

Become a Disability Savvy Interviewer



Best practices for interviewing candidates for customized employment opportunities

When you are interviewing candidates for customized employment opportunities, a successful interview and a successful hire begins with a great job description, a willingness to be flexible and a solid interview plan, just as it does when you are hiring people for other positions in your business.

There is no 'right way' or 'perfect' interview template to rely on when you're interviewing people with different abilities. The only thing consistent about people with disabilities is that like everyone else, they are individuals! However, a few simple guidelines can help you set yourself and your company up for a successful interview and hiring experience.

IT ALL BEGINS WITH PREPARATION

Focus on the job description and skillset required

Most job descriptions reflect an idealized view of the person an organization wants to hire, and may



include inflated requirements that serve as a block to an otherwise solid candidate. Don't discount a potentially great employee because he or she doesn't tick all the boxes on that idealized profile. For example does a candidate really require a high school diploma for a job doing physical labour or working on a production line? Many hiring managers would agree that it is often more important the candidate bring a positive attitude, willingness to learn and a solid work ethic to a job than it is to have a specific credential or experience.

It isn't necessary to lower your standards or expectations for candidates with disabilities. The key is to focus on the candidate's skills and abilities and ensure they are well aligned with the tasks you need accomplished and the job description.

When you're reviewing the position, be sure to identify key responsibilities and the actual skills required to get the job done. Also consider customizations, training or accommodations that can be made to ensure a good fit with your candidate.

- What is the purpose of the job?
- What are the major responsibilities of this job?
- What are the essential skills/abilities that are needed to be successful?
- Is experience required or is job training sufficient?
- What level of education is required?
- Is life experience or volunteer work important?
- What are the working conditions?
- What are the physical and mental demands of the job?
- What results are expected of the employee?

Create an interview plan

For individuals with disabilities such as developmental delays, navigating the traditional interview experience for the first time may cause anxiety to the point that they are unable put their best foot forward in the interview even if they are highly capable of doing the job. Keeping the interview less formal can take the pressure off. Consider starting the interview with a tour of the facility. It will give you an opportunity to build rapport, show the individual the environment they would be working in, possibly demonstrate the tasks they will be doing while introducing them to employees.

If appropriate, rather than conducting the interview in an office across a desk, look for a quiet and reasonably private area you can talk without interruption. Perhaps an out of the way corner in the cafeteria, a comfortable lounge area, or even a garden courtyard would suffice.

Prepare questions in advance

Be welcoming, set the interviewee at ease and begin with some simple rapport building questions.

- Did you have any trouble finding us?
- Before we get started, would you like to have a quick tour? I'm happy to show you around and tell you a bit about the work we need done and then we can sit down and chat for a bit.



- Would you like a glass of water or some tea?

Keep the interview short, and straightforward

- Avoid using abstract questions. Keep questions concrete and specific.
- Avoid asking behavioural questions such as “Can you tell me about a situation when...” or “What would you do if X happened?”
- Use non-technical language, and keep your wording simple.
- Seek to make it a conversation rather than an inquisition.
- You could also offer to supply the questions in hard copy to support clear understanding.

Sample Questions:

- I see you worked at _____. Can you tell me about the work you did there?
- What other kind of jobs have you done before?
- Tell me what tasks you liked doing in your last job?
- What is the hardest thing you had to learn at your last job?
- Did you get any training in _____?
- Do you like having a predictable routine at work?
- Are you comfortable working with the public?
- Do you have WHIMIS certification?
- How many hours a week do you want to work?
- This job requires someone quite fit. Are you able to be on your feet and walk around for long periods of time?
- Do you have any questions for me?
- Ask the person if there are accommodations that would help them to perform their tasks. Allow them to educate you as to what they can do and how you can help them share their gifts.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

If you are interviewing an individual recruited through a community partner such as the Aspire Richmond Employment Services program, they will likely be accompanied by a support person who can help facilitate the interview. Please be aware of speaking directly to the individual you are interviewing rather than to their support worker. However, expect that the support person may step into the process to ensure you receive an accurate picture of the person’s capabilities or to help them understand the intent of a question being asked of them.

BE FLEXIBLE AND CREATIVE

An individual’s ability to converse and reply to questions in an interview doesn’t necessarily correlate to their ability to do a specific job! Be prepared to be flexible and roll with what comes up during the recruiting process.

For some candidates, consider offering an opportunity to job shadow, or a working interview in which they actually have an opportunity to learn and practice some of the work skills they would be using. Another alternative might be arranging a conditional work trial period to train them and assess their ability for a period of time before offering them a permanent position.



TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING PEOPLE WITH COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

- Be prepared to rephrase questions for clarity
- Stay focused on the person as they respond to you.
- Don't jump in and finish sentences for people who may respond slowly.
- Give sufficient time to process and respond to questions
- Be considerate without being patronizing
- In some cases, it may be better to demonstrate tasks or show rather than verbally describing job responsibilities.



FAQ

What the role of a vocational coach?

Vocational coaches are available to all individuals hired through Aspire Richmond Employment Services. Vocational coaches support both the new employee and the employer during the onboarding and training process.

Before recommending a candidate for a job, a vocational coach will meet with the employer to do a task analysis to ensure a good match of the job candidate's ability to the job requirements. The vocational coach will then facilitate the application and interview process to ensure the job candidate is able to put their best foot forward.

Once they are hired, the vocational coach will be on hand to ease the onboarding and training by taking detailed notes on tasks, priorities, and processes. It's easy for new employees to get overwhelmed by the volume of new information they have to process.

The coach will help familiarize the employee with their new responsibilities, create task lists and training aids, identify reasonable accommodations that will make them more efficient, and help the employee to integrate with their colleagues.

The goal of the vocational coach is to ease the transition for both the employer and the employee with an eye to supporting the employee in being as independent as possible in the workplace.

A vocational coach would typically support a new employee for a period of a month or two, with the objective of gradually fading out their support, once they are comfortable and confident in their tasks. The coach will continue to check in to keep an eye on performance, be available for additional training if they are taking on new responsibilities or to support the employer during employment reviews or dealing with any employment-related issues that may arise.