Green Equity Guide For Employers

GGG

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Introduction

Employment Equity was introduced by the federal government to ensure barrier elimination in favour (equitable) of the employment of four designated groups: women, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples (Indigenous People), visible minorities and peoples with disabilities. However, progressive thinking organisations have expanded that commitment to include members of the LGBTQ2S+ community, (McMaster University, 2017).

Although Employment Equity is federally and provincially recognized through the Employment Equity Act, many organisations have failed to see the importance of adhering to this act, with only a handful of entities going above and beyond to ensure equitably and just practices.

Historical data proves that the groups mentioned above have been on the unfortunate end of the Canadian labour market. These communities have been on the receiving end of systemic barriers, high rates of under-employment and unemployment, and a disproportionate amount of low pay and low-status jobs. The pandemic has thrown an additional curve ball at racialized members in the previously mentioned cohorts, (Public Health, 2021).

The Green Career Centre is a non-profit organization powered by Regenesis with a mission to prepare youth, BIPOC and newcomers for green careers. The Green Career Centre works by and for these communities to bridge the gap between equitable, accessible and transparent social and environmental employment opportunities.

Our team drafted this **Green Jobs Equity Guide for Employers** in response to the ongoing systemic issues impeding the progress of youth, BIPOC and newcomers in their respective green job searches.

Some common pain points associated with these critical cohorts include:

- **Unsuccessful applications due to the unreasonable prerequisite** of having numerous years of experience. This unfairly targets students, especially recent graduates with limited experience due to school commitments and other factors such as youth bias, (Nunley et al, 2014).
- **Discriminatory practices** within the educational system and the recruitment process (BIPOC bias). According to a report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), there has been little progress in closing the racial unemployment gap, (Block, Galabuzi, & Tranjan, 2019).
- **Newcomers' ineligibility to secure employment or internships** due to the government's restrictions on employee funding provided to potential employers. There is a general preference for Canadian citizens over international students/newcomers, which disfavors one group over another, even if they have the required experience for the job (Castelino, 2021).

Imagine being disqualified from a race (before even competing) because of your background or minority-identifying information, without a chance to prove your capabilities.

Not fair...Is it?

Why Should Employers Care?

There are a plethora of reasons why employers should care about equitable hiring practices. The most common one is that companies with diverse management teams have 19% higher revenues due to innovation, (Lorenzo et al., 2018). However, for employers looking for a more holistic experience beyond bettering their bottom line,

the simple answer is that diverse talent attracts fresh and innovative perspectives, which translates to an increase in brand awareness and healthy and productive work environments. By creating equitable and just environments for optimum hiring and training practices, it opens up healthy avenues to better management within the local supply chain. In addition, by centering marginalised voices for social, environmental and economic development, and providing value-added relationships for all stakeholders–it's a win-win.

*GCC Tip: Progressive workplaces are becoming more and more diverse. Genuine, forward-thinking organisations wisely position themselves for the future when the perspectives of people of colour and low-income communities are actively represented within their organisations, especially when individuals are strategically placed to make equitable decisions, (USDN, 2018).

As an ever-evolving organisation, we know there is no such thing as 'the perfect' workplace. However, we are proud to stand behind this guide and the inclusive actionable practices found throughout our research. This guide aims to serve as a helpful resource to navigate and hopefully mitigate the pitfalls mentioned above and provide additional content on what it takes to create a more resilient and inclusive workforce for foundational sustainable growth.

Let's begin!

Recruitment

Before recruitment, ensure the organisation has sufficient capabilities and the resources to invest in a new employee. This will help avoid shortcuts and proceed with fair and equitable recruitment.

Pre-hiring checklist:
- **Onboarding:** Is there time and capacity for onboarding new staff with clear goals for the position?
- **Employee safety:** For BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ youth, is there an anti-oppressive, brave space for the workplace? Anti-oppression training cannot be done through a single training and requires a genuine anti-oppression task force (fairly compensated) and an equitable system in your organisation. How is the organisation actively addressing anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism within the organisation and in its activities?
- **Compensation**: Are there other ways, such as additional grants to compensate new employees fairly? For example, new employees should be paid an above minimum wage ($15) for a position with an immense amount of labour or requiring specialised skills (Advocacy Committee, 2021).

In many cases, working youth wages are lower for young people of colour (Black, Latin and Asian) compared to their white peers. The gap is surprisingly prevalent among college, university students and out-of-school youth. To prevent and reduce this gap, **design well-build summer youth employment programs.** These programs are shown to address high youth unemployment rates, increase earnings, and build skills and networks for further employment and studies.

Another crucial strategy is to **evaluate the job description for any signs of socioeconomic bias.** More often than not, educational prerequisites such as bachelor's and master's Degrees are stated as 'must-haves' for many organisations. However, this could be biased against individuals who have relevant professional experience but could not afford a college/university education (USDN, 2018).

*GCC Tip: Include diversity quotas at the executive and board level so that young racialized people feel more welcomed when wanting to apply for a job at a green organisation, (Castelino, 2021).

With the examples mentioned above focusing on youth and BIPOC communities specifically, these next few pointers will provide quick tips on how an organisation can tackle the prevalent barriers to entry for international students/newcomers:

1. **Find innovative alternatives to assessing candidate experience**, especially with international students who cannot acquire the experience. For example, a case competition allows students to combine knowledge from the classroom with real-time situations within the hiring company. This will help in assessing the problem solving and design thinking skills of the applicants for hiring consideration.
2. **Offer micro-credential and certification programs** to help young people get their foot in the door to green job opportunities.
3. **Open up more green job opportunities** to recent graduates instead of currently enrolled students this helps diversify the talent pool

Advertising & Outreach for the Position

Traditionally, when it comes to advertising and promoting a new position for hires, employers typically go through traditional routes known to their organisation. Usually, it involves circulating new job information through affiliated environmental groups or partnered academic institutions. However, these recurring habits unintentionally may comprise the same practices that hinder the organisation from tapping into diverse talent pools by directly decreasing the percentage of qualified applicants of colour (USDN, 2018). This is primarily because sustainability networks and large academic institutions are predominantly white. Although this practice may seem it is reaching different categories of people, it ultimately serves the interests of the dominant demographic (white).

So as an employer, you may ask yourself, "How do I bypass the pitfall mentioned above of favouring one group over another, thereby reaching a more diverse applicant base?" The examples below might help give some clarity to your dilemma:

- **Partnering with multicultural centres** and BIPOC-based student groups at local colleges and universities. Establishing a relationship first-hand through job fairs or speed networking events would help establish a value-based relationship.
- **Establishing and maintaining contact with job boards**, websites, social media accounts and in-person job or community events hosted by organisations that serve communities of colour.
- **Creating and championing an internal Employee Resource Program** that focuses on the needs of BIPOC workers and the community. Creating an internal task force catalyses grassroots relations and empowers employees to facilitate conversations and actively seek out equity-deserving groups within their immediate communities.

*GCC Tip – The Green Career Centre prides itself in its ability to work hand-in-hand with youth, BIPOC and newcomers. We are open to facilitating purpose-led partnerships between interested employers and the communities mentioned above. Feel free to reach out to us at info@greencareer.ca to further this conversation.

In addition to those mentioned above, the GCC has curated a list of ongoing tangible examples of existing partnerships and how specific organisations have put their personal twist on eempowering youth, BIPOC and newcomers through an economic, social and overall holistic lens. They are as follows:

1. **Green Growth Working Group (GGWG) of the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED)**
   GGWG works to mainstream inclusive green-growth strategies in private-sector development (PSD), (ILO, 2022). Private sector development (PSD) is at the centre of the GGWG & DCED and therefore catalyses them to work on inclusive green strategies for strategies and policies for assisting the private sector in generating jobs and economic opportunities that empower the most disenfranchised individuals/groups. Their global scale focus with an emphasis on developing nations has provided a much needed push in the right direction for future private sector development initiatives.

   Some priority themes of this group include:
   - Private Sector Engagement
   - Market Systems Development
   - Results Measurement
   - Business Environment
   - Women's Economic Empowerment
   - Green Growth

2. **Intersectional Environmentalist's (IE) focus on community, collaboration and colour.** Private and public sector partnerships are pervasive throughout this non-profit, thereby championing a more holistic approach to combating climate change.

As a climate justice collective, Intersectional Environmentalist curates accessible green educational resources while serving as a incubator for collaborative grassroots initiatives that centre BIPOC voices in the climate justice movement. They have a plethora of online and offline partnerships and are currently looking to expand their reach; check out more here.

There are a lot of core similarities with IE and GCC, most noteworthy is their partnerships core value list;
- Education-based
- Long-term relationship
- Supporting BIPOC artists (youth and newcomers) + thought Leaders

*GCC Tip - Try not to over complicate your community collaboration program. Whether you have local or international plans for your program, starting small and growing big is the best piece of advise we can give you. Just remember that having a community collaboration program will aid your organisation in developing a more grassroots approach to talent development, training and community empowerment.

*GCC Tip: Create a Bias Checklist to ensure equitable and just recruitment strategies.

- **Discuss with committee members** how to invite and attract applicants from underrepresented groups with diverse backgrounds and interests.
- **Allow equal opportunity** and timing during interviews and interactions.
- **Avoid activities or dialogues** that condone racism, sexism, and/or discrimination in your workplace.
- **Hire and contact those depending on skills and interests,** not on appearance or names typically associated with equity deserving groups.
- **Use inclusive language.** Avoid using gendered pronouns or words that associate with certain groups.
- **Be clear on what is "required" and "preferred"** in a job position, as it may limit specific candidates from applying depending on the statements.

By ensuring fair and inclusive recruitment practices, the company will be able to attract more candidates - allowing us to move to the next step, hiring.

The hiring process is essential to the sustainability of the company. This procedure aims to filter and narrow down the candidates before choosing the best person for the position. The first step is to review resumes and job applications.

Review Resumes Without Bias

When reviewing resumes, **unconscious biases** from employers can affect the screening process. These unconscious biases are stereotypes about specific groups of people that individuals form outside of their own consciousness. Some examples of unconscious biases are gender and racial biases, which can lead to the rejection of a candidate if they have identifying information belonging to those groups, even if they possess the skills to benefit the company (Hilgers, 2021).

From the names of candidates alone, it can hold a lot of influence as it is the first thing employers see. Most often, minorities are the most affected by these factors. According to many studies, black-sounding names receive 14% fewer interview offerings than their identical white counterparts (Nunley et al., 2014). Another study found that when Black applicants from minorities "whitened" their applications/resumes by changing or eliminating references to their race such as interests, hobbies, and words like "black", 25% of Black candidates received responses against 10% who did not make those changes (Gerdeman, 2017). Often, changes in the applications can simply be changing their non-western name to a common western name. To ensure fair and equitable hiring practices, employers must be aware when their unconscious biases are interfering with the screening process.

Here are some strategies to limit unconscious biases and promote more inclusive hiring:

Try blind screening. A process where identifying information such as name, address, photo, and education of applicants is hidden, emphasising their experience and skills. Anonymizing their resumes can reduce bias during the screening process. Tools like **Pinpoint** and **Blendoor** have blind screening features, or simply ask applicants not to include identifying information on their applications on the job description. Then only ask them about personal information after they are invited to an interview.

Another method to reduce bias and quicken the screening process is to **eliminate resumes altogether and replace them with a standardised and anonymous test** for all candidates to complete. After the test is conducted, the applicants will be ranked based on their answers from a pre-made scorecard (Hilgers, 2021). This procedure eliminates both identifying information and resumes that may deter a recruiter from considering a candidate.

Finally, have a **diverse resume/application review panel**. Strive for a mix of genders and non-binary people, ethnicities, and age groups to get various opinions and perspectives for a fair evaluation of each candidate. To reduce bias and maintain equality, implement regular checks for discrimination, and compare the number of applicants from underrepresented groups to how many receive interview offers. Members on the review panel should be changed periodically, so the screening process is not limited to one team's biases.

During the Interview Process

Establish a diverse interview panel and interview process
Implement a standardised interview process for all candidates, with a pre-made script, relevant interview questions, and a scorecard to evaluate their performance (Taylor, 2021). During the interview process, have two or more interviewers (the more diverse, the better) to ensure fairness and objectivity and see things from different perspectives. Diverse interviewers show the interviewee that the company is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion.

The hiring/interview process should not be too long or complicated as it can be a red flag for candidates. 3-4 interviews (including subsequent interviews) should be the limit, as the candidate may not have enough time to go through the entire process (Lee, 2022). Be respectful of everyone's time, and consider whether the lengthy interview process is necessary or not.

Interview Questions to Ask - in Consideration of Youth, BIPOC, Newcomers and More
Here are some sample interview questions:
- EDI-focused
- Hiring for higher-level leadership positions and professionals and staff with questions on diversity and inclusion
- For youth and entry-level positions

Employers should ask the same questions to all applicants of the same job. Situational questions seem to work well when uncovering implicit or hidden biases, revealing actions in the past, and predicting future actions. Make sure the questions are not subjective to one's preferences or ideals, and they should be reasonable. Without careful consideration of the interview questions, the employer may unintentionally ask questions that are unfair, offensive, or irrelevant to the position.

Accommodations

Accommodations can vary per person, where adjustments can be made in the workplace, the process to complete tasks, or the tools needed to perform the job. As the employer, you must consult with the employee before implementing the accommodations and understand that these adjustments cannot be used to judge applicants' calibre in the hiring process.

Accommodations allow job seekers to access opportunities, showcase their skills without difficulty during interviews, reach maximum potential on the job, reduce employee turnover, and achieve higher employee satisfaction (The Inclusive Workplace, 2021).

Some accommodations include additional time to answer interview questions or do assessments, changes in hours so employees can pick up their children on time, and/or provide reserved parking passes and specific places for wheelchair users.

Accommodation checklist which helps to:

- **Identify if the candidate needs accommodation.** This can be at any stage of the hiring process or on the job. If applicable, the probationary period should begin after the accommodation implementation (Carleton University, 2020).
- **If the employee requests accommodation, they must inform the employer,** and provide any necessary documentation related to the nature of their mentioned limitations. However, the employer is also responsible for identifying if a person may require accommodations even if there are no requests made. The employer may question the employee if they are able to perform the essential functions of their role, but cannot ask for specific information such as the diagnosis of the disability (Carleton University, 2020). If the employer is uncertain about what actions to take, the employer should consult with an expert (e.g. an accommodation specialist) or obtain further advice.

- After documenting their information, **maintain confidentiality and respect** the dignity of the employee requesting the accommodation.
- **Study and evaluate alternative methods**, and collaborate with the employee to find the best solutions. Whichever method you choose, be sure it is within your company's budget/costs as compensation for any requested medical records and adjustments made to the workplace may be required (Carleton University, 2020).
- Once implemented, **obtain feedback and conduct periodic check-ins** (e.g. every month/quarter) to ensure that the accommodations serve their needs and help them fulfil their roles and responsibilities (The Inclusive Workplace, 2021).

Suppose the cost of accommodation is a concern. In that case, the employer/organisation can outsource funding to cover the costs, such as this Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities offered by the Canadian Government (Government of Canada, 2022).

Retention

General Onboarding Tips

Onboarding is what levels the playing field and narrows the learning curve. With a strong and smooth onboarding process, the new employees will be able to perform better, feel more included, and familiarise themselves faster within the company culture.

To start, the employer can provide a **welcome package** with the essentials such as company details, and initiatives, alongside a job description, responsibilities, expectations, points of contact, ethics policies, DEI statement, and site maps that show the layout of the buildings (Harvard University, 2019). The site map should highlight important rooms such as meeting rooms, washrooms, and social places like the cafeteria or the lounge. This also includes highlighting inclusive spaces

such as accessible entrances, prayer rooms, parent-child rooms and relaxation areas - the list is endless. The point is to list out everything a new and old employee should know about within your company building (Cordivano, 2019).

If you plan to host a virtual onboarding experience, one inclusion tip is to provide a **video** of the workplace's interior, entrance, walking distance to the closest bus station, and its surrounding conveniences (The Inclusive Workplace, 2021). This can show the employees what the physical building looks like, and allow them to prepare before coming to work.

During the onboarding process, make sure also to introduce any **employee resource groups, culture/interest groups, or peer group/ programs** alongside their responsibilities at work. It shows that your company is more than just a place that values work, but also its people (Gittens-Ottley, 2021).

Teach new employees the company's language! Each company has different acronyms, vocabulary and slang; If your company has a unique language, be sure to teach them, so they are kept in the loop, and feel included in the conversation (Gittens-Ottley, 2021).

Give the new hires time to settle in. Each person learns differently. The onboarding process varies per company, and it can last from one month to a year; however long it is, make sure to communicate this to your team (Harvard University, 2019). Allocate time especially during the first week to answer questions and support them while they are doing their tasks. Conduct 1:1 meetings periodically to obtain feedback. The more often you meet, the more likely the employee will feel cared for and acclimated to their role on the team. If you have limited time, assign a mentor to the new employees to assist them in their roles (Gittens-Ottley, 2021).

Implement strategic diversity training
Provide diversity training to help employees and the team understand how cultural differences impact people's work ethic and communication styles. If this topic is unfamiliar to you, you should reach out to experts such as diversity coaches or consultants for advice on how to implement a diversity training program that aligns with the company's DEI initiatives and challenges (McClendon, 2022).

Ultimately you want to build awareness about equity within the organisation. Let them know that people can discriminate or offend others with their words with or without intention to do so, and how most of these misunderstandings or acts of discrimination are due to lack of awareness. Educating the team about hiring bias, interview practices, and unconscious bias will help employees become more aware of how to address others, approach different cultures, and be a good representative of the company's EDI mission (McClendon, 2022). Letting them know how to change for the better, can improve the company's image and head towards a more holistic approach.

Cultivate an inclusive culture with these initiatives
Here are three ideas you can incorporate into your company to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion:

1. **Start an internal forum**. Talk to your (new and old) employees, including equity-seeking groups. This is a great way to talk openly about EDI concerns and to uncover any internal tension or strife between employees. Create an anonymous form for employees to submit if they discover traces of racism or negative intentions in the workplace. You want to create a safe environment where employees are not afraid to express their honest opinions without fear of retaliation. For group discussions, they can be hosted through lunch and learns, or online through Zoom webinars (Ryan, 2020). By making these discussions open and accessible, employees will feel more comfortable and secure at work.

2. **Create and encourage employees to form employee resource groups (ERGs).** These allow people to find common interests among employees, which can create long-lasting relationships. Allow them to create their own, giving them a leadership and learning opportunity to lead a group discussion or activity. When employees connect with their colleagues, it boosts productivity and satisfaction, leading to higher referrals and increasing employer brand recognition (Gittens-Ottley, 2021).

3. **Implement a mentorship program.** Have an experienced or long-term worker become a mentor and a new hire as the mentee. The mentor gains leadership and coaching skills, whereas the mentee learns how to complete the tasks and fulfil their role. Additionally, the mentee learns from another perspective from another perspective of someone who is not their manager" (Trinidad, 2021). With a successful mentorship program, the mentee may want to become a mentor in the future, creating a virtuous cycle of mentorship and self-development.

Review company EDI policies on an ongoing basis

Keep track of each implementation or initiative year-round. This will show what is working and creating results, and what needs to be changed or improved. Moreover, it holds leaders accountable for their actions and encourages them to pursue better solutions.

Conclusion

Speaking from personal experience (youth, BIPOC and newcomer identifying) the topic of Employment Equity has been the deciding factor in how and where most of our team members ultimately carve out their sustainable career paths. As a potential employer reading this, we implore you to take our tips as a healthy actionable guide toward a more diverse, equitable and resilient workforce.

From recruitment to retention, we hope organisations implement and maintain equitable and unbiased practices to support the various diverse groups and communities in what is currently known as Canada.

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