

Summary of Employer Practices

Purpose: What are some specific actions emerging from the data collection report that employers can take to be more inclusive in their workplaces?

Context: There are more small businesses per capita in B.C. and self-employment is more prevalent than any other province in Canada. Of the 513,300 businesses in B.C. in 2022, 58 per cent were self-employed without any help, 24 per cent were businesses with 1 to 4 employees, and 16 per cent were businesses with 5 to 49 employees. The remaining 2 per cent were large businesses. Screening (environmental scan) of employers for the interviews and focus groups allowed employers to self-identify according to the following categories:

- **Self-employed**
- **5 to 9 employees**
- **10 to 19 employees**
- **20 to 49 employees**
- **50 to 99 employees**
- **100 and over employees**



Image Description: Right, a young white woman with Down Syndrome, wearing glasses and a black turtleneck, is seated at a desk in a busy office environment. She is wearing a headset and appears to be engaged in a phone conversation, with her hand adjusting the earpiece. In the background, blurred figures of colleagues can be seen working. The office is well-lit, with natural light streaming in through large windows.

Most actions and strategies below can be applied across employer sizes, organizational models, and contexts. Where applicable, distinctions between self-employed, smaller employers (under 10 employees) and larger employers (50 employees and over) are noted.

There are 9 themes that include:

1. Inclusive and Accessible Communication
2. Accessible Recruitment and Hiring Practices
3. Workplace Accommodations/Accessibility
4. Scheduling and Working Conditions Flexibility
5. Individualizing Roles
6. Employee Wellbeing and Benefits
7. Service Organization Partnerships
8. Other Employers Partnerships
9. Addressing Barriers in the Local Community / Physical Environment

Image Description: Below, a bearded white man is wearing a black baseball cap with sunglasses resting on top, a navy blue t-shirt, and black over-ear headphones around his neck. He is operating a professional camera mounted on a tripod. He has a focused yet relaxed expression as he looks towards something off-camera. The background includes a store setting with shelves stocked with products and a stainless-steel kitchen door. The lighting is bright and even.



1. Inclusive and Accessible Communication

Why Is this Important for inclusion?

- All workplaces rely on relationships (with coworkers, clients, partners) built on effective communication.
- Differences in individuals' communications styles and preferences are often overlooked and communication can often be a significant barrier in the workplace.
- It's not about "just being nice". Open, non-judgemental communication with employees that adapts to individual needs is important for employees to be successful.
- Communication and supportive interpersonal relationships also foster psychological safety (defined as a workplace that promotes workers' psychological wellbeing and actively works to prevent harm to worker psychological health including in negligent, reckless, or intentional ways), team cohesion, and employee engagement.
- Inclusive approaches to communication and interpersonal relationships were also a way for employers to concretely align values and mission with everyday actions. Employees with disabilities also emphasized that no two individuals experience their disabilities the same way. For example, people in the Deaf community have different preferences regarding lip reading vs. sign language, or both.

Employer Actions

- Providing choices and options for daily communication (e.g., text messages, in-person meetings, telephone calls).
- Including employees with disabilities in decisions regarding their communications needs and preferences (e.g., sign language vs. lip reading, choice of formats for individuals with low vision).
- Adopting plain language in public-facing text.
- Ensuring websites are fully accessible. Working with service providers and job coaches to develop individualized approaches to communications.

Are there differences in how this is applied depending on employer size, organizational model, or context?

- Most self-employed individuals with disabilities emphasized the importance about asking the person how to best support them and their communications needs/preferences.
- Smaller employers mostly relied on informal and continuous forms of employee engagement and feedback.
- Some larger organizations sometimes rely on accessibility committees or employee resource groups to identify communication barriers and priorities for accessible communication in the workplace. Employers of all sizes, organizational models, and sectors highlighted the importance of working with service organizations – i.e., providing additional resources and expertise where needed.

1. Inclusive and Accessible Communication (continued)

Illustrative Quote

“So, this guy, he loves reading comic books. So, [the job coaches] created a comic book starring him and being in the workplace and the strategies that he can then use... they did [a] comic strip when he was learning how to take a HandyDART because he had never taken it before from his house to work, and then from work to his day program...” (Manufacturing BC Focus Group)

2. Accessible Recruitment and Hiring Practices

Why is this important for inclusion?

- Traditional recruitment and hiring methods can be a significant barrier for people with disabilities.
- Many potential candidates can be “screened out” because their skills and experiences don’t fit traditional application forms or processes.
- Potential candidates with disabilities also have a preference to work with inclusive organizations and are looking for indications of organizational commitment to accessibility and inclusion in job ads.
- Traditional job interviews can also have many barriers for people with disabilities and employers provided examples of how to rethink these processes for inclusion.

Employer Actions

- Review job ads for language, reading level, and technological barriers in off-the-shelf recruitment platforms.
- Highlight the employer’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the job ad.
- Automatically screen-in candidates who self-identify as living with a disability.
- Create hiring “champions” to recruit directly from diverse communities or make it mandatory that hiring managers collaborate with community organizations to recruit people with disabilities.
- Reconsider job requirements – remove unnecessary training or education criteria and focus on requirements for the job.
- Apply a strengths-based approach to reviewing candidates; look for transferrable skills and “attitude over aptitude.”
- Reconsider traditional requirements for a cover letter and resume and offer different ways to apply e.g., in person sessions.
- Share interview questions in advance.
- Consider working interviews e.g., inviting candidate to showcase their skills directly on the job.

2. Accessible Recruitment and Hiring Practices (continued)

Are there differences in how this is applied depending on employer size, organizational model, or context?

- Most self-employed individuals with disabilities noted that they were not in a position to hire but would target recruitment to other people with disabilities if they were in the future.
- Employers of all sizes, organizational models, and sectors highlighted simple and creative ways to remove barriers in the recruitment and hiring process.

Illustrative Quote

“My hiring philosophy now is attitude over aptitude and for the vast majority of our staff that are coming in, whether they identify as living with a disability or not, they’re coming in with a really great attitude so I can teach them what they need to know.” (Manufacturing BC Focus Group)

“We’ve done some kind of working interviews which are awesome... We had one gentleman come in and he would have been fine, but he had severe arthritis in his hands, and that wasn’t something that he could overcome based on the dexterity needed... for the [specific] job itself. So, it just wasn’t the right fit. But on paper, he looked like he’d be a great candidate, but actually meeting the person, we came to that agreement that, you know, you’re not going to be comfortable here. There’s going to be something better for you out there. So, it gave us a lot more insight and into how that would translate to what we needed as well as the individual.” (Interviewee 6)

3. Workplace Accommodations

Why is this important for inclusion?

- There is a common myth that making accommodations for employees with disabilities is complicated and expensive.
- Like other research that has debunked this myth, [\[https://accessibleemployers.ca/resource/workplace-accommodation-guide/\]](https://accessibleemployers.ca/resource/workplace-accommodation-guide/) findings supported that most inclusive employers considered accommodations on a case-by-case basis, aligning them with individuals needs, strengths, and requirements for the job and did not consider these to be complicated or expensive.
- Many employees may not feel comfortable self-identifying as living with a disability or requesting accommodations. Providing options up-front – and to everyone – fosters inclusion.

3. Workplace Accommodations (continued)

Employer Actions

- If making an investment in the physical workplace or technology, focus on a “universal design” approach i.e., approach to designing the workplace/environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability.
- Proactively offer different accommodation options/choices to new employees to reduce the need for self-identify as living with a disability.
- Work with service or community organizations that can offer services and supports for recommending specific workplace or worksite adjustments and can offer help navigating available resources.
- Individual approaches – i.e., adjusting the job role/work conditions based on individual strengths and needs – helps to empower employees to meet their role-specific requirements.

Are there differences in how this is applied depending on employer size, organizational model, or context?

- Most self-employed individuals with disabilities emphasized that accommodations are as unique as individuals themselves. They felt it was important to dispel a “one size fits all” approach to accommodations.
- Many self-employed individuals found that self-employment allowed choice and control over their adjustments on a regular basis.
- Employers of all sizes, organizational models, and sectors highlighted simple ways to make adjustments. However, this required consideration of the job role. For example, many roles required employees to be on-site (i.e., in a service role, at a manufacturing plant) so hybrid or work-from-home options were not always available in these cases.

Illustrative Quote

This quote is in relation to an employer that had an occupational therapist modify the employee’s workstation during onboarding: “I have to be quite honest with you, I thought I was being placated a little bit as the token guy in a wheelchair joining the organization. So, I said to the staff, ‘You really don’t have to do this to me. For me, I’ve never had this type of accommodation done in the past. I’m pretty adaptable. I can make this happen.’ What they explained to me was... ‘You don’t understand, we’re not doing this as an onboarding practice for you. We do this for all employees that join our organization.’” (Interviewee 4)

4. Scheduling and Working Conditions Flexibility

Why is this important for inclusion?

- Offering flexibility in scheduling and working conditions was seen as a simple, low-cost way to accommodate diverse employees.
- Flexibility in scheduling and working conditions looks different in diverse sectors and job roles – while hybrid and work from home might not be possible in all cases, offering more flexibility for breaks, part-time roles, or having uninterrupted work time were seen as other options.

Employer Actions

- Allow flexibility for taking breaks or scheduling uninterrupted time.
- Provide open-ended leaves in which employees can be welcomed back to jobs or roles after time off.
- Part-time and shift work can be seen as flexible or preferred options for some employees with disabilities.
- Job-sharing (i.e., one FTE position split among several part-time employees) may be an option for some employers.
- When possible, hybrid or remote work to fulfill job roles or specific job tasks.
- Allowing employees to find their best approach instead of relying on strict instructions.
- Encouraging manager and supervisors to not “micromanage” and focus on outcomes.
- Adapt job duties or offer choice of tasks when an employee needs “a change of scenery”.
- Align learning and growth opportunities with career aspirations and roles.

Are there differences in how this is applied depending on employer size, organizational model, or context?

- Most self-employed individuals with disabilities preferred self-employment for the flexibility, choice, and control that it offered.
- Many employers who had job roles requiring employees to be on-site emphasized how shift work, job-sharing, or part-time roles could offer more flexibility for people with disabilities.

Illustrative Quote

“We use a job share sort of approach, which I think everybody needs to get in on that, especially in this economy and this job market. Why do you have to have one person for a full-time position... why can't that position be shared by five people? ... If you can think a little outside the box and be willing to try something, maybe not quite as traditional... would you rather not have five people to fill the job that are good, and they want to be there for the hours that they're there?” (Interviewee 5)

5. Individualizing Roles

Why is this important for inclusion?

- Tailoring jobs to match strengths, abilities, and interests promotes inclusion.
- Individualizing roles to employees may look different in different sectors and job roles – while creating a job around an employee might not always be possible, other approaches might exist to align roles to employee strengths.
- Overall, providing choice and control for individuals to complete their job roles and tasks was emphasized – i.e., focusing on the outcome rather than how the individual performed the task.

Employer Actions

- Allowing employees to find their best approach instead of relying on strict instructions.
- Encouraging manager and supervisors to not “micromanage” and focus on outcomes.
- Adapt job duties or offer choice of tasks when an employee needs “a change of scenery”.
- Align learning and growth opportunities with career aspirations and roles.

Are there differences in how this is applied depending on employer size, organizational model, or context?

- Employers of different sizes, organizational models, and sectors noted that flexibility and tailoring might exist on a spectrum. For example, a very large employer (i.e., over 100 employees) offered a “menu” of job options/tasks for individuals to choose from. Other employers might be able to tailor the role around the individual employee.
- Regardless of size, sector, or structure, many employers felt that focusing on outcomes, allowing for different approaches, and an open mind to executing tasks was important.

Illustrative Quote

“Yeah, just kind of in finding the gifts that we all have. I think I like to do that with all my staff. I think we’re all very different. And I think that’s really important. It makes business operate very smoothly when you can find, highlight, and let people work towards their strengths.” (Interviewee 14)

6. Employee Wellbeing and Benefits

Why is this important for inclusion?

- Flexibility was considered a core part of employee wellbeing – fostering a culture of support, trust, and safety.
- Supporting employee wellbeing not only fosters inclusion, but also enhances productivity and retention.
- Recognizing the importance that flexibility plays in mental health for all employees was emphasized.

Employer Actions

- Provide for personal days off or recognize mental health days in leave policies.
- Provide mental health first aid training for leaders.
- Allow for time off or flexible schedule for medical appointments, childcare responsibilities, or counselling.
- Review sick leave and health care spending account policies.

Are there differences in how this is applied depending on employer size, organizational model, or context?

- Regardless of size, sector, or structure, many employers emphasized that mental health was a major concern for their workplaces and that all employees were impacted.
- Recognizing the importance of mental health in the workplace was also seen as an important “entry point” into changing attitudes and practices in favour of flexibility and disability inclusion.

Illustrative Quote

“I think people are starting to understand like this is how things have to be done. You have to be flexible with childcare, people have childcare issues. People have depression where it’s easier if you get them started later in the morning...This whole idea has changed about what work looks like.”
(Interviewee 11)

“You’re welcome back and to take time off because you need to focus on yourself. That’s not a bad thing, and it’s not anything to feel embarrassed about or feel guilty about, like it’s a good thing that you can recognize that, ‘Hey, you know what? I’m struggling right now, and I need some time.’ So, we fully support that, and we let all the workers know... if that’s what you need, you [just] have to tell us.” (Interviewee 5)

7. Service Organizations Partnerships

Why is this important for inclusion?

- Partnerships with other organizations were pivotal for accessibility and inclusion for many of the interview and focus group participants from a variety of organizational models.
- More than 30 unique organizations in B.C. were identified as partners.
- Employers noted that service organizations provided expertise, resources, and one-on-one support to job candidates and employees with disabilities at no additional cost to the employer.
- Sector-specific organizations (e.g., TAP Network, Employ to Empower) offered tailored supports to members and helped them see the value of inclusion in their specific contexts.

Employer Actions

- Service organizations can complete accessibility audits; identify barriers to workplace policies, practices, and the physical environment.
- Service organizations have the expertise to recommend workplace adaptations and can help identify specific resources for employers.
- Service organizations can help recruit and match employees with disabilities to positions and offer ongoing supports for their success, such as social workers and job coaches.
- More broadly, service organizations can help employers' diversity recruitment and reach untapped talent in the community.

Are there differences in how this is applied depending on employer size, organizational model, or context?

- Entrepreneurs/self-employed individuals with disabilities highlighted the value of direct support (resources, equipment, business coaching).
- Regardless of size, sector, or structure, many employers noted that service organizations provided the resources and ongoing supports required to ensure successful workplace adjustments and accommodations for employees with disabilities.
- Diverse employers noted that the key to successful partnerships includes that the service organization deeply understands the employer's business needs and context.

Illustrative Quote

"The nice thing is having the job coaches, they are a great sounding board because every time that I need support, they're there for me as well as well as their employee or the job seeker or their person that we have here... They've been really instrumental to us as well as to the individual and some of the things that have come up that we hadn't thought of before." (Interviewee 6)

7. Service Organizations Partnerships (continued)

Illustrative Quote

“I think we were only able to hire because of the collaboration and support from...WorkBC... Being able to get the specialized equipment for our staff member... was essential, but we didn’t have the budget for doing that ourselves. So, and then just learning right, learning, and providing a base support that we were able to.” (Terrace Focus Group)

8. Other Employers Partnerships

Why is this important for inclusion?

- Local networks with other employers were helpful for idea sharing and mutual support for implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.
- Learning from other employers (e.g., through communities of practice, local events, guest speakers) was considered a powerful way to raise awareness and educate employers on the value of inclusive workplaces.

Employer Actions

- Partnering with local Chambers of Commerce to learn from inclusive employers.
- Hosting guest speakers or “lunch and learn” to hear about employer success stories.
- Hosting inclusive employer awards to highlight success stories.
- Participating in a community of practice – some sectoral associations offer this – to share ideas and problem solve with peers.

Are there differences in how this is applied depending on employer size, organizational model, or context?

- Participation in communities of practice was more prevalent for larger employers and employers in rural or remote areas.
- While smaller employers noted that they sometimes lacked the capacity to participate in networking and employer communities of practice, one small employer offered an example to overcome this – their community created a network of employers, service organizations, and other stakeholders to work towards a community-wide inclusion charter.
- Some smaller employers noted that there was an opportunity for local Boards of Trade or start-up accelerators to foster more peer learning regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion.

8. Other Employers Partnerships (continued)

Illustrative Quote

“There was a community committee that was looking at employment... through different organizations. And so, I joined that committee, and our goal was to try to create more opportunities in the community for people with disabilities... We brought in some guest speakers. You know, go to the Business Improvement Associations, the Chambers of Commerce, really trying to educate the business world in regard to hiring people with disabilities, which was great. But we weren’t really changing the culture of those businesses because businesses weren’t hiring people with disabilities because they didn’t know how to hire people with disabilities. So, we had to sort of educate them.” (Interviewee 9)

9. Addressing Barriers in the Local Community / Physical Environment

Why is this important for inclusion?

- Employers’ location in the community and availability of accessible infrastructure (e.g., buildings, sidewalks, transit, etc.) was highlighted as a challenge. However, many inclusive employers used creative solutions to address these challenges.
- Where employers did have influence over their own environments, many opted for Rick Hansen Accessibility Certification for building enhancements.
- Employers noted that there were some examples of government support to address accessibility and infrastructure in their communities, but more would be welcome.

Employer Actions

- Providing transportation to a less accessible worksite by creating a central pick-up/drop-off location closer to transit.
- Working with service organizations to remove barriers in buildings.
- Working with service organizations to identify provincial or federal sources of funding to address accessibility in the built environment.
- Participating in local community opportunities to advocate for accessible infrastructure.

Are there differences in how this is applied depending on employer size, organizational model, or context?

- Employers located in smaller communities had to address barriers due to lack of public transit and sometimes provided solutions themselves (i.e., carpooling).
- One employer in the non-profit sector highlighted that there is an opportunity for more consortia models to procurement of accessible infrastructure. For example, where one organization might not be able to license accessibility technology on their own, a consortia license would reduce costs as a shared resource.

9. Addressing Barriers in the Local Community / Physical Environment (continued)

Are there differences in how this is applied depending on employer size, organizational model, or context?

- Larger employers may have more resources available to invest in accessibility to their buildings.
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- Larger employers may have more resources available to invest in accessibility to their buildings.
- One employer in the non-profit sector highlighted that there is an opportunity for more consortia models to procurement of accessible infrastructure. For example, where one organization might not be able to license accessibility technology on their own, a consortia license would reduce costs as a shared resource.

Illustrative Quote

“Most of [our staff] don’t have a car. A lot of them don’t have a license. So, for us, the challenge is finding somebody that can drive on the crew. So, we provide the transportation to and from... take them to work and then bring them back to the mall and drop them off.” (Interviewee 5)

Image Description: Below, an Asian woman and a young Asian man with Down syndrome, both wearing aprons, are smiling and preparing bread together in a kitchen. The counter is filled with various types of bread and pastries, and the atmosphere is warm and supportive.

