



# ***Neuroinclusive Approaches to Recruitment, Hiring, and Onboarding: Insights from the Research***

## **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.

## **Breaking down barriers for neurodivergent talent**

The initial stages of a new employee's journey are critical for building connections and setting them up for long-term success. However, research suggests that traditional recruitment and hiring practices often rely on standardized processes that can unintentionally disadvantage neurodivergent individuals who may think, communicate, or interact differently. These barriers can arise as early as the job advertisement and application process and continue into onboarding once a hire is made. To create a truly neuroinclusive workplace, employers must understand these barriers and take steps to remove them at every stage of recruitment, hiring, and onboarding.



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## Getting started: neuroinclusive strategies from the research

### Finding and Attracting Talent

Research and guidance for employers suggests that attracting neurodivergent candidates starts long before they see a job posting. It begins with how your organization is perceived and how candidates learn about job opportunities. Your website, social media presence, and the accessibility of your workplace are opportunities to show your commitment to inclusion.

Employers can seek feedback from community members or organizations supporting people with disabilities to assess how attractive their organization is to potential neurodivergent candidates. These organizations can also help to expand your recruitment networks and make neurodivergent job seekers aware of your organization and potential job opportunities.

### Job Postings

Job postings can either encourage or discourage someone to applying for a role. Research suggests that neurodivergent talent may opt out of applying for jobs even when they are qualified, because of jargon or vague requirements like “strong people skills.” Instead, the evidence points to the following strategies for creating neuroinclusive job postings:

- **Avoid jargon:**  
Keep language simple and clear and include only necessary information.
- **Focus on skills:**  
List only the skills and experience truly needed. Instead of terms like “strong people skills” highlight the specific requirement that might include “ability to collaborate with a team.” When reviewing job descriptions, also consider what can be offered as on-the-job learning over strict education or experience requirements.
- **Provide specifics:**  
Include details like job type (e.g., full-time, part-time), salary and benefits, location, remote options, and any flexibility in work hours.
- **Highlight inclusion:**  
Share your commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and explain how your recruitment process is flexible to meet individual needs.



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## Job Application Process

Job application processes and “off the shelf” job application software may have hidden barriers that employers overlook. For example, standardized tests or personality assessments may unintentionally exclude neurodivergent candidates. When using a digital solution, ensure that it meets accessibility standards. In addition, there is an opportunity to re-think traditional approaches, such as requiring a resume and cover letter. Research also points to other ways to make the job application process and requirements more inclusive:

- **Offer alternatives:**  
When asking for a resume and cover letter, also provide alternatives for candidates to respond, such as video or audio formats, or submitting examples of their work.
- **Simplify written applications:**  
With standardized forms or online application systems, ensure that candidates can use spell-check, skip questions, and can either upload or manually enter their information.
- **Encourage transparency:**  
Provide space for candidates to add comments or explain selections in application forms. Also provide the opportunity for them to share what accommodations or adjustments they may need, reassuring them that you are a neuroinclusive employer.
- **Shift from ‘screening out’ to ‘screening in’:**  
Focus on transferrable skills and potential. Avoid placing too much emphasis on hobbies (which are not a reflection of skills), minor spelling errors, or gaps in a candidate’s employment history to ‘screen out’ potential talent. Recognize the value of other experiences, such as volunteering or internships. Also consider ‘screening in’ candidates who voluntarily self-identify as neurodivergent or who live with a disability.



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## **Job Interviews**

The interview stage can be one of the most significant barriers for neurodivergent candidates, as they may communicate or express themselves differently. The sensory environment, such as bright lighting or background noise, can also make it harder for them to perform well. Interviews can trigger anxiety, especially for those who have faced discrimination or who have had negative experiences in the past. Interviewers—from human resource professionals to hiring managers—benefit from training to ensure they are applying neuroinclusive interviewing practices effectively, as well as the understanding that interviews are just one part of assessing a candidate’s potential.

There are alternative ways to interview a candidate – from working interviews or trials, to virtual interviews or walking interviews to offer flexibility in meeting a candidate’s sensory needs. Regardless of format, guidance for employers and other workplace studies highlights the following neuroinclusive interview strategies to consider:

- Provide core interview questions in advance to allow candidates time to prepare.
- Let candidates bring notes to the interview.
- Avoid abstract or double-barreled questions, and focus on clear, specific ones that are directly relevant to the job.
- Base additional questions on the candidate’s resume or their relevant work-related experiences.
- Allow extra time if reading or writing is required during the interview.

## **Selecting Candidates**

It is important to notify all candidates who interviewed for a position, not just those who were selected. Providing transparent communication when declining candidates helps maintain your organization’s reputation for inclusion. Offering constructive feedback—either directly to the candidate or through a support organization—can help explain the decision, align expectations, and support the candidate’s growth for future opportunities.

Once a candidate has been selected, start with a clear, concise verbal job offer, followed by a detailed written offer. Include any accommodations or adjustments discussed during the recruitment and hiring process. Continue to emphasize your commitment to an inclusive workplace.



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## Onboarding New Employees

Intentional onboarding helps new employees adjust to their roles, build relationships, and become familiar with the workplace. A positive onboarding experience is key to retaining employees, especially for those living with disabilities. It requires that employers prepare and have processes in place before a candidate starts their job. While employers often focus on support for first few days, ongoing support is required in the first few months. This provides an opportunity for the candidate to adjust to the new role, environment, and work routines. Additional evidence from the research suggests the following:

- **Before new employees start:**

Share details about the work environment, team members, and what to expect on day one. Ensure a quiet space is available if the employee needs a break from sensory overload. Confirm any other adjustments and accommodations that are available and will be in place on day one.

- **On their first day:**

Best practices suggest limiting introductions to close colleagues and/or the HR point of contact to avoid overwhelming the new employee. A tour of key areas, like meeting rooms, social spaces, and the employee's workspace is important, as is a list of common phrases or acronyms used in the workplace. Additionally, employers can also consider developing a short guide to explain other workplace norms such as dress codes (including required uniforms or safety attire), social events, or how employees and teams routinely communicate with one another.

- **During the first months:**

Ensure that the employee receives the necessary training, but also offer support such as a workplace "buddy" to help the new employee navigate the workplace. Direct supervisors and managers should also regularly check-in for consistent review of learning, as well as to identify any additional supports or adjustments for the new employee. Overall, these check-ins should include open discussions about how to best meet the new employee's functional, social, and other needs, and there should be processes in place to follow up to ensure those needs are met.

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 resources and services that can help you implement practical strategies and approaches to neurodiversity, equity, and inclusion. These include more resources on [neuroinclusive job postings](#) and [interviews](#).

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