

# Brick by Brick

## Building Neuroinclusive Workplaces



## Breaking down barriers

There are many benefits to creating a neuroinclusive workspace. Yet neurodivergent Canadians continue to face barriers to employment and career progression.

With many Canadian companies experiencing significant labour shortages, employers can benefit from recruiting and supporting talent from underrepresented groups, including neurodivergent workers. Companies that do so might see improved communication, more innovation, and better company morale.

Through an online survey and a series of one-on-one interviews with neurodivergent workers and employers of neurodivergent workers, this research explores best practices for building and supporting a neurodiverse workforce. From it, we have developed five practical recommendations for employers to consider when creating more inclusive workplaces for those who are neurodivergent.



## Start with awareness training

The most significant barrier that neurodivergent workers face is a lack of understanding of neurodiversity. Participants indicated that the first step in becoming more inclusive of neurodivergent workers is to provide managers and co-workers with neurodiversity awareness training. Interview participants suggested ways that this training can be most effective:

- be company-wide and delivered on an ongoing basis;
- provide an opportunity for co-workers and managers to learn more about what neurodiversity is (and is not) and develop strategies for becoming more inclusive;
- be delivered by those with significant professional and/or lived experience with neurodiversity.

## Offer alternatives to the traditional hiring process

Traditional hiring processes often don't allow neurodivergent individuals to demonstrate why they're a good fit for the job. Interview participants suggested ways employers can make hiring processes more inclusive of neurodivergent candidates:

- provide interview questions in advance;
- provide multiple options for interviews when appropriate (e.g., in person, virtually, over the phone, over e-mail);
- avoid abstract and/or behavioural questions (e.g., "If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?");
- focus on matching job-related skills rather than solely personality;
- provide job seekers with opportunities to demonstrate their skills;
- write clear, skills-based job postings that avoid ambiguous language such as "good culture fit."

## Develop flexible accommodation processes

Many participants highlighted a lack of support and a daunting accommodation process as significant barriers. Being up front about what supports are available (e.g., providing a checklist of available supports during onboarding) can make the accommodation process more inclusive—all new workers can access the supports they need without having to navigate a complex process.

Frequently, accommodations involve only small, informal changes to how an employee performs their work:

- flexibility in terms of work location and schedule;
- access to a private office if required to minimize distractions;
- noise-cancelling headphones to minimize distractions;
- assistive technology;
- soft lighting;
- alternative communication methods (e.g., e-mail, direct message) when appropriate.



## Build trust: People-first management

Fear of negative repercussions is a major barrier to workers disclosing their neurodiversity status. By creating a trusting employee–manager relationship, neurodivergent workers may feel more comfortable talking openly with their manager and accessing the supports that they need. This type of management is not only beneficial for neurodivergent workers, it can also have positive impacts for the whole team.

## Foster community

Some neurodivergent workers noted that being neurodivergent in the workplace can feel isolating. Many said they would benefit from having a community where they can seek advice and support. Creating an employee resource group for neurodivergent workers can raise awareness about neurodiversity and help neurodivergent workers feel more engaged and supported in the workplace.

## Are you building barriers, or an inclusive workplace?

Check out the accompanying impact paper to dig deeper into the benefits of workplaces becoming more neuroinclusive. Readers may also be interested in our recently published [issue briefing](#) that summarizes employee and employer perspectives, attitudes, and ideas for supporting neurodiversity in the workplace.

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