EDI Strategies in Recruitment
Toolkit

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This toolkit was built by the contributions of Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour (IBPOC) who have been through the hiring process in libraries and offered their personal experiences and insights through surveys and interviews. Contributions from library leaders and supervisors who have been responsible for hiring and taken part in the recruitment process also informed the strategies shared here. After 132 online survey responses, 21 follow up interviews, and numerous consultations, this project would not have been possible without the support, openness, and collegial spirit of our colleagues at all sides of the table.

Introduction

> The HR staff told me that one of the managers believed Chinese librarians are too shy to be responsible as the person-in-charge for closing the library branch and responding to issues. This is why I wasn't the successful candidate.
> – IBPOC candidate

Libraries are dominated by policies, practices and procedures that have created barriers for racial representation in our workforce. This is reflected in how:

- there are fewer racialized staff in professional roles, and in roles of increasing leadership levels.[1]
- there is an imbalance of racialized workers in libraries compared to their diverse multiracial client bases. Our library workforces often do not reflect the populations and groups we serve.[2]

Research has long proved that diverse teams are better at being innovative and creative; they're better problem solvers and decision makers.[3] These teams benefit from broader perspectives with more information and experience brought to the table. Team members benefit when they're exposed to new skills and approaches to work.

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[1] Li, Y., Kumaran, M., Cho, A., Ly, V., Fernando, S., & Miller, M. D. (2021). 2021 Redux Survey of Visible Minority Librarians of Canada.

[2] Public Library Association. (2022). Public library staff and diversity report: Results from the 2021 PLA Annual Survey.

[3] Dame, V., Layon, D., and Prince, S. (2015). Why diversity matters. McKinsey & Company.
Rock, D., Grant, H. (2016). Why diverse teams are smarter. Harvard Business Review.
Stahl, A. (2021). 3 benefits of diversity in the workplace. Forbes.

This Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) strategies toolkit project emerged from the need to address "whiteness" in our sector and to disrupt the biases and barriers our libraries have imposed on racialized groups.[4] It seeks to strengthen our organizations by diversifying our teams and to support our libraries in becoming more welcoming and inclusive places of work.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

This toolkit is for library leaders across Canada and anyone involved in the hiring process in libraries from supervisors to human resource staff. The strategies are scalable and can be used in recruiting for any role in libraries.

HOW WAS THIS BUILT?

The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategies in Recruitment Toolkit was developed in 2022. Its content is built from data and insight collected through surveys, stakeholder interviews, and secondary research.

WHAT TO KNOW FIRST

WE ALL HAVE UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Unconscious bias, or implicit bias, is an assumption, belief, or attitude that we hold subconsciously and affects the judgements we make in favour or against someone. We all have bias no matter what our background is. Bias can be influenced by: stereotypes we hold, affinity we have for people who are like us, perceptions we have about cultures, or our tendency to support someone we see as being part of our social group vs an outsider. There are many types of bias. We need to acknowledge and understand that we are influenced by bias before we can move forward with applying any EDI strategy.

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[4] Galvan, A. (2015). <u>Soliciting performance, hiding bias: Whiteness and librarianship.</u> In the Library with the Lead Pipe.

THERE IS NO "DIVERSE CANDIDATE"

An individual candidate cannot be described as diverse. "Diverse" is an adjective for describing things that are different from one another. This means a group of people can be diverse (different from one another) but a single person cannot be diverse (different from themselves). Using diverse to describe a candidate is a veiled way of tokenizing someone. It is vague and not meaningful. Be explicit about the unique experience, skills, and competencies you're looking for and valuing in a candidate.

INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES BENEFIT ALL

Diversity is not limited to the category of race and ethnicity — there are additional underrepresented identity groups in libraries. This project has focused on hearing the experiences of candidates with diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, while understanding we share intersectional identities. The strategies outlined here are inclusive recruitment practices that can benefit all candidates as well as our workforce in general.

THIS IS ONE STEP

Recruitment is not the sole solution. An organizational culture shift is needed. Changes to infrastructure and systems are required including ones to support minority workers when they join our workplaces. Taking action to change the way we recruit should happen concurrently with other EDI efforts. We need systemic change in our organizations.

START TODAY

The recommended actions in this toolkit are a starting place. Consider what is realistic for your organization when it comes to resources, time, and budget. You can implement select strategies, observe, learn, and adapt. Applying what you read here will look different for every library. There are no reasons to delay nor wait. Start with actionable steps today.

Taking Action

This toolkit outlines 20 actions you can take to transform the way you recruit at each stage of the process from posting to onboarding.

General

1. **Be transparent about your process**

   Share as much as possible about your hiring process so applicants know what to expect and are set up to succeed. Outline what is involved in your process: what are the steps or stages? How do you assess applications or evaluate interviews? What is your timeline? In the interview, do answers apply from one question to another? Define your hiring process and make this information publicly available on your website. Communicate it in advance to interested candidates.

   Keeping people in the dark creates misunderstanding and mistrust. Demystifying the process gives both your hiring committees members clarity and applicants clarity about what you're doing and how. Being as transparent as possible eliminates ambiguity, promotes consistency, and mitigates concerns candidates may have about being treated differently or unfairly.

   The library gave explicit details on what their interview process is like and what is being judged on the record. I would like to see this become standard practice.
   – IBPOC candidate

   More transparency about the process benefits people who are new to the field, people who are new to a type of library, people who have different cultural background.
   – Hiring manager

2. Offer accommodations

Support candidates with accommodations as needed during the hiring process. State this on your website. Include it in your job posting. Make this same offer when you contact candidates and invite them for an interview. Be clear about whether you're requiring proof for an accommodation.

Instead of asking what a candidate needs, tell them what you can offer. Reduce the burden placed on an applicant to know what they need or what they can ask for. Do the work in advance and know what your organization can or cannot offer. Have a set of examples of what you can do to accommodate a person (e.g, options for interview format, provide questions in advance, extra time to answer questions).

3. Provide training to support all personnel involved in hiring

When asked what they need in order to pursue the work of diversifying their teams, training is the most common need expressed by hiring managers. It is also the most common request IBPOC candidates say they would like to see happen in organizations.

Suggested training topics include anti-racism, anti-oppression, unconscious bias or anti-bias, cultural sensitivity, hiring with an EDI approach, and understanding EDI/DEI. Free training and resources are available online which can be a starting place. Be aware, however, more impactful training requires some guidance, direction, and accountability.

External consultants can offer training, and there are many local consulting groups offering workshops on these topics. To help you in selecting a consultant, you can seek referrals from other libraries and organizations, check reviews, and talk to previous clients.

You can seek potential training options from your parent organizations, connected associations or networks. Everyone who could potentially be part of a hiring process should be trained and receive refreshers over time.

> Everyone who could potentially be on a hiring committee has completed anti-bias training delivered by an external consultant. It's been useful to have shared common understanding, but this is only a first step. I can see training on more topics needed in order to continually work on a more equitable process.
> – Hiring manager

Posting

4. **Be strategic about where or how you promote your job posting**

Approach: Casting the net wide
You can post your jobs broadly, and use channels you haven't used before. For example, advertise your job posting through specialized jobs boards (e.g., ViMLoC), ethnic community newspapers, radio stations and other media platforms, Indigenous community boards, employment centres, community agencies and partners.

Approach: Being specific, being intentional

Your strategy for posting can look different based on the position; sometimes the best strategy is not to post everywhere. A narrower approach may be better for postings that typically attract an overwhelming number of applications from broad job board platforms, many of which are irrelevant. Invest your resources in posting at strategic places or through intentional connections rather than an open call out.

Approach: Using a targeted search program

Assess the circumstances for the role(s) you're hiring; you can consider using a targeted program to hire from a specific demographic group. Several libraries have enrolled in a Special Program with the BC Human Rights Commission to restrict their hiring to candidates belonging to specific identity groups. These targeted searches have proven to attract quality applicants.

> With each competition under the special program, we found a strong candidates pool with well-qualified applicants. A candidate told us they hadn't been actively looking for work but seeing the program influenced the decision to apply.
> – Hiring manager

Approach: Using specialized recruiters

Work with a specialized employment agency or recruitment team. This can be external or internal. You can enlist an external group specialized in equitable and diversity hiring to take charge in searching for applicants. Your parent organization may also have resources in specialized recruitment (i.e., Indigenous recruitment team).

Approach: *Timing your posting*

Post the job for an extended amount of time. Your usual time limit for a posting may not be adequate to draw and prepare a wider breadth of applicants. Don't be afraid to close the competition and repost with a different strategy.

> It's okay to let a competition fail. Go back to square one, revise the job posting. Sometimes it's timing.
> — Hiring manager

5. **Revamp your job posting**

Posting broadly or strategically alone is not enough and has to work in tandem with revisiting the way your job postings or descriptions are written. If you're finding that you're not receiving applications, revisit your job posting. Strong potential candidates may see your job posting but the description is causing job seekers to screen themselves out.

Here are ways to rethink and rewrite your postings:

Plain language
Write simply. This will benefit and be appreciated by everyone from all backgrounds (any educational or literacy levels, no matter the type of position). Use simple words and fewer words to communicate your point. Use an active voice and fewer clauses. Keep sentences short. Break it up. Be brief. Be concise.

Cut and paste your job description or sections of it into an online readability tool. It will tell you how complex your writing is and the reading level required to understand the text. Does the language in your posting match the qualification you're asking for? If your job description is asking for high school level education, it shouldn't be written for someone with a doctorate to be able to understand. Furthermore, communicating simply at all stages of recruitment benefits everyone.

Salary transparency

Include the salary (range) in your job posting everywhere that you post – this includes your organizational website as well as job boards.

The salary information for your organization may be publicly available, but do job seekers have to navigate a maze to find this information through union or association agreements? Do they have to know how to dissect schedule tables and out of date numbers? Or dig through employment databases? Be clear about salary and link to salary scales. Note also that wording such as "competitive compensation package" is not meaningful.

Research has long shown how wage gaps exist between white workers and workers of colour, as well as across other demographics like gender.[5] Being transparent about pay supports the work towards pay equity. Additionally, this information impacts IBPOC candidates who cannot afford to invest the labour into applying for a position with a pay that cannot adequately support them. The absence of salary information often deters potential IBPOC candidates from applying. Do not leave the burden of finding compensation to the applicant. You create an unnecessary hurdle and may lose great candidates.

> The lack of salary transparency is a bigger issue for IBPOC since we often don't come from money and we rely on our wage more heavily. I cannot afford to invest the time, effort and emotional labour to apply for a job only to learn in the end of the process that the salary isn't enough to support me.
> – IBPOC candidate

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[5] The Conference Board of Canada. (2017). Racial Wage Gap.

Criminal Record Check / Police Information Check

Indigenous, Black and people of colour are overpoliced and overrepresented in arrest/chargeable incident statistics. The influence of bias in policing practices and systemic racism means that we need to rethink our organizations' practice in asking for criminal record checks on our job postings. A statement like "a criminal record check is required" raises an immediate barrier for potential applicants who may have a charge on their record unrelated to the position or its duties. Ask yourself whether a criminal record check is truly necessary for this position. If it is, clarify in your wording what you care about (or do not care about) from the check and why.

Qualifications

Have you reviewed your job descriptions recently? Many of our job postings are filled with requirements that are not relevant or essential to the role. This raises an unnecessary barrier for people from minority groups who are more likely to self-select themselves out of an opportunity. Not to mention, a long list of requirements is intimidating and daunting for anyone.

Take the time to re-read it with a new lens. Ask: what is truly necessary for the job; what is out of date; what can or cannot be learned on the job. Eliminate as many qualifications as you can. Make it clear what are the must haves and what are the nice to haves.

Job seekers with experience and education outside of Canada bring a lot to the table. Attract skilled immigrants by including content on or links to information on foreign credentials validation and temporary work visas. Depending on the role, consider making education an asset rather than a requirement, and prioritize the diverse experiences candidates bring.

6. **Craft EDI statement and be able to back it up**

EDI statements are increasingly common on job postings. At best, they let job seekers know that an organization is welcoming qualified applicants of all backgrounds and identities, is committed to building an inclusive workforce and environment, and actively engaged in EDI work beyond this statement. At their worst and too often, EDI statements are performative and read like cut and paste sentences that immediately turn off IBPOC job seekers.

> I always see statements that welcome applicants from marginalized populations but I am not sure if the managers or staff truly have this kind of mindset.
> – IBPOC candidate

> I would like to see organizations explicitly state they value diversity and how they follow through with this.
> – IBPOC candidate

There are ways to write a good statement. Keep it short (3-4 sentences). Be genuine and be human. Use a first-person or second-person voice (we/you) that is conversational. No complex sentence structures or vocabulary needed. Break it up from the rest of your posting and use a heading. This prioritizes it for readers. It shows you take it seriously. Link to where applicants can learn more about the anti-racism and/or EDI work you're actively doing, and your related policies and statements.

Screening

7. **Explore anonymous recruitment**

Anonymous recruitment involves removing identifying details from candidates' applications. Information usually blacked out would be: a

person's name, name of educational institutions, language denoting gender, countries or locations. This is intended to mitigate unconscious biases in the hiring team. This strategy has not yet been commonly used in our sector, in part because it is labour and resource intensive. In other industries, it's shown to lower implicit bias and increase chances for a more diverse shortlist pool. At times, however, this method can work against diversity goals if your bias is in favour of underrepresented groups.[6]

8. **Create a rubric when screening applications**

   Use your job description to establish set benchmarks and values for shortlisting, before reviewing applications. Consider whether your rubric favours one type of person or one kind of experience, and how it can be adjusted to ensure a more inclusive shortlist.

9. **Value experience, skills, and knowledge outside of education**

   Change the way you shortlist by looking at applications and assigning values differently. A common barrier IBPOC candidates have faced is the way we prioritize education. They would like to see more value given to experience (including lived experience, experience outside of libraries), skills (including language), knowledge, relationships, and cultural understanding. These are all valuable contributors to a more diverse team and a benefit to our organizations.

   Language skills
   Recognize the value of language skills relevant to your community's demographics and needs. If additional languages are an asset in your job postings, it should be given weight or points when you're assessing applications. Incorporating it as an interview question also prioritizes and demonstrates you value it.

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[6] Fledmann, J. (2018). The Benefits and Shortcomings of Blind Hiring in the Recruitment Process. Forbes.

10. **Acknowledge the value of education and experience outside of Canada**

Be mindful about the biases you hold when you see education and experience outside of Canada. You may not understand education and experience outside of the Canadian context but that doesn't mean it shouldn't be recognized. Take the time to find out more.

> I was given the feedback that I need Canadian experience or credentials even though I have 20 years of experience working as a librarian and manager in public libraries outside of Canada.
> – IBPOC candidate

Interviewing

11. **Ensure there is an IBPOC staff on your hiring committee**

As often as possible, have IBPOC staff members join the hiring committee. They can offer unique alternate perspectives to the hiring table and understand candidates differently. They may also be able to flag questions that create barriers for racialized candidates. Recognize the value of IBPOC committee members' diverse voices and perspectives, and create safe open environments for these voices during interview preparations and debriefs. Having a diverse committee can also put IBPOC candidates more at ease.

> I have always appreciated seeing faces like mine reflected back to me at the interview table. It also makes it much less awkward when I am asked EDI questions like what does diversity mean to me.
> – IBPOC candidate

12. **Be consistent with your questions and the way you assess**

In striving for consistency and fairness, libraries have used the following tools and methods:

- Establish a rubric for assessing interview answers.

- Assign values or weights to questions.

- Draw from a bank of interview questions.

- Use the same set of questions for all candidates.

- Build in an honest open discussion on implicit bias as an explicit part of the debrief process. Search committee can ask "how might bias be showing up in this decision?".

- Do not discuss the interview and your assessments until every panelist has completed their rubric or scorecard. Discussion between those who finish earlier may sway others who are still deliberating.

The outcome is a more fair process with built-in measures to reduce bias.

13. **Format**

People engage, process information, and communicate differently. Our goal is to assess if someone is skilled and able to perform the responsibilities of a position in real life environments; it isn't to test how proficient people are at interviewing or how well they can answer questions in a pop quiz.

Here are several ways to shape your interviews and create a more equitable interview process:

- Offer flexibility for the interview format by including options such as in person or virtual interviews. This allows candidates to choose a setting they can be comfortable and at ease in to best respond to your interview questions and connect with the

panel. The option for remote interviews is particularly beneficial when interviews involve full or multi day interviews and meetings. Taking time off to attend the interview process in person can be challenging for IBPOC candidates who rely on their current employment's earnings.

- Explain [library] jargon as needed during the interview. A person may have experience and skills in the work you're referring to but they don't recognize the terms you're using. Avoid acronyms. Provide a brief introductory sentence or description with your question as needed.

- Provide questions in advance. This can be an hour, one day, or one week in advance (but ideally more time is better). It can be all questions or partial. This allows candidates time to process the questions and be primed. You can clarify with interviewees that they're not expected to prepare answers to read verbatim but it is meant instead just to give them a chance to feel ready to respond.

> We give the questions one week in advance of the interview. Candidates can also bring in their notes. We know that different people receive and present information in different ways. This approach has been very positively received. It reduces candidates' anxiety and leads to more thoughtful answers.
> – Hiring manager

14. EDI competency questions

Your organization may be committed to EDI and you want to add team members who are aligned with these values and your mission. Include an EDI related question in your interview. You should a) be prepared

to answer the same question on behalf of your organization, and b) be prepared to answer how you would support the candidate in gaining or growing EDI competency in their work.

Do you have an answer if a candidate asks:

- How does your organization (or department) apply principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion in your work?
- How is your organization prioritizing EDI?
- How will you support me in applying EDI to my work at your organization?

Often EDI questions – their wording and intent – can be vague and confusing. At times, the question may seem to imply that you're asking the candidate to identify themselves as part of a marginalized or vulnerable group and/or to make a case for why this matters. Be clear and honest about what you're asking for in your question. Test your questions. Read it out loud to someone and get feedback.

It is awkward and intimidating when I am answering an EDI related question asked by an all white hiring committee. It's difficult to ascertain what is expected from me as a racialized person answering the questions. What are they really asking and how honest can I be?

– IBPOC candidate

When I'm considering a library or institution, I want to know how they're putting their EDI priority into practice, ideally with examples. I am not interested in performative EDI.

– IBPOC candidate

Selecting

15. Value intercultural communication & language skills

> The candidate was a foreign-trained librarian and a recent immigrant who had gone through the library champion program in a large urban public library. My fellow interview panelist said her reason for rejecting this candidate was over concerns about her communication abilities and being able to respond to the different types of people who use a public library. To me, it seemed like a veiled remark about the candidate as a person of colour with accented English.
> — Hiring manager

Before you cast a candidate aside because of 'communication' skills or gaps, reflect on your unconscious bias when assessing candidates with non-Canadian/American accents. Consider the level of English that is truly required for the position and for responding to a wide range of community library users. Candidates with language skills and cultural understanding bring immeasurable value and abilities to connecting with and communicating with diverse library user groups.

16. Give *better* feedback

> It's common to never hear why you weren't considered after an interview. You aren't given a chance to improve. Otherwise the debrief isn't specific on how to truly do better.
> — IBPOC candidate

The most common challenge IBPOC candidates experience is unhelpful or lack of feedback. The absence of feedback or unhelpful feedback results in a feeling of mistrust and self-doubt. It contributes

to signs of prejudice or unconscious bias. Candidates express they've been left wondering if the outcome has been because of reasons such as their name, their accent, or their background as an immigrant.

Racialized people are also wary of tokenism. Without good feedback, there can often be an assumption that they were invited to interview only as a gesture or box ticking exercise and that they were not being genuinely considered.

> An external candidate was hired for the full time position. Our staff is overwhelmingly majority white. I'm an immigrant. I have an accent. Their feedback was that I didn't score the required points in the interview. But I couldn't shake the feeling that there may have been some prejudice.
> – IBPOC candidate

Often internal candidates are left confused and frustrated when an external candidate is hired and little to no feedback is given to explain the decision. Meanwhile external candidates say they feel their time was wasted and they weren't being seriously considered when they learn an internal candidate is chosen. This tension between internal and external hiring fosters mixed feelings and unanswered questions. Without clear feedback, racialized candidates are left with assumptions. Transparency is needed in the hiring process from beginning to end.

Ways to give better feedback include:
- Communicate and follow up when deliberations are longer than expected. Be considerate by giving an update and reason for the wait.

- Have an interview panelist be the one to reach out to candidates to communicate the decision rather than an HR staff member who was not part of the decision making.

- Offer to give feedback when you contact the candidate with your decision, and be prepared to give it on the spot rather than deferring it to another appointment.

- Debrief as a group with your fellow hiring committee members. Ensure you understand why you did not select a candidate and can relay clear reasons.

- View the feedback session as a coaching opportunity and provide actionable suggestions for the candidate so they can improve for their next opportunity.

- Coach candidates on the recruitment or interview process itself if needed; moving beyond focusing solely on their performance with the questions.

- Be specific. Instead of saying "the other candidate had more experience", tell this candidate what areas of experience they need to build on.

- Share what you were looking for and what you were valuing.

- Be critical. Be honest. It is more beneficial and appreciated.

- Let IBPOC employees know that they are being considered because of their expertise and capabilities and not just for diversity purposes.

If you want to improve the way you recruit, consider asking feedback from candidates about your hiring process. Have a safe and open way for candidates to send you their feedback.

> At the end, the Dean asked me: do you have any feedback about the whole process? He was receptive to what I had to say.
> – IBPOC candidate

Onboarding & Retaining

Growing a diverse library workforce requires change and support. Strategies for onboarding and retaining IBPOC staff are critical to sustain and grow a diversifying library workforce.

> If your job posting says you welcome candidates from diverse and underrepresented identity groups, you need to be able to answer the question of how you support your diverse employees.
> — IBPOC candidate

17. Support mentorship

Support mentorship for and between IBPOC staff. Give staff the time they need to participate in formal mentorship programs and informal mentoring relationships. Compensate IBPOC leaders who are mentoring and supporting internal staff. This can look like allocating funds so that an IBPOC mentor can take their mentee to coffee. Allocating resources for mentorship is an investment in your team, and IBPOC staff should feel supported by their organization to do this work.

18. Compensate staff for their EDI work

Racialized staff will often take part in EDI initiatives in part because it resonates with them and because they are often asked for their representation and voice. Too often this has meant additional responsibility and tasks added on to an existing workload. This work is important and transformational for your organization. Compensate staff for this added work. Provide time and resources so this doesn't become work that is done at the side of the desk or free labour.

19. Support participation with affinity groups

Connect IBPOC staff with affinity groups in your organization or parent organization if they exist. Support them when they need flexibility to attend or participate in these groups that can be both external or internal. It will give staff who are underrepresented in most workplace environments, a more safe and open place to share their experiences, have support, and find a kind of kinship.

20. Foster a safe space and inclusive workplace culture

An inclusive workplace culture includes recognizing different voices, accepting various ways of participating or engaging in situations, as well as learning and understanding people as their unique selves. Culture change takes time and intention. For establishing a workplace where people from all backgrounds can feel they are able to thrive and belong, here are just a few practical considerations:

- Be clear about expectations and understanding what an inclusive culture means and looks like. You can shape this with your staff. Emphasizing and clearly communicating how important this is from the top sets the tone for the organization.

- Support team building activities. This can be formal workshops, volunteer days, or team lunches. Spending time together is the goal, and this encourages team members to connect with each other and build trust.

- Bring different people together to work collaboratively.

- Connect with staff in a transparent way – sharing on a personal level signals to others it's okay to be their whole selves too.

- Provide different ways for staff to give feedback. Methods can be a staff engagement survey or activity, open discussion, or one-on-one conversations. Fostering inclusive culture is ongoing. Asking for feedback allows for continuous improvement with thoughtful follow-up actions.

Final Remarks

The toolkit is designed to support any organization with active steps towards better recruitment practices and a stronger workforce. For many of us, we are in the early beginnings of this work. The investment we make now will transform our libraries and teams for the better. From your colleagues who are actively making recruitment more equitable and inclusive, they want you to know:

This work is difficult. It takes time.

It is also crucial and it needs to be done now.