

## QUICK TIPS

### **Inclusive Competitions**

One stated commitment in the Employment Equity Policy is to be a workplace that is “free of discrimination”. Selection assessment tools must not create systemic barriers to employment, and must be inclusive in their design and implementation. The more inclusive the tools are, the less there is need for selection accommodations, as the tools are already adapted to many applicants. As a result, the uniformity of the process is increased and last minute difficult accommodations might be avoided. Thinking of and planning for inclusion in advance should increase fairness and access to everyone.

The nature of systemic barriers is that we may not be aware that certain assessment tools could pose a barrier. To remove barriers involves a heightened awareness of potential barriers, and using judgment in applying the principles of fair assessment and inclusiveness. To help you choose or develop assessment tools and process that are fair and inclusive, consider the following:

- Explore the many acceptable ways the job could be accomplished at the earliest stage of planning. When a position is defined or when merit criteria are established, examine if the requirements or criteria identified are really required by the position. Assess also if the way these requirements or criteria are defined is really representative of the demands of the job.
- Have many diverse applicants in mind when developing an assessment tool, and think about possible accommodations that could be made should there be a need for it, such as breaks or the use of a computer. Doing so, explore if it could be possible to extend those possible accommodations to all applicants by making them part of the design of the tool. For example, if this does not alter the nature and level of the qualification being assessed:
  - Develop a written test that can be completed on the computer as well as by hand.
  - Allow applicants 30 minutes to review the interview questions before the interview starts.
  - Use multiple assessment tools so that persons have the opportunity to demonstrate their competencies in different ways.
- Assess whether the questions and scenarios of the assessment tool require culture-specific knowledge that is not work-related, or do they constitute a disadvantage for certain groups, for example: subtle word meanings, colloquialisms or jokes can be meaningless to persons not belonging to the same group.
- Assess if the demands of the assessment tool exceed those of the job. For example, when staffing a clerical position that does not require advanced writing skills, it would not be fair to ask in a written test to answer complex procedural questions in writing which would require advanced writing skills. Consider the following:

1. If speed of executing a particular task is not a requirement of the job, does the time allotted to do the same task in the assessment long enough so everyone can finish?
  2. If, to do the job to be staff, the person has access to grammar and spelling tools to write documents, why not choose or develop a test that allows access to such tools?
  3. Do the assessment instruments focus only on knowledge and skills which could be acquired only through job experiences, and ignore other competencies and the ability to learn? For example, persons who have not had access to opportunities such as acting appointments or contract work may be at a disadvantage.
- Explore if the existing assessment tool is available in multiple formats. When developing a new tool, ensure that the tool allows for multiple formats. Remember that :
    1. Not all electronic formats are accessible. For example, documents produced in Portable Document Format (PDF) are not yet fully accessible to persons with visual impairments.
    2. The use of diagrams, columns, and other visually based elements may render a document partially inaccessible, if not accompanied by a narrative description.
  - When developing an assessment tool which includes video elements, make sure that the video produces include closed or open captions for persons with hearing disabilities, an audio descriptive track for persons with visual impairments.
  - Ensure that all panel members have an understanding of the Fair Hiring and Employment Equity Policies.
  - Include a member of the designated groups on competition panels or in the development team of an assessment tool. One of the potential benefits of a diverse assessment board and diverse test development team is the availability of a broader understanding of the ways in which persons may demonstrate their qualifications, thus better enabling managers to make sound selection decisions based on work-related requirements.
  - We have established the Diversity Selection Panel Pool which will have members of the designated groups who have been trained on the recruitment and can be available to sit on competition panels or provide advice when developing the assessment tools. For more information contact the Diversity Unit at the Nova Scotia Public Service Commission.