



INCLUSIVE DESIGN FOR EMPLOYMENT ACCESS
VISION RADICALE POUR L'ACCÈS INCLUSIF À L'EMPLOI

Hiring persons with disabilities and support needs in public sector organizations

Reflection guide on staffing practices

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Inclusive Design for Employment Access (IDEA) helps build employer capacity for sustainable and rewarding employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through evidence-informed policy and practice.

IDEA develops evidence-informed tools and resources through co-design with partners that help advance workplace capacity for recruitment, hiring, onboarding, retention, mentorship, and promotion of persons with disabilities across the full range of employment opportunities. Where possible, we draw on practices that have shown promise in one or more workplaces in Canada and elsewhere.

Our work is spearheaded by teams of researchers, global experts, and industry leaders. Many of those involved in IDEA identify as persons with disabilities.

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Introduction

In the Canadian workforce, 8 million people have a disability - one in four. Of these, 38% are unemployed, and persons with more severe disabilities are less likely to be employed [1].

In 2023, **1.4% of the staff of the 22 ministries and 53 public bodies in Québec** were persons with disabilities, well below the target of 2% set in 1984. In the **345 public bodies** subject to the *Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies*, persons with disabilities represent **approximately 1% of staff**. Fair representation of employees with disabilities in these organizations would require reaching a target of at least **10.5%** [2].

Several scientific studies address barriers and facilitators to hiring persons with disabilities [3, 4]. Employers' legal obligations to prevent discrimination against job applicants or employees with disabilities are very clear. They are required to be innovative in the accommodations they offer [5-8]. Despite the development of knowledge on the subject, progress has been limited in reducing the barriers to employment for persons with disabilities.

The Commission on Human Rights and Youth Rights recently called on the Québec government to develop binding mechanisms for all employers [2]. **Québec's public sector organizations will be called upon to review their staffing processes in response to this call.**

This guide is based on lessons learned from a project led by [Service d'entretien PROPRET \[PROPRET Maintenance Services\]](#), a community-based employment integration organization located in Montréal, in collaboration with three public sector organizations, as well as a review of the scientific literature.

Purpose of the guide

Public sector organizations regularly hire participants from employment integration organizations, such as [Service d'entretien PROPRET \[PROPRET Maintenance Services\]](#), whose objective is to support people who are disconnected from the labour market through training and skills development programs. However, these organizations are more **hesitant to hire persons with disabilities who have more support needs** and who participate in these programs.

The staffing processes and structures of public sector organizations can act as a barrier to hiring persons with disabilities, particularly those with more support needs.

Resources for inclusive hiring of persons with disabilities are already available, such as:

- Centre de recherche pour l'inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap (CRISPESH). *INCLUVIS | Vers des pratiques inclusives en employabilité des personnes en situation de handicap [in French]*. <https://crispesh.ca/incluvis-vers-des-pratiques-inclusives-en-employabilite-des-personnes-en-situation-de-handicap/>
- The Inclusive Workplace. *The Employer Journey: Building Your Path to Inclusive Employment*. <https://theinclusiveworkplace.ca/en/articles/the-employer-journey-building-your-path-to-inclusive-employment>
- Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI). *Inclusive hiring practices. Toolkit for transforming hiring practices to attract and retain diverse talent*. <https://new-api.ccdi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/inclusive-hiring-en-final.pdf>

- Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE). *HR Inclusive Policy Toolkit*.
<https://www.supportedemployment.ca/resources/employers/hrtoolkit/>

However, there is little to no information available on the **specific** adaptations that need to be made **to staffing processes** to make them inclusive and accessible.

This guide offers points for consideration on adapting staffing processes for public sector organizations wishing to hire persons with disabilities, particularly those with more support needs.

The challenges of hiring persons with disabilities with more support needs in public sector organizations

A complex staffing system

Public sector organizations generally have a **highly structured staffing process**, often due to their large size, the nature of their activities governed by a number of laws, and their accountability to public decision-makers. This process operates under many internal and external **rules** and in compliance with **agreements negotiated** with unions. Its many stages are supported by **information systems**.

The rules of the staffing system have been designed **to treat all employees equally** and to avoid political or administrative favouritism or arbitrary decisions. Despite selection processes based on merit criteria, **equal treatment may prove unfair and not equitable**.

Discrimination against persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities are discriminated against in the labour market, as evidenced by their lower employment rate (62%) than persons without disabilities (78%), a difference that is more pronounced among persons with a severe disability (54.5%) [1]. They are less likely to be asked to attend a selection interview and are more likely to report experiencing discrimination in the workplace [9, 10].

Necessary accommodations¹

Hiring staff with disabilities, particularly those with more support needs, requires **adjustments to be made to the usual staffing and human resources management processes**. Some recruitment and selection procedures do not allow the potential of candidates with

¹ The term “accommodation” has a broader meaning in English than in French. In French, this term is related to the legal obligations arising from the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*. Thus, in the French version of this document, the term “adaptation” was preferred, while in the English version, the term “accommodation” is used.

disabilities to be discerned, particularly where they may **perform tasks in a different way or with different tools** from other employees.

The experience of employees with disabilities is better in organizations that provide them accommodations [11-13]. The flexibility of organizations in offering accommodations is even more important for persons with disabilities who have more support needs.

Employees with disabilities: a wide variety of profiles

Persons with disabilities have a wide variety of profiles. An approach based on medical diagnosis or health condition can identify, for example, persons who have:

- Sensory disabilities (e.g. affecting sight or hearing);
- Mobility disabilities (e.g. requiring the use of a wheelchair or affecting their gait);
- Pain-related disabilities (e.g. making certain movements more difficult or requiring more recovery time);
- Developmental or cognitive disabilities (e.g. attention deficit disorder, autism or intellectual disability);
- Psychological disabilities (e.g. mood disorders).

Identifying support needs

Information about a person's diagnoses and health conditions is of little use in the workplace for determining appropriate accommodations. This information does not allow for a personalized approach, depending on the person, the job, the work team and the organization [14, 15].

It is preferable to consider support needs to perform a job or a specific task. Support needs can be varied and of varying degrees. For example, persons with disabilities may need:

- Accommodations to carry out certain tasks or at certain times of their working day;
- Special equipment, tools or software;

- Physical adjustments to their workstation or to the building where they work;
- Withdrawal of certain tasks that are usually part of a job;
- Supervisory and communication approaches that require adjustments on the part of their supervisor;
- Flexibility and adjustments on the part of work colleagues in terms of the way they do things or communicate;
- Different working conditions, such as different working hours.

Persons with disabilities may have support needs that require few accommodations.

Others may be considered to have significant support needs when they cannot carry out all the tasks usually included in a job and require several different accommodations in order to perform their work.

Accommodation - a legal obligation

The *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (CQLR c C-12)* introduces protections against discrimination, including on the grounds of disability and the means of accommodating it. The Charter includes a provision on discrimination in the workplace, including for hiring, training, probation, promotion and working conditions [5].

In this context, **organizations have a duty of reasonable accommodation** towards persons with disabilities [6, 8], which may require them to adjust their usual staffing and human resources management processes, as well as tasks, working conditions and supervisory practices.

Benefits of hiring persons with disabilities

Employees with disabilities contribute in many ways to organizations, in addition to **the work they provide**. Research shows, for example, their influence on an organization's capacity for **innovation**, their **ethical** behaviour, their lower **turnover rate** and their contribution to a more inclusive **culture** [16-19].

Québec's public sector organizations must produce an [Equal Access to Employment Program](#) that includes **representation targets** for five groups covered by the [Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies](#). By hiring persons with disabilities, the targets set can be met.

Improving staffing practices in relation to persons with disabilities also reflects the organization's values of **inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility** (IDEA). Thinking about hiring persons with disabilities who have more support needs can help to make the organization's **culture and practices more inclusive** of all under-represented groups. It can also remove barriers for some persons in the staffing process, which can improve the **diversity** of its workforce, or target measures to make the staffing process **fairer and more accessible** to all.

Starting a project

The launch of a project aimed at hiring persons with disabilities who have more support needs should be planned by a steering committee bringing together the necessary stakeholders. The purpose of the project should be clear from the outset so that these stakeholders can be identified.

Setting up a steering committee

The steering committee should include:

- One person from the **human resources management team**:
 - For their knowledge of the organization's staffing processes, steps and requirements;
 - To identify the decision-makers to be contacted regarding the various accommodations under consideration.
- One person with a mandate relating to **equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility (EDIA)** to ensure consistency with the objectives of the equal access to employment programs and the organization's EDIA guidelines.
- One person from the **team of the jobs concerned**:
 - To understand the expectations associated with the job and the tasks;
 - To identify the teams likely to welcome the employee;
 - To anticipate the support needs of the employee, the supervisor and the team.
- One person from the **union**:
 - To understand the union's concerns in relation to the project;
 - To ensure communication with union members;
 - To participate in the discussions leading up to decisions.

Other people may be involved called upon during the course of the project:

- A member of the **human resources management team**, with decision-making authority over the staffing process:

- To make decisions arising from the committee's work;
- To ensure that the decisions taken are followed.
- **A director of the team targeted by the project:**
 - To make decisions arising from the work of the committee;
 - To ensure that decisions are followed.
- An **occupational health and safety (OHS) professional** to suggest tools, equipment, or accommodations, when relevant to their prevention responsibilities.
- The **labour relations team** if a decision requires expertise in this area.

Clarifying the objective of the project and the jobs targeted

The steering committee will need to consider the status of the jobs developed by the project. This choice will influence the scope of the project, the participants on the steering committee, the people to be consulted and those responsible for making decisions.

The project could aim to:

- creating a **one-off project**, in parallel with the usual staffing process, **focusing on a specific candidate, team or job**, or;
- **adapting the organization's usual staffing processes** to reduce the barriers to hiring persons with disabilities in general, including those requiring more extensive accommodations.

Dealing with stigma and prejudice

The steering committee will have to take into account **the stigma associated with prejudice against persons with disabilities**.

Indeed, ignorance and prejudice can lead to rejection by people in the organization when it comes to considering persons with disabilities as employees or work colleagues [4, 20, 21]. Raising awareness is essential to promoting acceptance of the project and, subsequently, acceptance of employees with disabilities.

Some jobs are less valued than others in organizations or in society, for example housekeeping jobs [22]. A project aimed at hiring persons with disabilities and more support needs in these occupations may be perceived as devaluing, either for the people in these occupations when they have prejudices against persons with disabilities, or for persons with disabilities or their relatives when they have prejudices against these occupations.

Ways of **reducing the rejection of a project** on the basis of prejudice and stigmatization are:

- An organizational culture that respects all professions;
- Initial discussions that include information about persons with disabilities;
- Union involvement at all stages of the project;
- A project that is explicitly in line with the EDIA objectives valued by the organization and whose lessons could be extended to other jobs.

Working with external support resources

A number of organizations provide employability services to persons with disabilities [4]. In Québec, they can be member of the [Regroupement des organismes spécialisés pour l'emploi des personnes handicapées \(ROSEPH\)](#).

Working with an external resource can be useful:

- To understand the profile of persons with disabilities and the accommodations that need to be made in general;
- To access government subsidies;
- To assist in the hiring of specific candidates in order to:
 - Better understand their qualifications;
 - Plan the necessary accommodations;
 - Support their training and onboarding;
 - Support the resolution of any difficulties that may arise.

Long-term collaboration with an external resource enables the resource to gain a better understanding of an organization's qualification requirements and possible accommodations within the organization.

Planning the budget for accommodations

Accommodations **are rarely expensive** [23, 24]. The costs of accommodations can be borne by the unit where the employee will be working or by a specific organizational budget for this purpose. The steering committee should plan the budgets for these costs. It can also plan the budget for the position of an employee with disabilities who would be supernumerary in a team.

Government subsidies exist to reimburse specialised equipment or part of an employee's salary, subject to certain conditions.

The services of an external resource, financed by the government, may be at no cost to the organization. Privately practising professionals also offer services.

Elements and stages of a project

A project to facilitate the hiring of persons with disabilities and support needs should have several elements.

Raising awareness and communication

Raising awareness among the organization's stakeholders is essential [25]. It should **focus on different elements depending on the role of the people involved**. Table 1 suggests themes to be addressed depending on the target audience.

Awareness-raising and communication on the more general elements and on adjustments to be made to the processes will concern top management, middle management and human resources staff. However, all staff should be made aware of the organization's EDIA values and towards persons with disabilities.

Awareness-raising and communication on the adapted recruitment, selection and hiring processes should target management, human resources management and staff, as well as the team managers who are likely to receive candidates.

Awareness-raising and communication about possible supports for the supervisor, teams and the employee with a disability should be aimed at the team where the employee was hired, other work colleagues and clients who may come into contact with the employee, if necessary.

Awareness activities should be **repeated over time** to remind people of certain information, to adapt to changes in the organization and to take in consideration staff turnover.

Table 1 - Awareness themes according to stakeholders

	Top management	HR management and staff / Unions	HR staff handling applicant files	All staff	Candidate's direct supervisor	Candidate's work colleagues	Clients in contact with the employee
OVERALL PLANNING							
Organization's IDEA values	X	X	X	X			X
Equal Access to Employment Program targets	X	X	X				
General profile of persons with disabilities	X	X	X	X			
Adaptation to the staffing process		X	X				
Overall budget for accommodations		X					
External support resources		X	X				
ADAPTED PROCESSES							
Procedures for assessing a candidate's profile		X	X		X		
Procedures for determining accommodations for a candidate		X	X		X		
Budget allocation method for accommodations		X	X		X		

	Top management	HR management and staff / Unions	HR staff handling applicant files	All staff	Candidate's direct supervisor	Candidate's work colleagues	Clients in contact with the employee
TEAM SUPPORT							
Internal support for employee supervision			X		X		
Procedures for obtaining support from external resources			X		X		
Support and accommodation needs of the employee (with the employee's agreement and if necessary)			X		X	X	X

Employee recruitment and selection

Recruitment and selection processes can pose barriers to candidates with disabilities.

Information system for applying for a job

Some people may have difficulty navigating information systems that post job vacancies or allow them to submit an application:

- Because they have low literacy or low digital literacy;
- Have difficult access to an internet connection or do not have a suitable electronic device;
- Because the **system has accessibility barriers** [26].

Assistance to candidates with disabilities who have more support needs may be essential for them to submit their application. This could also be provided by an external resource.

Qualification requirements for a position

Persons with disabilities may encounter difficulties in the usual educational pathways. Instead, they may develop their skills in other contexts.

For example, the educational pathway for persons with disabilities with more support needs may lead to a semi-skilled trade certificate rather than a high school diploma.

Specific or alternative qualification criteria could be defined for candidates with disabilities who have more support needs. The requirement for a specific diploma could be replaced by another certification or demonstration of the necessary skills [26].

Selection interview

Some persons with disabilities with more support needs may find it difficult to participate in selection interviews [27], because they:

- Are unfamiliar with the expectations implicit in interviews;
- Experience a great deal of anxiety when faced with a situation that involves a great deal of uncertainty;
- Do not have the necessary level of fluency or communication skills;
- Have to describe their skills orally rather than being able to demonstrate them.

For example, an interview with a candidate with a speech disorder will not provide any information about their qualifications for housekeeping.

Accommodations should be planned to improve the accessibility of selection interviews and enable persons with disabilities to demonstrate their qualifications fairly [5, 26, 27]. Assistance to candidates, in particular by an external resource, could help to reduce these barriers related to interviews and the selection process.

Qualifications assessment internship

Some candidates' qualifications could be more easily assessed by **demonstrating them in a real context during a short observation and exploration placement**. These placements can also give candidates a better understanding of the expectations associated with a position, as well as enabling them to determine what accommodations need to be put in place.

In Québec, the provincial government's *contrat d'intégration au travail* (CIT) program - evaluation component offers a wage subsidy for an organization offering an internship of up to 13 weeks.

Employment conditions and assignments

The organization should plan flexible conditions in terms of the **number of hours worked** per week for candidates with disabilities who have more support needs. For example, full-time or part-time status, or the possibility of working or refusing overtime could be considered according to the employee's needs.

In public sector organizations and for certain positions, workers may first **be hired for a job and then assigned to a specific position**. In other cases, workers start with **on-call status**, before being able to access a regular assignment. **Assignment to specific shifts** is also sometimes determined by seniority.

This raises barriers for persons with disabilities who have more support needs, as it **is difficult to plan and implement accommodations in these changing contexts**.

The organization needs to plan a **flexible assignment process or an alternative procedure** that takes into account the accommodations required for persons with disabilities with more support needs, according to their individual needs profiles.

Planning accommodations

Several types of accommodation may be required for persons with disabilities who have more support needs. Accommodation planning should consider these elements:

Job tasks

Accommodations may relate to:

- Primary or secondary job tasks;
- Tools;
- Work methods;
- Adjustments to the workstation;
- Workplace adjustments.

Relations and interactions

Accommodations may concern the atypical ways in which some persons with disabilities communicate or relate to others. Supervisors, colleagues or other people working with them may be required to:

- Modify the way they give instructions (e.g. clearly, in stages);
- Avoid behaviour that could cause stress (e.g. interrupting an employee while they are performing task);
- Respect the different ways of working and the accommodations that have been established;
- Use alternative or additional means of communication (e.g. written instructions, pictures);
- Respect the employee's communication or social preferences (e.g. not insisting on having lunch together);
- Avoid passing judgment on the person's atypical behaviour.

People management practices

Accommodations can be needed to management practices within the team or the organization.

A supervisor may have to plan accommodations to the management of his or her team, for example for:

- Work schedule (start and end times, breaks and meal breaks);
- Rules for allocating holidays, tools, etc.

Assistance should be provided to navigate the communication to staff (e.g. memos, computer portals, forms, emails) for employees with low literacy or digital literacy skills.

Implementing, sustaining and reviewing accommodations

Decisions on accommodations **should be recorded** so that they can be consulted by the people concerned. Unrecorded accommodations are likely to be questioned by people who were not involved in the decisions.

Someone should be responsible for **communicating** decisions about accommodations to **those affected**, when necessary, for example to the purchasing department for the purchase of specific equipment or to a new direct supervisor.

*For example, the Government of Canada has developed the **Passport to an Accessible Workplace** tool to record agreements between employees and managers on the tools and measures to be provided as workplace accommodations.*

<https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity->

[inclusion-public-service/accessibility-public-service/government-canada-workplace-accessibility-passport/about.html](https://www.inclusion-public-service/accessibility-public-service/government-canada-workplace-accessibility-passport/about.html)

The **review and evolution of accommodations** should be planned. It is sometimes necessary to try more than one accommodation before determining which ones are useful [28]. Changes in the employee, his or her supervisor, colleagues, the work to be done or the workplace may also require new accommodations.

New employee onboarding plan

The usual procedures for onboarding new employees should be adapted to take into account the **additional consideration** required to integrate an employee with disabilities who has more support needs.

For example, time should be set aside to clearly define and communicate the supervisor's expectations and the tasks to be carried out at each location, as well as the methods and tools.

Working with an **external resource** could facilitate onboarding by helping to implement accommodations, contributing to training, raising team awareness or reassuring the new employee.

The adapted onboarding plan should also take into account preparing and supporting the **direct supervisor**, as their new employee may present them with new or unexpected situations or questions.

Designating a **colleague who can play the role of mentor** could be included in the adapted onboarding plan, in particular to help guide the new employee, answer their questions and also help them navigate the team's social relationships and informal rules. This mentor, ideally someone who volunteered for that role, should be

made aware of the needs of their new colleague so that they can play their role effectively.

Job performance appraisal

Job performance appraisal is an important step at the end of a probationary period, or when it forms the basis for a decision to extend or renew a contract or to provide a permanent position. The performance appraisal process for an employee with disabilities and more support needs should be **planned and adapted** to ensure that it is **fair and equitable**.

The **accommodations** required by the employee must have been effectively **put in place during the period being assessed**. The evaluation during the probationary period should also include a mid-term meeting to review expectations and document any adjustments that need to be made to the employee's work or accommodations.

The performance appraisal of an employee with disabilities who has more support needs **must be based on the expectations determined for this employee, according to his or her profile and needs**. The assessment should enable the employee to improve his or her performance at work and to judge, in collaboration with his or her supervisor, the usefulness of the accommodations.

Working with an **external resource** during performance appraisals, particularly during the probationary period, can help to ensure mutual understanding between supervisor and employee, and also to plan and implement any changes that may subsequently be necessary.

Remuneration

An employee benefiting from accommodations and performing the essential duties of a job should receive the remuneration provided for the position, according to the established pay scale.

In the context of a project where a **position is tailor-made** for a person with disabilities who has more support needs, guidelines should be established to **determine the appropriate remuneration for the position, so that it is fair and equitable** to the employee, as well as to other members of staff. The decision could take into account the responsibilities of the position, the tasks to be carried out and the expected workload.

Government wage subsidy programs are designed to compensate the employer if the employee has reduced productivity or requires increased supervision time.

Career progression

An employee should not remain indefinitely in a job that excludes any job security, or salary and career progression because of their disability

The organization's career development programs should be accessible to employees with disabilities who have more support needs.

For example, an employee with a disability who has more support needs should be able to participate in the training offered within the organization or apply for another position.

Conclusion

This guide offers points for consideration on adapting public sector organization's staffing process for hiring persons with disabilities, particularly those with more support needs. An organization wishing to conduct a comprehensive and rigorous project may also consult Accessibility Canada's Employment Standards (CAN/ASC-1.1:2024 - REV-2025) [29].

Hiring persons with disabilities who have more support needs **calls into question the rules and standards within the organization**, as well as the way in which our society perceives them. However, a project such as this also provides an opportunity to think about the flexibility of human resources management policies and practices in the face of staff diversity.

Working towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities, including those with more support needs, both in our society and in the workplace is an important step in working towards a **fair and equitable society for all**.

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