

Case Studies

Applying Evidence-Based Disability Employment Practices to Real Employer Situations

About these case studies

The following four case studies illustrate how Canadian employers can use An Employer Guide to Disability Employment Practices in Canada (Anyinam et al., 2026) to address common disability employment challenges. Two case studies focus on hiring (recruitment, interviewing, hiring, and onboarding), and two focus on retention (accommodation, return to work, career advancement, and inclusive culture).

The scenarios are illustrative composites and do not depict identifiable employers or employees. Each case study identifies the most relevant recommendations from the full guide and shows how an employer might apply them in sequence. The recommendation numbering in the case studies matches the numbering in the full guide and the corresponding fact sheets.

Case Study 1 A first inclusive hire: small non-profit, new administrative coordinator

Domain focus: Recruitment, Interviewing, Hiring | Employer size: Small (8 staff)

The situation

A small community non-profit with eight staff is recruiting an administrative coordinator. The Executive Director wants to make inclusive hiring a deliberate priority for this position, in line with the organization's mission, but is uncertain where to begin. The organization has limited HR capacity, no formal accommodation policy, and has never explicitly sought candidates with disabilities.

How the guide applies

The situation involves practices across three domains: recruitment, interviewing, and hiring. The Executive Director can work through the relevant fact sheets in sequence, drawing on the recommendations that match the steps of the hiring process.

Suggested approach

Rewrite the job description before posting. Apply Recommendation 1.1 to focus the description on what the role genuinely requires rather than on methods of performance. Apply Recommendation 1.6 to use plain language at a Grade 8 reading level, avoiding exaggerated descriptors and listing only essential qualifications. Add the accommodation statement from Recommendation 1.2 before the application instructions, naming a contact person and explaining how candidates can request support.

Plan the sourcing. Recommendation 1.3 directs employers to advertise through disability-specific channels alongside their usual job board. For a small organization, Recommendation 1.5 is particularly useful: partner with a local disability employment service provider. These organizations pre-screen candidates, offer post-placement coaching, and provide ongoing workplace support at little or no cost. Ask potential partners what supports they offer after placement and what they expect from the business.

Prepare for interviews. Apply Recommendation 2.1 by asking every shortlisted candidate, at the scheduling stage, whether they require any accommodation. Send the "what to expect" information described in Recommendation 2.2, including the interview format, who will be present, expected duration, and accessibility features of the location. Confirm the interview space is accessible (Recommendation 2.4). Use structured questions and a consistent scoring matrix (Recommendation 2.3) so all candidates are evaluated on the same criteria.

Make the offer with care. Apply Recommendation 3.5 to confirm any agreed accommodation in the offer letter and to communicate the organization's accommodation approach to the successful candidate. Even without a formal written policy in place yet, the principles of the duty to accommodate apply from the offer onward.

Case Study 2 Reviewing hiring practices after a human rights complaint: mid-sized professional services firm

Domain focus: Recruitment, Interviewing, Hiring | Employer size: Medium (200 staff)

The situation

A 200-person professional services firm has received a human rights complaint alleging that its online application portal is incompatible with screen reader software, preventing a candidate from completing an application. The HR director has been asked by the executive team to conduct an end-to-end review of the firm's hiring practices to identify and address barriers. Workforce data indicates that representation of persons with disabilities is well below labour market availability.

How the guide applies

The complaint points to a specific technical accessibility failure, but a comprehensive review needs to cover the full pipeline: application accessibility, screening tools, interview practices, and decision-making. The relevant recommendations cluster across recruitment, interviewing, and hiring.

Suggested approach

Begin with the immediate accessibility failure. Recommendation 1.4 directs employers to ensure the entire application process is accessible to persons with disabilities. Audit the careers website against WCAG 2.1 standards, confirm screen reader compatibility, add alternative text under 125 characters to all images, and accept applications in alternate formats including paper, email, and phone. Clearly identify which fields are mandatory versus optional.

Audit screening tools. Recommendation 1.1 directs employers using applicant tracking systems or AI screening tools to confirm those tools filter for legitimate job requirements without inadvertently screening out candidates with disabilities. Recommendation 3.3 reinforces this by directing organizations to give hiring managers guidance on recognizing algorithms that may discriminate.

Strengthen interview practice. Apply Recommendation 2.3 to standardize interviews with structured, job-related questions and a consistent scoring matrix. Establish interview panels of two to three people, trained in equity, diversity, inclusion, and bias-free assessment. Train all interviewers on unconscious bias (Recommendations 2.5 and 3.3). Ensure interview locations and processes are accessible (Recommendation 2.4) and that candidates know in advance what to expect (Recommendation 2.2).

Review hiring decisions. Recommendation 3.1 confirms that disability or accommodation needs must never be used as a factor in hiring decisions, and that medical examinations may only be conducted after a conditional offer of employment. Recommendation 3.2 directs employers to broaden evaluation criteria, considering transferable skills, problem-solving ability, and capacity for new perspectives rather than relying on traditional minimum experience requirements that may exclude qualified candidates with non-linear career histories.

Build longer-term capacity. Apply Recommendation 1.7 by placing a public commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion on the firm's website, in employee handbooks, and in all job postings, explicitly mentioning disability. Recommendation 7.4 directs employers to monitor workforce equity data and set targets with specific timelines, so that progress is measurable.

Case Study 3 Graduated return to work after injury: small contracting business

Domain focus: Return to Work, Accommodation | Employer size: Small (15 staff)

The situation

A 15-employee contracting business has a long-tenured tradesperson returning to work after four months of medical leave following a workplace injury. His physician has cleared him for graduated return-to-work, with restrictions on lifting heavy materials and on prolonged standing. The business owner values the employee, wants to support a successful return, and is uncertain about what the law requires and what is reasonable to expect from a small business.

How the guide applies

Return-to-work obligations sit at the intersection of human rights law, workers' compensation, and the duty to accommodate. The relevant recommendations come from the Return to Work fact sheet and the Accommodation fact sheet, and the two should be read together. Small business size does not change the underlying legal obligations, but most accommodations are low-cost or free.

Suggested approach

Build a collaborative return-to-work plan. Recommendation 6.1 directs employers to develop the plan with the employee, the health care provider, and, where applicable, a union representative. The plan should be documented and should follow a hierarchy: first, return to the employee's own position; second, return to the same position with accommodations; third, return to a different position. Include specific accommodation measures, timelines, schedules, duties, and workplace adjustments.

Build the graduated return. Recommendation 6.2 directs employers to support graduated or phased returns with progressively increasing hours and duties as the employee's condition improves. The plan should specify essential job functions at each phase, work hours and schedules, equipment required, and the expected duration at each stage.

Identify the right accommodations. Recommendation 5.1 lists the range of accommodation options the owner can draw from: modified duties, flexible scheduling, ergonomic equipment, reassignment of non-essential tasks, and changes to the physical workspace. For a tradesperson with lifting and standing restrictions, this could include mechanical lifting aids, adjusted task assignments, and a stool or anti-fatigue mat. Recommendation 5.16 confirms the employer is responsible for funding accommodations, though most are inexpensive.

Engage the employee as a partner. Recommendation 5.3 directs employers to make accommodation a collaborative process: sit down with the employee, discuss the specific limitations affecting work, explore possible accommodations, and arrive at a mutually agreed solution. Recommendation 5.5 reinforces case-by-case, individualized assessment.

Have everything ready before the return. Recommendation 6.6 directs employers to have accommodations in place before the employee returns: procure and install adaptive equipment in advance and arrange training on any new systems. Document the plan in writing and have all parties sign (Recommendation 5.12). Maintain appropriate contact throughout the leave (Recommendation 6.5), which research identifies as the single most important factor in successful disability management.

Monitor and adjust. Recommendation 6.3 directs employers to monitor the effectiveness of return-to-work arrangements and adjust as needed. Schedule check-ins, respond to changing needs, and where possible keep the employee at work while adjustments are made.

Case Study 4 Bringing consistency to accommodation across departments: large public sector organization

Domain focus: Accommodation, Retention and Inclusive Culture | Employer size: Large (1,500 staff)

The situation

A municipal government employing 1,500 staff has completed an internal audit that revealed significant inconsistency in how managers handle accommodation requests across departments. Some managers respond promptly and arrange supports collaboratively; others require excessive documentation, treat accommodation needs as performance issues, or delay responses indefinitely. Employee survey data shows lower engagement and higher turnover

among employees with disabilities. The Chief Human Resources Officer is developing a multi-year remediation plan.

How the guide applies

Inconsistent accommodation practice points to gaps in policy, training, governance, and culture simultaneously. Remediation requires recommendations from both the Accommodation fact sheet and the Retention and Inclusive Culture fact sheet, anchored by leadership accountability and structural change.

Suggested approach

Anchor the plan in employer responsibility. Recommendation 5.2 establishes that the employer bears ultimate responsibility for the accommodation process, as a legal obligation under federal and provincial human rights legislation. The accommodation policy must clearly state the accountabilities of the employer, the manager, and the employee.

Develop or revise the written policy. Recommendation 5.17 directs organizations to maintain a written accommodation policy that outlines the process, designates responsibility, explains how decisions are made, and sets timelines. The policy should be an evolving document, reviewed at least annually (Recommendation 8.11). Include a dispute resolution process (Recommendation 5.20) so employees who believe a request was not handled appropriately can request a review without first filing a human rights complaint.

Establish centralized coordination. Recommendation 5.23 directs organizations to designate a unit or individual responsible for overseeing accommodation requests, ensuring consistency across departments, and tracking outcomes. For an organization with 1,500 staff and demonstrated inconsistency between departments, centralized coordination is the single highest-leverage structural change. Consider a centralized accessibility supports fund to remove financial disincentives at the departmental level.

Make manager training mandatory. Recommendation 5.14 directs employers to train all managers, supervisors, and HR staff on accommodation obligations and processes. Training should cover the duty to accommodate, the duty to inquire, undue hardship, confidentiality, human rights principles, and practical accommodation conversations. Include ableism-awareness content. This training should be mandatory, not optional.

Layer in cultural change. Recommendation 8.5 extends training beyond managers to all employees, including disability awareness, unconscious bias, and disability etiquette. Recommendation 8.6 directs organizations to address attitudinal barriers, stigma, and misconceptions directly through ableism-awareness training. Hire training providers led by persons with disabilities or with lived experience.

Build leadership accountability. Recommendation 8.7 directs senior leaders to visibly champion disability inclusion through public statements, active participation in training, and executive accountability for outcomes. Add metrics and targets on disability inclusion to the performance assessments of managers and executives. Use job exit information to identify retention trends among employees with disabilities.

Measure progress and adjust. Recommendation 8.16 directs organizations to use anonymous employee surveys and structured feedback mechanisms to measure inclusion and identify barriers. Track results, make data-driven improvements, and report transparently on progress. Recommendation 7.4 directs employers to monitor representation in hiring, retention, promotion, and turnover by equity group, addressing any gaps identified.

For the full evidence base

Each recommendation referenced in these case studies is drawn from *An Employer Guide to Disability Employment Practices in Canada*. The full guide contains jurisdictional notes identifying which practices reflect legal obligations, the complete list of supporting source documents for each recommendation, and the full methodological account of the convergence synthesis.

Anyinam, C., Coffey, S., Da Silva, C., Graham, L., & Godin-Jacques, C. (2026). An employer guide to disability employment practices in Canada: Evidence-based recommendations from a convergence synthesis of Canadian grey literature. Building Employment Pathways for People with Disabilities Project, National Educational Association of Disabled Students.

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