



Supporting the Career Development of Neurodivergent Employees

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.

Once a new employee has completed their onboarding process, inclusive employment practices and workplaces continue to be important for supporting the career development of neurodivergent employees. At this stage of the employee lifecycle, neurodivergent people can encounter barriers due to changing routines, their supervisor's limited knowledge of disability inclusion practices, communication challenges that may lead to a misunderstanding or conflict with coworkers and/or supervisors, and a lack of tailored tools, training, and supports.

5 Actions for Fostering a Neuroinclusive Workplace That Supports Employees' Career Development

1) Use clear, direct language, and varied communication methods that meet the needs and preferences of neurodivergent employees.

- ▶ Research shows that neurodivergent employees benefit from communication that is free of ambiguity, sarcasm, and colloquialisms. Employers should ensure communication is clear and direct, extending these practices to both dialogue between staff as well as formal messaging at the organizational level.
- ▶ Use of varied or tailored communications, such as direct messaging or meeting recordings, can allow for neurodivergent employees to access information in the way that works best for them.



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- 2) Build strong, trusting relationships between neurodivergent employees and their supervisors. This requires supervisors to have the necessary knowledge and skills to support neurodivergent employees succeed in the workplace.**
 - ▶ Research highlights that the relationship employees living with disabilities have with their supervisors plays a significant role in employee satisfaction and retention. Regular check-ins, with agreed-upon frequency and format, and allowing for ongoing communication, guidance, and proactive support are recommended.
 - ▶ Research demonstrates that supervisors require the appropriate knowledge and skills related to disability inclusion and neuroinclusion, but that this is often lacking. Supervisors can build capacity through training, on the job learning, or through the engagement of a community organization. Many organizations can also help with a job coach, who can support an employee's learning, performance, and behaviour to help them succeed in their roles.
- 3) Provide sufficient and appropriate team integration to support neurodivergent employees as they adjust to their roles and work environments.**
 - ▶ Peer support, such as assigning a “buddy” can help neurodivergent employees navigate workplace social norms and facilitate introductions. Peer support also helps to foster belonging both during and following the formal onboarding period.
 - ▶ Leaders and managers can promote inclusion by modeling positive behaviors and assisting the broader team in understanding how to support the new member while respecting the employee's confidentiality and privacy. They can further support these employees' social needs by offering varied activities and involving them in planning team activities (e.g., meetings, events, etc.).
- 4) Use flexible and individualized approaches, customizing job roles and environments that align with employees' unique strengths and needs. Where possible, allowing employees more choice over core aspects of their work - such as when, where, and how they work - is also beneficial.**
 - ▶ Research finds that generic, one-size-fits-all support or accommodation models often fail to provide the individualized support necessary for neurodivergent employees to thrive. Instead, support should be tailored to individual needs and preferences, focusing on employees' long-term success.
 - ▶ When possible, providing individualized work environments and offering choice regarding how employees complete tasks (e.g., hours, routines, scheduling) can further enhance support and ensure that neurodivergent employees can thrive. For more tailored approaches such as job crafting, or customizing roles around employees' strengths and needs, employers should start early (during hiring and onboarding) and continue through regular check-ins for ongoing alignment.



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5) Offer strengths-based training and career development opportunities, accommodating diverse learning preferences. Engage employees in open discussions about their individual goals and skill development needs.

- ▶ When planning training opportunities, discuss with neurodivergent employees' what skills they would like to develop and why, rather than make assumptions about their career goals or reason for wanting to engage in training.
- ▶ To accommodate diverse learning preferences, employers can also offer various training formats – such as online and in-person options, synchronous and asynchronous training – or offering part-time learning options. Training resources can also be reviewed for accessibility, e.g., compatibility with a screen reader, subtitles, etc.
- ▶ A common strategy to support employees is to provide mentorship opportunities in the workplace. Guidance for employers suggests that employees should be able to share what they value in a mentor, and how they can be best supported, with the necessary knowledge and capacity to support employees who identify as neurodivergent.

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.

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