

Recruiting, Interviewing and Supervising:

An Employer's Basic Guide to Hiring Persons with Disabilities



Introduction

For many employers, integrating persons with disabilities in their workforce can cause challenges. For some employers, the challenges may be the unfamiliarity of the techniques that can be applied to integrate persons with disabilities in their organization. For others, the challenges may be related to the significant changes required in the methods used by human resources. This guide hopes to shed light on such issues, while informing employers of some useful techniques to successfully integrate persons with disabilities in their businesses. Furthermore, this document introduces three key issues surrounding questions that employers may have: recruiting, interviewing and supervising persons with disabilities.

1. A mentality change: Practices promoting the integration of Persons with disabilities

Before undertaking the process of integrating persons with disabilities in the workplace, it is essential to recognize that the promotion of diversity and inclusion requires changes in the HR practices. To foster an organization open to hiring a person with a disability, it often has to review its hiring process and the mentality it advocates. Initially, these changes must be made by both the management and the Human Resources department, and then this will follow to the other employees.

For employers, this means they should take the time to evaluate the current practices to determine whether they are inclusive or not. Subsequently, it is possible to implement an effective strategy focused on the inclusion of persons with disabilities. To do this, the first step is to *recognize* the barriers to inclusion that persons with disabilities face, and only then is it possible to overcome them.

1.1. Barriers to inclusion

There are many barriers to inclusion for persons with disabilities in the workplace. In most cases, these barriers are unintentional and unknown by employers. However, once aware of these barriers, it is easier for an organization to eliminate them, and consequently, to benefit from an underutilized and skilled workforce: persons with disabilities.



The perceptions and prejudices, the lack of knowledge about the importance of diversity, the absence of recruitment strategies, the resistance to change and non-inclusive hiring practices are all barriers to inclusion. The obstacles are numerous and diverse. It is necessary to recognize them in order to eliminate them, and thereby achieve diversity and inclusion¹.

At first, it may seem difficult to eliminate *all* barriers interfering with the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce. Although it may not be possible to make the changes all at once, the important thing is to continue to strive towards inclusion and remain open to change. Being aware of these obstacles and implementing changes indicates an organization's evolution towards inclusive practices.

1.2. The importance of a strong leadership in an organization

To effectively execute transformations within an organization, it is essential to have good leaders. Leadership sets the nature, the philosophy and the direction of an organization. When a business wishes to be diverse and inclusive, it is undeniable that the first steps should be made by the management, and then this will follow to the other employees.

Leaders, as role models for their employees, must be able to understand and share the importance of a diverse workforce. By demonstrating their openness to diversity and by conveying inclusive values they prove a mentality change is adopted². Once the process of changing the mentality of the organization is initiated, the next steps are to develop inclusive practices throughout the organization.

1.3. How to develop inclusive employment practices

When a business establishes inclusive practices, it recognizes that each candidate has an equal opportunity to get the job. Consequently, the employer has a better chance of finding the best person for the position when they draw from a larger talent pool.

The first step in developing inclusive practices is simply by doing an evaluation of the organization by reviewing its existing policies and procedures to identify and remove employment barriers³. It is easier for an organization that knows where it stands at a precise moment to thereafter make changes with respect to diversity and inclusion, and then to establish appropriate strategies

Next, the business should establish a vision, set goals, and most importantly, make sure all members have similar and common objectives. From there, the business can begin to create a positive work environment focused on openness and inclusion. At all levels of the

¹ Le Conseil Canadien de la Réadaptation et du Travail (CCRT). (2008). *Une société inclusive : Outil de planification de la diversité*, pp.12-13.

² Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. *Taking Action: An HR Guide Hiring and Retaining Employees with Disabilities*, [Online], <http://on.cme-mec.ca/download.php?file=h6z1z1ea.pdf> (Page consulted May 27th, 2014)

³ CCRW, *op.cit.*, pp.12-13.



organisation, it should be made clear that the inclusion of persons with disabilities is a key element in the future of the organisation. But for accommodation and inclusion to be part of the work culture, it must be incorporated into the policies and procedures of the business/organisation.

It is also important not to forget the importance of training the employees on the matter. It is much easier to integrate persons with disabilities into an organization where all staff members are trained and educated in diversity and inclusion. There are many ways to become familiar with the inclusion of individuals with a disability, including attending conferences, reading on the subject and being in direct contact with them. As well, there are employment assistance service providers and disability-related organizations that provide disability specific awareness training for businesses. Other training that can be accessed within the province emphasizes the business benefits of a more inclusive working environment. For further information, please contact NB Employer Support Services.

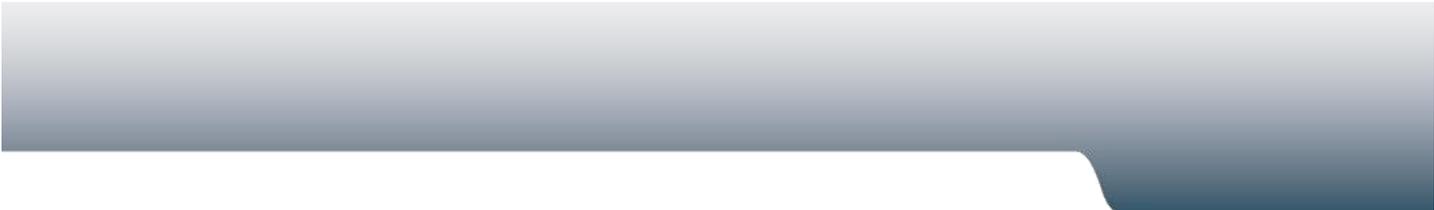
Again, it is essential to remember that these modifications may be gradual and it may not be necessary or feasible to change everything immediately. The inclusion of persons with disabilities can be an on-going process requiring commitment, patience, openness, cooperation and as well as work. This challenge is not insurmountable and the inclusion of persons with disabilities can help to create a culture and the values that can be beneficial for the organization as a whole.

2. Recruiting persons with disabilities

Once the mentality change is engaged and the integration has begun, the recruitment phase can start. Essentially, the recruitment of persons with disabilities is not different from the "normal" process already practiced: the creation of the job, its advertisement and the selection of potential employees. However, organizations often have recruitment practices that cause challenges for persons with disabilities and consequently, harm their chances of being selected as candidates. This section therefore hopes to shed light on the matter and help employers to make their hiring process more inclusive in the future.

2.1. Job analysis

Before beginning the recruitment process, it is advisable to analyze the position. Being familiar with a position allows the employer to make a portrait of the ideal individual wanted for this role, and to make sure the job posting is as concise as possible. What knowledge, skills and aptitudes would a candidate need to succeed in the job? What personal characteristics would help an employee excel into the



corporate culture ⁴? The employer can then use that information to write an inclusive job description and job advertisement. By doing so the employer creates a fair and inclusive ad for persons with disabilities who may be interested in applying.

A good job description should contain some essential information. Examples include ⁵:

- The exact job title.
- The location and work environment.
- The essential requirements.
- The main tasks.
- The knowledge and skills.
- The hours of work.
- The physical effort.
- The equipment and tools.

As mentioned above, employers are encouraged to be clear to avoid posting a vague and inaccurate description. For instance, instead of displaying a job under the title "Construction worker", the company should indicate whether it is looking for a truck driver, a carpenter, a mason, etc. Instead of indicating that the person will work with a computer, it would be appropriate to specify the software to be used. It is also recommended to make sure the job description is updated as often as possible, in case the tasks change with time.

Job descriptions often include credentials or specific requirements that are not really required to perform the job. Many employers make university degrees or other academic credentials a standard job requirement, without taking into account that skills or knowledge may be learned on the job or gained in other ways. These requirements can cause an important employment barrier for persons with disabilities who have the potential to learn, but may not have had occasions for specialized training or skill development. To have a good description of a position, it should *only* ask what is *absolutely* required⁶. Once the description of the position is clearly established, the business can create the job offer. Moreover, to avoid eliminating qualified people, the employer should focus on essential duties and requirements and less on credentials. The workforce you hire must be skilled to meet the essential requirements of the job.

⁴ Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. *op.cit*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The Conference Board of Canada. (April, 2013). *Leveling the Playing Field- Attracting, Engaging, and Advancing Persons with disabilities*, [Online], <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1292&context=edicollect> (Page consulted May 29th, 2014)



2.2. Creating an inclusive job offer

A job posting is often the first contact a potential employee has with the business. It makes a statement about the company and should send a positive and welcoming message. A well-designed job posting can significantly increase the talent pool by attracting talented and experienced candidates with a sincere interest in the position.

As mentioned in the previous section, one must include the job description in the job posting. To make sure the ad does not discourage qualified candidates, it should keep the focus on the essential job requirements identified in the job description. If an organization wishes to be recognized as one supporting diversity and inclusion, the ad should mention the interest in receiving applications from persons with disabilities and other minority groups. It is also suggested to include a policy supporting human rights, equity and accessibility. The ad can also mention that the company provides accommodations if necessary. A business can add images to the job postings. However, these pictures should reflect the organization's diversity, while being non-discriminatory⁷.

Below, some guidelines for an inclusive job advertisement are listed:

- Use a clear, easy-to-understand and inclusive language.
- List the essential requirements of the job. Try not to ask for credentials or requirements that are not necessary to perform the job.
- Make sure the offer is easy to read, to see and to understand for all types of disabilities.
- Stay positive, but realistic. Do not try to intimidate applicants ... we want to hire them, not to scare them!
- Make the ad available in multiple formats (e.g. high contrast text, radio, newspaper, etc.)
- Keep it simple!

2.3. Advertising an inclusive job ad

Once the job offer is created, it is time to advertise it. Of course, we all know the many ways to look for jobs, including Internet recruitment, professional networks, personal connections, employment agencies or recruiters, ads in media and job fairs. When someone is trying to find work, he or she usually turns to such strategies, and this is not different for persons with disabilities⁸. They find employment using the same job search techniques and resources as anyone else.

⁷ Siu, Bobby. (2011). *HR Manager's Guide to Diversity and Inclusive Practices*, Toronto, Carswell, p.44.

⁸ Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. *op.cit*



In order not to affect individuals with a disability in their career path, it is important for the employer to ensure the job is displayed in as many formats as possible. This will give all applicants an equal opportunity to apply, and consequently, to be selected. It would be unfair for a blind person not to be able to apply for a position because it is only available in an electronic format. This would also be true for an individual with mobility issue who cannot go to a job fair because of accessibility concerns. In brief, the important thing is for the job offer to be accessible in as many formats as possible, in order to give persons with disabilities the opportunity to apply for the desired position⁹.

2.4. The selection process

For persons with disabilities, the selection process is often a major challenge, especially when inclusive practices are not implemented. Sometimes, traditional recruitment strategies create employment barriers this group has difficulty overcoming. The candidates may be excluded from referral networks because they lack the proper connections or poorly written job ads may discourage them from applying for particular positions. Yet with inclusive practices, these candidates could definitely be able to demonstrate their potential.

In the selection process, the first challenge an individual with a disability faces is the application form. The format, the wording and the type of questions asked can create significant employment barriers in the path of qualified candidates. To make the process inclusive, a business should provide all forms in a variety of accessible formats (e.g. large prints, electronic text and audio file). An employers must also remember that it is prohibited to request a photo, a driver's license or to ask questions directly or indirectly related to the disability¹⁰.

After receiving all applications, the employer must review the forms and resumes, and choose the best candidate for the job, regardless of whether one has a disability or not. All candidates must be treated equally and meet the same requirements. However, the employer should take into account the fact that persons with disabilities often have different work and life experiences. Therefore, the employer has to be open when reviewing the applications, not just for a person with a disability, but for all candidates. An employer should overlook the disability and focus on what the individual has to offer.

During the selection process, many organizations require pre-employment assessments. Those are used to screen job applicants and can include testing of abilities, knowledge, work skills, personality, intelligence, language proficiency, and even integrity. Companies use

⁹Deloitte. (July 2010). *The road to inclusion: Integrating persons with disabilities into the workplace*, [Online], http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-Canada/Local%20Assets/Documents/About%20us/Diversity/ca_en_dialogue_on_diversity_v2_080710.pdf (Page consulted May 29th, 2014)

¹⁰ Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. *op.cit*



testing to find the candidates most likely to succeed in the open positions and to screen out those who are unqualified. Administered correctly, pre-employment testing can help companies save time and money, decrease employee turnover, increase productivity, and improve morale. However, if made inaccurately, they can be problematic for persons with disabilities. The employer must first inform the candidates of any required testing, so there are no surprises. Meanwhile, the applicant must tell the employer if accommodations are needed to fairly take the test. If this is the case, the employer should take the necessary steps to make the test accessible for the individual¹¹. Accommodations for testing may include strategies such as offering the testing in several formats, extending the time to complete the assessment, conducting the test in an accessible and/or quiet location, providing a person to read test questions orally, or by having a sign-language interpreter.

Again, the employer does not have to change the requirements for testing if the individual has a disability; however, the employer should provide accommodations if they are required. Also, an employer should not give a test to a person with a disability if the other applicants do not have to take a test¹².

3. Conducting job interviews

Another key step is obviously the interview. At first glance, it may seem difficult to interview someone with a disability. However, this process is not as complex as it looks when you are well organized and know the basics of a good interview.

3.1. Preparing for the interview

Before performing an interview, the employer may or may not be aware that the interviewee has a disability. Nevertheless, it is possible to have an effective interview if you are well prepared. When setting up the appointment for the interview, the employer should ask all candidates if they will require any accommodations during the interview, and then provide the ones requested (e.g. a private and quiet room, specific material and/or the presence of an interpreter). Moreover, the employer should specify in advance how much time will be allocated for the interview because, for instance, a person with a disability may need to plan his or her transportation accordingly and book in advance. Also, the organization should make sure the place where the interview is taking place is accessible for persons with disabilities (e.g. availability of parking spaces, wheelchair access for elevators and washrooms, etc.)¹³. The individuals involved in the interview process should be informed on the matter, in order to make the experience as stress-free as possible for everyone¹⁴.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Kootenay Career Development Society. *Why hire persons with disabilities? Support for employers*, [Online], http://www.kcads.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Disabilities_Support_For_Employers1.pdf (Page consulted May 29th, 2014)

¹⁴ Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. *op.cit*

3.2. How to interview someone with a disability

First, employers should know that interviewing a person with a disability is not totally different. The basic rules, questions and objectives are the same for all. Below, you will find helpful tips to follow the etiquette of a good interview with persons with disabilities¹⁵:

- Be patient and respectful.
- Avoid sudden and non-required physical contact that might disturb the candidate.
- Respect the privacy of the individual.
- Ask before helping.
- Stay yourself and conduct the interview normally.

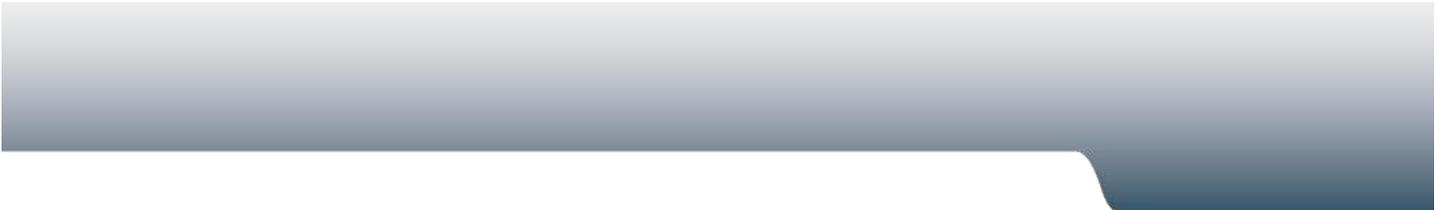
It is essential to treat the individual the same way as you would others. Offer to shake hands, even if the individual has limited hand use or an artificial limb. Shaking with the left hand is also acceptable. More often than not, the individual will make the effort to respond to the gesture. The interview should be conducted the same way as one does with other applicants since the primary objective is to find the candidate that best meets the requirements of the position to be filled.

The same interview questions should be addressed to each candidate. It is easier to compare applicants when you ask them all the same questions. It is not acceptable to ask questions directly related to the person's disability. However, it is perfectly suitable to ask questions about the tasks to be done and ask how the individual would do it, *but only if* the same questions are asked to *all* other candidates. Furthermore, having more than one person interview the candidates is a good HR practice. This allows the selection process to be more objective and reliable.

Here are some helpful tips to follow the etiquette for a good interview with people having specific disabilities:

- When someone has a hearing impairment, ask what form of communication the person prefers (e.g. sign language, reading lips, writing or a combination).
- When interviewing an individual that is in a wheelchair, speak to him or her at eye level.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

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- If you do not understand what an individual with communication disabilities is saying, ask him or her to repeat or offer another form of communication (e.g. writing or typing).
 - When a person is blind and accompanied by a service dog, avoid distracting or touching the dog because it is working
 - When an individual has an interpreter, speak to the person who is deaf, rather than the interpreter.

Finally, it is normal that interviewing a person with a disability can be intimidating at first. If the employer does not know how to act, it is possible and perfectly acceptable to ask the candidate what he or she prefers. Every person is different, and this also goes for persons with disabilities. The best way to give a good interview, regardless of the person, is to be well prepared, to ask the right questions, and to treat all candidates respectfully and fairly.

4. Orientating and supervising

The last step in the process of integrating persons with disabilities in the workplace is the hiring, which includes the orientation and supervision of new employees. Again, an organization may have concerns about what to do when hiring a person with a disability. However, when one takes the time to be aware of what it entails, it becomes obvious that it is not quite as complex as it seems.

4.1. Welcoming the new employee

Once the employee is hired, the first thing to do is to welcome him or her into the organization. Again, the process used for the orientation of a person with a disability is not so different from that of any other employee. Initially, the employer should meet the newcomer and provide basic information, indicate to the employee what is expected of him or her and to make sure the duties and responsibilities are understood¹⁶.

Other relevant information may include working hours, additional information on the organization, rules and procedures on the issues of absenteeism, emergencies, and security, etc. It is also important that the employer should offer the employee lists, material, or manuals

¹⁶ JTPR Workplace Connection. (March 2011). *Supervising Persons with disabilities - Hint, It Really Isn't Very Different than Anyone Else*, [Online], <http://www.scribd.com/doc/50379361/Supervising-People-with-Disabilities-Hint-It-Really-Isn-t-Very-Different-than-Anyone-Else> (Page consulted May 28th, 2014)



on these subjects, so they can be readily available to them at any time¹⁷. And obviously, this information should be made accessible in multiple formats, as needed by the individual (e.g. Braille, audio, video, etc.).

Thereafter, it is also important to conduct a tour of the business with the individual. During the tour, point out the washrooms, the dining room and the place where he or she can store personal belongings¹⁸ while confirming that these places are all accessible for the individual.

Another very important aspect in the welcoming of a new employees is of course to introduce him or her to the rest of the team. It is at this time that one realizes the importance of having a philosophy oriented towards inclusion. In actuality, integrating persons with disabilities in the workplace is much easier if the rest of the employees are educated and sensitized on the subject¹⁹. If the other employees are not “ready” for the person, the process can be more complicated than expected; therefore it is important to make sure employees are aware and educated, thereby creating a positive and welcoming environment.

4.2. The orientation

The orientation of a new employee is essential for a successful integration. This phase gives the new employee a period of adjustment and allows him/her to understand what is expected. All organizations have their own way of orienting new employees, and often, no major changes are needed for a person with a disability. It is not necessary to give the individual a preferential treatment²⁰.

Many companies have an internal orientation process pairing a new employee with a mentor to give guidance and/or to teach the duties and responsibilities. This approach is totally acceptable with a person with a disability, especially since he or she can establish a good relationship with the new colleague. Sometimes, minor modifications or accommodations need to be made to the usual process in order to make the orientation as effective as possible and this may include, for instance, providing the employee with equipment and tools adapted to his/her disability, or simply by giving more time for his/her orientation. Some organizations use an external counsellor (job coach), which can also be applied when hiring a person with a disability²¹.

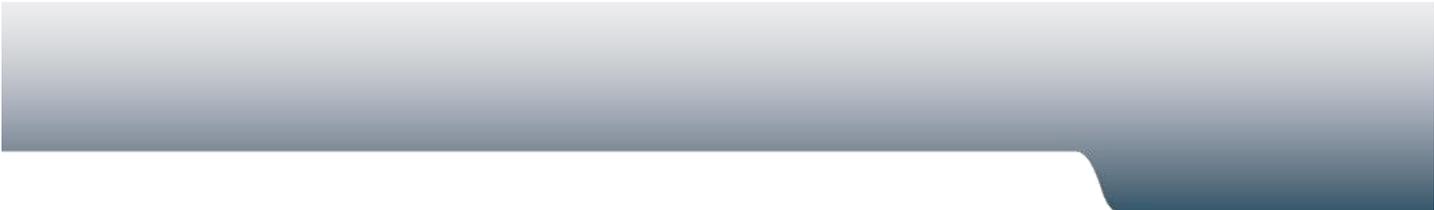
¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Canadian Human Rights Commission. (1998). *Barrier-Free Employers- Practical Guide for Employment Accommodation for Persons with disabilities*, [Online], http://dawn.thot.net/employment_accommodation.html#guidelines (Page consulted May 29th, 2014)

²¹ Kootenay Career Development Society. *op.cit.*



As can be seen here, the orientation process is not really different when applied to a person with a disability. The important thing is mainly to ensure he or she has the resources and accommodations necessary to do the job, and that the person who gives the orientation is well-informed about the realities and needs of the employee, while being able to effectively provide the necessary guidance.

4.3. How to supervise persons with disabilities

The Harris study suggests that 82% of business managers say employees with disabilities are not harder to supervise than employees without disabilities²². They must meet the same standards and requirements as others in terms of performance, productivity, absenteeism, conflicts or safety. Persons with disabilities are not exempt from the rules because of their situation²³. Despite this, we must understand that employees cannot all be supervised the same way. First, to be able to properly supervise an employee, you need good supervisors!

Here is a list of advices for a greater chance of success when supervising persons with disabilities²⁴ :

- Make sure the individuals understand their duties and responsibilities and clarify, if necessary.
- Keep the supervision process simple and accurate (e.g. provide information and clear guidelines in understandable language).
- Provide feedback on their work, so they know what is expected. Also, allow them to improve and develop.
- Be realistic. Do not underestimate or overestimate the employees' abilities.
- Be patient and encouraging.
- Get involved with your employees: It is important to get to know them and to understand that each one is unique with their strengths and limitations. An involved employer helps create good relationships with colleagues, and establishes a working atmosphere based on respect, cooperation and mutual assistance.
- Be flexible and opened to suggestions from your employees: Persons with disabilities, better than anyone, know their strengths and limitations, and how to do their job the best way.

22 NB Employer Support Services (NBESS). *Mythbuster: Myths about hiring persons with disabilities*, [Online], <http://www.employersupport.nb.ca/mythbusters.asp> (Page consulted May 27th, 2014)

23 Michigan Rehabilitation Services. (August 1998). *How to Hire and Supervise a Person with a Disability*, [Online], http://www.michigan.gov/documents/HowToHire_40951_7.pdf (Page consulted June 2nd, 2014)

24 Kramer John, Ashley Wolfe, & Jean Winsor, Institute for Community Inclusion (July 2013). *Support through Mentorship: Accessible Supervision of Employees with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, The Institute Brief, Issue no. 29, University of Massachusetts Boston, [Online], http://www.communityinclusion.org/pdf/IB29_F.pdf (Page consulted June 2nd, 2014)



Overall, the supervision of each employee is much simpler when a clear vision, a positive environment and effective communication are in place. One should not worry when it comes to supervising a person with a disability since it does not require significant changes in the methods already in place. Each employee, with a disability or not, is different, and consequently, supervisors should adjust their approach to each individual.

Conclusion

The recruiting, interviewing and supervising methods are not totally different when applied to persons with disabilities. Although, it may sometimes necessary to make alterations or to provide accommodations to make an organization inclusive, but the basic rules remain the same.

Furthermore, there is no universal method applicable to each employee. One just needs to be aware and to adapt to the situation at hand. More often than not, the best way to promote the inclusion of person with disability is simply to be open, flexible, organized, and, implement inclusive practices at every level within the organization.

In general, one of the primary goals of all employers is to find the best employees for their business or organization. To do this, employers should be the best themselves – remain open to change and have the best recruitment, selection, orientation and supervision techniques or methods that are inclusive.

For further information, please contact the New Brunswick Employer Support Services (NBESS). The NBESS offers free services to employers through consultations, presentations and training.

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