INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICES: REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

Introduction

Inclusive hiring practices are strategies used by hiring managers and organizations to create hiring processes that are more likely to encourage diverse qualified applicants to apply and to participate equitably in a hiring process. For the special study into inclusive hiring practices, the Office of the Merit Commissioner (the Office) first sought to identify what studies, if any, had been conducted regarding inclusive hiring. The Office examined academic databases, Canadian government websites, and relevant equity, diversity, and inclusion reports to determine what types of studies were being conducted, in which disciplines, and what information these studies might yield that would be relevant to BC Public Service hiring.

Overall, many organizations are placing increasing importance on inclusive hiring, such as universities, governments, and not-for-profit organizations specializing in a range of disciplines, including science, education, public policy and human resources. Many organizations report striving toward more inclusive workplaces, where all employees feel valued and respected, contribute their perspectives, and have equal access to opportunities and resources within the workplace. The studies that have been generated in academic journals to date fall into three main categories: representation gaps, the effectiveness of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives, and best practices.

Representation gaps

Much of the current body of literature on EDI hiring focuses on the relative representation of different equity groups and aims to identify gaps by examining promotion rates within organizations. For example, in 2022, the Government of Canada conducted the *Employment Equity Promotion Rate* study covering 27 years of promotions within the Canadian government between the years 1991 and 2018. This study explores promotion rates and representation of employment equity groups both over time and compared with their respective counterparts (Government of Canada, 2022).

This type of study has also been undertaken on a provincial level in British Columbia to better understand representation and other equity considerations in the BC Public Service and broader workforce. In the most recent available data from the [BC Stats Workforce Profiles](#), representation reports across the BC Public Service indicate that in the reported year (2022), Indigenous peoples, visible minorities, and women all had a reported shortfall in hiring. Notably, persons with disabilities were represented at a higher rate than was anticipated. Comparing reported data from 2020 to 2022, women and visible minorities reported a small increase in the representation in the population of the BC Public Service. Indigenous people's representation had a reduction in overall representation in the BC Public Service during this timeframe. Comparing the BC Public Service to the available BC workforce, Indigenous peoples and visible minorities are represented at a lower rate in the BC Public Service than in the available workforce. Conversely, women and persons with disabilities are represented at a higher rate (Government of British Columbia, 2022).

Lastly, the Public Service of Canada (PSC) has noted that as Canada's largest employer they have a responsibility to reflect the diversity of the Canadian people and to be truly representative of the people they serve. Their first step was to evaluate and understand the current representation within their workforce and to gain a more accurate picture of the representation gaps. This was accomplished by improving on the availability and reliability of existing data thus providing a peek into the composition of the public service employees who self-identify in employment equity sub-groups. Since the fall of 2020 the PSC began releasing this data and introduced an [interactive data visualization tool](#) allowing users to easily access employment equity data. As the gaps in representation appear in the data, this can provide direction to focus groups and initiatives while also identifying where change in processes is needed.

Studies examining equity group representation and gaps are important for identifying areas in hiring with room for improvement. For example, an audit of employment equity representation in recruitment was performed by the Government of Canada in 2021. The audit was aimed at identifying whether four equity groups (women, members of visible minorities, Indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities) remained proportionally represented throughout recruitment processes in the Canadian federal government, and at identifying factors that may influence employment equity group representation (Government of Canada, 2021).

Effectiveness of EDI initiatives

The next body of literature the Office reviewed focused on understanding, promoting, and assessing various EDI initiatives aimed at creating more equitable, diverse, and inclusive recruitment processes and work environments. In the literature surveyed, EDI initiatives related to hiring included training sessions for employees and hiring managers of organizations; the revision of organization policy documents; and prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion in academic programs.

The *Audit of Employment Equity Representation in Recruitment* conducted by the Government of Canada in 2021 provides insight into one of these initiatives. The audit's questionnaire found that:

- 27% of responding organizations require hiring managers to go through mandatory employment equity related training;
- 19% of responding organizations provide workplace diversity and inclusion training;
- 19% provide training in unconscious bias; and
- 12% of responding organizations require interview panels to include one member from an employment equity group (Government of Canada, 2021).

The Office observed that at the time of this study, information is limited related to how well initiatives such as training hiring managers in employment equity training positively impact diversity in hiring. Further research is needed to understand the impacts and overall effectiveness of these EDI initiatives to increase diversity in hiring.

Best practices

Some studies and reports also suggest how to incorporate specific inclusive hiring practices into recruitment. This smaller, more relevant subset of the existing literature more closely examines recruitment and hiring practices in relation to equity group representation gaps to suggest ways to make hiring processes more effective and inclusive. Some examples of these practices include:

- providing applicants with timelines and additional information relating to the recruitment process;
- offering accommodations;
- providing clarity around job duties and responsibilities;
- using plain language;
- sharing interview questions in advance; and
- offering flexible scheduling of interviews and assignments.

These and other practices are described and discussed in [section three](#) of this special study. In addition, a 2023 study conducted by the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) highlights some of these practices, noting that the tactics most used by human resources professionals to increase EDI through their recruitment processes are:

- flexible working arrangements (66%);
- inclusive language used in job advertisements (53%); and
- using structured interviews (standard questions) for promotions and recruitment (41%) (AHRI, 2023).

Other studies look at specific interventions in hopes of providing evidence of how organizations can build more equal and inclusive workplaces. Notably, a study using behavioral insights theory conducted by the New South Wales Government (NSW) found that simple interventions, such as an email or phone call from a recruitment manager encouraging women to reapply for leadership positions they had “narrowly” missed out on, significantly decreased the gender gap in recruitment. Within their organization, these interventions increased the likelihood of women reapplying to a leadership position by 27%, reducing the gender gap between men and women reapplying for these positions from 45% to 4% (NSW Government, 2020).

In contrast to studies of specific interventions, a Government of Canada study examined equity group experiences of hiring by stage of the hiring process. The audit had two main objectives: (1) to assess whether the four main equity groups remained proportionately represented throughout Canadian federal government recruitment processes, and (2) to identify the factors that influence employment equity group representation in this organization. The four main equity groups include:

1. women
2. members of visible minorities
3. Indigenous peoples
4. persons with disabilities

This federal government study examined the representation of each group at five stages of the appointment process. The stages are:

1. job application
2. automated screening
3. organizational screening
4. assessment
5. appointment

The study assessed whether employment equity groups experienced changes in representation at each stage, and examined these stages for factors that may have influenced their representation. Results of this audit found that employment equity groups did not remain proportionately represented during recruitment processes. Interestingly, the only group to experience an overall increase in representation from application to appointment stage were women. In addition, Indigenous candidates, members of visible minorities, and persons with disabilities all experienced a drop in representation at the assessment stages.

Lastly, while not a formalized “study,” the Canadian federal government recently introduced new requirements for hiring managers specifically regarding diversity and inclusion at the “assessment” stage of competitions. Given the federal government study’s observation of a drop in representation at the assessment stages of a competition, it is noteworthy that the new requirements focus on “assessments,” such as interviews and tests. Every hiring manager in the

Canadian federal government three-step process prior to assessing candidates

1. **Description of the assessment method:** This provides an opportunity for the hiring manager to take note of the key elements of their assessment method, including qualifications, administration procedures, and rating methods.
2. **Identification of potential biases and barriers:** This is where the hiring manager evaluates the assessment methods and its application by reviewing and identifying potential biases and barriers.
3. **Action taken to remove or mitigate their impact:** The final step is where the hiring manager identifies and implements mitigation strategies that are suitable for the assessment methods and qualifications being assessed.

Canadian federal government is required to complete an evaluation and three step process prior to assessing candidates (see box below).

When reviewing the federal government’s literature, the Office found a great number of resources, tools and learning materials to promote inclusivity in hiring. Here are a few examples of these resources:

- The [inclusive appointment process](#) provides an inclusive lens for all stages of the hiring process and is aimed to build diversity, accessibility and inclusion into their appointment decisions.
 - It consists of a list of key questions and self-reflection for hiring managers to consider at each stage of the hiring process, as well as links to resources and learning such as the [Fairness Review Checklist](#).
- The [Fairness Review Checklist](#) is used to reduce bias and enhance fairness for existing and new assessment tools.
 - The intent is to remove content that could be perceived as unfair and to identify content that could be problematic for employment equity groups. As well as enhancing the fairness of tests and tools, it removes irrelevant qualifications and reduces the need for accessibility accommodation requests.
- The federal government has also created several “toolkits.”
 - Examples include the *Inclusive Recruitment Toolkit*, the *Virtual Door to Talent with Disabilities*, and the *Indigenous Recruitment Toolkit*. These toolkits have been created to assist hiring managers involved in the staffing process to anticipate and embrace alternative methods to create an inclusive environment for all.

Limitations

Studies of inclusive hiring practices themselves, at the time this special study was being prepared, were limited in number and scope. In many cases, studies described their efforts to increase diversity in applicant pools and enhance candidate experiences. In some cases, studies were designed to uncover factors influencing the recruitment and retention of diverse staff. Few studies researched inclusive practices themselves, either in theoretical or practical terms. Only a handful of studies examined the effectiveness of practices promoted as “inclusive” or to indicate how to employ

those practices more powerfully. This provides an important caution to hiring managers and organizations wishing to adopt practices that are billed as “inclusive hiring” practices: not every

More research is needed to understand the impact of practices on fostering more inclusive workplaces where all employees feel valued and respected and have equitable access to resources and opportunities.

inclusive hiring practice may be as effective at attracting, encouraging, or supporting diverse applicants as it may be promoted to be. As more research is conducted into this emerging area of practice, organizations and hiring managers are encouraged to review research to make informed choices about best practices.

Methodologies

In the literature reviewed, many organizations seeking to gain insight into inclusive hiring are doing so using qualitative research methods such as surveys and interviews. Researchers relied on the perspectives or expertise of hiring managers, recent hires, human resources professionals, academic advisors, administrative staff, experts in equity, diversity and inclusion, and senior leadership members from organizations.

As this body of research is emerging, the methodologies employed to this point appear to be limited. For example, little quantitative research exists in this area and studies reviewed at this time were limited to a point in time, not longitudinal.

Conclusion

As observed in this research, many organizations report being committed to supporting more inclusive hiring practices. Groups and researchers are focused on understanding representation in their organizations and identifying areas for improvement. Many organizations report increased practices related to fostering more inclusive hiring processes and work environments. However, the Office observed that data related to effectiveness of many of the initiatives and practices is limited. More research is needed to understand the impact of these practices on fostering more inclusive workplaces where all employees feel valued and respected and have equitable access to resources and opportunities.

FOUNDATIONS OF FAIRNESS: A MERIT-BASED AND INCLUSIVE HIRING PROCESS



FOUNDATIONS OF FAIRNESS: A MERIT-BASED AND INCLUSIVE HIRING PROCESS

Many new practices are being identified as opportunities to make merit-based hiring more inclusive, as this special study outlines in the section titled [Inclusive Hiring Practices: – A Survey of Emerging Recommendations and Practices](#). It is important for hiring managers to thoughtfully consider their hiring process each time to ensure a fair competition that results in qualified candidates. Taking into consideration new approaches, such as those outlined in [Inclusive Hiring Practices](#) can be a valuable part of preparing a merit-based hiring process.

While it is important for hiring managers and organizations to explore new practices, it is also important for those hiring under the *Public Service Act* (the Act) to understand foundational practices that are already expected of a fair hiring process under the legislation. The building blocks of a merit-based process are the foundation for treating applicants and candidates consistently and fairly. In turn, public service organizations that have reputations for consistent and fair hiring may have a better opportunity to attract more diverse and qualified applicants. Once in a hiring competition, candidates are more likely to have an inclusive and fair experience if the foundational building blocks of a merit-based process are in place.

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Building on Foundations of Fairness

This section describes at a high level some of the building blocks of merit-based hiring. The purpose of this section is to provide hiring managers and organizational leaders with the principles behind a merit-based process, with examples. It is not intended to be comprehensive, but to remind hiring managers of some of “the basics” to consider when looking to be more inclusive in their hiring processes.

When considering whether a hiring process was merit-based, the Office considers four cornerstone principles, as well as specific practices that align with those principles. To be fair, and based on merit, hiring processes must include the following components:

- open and transparent processes
- objective and relevant job assessment
- reasonable decisions
- fair and consistent treatment of applicants

Open and transparent processes

An open and transparent process relates to providing clear and accurate information in a timely manner. This allows prospective applicants, and candidates taking part in a competition, to make informed decisions about their participation in a hiring process.

Key Points:

Clear and accurate information about the process, provided in a timely manner, is important for all prospective applicants before they apply, as well as for candidates once they are in a hiring process.

- Hiring managers should consider whether their hiring process is open and transparent.
- Openness and transparency are important considerations in areas of the hiring process such as:
 - Communicating all required/mandatory and preferred educational and experiential qualifications to prospective applicants so they can make informed decisions. This allows people to recognize whether they have the qualifications before they decide to invest in applying for a position.
 - Outlining if equivalent combinations of education and experience may be considered in lieu of the required/mandatory job qualifications as posted—and, if so, defining those equivalencies up front. This allows people to assess whether their unique background and experiences may qualify them a job even where they do not meet the standard qualifications.
 - Identifying practical aspects of the job, such as:
 - the nature of the job opportunity (e.g., temporary or permanent);
 - pay rate or range;
 - job location;
 - availability of remote work options;
 - travel requirements; and
 - other factors likely to impact a person’s decision to apply.
 - The hiring manager providing the interview panel with clear criteria on how candidates will be evaluated and assessed.

- Accurately communicating the competition outcome so that eligible internal public service candidates can exercise their right to the staffing review processes as [defined in regulation](#).
- Openness and transparency are foundational to a fair process for all and support efforts to attract qualified applicants from diverse backgrounds.

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Objective and relevant assessment

Assessing participants objectively is critical to a merit-based and inclusive hiring process. Screening, short-listing, testing, interviewing, reference checking, years of continuous service consideration, and criminal record checks are all examples of assessments in a hiring competition. Without measures in place to support objective assessments, hiring manager decisions may be influenced by their own bias or other pressures, such as pressure from senior stakeholders in an organization to hire a specific candidate. Assessments also must be reasonable and relevant to the job. The hiring manager's task is to hire the most qualified person to do a particular role that is being filled.

Key Points:

- Hiring managers should be confident that their methods of assessing job qualifications are objective and that what they are assessing is relevant to the job.
- This principle comes in to play in many choices that a hiring manager must make, such as:
 - Deciding which applicants will move forward in a hiring process based on screening and short-listing criteria.
 - Deciding on what kind of tools are used to evaluate candidates' knowledge and skills (e.g., what kind of rating guides and marking criteria will be used).
 - Marking guides mitigate bias by using an established and predetermined set of criteria.
 - Having a diverse and multi-person panel to conduct testing and interview assessments to help mitigate bias, instead of one person conducting interviews in isolation.
 - Deciding in advance what questions to ask to assess competency, skills, abilities, and past work performance (that is, what to ask when checking references).
- Without objective assessment methods, when job qualifications relevant to the job are being assessed, it is unlikely that a hiring process can be fair or inclusive.

- Newer inclusive hiring practices that are designed to reduce bias, such as anonymized scoring (sometimes called “blind scoring”) and deliberate diversity on a hiring panel, are an extension of the principle that applicants/candidates should be assessed objectively.

Reasonable decisions

A fair hiring process requires that decisions made through the process meet a standard of reasonableness to ensure that successful candidates are qualified and that decisions are not based on patronage.

Key Points:

- Reasonable decisions are required throughout the hiring process. Some examples include:
 - Ensuring the job posting includes the job qualifications necessary to do the job;
 - Not allowing an applicant to be short-listed into the process without clear evidence of having the posted mandatory job qualifications; and
 - Establishing the methods to assess the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to do the job on “day one” (rather than for what will be required after a person has been in a job for a length of time.)
- When designing a competition process and implementing it, good hiring managers should challenge themselves to make reasonable decisions from different perspectives.
- Reasonable decisions in hiring are critical not only so that applicants and candidates are treated fairly, but also so that appointed public servants are qualified and hired based on merit rather than favouritism.

Fair and consistent treatment of applicants

Elements of the hiring process must be applied fairly and consistently to all candidates while allowing for adjustments if needed. The principle of equity recognizes that a candidate may have different circumstances and may require an adjustment to the process in the form of an “accommodation.”

Key Points:

- Fair and consistent treatment is important to consider through the stages of a hiring process.
- At the start of the competition process, treat applicants fairly when screening people out for incomplete or late applications.
 - A person forgot about the deadline and submitted their application late. In this situation, it would not be fair or consistent to accept the late application.

- A server malfunction did not allow people to apply for the last hours before the posted close date and time. In this situation, it would be fair to accept the late applications that could not be submitted due to the server error.
- When testing knowledge, skills, or abilities, assess candidates on similar material, rather than different subject matters or content.
- All candidates should receive the same amount of time to complete a written assignment.
 - However, some candidates may require an adjustment to the time because of a protected ground in BC's *Human Rights Code* (Code) (e.g., a candidate self-identifies as a person with dyslexia and requests additional time).
- If one candidate receives information about the competition (e.g., interview questions in advance, or clarification of testing instructions), all candidates should equally receive the same information with the same opportunity to review it.
- For fairness and consistency, when candidates are interviewed, they should be asked the same questions and marked according to the same criteria. Any probing questions asked by the panel to better understand an answer are customized to each candidate.

Fairness and consistency help candidates compete equitably in any competition.

Learn more about adjustments in the hiring process below where reasonable accommodations, when required, are part of a fair and merit-based process.

A special note on “accommodations” in a hiring process

Some candidates may require an adjustment to the hiring process because of part of their identity, such as disability or religion, that is outlined in the Code. The Code prohibits discrimination in employment under section 13. The protected grounds are: Indigenous identity, race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age of that person, or that a person has been convicted of a criminal or summary conviction offence that is unrelated to the employment or to the intended employment of that person.

As part of a fair and merit-based process, the hiring manager may therefore need to adjust the hiring process for one or more people either at the application stage or during competition.

- In an interview situation, a candidate who has a hearing impairment may require a seating arrangement where they can directly face all interviewers in order to lip read.
- A person who is neurodiverse may prefer to bring a fidget tool to an interview, or to walk around during the interview.
- A person with dyslexia may require additional time to complete a written assignment.
- A person may ask for a different interview date if the first date offered conflicts with their religious holiday.

Reasonable accommodations can be implemented at various stages of the hiring competition. There are many ways to support an adjustment for a candidate without affecting the integrity of the hiring process.¹ However, it is still important that hiring managers consider fairness overall.

Consider fairness for all applicants when offering accommodations

If a change for one candidate may not be considered reasonable nor fair to others, it may be worth considering whether the change could be extended to all candidates (e.g., if one candidate is given the option of a virtual interview as an accommodation, and if that may provide an advantage, the hiring manager may wish to consider offering that option to all candidates).

Consider advising candidates in the job posting that they can request reasonable accommodations during the recruitment process. Add a short description of how and when candidates can request these. This helps candidates understand what they can ask for and encourages them to do so.

Examples of including accommodation information in job postings

- At the [ministry of] we work closely with applicants and employees to help them achieve their best outcomes. This sometimes includes adjusting the competition process in ways that maintain fairness and equity. All candidates invited to an assessment have the opportunity to request a reasonable accommodation to their recruitment process, when scheduling your times and access. Some options include accessible parking, communication support or breaks.
- Candidates requiring any specific accommodations in the competition assessments should declare this in their cover letter or resume.
- Prior to any online assessment, technology instructions will be provided ahead of time. Online support may also be available.
- We can provide access to accessible parking and building entrances for any in person assessments.
- Our assessments will happen at various times of day and days of the week for individual selection. Should specific environments be necessary, we will adjust to the extent possible.

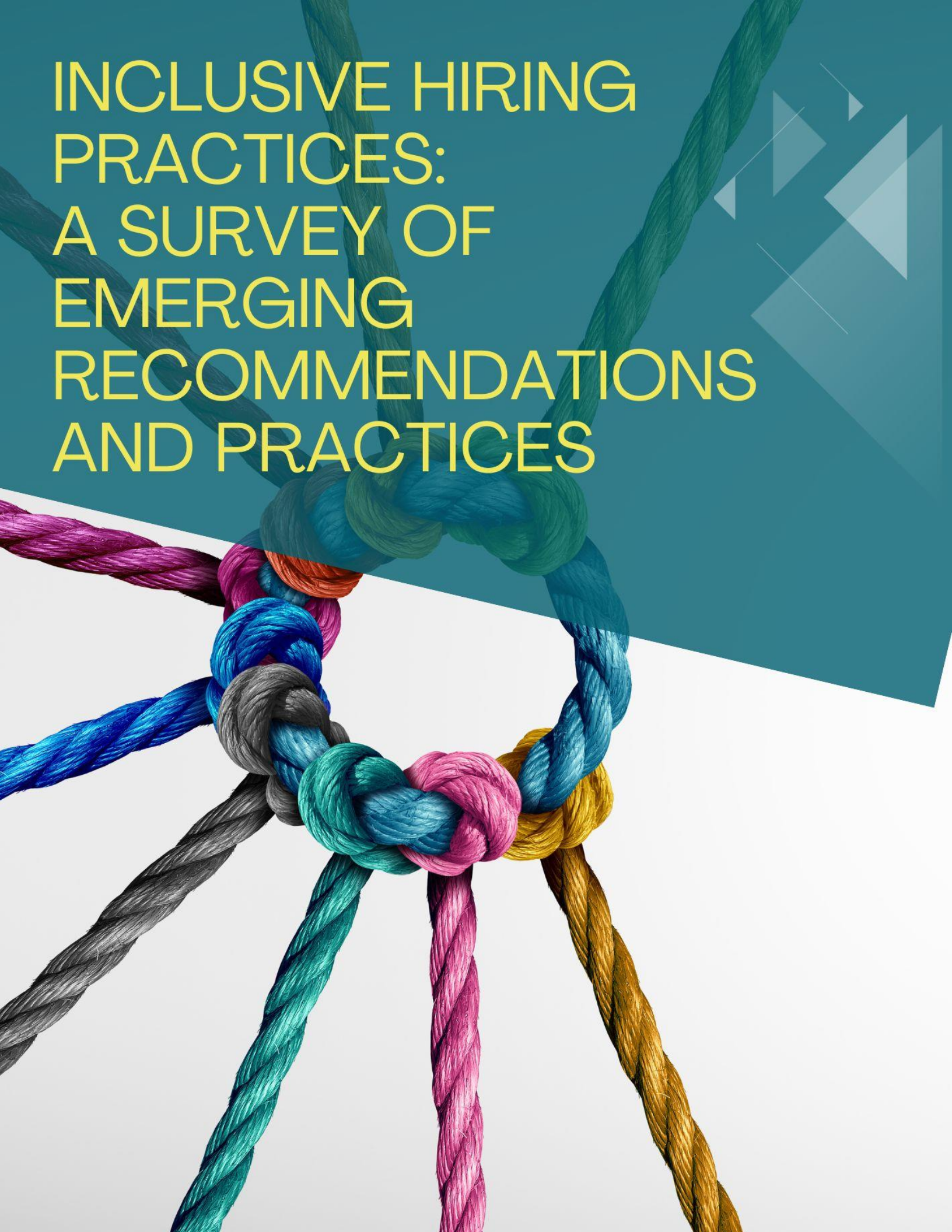
¹ British Columbia's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner's "Employment Equity Toolkit" contains helpful resources related to the topic of accommodations.

Learn More

The Office of the Merit Commissioner's [2023/24 Merit Performance Audit Report \(MPA\)](#), and MPA reports from previous years, are recommended reading for any hiring manager or leader who wishes to better understand these building blocks. Hiring managers and leaders are encouraged to read "Recruitment and Selection Process Observations," which outlines results from the Office's annual audit of hiring processes, by "stage" of the hiring process. It also provides anonymized case studies of common errors and examples of good practice.

This is important reading for any hiring manager who wishes to run a more inclusive hiring process; it will help hiring managers to understand some of the basic decisions they must make in a hiring process, and why those decisions are important to fairness.

INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICES: A SURVEY OF EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRACTICES



INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICES: A SURVEY OF EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRACTICES

This part of the special study provides a snapshot of inclusive hiring practices currently being recommended by advocacy groups and by other jurisdictions in Canada, such as the federal government. These practices are described so that public service hiring managers may consider adopting these practices into their decision making and practices.

In some cases, these inclusive hiring practices are recommended to support a particular group of prospective applicants, such as people who are neurodiverse. In other cases, these practices have been identified as valuable to multiple groups of prospective applicants.

The inclusive hiring practices that emerged from research for this special study are grouped into five practice categories:

1. Mitigating the Risk of Bias
2. Fostering a Welcoming Environment for all Job Seekers
3. Creating a Hiring Process That Is More Transparent for Applicants
4. Offering Greater Flexibility
5. Supporting Accessibility

This study outlines several practices in each category that are being recommended either by advocacy groups or organizations, or in studies of EDI.

The practices surveyed do not include preferential or limited hiring (for example, limiting applicants to members of one group). For more information about the use of “preference statements” for members of equity group memberships, refer to Appendix A.

It should be noted that while advocates, who are often working directly with clients of diverse backgrounds (for example, persons with disabilities, neurodiverse persons, or members of the BIPOC community, or intersections of the above) recommend these practices, the Merit Commissioner cannot comment on their effectiveness. Organizations and hiring managers are encouraged to review emerging research to make informed choices about best practices and their own internal policies. Finally, not every practice recommended by advocates has been included. Some practices may be problematic within the BC Public Service hiring context and have not been included here.

Mitigating the Risk of Bias

Bias can exist consciously and unconsciously and may affect hiring decisions about a candidate. Bias may manifest in qualified candidates being eliminated from a hiring process, resulting in reduced diversity in an organization.

There are many aspects of a merit-based hiring process that already help to mitigate the risk of bias, which are discussed in the [Foundations of Fairness](#) section of this report. In addition, other practices are emerging that may further mitigate the risk of bias. These include recommendations from studies and advocacy groups to:

- remove names from resumes and other screening/short-listing documents;
- remove dates from resumes and other screening/short-listing documents;
- remove names from written assignments before assessing; and
- include people of diverse backgrounds on the hiring panel.

These practices are described below, along with some cautions and considerations for hiring managers.

Remove names from resumes and other screening/short-listing documents

“Screening” is the first review of an applicant’s candidacy for further consideration. This stage is typically to review specific elements that are required for a posting, such as “ability to legally work in Canada.”

“Short-listing” is another important initial stage in the selection process where (in the BC Public Service context), applicants are short-listed “in” or “out” based on whether they possess the required education and experience criteria outlined in the advertised job posting.

Several studies have indicated that bias can occur at the initial screening/short-listing stage based on assumptions made about applicants’ names. The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), a United States-based research organization focusing on developing economic information for government, business, and academic audiences, found that candidates with “white” names needed to send on average 10 resumes to receive a callback; conversely, candidates with “African-American” names needed to send 15 resumes to get a callback. Therefore, screening and short-listing are important places for hiring managers to pay attention to the risk of any conscious or unconscious bias. Hiring managers are encouraged to consider their own unconscious bias.

Removing candidates’ names from all resumes, cover letters, and other application materials (such as questionnaires) prior to screening and short-listing is an emerging method to reduce bias. This method involves replacing candidates’ names with another identifier (such as a letter or number). While this method takes additional time and effort to set up, it may limit bias to allow the hiring manager to more objectively and accurately determine which applicants are best qualified to move forward in the hiring process. If hiring managers decide to take this approach, they should be very careful to ensure accuracy when transcribing any results or decisions and not to mix identifiers and names up when moving candidates forward to the next stage of the competition.

Remove dates from resumes and other screening/short-listing documents

Several sources, including The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), a UK-based organization with a mission to support human resource professionals and create more positive and equitable workplaces, noted the possibility of ageism bias from hiring managers calculating the estimated age of a candidate from the dates on their resume.

- A hiring manager might assume someone's age by the year of their high school or university graduation.
- Advocates for inclusive hiring have noted that gaps in a resume may occur due to illness, disability, or taking time away from the workforce due to childcare or eldercare, and that these gaps may sometimes lead to negative assumptions by hiring managers.

Accordingly, hiring managers are sometimes counselled to avoid penalizing applicants for gaps in their resume. In addition, some advocates go further to recommend that hiring managers find a way to remove references to specific years of experience. Some options that may reduce bias in this situation are to:

- Use specialized software to redact information.
- Engage a staff member to redact the data manually before forwarding to the hiring team.
- Have candidates enter their educational and work experience into computer fields that calculate months or years of worked experience, but do not include the actual years in which the experience took place.

Hiring managers may wish to take steps to mitigate potential bias resulting from date references in job application materials. At the same time, it is important for hiring managers to be able to carefully evaluate the months and years of experience of applicants. The hiring managers need to determine if candidates meet the required qualifications listed in the job description and/or posting, and time in the BC Public Service may be needed at the end of the process for the "Years of Continuous Service" factor of merit calculation. Therefore, any mitigation strategies should be done thoughtfully and carefully to avoid potential errors.

Remove names from written assignments before assessing

Public service organizations commonly include some form of test or other "written assignment" following short-listing, to assess candidates' knowledge, skills, and/or abilities. These assessments are marked by an automated system, a hiring manager, or a panel. Typically, those candidates who are successful pass on to another stage of assessment, such as an interview. As discussed in the [Foundations of Fairness section](#), a merit-based hiring process will include important components to mitigate bias, such as a detailed marking guide that supports consistent and fair marking.

Anonymized marking (sometimes called "blind marking" or "blind scoring") is one practice that has emerged to mitigate bias in the marking of written assignments. This method takes place when candidates' names are removed from assignments prior to marking, and candidates are instead assigned numerical identifiers. Some community organizations and research have

suggested that removing names from an assignment could reduce unconscious bias in relation to non-Anglophone sounding names, or names that are commonly thought of as female. In Harvard Business Review's 2020 article "To Reduce Gender Bias, Anonymize Job Applications," researchers indicated that in several professions, anonymizing job applications can benefit female candidates.

The potential for harm from potential bias is significant. [Rights in Focus](#), a 2024 study of inequalities and injustices faced by marginalized people by British Columbia's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, found that:

[m]any respondents reported that they were treated differently in the job application process because of their age (28 per cent), sex or gender (20 per cent) or race or ethnicity (20 per cent).

Research from other parts of Canada demonstrates that even when resumes and cover letters are otherwise identical, and regardless of the level of education and work experience they include, applicants with non-Anglophone names or who mention using a wheelchair receive callbacks at significantly lower rates than other applicants.

Anonymized scoring takes additional time and effort to set up. However, community advocates and academic literature suggest potential reduction in bias. Anonymized scoring may limit unconscious bias that may exist, as the panel members only assess based on the documentation submitted by the candidate. In addition to the potential for reducing bias related to gender or cultural background, this approach to marking written assignments may also reduce bias (either for or against) candidates who may already be known to the hiring panel.

Scoring assessments as a panel requires a predetermined agreement on practice. Some examples of merit-based panel scoring approaches include averaging all panel members' scores for each element being assessed; or "consensus scoring" where the panel members refer to their own notes, discuss, and agree as a group upon a score for each element being assessed.

Include people of diverse backgrounds on the hiring panel

Having a hiring panel to conduct short-listing, assessment marking, and interviews (rather than relying only on the perceptions of one person) is a foundational practice to reduce bias and increase fairness in the competitive process. In addition to having a multi-person panel, some advocacy organizations have suggested deliberately ensuring the panel is diverse. DiverseTalent, a recruitment consultant organization with a focus on diversity and inclusion, outlines three key areas where a diverse panel can support inclusive hiring:

1. reducing bias
2. avoiding "groupthink"
3. welcoming all candidates

A diverse panel can include the following: a wide range of ages, members of the organization who are in a different work units, and diverse backgrounds such as gender representation,

cultural background, disabilities, and experience in a different range of industries. By looking to include diverse persons and their voices, perspectives, and opinions, it may be more likely that a discussion about the candidates will include a well-rounded perspective. It may also help avoid a variety of unconscious biases such as “similarity/halo bias,” where people show preference for people who are similar to them. This has been identified as a way to assess candidates more fairly and may address potential for bias. This practice may also make candidates feel more comfortable with the hiring process and provide them with more insight into the diversity within the organization or office that they are applying.

Fostering a Welcoming Environment for all Job Seekers

Creating a process where all qualified applicants feel encouraged to apply can result in a larger and more diverse candidate pool. If applicants are opting to self-select out of applying due to perceptions about the workplace, the team, or the hiring process itself, this may ultimately limit the number of qualified applicants available to that organization.

What to include in a welcoming job seeker environment:

- Choose inclusive language.
- Assess written materials for cultural appropriateness.
- Consider timing of a job posting.
- Be proactive regarding accommodations.
- Include diversity-welcoming statements in job postings and recruitment materials.
- Provide positive follow-up feedback.

Choose inclusive language

Several advocacy organizations have identified that “coded” language, or language that has typically been associated with one gender or age group, may discourage people from outside those groups from applying.

Avoiding ‘coded’ language

An expression like “digital native” in a job advertisement for a technical role may imply to prospective applicants that only younger applicants will be seen as having the appropriate level of expertise to be successful.

Instead of terms such as these, it is recommended that hiring managers use specific phrases that indicate the skills required, such as “two years experience with digital marketing, three years experience with databases.” Likewise, if a job posting invited applicants to join their “young and vibrant team,” it may imply to prospective applicants that older applicants are considered less vibrant or imply that younger applicants will be preferred. Choosing more inclusive phrasing such as “effective and vibrant team” can be an important step to make all qualified applicants feel their applications will be welcomed. The BC Public Service Agency’s [Words Matter: Inclusive Language Guidelines](#), from which this example phrasing is taken,

contains guidance for hiring managers and others about how to consider the impact of their language choices.

According to the Pay Equity Office of Ontario, many terms commonly used in job postings can be strongly associated with one specific gender. They give examples of commonly used words such as “competitive”, “go-getter”, and “dominant” that have been associated with male candidates. A suggestion to be more inclusive is to use more neutral alternatives without strong gender associations. Alternative suggestions that may be considered instead of those listed above are “motivated” or “hardworking.”

A study by Gaucher *et al* that conducted experimental studies found that:

When job advertisements were constructed to include more masculine than feminine wording, participants perceived more men within these occupations (Study 3), and importantly, women found these jobs less appealing.

Carefully considering, and, where appropriate, removing language that may have traditionally been associated with one specific type of candidate might encourage a wider range of qualified candidates to apply for a role or pursue future employment with the organization.

Assess written materials for cultural appropriateness

The Public Service of Canada’s [hiring guide checklist](#) indicates specific ways in which hiring managers can make a hiring process more welcoming. While candidates may be required to interact with politically or culturally sensitive topics in some roles, it is not a requirement for all positions. In cases where it is not required to engage with or interact with topics of a sensitive nature, the suggestion is to use more neutral examples or questions. Furthermore, the same checklist encourages hiring managers to assess for diversity in images and examples used in testing and to consider a wide range of diverse experiences before using the materials.

A further consideration is language that may not be understood without a cultural background. While this often refers to idioms, there are a number of considerations noted in the [Public Service of Canada’s hiring guide checklist](#). This list recommends hiring managers look for ways to ensure all test questions are fair for test takers, including removing cultural references to TV or popular culture characters, and assessing if phrases used are understood by most people.

The focus of this inclusive hiring approach is to consider the backgrounds of potential applicants and to design assessments suitable to a broad and diverse audience.

Consider timing of a job posting

Hiring managers can create a more welcoming experience for applicants of all backgrounds by paying attention to religious and cultural holidays when they decide on the timing of the job posting. Greater awareness of religious and cultural holidays may help the hiring manager avoid having a job posting during at time when a portion of the applicant pool may be immersed in cultural celebrations. Being mindful of this this may increase the reach and pool of qualified

applicants. A simple web search for “diversity calendar” will provide several results for consideration.

Hiring managers may wish to have a posting close on a Monday rather than a Friday, and not on a statutory holiday. This allows applicants to submit over a weekend, and in the event of any technical issues, it is more likely that assistance will be available on the close date and on the day immediately after the close date.

Be proactive regarding “accommodations”

BC’s [Human Rights Code](#) recognizes that all persons are equal in dignity, rights and responsibilities, regardless of ancestry, place of origin, race, colour, age, sex, physical or mental disability, marital or family status, sexual orientation, religion, political belief and criminal convictions unrelated to the employment. In a hiring process, there may be times when the hiring process presents a barrier that adversely affects people based on one or more of the grounds protected under the Code. To support all candidates in having a fair hiring experience, hiring managers make adjustments to the hiring process to remove barriers so that people are able to participate. Some examples include:

- In an interview situation, a candidate who has a hearing impairment may require a seating arrangement where they can directly face all interviewers in order to lip read.
- A person who is neurodiverse may prefer to bring a fidget tool to an interview, or to walk around during the interview.
- A person with dyslexia may require additional time to complete a written assignment.

Another example of a request for an adjustment to the hiring process would be a request for a different interview date if the first date offered conflicted with the candidate’s religious holiday.

While job applicants in BC can request such adjustments in the hiring process if needed, organizations such as the Canadian Human Rights Commission have identified that it can be a barrier for candidates to request an accommodation; they found that there is often a belief that requesting accommodations may unfairly disadvantage a candidate. Hiring managers can create a more inclusive hiring process by considering possible accommodation needs in advance. One practice they may adopt to counter candidate hesitancy is to proactively provide all accessibility information about the interview space, and a list of adjustments that a candidate may request when inviting the candidates to an interview or to complete a written assignment.

Include diversity-welcoming statements or other supports in job postings and recruitment materials

Diversity-welcoming statements in postings are intended to communicate that employers value inclusion, equity, and diversity, and to encourage applications from marginalized groups. This kind of statement indicates to prospective applicants that the organization values diversity and welcomes applications from qualified, diverse applicants.

Examples of diversity-welcoming statements in job postings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The BC Public Service is committed to creating a diverse workplace to represent the population we serve and to better meet the needs of our citizens. Consider joining our team and being part of an innovative, inclusive and rewarding workplace.• [Ministry] is proud to be an equal opportunity employer; we strive to ensure all employees contribute in meaningful ways, bring their full self to work and celebrate their differences. The Ministry focuses on reducing poverty, creating opportunities, and increasing inclusion. The ministry provides strategic leadership and quality services that empower a broad range of British Columbians in need to share in the province’s prosperity, to participate fully in their community, and to reach their full potential.• With close to 200 employees based across the province, [ministry] provides a working environment that includes meaningful careers with opportunities for training, professional development, mentorship, and growth. Our core values are to work in an inclusive and diverse, professional, culturally welcoming and trusting environment that values curiosity, flexibility and empowering others to find and determine their path or solutions. We offer flexible work arrangements and benefits that support work-life harmony and help employees reach personal and professional goals while making a real difference in the lives of children, youth, and families.

Diversity-welcoming statements may offer insight to job seekers and have the potential to be a helpful tool in recruiting candidates. Sharing information about inclusion and diversity can signal to job seekers that a wide range of voices, experiences, and backgrounds are welcomed. This may translate to more qualified candidates of diverse backgrounds applying, as opposed to self-selecting from competitions that indicate no stance on diversity.

In a similar vein, advocates indicate that listing supports available to specific groups, such as the Indigenous Applicant Advisory Service offered by the BC Public Service Agency, in the job posting itself, may also indicate an organization’s commitment to diversity.

Provide positive follow-up feedback

Thoughtful, empathetic and personalized feedback for candidates can foster a positive experience. Hiring managers can give feedback about not only about aspects which candidates could improve on, but also about what candidates did well.

In [*Providing Feedback*](#), guidance intended for hiring managers in the BC Public Service, hiring managers are encouraged to consider and share aspects of what a candidate did well in a hiring process. It provides specific examples where hiring managers share how close a candidate came to a position. It has been suggested that by indicating these close decisions, candidates may be more inclined to submit their applications for upcoming competitions.

A [*study by the New South Wales Behavioural Insights Unit*](#) shows evidence of the value of positive feedback in encouraging future applications by unsuccessful applicants. Researchers indicated that in their study, women preparing to pursue management level positions were significantly more likely to reapply in upcoming competitions when positive feedback was provided and when they were encouraged to apply again in upcoming management level competitions. They observed that these kinds of actions can “significantly reduce the gender gap in recruitment.”

Creating a Hiring Process that is More Transparent for Applicants

Transparency is an important aspect of a hiring process for everyone: it allows for appropriate communication and information sharing among applicants, candidates and hiring managers. Communicating clearly about aspects of the hiring process, as well as the position and workplace, is crucial not only for job seekers but also for hiring managers to recruit the right candidates.

When it comes to creating a more inclusive hiring process, increasing transparency supports applicants of more diverse backgrounds to have a better understanding of what to expect from the hiring process and what to expect from the organization. This may be important for applicants who, due to their backgrounds, may be less familiar with the hiring methods most often used to fill BC Public Service jobs, such as immigrants, people who have been out of the workforce for some time, or those who have not experienced a hiring competition under the Act. It may also be important for applicants who may perceive barriers to their success either in the hiring process or in the workplace culture. Providing more open information, rather than less, may help dispel fears about perceived barriers. Overall, enhanced transparency may encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds to apply on jobs they are qualified for, as well as to successfully demonstrate their qualifications through various stages of assessment.

This study highlights three recommendations that fit into this category:

1. Provide a timeline and additional information about the hiring process.
2. Provide clarity around practical workplace information.
3. Share information about how preferences will be applied.

Provide a timeline and additional information about the hiring process

Community advocacy groups suggest that in a hiring process, telling candidates what information may be required, and providing a timeline of the hiring process once candidates have been screened in, can be especially helpful for some candidates. Some candidates may be deterred from applying because they fear participating in the hiring process will not be practical for them or because the process can feel overwhelming. As outlined by both the Labour Market Information Council (Canada) and Cognassist (an organization that provides support for neurodiverse individuals in education and the workplace), many candidates persons with disabilities and neurodiverse individuals identify the heavy mental workload of applying for positions.

Providing a timeline can help better understand what to expect. Advocates recommend that the timeline include information about how long the recruitment processes will take and how much time is scheduled for candidates to complete assignments. While traditionally candidates learn more about the competition process as it proceeds, this approach provides a greater amount of information and detail to applicants up front to inform decision-making. Additional transparency around the hiring timeline can also benefit people with child or family care responsibilities because it helps them plan for additional support if they choose to proceed with the competition. The BC Human Rights Commissioner, in their [hiring and promotion worksheet](#), recommends that hiring managers:

Increase trust and reduce bias by being transparent about the steps involved in the application process and the amount of time it will take to apply, so that candidates can assess whether to proceed given their personal commitments.

In addition, advocacy organizations note that too much information can be overwhelming for some candidates and that hiring managers can take steps to make the process less overwhelming. The Labour Market Information Council (LMIC) a not-for-profit organization which collects, distributes and makes commentary on Canadian labour market information, notes job competitions can be onerous for some neurodiverse candidates to process when there is an overload of information. Job postings that describe a process of inputting information, creating an online profile, uploading documents, and following specific formatting requirements were described by some as “overwhelming.”

According to supporters of this approach, the information provided should be laid out in an easy-to-read format with appropriate margins, font, and white space. Hiring managers may wish to use formatting such as bulleted lists, paragraph breaks, or headers to break up large sections of text. Another consideration may be to include a further resources list at the end of the document if candidates would like to learn more about the organization specifically, including

links to workplace or interview locations, the accessibility or diversity plan, or other information that may be helpful as context but is not required in detail in the job posting. Advocates recommend that hiring managers provide robust information without providing too much additional information that is not needed until later in the competition.

Provide clarity around practical workplace information

Many community advocate organizations, such as the Labour Market Information Council, have found in discussion groups that their clients prefer to have practical information about the workplace up front. This allows applicants to best determine which postings are an appropriate fit prior to applying or to devise a list of questions to ensure the position will meet their needs.

Information on topics such as flexible scheduling, hybrid or remote work arrangements, or non-traditional workspaces can be a positive determiner for many applicants with diverse backgrounds. For some candidates, having a clear idea of how a potential workspace is structured can be critical in their decision to apply or not to apply to an organization. Some recommend a short video describing the workplace and team, that is linked in the job posting.

For example, in their report [*Decoding Job Postings*](#), the Labour Market Information Council (Canada) noted that many neurodivergent participants emphasized the significance of the language used to describe work location and flexibility around that—whether the posting mentioned options to work remotely, in a hybrid model, or via other arrangements. The way job postings articulate the flexibility of work arrangements was found to greatly influence the decisions and preferences of neurodivergent job seekers.

Job seekers appreciate practical information around hybrid and remote work, such as:

- if there are mandatory days they must work in office; and
- if they will have a dedicated workstation or whether they will move between workstations.
- what conditions must be met for the candidate to work in their preferred format (e.g., is there a mandatory minimum number of days worked before remote work can be accessed, such as a probationary period).

Offering Greater Flexibility

Being more flexible in a hiring process can allow for a wider range of candidates to complete an application process. If candidates apply for a position but are not able to proceed because the process is overly rigid, qualified applicants who may have been an excellent addition to an organization may drop out of the process prematurely.

Studies in this field and recommendations from advocacy groups suggest two practices that may provide greater flexibility in the hiring process:

- Schedule interviews or written assignments for a wider range of times.
- Consider offering the option of virtual interviews.

Schedule interviews or written assignments for a wider range of times

Flexible scheduling of interviews and/or written assignments has been recommended to address the needs of candidates with non-standard employment, particularly those who work non-standard hours. Often, people working in these kinds of job may be working in multiple on-call roles with no set hours, and may find it difficult to plan for interviews or written assignments. Supported Employment, a Canadian partnership Organization supporting diverse job seekers, identified those in non-standard employment positions as being disproportionately filled by people of colour and persons with disabilities. Being flexible about interview times is one approach with the potential to widen the pool of candidates who may be able to complete a competition. The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* also notes that offering candidates with disabilities a range of time options may allow them to select a time of day that best suits their needs. Advocacy groups have suggested that making interview times available before or after work hours, or at the beginning or end of the day, can support candidates who may not have flexibility in their work schedule.

Similarly, hiring managers may wish to consider religious and cultural holidays when scheduling interview dates or written assignment dates. If parts of a job process occur at the same time as religious or cultural holidays, qualified candidates may not be able to continue taking part in the hiring process. While a candidate in this situation could ask the hiring manager for an alternative time as an accommodation under one of the protected grounds in the Code, a more inclusive hiring process would anticipate potential conflicts and provide candidates with options proactively.

Consider offering the option of virtual interviews

Virtual interviews may be a good option to make a competition more accessible to some candidates. For example, virtual interviews may be more accessible for parents caring for young children or providing support to aging parents or family members. If a candidate is interviewing for a position that would require a relocation, a virtual interview can support candidates with disabilities for whom travel may be a barrier. Other candidates, such as those who are hearing impaired, may prefer the option of a virtual interview as they may have built-in tools such as automatic transcription to support them in their interview.

Supporting Accessibility

Accessibility is key to inclusive hiring. As accessibility is becoming more widely discussed and considered in workplaces, there are several community resources which can be used to inform how competitions may be made more accessible for a wide range of candidates from diverse backgrounds. Accessibility advocates provide two key recommendations for more accessible hiring processes:

- Assess all postings and assignments for ease of use with accessibility tools.
- Assess for plain language prior to posting a position.

Assess all postings and assignments for ease of use with accessibility tools

Advocates recommend that all postings and competition documents should be accessible for those using adaptive technologies such as screen readers (programs that read text aloud for people with visual or cognitive disabilities). If images or charts are being used, advocates say either “alt text” should be used, or the posting should be formatted to allow for full functionality of screen-reading software. As defined by the [Government of BC](#), “[a]lternative text, also known as alt text, describes the information or function of digital images. Alt text should be clear and concise, try to stay under 15 words.”

The Government of BC maintains [high standards around accessibility for persons with disabilities](#). It is helpful for hiring managers to make themselves aware of these standards prior to submitting job postings uploaded to the job seekers website. This would mean that all members in a hiring process would be able to work together to ensure that everyone involved is assessing for accessible practices. In [What is Assistive Technology?](#), those creating documents or web content are encouraged to consider four main assistive technologies when creating content: screen readers, screen magnifiers, voice recognition, and keyboard navigation.

The BC Public Service Agency has created a series of guides that all hiring managers have access to, which outline ways in which to make competitions more accessible. [Creating Accessible Documents](#) outlines the most common types of documents, as well as how to make them accessible for a wide range of audiences.

Assess for plain language prior to posting

Another area of improvement identified by advocacy groups is to assess all written postings, assignments, and other communication for “plain language,” or clear, straightforward expression that is easily understood by its intended audience. Advocates for neurodiverse persons state that removing all jargon and acronyms can result in a more clear, easier to read document. Plain language can also make postings more understandable to job seekers who are new to Canada or for whom English is not their first language.

The Government of BC [plain language checklist](#) is intended for public-facing content, and provides information that can be helpful for hiring documents as well. It encourages writing content with appropriate margins and reading level that readers can easily scan.

Conclusion

Inclusive hiring is increasingly an area of interest and discussion among hiring managers and advocates for diverse persons. Some of these practices can be incorporated into a hiring process with a minor amount of effort, and others may require more effort and consideration to implement. Many inclusive hiring practices build on critically important foundational fairness concepts. In doing so, they may widen the applicant pool and possibilities for a diverse range of candidates to apply for, and be considered, for a role.

QUESTIONS FOR HIRING MANAGERS: A TOOL FOR MERIT-BASED HIRING



QUESTIONS FOR HIRING MANAGERS: A TOOL FOR MERIT-BASED, INCLUSIVE HIRING

This special study has outlined existing research; reminded hiring managers of key foundational principles and practices of a merit-based process that are also key to running an inclusive hiring process; and surveyed inclusive hiring practices recommended by a range of organizations.

The Merit Commissioner’s mandate does not include hiring training, hiring advice, or hiring policy. However, as a way of summarizing many of the points covered in this special study, the Office has included a list of questions, organized by stage of the competition, that hiring managers may wish to consider as a starting place when looking to improve the inclusiveness of their hiring processes. It is the hiring manager’s responsibility in each case to make informed and thoughtful decisions around how to design a hiring process and how to implement their plan. The Office of the Merit Commissioner encourages hiring managers to contact their human resources organization or department if they have any questions or require advice.

This practical tool provides a list of prompts for hiring managers to consider practices, both “new” and “foundational.” It is the hope of the Office that these prompting questions may help hiring managers navigate the requirements of a merit-based and inclusive hiring process in their individual circumstances.

Recruitment: job advertisements and job descriptions

- Does my job description clearly explain the job requirements?
- For the job requirements, could an equivalent combination of education and experience be an appropriate alternative to the stated job requirements? If so, does my job description clearly state that to encourage a broader group of qualified people to apply?
- Does my job description clearly explain the practical details of the job, such as pay, location, part-time/full-time, hybrid/telework options, etc.?
- Is my job description and advertisement written in plain and neutral language that can be understood by a broad range of people who would be qualified for the job? Is it free of cultural references, acronyms or government jargon?
- Does my posting include an organizational statement about diversity and inclusion?
- Does my job description and advertisement need to be updated to remove words or phrases that may not be inclusive to some prospective applicants (such as "young and vibrant team")?
- Can I use any non-traditional advertising sites to attract a broader applicant pool?

- If I restrict the competition to a branch/division/ministry, will I receive applications from a diverse pool of qualified applicants? If not, should I reconsider restricting the posting?
- Would experience of a particular branch/division/ministry be helpful or is it necessary for the position? Could it be a preference rather than a limitation on who can apply?
- Have I included a statement in my posting to let applicants know they can request accommodations if needed?
- Have I included a contact for questions or accommodation requests?

Decisions about when to post the job and for how long

- Should I lengthen the posting time so that a larger pool of applicants may apply, increasing the chances of attracting a more diverse pool of applicants? (For example, posting for only one week may mean that some applicants are less likely to see the post; it may also create the impression that the job is "earmarked" for someone, and discourage applications.)
- Should I adjust the timing of the posting to take into consideration religious or cultural celebrations, so that applicants from diverse backgrounds are more likely to see the posting and have time to prepare their application?
- Has the recruitment process been described in enough detail to allow applicants of diverse backgrounds to know what to expect?
- Have I created a diverse panel?

Short-listing

- Would anonymized screening be an approach that could be applied in this competition?
- If I remove applicants' names for anonymized screening, have I been careful to record all results accurately in my short-listing documentation?
- Have I designed my assessments in a way that will be accessible to as many people as possible (avoiding the need for candidates to request accommodations)?
- Have I evaluated and removed potential biases and barriers in my assessment methods?

Testing/written assignments

- Am I testing the required job qualifications as stated in the job profile?
- Have I clearly explained to candidates what they will be tested on?

- Have I given all candidates the same amount of time to complete the test (with the exception of any reasonable accommodations that I have granted under BC's *Human Rights Code*)?
- Have I given all candidates the same information required to understand the instructions?
- Do I have a marking guide with clear criteria to support evaluating candidates objectively and consistently?
- Am I designing the competition assessments (consciously or unconsciously) to support the success of particular individuals or particular types of applicants? If so, what do I need to change to assess candidates fairly and without bias?
- Have I considered accommodations in our process and provided language/process information in our communications to applicants (e.g. providing interview questions ahead of time or in-person, teams, phone call interview options)?

Interviewing

- Is a multi-person panel in place to conduct the interviews?
- Has the panel discussed or been trained in unconscious bias?
- Will the people on the panel contribute a diversity of perspectives when assessing the candidates?
- Does the panel have a marking guide with clear criteria to support evaluating candidates objectively and consistently?
- Have I considered accommodations in our process and providing language/process information in our communications to applicants (e.g. providing interview questions ahead of time or in-person, Teams, phone call interview options)?
- If I assess oral communication, have I considered using a template to help me reduce bias and ensure my assessment method is relevant to the job? Am I assessing things like eye contact that may have the potential to discriminate against candidates from different cultures or who are neurodiverse?

Past work performance assessment

- Are the questions I'm asking in my reference checks relevant to the job?
- Am I assessing the same things for each candidate?
- For each candidate, is the person giving them a reference in a position to speak to the areas I will be asking about?

After the competition:

- Did I notify all applicants at the end of the competition so that they have access to the staffing review process if they wish to pursue it (applies to all competitions under the Act)?
- Have I considered expanding the feedback to candidates to include “what you did really well” as well as constructive feedback?
- Should I include statements to encourage the candidates to apply in the future?

OBSERVING INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICES IN THE BC PUBLIC SERVICE



OBSERVING INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICES IN THE BC PUBLIC SERVICE

This special study has examined the topic of inclusive hiring by surveying existing literature on the topic; reminding readers of the foundational principles of an overall fair, merit-based hiring process; describing emerging practices that hiring managers may wish to carefully consider; and providing a practical tool for hiring managers to pursue more inclusive hiring processes. In addition to providing practical information and tools to support hiring managers, the Office of the Merit Commissioner (the Office) is also able to provide some limited insight into inclusive hiring in the BC Public Service. This final section turns to the question “What can be observed about inclusive hiring in the BC Public Service?”

Through conducting random audits of hiring, as outlined in the *Public Service Act* (the Act), the Office is able to analyze data from randomly audited files with a particular lens. As with previous special studies by the Office on topics such as [lessened qualifications](#), [eligibility lists](#), and [self-assessment questionnaires](#), through re-examining documents and data already collected, the Office is able to provide a snapshot of one aspect of hiring. It is the Office’s hope that offering this moment-in-time insight into an important aspect of hiring will contribute to ongoing growth in public hiring transparency and expertise. While the line of sight is limited, it is a start. Over time, the Office may see more documentation from hiring managers on this emerging topic.

The Office has reviewed several sources of data to provide a snapshot of inclusive hiring practices that can be observed in the BC Public Service competitions audited by the Office. The Office audits approximately 284 randomly selected hiring competitions annually. These files include permanent appointments and temporary appointments of seven months or longer, including positions posted as “expressions of interest.” The Office has observed, in some cases, where the kinds of inclusive hiring practices recommended by advocacy groups and others are beginning to appear in competition documentation. The Office reviewed the job postings and profiles from all audited files from fiscal years 2022/23 and 2023/24 to see what kinds of inclusive hiring practices could be observed at the initial “recruitment” stage of competitions. In addition, the Office reflected on examples they had observed of practices through different stages of the competition.

The Office is limited in which aspects of inclusive hiring can be observed through random audits, because hiring managers may not fully document all the steps they take to make their hiring process more inclusive. Where they do document such considerations, auditors can see them and make a note of hiring managers’ efforts. Therefore, the Office is limited to anecdotal observations in many cases. It is the hope of the Office that, over time, auditors may see more documentation of hiring managers’ efforts in this regard.

Mitigating the risk of bias

In a small number of audited appointments, the Office observed modified screening documents where applicant names were hidden, and numbers were instead assigned to represent each

applicant. These documents suggest that anonymized screening was intended; however, no notes were specifically included to suggest that this was the case in these audits.

Anonymized marking of written assignments has been observed in some BC Public Service appointment processes. Anecdotally, the Office noted an increase in the last few years in the number of appointment processes where anonymized marking was used.

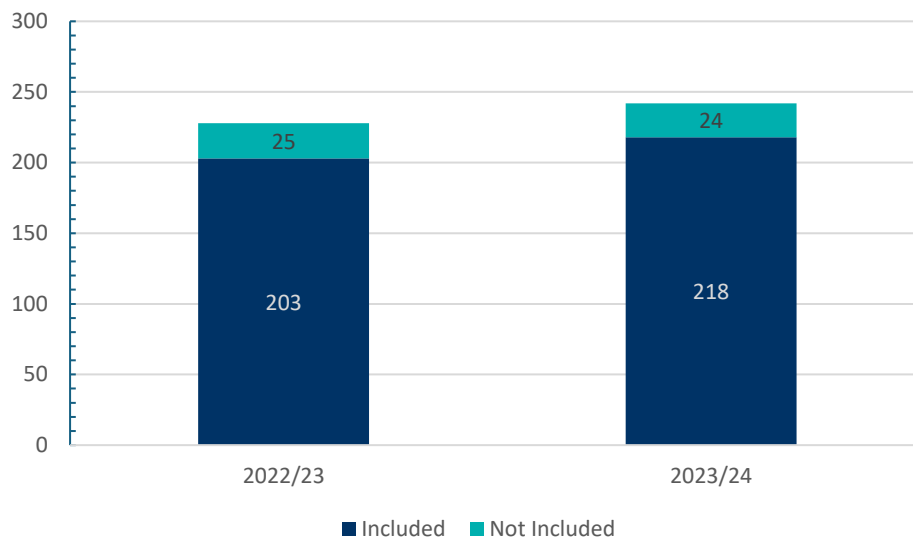
Findings from the merit performance audit reports that in 99% of audited competitions, the interview stage had more than one person on the hiring panel. However, the Office is not able to examine the panel's composition for diversity unless this information is specifically documented by the panel members or hiring organization. The documentation collected by the Office did not indicate any specific competitions where deliberate steps had been taken regarding panel diversity.

Fostering a welcoming environment for all job seekers

In all job postings and profiles examined for the past two years, no instances of obviously gendered or ageist language were observed in the job postings.

The Office observed that many audited job postings included a "diversity-welcoming statement." Diversity-welcoming statements in job postings are intended to communicate that employers value equality and diversity and are designed to encourage applications from marginalized groups.

- These kinds of statements indicate to prospective applicants that the organization not only values diversity but welcomes applications from qualified diverse applicants.
- Diversity-welcoming statements were included in 207 of 226 (92%) of job postings in 2022/23 and 218 of 242 (90%) of job postings in 2023/24. It was also noted that 16 of the 22 (73%) "expression of interest" postings in 2022/23 did not include a diversity-welcoming statement. Similarly, 20 of the 26 (77%) "expression of interest" posting from 2023/24 did not include diversity welcoming statements.



Most common welcoming statement in job postings

The BC Public Service is committed to creating a diverse workplace to represent the population we serve and to better meet the needs of our citizens. Consider joining our team and being part of an innovative, inclusive, and rewarding workplace.

The job postings for the past two years were examined to observe what diversity and inclusion information was included. In many postings, the Office observed information about a service designed to support Canadian Indigenous applicants in navigating the BC Public Service hiring process. This service, called the [Indigenous Applicant Advisory Service](#), is available to applicants that self-identify as Indigenous (First Nations, status or non-status, Métis, or Inuit) who are seeking work or already employed in government ministries. The service provides personalized guidance on the BC Public Service hiring process including job applications and interviews. The service aims to increase representation of Indigenous people in the BC Public Service to better reflect the diverse population and to promote career advancement for Indigenous people.

In the 226 postings reviewed in 2022/23, it was observed that:

- 208 (92%) included information about the Indigenous Applicant Advisory Service, and
- 18 (8%) did not.
 - Of those 18 postings, 15 were posted as an “expression of interest” (restricted to current internal employees) in organizations with access to the service.

In the 242 posting reviewed in 2023/24, it was observed that:

- 213 (88%) included information about the Indigenous Applicant Advisory Service, and
- 29 (12%) did not.
 - Of those 29 postings, 23 were posted as an “expression of interest” (restricted to current internal employees) in organizations with access to the service.

Creating a hiring process that is more transparent for applicants

One practice described in the [Inclusive Hiring Practices](#) is providing advance notice to candidates regarding timelines and what to expect from the hiring process. Merit Commissioner staff reviewing audit files noted several instances where such information was provided to candidates. Information included details about the interview (including estimated time for introductions, welcome questions, etc.) and information about how and when the candidates could expect to be notified about next steps in the hiring process.

A recent competition created a streamlined document for all applicants that included information in a PDF booklet with excellent detail for applicants. A document was created explaining all the required qualifications and equivalencies, and included information for applicants who completed their education outside Canada how to have their credentials verified. An accompanying document outlined each stage of the hiring process, and included information about training and mentorship, should they be the successful candidate. This document also included what the applicants might expect to take place at each stage, and information about available work locations, as well as roughly how many staff are at each location.

Providing information about accommodations before being asked by the candidate was observed in some competitions where hiring managers are providing accommodation information in interview invitation emails. One invitation stated:

The BC Public Service is an inclusive and accessible employer. Please advise me prior to participating in this oral interview if any accommodations are required. Every possible effort will be made to assist you to ensure equitable participation.

The practice of providing interview questions in advance has been recommended by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) as a practice that is supportive of candidates with a disability. This practice has been observed in many competitions audited by the Office. In one example, the hiring manager opted to provide most of the interview questions in advance of the interview, and an additional question at the time of the interview. In this case, candidates were informed to expect an additional question, ensuring candidates were fully informed prior to their interview.

Offering greater flexibility

Anecdotally, staff have noted an increase in competitions where a wider range of interviewing dates and times are made available. In one competition with many candidates, the candidates

logged in and selected their preferred date and time from a wide range of options. As many workplaces embraced flexible working options during the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have noted that many competitions now offer a choice between virtual or in-person options for interviews.

The Office also examined how often “equivalent qualifications” were listed in job postings. BC Public Service job descriptions outline the experience and education requirements for the job, as well as required knowledge, skills, and abilities. Sometimes, an equivalent combination of education and experience can be an appropriate alternative to the stated job requirements. This can open the posting to a wider pool of qualified applicants, without removing qualifications required for the position. A greater amount of work experience may be acceptable when combined with a lesser educational qualification. Clearly outlining those equivalent combinations of education and experience that may be considered in lieu of the exact job qualifications as stated in the role profile is recommended. This allows people to assess whether their unique background and experience may qualify them for a job even where they do not exactly meet the typical standard qualifications.

Some examples of “equivalency statements” include:

- An equivalent combination of education/training and experience may be considered.
- Grade 12 graduation or equivalent.
- Bachelor’s degree in business administration, public administration, or equivalent.
- Equivalent experience and education which may be considered include: 5 years of related work experience with a related post-secondary educational certificate, or 4 years of related work experience with a related post-secondary diploma, or 3 years of related work experience with a related bachelor’s degree.

Analysis of public service job posting “equivalency statement” use

In 2022/23, of 226 job postings that were examined:

- 172 postings (76%) allowed for “equivalent qualifications.”
- 66 of these 172 postings (38%) referenced secondary school graduation with inclusive options for alternative secondary school graduation/program equivalents.

In 2023/24 of the 242 job postings that were examined:

- 193 postings (80%) allowed for “equivalent qualifications.”
- 72 of these 193 postings (37%) referenced secondary school graduation with inclusive options for alternative secondary school graduation/program equivalents.

Supporting accessibility

The Office is not able to assess whether hiring managers assess postings and assignments for ease of use with accessibility tools. Similarly, hiring documentation does not state whether hiring managers assess their job posting for plain language prior to posting.

However, the Office identified several instances of accommodations being granted to candidates with disabilities at different stages of a competition. The exact number of accommodations is difficult to establish. This information is not always captured in the hiring documentation as it may have been the result of a private conversation between a candidate and a hiring manager.

APPENDIX A – PREFERENCES

Hiring managers in the BC Public Service sometimes choose to include in their job postings a statement indicating that “preference may be given to” members of one or more equity groups. For example, a job posting may state “Preference may be given to applicants who self-identify as Indigenous or Métis.”

The *Public Service Act* (the Act) states, under section 8 (“Appointments on merit”), subsection 4(a), that:

Subject to the regulations, the agency head may direct in respect of a vacancy or class of vacancies in the public service, that applicants be

(a) limited or given preference in a manner intended to achieve employment equity objectives

The “agency head” refers to the deputy minister of the BC Public Service Agency. This provision in the Act means that in certain circumstances, the PSA deputy minister may approve giving preference in hiring competitions to members of equity groups. The full details of when this is permitted, and how this has been applied in the BC Public Service, are beyond the scope of this study of inclusive hiring practices. Readers with detailed questions are encouraged to contact the BC Public Service Agency or their own human resource experts.

This study comments on only a small number of points related to the use of equity group preference statements.

How often were equity group preference statements observed and used in audited competitions?

Randomly audited hiring competitions from the past two years were examined to observe whether an equity group preference was stated in the job posting. Based on documentation submitted by hiring managers to the Office, it is sometimes difficult to confirm definitively if equity group preferences were applied. Preferences for applicants of a specific equity group or groups were included in:

- 28 postings (12%) in the 2022/23 assessed data
 - However, auditors could definitively confirm that equity group preferences were applied for two appointments.
- 38 postings (17%) in the 2023/24 assessed data
 - However, auditors could definitively confirm that preferences were applied for five appointments.

Emergence of new terminology

In the ~290 files randomly selected for audit, auditors began to see the phrase “lived experience” used in equity-group-related preference statements in postings.

- In 2022/23 a preference for “lived experience” was observed in one case.
- In 2023/24 a preference for “lived experience” was observed in two cases.

Job postings stated that preference may be given to applicants with:

- “Lived experience or experience working with populations with complex health and social challenges.”
- “Lived or living experience of, or experience working with populations with, complex health and social challenges.”
- “Direct or indirect experience of addiction, poverty, homelessness, or mental health challenges.”

While this phrase was observed only in one instance in the Office’s historical data, it has been observed more frequently in both preferences and limitations in current job postings. The Office will continue to observe and track the emerging use and application of this terminology in future audits.

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