A Practical Guide to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Hiring and Onboarding

Background

Involving those most affected by an issue is essential to the development of relevant, appropriate, achievable and sustainable solutions (Ontario Centre of Excellence in Child and Youth Mental Health, 2016). A diverse workforce is key to delivering equitable and culturally effective care to diverse populations (Taillepierre, 2016). In alignment with YWHO's goal of equitable access, experiences, quality of care and outcomes for *all* youth, it is critical that candidates and YWHO staff are diverse ***and*** possess a solid understanding of person-centered care and anti-oppressive practice.

This is a short guide to addressing biases in each step of the talent management cycle – from preparation to onboarding. Before beginning the candidate recruitment process, every person involved in the recruitment cycle should invest the time necessary to become familiar with this content and refer back to it during each stage of your onboarding process. This should be done regardless of past work experience in the area of diversity and/or past training(s) completed in diversity, equity, and inclusion. This guide includes the following: 1. Practical Actions to Overcome Bias during Each Stage of Onboarding: Preparation (p 1), Screening (p 3), Interviewing (p 3), and Onboarding (p 5); 2. Promoting Job Ads and Outreach in Smaller and/or Northern Communities (p 2); 3. Suggested Interview Questions & Criteria for Identifying Anti-Oppressive and Anti-Racist Background and Experience in Candidates (p 4); 4. Types of Bias in Hiring (p 6); 5. The SPACE2 Model for Interrupting Bias (p 8).

> Anti-oppressive practice embodies a person-centered philosophy, a belief that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities. It is focused on both process and outcome, and a way of structuring relationships between individuals that aims to reduce the negative effects of hierarchy on interactions and the work together. It is concerned with reducing the harmful effects of structural inequalities upon people's lives. -adapted from the definition by Dominelli

Practical Actions to Overcome Bias During Each Stage of Onboarding

1. **Preparation Stage**
   - When developing job descriptions for new roles, make a clear distinction between competencies that are "essential" and "nice to have" for the role. Do not include competencies that are not relevant to the job (Subramanian, 2021).
   - Clarify if you are able to accept equivalent education and work experience in lieu of particular credentials (Turner, 2012).
   - If and when lived experience is considered an asset for a job posting, make it clear in the job ad.

- Include clear information about the organization, the position, the qualifications, and the working conditions so that applicants can appreciate both the work required and the context (OHRC, 2008; Turner, 2012).
- Use gender-inclusive/ gender neutral language to encourage more gender diverse candidates to apply (Subramanian, 2021, OHRC, 2008).
- Be deliberate in putting together a hiring panel that is as representative of the full diversity of the community as possible (eg. lived experience of mental health challenges, race, Indigeneity, gender, age, disability, etc.) and that brings an understanding of equity, anti-oppression and anti-racism. This helps to reduce bias while increasing candidates' comfort levels and possibly their performance. In addition, an interview panel that is not diverse could lead a candidate to interpret that the organization is not welcoming of diversity (Subramanian, 2021; Provincial System Support Program Equity & Engagement Team, 2021).
- Include an accommodation statement in the job posting.
- Develop a standardized promotion policy to ensure job ads are shared with diverse job boards, community and employment agencies, community groups and agencies for and by equity-seeking groups, diverse professional associations, Indigenous and ethno-cultural organizations in your region etc. Consider connecting with the Indigenous Professional Association of Canada (IPAC), Pride at Work, bridging programs and services supporting internationally trained health professionals, like Health Force Ontario (Turner, 2012; Subramanian, 2021).
- Include a statement on diversity and equity in the job posting. Tailor it to include any specific communities your organization is prioritizing.

> **Promoting Job Ads and Outreach in Smaller and/or Northern Communities**
> - Despite some narratives, there is local diversity, including racial diversity and Indigenous representation, in every single region in the province. There are Indigenous Friendship Centres, Aboriginal Health Access Centers, multicultural centres, settlement services, and/or diverse professional and/or student associations in or near each region. These can be places to share and promote job postings.
> - Candidates need to be excited not only about working for your organization, but also about living in your specific area (if relocation and in person work is required). If you live in a very small area, share information on local arts, community, possible housing options, and make connections to high-profile individuals in the neighborhood. Outreach to larger urban centres to attract candidates that are interested in a different lifestyle, including through the regulatory college (Subramanian, 2021).
> - For non-clinical positions, consider identifying local candidates, volunteers and/or newcomers that may be re-skilled or upskilled for the role. For example, for a reception/office administrator role, be open to looking at local candidates that have essential competencies and train for specific skills such as using a particular software etc. (Subramanian, 2021).

> - Use social media and networking to find potential hires and spread the word about open positions (Subramanian, 2021).

2. **Screening Stage**
- Develop and use a pre-screening form to assess each resume or application against specific job-related criteria (Turner, 2012).
- Do not eliminate applicants simply because their resume is structured differently than what you normally receive (Turner, 2012).
- Factor in work experience gained from volunteer work and from work outside of Canada (Turner, 2012).
- Don't eliminate candidates who have gaps in work experience or who appear to be over-qualified (Turner, 2012).
- Do not screen out resumes because they may appear to be from internationally trained professionals, gender diverse, people who are neurodivergent, people with lived experience of mental health or addiction challenges, people with disabilities, "non-white sounding" names and/or people unlike yourself (Subramanian, 2021; Provincial System Support Program Equity & Engagement Team, 2021).

3. **Interview Stage**
   Informal processes are more susceptible to unconscious biases. If you hire staff based on how well you get along, your gut reaction, or because you think they will fit in, this will privilege people who share characteristics with the dominant group (OHRC, 2008). Interview processes are often more of a cultural matching process where managers unintentionally hire people who remind them of themselves as opposed to the person who is best for the job (Rivera, 2012). These are some ways to be more proactive about interviewing candidates in ways that ensure more equitable access:

- A structured interview format, in which a standard set of questions is posed to each candidate, is best to reduce bias in the process.
- Be deliberate in putting together an interviewing panel that is as representative of the full diversity of the community as possible (ex. lived experience of mental health challenges, race, Indigeneity, gender, age, disability, etc.) and that brings an understanding of equity, anti-oppression and anti-racism. This helps to reduce bias while increasing candidates' comfort levels and possibly their performance. In addition, an interview panel that is not diverse could lead a candidate to interpret that the organization is not welcoming of diversity (Subramanian, 2021; Provincial System Support Program Equity & Engagement Team, 2021).
- Offer and provide accommodations to attract candidates of diverse abilities. For example, wheelchair access for those with mobility restrictions, TTY line (Teletypewriter) for those who are Deaf or hard of hearing, and screen reader software for those with vision diverse abilities (Subramanian, 2021; OHRC, 2008).
- Use accessible language in interview questions. Avoid the use of jargon, including equity jargon, in interview questions and scoring guides (ex. terms like microaggressions, intersectionality, acronyms like DEI, BIPOC, PWLE etc). The use of these terms and acronyms can exclude and/or

disadvantage candidates whose native language may not be English, who may have been educated in different fields of study, whose equity background may have developed in community rather than in institutional settings, candidates who are older, and many others (DuBose, 2019; Provincial System Support Program Equity & Engagement Team, 2021).

- Ensure interview questions can be scored objectively and are related to the duties of the job and can be objectively scored (don't ask questions such as "What is your pet peeve?" "Why did you apply for the job?") (Turner, 2012).
- Provide the interview questions in writing, so that the candidates can reflect before and during the interview (Turner, 2012).
- Do not factor in the candidate's perceived enthusiasm for the job, which is expressed differently across cultures, abilities and neurodiversity (Turner, 2012).
- Do not take into account non-verbal interactions of the candidate, such as eye contact and tone of voice, which can be determined by culture, disability and/or neurodiversity (Turner, 2012).
- Use an interview marking guide that includes the interview questions, ideal responses, and allows each candidate to be objectively scored (Turner, 2012).
- Interview panel members should use micro-affirmations such as smiling, nodding, leaning toward the candidate, and eye contact to support all candidates and not just those who are similar to them (Turner, 2020).
- Do not assume that someone who is living with a disability, neurodiversity or a mental health challenge cannot perform at the same level as other employees just because they might need accessibility accommodations (ex. do not only offer them part-time positions because you think they cannot "handle" full-time work) (Provincial System Support Program Equity & Engagement Team, 2021).
- Be prepared to objectively explain why you choose one candidate over another. Keep written records of the interview and your decision for at least one year (OHRC, 2008).

Examples of Interview Questions and Criteria for Identifying Anti-Oppressive and Anti-Racist Background and Experience in Candidates

A few suggested options for interview questions:
- Describe your understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion as it relates to this position. **OR** What does it mean for you to have a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion? b) How have you demonstrated that commitment in your past work? c) How do you see yourself demonstrating that commitment in this role?
- What is your approach to dealing with discussions about potentially difficult topics, such as racism, religion, discrimination, or sexual orientation with clients and colleagues? Please provide a specific example.
- How do you adapt your work with clients to meet their diverse needs? (ex. culturally, abilities, language, history of trauma)

Note: Listen for specific examples of work and/or actions that demonstrate how knowledge has been *applied* in practice. Do not factor in the candidate's perceived enthusiasm when responding to these, or any other, questions.

Here are *some* suggested attributes for interviewers to look for in answers to questions about working from an anti-oppressive and anti-racist perspective. This list is *by no means exhaustive,* but provides the start of a guideline for the candidates' knowledge and competencies that can be assessed (Subramanian, 2021).

1. Establishing trust, taking a person centered approach, seeking to understand from a place of cultural safety and humility
2. Effort taken to understand the lived experience of the client with empathy
3. Flexibility in clinical approaches and a willingness to give the client the space to voice their preferred approach
4. Understanding of the social determinants of health
5. Understanding the impact of colonization and/or intergenerational trauma on mental health
6. Demonstrated knowledge of the history of harm that the mental health care system caused people with mental health challenges and other particular groups (ex Indigenous. Black and racialized people, people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans) and the emotional burden they place on individuals.
7. How systemic oppression and racism also shows up in diagnostic assessment tools, processes, and in treatment of mental health, such as, dismissing of non-medical and non-Eurocentric/non-western approaches to mental health and wellness that may resonate with Indigenous, Black and racialized groups as they align with their cultural traditions, differential treatment
8. Ability to describe their own biases, privileges, social location and how they may be influencing the interaction with the client
9. Ability to see as their role in either sustaining the larger eco-system that perpetuates systemic racism and oppression in mental health settings and/or to actively be involved in naming, disrupting and dismantling these systems
10. Working together with clients, co-workers and peers whose values may not be in alignment without compromising on the fundamental AOAR perspective that is fundamental to the YWHO approach

Note: Candidates may speak to these themes, their knowledge and/or experiences using different terms. Avoid scoring for the use of specific buzz words, including equity jargon (ex. looking for use of terms like microaggressions, intersectionality etc., acronyms like DEI, BIPOC, PWLE etc). Scoring for the use of specific terms and acronyms can exclude and/or disadvantage candidates whose native language may not be English, who may have been educated in different fields of study, whose equity background may have developed in community rather than in institutional settings, candidates who are older, and many others (DuBose, 2019; Provincial System Support Program Equity & Engagement Team, 2021).

4. Onboarding Stage

- Experiences with discrimination and unfairness can negatively impact staff retention (OHRC, 2008). Deal with any incidents of discrimination and harassment seriously and immediately. A policy of zero tolerance of discrimination and harassment towards people on protected grounds

(or any other individuals/groups) needs to be backed up with swift and meaningful action so that all employees will take the organization's policies seriously ([Turner, 2020](#)).

- Avoid differential treatment of employees based on bias. For example, surveillance and no room for errors with Black employees vs. understanding, offering support and learning from errors made by white employees (Provincial System Support Program Equity & Engagement Team, 2021).
- Examine your office dress code to ensure it is inclusive of non-Western dress, religious clothing and head coverings, natural hairstyles for all hair textures, gender diversity etc. (Everyday Feminism, 2015).
- Gather information from exit interviews. Understanding why diverse employees leave is crucial for understanding how to retain them. Acting on this information will help the organization create a welcoming and respectful workplace for all employees ([Turner, 2020](#)).
- Publicize all opportunities for advancement across your organization, with clear eligibility criteria. Provide equal support with the process to anyone who demonstrates interest in the position. Avoid singling out specific employees you would like to apply ([OHRC, 2008](#)).
- Consider how the types of bias listed below play out in promotions, day-to-day interactions, and other career advancing opportunities.

Types of Bias in Hiring

(Subramanian, 2021, 2021; Turner, 2020; Provincial System Support Program Equity & Engagement Team, 2021)

Every single person and organization has biases, there are no exceptions to this. We must become aware of these biases to unlearn and respond to them to create environments that are healthier and more inclusive for everyone (Turner, 2012). Awareness should not be the end goal, it should lead to changes in behavior and practice.

Note: this list is not exhaustive

Ableism: Differential treatment based on a bias against a disability that a person has, or is judged to have

Affinity Bias: Tendency to want to work with someone who is like us culturally, someone we like and who we can socialize with. This can also include personal discomfort with someone who is different than ourselves

Age Bias: Bias against hiring someone perceived to be too young or too old for the position

Anti-2SLGBTQ+: Tendency to treat a candidate who is, or is judged to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, 2Spirit, or gender diverse differently in interviews and assess them as less competent when the same qualifications are presented

Anti-Black Bias: Tendency to treat Black candidates differently in interviews and assess them as less competent when the same qualifications are presented

Attentional Bias: When a person's features or mannerisms distract us from fairly assessing the candidate

Anti-Immigrant Bias: Tendency to screen out those with 'foreign sounding names' and be negatively affected by accents

Anti-Indigenous Bias: Tendency to treat Indigenous candidates differently in interviews and assess them as less competent when the same qualifications are presented

Attribution Bias: A phenomenon where you try to make sense of or judge a person's behavior based on prior observations and interactions you've had with that individual that make up your perception of them

Confirmation Bias: Tendency to seek out and assign more weight to evidence that confirms our initial assessment and ignore our under weigh evidence that contradicts this assessment

Conformity Bias: The tendency people have to act similar to the people around them regardless of their own personal beliefs or idiosyncrasies — also known as peer pressure

Contrast Bias: When you compare two or more things that you have come into contact with — either simultaneously or one-after-another — causing you to exaggerate the performance of one in contrast to the other

Gender Bias: Influence of gender bias on our assessment of candidates, including a tendency to rate equally qualified men higher

The Halo Effect: The tendency people have to place another person on a pedestal after learning something impressive about them

Heightism: Tendency to judge a tall person as more intelligent, assertive, independent and ambitious

The Horns Effect: The tendency people have to view another person negatively after learning something unpleasant or negative about them

Mentalism or Sanism Differential treatment based on a bias against a mental trait or condition a person has, or is judged to have

Opportunity Hoarding: When we restrict access to job opportunities to family and people within our own social circle

Performance Bias: Tendency to be enamored with how the candidate performs or presents during the interview

Sizeism: Tendency to treat candidates who are larger bodied/fat[1] differently in interviews and assess them as less competent when the same qualifications are presented

Stereotype Bias: When we filter in information that supports our stereotypes and filter our contradictory information

Systemic Bias: This is deeply ingrained and harder to identify. They include the policies and practices your organization was built on. Examples include physical spaces that disadvantage people with mobility issues, and recruiting job applicants through personal connections (Turner, 2012). Word-of-mouth referrals tend to privilege those with the same characteristics as the recruiter (OHRC, 2008).

SPACE2 Model for Interrupting Bias (Menzies, 2018)
The SPACE2 Model of Mindful Inclusion is a collection of six evidence-based strategies that activate controlled processing and enable individuals to detect and override their automatic reflexes. For a full description of each step, visit the SPACE2 article here.

- **S**lowing Down — being mindful and considered in your responses to others
- **P**erspective Taking — actively imagining the thoughts and feelings of others
- **A**sking Yourself — active self-questioning to challenge your assumptions
  - Does this person remind you of yourself?
  - Does this person remind you of anyone else? Is this positive or negative?
  - Are there things about this person that particularly influence your impression? Are they really relevant to the job?
  - What assessments have you already made? Are these grounded in solid information or your assumptions?
- **C**ultural Intelligence — interpreting a person's behaviour through their cultural lens rather than your own
- **E**xemplars — identifying counter-stereotypical individuals
- **E**xpand — the formation of diverse friendships

A Practical Guide to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Hiring and Onboarding, 2021
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[1] Although not everyone is comfortable using the word fat, fat activists and scholars have reclaimed it as a value-neutral descriptor https://www.abc.net.au/everyday/unpacking-and-reclaiming-the-word-fat/11726100

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