



Laying the Foundation for Inclusive Workplaces

What is the Neuroinclusive Employment Project?

In partnership with the Sinneave Family Foundation, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation is conducting research to explore how employers can create more neuroinclusive workplaces. The research aims to identify evidence-based practices and real-world examples that help employers support neurodivergent people and people living with disabilities to uncover opportunities to further improve workplace inclusion.

The following summary shares insights from the knowledge synthesis phase of research to help employers strengthen their capacity to foster inclusive workplaces. These evidence-based strategies and practices can help to increase employment opportunities and foster inclusion, with a special focus on neuroinclusion, in the workplace.

Neuroinclusion throughout the employee lifecycle

Neuroinclusion is about creating a workplace that embraces and supports neurodivergent employees by removing barriers, not just accommodating differences. This approach is rooted in the social model of disability, which focuses on external and societal barriers—such as attitudes, communication, and workplace practices—rather than focusing on an individual or medical condition.

To be truly neuroinclusive, employers must consider the entire employee lifecycle, from recruitment to job exit. The employee lifecycle involves key stages like hiring, onboarding, and transitions, as well as everyday interactions with supervisors and coworkers. While it's crucial to identify and remove barriers at each stage of the employee lifecycle, success starts with a strong foundation of organizational inclusion. Without addressing these broader organizational factors and preparing all employees to be inclusive, targeted efforts like recruitment or promotion may not achieve lasting impact.



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Starting with a strong foundation: 10 actions for fostering inclusion at the organizational level

1) **Have a clearly expressed commitment to inclusion – ideally written out and developed in collaboration with employees and community partners – endorsed by leaders in your organization.**

- ▶ Research shows that a clear commitment to inclusion, backed by leadership, leads to better outcomes for people with disabilities. This organizational commitment sets the tone and may also include steps to implement policies, allocate resources, and establish accountability for results.
- ▶ Guidance for employers highlights the importance of embedding a commitment to inclusion into the organization’s mission, vision, and values. Employers who identify as disability-inclusive often cite this commitment as key to fostering a truly inclusive organizational culture, ensuring this commitment is communicated to both current and prospective employees.

2) **Be a model for others in your organization. Show others in your workplace that you value opportunities to develop your knowledge, skills, and attitudes about neuroinclusion.**

- ▶ Research highlights that leadership plays a key role in fostering inclusion, but every employee must share responsibility for creating an inclusive workplace. The first step is often with leaders who take steps to educate themselves on how differences can influence thinking, communication, and social interactions. Leaders can also help to foster a dialogue for employees, setting expectations for everyone’s role in contributing to an inclusive workplace.
- ▶ Leadership is an important factor in creating a workplace environment where all employees feel safe to communicate openly, take risks, and support one another in learning about and embracing neuroinclusion at work. However, workplace studies indicate that it is not just a top-down approach – it also needs to come from the bottom up. When everyone in the organization is engaged in this effort, it helps foster a solid foundation for inclusion built on shared responsibility and accountability for progress and results.

3) **Seek out a trusted partner. There are services and community organizations across Canada that specializes in neuroinclusion in the workplace.**

- ▶ While employers are experts on their own organizations and employees, partnering with specialists in disability and neuroinclusion can offer valuable insights. Many of these organizations offer a range of no-cost or low-cost services to help identify barriers that may not be immediately obvious to employers. They can suggest practical ways to make your organization more inclusive.



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- ▶ By working together, partners can tailor their advice to your organization's specific needs, providing the expertise and guidance needed to move forward with confidence in your inclusion efforts. Research shows that partnering with outside organizations can offer employers a sense of security in navigating new and uncertain territory, ensuring you make meaningful progress.
- 4) Understand where you are (and where you need to go). For example, engage a third party to conduct an accessibility and inclusion audit of your organization.**
- ▶ Engaging with a process like an accessibility and inclusion audit can help identify strengths, areas for improvement, and barriers that might otherwise be missed. There are also a number of self-assessment tools that you can use.
 - ▶ Starting with an assessment of your organization is an important first step in purposely finding and reducing barriers throughout the employee lifecycle. Audits with third-party support have the added benefit of comprehensive gap analysis, policy and process reviews, and consultation with leaders, managers, supervisors, and employees.
- 5) Establish expectations to help all employees understand their roles and responsibilities with respect to neuroinclusion.**
- ▶ At a minimum, employers must comply with employment and human rights laws that protect people with disabilities from discrimination. Federally regulated workplaces, under the Accessible Canada Act also require an accessibility plan – as do some provincially regulated workplaces under provincial accessibility laws. Clear organizational policies help set expectations, promote inclusion, and outline processes for resolving disputes and addressing unacceptable behavior.
 - ▶ While formal Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDI&A) strategies are common in larger organizations, small and medium-sized enterprises often operate without formal policies. Research shows that these smaller employers can still foster inclusion by aligning their mission and values with inclusive practices, often embedding inclusion throughout their workplace culture.
- 6) Gather a team of employees who are passionate about this work and can be champions for driving efforts within your organization – for example, maybe you already have or can establish an Employee Resource Group.**
- ▶ Champions for inclusion are individuals who advocate for and drive inclusion initiatives across the organization. An Employee Resource Group (ERG) is one strategy to provide a platform for champions – including people with living experience of neurodivergence – to share and influence organizational change to embrace inclusion.



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- ▶ Research suggests that for champions or ERGs to be meaningful and effective, employers should encourage voluntary participation from both employees with living experience and allies, without pressuring anyone to self-identify. It is important to recognize their contributions by offering resources and, where appropriate, compensation or time release. Clear roles and responsibilities should be defined, and leaders must actively support these efforts to ensure long-term success.

7) Provide neuroinclusion training to all employees – especially hiring managers, HR staff, and supervisors – to create a more inclusive workplace and unlock the benefits of supporting neurodivergent talent.

- ▶ While there is growing awareness of the value people living with disabilities bring to the workplace, research indicates that more education is required to understand the experience of neurodivergent employees.
- ▶ Effective practices include awareness training to address bias, dispel common misconceptions about neurodivergence, clarify employee rights and employer responsibilities, and articulate the broader benefits of inclusive employment. Training has the added benefit of connecting employers with service providers, as well as hearing directly from people who identify as neurodivergent about their experiences.

8) Encourage proactive, voluntary disclosure but also take initiative by offering inclusive supports upfront, rather than waiting for employees to request them.

- ▶ Research indicates that many neurodivergent employees are hesitant to disclose due to stigma, but there is also evidence nondisclosure can impact job performance, result in unsafe working conditions, and negatively affect neurodivergent employees' wellbeing.
- ▶ An employee's decision to disclose often depends on their sense of safety and perception of an inclusive employer. Employers must ensure transparency about how personal information is collected and used, and safeguard privacy and confidentiality. Confidential and positive opportunities for disclosure should be provided throughout the employee lifecycle, since prospective employees may hesitate to disclose during hiring. Following disclosure, it is also important that employees aren't defined by their neurodivergence or disability.

9) Rethink your approach to accommodations by proactively integrating inclusive practices for all employees.

- ▶ Despite evidence that the cost of accommodation is low, misconceptions persist. Employers need to rethink accommodations as adjustments that enable employees to succeed. Many of these are already part of day-to-day work, where offering more flexibility benefits everyone and is often not complex or costly. Common, low-cost accommodations for neurodivergent employees include extra breaks, breaking down tasks into smaller steps, maintaining



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consistent schedules, reducing unstructured time, and adjusting sensory inputs like lighting and noise.

- ▶ Linking accommodations to disclosure places the burden on employees and often requires medical documentation, which creates additional barriers. Employees' needs for accommodation and adjustments can also be episodic, acquired at any stage of the employee lifecycle and evolve over time. Rather than waiting on employees, employers can provide information on available support and ensure that support is individualized and regularly reviewed. Communicating available support, such as through a checklist or other resources available to all employees, can foster a more inclusive workplace that benefits everyone.

10) Embrace universal and inclusive design approaches that create inclusive environments accessible to everyone – without the need for specialized adjustments.

- ▶ Universal design proposes that everyone should be able to access, understand, and use a space or product without the need for specialized adjustments. It is endorsed by the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as the preferred approach to accessibility. Inclusive design goes further by centering human variation and involving people with living experience of disability in the design process.
- ▶ Incorporating universal and inclusive design into all processes fosters workplace inclusion rather than relying on “retrofitting” things later on. One way to incorporate these approaches into the workplace is by involving neurodivergent employees to help identify and remove barriers – both in the physical environment and in daily work routines.

Interested in learning more about the evidence that informs these actions?
Check out the full Knowledge Synthesis report [here](#).

You can also click [here](#) to learn more about no-cost services that can help you implement practical strategies and approaches to neurodiversity, equity, and inclusion.

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