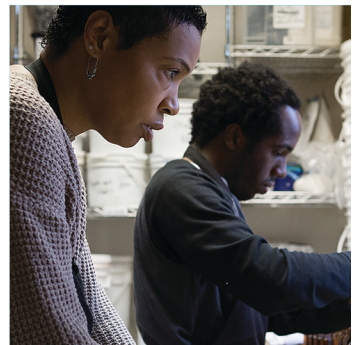
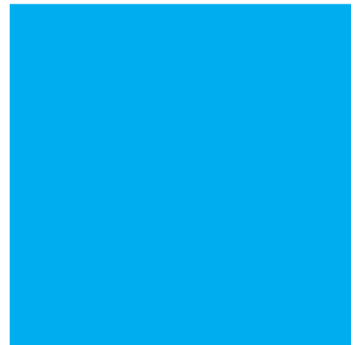
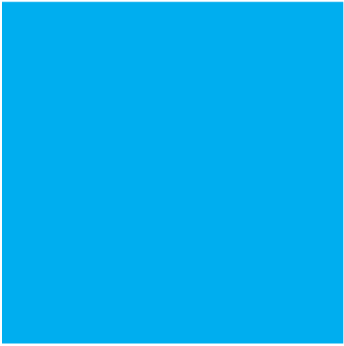


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INCLUSIVE HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES: TIPS FOR BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE



What is Inclusive Employment?

Inclusive employment is **real work for real pay** as part of the general workforce and alongside individuals without disabilities in inclusive community settings. Compensation in an inclusive employment environment reflects industry standards associated with the position and has the same protections and benefits available to the general workforce.

Workplace accommodations are **much more** than simply a legal requirement to provide the tools or supports that allow a person to meet the minimum requirements of the job. Ready, Willing and Able (RWA) challenges you to think about workplace accommodations as any and all supports that **allow businesses to tap into both the short- and long-term potential of an individual employee**. Using this definition, workplace accommodations can be understood as any supports or benefits that are put into place in order to allow businesses to tap into the full talent of their employees and maximize their performance.

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder? What is an intellectual disability?

RWA supports businesses across Canada to hire individuals with an intellectual disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). While it is helpful to understand the unique characteristics of intellectual disability and ASD, labels do not and cannot tell us everything about a person. People with disabilities are as diverse as people without disabilities, with unique skills and strengths.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder that affects a person's social communication and behaviour. In other words, ASD affects how a person interacts with others, how they experience the world and how they process information. ASD manifests itself early in a person's development, typically within the first three years of a person's life.

ASD is a spectrum disorder, which means that not all individuals with ASD share the same characteristics or are impacted by these characteristics to the same degree. In fact, the characteristics of ASD may change depending on context and situation and the level and nature of supports provided. The autism spectrum is not linear. Individuals with ASD may require minimal to no supports in some areas of their life but require substantial supports in other areas.

People with ASD bring unique perspectives and different ways of thinking to the workplace. These strengths can often include extraordinary concentration capabilities, exceptional attention to detail, excellent problem-solving skills and ability to 'think outside the box', exceptional memory, specialized skills or interests, heightened abilities in logical reasoning and pattern recognition, reliability and honesty, and ability to excel in tasks that involve a high degree of precision and repetition.

What is an intellectual disability?

An intellectual disability is a lifelong condition, which manifests early in a person's development, typically before the age of 18. It affects a person's intellectual and adaptive functioning. Intellectual disability may co-occur with other disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and, in some cases, is misinterpreted as a mental health condition.

People with an intellectual disability may learn in different ways or take longer to learn new skills, but many characteristics of intellectual disability are unique strengths. Importantly also, not all people with an intellectual disability are impacted to the same degree. Research has shown that businesses that hire individuals with an intellectual disability rate their employees as well as or better than average on productivity, reliability and attitude.

Are your sourcing strategies and tools inclusive? Tips for attracting candidates who have an intellectual disability or ASD

1. Build a bigger and more diverse/inclusive talent pipeline

There are many ways that you or the company that you work with may source candidates - you may use internal sourcing strategies where you look to fill new positions with internal candidates or you may use external or third-party sourcing strategies such as job fairs or employee referral programs to attract new, qualified candidates. These strategies all help to increase your talent pipeline but still may not be reaching untapped talent pools, such as candidates with an intellectual disability or ASD.

- Extend your talent acquisition team by partnering with initiatives and agencies that specialize in inclusive employment. Share job postings with initiatives like RWA or employment agencies that specialize in working with candidates with an intellectual disability or ASD.
- Target accessibility offices when recruiting at colleges and universities. Many students and soon-to-be graduates with an intellectual disability or ASD who are keen to begin work in their field may be connected to these offices or centres.

2. Create an inclusive job description: Is it clear, comprehensive and results-oriented?

The more comprehensive and accurate your job postings, the better the fit will likely be between the job you're looking to fill and the applications you receive. Here are some things to consider as you review the job posting:

- Be critical. What skills or tasks are actually essential to successfully performing the job? For example, does a software tester or data entry clerk actually require superior verbal communication skills?
- Ensure the job description is up to date. Jobs change and evolve over time – does the job description you’re posting reflect the current job requirements? Be specific and avoid vagueness and ambiguity. Are the requirements of the job clear and comprehensive? For example, stating “must be good at working in a team” does not tell the candidate much. How much team work is involved? What does it look like?

Use inclusive language to describe job duties and requirements.

Here are some things to consider when writing a job posting:

- Employees with disabilities may achieve the same outcomes as employees without disabilities but by using different means. Use results-based language instead of process-based language to create flexibility in how tasks and duties are carried out. Instead of writing “must have excellent verbal communication”, consider writing “must have excellent communication skills”.
- Individuals with an intellectual disability or ASD may interpret language very literally and may have difficulty with abstract ideas or concepts. Use clear, concrete language, be specific and give some examples. Instead of writing “must demonstrate strong computer skills”, consider explicitly stating the types of programs that the candidate must have experience in such as “must be proficient in Adobe Illustrator, Wordpress and AutoCAD”. Other common examples of abstract or ambiguous job requirements are “must be a team player”, “must be effective at working under pressure”, “excels in a fast-paced environment”, “must possess effective interpersonal skills” or “must be an outside the box thinker”.

Include additional information on the ‘hidden aspects’ of the job

Call to mind the ‘hidden aspects’ of the job, like workplace culture, company values and public transit accessibility, to ensure all necessary information is shared with candidates at the outset. These hidden aspects of the job can serve to either attract or deter potential candidates.

Consider engaging initiatives like RWA to tour your workplace and conduct an environmental scan of the physical, cultural and social space to help identify these hidden aspects through the lens of individuals with an intellectual disability or ASD. Such transparency will increase the likelihood that you’ll receive applicants who are best fit for the

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job. Here are some questions to consider as you review or write the job posting: How would you describe your workplace culture? What are your company values? What is the physical environment like? Is it loud and noisy? Is it an open space office with shared desk space? Is your location accessible by public transit?

3. State your company's commitment to diversity and inclusion in employment

A carefully crafted, unique statement sends the message to applicants that you're not simply including a statement in order to comply with legal requirements.

- Create a statement that describes why and how your unique company is committed to diversity and inclusion. Include a direct telephone number or email address where interested applicants can make inquiries about accessibility and accommodations. Consider the difference between these two statements.
- "Acme Inc. is an equal opportunity employer. Accommodation is available upon request for applicants with disabilities in the recruitment and selection process".
- "Acme Inc. is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace and values diverse abilities and ways of thinking among its employees. We believe that diversity and inclusion creates a stronger, more productive business. As such, we are committed to creating inclusive and barrier-free recruitment and selection processes. We recognize that all applicants are different with unique characteristics and needs. By stating your accommodation needs, you help us to create recruitment and selection processes that provide you with the opportunity to best showcase your knowledge, skills and abilities. If you require accommodations throughout these processes, please contact us and we will work with you to meet your needs."

4. Company Image & Culture

In addition to expanding your sourcing strategies and creating inclusive job descriptions, consider the image that your company projects and how your image may be perceived by potential candidates.

- Integrate a commitment to flexibility, heterogeneity and creativity within your organization to reflect diversity and celebrate difference. This will help to attract candidates with an intellectual disability or ASD. **For example,** What does your company's online image project? What photos are used on your website to showcase your organization? How is information conveyed? Are staff photos and bios published online? Do they reflect diversity and celebrate difference?



Inclusive Selection Strategies

You've built an inclusive talent pipeline; don't let your selection strategies screen out strong candidates!

1. Identify Accommodation Needs

As the business, you are expected to respect the candidate's right to privacy and confidentiality about the exact nature of their disability, while fulfilling your legal duty to accommodate.

- Advise all candidates that you can offer accommodations during the selection process. It is the responsibility of each candidate to request any accommodations they may need.

Ready, Willing and Able and our employment agency partners offer a range of supports and resources that enable participating businesses to address the accommodation needs of their employees with an intellectual disability or ASD, at no cost to the business. Supports include but are not limited to job coaching, disability awareness training, adaptive technology and equipment, and support with the selection and onboarding process.

2. The Job Application

Creating inclusive job application formats can attract and accommodate individuals with an intellectual disability or ASD. The following section considers how businesses can ensure an inclusive job application for each stage in the hiring process.

Standardized online applications

Online applications can be a great fit for some candidates with an intellectual disability or ASD, providing them with a clear, structured application format which explicitly captures the expectations of the job. However, web-based application forms may also discourage or screen out applications from some candidates with an intellectual disability or ASD. Highly structured online applications can mean that response choices to key questions are narrow and restrictive and do not provide the opportunity to capture different experiences or skillsets. Remember that standardized forms are, by design, not created to capture diversity! If you do use a standardized application form, keep these recommendations in mind:

- Make sure questions are short, simple, clear and related to the job requirements.
- Clearly indicate which fields are mandatory and which fields are optional.

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- Create room for candidates to share additional information related to the questions asked. This may be in the form of an open-ended text box.

Portfolios or work samples

If you accept portfolios or work samples, here are some key considerations to keep in mind:

- Portfolios and work samples may alleviate some of the anxiety or difficulty associated with demonstrating their skills and experiences either in verbal or written form for candidates with an intellectual disability or ASD. This shifts the assessment of the candidate from *experience* to *expertise* and *competency*.
- Keep in mind that portfolios or work samples showcase past work which is often contingent on the resources available to the individual such as materials, equipment, software or access to the newest technologies, and even support from a post-secondary institution.

Cover Letter & Resume

If you accept cover letter and resume applications, here are some key considerations to keep in mind:

- If strong written communication skills are not a necessary requirement for the job, don't evaluate a candidate's cover letter and resume as a reflection of their ability to perform the job.
- For a candidate with little paid job experience, the resume format does not and cannot accurately capture or depict their potential fit for the job. A lean resume or a resume with gaps should not be interpreted as indication that the candidate is not a competent employee.
- Consider volunteer and internship experiences as well as paid employment experiences.

3. Pre-Screening

Many companies use pre-screening as an initial step in their selection process. Pre-screening is often completed over the phone and can be useful in determining if the candidate meets some of the basic conditions needed to be considered for the job. Examples may include ensuring the individual has a valid driver's license and access to a vehicle or ensuring that the candidate can work evenings and weekends. Receiving an unscheduled call from an employer may create anxiety and furthermore, some candidates with ASD or an intellectual disability may have

difficulty processing and answering pre-screening questions quickly over the phone. If pre-screening is a component or step in your organization's selection process, here are some key considerations to keep in mind:

- Provide the candidate with an alternative to telephone pre-screening. Some individuals with an intellectual disability or ASD are better able to process questions and articulate responses using different media (e.g. email allows candidates more time to process, Skype allows candidates the opportunity to see the person they are talking to).
- Consider scheduling the pre-screening meeting in advance, whether the meeting will be over the phone or on a web-based platform like Skype, to allow the candidate to prepare.
- Consider offering the candidate the opportunity to be supported by their job coach or support person in completing the pre-screening.

4. Competency Testing

Standardized tests, by design, are not created to assess diverse ways of thinking. Standardized tests have limits and test results alone should not dictate a person's potential fit for a job. If competency testing is a component or step in your organization's selection process, here are some key considerations to keep in mind:

- Make sure you're not testing for skills or competencies that aren't related to the job.
- Consider providing the candidate with sample test questions in advance of the actual test.
- Provide the candidate with extra time to complete the test.
- Consider providing the candidate with the opportunity to take the test in an alternative environment such as at home or at the employment support agency and with the support of their job coach or support person

5. The Interview

Interviews can be daunting for everyone, no matter what side of the table you are sitting on. For candidates with an intellectual disability or ASD, interviews may be particularly stressful. Many candidates may have less experience in being interviewed or have experienced discrimination in past interviews, making it an anxiety-provoking experience. Furthermore, individuals with an intellectual disability or ASD may have difficulty with social communication – the



very skills we typically use to ‘sell’ ourselves in an interview. This may make the interview process difficult for the candidate.

Here are some tips to make the experience easier for both the interviewer and the candidate:

Avoid Distractions.

- Create a space to hold the interview that is free of distractions and potential interruptions. Candidates with ASD may be hyper-sensitive to stimuli in their environment which can lead to difficulties concentrating, tolerating distractions and can build anxiety.

Tweak the Traditional Interview Format

- Offer information to help the candidate prepare for the interview in advance. Providing an interview itinerary ahead of time can provide the candidate with a roadmap for the discussion.
- Consider alternatives to the standard, boardroom job interview. You could hold a ‘walking’ interview and learn about the candidate as you walk through the workplace. This will give you the opportunity to explain the position and learn about the candidate’s skills and will provide the candidate with the opportunity to see the workplace environment and culture.
- Consider offering an interview that allows the candidate to demonstrate their skills and strengths by performing some of the core tasks related to the job. An experiential interview places emphasis on their ability to work as opposed to their ability to converse.
- Offer a one-on-one interview instead of a group interview. Group interviews with multiple company representatives or multiple candidates may cause individuals with an intellectual disability or ASD to become overwhelmed.
- Be open to providing the candidate with the opportunity to have their job coach or support person accompany them to the interview and support them throughout the process. A job coach may be able to offer both the interviewer and candidate support in re-phrasing questions, prompting for additional information and highlighting the candidate’s relevant skills and experiences.

Interviewing Techniques: Getting to Know the Candidate

Candidates who have an intellectual disability or ASD may struggle with “selling themselves”, articulating past experience effectively, or conveying enthusiasm about a role. Making small talk, reading body language, and understanding the amount of detail that an interviewer is looking for can be difficult. You can improve the quality of the interview by keeping your language straightforward and job-related. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Ensure your interview questions are relevant to the job. Ask supervisors or department leads to review the questions prior to the interview to ensure that the questions accurately reflect the core requirements of the job.
- Consider the applicant and their experience before the interview. Make notes on their work history and experience in advance of the conversation to be able to guide the conversation, in case they don't bring up these experiences themselves.
- Keep small talk to a minimum. Focus the discussion on specific job-related questions.

Ensure questions are clear, short and straightforward. Consider the following:

- Ask one question at a time and allow the candidate extra time to process the question and respond.
- Avoid double-barreled questions. Instead of asking, “what would you say is your greatest strength and weakness?” ask “what would you say is your greatest strength?” and “what would you say is your greatest weakness?”
- Avoid clichés, pop culture references, or non-literal expressions, unless they are necessary to the job. Speak literally and allow for pauses.
- Use closed-ended questions and as best you can, avoid hypothetical or abstract questions. Ask straightforward questions, grounded in specific experiences (see example below). Avoid behavioural questions when possible, which are designed to encourage candidates to provide examples of how they've handled or managed specific situations in the past. For candidates with an intellectual disability or ASD, behavioural questions can be too abstract. Instead of asking the question “Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to achieve it” consider re-phrasing and grounding the question in a specific example pulled either from the candidate's work history or from an example they have shared during the interview. For example, “you mentioned that in your previous position as stock clerk at the local grocer that you spent the summer

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completing a full inventory of stock. What was challenging about completing that task? Then you may go on to ask, “what helped you complete that task on time?”.

Be flexible in the interview. Be prepared to re-phrase your questions to ensure understanding and encourage or prompt the candidate should additional details be needed.

Allow individuals to avoid eye contact. Some individuals with ASD may have difficulty engaging in non-verbal communication, such as making eye contact. Avoiding eye contact may, in fact, be helping them to concentrate and process information during the interview.

Ignore repetitive behaviour. Some candidates with ASD may engage in repetitive behaviour during the interview – they may fidget or doodle on their paperwork. Sometimes these behaviours may look or sound a little unusual, however they serve a function and may help an individual stay calm or may help them to concentrate during the interview.

Don't ask someone to disclose their disability. If the candidate shares that they have an intellectual disability or ASD in the interview this may provide you with a natural opportunity to ask the candidate if they have any particular accommodation needs to be successful in the position. Otherwise, you may simply thank them for sharing and continue on with the interview, keeping in mind some of the tips shared above.

What are some examples of common workplace accommodations for employees with an intellectual disability or ASD?

Every employee is different, with unique abilities and needs. As such, all employees, with or without disabilities, require accommodations of some sort. RWA describes workplace accommodations as *supports or adjustments that are put in place that allow both the business and the employee to maximize their success on the job*. Some employees with an intellectual disability or ASD won't require any accommodations at all, but when necessary, RWA will work with you to ensure necessary supports and accommodations are in place.

Here are some examples of common workplace accommodations for employees with an intellectual disability or ASD:

Disability Awareness Training

One of the most effective accommodations needed for successful hiring and working with employees with an intellectual disability or ASD, starts with you. Learning about intellectual disability, ASD and inclusive talent management practices is sometimes the only accommodation needed.

Job coaching

Depending on the workplace context and the unique needs and strengths of the employee, a job coach may be required. A job coach is someone who provides flexible supports to an individual who has been hired for a specific job. This support is primarily provided directly to the employee however the job coach may also liaise with the business and even the larger team to ensure that necessary accommodations are made.

Job coaching supports are provided by the employment agency supporting the new employee. Across Canada, employment agencies working with individuals with an intellectual disability or ASD are funded to provide a variety of on-the-job supports, including job coaching. A business that has hired an employee who requires a job coach is not expected to hire or pay for the services of the job coach. The job coach is not an employee of the business but rather a paid employee of the employment agency.

Sensory accommodations

Some individuals with ASD may have difficulties with sensory processing and can be over-sensitive to touch, sights, sounds, and smells in the workplace. Common sensory accommodations include noise cancelling headphones, replacing or dimming fluorescent overhead lighting, or wearing tinted lenses.

Augmentative and Alternative Methods of Communication

Some individuals with an intellectual disability or ASD may require the use of alternative or additional methods of conveying information about the job. Visual tools, for example, may be used to support some employees in learning the responsibilities of the job, staying on task, managing time and learning the behavioural expectations of the job. Visual tools can augment traditional verbal communication and might involve anything from written or visual daily schedules, colour coding task priorities or even having a print copy of the organization's policies and procedures manual on hand.

Natural Supports or Mentorship

For many employees with an intellectual disability or ASD, having a mentor or key contact within the workplace that they can turn to for help or guidance is a very effective support. For example, this mentor can provide the individual with advice regarding specific job tasks, give concrete and direct feedback on social missteps or help them navigate workplace conflict.

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Register for RWA Works, a free online resource hub with courses on a variety of topics on inclusive employment.