

Recruitment Ethics: Building Fair and Inclusive Hiring Practices



Recruitment decisions can shape an organization for years, but even well-intentioned hiring processes can create barriers for qualified candidates. Bias may enter recruitment through job advertisements, résumé screening, interview questions, assessment methods, accessibility practices, or seemingly informal decisions about whether someone will “fit” with the team.

For HR directors and workplace managers, ethical recruitment means creating a process in which candidates are assessed on legitimate job-related qualifications rather than personal characteristics, stereotypes, assumptions, or unnecessary barriers. A fair hiring process can also strengthen an organization’s reputation, expand its talent pool, and reduce the risk of discrimination complaints.

Recognizing Discrimination in Recruitment

Job seekers may experience discrimination for many different reasons. Depending on applicable human rights or employment legislation, protected characteristics can include race, ethnicity, colour, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, family or marital status, pregnancy, and other protected grounds.

Discrimination is not always obvious. A recruiter may never deliberately exclude someone because of their race, gender, disability, or another characteristic, yet recruitment practices can still have discriminatory effects.

Examples may include:

- Rejecting candidates because their names, accents, cultural backgrounds, or places of education seem unfamiliar.
- Assuming that women, parents, or caregivers will be less available for demanding roles.
- Preferring younger applicants because they are perceived as more energetic or technologically capable.
- Assuming an older candidate will have difficulty adapting to new technology.
- Screening out candidates with employment gaps that may be connected to disability, caregiving responsibilities, parental leave, or other personal circumstances.
- Conducting interviews in inaccessible locations or using assessments that

unnecessarily disadvantage candidates with disabilities.

- Making assumptions about whether someone can perform a job because they use a mobility device or require another accommodation.
- Evaluating candidates based on gender expression, religious clothing, appearance, or other characteristics unrelated to job performance.

Organizations should also be cautious about vague concepts such as “culture fit.” When poorly defined, culture fit can become a way of selecting candidates who resemble existing employees rather than those who have the skills and behaviours necessary for success.

Identify Unfair Practices Before Recruitment Begins

Ethical recruitment starts before a vacancy is advertised.

HR should review hiring criteria with managers and ask whether every requirement is genuinely necessary. Requirements that have simply been carried forward from older job descriptions can unintentionally eliminate capable candidates.

For example, does the position truly require a driver’s licence, or does the employee simply need reliable transportation to different locations? Does the employee genuinely need to lift a specific weight independently, or could equipment or another reasonable accommodation allow the work to be performed safely?

Organizations can also reduce bias by establishing clear selection criteria before reviewing applications. Structured scoring systems, standardized interview questions, diverse hiring panels, and documented decision-making processes can help recruiters focus on qualifications rather than subjective impressions.

Recruiters should periodically examine hiring outcomes as well. If qualified candidates from particular demographic groups consistently disappear at the same stage of recruitment, HR should investigate whether an unnecessary barrier may exist.

Writing Fair and Accessible Job Postings

Job advertisements should describe what a person needs to accomplish rather than unintentionally describing the type of person managers imagine performing the job.

Avoid unnecessarily gendered, age-coded, culturally specific, or exclusionary language. Terms such as “young and energetic,” “digital native,” or “physically fit” may discourage qualified applicants and may create discrimination concerns.

Separate essential qualifications from preferences and avoid inflated credential requirements. If five years of experience is not genuinely necessary, requiring it may unnecessarily reduce the candidate pool.

Employers should also clearly communicate their willingness to provide reasonable accommodations during recruitment. Candidates should know who to contact if they require an accessible interview format, additional time for an assessment, assistive technology, an accessible meeting location, or another adjustment.

Accessibility should be considered from the beginning rather than addressed only after a candidate encounters a barrier.

Conducting Inclusive Interviews

Interviews should focus on whether candidates can perform the essential responsibilities of the position.

Ask all applicants a consistent set of core questions and avoid questions about protected personal characteristics. Recruiters generally do not need to know whether someone plans to have children, follows a particular religion, has a disability, is married, or has health conditions. Instead, ask job-related questions such as whether the candidate can meet the position's established scheduling or travel requirements.

Inclusive behaviour also matters. Recruiters should pronounce names correctly, respect candidates' stated names and pronouns, speak directly to candidates with disabilities rather than companions or interpreters, and avoid making assumptions about what accommodations someone may need.

Interviewers should document objective reasons for hiring decisions rather than relying on impressions such as "not the right personality" or "didn't seem like a fit."

Fairness Should Continue After the Interview

Ethical recruitment does not end when the interview concludes.

Candidates should receive consistent information about next steps, timelines, assessments, and follow-up requirements. Accommodation requests should be handled confidentially and shared only with individuals who genuinely need the information.

Organizations should also periodically review recruitment policies, templates, interview questions, assessment tools, and hiring data. Managers and recruiters should receive training on unconscious bias, discrimination, accessibility, accommodation, and inclusive communication.

Fair hiring is ultimately about removing irrelevant barriers while maintaining legitimate workplace standards. When employers design recruitment around objective qualifications, accessibility, consistency, and respect, they create opportunities for a broader range of candidates while making stronger and more defensible hiring decisions.