INSPIRE
Integrated Network for the Surveillance of Pathogens

Best Hiring Practices

with an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Lens

Applied Framework and Recommendations

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About INSPIRE

INSPIRE is a cross-disciplinary network of researchers, research institutes, non-profit organizations, and industry partners working together to strengthen Canada's preparedness for future health emergencies. Our work focuses on building resilience across supply chains, advancing pathogen surveillance, supporting new detection technologies, and preparing a skilled and diverse workforce to meet emerging health challenges.

As part of the Canadian Hub for Health Intelligence & Innovation in Infectious Diseases (HI^3) and funded through the Canada Biomedical Research Fund (CBRF) and Biosciences Research Infrastructure Fund (BRIF), INSPIRE brings together national and cross-border collaboration to support biomanufacturing, scientific innovation, and training pathways for current and future leaders in health and biosciences.

Our Commitment to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

INSPIRE envisions equity not as a symbolic value but as a daily responsibility embedded into how we collaborate, research, train, and serve our communities. We recognize that access, safety, and belonging are not experienced equally—particularly for Indigenous Peoples, racialized communities, women, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, newcomers, and other historically excluded groups.

We are committed to identifying and dismantling structural, interpersonal, and cultural barriers that create inequity. This includes integrating EDI principles into training programs, supervision practices, mentorship models, and research processes. Our multidisciplinary EDI Committee—composed of visible minorities, underrepresented groups, and women—guides this work to ensure that inclusion is not performative but systemic.

Hiring, evaluation, and promotion processes within INSPIRE follow equity-focused recruitment practices, including transparent criteria, bias-reduction strategies, and intentional outreach to communities historically underrepresented in science and health sectors. Selection committees are expected to declare conflicts of interest, apply anti-bias guidelines consistently, and follow defensible, structured processes that reduce opportunities for subjective or discriminatory decision-making.

INSPIRE provides ongoing EDI learning opportunities for staff, trainees, and partners, supported by regular evaluation and feedback loops. All members have access to protected and transparent mechanisms to report equity concerns confidentially and safely.

We also believe that equity must shape how research is designed, conducted, and shared. Through meaningful collaborations with communities most affected by health inequities—including migrant, cross-border, and underserved populations—we use participatory, culturally responsive approaches to ensure our work is relevant, respectful, and

accessible. This includes plain-language communication, closed captioning, and the integration of assistive technologies in virtual and hybrid learning environments.

INSPIRE is committed to redistributing power through co-creation and shared decision-making. Partnerships with organizations such as the Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County anchor our work in lived experience and community expertise. We publish project outcomes openly on our website to promote transparency, accountability, and shared benefit.

Equity is not a checkbox—it is a continuous, collective practice. INSPIRE holds itself accountable to progress, humility, and repair, informed by the communities we aim to serve.

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Laying the Foundation

A strong hiring process begins long before a job is posted. “**Laying the Foundation**” focuses on the critical early steps that shape every decision that follows.

These steps include establishing why the role is needed, identifying structural or equity gaps that the position is meant to address, and ensuring that the work and expectations are clearly defined. Without this foundation, hiring decisions can easily default to personal preferences, assumptions about “fit,” or informal practices that unintentionally reproduce inequities (Herman, 2024; Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014).

This section also highlights how **invisible labour**—such as mentorship, emotional support, and diversity work—often goes unrecognized yet is essential to team functioning (Gagnon et al., 2022). By naming and formally accounting for these responsibilities, organizations prevent them from being unfairly downloaded onto women, racialized staff, or early-career employees.

Finally, this section ensures that **equity, diversity, and inclusion** (EDI) commitments are embedded from the beginning rather than added later as an afterthought. Integrating EDI into role definition, expectations, and evaluation criteria creates a hiring process that is transparent, defensible, and aligned with **Canadian human rights and employment**

principles. Taken together, these foundational steps create clarity for hiring committees, consistency for applicants, and fairer outcomes across the entire process.

1.1 Why Structured Hiring Matters

Hiring is one of the most consequential activities an organization undertakes. Yet, in many workplaces—especially in academic, scientific, and healthcare settings—hiring often unfolds informally. Committees rely on intuition, personal impressions, or a sense of "fit" to make decisions. While common, these practices introduce inconsistency and unintentional bias into the process (Herman, 2024). Structured hiring matters because it replaces intuition with clarity, replaces guesswork with transparent standards, and ensures that decisions can be justified based on evidence rather than preference.

A structured process prevents the most frequent pitfalls in hiring. Without structure, committees may overlook strong candidates because their training, communication style, or academic background differs from what the team is used to (Stewart & Valian, 2018). They may also disproportionately value institutional prestige, informal recommendations, or interpersonal familiarity—none of which reliably predict job performance (Campion et al., 1997). Structure increases fairness and predictive accuracy by ensuring that every candidate is evaluated using the same criteria, scored using the same tools, and assessed by reviewers who understand their responsibilities (Calluso & Devetag, 2024).

Structure also increases equity. Unstructured hiring tends to reproduce existing demographics because committees unconsciously gravitate toward candidates who look, sound, or behave like their current teams (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). This creates a cycle where opportunities cluster around those already privileged within academia or science. A structured process interrupts these patterns by explicitly defining what the job requires and how excellence should be assessed—before any applicants are seen. This protects applicants from being judged against shifting or subjective expectations and protects organizations from making decisions that contradict their own EDI commitments.

Finally, structured hiring supports transparency and defensibility. Canadian institutions must demonstrate that hiring processes are fair, non-discriminatory, and aligned with provincial and federal human rights requirements. Clear criteria, documentation practices, and consistent scoring provide an audit trail showing that decisions were based on job-related evidence rather than personal preference. This not only strengthens the integrity of the process but also enhances trust among applicants, employees, and the broader community. Hiring committees should receive a brief orientation or training on bias awareness, documentation expectations, and equitable evaluation before reviewing any applications. This ensures that all reviewers begin from a shared understanding of their responsibilities and reduces the influence of unconscious assumptions during decision-making.

Example:
A research lab is hiring a coordinator. Without structure, one reviewer might prioritize previous work with a specific instrument, another might focus on personality, and a third might judge writing style or email tone. Structured hiring requires the team to determine, in advance, which competencies truly matter (e.g., organizational skills, ethics protocols, data accuracy) and evaluate every candidate against those same competencies. This reduces bias and increases the likelihood of selecting someone who will succeed in the role.

1.2 Defining the Need

Defining the need is the first essential step in any equitable hiring process. It clarifies *why* the position exists, *what gap it fills*, and *how it contributes to both organizational and equity goals*. When this step is skipped or rushed, organizations often rely on informal judgments or "gut feeling" to justify hiring decisions, which makes the process vulnerable to bias, inconsistency, and internal disagreement (Herman, 2024).

Before posting a replacement position, teams should also reassess whether the original role is still required, whether its responsibilities have changed, and whether the title or level should be updated. Vacancies often reveal shifts in workload, scope, or institutional

needs, and confirming these changes in advance helps avoid replicating outdated job structures or pay inequities.

In many academic and scientific environments, positions are created **reactively**—after new funding arrives, when a project expands, or when a team member suddenly leaves. While these circumstances are common, reactive hiring can easily result in unclear job expectations or replicated inequities. Instead, defining the need requires stepping back and articulating the position's purpose in a way that aligns with the institution's mission, the team's workload, and equity principles.

A strong definition of need includes a clear rationale for how the position supports the broader team. Using the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model** (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), this step involves identifying which tasks the role will relieve, what new responsibilities it will introduce, and how it will reduce workload strain or increase resources for existing staff. This ensures the role is not created simply to redistribute overwork, especially to marginalized staff who already experience disproportionate invisible labour.

This step also prevents informal or biased practices, such as designing a role around a preferred candidate or unconsciously replicating the characteristics of the current team (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). When committees articulate the purpose of the role *before* reviewing applications, they create a foundation for all later decisions: job description writing, evaluation criteria, interview questions, and onboarding.

Defining the need also applies to equity expectations. If the role requires working with diverse communities, mentoring trainees, or addressing systemic barriers within a department, these responsibilities should be identified at this stage—not added later as optional or informal labour. This creates clarity and fairness for both the hiring committee and future candidates.

Example:
A healthcare research group wants to hire a project assistant because "the team is too busy." Before posting the job, the supervisor maps out what tasks are overwhelming the team (e.g., maintaining participant schedules, managing data entry, coordinating ethics amendments). They also identify that early-career racialized staff have been informally managing participant communication and emotional support. Defining the need allows the team to formally acknowledge and redistribute this equity labour into the new role, increasing fairness and reducing burnout.

1.3 Recognizing Invisible & Equity Labour

Invisible labour refers to the work that is essential for a team or organization to function but is rarely formally recognized, compensated, or explicitly assigned. This labour includes tasks such as mentoring junior staff, providing emotional support, mediating conflicts, supporting new hires, participating in EDI initiatives, and doing the relational work that maintains a positive work environment. Research consistently shows that this labour is disproportionately carried by women, racialized employees, and early-career staff (Gagnon et al., 2022).

In scientific, academic, and healthcare contexts, invisible labour often appears in the form of "voluntary" contributions that heavily influence workplace climate but are missing from official job descriptions. Examples include checking in on distressed colleagues, representing the unit on diversity committees, helping students navigate cultural barriers, or ensuring communication is accessible to all team members. Although these contributions are central to team cohesion and organizational wellbeing, they are often taken for granted.

Equity labour is a related concept referring specifically to the work involved in advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion—such as educating colleagues about cultural sensitivity, supporting marginalized trainees, or serving as an informal consultant on diversity matters. While organizations publicly value EDI, they often rely on racialized or equity-seeking staff to carry out this work informally, without recognition or workload adjustment (Herman, 2024). This places an unfair burden on those already navigating systemic inequities.

Recognizing invisible and equity labour during the early stages of hiring is crucial. If the role is expected to support students, moderate team dynamics, or carry EDI responsibility, these tasks must be explicitly articulated during the job analysis and clearly embedded in the job description. When these responsibilities are left vague or implied, they inevitably fall on already overextended individuals, which reinforces inequities rather than addressing them.

Accounting for this labour also supports retention. Employees who consistently provide unrecognized emotional, cultural, or relational labour experience higher burnout and lower belonging, particularly in research environments with high turnover or limited administrative support (Gagnon et al., 2022). When invisible labour is formally acknowledged and distributed through well-defined roles, the entire team benefits.

Reflection Exercise: "The Shadow Job Description"
1 minute — individual or group
Take a moment to write two short lists:

- List A: Tasks your team officially recognizes as part of staff roles.
- List B: Tasks that actually keep your team functioning but appear nowhere in any job description.

Then ask:

- Who performs the majority of the tasks in List B?
- Are these tasks disproportionately carried by women, racialized staff, or early-career employees?
- Should any of these tasks be formally included in the upcoming role?

This "shadow inventory" helps reveal hidden labour patterns and makes invisible work visible—before crafting the job description.

1.4 Embedding EDI Commitments Early

Embedding EDI commitments early in the hiring process ensures that equity is not treated as an optional add-on but as a structural component of how roles are designed, evaluated, and supported. When EDI principles are considered only at the end—during shortlisting or interviews—they function as filters rather than foundations. This reactive approach often

leads to inconsistent decisions, superficial diversity efforts, or a mismatch between organizational values and actual hiring practices (Herman, 2024).

Canadian organizations are increasingly expected to demonstrate that hiring decisions align with **human rights principles** and do not reinforce systemic barriers. Embedding EDI from during the planning stage means explicitly articulating how the role contributes to inclusion, accessibility, and equitable workload distribution. It also ensures that the competencies tied to collaboration, communication, cultural humility (i.e., staying aware of one's limits and being open to learning about others), reflexivity (i.e., recognizing how one's own biases and experiences influence decisions), and mentoring are named clearly rather than assumed "soft skills" that only some candidates are expected to possess (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

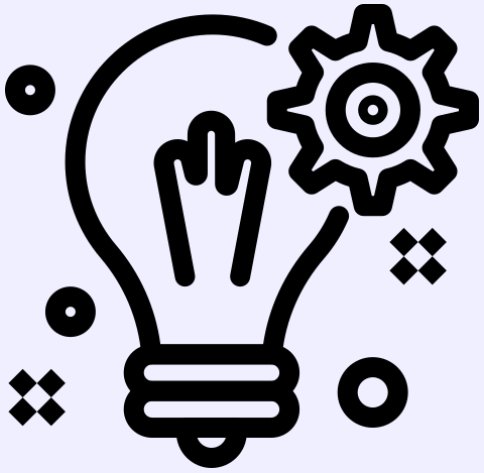
Embedding EDI early also supports **transparency**. When committees define equity-related expectations at the start—during the role definition and job analysis—candidates understand what is valued, and hiring panels have a consistent basis for evaluation. This reduces the likelihood that EDI becomes "extra credit" for some applicants, or that candidates from marginalized backgrounds are implicitly expected to shoulder cultural or mentoring responsibilities beyond the scope of their role (Gagnon et al., 2022).

Reflection
Use this during committee discussions.
"If someone with a completely different background from our current team were to step into this role, what conditions would help them succeed?

"Have we built those conditions into the job design?"

"How would we design the job ad?"

Understanding the Role (Job Analysis + Job Description)



Understanding the role is an essential early step in creating a fair and defensible hiring process. Before a position can be posted or evaluated, the hiring committee must be clear about what work the role involves, what competencies it requires, and how it supports the broader team. Many inequities in hiring emerge not from candidate evaluation but from unclear or outdated role definitions that rely on assumptions, informal expectations, or inherited job descriptions that no longer reflect actual responsibilities (Herman, 2024).

Job analysis provides a structured way to articulate the tasks, skills, knowledge, and working conditions associated with the position.

When approached through an **EDI-informed lens,** it also identifies potential barriers built into job expectations—such as unnecessary credential requirements, "nice-to-have" qualifications that exclude strong candidates, or hidden responsibilities that disproportionately fall on women and racialized staff (Gagnon et al., 2022). This step ensures that the role is grounded in actual needs rather than symbolic or historical expectations.

Translating the job analysis into a **clear, accessible, and inclusive job description** is equally important. Job descriptions are often the first point of contact between candidates and the organization, and they signal who is valued, who belongs, and what kinds of

contributions are recognized (Stewart & Valian, 2018). Inclusive job descriptions help broaden applicant pools, reduce self-selection out by underrepresented candidates, and communicate the organization's commitment to equity and transparency.

This section walks through how to conduct an **EDI-informed job analysis**, distinguish essential from preferred qualifications, and write a job description that is clear, inclusive, and accessible.

Together, these steps lay the groundwork for **fair evaluation criteria**, **bias-resistant interviewing,** and a hiring process that reflects Canadian human rights and employment equity principles.

2.1 EDI-Informed Job Analysis

Job analysis is the structured process of identifying the tasks, responsibilities, knowledge, skills, and working conditions required for a specific role. It is the foundation of fair hiring because it defines *what the job actually involves* before any decisions are made about who should fill it (Campion et al., 1993). Without job analysis, hiring committees often rely on assumptions, vague expectations, or inherited job descriptions that no longer reflect current needs, which increases the risk of inconsistency and unintentional bias (Herman, 2024).

A strong job analysis clarifies:

- What work needs to be done
- What competencies are required to do the work well
- What conditions the employee will work under
- What supports are needed for success

In an EDI-informed hiring process, job analysis also examines the equity implications of the role. This means identifying any expectations that could unintentionally disadvantage certain groups—for example, unnecessary educational requirements, unrealistic multitasking expectations, inflexible scheduling, or hidden emotional or cultural labour that has historically fallen on women or racialized staff (Gagnon et al., 2022).

When done properly, job analysis becomes an equity tool. It ensures that qualifications are tied to real job requirements rather than assumptions about prestige, personality, or familiarity. It prevents the use of vague categories such as “fit” or “strong communication skills” unless they are clearly defined and observable. It also ensures that invisible tasks—such as mentoring trainees or supporting accessibility needs—are formally recognized rather than simply expected of certain employees.

In short, job analysis is not just paperwork:
It is the core step that protects fairness, transparency, and defensibility across the entire hiring process. Every later step—job description writing, selection criteria, interview questions, scoring rubrics—comes directly from the job analysis. If the job analysis is unclear, every later decision becomes vulnerable to bias and inconsistency.

EDI-Informed Job Analysis Checklist
Use the checklist below to structure the job analysis before writing the job description or discussing candidates.

A. Clarify the Purpose of the Role

- ☐ What core problem or gap is this role meant to address?
- ☐ How does this role support the team’s scientific, academic, or service goals?
- ☐ How does it align with organizational values, mandates, and EDI commitments?
- ☐ Are we creating this role out of immediate pressure (e.g., funding, turnover), and if so, have we paused to define it clearly?

B. Identify Tasks & Responsibilities

- ☐ List all major tasks the role will perform.
- ☐ Identify which tasks are essential vs. occasional or administrative.
- ☐ Ensure the list reflects actual team needs, not an idealized version of the job.
- ☐ Check for tasks the team has been informally relying on marginalized staff to perform (Gagnon et al., 2022).

C. Map Required Knowledge, Skills & Abilities (KSAs)

- ☐ Identify the technical skills required (e.g., data management, protocols, reporting).
- ☐ Identify the relational or interpersonal skills needed (e.g., clarity, collaboration, responsiveness).
- ☐ Do not label relational or EDI-relevant skills as “soft skills”—treat them as evaluable behaviours.

☐ Remove KSAs that are not directly tied to job performance (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

D. Distinguish Essential vs. Preferred Requirements

☐ Which qualifications are truly essential to start the job on day one?
☐ Which qualifications could be learned on the job?
☐ Remove "requirements" that primarily reflect privilege or access (Herman, 2024).
☐ Ensure preferred qualifications do not become subconscious filters for exclusion.

E. Identify Barriers Embedded in the Role

☐ Are any requirements unnecessary (e.g., specific Canadian credentials, prestige institutions)?
☐ Does the role assume access to resources that not all candidates have?
☐ Does the expected schedule, meeting format, or workspace disadvantage caregivers, disabled staff, or international applicants?
☐ Are any responsibilities impossible to complete without unpaid invisible labour?

F. Account for Emotional, Cultural & Equity Labour

☐ Will the role include mentoring, onboarding, or accessibility support?
☐ Will the role interact with marginalized or diverse communities?
☐ Are these responsibilities formally reflected in the description, not implied?
☐ Remove assumptions that only certain staff should carry EDI-related labour (Gagnon et al., 2022).

G. Define the Working Conditions

☐ Typical hours and flexibility
☐ Hybrid, remote, or in-person expectations
☐ Physical, sensory, or emotional demands
☐ Travel expectations
☐ Support resources available (training, supervision, team structure)

H. Validate the Analysis

☐ Does the analysis reflect the real work or just last year's job description?
☐ Has the team reviewed the tasks for hidden biases or unrealistic expectations?
☐ Would someone new to the field understand what this job actually requires?
☐ Has equity been integrated throughout, not added as a final line?

Your job analysis is complete when:

- ✓ You can clearly explain what the job is,
- ✓ You can list the responsibilities
- ✓ You can justify each requirement, and
- ✓ You can show how the role supports equity rather than relying on it informally.

2.2 Writing or Updating the Job Description

A job description is one of the most powerful tools in the hiring process. It communicates the organization's expectations, signals who belongs, and frames how candidates assess whether they should apply. An EDI-informed job description must be clear, accessible, and directly tied to the job analysis rather than inherited templates or informal assumptions (Stewart & Valian, 2018). When job descriptions are outdated or vague, committees inevitably fill in the gaps with personal preferences, which increases bias and narrows the applicant pool (Herman, 2024).

Scenario: Job Description

Your team is preparing to hire a new research assistant. The department already has an old job description on file, so a committee member suggests simply updating the date and reposting it. The group reviews the document:

- Several tasks listed are from a project that no longer exists.
- No mention is made of mentorship, onboarding support, participant-facing communication, or accessibility tasks — despite these being major responsibilities.
- The posting includes vague statements like "excellent communication skills" and "ability to work well under pressure," but no explanation of what these behaviours actually look like.
- The job description ends with a generic EDI statement unrelated to the specific role.
- The qualifications list includes optional skills that were added years ago because "it might be useful one day."

As the group reads through, someone asks:

"If a new candidate read this, would they understand the actual work we need them to do?"
The room goes quiet.

This scenario highlights a common issue: job descriptions often accumulate outdated expectations, unexplained requirements, and vague competencies that do not reflect real needs. They also frequently exclude invisible tasks that are essential to the team's functioning, which means those tasks will fall informally on certain individuals—usually women, racialized employees, or early-career staff (Gagnon et al., 2022).

2.3 Essential vs Preferred Qualifications

Distinguishing between **essential** and **preferred** qualifications is one of the most important steps in creating a fair and equitable hiring process. Essential qualifications identify what a candidate must have *on day one* to perform the core responsibilities of the job. Preferred qualifications describe skills or experiences that may enhance performance but are *not required* for successful entry into the role.

This distinction matters because hiring committees often include preferred qualifications as if they are mandatory. When this happens, applicant pools become unnecessarily narrow, and individuals who have strong capability but different training pathways are unintentionally excluded.

Many preferred qualifications—such as experience with a very specific software, familiarity with Canadian institutions, or prior work in a particular lab—often reflect access and privilege rather than true job readiness (Herman, 2024).

Research shows that overinflated or unclear requirements contribute to self-selection out, particularly among women and racialized candidates, who tend to apply only when they meet nearly all listed criteria (Stewart & Valian, 2018). Being precise and cautious with preferred qualifications helps ensure that strong candidates are not discouraged from applying due to small or learnable gaps in experience.

Essential qualifications should always be directly tied to the **job analysis**, meaning they reflect the tasks and behaviours required for immediate performance. They should be observable, measurable, and clearly connected to the expected work.

Preferred qualifications, on the other hand, should be limited, purposeful, and framed to avoid functioning as gatekeeping tools. If a preferred qualification is not truly useful or risks excluding otherwise excellent candidates, it should be removed.

A useful question is:

"Would we hire a strong candidate who does not have this qualification?"

If the honest answer is yes, it belongs under preferred—not essential.

Clear separation between essential and preferred qualifications reduces bias, expands applicant pools, and strengthens the fairness and defensibility of the hiring process.

2.4 Inclusive Language & Accessibility

Inclusive and accessible language ensures that a wide range of candidates can understand, trust, and see themselves in the job posting. In hiring, language is not just descriptive — it is *signal-setting*. It tells applicants who is welcomed, who is valued, and who the organization assumes is the "default" candidate. Many job descriptions unintentionally exclude people by using jargon, inflated language, coded expectations, or outdated terms that reflect historical power structures rather than real job requirements (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

Accessible language also ensures that candidates using assistive technology, English language learners, neurodivergent applicants, and international candidates can clearly interpret what is required. This is especially important in Canadian workplaces, where candidates come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Accessibility is not about "simplifying" expectations — it is about removing unnecessary barriers that have nothing to do with job competency.

Inclusive language avoids assumptions about identity, background, or working style. For example, words such as “aggressive,” “dominant,” or “native speaker” carry gendered, racialized, or ableist associations and may prevent excellent candidates from applying. Similarly, terms such as “fast-paced,” “resilient,” or “thick-skinned” often describe workplaces that lack proper support, not genuine job requirements (Herman, 2024).

Accessibility also includes formatting:

- avoiding dense paragraphs,
- using clear bullet points,
- ensuring screen-reader compatibility,
- and removing unnecessary acronyms.

Clear, accessible language helps candidates understand whether they meet the **essential** qualifications and whether the role is feasible for them. It also signals that the organization takes fairness seriously.

Examples of What to Remove or Rewrite

Here are intentionally straightforward examples that make the point impossible to miss. These are the types of phrases that silently push people away:

❌ **“Must be a native English speaker.”**
→ **This is discriminatory.** Use “strong written and verbal communication skills.”

❌ **“Must be able to work in a fast-paced, high-pressure environment.”**
→ **Unless this is a trauma ward, this phrase usually means: “We’re disorganized.”**
Be honest about actual workload and support.

❌ **“Looking for someone who fits our lab culture.”**
→ **This is code for bias.**
Replace with the behaviours you expect: collaboration, clarity, responsibility, etc.

❌ **“Rockstar,” “Ninja,” “Guru,” “Powerhouse.”**
→ These terms disproportionately deter women and many international applicants. Use actual competencies instead.

❌ **“Must have experience at a top Canadian university.”**

→ **This is prestige bias** and discriminates against international and non-traditional pathways.
Name the *skills*, not the institution.

❌ **"Thick-skinned" / "Able to handle criticism."**
→ This is often a red flag for unhealthy communication norms.
Specify what kind of feedback processes exist.

❌ **Overstuffed sentences like:**
"The successful candidate will demonstrate strong initiative, exceptional organizational leadership, unparalleled multitasking ability, and the capacity to thrive under competing and intense demands."
→ **This is a recipe for burnout disguised as ambition.**

✓ **What to do instead**
Use **clear, neutral, behaviour-based language**:

- "Able to manage multiple projects with support and clear timelines."
- "Able to communicate findings to diverse audiences."
- "Comfortable learning new software with training provided."
- "Experience working collaboratively with colleagues from different backgrounds."

This signals professionalism, transparency, and fairness — and it attracts stronger candidates.

⭐ Sample of an Inclusive Job Posting

Position Title: Program & Research Coordinator (Example)

About the Role

We are seeking a coordinator who will support project planning, communication, and research activities across interdisciplinary teams. The role focuses on collaborative problem-solving, clear communication, and equitable workflow management.

Key Responsibilities

- Coordinate meetings, timelines, and shared documents with transparent communication.
- Support data collection, analysis, and knowledge-translation activities.

- Prepare project materials (e.g., agendas, summaries, presentations) with guidance and feedback.
- Contribute to building accessible, inclusive team practices.

Required Competencies

- Ability to manage multiple tasks with support and realistic timelines.
- Experience working with colleagues from diverse backgrounds.
- Willingness to learn new tools and processes with training provided.
- Strong communication skills, including comfort asking questions or seeking clarification.

Work Environment & Supports

We value learning and collaboration. New team members receive onboarding, mentorship, and access to accommodations as needed. We encourage applicants from historically excluded groups to apply.

Salary Range (Non-Negotiable Band)

This position is classified as **Coordinator II** under our institutional pay structure.

The approved salary band for this role is:

- **$57,421 – $64,983 CAD annually**

New hires are typically placed **between Step 1 and Step 3** ($57,421–$60,894) to maintain internal equity across the team.

Placement within this range is based solely on **verified, job-related experience** — not on negotiation skill or previous salary (to prevent inequities commonly affecting women, racialized candidates, and newcomers).

Annual Progression

Employees move up one step each year based on satisfactory performance:

- **Step 1:** $57,421
- **Step 2:** $59,120
- **Step 3:** $60,894
- **Step 4:** $62,742
- **Step 5:** $64,983 (maximum of band)

Benefits Package (Detailed Overview)

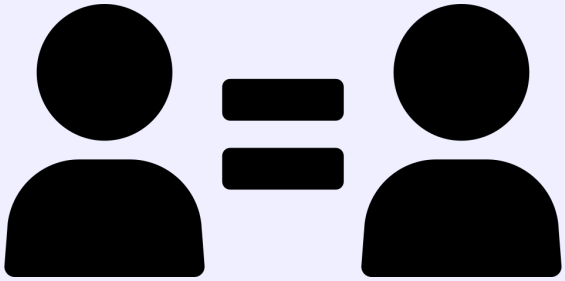
All employees in this classification receive:

- **Health, dental, and vision coverage** effective on Day 1
- **Paramedical services** (psychologists, physiotherapy, chiropractic, etc.) up to **$500–$1,000 per year**
- **Long-term disability insurance** (employee-paid)
- **Pension plan** with **5% employer contribution**, matched
- **20 vacation days** per year, plus statutory holidays and **2 personal days**
- **Paid sick time** (10 days/year), with flexibility for disability- or caregiving-related needs
- **Professional development fund** of **$1,000/year**
- **Access to hybrid work options** where operationally feasible
- **Extended accommodations** (ergonomic equipment, assistive technologies, modified schedules)
- **Equitable Pay Practices**

  To reduce systemic pay inequities, we do not:
- Request salary history
- Adjust offers upward or downward based on negotiation
- Make discretionary exceptions outside the published band

All offers are reviewed by HR for **equity, consistency, and compliance with Canadian human rights guidelines**.

Designing a Fair Evaluation Framework



3.1 Establishing Selection Criteria

Selection criteria are the foundation of a fair and defensible hiring process. They specify what the hiring committee is evaluating, why, and how. Without predetermined criteria, committees tend to fall back on personal impressions, institutional prestige, or vague ideas of “fit,” all of which introduce subjectivity and bias (Herman, 2024).

Research consistently shows that structured, evidence-based criteria lead to more accurate hiring decisions and reduce the influence of stereotypes or interpersonal preferences (Campion et al., 1997; Calluso & Devetag, 2024).

Strong selection criteria come directly from the job analysis. They identify the essential responsibilities of the role and translate them into observable, measurable behaviours. For example, instead of saying “strong communication skills,” the criteria should specify behavioural indicators such as “ability to explain complex technical information in clear, accessible language to diverse audiences.” This prevents the committee from interpreting communication quality based on accent, personality, familiarity, or cultural style (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

Selection criteria also improve transparency. Candidates know what will be evaluated, and committee members know what evidence to look for. This allows the hiring process to focus on job-related competencies rather than assumed preferences, unspoken expectations, or “gut feelings.”

Importantly, selection criteria should limit the number of competencies assessed. Overly long lists encourage committees to fall back on subjective shortcuts. Fewer, clearer criteria lead to more reliable scoring and more equitable decisions.

Practical Example: Good vs. Bad Selection Criteria

Scenario: Hiring a Research Coordinator

Your team needs someone who will:

- manage participant schedules
- maintain ethics documentation
- support trainee onboarding
- communicate findings to community partners
- coordinate day-to-day lab operations

A weak hiring process might produce criteria like:

❌ Poorly written criteria (far too vague)

"Good communication skills"
"Strong organizational ability"
"Works well under pressure"
"Good with people"
"Strong work ethic"

These phrases are meaningless because they describe traits, not behaviours. They invite bias, reward confidence over competence, and punish applicants whose communication styles differ from the reviewers.

✓ Well-written criteria (specific and evidence-based)

"Communication: Demonstrates ability to explain research materials in plain language to diverse groups, with examples provided in interview or application."

"Organization: Manages multiple tasks using calendars, checklists, or tracking systems; evidence includes prior project coordination or detailed work samples."

"Ethics & Documentation: Shows experience maintaining accurate records, following protocols, and managing sensitive information."

"Equity & Inclusion: Demonstrates behaviours that support accessibility, participant comfort, and culturally respectful communication."

Why does the second set work?

- They are observable (you can watch or hear the behaviour).
- They are measurable (you can rate the quality).
- They are job-based (they come directly from the tasks).
- They reduce reliance on impression-based judgments.

This structure helps every reviewer evaluate candidates in the same way, preventing unconscious biases from guiding decisions about who is “strong,” “professional,” or a “good fit.”

3.2 Building Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS)

Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS) are structured tools that link each selection criterion to specific, observable behaviours. Instead of rating candidates based on subjective impressions (e.g., “strong communicator”), BARS require reviewers to assess candidates using clearly defined behavioural indicators at different performance levels (Smith & Kendall, 1963; LeBreton & Senter, 2008).

Using BARS increases reliability and reduces bias by giving all reviewers a shared understanding of what “excellent,” “acceptable,” or “insufficient” performance actually looks like in the context of the job. It also makes scoring more defensible, since evaluations are tied to behaviours directly derived from the job analysis rather than personality traits or reviewer preferences. Ultimately, BARS help ensure that candidates are assessed consistently and based on evidence, strengthening both fairness and accuracy in the selection process (Calluso & Devetag, 2024).

3.3 Weighting Competencies Fairly

Weighting competencies is the process of deciding **which skills and behaviours** matter most for successful performance, and how much influence each one should have in the final hiring decision. Not all competencies contribute equally to the job, and without intentional weighting, committees often overvalue what feels familiar (e.g., academic pedigree, personality, communication style) while undervaluing the competencies that are actually essential (Herman, 2024).

Fair weighting ensures that the hiring process reflects **real job demands**, not reviewer preferences. For example, a role that involves participant coordination may require strong organization and ethical documentation far more than advanced statistical skills. When

committees weight competencies inconsistently or intuitively, biases such as prestige bias, affinity bias, and halo effects can shape decisions (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

Setting weights early — during the design of evaluation materials — creates transparency and defensibility. It also prevents "after-the-fact" rationalizing where committees elevate competencies only after their preferred candidate demonstrates them (Calluso & Devetag, 2024). Weighting is ultimately an equity practice: it helps prevent overemphasizing credentials tied to privilege while undervaluing relational or EDI-related work that is essential but historically unacknowledged (Gagnon et al., 2022).

Mini Activity: "The 100-Point Test"
A fast way to catch hidden bias in weighting

Give the hiring committee **100 points** to distribute across the competencies identified in the job analysis.

- List all essential competencies (e.g., documentation accuracy, plain-language communication, coordination, ethics compliance, collaboration).
- Ask each reviewer to privately allocate 100 points across these competencies based on what truly matters for the job.
- Compare the distributions.

What you're looking for:

- Are reviewers weighting prestige-based qualities higher than job-based ones?
- Are "communication" or "professionalism" used as euphemisms for personal similarity?
- Are EDI-relevant behaviours (e.g., participant comfort, accessibility, mentoring) undervalued despite being essential?
- Are some reviewers weighting competencies based on past hires rather than the actual role?

***If point* allocations *vary wildly, pause and re-discuss the job analysis*.**
This 3-minute activity exposes assumptions before they turn into biased scoring.

3.4 Avoiding Bias When Defining Fit

"Fit" is one of the most commonly misused concepts in hiring. When left undefined, it becomes a placeholder for personal comfort, familiarity, and unconscious biases. Committees often equate fit with sameness — preferring candidates who share their

background, communication style, educational pathway, or personality — rather than evaluating whether the candidate aligns with the behaviours, values, and responsibilities required for the role (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

This is especially problematic in academic, biomedical, and research environments, where informal networks and prestige norms strongly influence decision-making (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014). Unstructured notions of fit systematically disadvantage candidates from underrepresented backgrounds and make the hiring process less transparent, less fair, and harder to defend (Herman, 2024).

Fit should **never** refer to personality, similarity, or comfort.
It should refer only to **alignment with job-based behaviours**, such as collaboration, reliability, ethical conduct, clarity in communication, and respect for diverse perspectives.

Scenario: "The Comfortable Candidate"
Your committee is interviewing two finalists for a coordinator role.

Candidate A:

- Went to the same university as two committee members
- Speaks confidently and casually
- Has a similar communication style to the team
- Lacks experience with key tasks such as ethics documentation and participant coordination

Candidate B:

- Comes from a different institutional background
- Speaks in a more formal or reserved manner
- Has extensive experience coordinating research activities, managing sensitive data, and engaging with diverse communities
- Demonstrates strong alignment with job-based competencies

During the debrief, someone says:
"Candidate A just felt like a better fit."

When asked why, the person struggles to provide job-based reasons. Instead, they mention comfort, familiarity, and ease of conversation. This is a red flag.

This scenario illustrates how “fit” can mask implicit bias. Candidate A feels familiar, but Candidate B is more qualified based on essential competencies. If the committee does not clearly define fit beforehand, they risk choosing the person who is easier to talk to rather than the person who is demonstrably capable of performing the work.

Attracting Candidates

4.1 Where to Post the Job

Where a job is posted significantly shapes who sees it, who applies, and ultimately who is considered. Relying only on traditional or discipline-specific job boards tends to reproduce the demographics already dominant in that field, especially in academia, biomedical science, and research settings (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014).

An equitable posting strategy includes **both mainstream platforms** and networks that reach candidates from historically underrepresented groups.

In a Canadian context, this means complementing institutional job boards with postings on **professional associations, community organizations, and equity-focused networks**. Posting across a broader range of platforms helps reduce the effects of informal networks and increases transparency by giving all candidates equal access to opportunities. It also signals organizational commitment to inclusive hiring, builds trust with applicants, and strengthens the overall quality and diversity of the talent pool (Peek et al., 2013).

Mainstream platforms (general audience):

- **LinkedIn** – most widely used for professional roles; strong for research, healthcare, and industry postings.
- **Indeed (Canada)** – broad reach, useful for early-career and administrative roles.

Canadian academic & research platforms:

- **University Affairs (UA Careers)** – widely used for academic, research, and professional staff positions.
- **CAUBO / CARA / CSCI job boards** – depending on the role (research admin, compliance, biomedical science).
- **HigherEdJobs (Canada section)** – additional visibility for academic searches.

Biomedical & health-related networks:

- **BioTalent Canada Job Board** – biotechnology, biomedical research, health innovation.
- **HealthCareCAN / CIHR Institute newsletters** – for research and health-policy roles.
- **Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) Job Board** – relevant for surveillance, lab science, public health analytics.

Equity-focused and community networks:

- **Indigenous Link / Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) job boards**
- **Canadian Centre for Diversity & Inclusion (CCDI) Career Spotlight**
- **ACCES Employment, TRIEC, and other newcomer-serving organizations**
- **Local multicultural councils** (e.g., **Multicultural Council of Windsor & Essex County**)
- **QueerTech**, **Pride at Work Canada** – LGBTQIA2S+ inclusive networks
- **DAWN Canada** – for people with disabilities and women with disabilities

A clear posting strategy ensures that qualified candidates—regardless of background—have a fair chance to see and apply for the role.

4.2 Inclusive Messaging in the Posting

Inclusive messaging in a job posting ensures that candidates from diverse backgrounds can understand the role, see themselves as potential applicants, and trust that the hiring process is fair. The language used in postings communicates far more than responsibilities — it signals who an organization values, how it treats its employees, and whether equity is taken seriously or merely mentioned symbolically (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

Inclusive messaging avoids coded language, prestige-based assumptions, and phrases that subtly discourage applicants from marginalized groups. It emphasizes clarity, accessibility, and behavioural expectations instead of personality traits or vague

descriptors. For instance, instead of saying a candidate must be “highly polished” or “thick-skinned,” inclusive messaging explains the specific tasks, communication needs, and supports available in the role. This makes the posting more transparent and protects candidates from exclusion based on stereotypes or unspoken cultural norms (Herman, 2024).

An inclusive posting also communicates the organization’s EDI commitments in a way that is **role-relevant** rather than superficial. Instead of a generic diversity statement, it specifies how the workplace supports equity, what resources are available, and how the role contributes to this environment. This demonstrates authenticity and reduces the burden on marginalized applicants to guess whether the organization is prepared to support them (Gagnon et al., 2022).

Finally, messaging should be accessible — using plain language, avoiding unnecessary jargon, and maintaining formatting compatible with screen readers. Clear and accessible postings invite a wider pool of qualified candidates and reduce barriers unrelated to job competency.

Example of Non-inclusive, but very common language

“We are looking for a highly motivated, detail-oriented individual who can handle competing priorities in a fast-paced environment. The ideal candidate is confident, polished, and able to communicate professionally with senior leadership. Must be able to multitask, work independently, and adapt quickly to changing demands.”

Why is this important:

“Highly motivated” → subjective; often used to justify overwork.

“Fast-paced environment” → signals chronic stress, deters caregivers & disabled applicants.

“Polished” and “professional” → coded language tied to race, class, dialect, and neurotypical norms.

“Multitask” → unrealistic cognitive demand; not tied to job analysis.

“Adapt quickly to changing demands” → signals instability, lack of structure.

No mention of training/support → implies sink-or-swim.

4.3 Recruitment Outreach & Pipelines

Recruitment outreach goes beyond simply posting a job. It involves intentionally expanding awareness of the opportunity so that qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds actually encounter it. Outreach is especially important in scientific, academic, and healthcare settings, where hiring often depends on informal networks or word-of-mouth — systems that disproportionately favour those already well-connected to the institution or field (Peek et al., 2013).

Building inclusive recruitment pipelines helps counter these structural barriers. Pipelines are the long-term relationships an organization maintains with communities, educational institutions, and professional networks. These relationships help ensure that opportunities consistently reach candidates who have historically been underrepresented in the field. In the Canadian context, this might include partnerships with community colleges, newcomer organizations, Indigenous-serving institutions, disability employment networks, and equity-focused professional associations.

Outreach also strengthens trust. Many candidates from marginalized groups are wary of environments where diversity is treated as a checkbox or where they may not feel supported. Transparent information sessions, clear communication about role expectations, and honest descriptions of workplace culture help reduce stereotype threat and anxiety during the application process (Steele & Aronson, 1995). These practices not only broaden the applicant pool but also ensure that candidates understand the environment they are considering joining.

Finally, effective outreach is proactive rather than reactive. Instead of waiting until a posting goes live, organizations can build connections months or even years in advance through mentorship programs, internships, campus partnerships, and community engagement (Rosales et al., 2022). This makes future hiring more equitable and predictable by ensuring a steady flow of applicants who are already familiar with the organization’s work and values.

4.4 Posting Timelines & Accessibility

Posting timelines play a critical role in determining who is able to apply. Short or rushed posting periods tend to benefit candidates who already have insider knowledge, flexible schedules, or fewer caregiving responsibilities — which disproportionately excludes women, newcomers, disabled applicants, and those working multiple jobs (Herman, 2024). Longer, clearly communicated timelines increase fairness by giving all candidates equal time to prepare strong applications.

Accessibility also depends on when and how postings are released. Posting only during major holidays, academic breaks, or grant-reporting periods can unintentionally suppress applicant diversity. Similarly, releasing a posting at the last minute, or leaving it open for an undefined period, creates uncertainty that advantages insiders and disadvantages those with less stable work conditions.

A fair timeline is clear, predictable, and respectful of applicants' realities. It includes:

- a posting period long enough for thoughtful applications,
- a clear closing date and time,
- and transparency about the overall hiring schedule.

These practices signal professionalism, reduce unnecessary stress, and help ensure that applicants' ability to prepare is not shaped by factors unrelated to their qualifications.

Application Intake & Screening

5.1 Standardized Application Intake

Standardizing application intake ensures that all candidates are treated consistently and that no one gains an advantage because of timing, format, or informal pathways. When application intake is inconsistent — for example, when some applicants send materials directly to a supervisor while others use an online system — the process becomes vulnerable to bias and unequal access (Herman, 2024). A standardized intake process creates fairness, improves transparency, and forms the foundation for an equitable evaluation stage.

Use the checklist below to ensure intake processes are consistent and accessible.

Standardized Application Intake Checklist

A. Centralize How Applications Are Received

- ☐ All candidates apply through the same portal or email address.
- ☐ No applications are accepted through personal email, text, or informal channels.
- ☐ Late or incomplete applications are handled according to pre-established rules.

B. Provide Clear Instructions for Applicants

- ☐ Specify required documents (CV, cover letter, writing sample, references, etc.).
- ☐ Explain acceptable file formats (PDF, Word).
- ☐ Outline naming conventions (e.g., "Lastname_Firstname_CV").
- ☐ Avoid requiring excessive or inaccessible materials unless essential.

C. Ensure Accessibility of the Intake Process

- ☐ The posting includes a clear statement inviting accommodation requests.
- ☐ Instructions are written in plain language and screen-reader compatible.
- ☐ Applicants can request alternative formats if needed (audio, extended page limits, etc.).
- ☐ The application platform itself is accessible (no CAPTCHAs that are not accessible, no forced timed entries).

D. Maintain Intake Consistency

- ☐ All applications received are timestamped and logged.
- ☐ All files are stored in a central, secure location.
- ☐ No reviewer sees applications until the posting closes (reduces early-bird bias).
- ☐ All candidates receive the same acknowledgement email or confirmation.

E. Prevent Bias in Early Handling

- ☐ No reviewer evaluates or discusses candidates during the intake period.
- ☐ Names, institutions, or demographic information are not highlighted at this stage.
- ☐ Intake staff do not comment on applications beyond confirming receipt.

F. Protect Confidentiality & Professionalism

- ☐ Application materials are shared only with members of the hiring committee.
- ☐ Confidential documents (e.g., transcripts, reference letters) are handled securely.
- ☐ All committee members agree to confidentiality before accessing files.

Your intake process is standardized when:

- ✓ All candidates use the same process
- ✓ Instructions are clear and accessible
- ✓ No informal advantages exist
- ✓ Early biases are minimized through consistent handling

5.2 Masked Review (When Applicable)

Masked review — sometimes called blinded or anonymized review — is the practice of removing identifiable information from applicant materials so reviewers focus on **skills, behaviours, and evidence**, not on characteristics unrelated to job performance. In many hiring contexts, especially within science and academia, information such as names, institutions, publications, accents, or career paths can unintentionally influence reviewers' perceptions (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Bohnet, 2016). Masking removes these cues and allows committees to assess candidates on the basis of the competencies identified in the job analysis.

Masked review is most effective when used strategically, typically during the **initial screening** stage. Removing names, addresses, school names, and other identity cues helps reduce prestige bias, linguistic bias, and assumptions about cultural or socioeconomic background.

While not always feasible for every role — especially those requiring portfolios or specialized training — masking is a powerful tool for increasing fairness when it can be applied meaningfully (Goldin & Rouse, 2000).

Importantly, masking is not about hiding identity or preventing diverse self-expression. Instead, it is a way to ensure that candidates are first evaluated based on their **capabilities**, before reviewers form impressions influenced by familiarity, favouritism, or implicit bias. Once candidates advance to interviews, masking typically ends — but the structure created in early stages helps ensure a more equitable pool of finalists.

Reflection Questions: "What Are We Actually Evaluating?"
Use these questions during committee discussions before deciding whether to use masked review:

1. Are we unintentionally evaluating identity instead of competence?
   - Would knowledge of someone's name, accent, or institution influence impressions?
   - Are we prone to prestige bias (e.g., valuing certain universities or labs more highly)?
2. Are any of our criteria vulnerable to bias?

- Are we assessing writing quality, clarity, or professionalism in ways tied to cultural or linguistic norms?
- Would masking allow us to assess these behaviours more fairly?

3. Can masking help us focus on the most essential competencies?
   - For example, organization, accuracy, ethics, coordination, or collaboration.
4. Is masking feasible for this role?
   - Are application materials easy to anonymize?
   - Would removing identifiable information obscure essential qualifications?
5. What would we learn about our own evaluation habits if masking changed our rankings?
   - If masked review produces a very different shortlist, what does that reveal about current decision-making patterns?

1-Minute Closing Reflection

Ask each committee member to answer silently:

"If I didn't know who wrote this application, what qualities would stand out to me the most — and are those the qualities that actually matter for the job?"

This single question often reveals more bias — and more fairness — than any formal training session.

5.3 Accessibility & Accommodation Statements

Accessibility and accommodation statements communicate an organization's commitment to ensuring that all qualified candidates can participate fully in the hiring process. These statements are not decorative; they are a required component of equitable hiring and an important signal that the organization understands its obligations under Canadian human rights and accessibility legislation, including the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and associated provincial guidelines.

A strong accessibility statement tells candidates **what supports are available**, **how to request accommodations**, and **whom to contact**, using language that is clear, respectful, and free of medicalizing or stigmatizing terms. This allows applicants with disabilities, chronic illnesses, caregiving responsibilities, neurodivergence, or other access needs to participate fully without fear of penalty or judgment (Herman, 2024).

Unlike the brief, generic statements often seen in postings ("accommodations available upon request"), meaningful accessibility statements proactively normalize the

accommodation process. They acknowledge that access needs vary, that support is a shared responsibility, and that requesting accommodations does not disadvantage an applicant.

These statements also reduce applicant anxiety by clarifying **when** and **how** accommodations can be arranged — whether during the application stage, screening, interviews, or assessments. They also demonstrate that the organization is prepared to offer accessible formats, extended time, alternative communication channels, assistive technology, or adjustments to interview formats.

Embedding clear accessibility and accommodation statements in the posting and application instructions ensures transparency, builds trust, and helps candidates understand that their needs will be met with professionalism and respect.

5.4 Initial Screening Using Criteria

Initial screening is the first evaluation stage after the posting closes and is conducted using only the **essential qualifications** and **core behavioural criteria** identified in the job analysis. This step ensures that applicants are assessed fairly and consistently before moving on to deeper review. Screening decisions must be grounded in explicit evidence from the application materials, not on comparative judgments, familiarity, or assumptions (Herman, 2024).

A structured initial screening process helps prevent strong candidates from being excluded prematurely due to subjective impressions, writing preferences, prestige bias, or assumptions about background. Reviewers evaluate each application **against the criteria**, not against other candidates, and record brief rationales tied directly to observable evidence. This maintains transparency and strengthens defensibility, especially within scientific and academic environments where competitive applicant pools can heighten bias risks (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

Clear documentation at this stage allows the committee to explain why certain applicants advance and others do not, ensuring compliance with Canadian employment standards and human rights expectations. When done properly, initial screening produces a shortlist

of candidates who genuinely meet the essential requirements, forming the basis for a consistent and equitable interview process.

5.5 Shortlisting Candidates

Shortlisting is the process of narrowing the applicant pool to candidates who meet the essential qualifications and demonstrate the key competencies identified in the job analysis. An equitable shortlisting process relies on **evidence-based criteria**, not impressions, familiarity, or assumptions (Herman, 2024).

The goal is to ensure that each applicant is evaluated consistently based on:

- the defined selection criteria,
- the behavioural indicators in the rating scales, and
- the weighting established in advance.

Committees should avoid shortcuts such as focusing only on education, previous institutions, or publication counts — all of which are strongly shaped by unequal access to opportunity rather than actual capability (Stewart & Valian, 2018). Evidence-based shortlisting requires reviewers to link every positive or negative evaluation to a **specific behaviour, example, or document** provided by the candidate, not a personal interpretation of “impressive” or “professional.”

An effective process also ensures that committee members are evaluating the same evidence. This means using standardized scoring rubrics, consistent instructions, and documented rationales. These steps increase defensibility, reduce bias, and ensure that qualified candidates are not screened out due to subjective impressions or unequal expectations.

Example: Weak vs. Strong Shortlisting

❌ **Weak (but very common) shortlisting**

A committee member says:

> "I don't think Candidate B is strong. Their CV looks a bit light, and their cover letter feels generic."

When asked for details, they cannot connect their judgment to the established criteria. Instead, they rely on vague impressions influenced by writing tone, formatting preferences, or assumptions about "productivity."

This type of shortlisting:

- penalizes candidates with non-traditional paths
- rewards formatting, confidence, or familiarity
- obscures bias under the language of "quality" or "strength"
- violates the principles of structured, fair hiring

✓ **Strong, evidence-based shortlisting**

Another committee member says:

> "Candidate B meets all essential qualifications. In their writing sample, they provide a clear example of coordinating participant schedules, which aligns with Criterion 2. Their description of maintaining ethics files matches the behavioural indicators for Criterion 4. The only area not demonstrated is experience with community-facing communication, so I rated that as 'developing.' Otherwise, their evidence is solid."

This response is:

- tied to the job analysis
- rooted in behavioural evidence
- consistent with the rating scale
- transparent and defensible

Candidate B may or may not be shortlisted — but the decision is based on evidence, not impressions.

Interviews

6.1 Designing a Structured Interview

Structured interviews are one of the strongest predictors of job performance because they evaluate behaviours rather than impressions, conversational fluency, or familiarity (Herman, 2024). Using standardized questions, clear behavioural indicators, and predefined scoring rubrics ensures that every candidate is assessed consistently and that the interview measures the competencies derived from the job analysis—rather than subjective traits such as confidence, accent, or social style (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

In science and biomed environments, structured interviews mitigate prestige bias, reduce over-reliance on prior institutions or supervisors, and ensure that candidates from historically excluded groups are not disadvantaged by informal norms or “fit” expectations. Structured interviews also strengthen defensibility by linking each question directly to measurable work behaviours.

Below is a set of **science-specific, EDI-safe, behaviourally-predictive interview questions** aligned with typical biomedical roles.

🔬 **Structured Interview Questions for Biomedical & Scientific Roles**

(Use 6–10 questions total. Choose from categories as needed.)

A. Research Rigor & Scientific Problem-Solving

- "Tell us about a time you had to troubleshoot an unexpected issue in an experiment or protocol. What steps did you take?"
  Assesses: problem-solving process, documentation habits, reasoning.
- "Describe how you ensure data integrity from collection to storage."
  Assesses: reproducibility, ethics, attention to detail.
- "Give an example of a situation where results contradicted your expectations. How did you proceed?"
  Assesses: scientific thinking, adaptability, bias awareness.

B. Technical Competence (Role-Specific)

(Choose depending on wet lab / dry lab)

Wet Lab

- "Walk us through how you prepare for a complex assay to ensure reliability and safety."
- "Tell us about a time you managed multiple samples or protocols simultaneously. How did you prevent errors?"

Computational / Bioinformatics

- "Describe a time you had to debug code or a workflow under time pressure. What was your approach?"
- "How do you validate that your data pipelines produce accurate, reproducible output?"

C. Collaboration, Lab Culture & Team Dynamics

- "Describe a time you worked with someone who had a very different communication style or level of experience. What did you do to collaborate effectively?"
  Assesses interpersonal adaptability without penalizing neurodivergent or immigrant candidates by focusing on behaviour rather than personality.
- "Give an example of how you handle disagreements about data interpretation or method selection."
- "Tell us about a time you contributed to creating a respectful or inclusive environment in a lab or research team."- EDI-aligned without forcing identity disclosure.

D. Organization, Time, and Project Management

- "How do you prioritize your tasks when dealing with competing deadlines in the lab?"

- "Describe your method for tracking experiments, analyses, or project progress."

E. Ethical Reasoning & Research Integrity

- "Describe a time when you identified a potential ethical or procedural issue in your research environment. How did you address it?"
- "How do you ensure that your work aligns with institutional and regulatory requirements (e.g., REB, biosafety, data policies)?"

F. Accessibility, EDI, and Psychological Safety

These are legally safe in Canada because they ask about behaviour, not identity.

- "Tell us about a time you adapted your communication or workflow to support a teammate's different working style or access needs."
  Assesses inclusive behaviour, not personal identity categories.
- "How do you contribute to a lab environment where colleagues feel comfortable asking questions, raising concerns, or admitting mistakes?"
- "Describe a time when you noticed someone being excluded or overlooked in a team setting. What did you do?"

Avoid these types of questions:

- asking about protected characteristics (illegal)
- forcing candidates to self-disclose disability or personal identity
- cultural bias (e.g., North American norms of confidence or self-promotion)
- They evaluate behaviours, not "fit."

6.2 Interview Panel Composition

The composition of an **interview pane**l significantly affects both the fairness and the quality of candidate evaluations. Diverse panels improve reliability by reducing the influence of individual biases, increasing the range of perspectives represented, and ensuring that decision-making is not dominated by a single status group (Herman, 2024). Panel composition also shapes how safe and respected candidates feel during the interview, particularly those from groups historically underrepresented in biomedical sciences (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

An effective interview panel includes individuals who understand the job demands, can evaluate candidates based on the behavioural indicators established earlier, and have participated in structured scoring calibration.

Representation matters — but tokenism must be avoided. The goal is not to "look diverse," but to build a panel capable of identifying varied forms of competence, reducing over-

reliance on prestige cues, and interrupting interpersonal risk biases (e.g., assumptions about communication style, personality, accent, or confidence).

In Canadian contexts, panels should also be prepared to offer accessible formats, incorporate trauma-informed practices where appropriate, and avoid creating power-heavy dynamics (e.g., one senior PI and two trainees with no decision-making power). What matters is ensuring that every panel member can evaluate, contribute, and challenge decisions using evidence rather than hierarchy.

Panel members must commit to using structured rubrics, avoiding side conversations during or between interviews, and grounding discussion in behavioural evidence. This maintains defensibility and upholds human rights expectations across the selection process.

Scenario: The Unintentional Power Imbalance
A biomedical research center is hiring a Research Technician.
The initial interview panel includes:

- the Principal Investigator (PI),
- a senior postdoc, and
- the lab's administrative coordinator.

On paper, this seems adequate — but during early calibration, the coordinator expresses discomfort with evaluating technical competencies, and the postdoc notes that the PI tends to dominate discussions, making it difficult to raise concerns. Additionally, all three panel members have similar training backgrounds and were trained under the same PI, limiting the diversity of perspectives.

What the committee changes:
After reflecting on these concerns, the hiring lead adjusts the panel to include:

- the original PI (role: assess high-level lab alignment), a research technologist from another lab who has no stake in the position (role: evaluate hands-on competencies),
- the administrative coordinator (role: evaluate organizational competencies), and an EDI-trained staff member from the department (role: observe process fairness, support accessibility, maintain structured scoring).

Outcome:
The new panel composition results in:

- more balanced participation,
- reduced pressure on trainees to defer to the PI's views,
- higher-quality technical evaluation,
- a more welcoming and neutral environment for candidates,
- and higher reliability in scoring due to multiple perspectives.

This example illustrates how panel composition is not about optics — it is about creating the conditions for consistent, evidence-based evaluation.

6.3 Scoring & Comparing Candidates

Scoring and comparing candidates must be grounded in the competencies and behavioural indicators established earlier in the hiring process. Structured scoring reduces subjective impressions, halo effects, affinity bias, and prestige bias — all of which disproportionately disadvantage candidates from historically excluded groups in science (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

Using a standardized scoring rubric allows each interviewer to evaluate the **same behaviours** using **the same definitions**, improving inter-rater reliability and ensuring decisions are consistent, transparent, and defensible (Herman, 2024).

Scores must be recorded **individually** before any group discussion to prevent influence from seniority, confidence, hierarchy, or status. Interviewers then compare their ratings and reconcile differences by referring back to **specific evidence from candidate responses**, not impressions or assumptions.

The goal is not to rank candidates based on personality, polish, or "presence," but to determine how strongly each candidate demonstrates the required competencies. A structured comparison also prevents committees from defaulting to "fit," a vague construct frequently tied to similarity, cultural norms, or dominant group expectations.

Scoring Template: Structured Interview Rubric

Competency	Behavioural Indicators	Rating Scale	Score	Evidence From Interview

Technical Skills & Methodological Rigour	• Demonstrates accurate understanding of lab protocols • Explains troubleshooting steps logically • Shows adherence to safety & reproducibility standards	1 = Not Demonstrated 2 = Partially Demonstrated 3 = Fully Demonstrated 4 = Strongly Demonstrated		(Write specific comments tied to candidate's actual examples)
Scientific Problem-Solving	• Breaks problems into steps • Uses evidence-based reasoning • Recognizes limitations & uncertainties	1 – 4		
Organization & Reliability	• Prioritizes effectively • Manages competing deadlines • Follows documentation processes accurately	1 – 4		
Communication & Collaboration	• Communicates clearly with diverse team members • Adjusts style based on audience needs • Navigates disagreements respectfully	1 – 4		
EDI & Psychological Safety Behaviours	• Demonstrates inclusive behaviour • Recognizes access needs without assumptions • Contributes to respectful lab culture	1 – 4		
Ethics & Research Integrity	• Identifies ethical issues	1 – 4		

	• Upholds data integrity • Follows regulatory requirements			

Total Score & Comparison Table

(Use after individual scoring is complete)

Candidate	Technical Skills	Problem-Solving	Organization	Collaboration	EDI Behaviours	Ethics	Total (/ 24)	Notes (Evidence-Based)
Candidate A								
Candidate B								
Candidate C								

How to Use These Tables (1-minute instructions)

✓ Score each competency independently using the behavioural indicators.

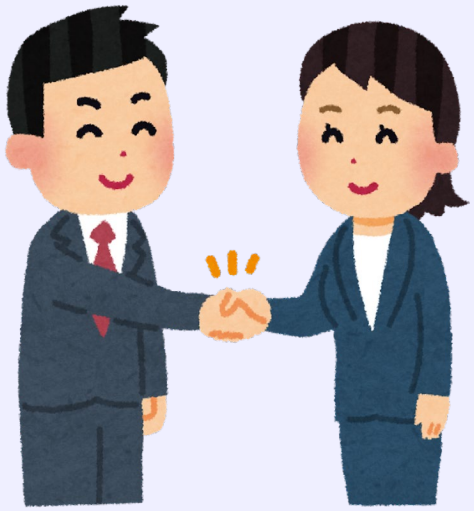
✓ Record only evidence, not impressions ("gave a concrete example of troubleshooting RNA degradation").

✓ Do not discuss scores until all interviewers have submitted their sheets.

✓ When comparing candidates, focus on competency strengths rather than global rankings.

✓ If two candidates tie, use evidence, not personality or "fit," to differentiate.

Final Decision & Hiring



7.1 Structured Reference Checks

Structured reference checks verify a candidate's past behaviours using the same competencies defined earlier in the hiring process. Instead of informal conversations that rely on personal impressions or reputation, structured reference checks use standardized questions, behaviourally anchored prompts, and consistent scoring. This reduces bias, limits the influence of interpersonal relationships, and ensures that information gathered is job-relevant and legally defensible (Herman, 2024).

Reference checks should focus on **specific behaviours**, not personality descriptions or general praise. They must avoid questions that could elicit information about protected characteristics under Canadian human rights law. Using the same set of questions for every reference ensures fairness, improves reliability, and prevents overreliance on prestige, familiarity, or institutional networks—factors that often disadvantage candidates from underrepresented groups in science (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

Structured reference checks confirm whether the candidate demonstrated the competencies required for the role while also identifying the supports they may need to succeed.

7.2 Culture & Interpersonal Risk Screening

In high-stakes scientific, biomedical, and technical environments, the cost of hiring someone who engages in harmful interpersonal behaviour is significant. Research shows that disrespect, unreliability, defensiveness, unethical conduct, and psychologically unsafe behaviour damage team performance, erode trust, and disproportionately impact marginalized staff (Stewart & Valian, 2018).

Because of these risks, many organizations use a **formal culture and interpersonal risk assessment**, delivered by a trained I-O psychology professional, as part of the hiring process. These assessments are structured, behaviour-focused, and grounded in validated models of workplace behaviour — not intuition or personality preference. They typically involve a **60–180 minute structured interview**, sometimes supplemented by situational judgment tasks or validated psychometric tools.

The purpose is not to judge personality or "likability," which would be discriminatory and legally indefensible. Instead, the goal is to identify **behavioural patterns** that predict whether a candidate will uphold or undermine a healthy, inclusive work environment. Canadian human rights law allows these assessments when they evaluate **job-relevant behaviours**, are administered consistently, and avoid probing protected characteristics. A culture risk assessment examines how a candidate handles:

- accountability and error recovery,
- conflict and feedback,
- collaboration with diverse colleagues,
- ethical challenges,
- power and boundaries,
- stress and ambiguity,
- communication with individuals with different needs or approaches,
- and contributions to psychological safety.

These behaviours are assessed against **explicitly defined, role-relevant expectations**, not against team similarity or subjective notions of "fit." The result is a defensible,

evidence-based evaluation of whether the candidate's behavioural tendencies align with the organization's values, equity commitments, and interpersonal norms (Herman, 2024).

Example: Structure of a Professional Culture & Interpersonal Risk Interview
A trained evaluator conducts a 2.5-hour structured behavioural interview with a finalist for a senior research manager role. The interview includes:

1. Behavioural Event Probes
- "Describe the most difficult interpersonal conflict you have managed in a scientific or technical environment. How did you approach it, and what was the outcome?"
- "Tell me about a time you received feedback that challenged your assumptions. How did you respond?"
- The evaluator is listening for evidence of accountability, defensiveness, empathy, clarity, escalation patterns, and repair behaviour.

2. Psychologically Safe Leadership Probes
- "Tell me about a time when someone brought forward a concern about ethics, safety, or inclusion. How did you handle it?"
- "How do you respond when a team member makes an error that affects timelines or results?"
- The evaluator assesses whether the candidate handles mistakes with proportionate, non-punitive responses, and maintains psychological safety.

3. Power, Ego, and Boundary Probes
- "Tell me about a time when someone disagreed with your approach. How did you navigate the power dynamics?"
- This screens for dominance, dismissiveness, retaliatory tendencies, or fragile ego structures, all of which create risk.

4. Cultural Intelligence & Equity Behaviour Probes
- "Describe a time when someone's communication or working style differed significantly from your own. What adaptations did you make?"
- Assesses flexibility, humility, and non-assumptive behaviour.

5. Risk & Integrity Probes
- "Tell me about a decision you made under pressure that involved ethical or compliance considerations."

Screens for corner-cutting, rationalization, or integrity gaps.

❌ What You Cannot Assess (Illegal or Biased)

- whether you "click" with the candidate
- whether they resemble existing staff

- personality style (e.g., introverted, quiet, assertive)
- accent, cultural communication norms, formality levels
- whether they "seem confident"
- assumptions based on identity or background

These violate Canadian employment law and produce measurable discrimination.

7.3 Final Decision Using Evidence

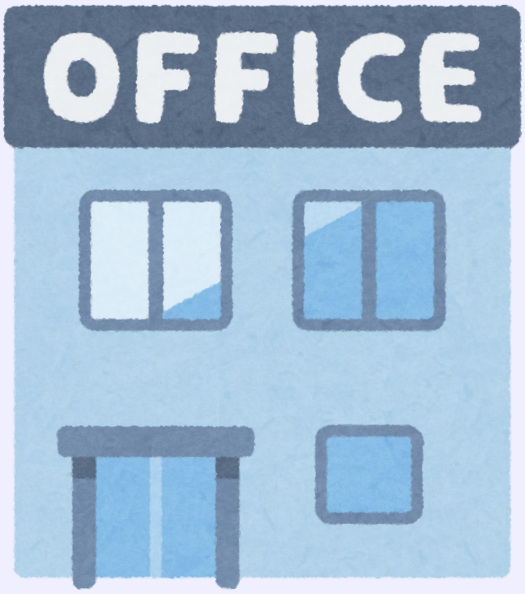
A defensible hiring decision is based solely on documented behavioural evidence collected through structured tools—not intuition, comparisons to past employees, or subjective impressions. The final decision process involves reviewing interview scores, reference check findings, interpersonal risk assessments, and any work samples or technical evaluations, ensuring each data point is tied directly to the competencies and expectations identified in the job analysis (Herman, 2024). Committees should avoid "gut feelings," prestige bias, and informal notions of "fit," focusing instead on which candidate most consistently demonstrates the required behaviours and the capacity to contribute to a safe, equitable, and effective workplace (Stewart & Valian, 2018). Decisions should be clearly documented, transparent, and grounded in evidence that can be explained and defended.

7.4 Offer & Negotiation with Transparency

The offer and negotiation stage is a critical equity moment because research shows that **women and racialized individuals are more likely to be penalized for negotiating compensation** (Leibbrandt & List, 2015). Without safeguards, identical negotiation behaviours can lead to different outcomes depending on who is asking. Structuring this phase transparently protects both candidates and the organization. Hiring teams should clearly communicate salary ranges, identify what aspects are negotiable, and use standardized procedures such as written templates and HR oversight (Calluso & Devetag, 2024). When compensation boundaries are fixed, equitable flexibility—such as professional-development funding, remote work options, or flexible schedules—helps ensure that candidates are not disadvantaged because of systemic barriers or inequities

(Herman, 2024). Supervisors should also receive bias-awareness training to avoid negative judgments toward assertive negotiation by underrepresented groups. Transparent, consistent negotiation practices close equity gaps and ensure that the final offer reflects fairness, not familiarity.

Onboarding & Early Retention



8.1 Pre-Arrival Preparation

Effective onboarding is one of the strongest predictors of early retention, psychological safety, and long-term performance. Research shows that the first days and weeks shape how confident, supported, and connected employees feel, especially for individuals who may experience additional barriers due to gender, race, disability, newcomer status, or cultural background (Herman, 2024). Onboarding should therefore be structured, predictable, and inclusive. Preparing in advance ensures that new hires are welcomed into a stable environment rather than expected to “figure it out,” which often disadvantages those unfamiliar with institutional norms. A strong onboarding process sets expectations clearly, provides access to tools and information, and supports early relationship-building within the team.

First Day / First Week Onboarding Checklist

(Paste directly into your toolkit – clean and practical)

A. Before They Arrive

- ☐ Workspace prepared (desk, equipment, seating, accessibility needs addressed)
- ☐ System access created (email, logins, software, lab systems)
- ☐ Mandatory training scheduled (safety, ethics, confidentiality, EDI where applicable)
- ☐ First-week agenda sent in advance
- ☐ Assigned onboarding buddy or point-of-contact
- ☐ Clear instructions for arrival (location, time, who to ask for)

B. First Day Essentials

- ☐ Welcome meeting with supervisor
- ☐ Overview of role expectations and priorities for the first month
- ☐ Tour of the workspace and key facilities
- ☐ Introductions to team members (in-person or virtual)
- ☐ Accessibility check-in (e.g., tools, ergonomic needs, communication preferences)
- ☐ Basic training on essential systems (email, calendars, lab management tools)
- ☐ Provide written onboarding materials (handbook, protocols, workflows)

C. First Week Tasks

- ☐ Set up recurring meeting schedule (1:1s, team meetings, check-ins)
- ☐ Begin hands-on training for core tasks
- ☐ Review project timelines, responsibilities, and expectations
- ☐ Clarify reporting structures and points of escalation
- ☐ Assign small, achievable starter tasks to build confidence
- ☐ Ensure the new hire understands safety, ethics, and data-handling procedures
- ☐ Follow-up check-in on inclusion, workload, and support needs

D. Relationship Building

- ☐ Introductions to partners or collaborators in other labs or units
- ☐ Time set aside to meet with key colleagues
- ☐ Encourage the new hire to ask questions without penalty
- ☐ Pair them with a peer or mentor for informal support
- ☐ Invite them to lab meetings, journal clubs, or relevant groups

E. Administrative & Compliance

- ☐ HR paperwork completed
- ☐ Payroll and benefits confirmed
- ☐ Review of confidentiality and data-security requirements
- ☐ Confirm access to equipment, software licenses, lab PPE
- ☐ Add to relevant email lists and communication channels

8.2 First Day

A new employee's first day sets the tone for psychological safety, clarity, and belonging. Research in I-O psychology shows that early ambiguity and disorganization can disproportionately affect individuals who are racialized, disabled, newcomers, or unfamiliar with institutional norms (Herman, 2024). A structured first day ensures that the employee knows what to expect, understands their role, and has the tools needed to begin confidently. This includes a clear welcome, introductions to key colleagues, essential training, and a brief outline of initial responsibilities. The goal is not to overload the employee but to offer stability, predictability, and support from the moment they arrive.

8.3 First Week

A helpful practice during the first week is assigning a **peer mentor or onboarding buddy**—someone who is not the employee's supervisor. A mentor provides a low-stakes point of contact for informal questions, clarifies unwritten norms, and helps the new employee begin building social connections. This is especially valuable for employees who may face additional barriers due to identity, disability, newcomer status, or previous workplace exclusion. A well-matched mentor supports confidence, reduces uncertainty, and reinforces that the organization is committed to their early success.

The first week should focus on building competence, confidence, and connection. Rather than expecting new employees to be fully productive, the emphasis should be on gradual skill-building, clear communication, and consistent support. Early weeks are when norms, expectations, and working relationships begin to solidify—especially for staff who may face additional barriers due to identity, disability, newcomer status, or previous workplace trauma (Herman, 2024). Structured check-ins, manageable tasks, and transparent guidance help reduce anxiety and ensure the employee feels safe asking questions. A thoughtful first week establishes a foundation for trust, clarity, and long-term success.

8.4 First Month & Early Feedback

The first month is when new employees begin to understand the deeper rhythms of the workplace—how decisions are made, who to go to for what, and how communication

actually works. Early feedback is important, but it is only useful if the **environment has been prepared to receive it**. People will not ask questions, raise concerns, or admit confusion unless they believe doing so will be met with support rather than judgment. This is especially true for employees who may already carry the weight of previous workplace inequities, exclusion, or stereotype-based scrutiny.

Early feedback should therefore focus on building clarity and trust, not evaluation. Managers should check in at two and four weeks to discuss workload, expectations, access needs, and what is working well. These conversations should be low-pressure, honest, and framed around making the employee's job easier—not testing whether they are "performing" fast enough. When the climate is intentionally supportive, employees feel comfortable giving and receiving feedback, asking for help, and raising issues before they grow.

Example: Early Feedback Check-In Questions

These low-pressure questions can be used during 2- and 4-week check-ins:

"How comfortable do you feel with your workload so far?"

"Is anything unclear about your role or expectations?"

"Do you have what you need to do your work effectively (tools, access, information)?"

"Have you encountered any barriers or processes that are slowing you down?"

"Is there anything I can adjust to better support you?"

"Do you feel comfortable raising concerns as they come up?"

These questions focus on clarity and support (not evaluation) and help establish open communication from the start.

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