

CREATING A MORE INCLUSIVE + EQUITABLE HIRING PROCESS

Many organizations are reconsidering their approach to hiring, with an eye to ensuring a more transparent and inclusive process that reaches out to and encourages a more diverse candidate pool. By first recognizing that barriers to equity exist for candidates, and by committing to removing and mitigating these barriers, organizations can take important steps towards being more inclusive.

KCI Search + Talent has been fortunate to work with a wide range of organizations that are striving to undertake more inclusive and equitable hiring. We've had the opportunity to learn from many of them, and we've also been pleased to share our knowledge and experience.

Here are some things to think about and do in order to improve the equity and inclusiveness of your hiring. Some of these tactics require a commitment of time and resources...a commitment that is a sound investment, because to get a different result, we must commit to doing things differently. We encourage you to try what you can, even if you start with just a couple of things at first.

Before you look outside, look inside

- It's important to **get your house in order** before you post any job. Take a look at your Board and your leadership team...what will candidates see? Will they see different dimensions of diversity reflected? Will they see themselves reflected? This isn't a 'quick fix', but Board and leadership team diversity is something you should be aware of as you're doing your hiring. Think about the (authentic) key messaging for candidates in terms of Board and leadership diversity, equity and inclusion policies, and the organization's concrete efforts to move forward in this area. And make sure that your hiring managers are also up to speed.
- [Inclusive leaders](#) create **inclusive cultures**, which lead to diverse and inclusive teams. Does your leadership recognize there is more than one way of doing and being? Do you value your team members for their individuality, and BECAUSE OF (not in spite of) their differences?
- **Consider 'cluster hiring'** (aka [cohort hiring](#)) so you don't create situations of tokenism or put people in situations where they are 'the one and only'. While not without its drawbacks, this tactic is increasingly used to accelerate faculty diversification in higher education.
- This is a great opportunity to **review the potential of your existing team**. Is there someone who might be ready to 'step up' and grow into the role? Is there someone in a parallel position who could 'grow sideways'? Investing in your existing staff helps signal to others that it's worth staying with the organization.
- What kind of **equity and inclusion training** has your organization provided for hiring managers and HR staff? Have they been trained in Behavioural Interviewing and Unconscious Biases? And if you're trying new equity and inclusion practices, be sure everyone understands WHY, so they don't inadvertently sabotage the process. (You might want to review "[Reducing Unconscious Bias in Hiring](#)", a free resource from KCI Search + Talent.)
- **Take a look at existing compensation** for team members in equivalent jobs. Does the compensation structure objectively assess roles and functions to ensure equitable pay for jobs of similar complexity and responsibility? Within comparable positions, is there relative parity in pay and other elements of compensation between genders, and amongst those with similar levels of experience and similar performance? Are you providing competitive salaries and benefits for your team? It's best to correct any outstanding issues before you post the salary range with your advertisement.

The job posting

- And yes, you should **post the salary range**, or at least the target hiring salary or range. (Why? [Check this out.](#)) This is a key principle in advancing salary equity. When you *#showthesalary*, it tells candidates that you care about compensation equity and transparency. We find that many candidates are now unwilling to apply to jobs where the salary is not posted.
- We also encourage **transparency about the organization's compensation structure**, not just the salary range, so that candidates and existing employees can understand total compensation, and the basis for compensation decisions. Since this practice is new for many organizations, internal education may be required.
- **Review the posting for gender-neutrality**, because [gendered language sustains gender inequality](#). And there are some basic concepts like using gender-neutral titles, gender-neutral pronouns (or better, none at all), and avoiding gender-charged words. To help, there are some great tech tools (like Gender Decoder and Textio).
- Think carefully about the **necessary requirements for the job**. Do you truly need a degree or specific credentials to be successful in the role? There is significant inflation in education requirements in recent years, even for entry-level jobs. We also see bias manifesting in relation to the type of degree, or to the degree-granting institution. [Equity gaps](#) create barriers to education and [reduced educational attainment](#), particularly for [Black](#) and [Indigenous](#) youth. Requiring degrees or certifications can further perpetuate barriers for disadvantaged groups.
- The **recruitment timeline should allow for additional time for outreach** to, discussion with, and recruitment of diverse candidates. Research tells us that a [short advertising period can be a barrier to candidate diversity](#). We recommend a minimum of four weeks 'in market' for this reason.
- Consider a **variety of advertising options** to highlight your opportunity to diverse professionals. For instance, different professional associations, business affinity groups, and job boards exist for specific equity-deserving markets depending on your goals. Must candidates come from a narrowly defined professional background? Or could they bring transferable competencies to the role? What other professions value similar competencies? You may want to advertise with some of THOSE professional associations or affinity groups.
- **Resist the urge to reach out to people you know!** Referral programs and personal endorsements can be a huge systemic barrier, because terrific candidates from under-represented groups often do not have access to the mentorship, sponsorship, or outright nepotism and cronyism sometimes enjoyed by others in dominant groups. This is a hard one for many people. But we know that a 'recommendation from someone you trust' can give an advantage (bias) to a candidate who actually may not be as qualified or deserving as another candidate who doesn't happen to have an advocate who knows you. (Want to know more? [Read this.](#))
- Similarly, ensure that **one person is designated to answer candidate questions**, so that any additional information provided is consistent. And staff should know to refer all candidate inquiries to this person. This is a more equitable approach which ensures all candidates have access to the same information, not just those who happen to have friends working in the organization.

Reviewing resumes & Screening candidates

- We suggest **removing names, gender identifiers, address, degree years, and even degree-granting institutions** from each resume. Yes, this takes time and effort...[and it's worth it!](#) This step can help to ensure greater equity in the short-listing process. Your HR team members should be able to help you with this...or you could designate a non-decision-making team member to edit information before the Committee sees it.
- Make sure that whoever is screening the resumes (or meeting with the applicants initially) truly **understands the key competencies for the role, and how these might manifest on a resume**. Sometimes we see good candidates with relevant competencies screened out too early because the people doing the screening don't actually understand the role, or how a particular experience can be relevant to a job.
- **Proceed with caution if using Artificial Intelligence** tools to screen resumes and candidates. You might be surprised to know that while some of these tools may increase efficiency, [AI tools can also adversely impact the equity of your hiring](#). (And it is also resulting in resumes geared to maximize AI recognition, rather than reflecting the candidate's true history.) As well, some candidates get so frustrated with the 'use of robots' in hiring that they refuse to apply to organizations using these tools. It's worth considering whether your drive for efficiency might be turning off the very people you were hoping to attract.
- Consider using a voluntary **applicant diversity self-identification survey**. Unless you ask candidates to self-identify, you actually have no idea of the diversity in the pool of applicants. Remember, many types of diversity are not visible. [Done well and used appropriately, such tools can effectively support diversity hiring efforts](#). However, if you're going to take this step, be sure you have good input, advice, and support from your HR team, search consultant, or HR consultant. Candidates need to know up front why you are doing this, how information collected will be stored (and when it will be destroyed), who will see the information, and how the information will be used. They also need to have the option 'prefer not to answer' for each question, and to not be penalized for this.

Interview process

- Please **banish the word 'fit' from your hiring vocabulary!** We need to collectively recognize that 'fit' can be code for 'just like me', or 'someone I naturally feel comfortable with'. Feelings about 'fit' often align with personality or communication style, and often do not align to candidates' experience and skills, and their ability to do the job. [This article](#) provides more detail.
- To help check your biases, ensure that **interview questions align to the competencies for the role**, and to the values of the organization. If you have a question that isn't linked to either of these, ask yourself why you're asking it? This could be an indication that some unconscious bias is coming into play.
- [Behavioural interview](#) techniques are proven to be the most effective method of assessing competencies, because the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. **Behavioural interview questions** also help us to understand not just what someone accomplished, but how they accomplished it.
- **Scoring rubrics or matrices** should be used to ensure equitable assessment of each interview and candidate. And also to ensure that you are 'weighting' different competencies accurately since not all areas of the role are of equal importance. Too often we see that good candidates do not move forward because they were weaker in an area that is actually a small or infrequent part of the job...or because their personality or 'style' wasn't preferred by some committee members.
- Just before the interview, have a group **discussion with the hiring panel about unconscious bias** and the impacts of bias in hiring. This is a great way to keep one another collectively accountable, and to support each person as they become aware of their biases.

Making the Offer

- **Approach your offer-making in an equitable manner.** Equity should exist for everyone, not just those who take the risk to ask for it out loud. There are well-recognized gender and racial biases in salary negotiation. Check out [this article](#) to learn more.
- Before making the offer, **compare the candidate's resume and actual relevant experience** against that of other employees who are doing the same job. Since future raises are based on the initial salary, you need to get this right to ensure ongoing salary equity. This approach also helps you correct any internal equity issues on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure that all employees have **equitable access to professional development, mentoring, and sponsorship.** Putting policies in place is a good start, and we recommend tracking investment in professional development to ensure you keep things fair. Suggest and offer professional development opportunities and mentoring when you see that someone will benefit, not just when someone asks.

Need help or advice?

We're here for you! KCI Search + Talent provides professional recruitment, executive search, compensation advisory, and talent management and development services to Canadian charities, not-for-profit organizations, associations, municipalities, educational institutions, and grant-making foundations.

Our website also provides a variety of free resources such as checklists, articles, and webinars.

Visit www.kcitalent.com or contact us at search@kcitalent.com.

CHECKLIST: Inclusive + Equitable Hiring

Before you post

- How diverse is your Board? And your leadership / management team? (And what are you doing about that?)
- Key messaging for hiring managers to share re: organizational diversity efforts?
- Any existing team members who are 75% ready to 'step up' (or step sideways) and grow into the role?
- Cohort hiring to increase diversity more rapidly, reduce tokenism, and increase support for diverse new hires?
- Appropriate training required and provided for all hiring managers and HR staff? (ie. Behavioural Interview techniques, Unconscious Biases in Hiring, etc.)
- Hiring team is aware of equity tactics and techniques being used, so they can support them?
- Establish a competitive salary range and/or hiring range if you have a formal salary structure already in place. (And if you don't, consider getting help in developing an equitable and transparent structure.)
- Ensure the internal team is aware of the salary range before posting it publicly.
- Is there compensation equity amongst existing team members in equivalent jobs?
- What level of formal education is truly required for success?

The job posting

- Has gendered language been corrected?
- Posting includes organizational equity statements or commitments?
- Posting includes salary or hiring range?
- Provide alternatives or equivalence to formal education/certification?
- Application deadline is set at least 4 weeks hence, to allow time to attract a diverse candidate pool?
- Advertising sites to attract non-traditional candidates with relevant skills and/or experience?
- Contact person and details clearly stated so candidates can seek more information?
- Notes prepared so that information provided to all candidates is consistent and equitable, and prepared with accessibility for all candidates in mind?

Reviewing resumes & Screening candidates

- Have a non-decision-maker remove name, gender identifier, address, years of graduation, and degree institutions from each resume and/or from any candidate summary list.
- Resume screener understands key competencies and what to look for on resumes. (Exemplars may be helpful.)
- Review your AI tools and check for bias in how the tools are being used.
- Try applying as a candidate, to learn what candidates experience, and to see how the AI tool might screen out qualified candidates.
- Develop and deploy a diversity self-identification survey for candidates and reporting tools for hiring managers.

Interview process

- Do interview questions align only to the competencies for the role and/or to the values of the organization?
- Are you using behavioural interview questions, and have hiring panel members been trained in this method?
- Has the hiring panel/manager been trained in unconscious bias?
- Has a scoring rubric been developed, and are weightings aligned to the importance of various competencies?

Making the Offer

- Compare the preferred candidate's resume and experience against other employees who are doing the same job to ensure ongoing salary equity.