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RIVERDALE IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S CENTRE

Inclusive Hiring Guide

Step-by-step guide to promote workplace inclusion and diversity

Accessibility Statement

This resource has been created to ensure clarity and understanding for readers with varying levels of English proficiency and familiarity with DEI concepts. The document is compatible with most screen readers and can be printed in large format for those with low vision. Where possible, visual elements have been described in words to improve accessibility.

If you require this guide in an alternative format, such as large print, braille, or audio, please contact RIWC to make arrangements.

Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge that this work was created in Tkaronto, which is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississauga and Chippewa bands. This land is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

We recognize the enduring presence of Indigenous peoples on this land and the ongoing impacts of colonization, systemic inequities, and dispossession. As we talk about equity, diversity, and inclusion, we also commit to actions that uphold Indigenous sovereignty, strengthen relationships, and address barriers faced by Indigenous workers and job seekers.

Author's Note

This guide was built with deep care, urgency, and respect for the voices that shaped it. Every section reflects insights drawn from community conversations, expert research, and lived experience.

What is on these pages is the outcome of deep listening - listening to the culture around us and to those who have been excluded, overlooked, or underrepresented in the workforce. These stories have been translated into actionable tools that are practical, equity-rooted, and accessible for small and medium-sized employers.

This is not a checklist. It is an invitation to reflect on your hiring practices, to take manageable steps forward, and to create the kind of workplace culture that supports all employees.

Contents

Introduction

The pace of change in today's workplace is relentless. Economic shifts, AI adoption, hybrid work challenges, and changing demographics are pushing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to rethink how they attract and retain talent. Organizations that once planned in five-year cycles now adjust their strategies quarterly, sometimes monthly.

For SMEs, this disruption can feel overwhelming, especially without a dedicated HR or DEI team. Rising costs, budget constraints, and skill shortages are putting pressure on both employers and job seekers. At the same time, expectations around inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility, and access (IDEAA) are rising. These expectations are not just coming from employees but also from customers, community partners, and regulators.

There is no sustainable talent strategy without DEI at its core. An inclusive hiring process is not just about filling vacancies. It is about building a workplace where people from all backgrounds can thrive. This means removing barriers before the first interview and ensuring fairness at every step of the hiring journey.

This Inclusive Hiring Guide is designed to meet SMEs where they are. **You do not need a large HR department, a big budget, or a fully formed DEI strategy to begin. What you do need is the willingness to listen, reflect, and take small, consistent actions that lead to lasting change.**

The guidance in these pages reflects real stories and barriers shared by job seekers and workers in Ontario, including racialized individuals, Indigenous peoples, newcomers, people with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQI+ community members. Their experiences are not abstract. They are the lived realities of candidates and employees who could be part of your workforce.

You do not need to complete this guide all at once. You can work through one section at a time, either on your own, with your leadership team, or alongside staff from across your organization. The key is to start somewhere and keep going.

Progress begins with action.

Master Glossary of Terms

When you see a term in this guide that is bolded, it is defined in this glossary. Use it as a quick reference to ensure you understand the concepts in context.

Accessibility - The design of products, services, environments, and experiences so they can be used by all people, regardless of ability or disability. Includes physical, digital, and communication access.

Accommodation - Changes or adjustments to a job, workplace, or process that remove barriers and allow a person to fully participate. Examples include modified hours, assistive technology, or accessible formats.

Bias (Unconscious Bias) - Attitudes or stereotypes that influence our decisions without our awareness. Can lead to unintentional discrimination in hiring and workplace practices.

Continuous Improvement - An ongoing effort to make incremental changes that improve processes, systems, and outcomes. In DEI, it means regularly reviewing and updating practices to better meet the needs of all employees.

Cultural Competence - The ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures by being aware of one's own worldview, biases, and values.

DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) A framework for creating fair and respectful workplaces.

- **Diversity:** The presence of differences within a group (race, gender, age, ability, etc.).
- **Equity:** Fair treatment and access to opportunities by addressing barriers.
- **Inclusion:** Ensuring all people feel welcome, valued, and able to participate fully.

Equity-Deserving Groups - Communities that face barriers to equal access, opportunities, and resources due to systemic discrimination. Examples include Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, and newcomers.

Intersectionality - A way of understanding how aspects of a person's identity (e.g., race, gender, disability, class) combine to create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege.

Job-Related Criteria - Requirements for a role that are directly linked to the essential duties and responsibilities of the position, not based on personal characteristics or unrelated preferences.

Microaggressions - Every day, comments or actions, often unintentional, that communicate bias or negative assumptions about someone based on identity.

Psychological Safety - A workplace climate where people feel safe to take risks, speak up, and make mistakes without fear of punishment or humiliation.

Reasonable Accommodation - An adjustment to a job, workplace, or process that removes barriers and allows a person to fully participate, without causing the employer undue hardship. Examples include modified hours, assistive technology, accessible formats, or changes to work processes.

Undue Hardship - **A legal threshold under the Ontario Human Rights Code**, where an employer can show that providing an accommodation would cause significant difficulty or expense. This is assessed using criteria like cost, outside funding, and health and safety risks.

In Ontario, undue hardship is assessed based on three factors defined by the Ontario Human Rights Code:

1. **Cost**: Whether the accommodation would cause excessive financial difficulty relative to the organization's size and resources.
2. **Health and Safety:** Whether the accommodation would create significant risks to the health or safety of the employee or others.
3. **Outside Sources of Funding:** Whether funding or other supports are available to help cover the cost of the accommodation.

Employers are expected to explore all reasonable options and to document the process when claiming undue hardship. The threshold for proving undue hardship is high, and it must be based on objective evidence, not assumptions.

Representation - The extent to which the diversity of a community or population is reflected in an organization's staff, leadership, and decision-making roles.

Universal Design - Designing spaces, processes, and tools from the outset to be usable by the widest range of people without the need for later modifications. Universal Design – An approach to designing products, services, and environments so they are usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation.

Workplace Harassment - Unwelcome conduct based on a protected ground (e.g., race, gender, disability) that is known, or should reasonably be known, to be unwelcome.

Section 1: Preparing for Inclusive Hiring

Framing Statement

Inclusive hiring starts before a job is posted. It means thinking ahead about the kind of workplace you want to build, the barriers that might exist for job seekers, and how you will remove them. For small and medium-sized employers, preparation helps attract the best talent, save time, and show candidates you value inclusion.

Why This Matters

Only 10% of leadership roles in Canada are held by racialized individuals, despite making up over 25% of the population (CCDI, 2024). Preparation is an opportunity to close this gap from the start of the hiring process.

Lived Experience Quote

"I almost didn't apply because the job ad didn't say if accommodations were available. It made me wonder if I would be welcome there." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Practical Actions for SMEs

1. Review job descriptions for essentials only. Remove any requirement that is not core to the role. How-to: match each requirement to daily tasks. If rarely used, remove it.
2. Plan for accommodations before posting. Decide who handles requests and list common options on one page. How-to: use OHRC examples to build your list.
3. Write a short diversity and inclusion statement. Example: "We welcome applications from all qualified people and will provide accommodations upon request."
4. Choose interview panel members with diversity in mind. Rotate panellists so different perspectives are involved.
5. Identify outreach channels now. Keep a list of 3 to 5 community job boards or agencies.
6. Check hiring tools for accessibility. Test your site and form with a free screen reader like NVDA.

Best Practices & Expert Insight

- Proactive accommodations build trust before candidates even apply.
- Representation on panels signals belonging.
- *Susan Scott (Fierce Conversations) underscores that clear, respectful communication in hiring builds strong relationships from day one.*
- *Wanda Deschamps, Canadian inclusion advocate, highlights that preparing for inclusive hiring requires addressing both visible and invisible barriers from the start, ensuring mental health, inclusion and accessibility are part of every step.*

Continuous Improvement Tip: Twice a year, ask someone outside your company to try applying and note where they get stuck. Fix those friction points.

Resources

- **Ontario Human Rights Commission – Interviewing and Hiring Guidelines**. Plain-language legal and inclusive hiring guidance. Access at https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/iv-human-rights-issues-all-stages-employment/5-interviewing-and-making-hiring-decisions Use when reviewing hiring policies or training interviewers.
- **Inclusion Hub – How to Create Inclusive Job Descriptions**. Step-by-step tips for inclusive postings. Access at https://www.inclusionhub.com/articles/inclusive-job-descriptions. Use before creating or refreshing job descriptions.

For a complete list of DEI and inclusive hiring resources, see Appendix: Resources for Inclusive Hiring.

Cross-Tool Connection

See Section A: Job Posting & Outreach in the RIWC DEI Self-Audit Tool.

Section 2: Writing Inclusive Job Postings

Framing Statement

A job posting is often the first impression a candidate has of your organization. Inclusive postings help you attract a wider and more diverse pool of applicants.

Why This Matters

Job seekers from underrepresented groups are more likely to apply when postings clearly show a commitment to inclusion, accessibility, and flexibility.

Lived Experience Quote

"I almost didn't apply because the job ad didn't say if accommodations were available. It made me wonder if I would be welcome there." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Practical Actions for SMEs

- Review job descriptions to remove unnecessary requirements and biased language.
- State your commitment to providing accommodations and how applicants can request them.
- Include salary ranges to promote pay transparency and equity.
- Use plain language so postings are accessible to a wider audience.

Ontario Job Posting Transparency Requirements (Ontario ESA, effective Jan 1, 2026)

If you have 25 or more employees in Ontario on the day you post a publicly advertised job posting (an external posting advertised to the general public), the posting and any associated application form must include the following, effective January 1, 2026:

- Pay information: Include the expected compensation or a compensation range. If you post a range, the difference between the minimum and maximum must be $50,000 or less. This

pay disclosure is not required if expected compensation (or the top end of the range) is more than $200,000/year.

- Vacancy status: State whether the posting is for an existing vacancy.
- AI disclosure: Disclose if artificial intelligence is used to screen, assess, or select applicants.
- No “Canadian experience” requirements: Do not request “Canadian experience” (or equivalent) in the posting or application form.
- Post-interview notice: If you interview an applicant, you must tell them within 45 days of their last interview whether a hiring decision has been made for that posting.
- Record retention: Keep copies of each publicly advertised job posting and any associated application form for 3 years after the posting is removed, and keep records of the post-interview notice for 3 years after it is provided.

Note: These requirements do not apply to certain situations (for example, internal-only postings, general recruitment campaigns that do not advertise a specific position, and roles performed outside Ontario). Employers should confirm applicability and exemptions.

Equity in Job Postings

Equity means recognizing that not all candidates have had the same access to education, training, or work opportunities. This means removing barriers in job postings that could screen out capable candidates.

- Focus on the skills and competencies needed rather than a rigid list of credentials.
- Accept equivalent work, volunteer, or community leadership experience in place of formal education when appropriate.
- Avoid unnecessary “Canadian experience” requirements that may exclude skilled newcomers.

Example: An SME hiring an administrative coordinator accepts three years of volunteer event planning experience in place of a formal diploma, recognizing the transferable skills gained through community involvement.

Sector-Specific Example: A hospitality employer removes the requirement for “five years of Canadian hotel experience” and instead looks for proven guest service skills from other countries, offering paid training on Canadian workplace standards.

Takeaway for SMEs: The more you focus on ability and potential rather than rigid prerequisites, the more talent you will uncover

Resources

- **Gender Decoder Tool** – Paste your job ad into this free tool to check for gendered wording that might discourage applicants. http://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com Use before posting to attract a wider talent pool and reduce unintentional bias.
- **Pay Transparency Requirements** – Pay Transparency Ontario: Guidance on salary ranges and Ontario job posting transparency requirements (effective Jan 1, 2026): https://www.ontario.ca/page/pay-transparency.

For a complete list of DEI and inclusive hiring resources, see Appendix: Resources for Inclusive Hiring.

Cross-Tool Connection

See Section D: Job Postings in the RIWC DEI Self-Audit Tool.

Section 3: Outreach and Candidate Sourcing

Framing Statement

Where you post jobs determines who applies. Expanding your reach to diverse networks builds a stronger, more innovative workforce.

Why This Matters

Employers who partner with community networks see up to a 37% increase in applications from underrepresented groups (CCDI Employer Survey, 2023).

Lived Experience Quote

"I only heard about the job because my community centre posted it. Otherwise, I wouldn't have known it existed." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Practical Actions for SMEs

1. Post in targeted community spaces. Newcomer centres, Indigenous job boards, and disability networks. How-to: ask if they have free or low-cost postings.
2. Use social media groups. Share jobs in LinkedIn groups, Facebook community pages, and relevant WhatsApp or WeChat groups.
3. Attend local job fairs. Choose events hosted by community organizations or training programs. Bring a one-page inclusion statement.
4. Build ongoing relationships. Schedule quarterly check-ins with partners so they know you are committed.

Best Practices & Expert Insight

- Relationships beat last-minute outreach.
- Rotate posting locations to reach untapped talent pools.
- Rumeet Billan highlights that consistent community engagement builds trust and "psychological capital," which strengthens your talent pipeline over time.

Equity in Outreach: Equity means recognizing that not all job seekers have equal access to job postings or networking opportunities and adapting your outreach to meet people where they are.

Outreach Equity Example: A rural Ontario manufacturing SME partners with a local Indigenous employment centre to co-host an information session, offering transportation stipends to candidates from nearby communities who face travel barriers. This approach expands the talent pool while reducing structural barriers.

Continuous Improvement Tip: Track where you post, and which channels yield strong candidates. Review the list every 6 months and keep the top performers.

Resources

- **ACCES Employment.** Connects employers with skilled newcomers through fairs and programs. Access at https://accesemployment.ca. Use to diversify pipelines and get onboarding support.
- **Indigenous Works.** Helps build partnerships with Indigenous employment networks. Access at https://indigenousworks.ca. Use when engaging and hiring indigenous talent, and to build sustained pipelines that reach candidates you might otherwise miss.

For a complete list of DEI and inclusive hiring resources, see Appendix: Resources for Inclusive Hiring.

Cross-Tool Connection

See Section C: Outreach and Partnerships in the RIWC DEI Self-Audit Tool.

Section 4: Screening & Shortlisting Candidates

Framing Statement

Fair screening ensures that candidates are evaluated consistently and on relevant criteria.

Why This Matters

Bias in screening can unintentionally filter out strong candidates before they ever reach the interview stage.

Lived Experience Quote

"I met every qualification but was screened out because my degree was from another country."
Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Practical Actions for SMEs

- Use a consistent scoring rubric for all applications.
- Hide personal details (such as names or addresses) during initial screening to reduce bias.
- Consider removing minimum years-of-experience requirements if they are not essential to the role.

Equity in Screening

Equity means recognizing that candidates have different starting points and tailoring the process to account for those differences.

- Accept alternative credentials or equivalent experience where possible.
- Consider skills gained through unpaid or community-based work.
- Provide opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their abilities through practical tasks rather than relying solely on resumes.

Example 1: An SME considers a newcomer's international project management experience equivalent to Canadian experience and invites them to complete a short, paid work simulation to assess skills.

Example 2: A hospitality SME recognizes that newcomer hires may not have prior experience with Canadian payroll systems. They add a one-hour orientation session with HR to walk through the first paystub, explain deductions, and answer questions privately.

Sector-Specific Example:

A manufacturing company accepts hands-on skills gained through apprenticeship and mentorship in place of formal trade certification, while supporting the employee to complete certification after hire.

Takeaway for SMEs: Screening with equity in mind expands your talent pool and helps identify skilled candidates who might otherwise be overlooked.

Resources

- **Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion – Inclusive Hiring Practices Toolkit.** Access at https://ccdi.ca/en/toolkits. Use to train screeners and reduce bias in selection.
- **Government of Canada – Foreign Credential Recognition.** Access at https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/foreign-credential-recognition.html. Use to assess international qualifications fairly.

For a complete list of DEI and inclusive hiring resources, see Appendix: Resources for Inclusive Hiring.

Cross-Tool Connection

See Section C: Screening in the RIWC DEI Self-Audit Tool.

Section 5: Interviewing Inclusively

Framing Statement

An interview should assess a candidate's skills and potential, not their ability to "fit in" with an existing culture that may not be inclusive.

Why This Matters

Candidates who feel respected during interviews are 38% more likely to accept job offers, even if pay is lower (LinkedIn Global Talent Trends, 2023).

Lived Experience Quote

"The panel didn't even introduce themselves. I felt like I was already at a disadvantage." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Practical Actions for SMEs

- Share the interview format in advance. Include the number of interviewers, the format (video, phone, in-person), and an estimated length.

- Offer different interview formats. Provide options like phone or video if travel is difficult.
- Train interviewers in bias-free questioning. Give them a short list of approved, job-relevant questions.
- Include diverse panel members. Rotate who is involved so different perspectives are represented.

Best Practices & Expert Insight

- Focus on skills, not personal background.
- Structured interviews improve fairness and predict performance.

Equity in Interviewing

Equity means recognizing that candidates start from different places due to systemic barriers. Equality gives everyone the same thing. Equity gives people what they need to succeed. This can mean adapting interview processes to allow candidates to demonstrate their potential in different ways.

- Consider candidates who may not have followed traditional career paths.
- Provide accommodations or adjustments during interviews so everyone can fully participate.
- Focus on transferable skills and lived experience in addition to formal credentials.

Example: An SME that recognizes not all applicants have equal access to formal education may adapt interview questions to focus on problem-solving skills and relevant experience instead of only formal qualifications.

Sector-Specific Example:

A construction company hiring for a site supervisor role removes the “Canadian experience” requirement and instead evaluates leadership skills gained abroad, pairing new hires with a mentor to bridge any local regulatory gaps.

Takeaway for SMEs: Equity does not lower the bar. It widens the gate, so you do not miss great talent because of unnecessary barriers.

Resources

- **Ontario Human Rights Commission** – Human Rights at Work. Interviewing and Making Hiring Decisions. Access at https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/iv-human-rights-issues-all-stages-employment/5-interviewing-and-making-hiring-decisions. Use when preparing interview questions and training interviewers.

For a complete list of DEI and inclusive hiring resources, see Appendix: Resources for Inclusive Hiring.

Cross-Tool Connection

See Section E: Interviewing in the RIWC DEI Self-Audit Tool.

Section 6: Reference & Background Checks

Framing Statement

Reference and background checks should confirm a candidate's skills and suitability without creating unnecessary barriers.

Why This Matters

Over 30% of Canadians have a criminal record, many for non-violent or dated offences. Blanket exclusion policies disproportionately impact racialized and Indigenous candidates (John Howard Society, 2023).

Lived Experience Quote

"I had a minor offence from over a decade ago, but the employer didn't even ask me about it, they just said no." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Practical Actions for SMEs

1. Request only relevant checks. For example, a driving record is only required if driving is part of the job.
2. Allow candidates to explain their findings before making a decision.
3. Use consistent reference questions. Focus on recent and relevant work performance.
4. Review human rights guidance on criminal record checks.

Best Practices & Expert Insight

- Avoid "pass/fail" thinking.
- Weigh the time since the offence and any evidence of rehabilitation.

Continuous Improvement Tip: Review your background check policies annually to ensure they match the actual risks and needs of the job.

Equity in Background Checks: Equity means balancing risk with fairness.

Example: A community childcare centre considers an applicant with a decade-old non-violent offence. After a conversation about rehabilitation and recent work history, they hire the candidate into a role with no financial handling and provide mentorship to support long-term success.

Resources

- **Ontario Human Rights Commission** – Record of Offences. Guidelines for fair use of record of offences checks. Access at https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/your-rights/code-grounds/record-offences. Use to align with human rights law.
- **John Howard Society** – Employer Toolkit. Fair chance hiring resources. Access at https://policerecordhub.ca/en/fair-chance-hiring-toolkit. Use to expand your candidate pool responsibly.

For a complete list of DEI and inclusive hiring resources, see Appendix: Resources for Inclusive Hiring.

Cross-Tool Connection

See Section F: References & Background Checks in the RIWC DEI Self-Audit Tool.

Section 7: Job Offers & Onboarding

Framing Statement

An inclusive onboarding process makes new hires feel welcome, valued, and supported from day one.

Why This Matters

Up to 20% of employee turnover happens in the first 45 days, often due to poor onboarding and lack of belonging (Workforce Institute, 2023).

Lived Experience Quote

"My first day was just paperwork. No one explained the culture or who to go to for help. I felt invisible." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Practical Actions for SMEs

1. Create a welcome plan. Include team introductions, schedule, and a workplace tour.
2. Provide materials in accessible formats. Use large print, plain language, or audio if needed.
3. Assign a buddy or mentor for the first few weeks.
4. Check workspace and tech accessibility before the start date.

Best Practices & Expert Insight

- *Tanya Sinclair, leadership strategist, notes that clear and respectful communication is a foundation for equity and trust-building, especially during moments that matter most to candidates.*
- Use onboarding to reinforce DEI values and expectations.

Equity in Onboarding: Equity means giving every new hire what they need to start strong, even if their starting points differ.

Example: A mid-sized landscaping company hires a newcomer with horticulture training from abroad. They provide a bilingual safety orientation, pair the new hire with a lead gardener for the first 30 days, and adapt training videos with visual demonstrations to reduce language barriers.

Continuous Improvement Tip: Ask new hires at 30 and 90 days what could have made onboarding better, then adjust your checklist.

Resources

- **Employment and Social Development Canada** – Inclusive Onboarding Guide. Access at https://equity.esdc.gc.ca/sgiemt-weims/maint/file/download/EmployerOnboardingGuide-LEEP-2024.pdf. Use to design onboarding that meets workplace equity requirements.
- **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).** Employer compliance information. Access at https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws. Use to ensure onboarding meets legal requirements.

For a complete list of DEI and inclusive hiring resources, see Appendix: Resources for Inclusive Hiring.

Cross-Tool Connection

See Section G: Onboarding & Retention in the RIWC DEI Self-Audit Tool.

Section 8: Developing DEI Policies

Framing Statement

A comprehensive DEI policy framework provides the foundation for all inclusive hiring practices outlined in this guide. Just as inclusive job postings are often the first impression candidates have of your organization, DEI policies represent your organization's formal commitment to equity and inclusion.

Why This Matters

Organizations with clear DEI policies are better positioned to attract diverse talent, reduce legal risks, and create consistent practices across all hiring decisions. DEI policies provide the structure that supports the practical actions outlined throughout this guide.

Lived Experience Quote

"I wanted to know if the company actually cared about inclusion or if it was just words on their website. Having clear policies made me feel more confident about applying." - Adapted from conversation themes, 2025

Practical Actions for SMEs

- Create a foundational DEI statement
- Develop accommodation policies
- Establish bias-free hiring standards
- Address pay equity and transparency

Equity in Policy Development

- Draft core DEI statement and accommodation policy
- Integrate DEI requirements into all HR processes
- Use **continuous improvement** principles to refine policies based on feedback

- Update policies annually to reflect legal changes and best practices

Equity means recognizing that standard policies may not serve all employees equally and building flexibility into your framework. Consider how policies will impact different groups and build in accommodations from the start.

Example: A mid-sized marketing agency develops a comprehensive DEI policy that includes a clear accommodation request process, bias-free hiring guidelines, and pay transparency requirements. When a talented graphic designer with ADHD requests flexible work hours and noise-canceling headphones as accommodations, the company's established policy allows HR to quickly approve the request without requiring extensive documentation, demonstrating their commitment to accessibility.

Sector-Specific Example:

A construction company in Northern Ontario creates DEI policies that specifically address the unique challenges of their industry and location. Their policies include partnerships with Indigenous employment centers for outreach, flexible training schedules to accommodate workers traveling from remote communities, and safety protocols adapted for workers with disabilities. They establish clear guidelines for evaluating international trade credentials and provide mentorship programs to bridge any gaps in local regulatory knowledge, ensuring their policies support both equity-deserving groups and operational needs.

Takeaway for SMEs: DEI policies are not just compliance documents—they are roadmaps for creating workplaces where all employees can thrive. Start with simple, practical policies that address your most common hiring and workplace situations, then build complexity over time. The more your policies focus on removing barriers and supporting **continuous improvement**, the stronger your talent pipeline and workplace culture will become.

Resources

- **Ontario Human Rights Commission - Policy Development Guidelines**: Legal framework for creating compliant DEI policies. Access at https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-development
- **Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion - DEI Policy Templates**: Practical templates and examples for SMEs. Access at https://lp.ccdi.ca/ccdi-dei-strategy-toolkit
- **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) - Policy Requirements**: Ensure accessibility compliance in all policies. Access at https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws

For a complete list of DEI and inclusive hiring resources, see Appendix: Resources for Inclusive Hiring.

Cross-Tool Connection

See Section G: Onboarding & Retention in the RIWC DEI Self-Audit Tool.

Section 9: Performance Management & Development

Framing Statement

Performance management should focus on supporting growth and success for all employees, not just identifying shortcomings.

Why This Matters

Women and racialized employees are 30% less likely to receive actionable feedback that leads to promotion (McKinsey Women in the Workplace, Canada Edition, 2023).

Lived Experience Quote

"*I work hard, but my manager only talks about mistakes. I never hear about opportunities to grow." Conversation Group Participant, 2025*

Practical Actions for SMEs

1. Set measurable goals together so expectations are clear.
2. Give regular, two-way feedback monthly or quarterly, not just once a year.
3. Offer training opportunities fairly and track participation.
4. Recognize different work styles and contributions.

Best Practices & Expert Insight

- Train managers to spot and address bias in evaluations.
- Wanda Deschamps advocates for neurodiverse-friendly performance reviews that value different ways of working.
- Continuous Improvement Tip: Review promotion and training data annually to check for equity gaps.

Equity in Performance Management: Equity recognizes that not all employees have the same access to informal coaching or stretch assignments.

Example 1: A construction company ensures women in field roles receive equal access to high-visibility projects by tracking assignment allocation, then pairing new supervisors with experienced mentors to build leadership confidence.

Example 2: A small construction firm shifts its performance review process to include 360° feedback and values-based measures, ensuring that leadership potential and collaboration skills are recognized, not just speed of output, which can disadvantage workers managing disabilities or caregiving responsibilities.

Example 3: An accounting SME notices that junior staff who work remotely have fewer chances to lead client meetings. They introduce a rotation system, so remote staff have equal opportunities to present to clients, boosting promotion readiness and visibility with leadership.

Resources

- **Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion** – Inclusive Leadership Guide. Access at https://canadacommons.ca/artifacts/17501719/canadian-centre-for-diversity-and-inclusion-centre-canadien-pour-la-diversite-et-linclusion/18390559/. Use to train managers in equitable performance evaluation.
- **Government of Ontario – Workplace Training Programs.** Access at https://www.ontario.ca/page/employment-ontario. Use to find subsidized or free training for skill development.

For a complete list of DEI and inclusive hiring resources, see Appendix: Resources for Inclusive Hiring.

Cross-Tool Connection

See Section J: Measuring DEI Progress in the RIWC DEI Self-Audit Tool.

Section 10: Accessibility & Workplace Accommodations

Framing Statement

Accessibility benefits everyone, not just people with disabilities. Inclusive design ensures that all employees, clients, and visitors can fully participate in your workplace.

Why This Matters

60% of workers with disabilities in Canada report experiencing workplace barriers, including lack of accommodations and inaccessible technology (CCDI National Inclusion Survey, 2023).

Lived Experience Quote

"I didn't ask for what I needed because I was afraid they'd see me as a problem." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Practical Actions for SMEs

- Conduct an accessibility audit of physical spaces, technology, and hiring processes.
- Make accommodation request processes simple, confidential, and free from stigma.
- Budget for accommodations proactively rather than waiting for requests.
- Include accessibility requirements in all workplace policies and job descriptions.
- When assessing undue hardship, document the decision-making process and reference OHRC guidelines to ensure fairness and transparency.

Best Practices & Expert Insight

- ***Rod Michalko, Canadian disability scholar,*** *reminds us that accessibility is not about "fixing" individuals but about redesigning environments so that barriers do not exist in the first place.*

- *Tanya Sinclair, inclusion strategist, emphasizes that accessibility is both a compliance requirement and a cultural value. How an organization responds to accommodation requests speaks volumes about its respect for all employees.*
- Universal design benefits everyone, from employees with disabilities to parents with strollers to customers accessing your services.
- Address attitudinal barriers through training that challenges stereotypes and unconscious bias

Equity in Accessibility: Equity means designing spaces and processes so that all employees can participate fully from the start, rather than making one-off fixes later.

Accessibility Example 1: A Toronto café owner redesigns their counter layout after realizing wheelchair users can't easily reach the register, improving service for everyone while meeting accessibility standards.

Accessibility Example 2: A marketing SME ensures its team meetings are accessible by providing live captioning and sharing materials in advance, supporting both employees with hearing loss and those who process information better in writing.

Resources

- **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) – Compliance Tools.** Access at https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-rules-businesses-and-non-profits. Used to meet Ontario accessibility standards.
- **Canadian Human Rights Commission – Duty to Accommodate Guidelines.** Access at https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/resources/duty-accommodate. Use to implement fair and legal accommodations.
- **Ontario Human Rights Commission – Policy on Ableism and Discrimination Based on Disability.** Access at http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability. Use to design accessible workplace policies.

For a complete list of DEI and inclusive hiring resources, see Appendix: Resources for Inclusive Hiring.

Cross-Tool Connection

See Section I: Accessibility in the RIWC DEI Self-Audit Tool.

Section 11: Continuous Improvement & Accountability

Framing Statement

DEI is not a one-time initiative; it's an ongoing process that requires commitment, measurement, and adaptation.

Why This Matters

Organizations that track and act on DEI metrics are 3.8 times more likely to achieve above-average profitability (Deloitte Canada, 2023).

Lived Experience Quote

"Policies don't matter if no one checks if they're working." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Practical Actions for SMEs

1. Set annual DEI goals with clear timelines.
2. Collect employee feedback regularly through surveys or team discussions.
3. Share progress updates and celebrate wins.
4. Use both numbers and stories to measure change.

Best Practices & Expert Insight

- Combine quantitative data (e.g., hiring rates) with qualitative input (employee stories).
- Rumeet Billan notes that organizations build resilience when they stay curious, act on feedback, and adapt over time.
- Continuous Improvement Tip: Review DEI goals every 6 months and adjust if priorities or barriers have changed.

Equity in Continuous Improvement: Equity means using data and feedback to address specific barriers.

Example 1: A manufacturing SME tracks training completion rates and finds that night-shift workers are attending 40% fewer training sessions. They respond by offering recorded sessions and paying for training time during regular shifts to ensure equal access to skill development.

Example 2: An SME reviews quarterly DEI data and notices employees with disabilities have lower promotion rates. They respond by implementing targeted leadership training and reviewing promotion criteria for bias.

Continuous Improvement Tip: Schedule a quick team check-in every six months to review what's working and where small adjustments could improve equity and inclusion.

Resources

- **Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion – Measuring the return on investment of diversity and inclusion.** Access at https://new-api.ccdi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/ccdi-report-what-gets-measured-gets-done.pdfs. Use for practical DEI metrics and evaluation tools.
- **Future Skills Canada. Evaluation and Learning in the Skills and Training Ecosystem.** Access at https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/sos-evaluation/. Measuring Social Impact.

For a complete list of DEI and inclusive hiring resources, see Appendix: Resources for Inclusive Hiring.

Cross-Tool Connection

See Section J: DEI Review & Accountability in the RIWC DEI Self-Audit Tool.

Final Thoughts

Inclusive hiring is not just about filling a role; it's about shaping the future of your organization. Every choice you make, from the words in your job posting to the way you greet a candidate, either builds or erodes trust.

This guide is designed for small and medium-sized employers with limited time and resources. The strategies are practical, low-cost, and grounded in Canadian best practices. The goal is progress, not perfection. Small, consistent actions create a lasting impact.

Key Reminders for SMEs

- Inclusion starts early. Preparation signals to candidates that they are valued before they even apply.
- Publicly advertised job postings must meet the Jan 1, 2026, requirement.
- Accessibility benefits everyone. Removing barriers for some improves the experience for all.
- Feedback is fuel. Regularly check in with candidates, employees, and your team to see what's working and what's not.
- Representation matters. Diverse voices in decision-making lead to stronger outcomes.
- Continuous improvement is essential. Revisit, refine, and track your progress.

From the Experts

"How an organization responds to an accommodation request speaks volumes about its culture." Tanya Sinclair, Inclusion Strategist

"Neurodiverse talent brings innovation and perspective that organizations cannot afford to overlook." – Wanda Deschamps, Neurodiversity Inclusion Advocate

Your Call to Action

1. Pick one section of this guide and start there.
2. Schedule your first DEI check-in meeting within 30 days.
3. Review and update your hiring practices annually using this guide as your baseline.
4. Bookmark and share the resources in each section with your hiring team.
5. Hold quarterly check-ins to celebrate wins and identify the next step forward.

When inclusion is built into hiring, you don't just fill jobs, you open doors, build trust and create a workplace where every employee has the opportunity to thrive.

Appendix A: Key Resources & Expert Insights

This appendix compiles the foundational resources, legislation, and expert voices that informed the development of the DEI Employer Toolkit. It reflects the collective knowledge, lived experience, and evidence-based practices used across all three tools: the DEI Self-Audit Tool, Self-Directed Training Tool, and Inclusive Hiring Guide.

Key Canadian Legislation & Policy Frameworks

These provide a legal and ethical foundation for inclusive employment practices:

- **Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC)** – Anti-discrimination and accommodation standards. www.ohrc.on.ca
- **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)** – Accessibility standards and 2025 compliance goals. www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws
- **Employment Standards Act (ESA)** – Workplace rights and protections. www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0
- **Pay Equity Act** – Mandates equitable compensation practices. www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p07
- **Pay Transparency Act (Ontario)** – Coming into force January 1, 2026: salary ranges required on public postings. https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/recent-changes#section-2
- **Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)** – Inclusive health and safety practices. www.ontario.ca/page/occupational-health-and-safety-act-ohsa
- **Federal Employment Equity Act** – Representation of designated groups in federally regulated workplaces. https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/E-5.401

Leading Canadian DEI & Accessibility Organizations

- **Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI)** – Training, research, and employer tools (www.ccdi.ca)
- **Pride at Work Canada** – 2SLGBTQI+ inclusion support and employer certification (www.prideatwork.ca)
- **Indigenous Works** – Partnership development for Indigenous workforce inclusion (www.indigenousworks.ca)
- **Future Skills Centre** – Equity-focused research and DEI playbooks for small employers (www.futureskillscentre.ca)
- **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities (AODA) Toolkit** – Employer checklists and compliance guidance (www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws)
- **Cerebral Palsy Foundation: Inclusive Workplace Design Guide** – Practical universal design guidance (www.cerebralpalsy.org)
- **Black Talent Initiative** – Talent recruitment and networking (www.blacktalentinitiative.com)
- **TechGirls Canada** – Networking and mentorship for women in tech (www.techgirls.ca)

- **Refugee Talent Hub** – Employer connections and resources for refugees (https://refugeetalenthub.com/en)

Practical DEI Tools & Research Referenced

- **50–30 Challenge (Government of Canada)** – Voluntary commitment to equity in leadership (www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/icgc.nsf/eng/07706.html)
- **Writing Inclusive Job Ads Guide (OHRC)** – Language equity in job postings (www.ohrc.on.ca)
- **Intersectionality Wheel (CRIAW-ICREF)** – Understanding overlapping identities and systems (www.criaw-icref.ca)
- **TED Talks: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** – "The Danger of a Single Story" (www.ted.com)
- **Harvard Business Review (May 2025)** – "Leading Global Teams Effectively" (www.hbr.org)
- **HR Interviews Podcast (July 2025)** – Canadian HR leaders on inclusion and team culture (www.hrinterviewspodcast.com)

Expert Voices Featured Throughout the Toolkit

The following thought leaders, organizational psychologists, and inclusion strategists provided conceptual grounding, reflective quotes, and actionable guidance:

- Dr. Wanda Deschamps – Advocate for neurodiversity and founder of Liberty Co
- Tanya Sinclair – Accessibility strategist and leadership advisor on disability inclusion
- Dr. Rumeet Billan – Author of *The Workplace Mental Health Playbook for Business Leaders*
- Rod Michalko – Disability scholar and author on blindness and embodied knowledge
- Brené Brown – Leadership researcher on vulnerability, courage, and belonging
- Susan Scott – Author of *Fierce Conversations*, exploring psychological safety in teams
- Simon Sinek – Leadership and workplace culture expert, known for *Start With Why*
- *Candace Sidoruk* – Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access & Accessibility (IDEAA) Strategist & Human Resources & Talent Acquisition Consultant

Acknowledgement

This Toolkit would not exist without the voices of the 2025 RIWC DEI Conversation Group Participants. Their insights, feedback, and experiences informed every page.

Quotes throughout are attributed as: Conversation Group Participants, 2025

Please use these tools with humility, respect, and ongoing reflection.

Appendix B: Resources for Inclusive Hiring

A curated list of local tools, guides, and platforms to support your equity journey.

Key Legislation & Employer Toolkits

- **Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC)** – www.ohrc.on.ca – Employer resources on hiring, accommodations, and anti-discrimination
- **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)** – www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws – Compliance guidance, employer checklists, and training modules
- **Pay Transparency Act (Ontario)** – https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/recent-changes#section-2– Coming into force January 1, 2026: salary ranges required on public postings
- **Employment Standards Act (ESA)** – www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0 – Minimum wage, hours, leave policies, and termination requirements

Hiring Equity & DEI Tools

- **50–30 Challenge (Government of Canada)** – www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/icgc.nsf/eng/07706.html – Voluntary pledge to increase diversity in leadership
- **Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI)** – www.ccdi.ca – Employer training, DEI strategy tools, and webinars
- **Pride at Work Canada** – www.prideatwork.ca – Inclusive workplace practices for 2SLGBTQI+ employees
- **Indigenous Works** – www.indigenousworks.ca – Support for building respectful Indigenous partnerships

Community Job Boards & Networks

- **Hire Immigrants** – www.hireimmigrants.ca
- **Equitek Employment Equity Job Posting Network** – www.equitek.ca
- **WorkInCulture (Creative Sectors)** – www.workinculture.ca
- **Indigenous Careers** – www.indigenouscareers.org
- **Black Talent Initiative** – www.blacktalentinitiative.com

Additional Community Job Boards & Inclusive Hiring Resources

1. **HireDiverse**
   A Canadian job board focused on connecting employers with skilled talent from traditionally underrepresented groups. It emphasizes inclusive hiring practices to build stronger teams. www.hirediverse.ca
2. **BIPOC Jobs**
   A DEI-focused job board that helps connect Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour

(BIPOC) communities with companies committed to fairness and inclusion.
www.bipocjobs.ca

3. **Indigenous Careers**
   Focuses on connecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis job seekers with inclusive employers across Canada.
   www.indigenouscareers.org
4. **United Way Greater Toronto – Inclusive Employment**
   Supports job seekers from marginalized communities in the GTA through career programs, training, and wraparound supports.
   www.unitedwaygt.org/our-work/inclusive-employment/
5. **Learning Enrichment Foundation (LEF)**
   A Toronto-based organization providing employment services, skills training, and mentorship to immigrants and at-risk youth.
   www.lefca.org
6. **ECO Canada**
   Canada's premier environmental job board, connecting professionals with meaningful work opportunities, certifications, and wage subsidies.
   www.eco.ca
7. **MyGwork**
   A global business community for LGBTQ+ professionals, graduates, and inclusive employers.
   www.mygwork.com
8. **Career Edge Organization**
   Offers paid internships for recent graduates, including programs for graduates with disabilities and internationally qualified professionals.
   www.careeredge.ca
9. **Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN)**
   A network of employment service providers in Ontario serving people with disabilities, promoting inclusive hiring practices.
   www.odenetwork.com

Tip for SMEs: Bookmark 2–3 key sites and revisit quarterly to stay updated. DEI doesn't have to be overwhelming.