

Equity, diversity and inclusion in hiring

A question and answer resource

Equitable hiring and promotion practices are not new. However, in recent years, criticism and misconceptions about EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion) initiatives have increased.

BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (BCOHRC) developed this question and answer (Q and A) resource to provide information about EDI hiring practices. The purpose of this resource is to address common misconceptions. It builds on BCOHRC's [employment equity toolkit](#), which was created to support employers wanting to learn how to improve equity within their businesses and organizations.

Under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*, the Human Rights Commissioner has the power to designate [special programs](#). A "special program" is meant to address disadvantages that certain groups or individuals experience in British Columbia. This goal is achieved by treating those groups in ways which would normally violate the *Human Rights Code*. This is legal when the initiative helps to address inequality that certain groups experience (see below for further details on special programs).¹

Contents

1. What do EDI hiring practices look like?.....	2
2. What is EDI?.....	2
3. What are other terms for EDI?	2
4. Why are some groups underrepresented in the workplace?	3
5. What does EDI hiring include?	3
6. Are EDI hiring practices legal?.....	4
7. What is a special program?	4
8. Are employers required to conduct EDI hiring?	4
9. Are EDI hiring practices fair?	5
10. What are the benefits of EDI hiring practices?	5
11. What is the difference between EDI hiring and affirmative action?.....	5
12. When should EDI hiring practices end?	6
13. Do EDI hiring practices include diversity training?	6
14. Where can I learn more?.....	6
References	7

1. What do EDI hiring practices look like?

EDI hiring practices are actions employers take to remove barriers for people who experience disadvantages. Barriers can prevent qualified people from being considered for job opportunities for reasons that are not related to the job. For example, some people experience discrimination based on some part of their identity such as their ethnicity, religion, gender or age when applying for jobs. EDI hiring practices make sure that workplaces reflect the wider population that is available to work.

Although things have gotten better in some ways, people in B.C. still experience discrimination when looking for work. People from certain groups deal with barriers, such as stereotypes and bias, and can be excluded from job opportunities. As a result, many workplaces do not reflect the general population that is available to work.

For example, a recent study found that even though racialized people in Canada are more likely to earn a bachelor's degree or higher, they are less likely to find jobs that offer the same pay and benefits as their white counterparts early in their careers.² In B.C., data shows that people with disabilities are the most underrepresented group in B.C.'s public service jobs. In 2020, people with disabilities made up only 6.9 per cent of jobs in the B.C. public service, even though 24.7 per cent of the population has a disability.³ Also, women are overrepresented in caregiving roles that are often paid less. In 2021, women made up 78 per cent of workers in the healthcare and social assistance sector.⁴

EDI hiring practices help make sure everyone has fair access to job opportunities, feels like they are included or belong in their workplace and that our workplaces reflect the diversity of B.C.'s communities.

2. What is EDI?

EDI stands for equity, diversity and inclusion. It describes many actions an employer can take to ensure that workplaces are fair, equitable and welcoming for everyone.

- Equity means employment opportunities and fair pay for everyone without discrimination or exclusion.⁵
- Diversity means that employees with various backgrounds, identities, experiences and abilities are present.⁶
- Inclusion is an intentional and ongoing process to create welcoming and accessible workplaces where everyone can thrive.⁷

3. What are other terms for EDI?

There are several terms used to describe EDI, such as:

- Employment equity⁸
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)
- Diversity and Inclusion (D&I)
- Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)

- Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA)
- Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization (EDID)⁹
- Substantive equality¹⁰

4. Why are some groups underrepresented in the workplace?

There are many reasons why some groups are underrepresented in workplaces. This is often caused by discrimination and inequities at the interpersonal, organizational and societal level.

Interpersonal

Interpersonal discrimination can happen when people interact with each other. This can look like an employer making the decision not to hire a qualified candidate because of stereotypes and biases associated with their identity. For example, an employer might not hire a woman to an executive role because men are viewed as better leaders.

Organizational

Discrimination at the organizational level happens because of an organization's policies, practices and processes that can cause harm. For example, using personal networks to share information about job opportunities, also known as "word of mouth," may seem harmless. However, this tends to benefit people with higher social status and personal connections and excludes people who do not have the same connections. As a result, employers miss the chance to find qualified applicants who may not have access to the same networks.

Societal

At the societal level, unequal access to education, training opportunities and other social supports can make it harder for some groups and individuals to find and get a job. For example, racialized immigrants may have challenges getting a job because international education and work experience is valued less than Canadian work experience.¹¹

5. What does EDI hiring include?

EDI hiring does not mean people who are not qualified to do the job are hired simply because of their identity, such as their race. It is also not about tokenism, such as hiring one racialized person in a workplace that is otherwise dominated by white people. EDI practices mean changing the workplace to be truly welcoming for everyone and to better reflect the identities of the community an organization works in or with.

Examples of EDI hiring practices:

- **Including preference statements to job postings:** If an employer finds that people from marginalized groups are underrepresented in their workplace, they may give preference to qualified people from those groups so that staff in their organization reflect the available workforce.¹²
- **Creating a hiring and promotion equity plan:** One of the most effective ways for employers to improve representation of marginalized groups in the workplace is to set proactive targets and timelines to hire and promote people from underrepresented groups.¹³

- **Establishing fair and inclusive practices:** Employers can standardize hiring and promotion practices so that they have the necessary tools to assess people more fairly. This reduces barriers that exclude qualified people from diverse backgrounds from being considered for job opportunities.
- **Focusing on knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for the job:** Sometimes, people do not gain qualifications in a way that might be expected, even though their experiences and credentials make them good candidates for a role. To ensure fairness, employers can consider people with qualifications from non-traditional paths and only list the specific knowledge, skills and abilities required to do the job.

6. Are EDI hiring practices legal?

Yes. Under the B.C. *Human Rights Code*, it is legal and not discriminatory to plan, advertise, adopt or implement a program or activity that excludes or indicates a preference for certain groups or individuals if the objective is to improve conditions for the identified disadvantaged group.

7. What is a special program?

A special program is meant to improve conditions for an individual or group that has faced disadvantage. B.C.'s *Human Rights Code* states that employment equity programs are not discriminatory if they achieve or are likely to achieve the goal of improving the conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups (s.42(1)).

Employers with an initiative to lower barriers for disadvantaged groups in their workplaces may apply to receive formal special program approval from B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner (s.42(3)). However, formal designation is not needed for an employer to start a special program (s.42(1)).

Visit BCOHRC's website to learn more about [special programs and how to apply](#).

8. Are employers required to conduct EDI hiring?

The Human Rights Tribunal can order employers to improve employment practices to remove barriers and address discrimination. This can happen as a result of a successful human rights complaint or where the parties have agreed to settle a complaint that includes such requirements for the employer. Some organizations and businesses are required to implement employment equity measures by legislation.

The federal *Employment Equity Act* (EEA) applies to the federal government and agencies, as well as federally regulated organizations or businesses (such as banks or airlines) with 100 or more employees. The EEA requires federally regulated employers to develop an Employment Equity Plan to address barriers in employment. The plan must also ensure the following four groups are fully represented within the organizations: women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and members of racialized groups.

In British Columbia, the new *Anti-Racism Act* (ARA) became law on May 16, 2024. The goal of the ARA is to address systemic racism in public institutions in B.C. The ARA includes requirements for some public bodies (starting with ministries of the B.C. government and the Office of the Premier) to set targets for the recruitment, retention and advancement of Indigenous people and racialized people throughout the organization, including within senior levels of the organization by June 2026. Over

time, this requirement will be expanded to other public bodies (such as agencies and health care and social services providers).¹⁴

9. Are EDI hiring practices fair?

Yes. EDI hiring practices are fair because they only consider qualified candidates for jobs. They also improve fairness by removing barriers that might make it difficult for qualified people from diverse backgrounds to have a fair chance at finding a job.

For example, research suggests that the qualifications of women and racialized people are often undervalued. They have a lower chance of getting promoted despite the same levels of effort, performance, mentoring, experience and social connections as others.¹⁵ This type of bias leads to women and racialized people having fewer leadership roles. One recent study found that women of colour only represent one in 16 senior executive leaders.¹⁶

10. What are the benefits of EDI hiring practices?

Diversity creates higher profits

Research shows that workplaces with diverse leadership teams have higher profits, revenue and are more likely to experience growth in market share.¹⁷

Diversity attracts customers and workers

Organizations with diverse teams tend to have a better reputation.¹⁸ This helps attract new clients, customers and employees. Employees also stay at their jobs longer in organizations with greater diversity.¹⁹

According to a March 2024 poll conducted by BCOHRC of 803 adults in B.C., more than half of British Columbians (54 per cent) think equitable hiring initiatives are a good idea. The poll also found that 64 per cent of respondents agreed that “Treating people equitably, or fairly, may require treating them differently.”

Diversity improves team performance and drives innovation

Innovation and creativity thrive when workplaces are diverse. Teams with employees from different backgrounds and experiences create environments where staff feel more comfortable to bring up new ideas and everyone has opportunities to learn from those who are different from them.²⁰ Greater diversity can also create improvements in team performance and lead to more positive outcomes.

For example, a recent study in Ontario found that hospitals with more than 35 per cent women surgeons and anesthesiologists had better patient outcomes, including fewer deaths, in the three months after surgery.²¹

11. What is the difference between EDI hiring and affirmative action?

Affirmative action is a term mostly used in the United States to describes efforts to improve employment, educational and other opportunities for groups who have experienced discrimination historically and in the present day.²² EDI hiring practices focus on improving equity in the workplace only. In the employment context, the goal of both is equity in the workplace.

There are other terms that are used to describe similar initiatives in different parts of the world. For example, the European Union implements “positive action measures” to achieve equality for individuals from disadvantaged groups.²³

12. When should EDI hiring practices end?

If an employer sets targets and timelines to improve representation in their workplace, they may decide to end EDI hiring practices once they reach their goals and their workplace is reflective of the diversity of the available workforce.

It is important to remember that improving representation in the workplace is only one part of the EDI journey. Equitable workplace policies and practices on compensation, accommodations for individual needs, professional development opportunities and complaint resolution should not have end dates.

13. Do EDI hiring practices include diversity training?

Diversity training is one tool that employers may consider using to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace. It is distinct from equitable hiring and promotion initiatives and may have varying results.

Research suggests that diversity training has mixed or sometimes negative results on promoting equity. Mandatory or punitive training, or training that raises awareness about stereotypes and biases without actions to address it have been found to be particularly ineffective.²⁴ However, diversity training is one of many tools available to employers and it is not a reflection of the effectiveness of EDI initiatives overall. In fact, there is strong evidence that EDI hiring initiatives are not only effective in improving diversity in the workplace, but they also benefit businesses and organizations in many other ways.^{25, 26}

14. Where can I learn more?

Visit BCOHRC’s [website](#) to learn more about special programs and how to apply.

The BCOHRC [employment equity toolkit](#) provides resources to support employers wanting to learn more about how to improve equity within their businesses and organizations.

For more information about labour market statistics visit [BC Statistics](#).

References

- 1 For more information about Special Programs, visit our website: <https://bchumanrights.ca/human-rights/special-programs/>
- 2 Canada. Statistics Canada. *The Daily. Racialized Canadians are less likely to find as good jobs as their non-racialized and non-Indigenous counterparts early in their careers.* January 18, 2023 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230118/dq230118b-eng.htm>
- 3 BC Stats, *Labour Market Outcomes of Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia*, (BC Stats, 2009), https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/data/statistics/people-population-community/community/labour_market_outcomes_persons_with_disabilities_bc.pdf.
- 4 “Industry Profiles,” B.C.’s Industries and Sectors, Work BC, 2021 Labour Force Survey, <https://www.workbc.ca/research-labour-market/bcs-industries-and-sectors/industry-profiles>.
- 5 Rosalie Silberman Abella, *Report of the Commission on Equality in Employment*, (Canadian Government Publishing Centre, October 1984), ii, <https://www.bakerlaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/Rosie-Abella-1984-Equality-in-Employment.pdf>.
- 6 Ministry of Multiculturalism and Immigration. “A Framework for Diversity: Multiculturalism, Human Rights, Employment Equity and Social Justice,” August 2000, 15.
- 7 “DEI, DIB, D&I, JEDI - Which Diversity-Related Acronym Should My Company Use?” Resources, Crescendo, 2021, <https://crescendowork.com/workplace-inclusion-blog/which-diversity-related-acronym-should-my-company-use>.
- 8 See BCOHRC’s glossary for a definition of equity <https://bchumanrights.ca/glossary/>
- 9 See BCOHRC’s glossary for a definition of decolonization <https://bchumanrights.ca/glossary/>
- 10 See BCOHRC’s glossary for a definition of substantive equality <https://bchumanrights.ca/glossary/>
- 11 Izumi Sakamoto, Daphne Jeypal, Rupaleem Bhuyan, Jane Ku, Lin Fang, Heidi Zhang and Flavia Genovese, An Overview of the Discourses of Skilled Immigrants and Canadian Experience: An English-language print media analysis, *CERIS – The Ontario Metropolis Centre, Working Paper no. 29*, (March 2013), <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/78816/1/Sakamoto%20Bhuyan%20discourses%20of%20skilled%20immigrants%20and%20Canadian%20experience.pdf>.
- 12 See s.42(1) of the *Human Rights Code*, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/00_96210_01#section42.
- 13 Alexandra Kalev, Frank Dobbin, and Erin Kelly, “Best Practices or Best Guesses? Assessing the Efficacy of Corporate Affirmative Action and Diversity Policies,” *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 4 (August 2006): 589–617, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240607100404>; Elizabeth Hirsh and Youngjoo Cha, “Mandating Change: The Impact of Court-Ordered Policy Changes on Managerial Diversity,” *ILR Review* 70, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 42–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793916668880>; Nan Weiner, “Chapter 2, Employment Equity in Canada: What Do the Data Show about Its Effectiveness?” In *Employment Equity in Canada: The Legacy of the Abella Report*, 29–50, University of Toronto Press, 2014; Eddy S. W. Ng and Ronald J. Burke, “A Comparison of the Legislated Employment Equity Program, Federal Contractors Program, and Financial Post 500 Firms,” *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences / Revue Canadienne Des Sciences de l’Administration* 27, no. 3 (2010): 224–35. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cjas.166>; See s.42(1) of the *Human Rights Code*
- 14 “New legislation aims to remove systemic barriers for Indigenous, racialized people,” Attorney General, Government of British Columbia, April 11, 2024, <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024AG0020-000521>.
- 15 Margaret Yap and Alison M. Konrad, “[Gender and Racial Differentials in Promotions: Is There a Sticky Floor, a Mid-Level Bottleneck, or a Glass Ceiling?](#),” *Relations Industrielles* 64, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 593–619.
- 16 Emily Field, Alexis Krivkovich, Sandra Kügele, Nicole Robinson, and Lareina Yee, [Women in the Workplace](#) 2023,

- (Mckinsey & Company, October 2023), <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and%20inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>.
- 17 Dame Vivian Hunt, Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle, Celia Huber, María del Mar Martínez Márquez, Sara Prince, and Ashley Thomas, *Diversity Matters Even More: The Case for Holistic Impact*, (Mckinsey & Company, December 2023) <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-matters-even-more-the-case-for-holistic-impact>; Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle, Kevin Dolan, Dame Vivian Hunt, and Sara Prince, *Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters*, (McKinsey & Company, May 2020) <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>; Rocio Lorenzo and Martin Reeves., “[How and Where Diversity Drives Financial Performance](https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-and-where-diversity-drives-financial-performance),” Harvard Business Review, January 30, 2018, <https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-and-where-diversity-drives-financial-performance>; Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Melinda Marshall, and Laura Sherbin, “[How Diversity Can Drive Innovation](https://hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation),” Harvard Business Review, December 1, 2013, <https://hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation>.
- 18 “[Systemic Barriers to the Full Socio-Economic Participation of Persons with Disabilities and the Benefits Realized When Such Persons Are Included in the Workplace](https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/corporate/transparency/open-government/literature-review.html),” Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada, December 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/corporate/transparency/open-government/literature-review.html>.
- 19 Austin Mac Nab, “[How Does Inclusive Culture Boost Company Performance?](https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/how-does-inclusive-culture-boost-company-performance/412820)” *Entrepreneur Media*, February 11, 2022, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/how-does-inclusive-culture-boost-company-performance/412820>; Adam D. Galinsky, Andrew R. Todd, Astrid C. Homan, Katherine W. Phillips, Evan P. Apfelbaum, Stacey J. Sasaki, Jennifer A. Richeson, Jennifer B. Olayon and William W. Maddux, “[Maximizing the Gains and Minimizing the Pains of Diversity: A Policy Perspective](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1745691615598513),” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10, no. 6 (November 1, 2015): 744, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1745691615598513>
- 20 Mac Nab, “How Does Inclusive Culture Boost; Galinsky et al, “Maximizing the Gains,” 744.
- 21 Gianni R. Lorello and Alana M. Flexman. “[A matter of life and death: physician gender and patient outcomes after surgery](https://academic.oup.com/bjs/article/111/5/znae097/7664184).” *British Journal of Surgery* Volume 111, Issue 5, (May 2024), <https://academic.oup.com/bjs/article/111/5/znae097/7664184>.
- 22 “affirmative action,” The Editors of Encyclopaedia, Britannica, last updated July 1, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/affirmative-action>.
- 23 Equality Law in Practice Working Group, “[Exploring Positive Action as a Means to Fight Structural Discrimination in Europe](https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Exploring-positive-action-as-a-means-to-fight-structural-discrimination-in-Europe.pdf),” (Equinet European Network of Equality Bodies, April 2022), <https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Exploring-positive-action-as-a-means-to-fight-structural-discrimination-in-Europe.pdf>.
- 24 Elizabeth Hirsh and Youngjoo Cha, “Mandating Change: The Impact of Court-Ordered Policy Changes on Managerial Diversity,” *ILR Review* 70, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 42–72, ; Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev, “Why Diversity Programs Fail,” *Harvard Business Review*, July 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail>; Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev, “The Civil Rights Revolution at Work: What Went Wrong,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 47, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090820-023615>; McGowan, R. and E. Ng, “Employment equity in Canada: Making sense of employee discourses of misunderstanding, resistance, and support,” *Canadian Public Administration-administration Publique Du Canada* 59 (2016): 310-329. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793916668880>; Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev, “Why Diversity Programs Fail,” *Harvard Business Review*, July 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail>; Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev, “The Civil Rights Revolution at Work: What Went Wrong,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 47, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090820-023615>; McGowan, R. and E. Ng, “Employment equity in Canada: Making sense of employee discourses of misunderstanding, resistance, and support,” *Canadian Public Administration-administration Publique Du Canada* 59 (2016): 310-329.
- 25 Rocio and Reeves. “[How and Where Diversity Drives Financial Performance](https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-and-where-diversity-drives-financial-performance).”
- 26 Hewlett, Marshall, and Sherbin, “[How Diversity Can Drive Innovation](https://hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation)