

A stylized map of the province of Alberta is shown on the left side of the cover. The map is filled with a dark brown color and is bordered by a thick, multi-colored line. The colors of the border transition from yellow at the top, through orange and red, to pink and magenta at the bottom. The text is positioned to the right of the map.

TOOLKIT FOR ALBERTA DIGITAL ECONOMY EMPLOYERS

ENGAGING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

APPENDIX TO *INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY
AT THE CORE: PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT IN
THE DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR ALBERTANS WITH
DISABILITIES*

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The Province of Alberta is working in partnership with the Government of Canada to provide employment support programs and services.

Canada  Alberta 

PREFACE

The Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC) is a not-for-profit, national centre of expertise for strengthening Canada’s digital advantage in a global economy. Through trusted research, practical policy advice, and creative capacity-building programs, ICTC fosters globally competitive Canadian industries enabled by innovative and diverse digital talent. In partnership with an expansive network of industry leaders, academics partners, and policy makers across Canada, ICTC has empowered a robust and inclusive digital economy for over 25 years.

FOREWORD

ICTC would like to welcome you to the *Employer Toolkit*. Intended to be a living document, the toolkit provides tips, checklists, guidelines, and references to help Alberta’s digital economy employers implement inclusive practices for hiring and working with people with disabilities. The toolkit is divided into five core sections:

RECRUITING

INTERVIEWING

ONBOARDING

WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION

ACCOMMODATIONS

This toolkit was leveraged during two workshops with employers in Calgary and Edmonton in 2020. It has been reviewed and validated by an advisory committee of experts.

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ALBERTA HUMAN RIGHTS ACT:

7(1) No employer shall

- (a) refuse to employ or refuse to continue to employ any person, or
- (b) discriminate against any person with regard to employment or any term or condition of employment,

because of the race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation of that person or of any other person.¹

¹ Province of Alberta, Alberta Human Rights Act, Current as of July 11, 2018, https://www.qp.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=A25P5.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779744060

RECRUITING

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Inclusive language refers to language, either written or verbal, that does not exclude people or groups, nor provoke stereotypes. There are several principles that apply to inclusive language:

- **Focus on the person**—Focus on the person, rather than the disability. For example, saying “person with disability,” places the person first and the disability after. Similarly, one may also focus on the range of people. For example, “people with disabilities.” When focusing on the person, we describe a trait, diagnosis, or disability a person has. As a result, the individual(s) are the essential elements, rather than the disability.
- **Avoid idioms, jargon, and euphemisms**—Idioms and jargon may be loaded with negative implications. Other phrases may inadvertently connote victimization. For example, the following terms should be avoided: “afflicted by” or “suffers from,” or “specially-abled.”
- **Reinforce positivity**—It is inappropriate to assume that a person with a disability is “suffering” or is a “victim.” Likewise, it is inappropriate to assume that living with a condition has stopped them from living a fulfilling and meaningful life.
- **Use of inclusive terms**—Avoid the use of language that excludes a gender, particular people or groups of people. Not only is the elimination of derogatory terms important, but so are common words that can be replaced with more respected alternatives. For example, “for all mankind” can be replaced by “for all humankind.”
- **Avoid the use of generalizations**—Avoid making assumptions about a person or group of people. Even when the intent is not harmful, generalizations can be problematic and function to reinforce existing stereotypes. For example, phrases like “all French people eat snails” should be avoided.
- **Avoid the use of prejudice**—Avoid prejudiced remarks and biased language. For example, replace phrases like “Joe was confined to a wheelchair” with “Joe uses a wheelchair.”

DIGITAL TOOLS FOR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE: TEXTIO

Textio is an app that supports thoughtful and inclusive up-to-date language. It is a writing enhancement service, primarily offered to companies to help them recruit diverse employees.² The platform utilizes AI and natural language processing to analyze writing and highlight jargon and words that are particularly subjective.

Figure 1 is an example of Textio’s services applied to a recruiting email for a marketing role. In the email, the term “team player” is flagged as a cliché that may not invoke the best responses from readers. The software suggests the term “teammate” to increase a sense of belonging among all potential applicants. Textio provides a total score, ranging from 0 to 100, with 100 being the best possible score. The job description scores predict how fast a job will be filled compared to other jobs in the market.

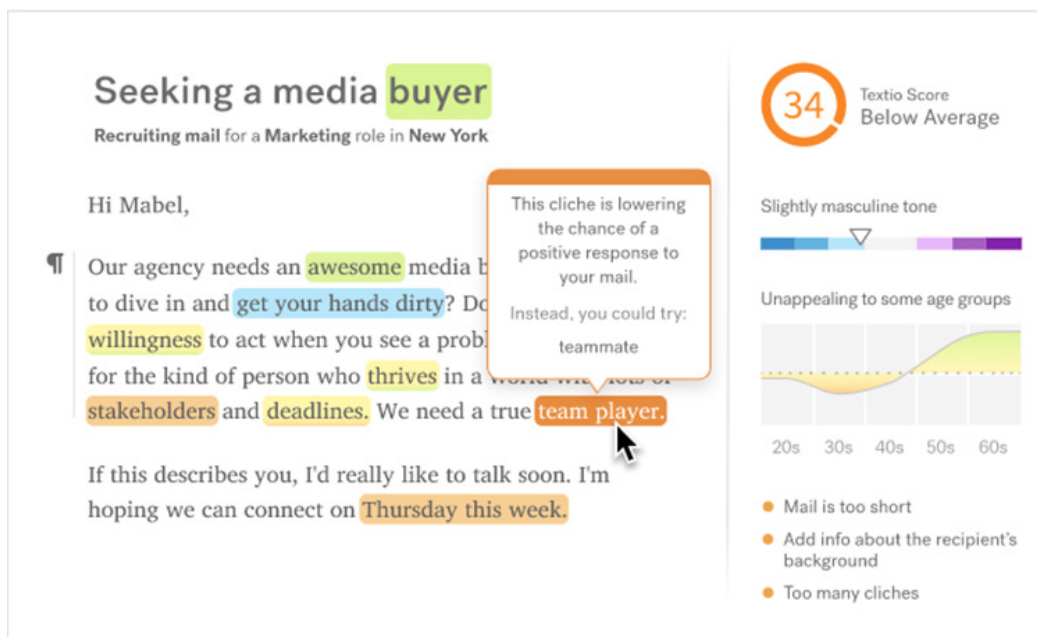


FIGURE 1. SCREENSHOT OF TEXTIO'S INTERFACE AND HOW THE SOFTWARE WORKS.³

² Textio, <https://textio.com/>

³ Textio, <https://textio.com/products/>

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Word choice is important to writing a job description. Word choice can reveal a company's mission, values, and overall culture. Yet, certain words or phrases may deter some qualified candidates from applying. Below are key points to keep in mind when crafting a job description:

- Use gender neutral language and avoid gender-coded words (i.e., avoid use of “female-coded” or “male-coded” language)
 - Example: “One key measure of success for a salesman is...” vs. “One key measure of success for a salesperson is...”
- Avoid descriptions that refer to a person's disability, race, age, sexual orientation
 - For example, “We have a great opportunity for a young graduate looking to get their foot in the door of the fintech industry,” vs. “We have a great opportunity for anyone looking to get their foot in the door of the fintech industry.”
- Use non-discriminatory language
- Use simple and clear language
- Include job requirements and qualifications needed (i.e., specific education needed, specific experience needed, specific credentials required, etc.)
- Include working conditions (i.e., weekends, outdoor work, noisy environment, work from home, etc.)
- Include inclusive benefits (i.e., parental leave, remote work, flexible schedules, professional development opportunities, etc.)
- Emphasize the company's commitment to an inclusive workplace, and consider adding an equal employment opportunity statement
- Consider adding a statement encouraging candidates to request accommodation as needed
- Offer recruitment materials in alternative formats (i.e., accessible PDF, large print, etc.)
- Offer variety of ways to receive applications (i.e., email, fax, teletype writer (TTY), video relay service (VRS), regular mail etc.)

INCLUSIVE JOB BOARDS

Inclusive job boards are employment portals that provide employment services for a variety of equity-seeking groups and/or specific communities. At the national level, inclusive job boards for people with disabilities include Workink,⁴ and Equitek.⁵ In Alberta, Edmonton-based organization, EmployAbilities,⁶ along with Calgary-based, Calgary Alternative Support Services⁷ offer employment services devoted to helping people with disabilities enter the labour market. They also support employers in hiring people with disabilities and creating inclusive and accessible workplaces.



The application process is the first step in hiring, and it is also the first experience that applicants and prospective employees have with an organization.

In addition to online job postings on “traditional” job boards such as LinkedIn, Indeed, or Neuvoo, alternative application processes can be useful to engage people with disabilities. This can include designing webpages that consider motor and sensory considerations. Here, company applications may be offered in Braille or audio, and online applications are made to be compatible with assistive technologies. For example, an accessible PDF interactive form can be created with Adobe Acrobat Pro⁸ or Adobe LifeCycle Designer,⁹ if a job application is in PDF format.

A company’s website design is also a key consideration for accessibility in the recruitment process. Universal design means building products or tools so they are accessible to all people, irrespective of ability. Generally speaking, online applications and websites should meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.¹⁰

Important considerations when developing a website can include the following:

- Ensure that the webpage is uncluttered
- Develop a practical design, following natural eye movements and standards for layout and content
- Add captions and/or transcripts for multimedia and interactive elements
- Add alternative text for photos
- Ensure appropriate contrast ratios and text size

4 Workink, <https://www.workink.com/>

5 Equitek, <https://equitek.ca/>

6 EmployAbilities, <https://employabilities.ab.ca/>

7 Calgary Alternative Support Services, <https://www.c-a-s-s.org/>

8 Adobe Acrobat, <https://acrobat.adobe.com/ca/en/acrobat/acrobat-pro.html>

9 Adobe LifeCycle Designer, <https://www.adobe.com/products/livecycle.html>

10 <https://accessibleemployers.ca/members/presidentsgroup/activity/239/>

INCLUSIVE JOB POSTINGS: CHECKLIST ITEMS	
	Ensure job posting is free from prejudice, bias, and/or discriminatory language
	Prepare job description that identifies essential components of the job
	Ensure the job application focuses on the person first
	Contact inclusive job boards such as EmployAbilities and/or Calgary Alternative Employment Services to post jobs
	Make the application fully accessible. Follow guidelines for inclusive and standard websites
	Consider offering a variety of application methods
	Include diversity and inclusion statement (or equal employment opportunity) in job posting
	Include statement encouraging candidates to request accommodation

INTERVIEWING

ACCOMMODATIONS WHEN INTERVIEWING

Employers have legal duties to make reasonable accommodations to meet an individual's needs during the interview process. Detailed information on the duty to accommodate can be obtained through the Alberta Human Rights Commission.¹¹

While it is not appropriate to ask questions about an individual's disability either during the recruiting or interviewing processes, if a candidate discloses a disability, the employer may and should ask about accommodations. Candidates may require assistive technology or other accommodations during the interview or at other stages of the interview process. Asking about accommodations in such instances ensures that personalized needs are met and that all candidates have an equal and fair opportunity to secure a job.

While accommodations may vary depending on the needs of the individual, some commonly requested accommodations during the interview process include the following:

- Digital vs. in-person interviews
- Relocating to an alternate location for in-person interviews in the event that certain buildings are not accessible
- Providing documentation and/or other forms relevant to the interview process in enlarged text

ALTERNATIVE INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

Complementing physical and/or technical accommodations that can be made once a candidate has disclosed a disability, the interview process may also be changed or altered to ensure fair assessment. Although not intended to be an exhaustive list, the following are examples of alternative interview techniques that employers can utilize when interviewing any candidate.

General Practices

- Ask all interview candidates the same job-related questions
- Ask "how" they would perform a task or "how" they would handle a specific situation rather than "can" they perform a particular task or "can" they handle a specific situation
- Ensure the candidate is comfortable with panel-group interview, or if a more personal interview is preferred
- Be aware of any cultural, personal, or other assumptions about physical and non-physical communications

¹¹ https://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/employment/employee_info/accommodation/Pages/duty_to_accommodate.aspx

Specific Practices

- Consider allowing certain computer-based tests to be taken orally (when ergonomic accommodations are not available)
- Consider allowing extra time to complete skill tests, where appropriate
- Consider allowing candidates to take tests in private rooms, as available
- Consider allowing assistants (for example translators, learning coaches, etc.) to accompany an individual in an interview
- Consider challenges, tests, and/or other competency-based methods of skill assessment in the place of a traditional interview

INCLUSIVE INTERVIEWING: CHECKLIST ITEMS	
	Let candidates know that accommodations are available upon request. This can be done in writing (email or letter), telephone, or another preferred method of communication.
	Recognize the need for accommodation, yet ask what suitable accommodation is required rather than guessing or assuming
	Ensure no cultural or personal presumptions and generalizations are brought forward during the interview
	Ensure the interviewer has knowledge and understanding of accessibility and inclusivity in the hiring process
	Ask “how” questions instead of “can” questions
	Speak directly to the candidate and remember that not all disabilities can be seen
	Endeavor to ask the same set of questions to all candidates
	Provide an approximate duration for the interview so candidates can make arrangements as needed

ONBOARDING

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD ONBOARDING

Onboarding is a new employee's first experience with the organization. A successful onboarding process can lead to positive outlooks and expectations. However, the first day at a new organization can be overwhelming for some. It is important to develop and evaluate onboarding practices and experiences that are inclusive and welcoming.

Facilitating a positive onboarding experience can be accompanied by clear documentation and accessible resources to help new hires acclimate to their environment. On or before the first day, new employees should be provided a "New Hire Welcome Package" that includes critical information the employee needs to be aware of. In order to be accessible to everyone, this package should be available in multiple forms as required, and personalized packages can also be developed, depending on needs. This welcome package should include at least the following:

- Welcome letter
- Employee handbook (including relevant policies, resources, etc.)
- Financial forms to complete (i.e., direct deposit information, tax forms, etc.)
- Compensation and benefits information
- Emergency contact forms to complete
- Company directory and contact details

Other resources that may be included are:

- Frequently asked questions
- Information on core activities and practices of the group the employee is joining
- Links to tools and resources to be used on the job
- A Personal User Guide to help others to get along with you better

It is important to align onboarding with business goals and to chart clear pathways for new employees to understand and contribute to these goals. Existing employees (with the necessary training) should also be encouraged to be mentors for the new hires and/or engage other methods to ensure an inclusive and welcoming environment. Some organizations can create a "buddy system" during onboarding, where new hires are paired together or with more senior staff members. The "buddy" system is intended to provide an additional resource for the new hire(s), helping them acclimate to their new environment more easily.

ONBOARDING: CHECKLIST ITEMS	
	New hire welcome package includes all forms and relevant information and is available in different formats
	Buddy system is developed to serve as a support system
	Onboarding activities are developed that align with the organization's missions and goals

WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION

TRAINING

Training and guidance should be implemented to encourage and shape a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion across the entire organization (leadership and employees). Training will vary depending on the organization and its need but should include topics such as unconscious bias, psychological safety, workplace accommodations, language, empathy, etc. The following are a few resources that employers can use to develop training materials:

- The Colbourne Institute for Inclusive Leadership offers diversity and inclusion training through Norquest College—provides workshops, support, training, and consultation, and has previously worked with large organizations in Alberta.¹²
- Alberta Human Rights Commission’s webinar—Duty to Accommodate in Workplace.¹³
- Scenarios of potential discrimination under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*, found online at the Alberta Human Rights Commission’s e-learning centre.^{14 15}

COMMUNICATION

Everyone has a preferred method of communication and a way in which they present themselves most comfortably. One person may prefer group discussions and meetings; another may prefer to express their opinion virtually, perhaps through an online chat platform. Similarly, one person may be comfortable taking a poll in person, while another may feel more relaxed voicing their opinion through an online poll. Providing a variety of workplace communication methods fosters engagement, inclusivity, and connectivity among employees.

Inclusive communication respects all forms of communications, not only written and spoken. Inclusive communication should support the use of gestures, signing, pictures/photos/graphics, and objects. The following are a few examples of different communications methods and tools:

- Chat platforms where employees can openly communicate in various methods as they wish (i.e., chat, call with one or more people, video or without)
 - Examples: Slack¹⁶, Microsoft Teams¹⁷, Chatwork¹⁸, Google Hangouts¹⁹
- Poll options should vary, providing employees an opportunity to vote in person but also online for ease and authenticity

12 The Colbourne Institute for Inclusive Leadership, <https://continuingeducation.norquest.ca/home/diversity-inclusion>

13 Duty to Accommodate in the Workplace Series: Overview of the Duty to Accommodate, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vigiojHJBI&feature=youtu.be>

14 Discrimination and Law, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLrNDvxAQJ_5tNcgkoNhwBGxhWeE10PQj1

15 Alberta Human Rights Commission’s e-learning centre, https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/education/Pages/e_learning.aspx

16 Slack, <https://slack.com/intl/en-ca/>

17 Microsoft Teams, <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>

18 Chatwork, <https://go.chatwork.com/>

19 Google Hangouts, <https://hangouts.google.com/>

- Examples: Google Forms²⁰, Survey Monkey²¹, Doodle²²
- Ask Me Anything sessions (AMAs), mimicking “office hours” offered at post-secondary institutions, allowing professors and teaching assistants to meet with students
- Virtual suggestion boxes, allowing for confidential 360 feedback and upward feedback (feedback for managers/supervisors provided by staff)
- Online whiteboards, allowing people to voice their opinions anonymously in larger groups
 - Examples: Google Jamboard, Miro

WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION: CHECKLIST ITEMS	
	Include variety of communication methods to increase engagement and participation
	Offer polling options and other feedback mechanisms (e.g. virtual whiteboards) to ensure all voices heard
	Be open to individualized communication styles and preferences

20 Google Forms, <https://www.google.ca/forms/about/>

21 Survey Monkey, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/>

22 Doodle, <https://doodle.com/poll-maker>

ACCOMMODATIONS

ACCESSIBLE SOFTWARE TOOLS

Nearly 40% of Canadian employees with disabilities aged 25-64 require workplace accommodation.²³ Yet, accommodations are increasingly common among all employees, irrespective of ability. The most common workplace accommodations can be classified into three groups: (1) flexible work arrangements, (2) workstation modifications, and (3) human or technical support. Examples of each are provided below.

Flexible work arrangements:

- Remote working
- Flex time
- Reduced hours
- Compressed work weeks
- Job sharing
- Gradual retirement

Workstation modifications:

- Height adjustable work stations
- Ergonomic chairs
- Scooters
- Accessible keyboards, mice

Human or technical support:

- Portable Braille Smartwatch technology (e.g., Dot, printers)
- Reading pen
- Assistive Listening Systems
- Guide and service dogs
- Amplified phones
- Video relay service (VRS)
- Sign-language interpreters

Accessible software and digital tools that can be leveraged include the following:

Screen Readers: reads aloud content that is on a screen

- JAWS for Windows
- Non-Visual Desktop Access (NVDA)
- Microsoft Narrator
- Apple Voiceover

²³ Canadian Survey on Disability Reports, Workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities in Canada, 2017. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2019001-eng.htm>

Magnification Software: software that enlarges print

- ZoomText
- SuperNova Reader
- MAGic

Visual guides

- Braille smartwatch
- BrailleBlaster
- BRLTTY

Voice Recognition Software: provides alternative to typing, converting speech to text

- Dictation
- Dragon Naturally Speaking Premium/Home
- Microsoft Speech recognition

PROGRAMS, FUNDING, AND RESOURCES FOR WORKPLACE ACCESSIBILITY

GRANT NAME	AFFILIATED ORGANIZATION	DESCRIPTION
Workplace Accessibility Stream	Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)	Grant supports capital costs of construction/renovations to improving physical accessibility
Canada Disability Savings Grant	Employment and Social Development Canada	Grant matches Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) up to 300%
Social Development Partnerships Program (SDPP)	Employment and Social Development Canada	Provides funding for projects to support and improve participation of people with disabilities in work and community
Disability Related Employment Supports (DRES)	Alberta Community and Social Services	Provides employment support to Albertans with disabilities

DISABILITY-RELATED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (DRES)

Disability Related Employment Services (DRES) provides employment support to Albertans with disabilities who meet specific criteria (i.e., document permanent disability, Alberta citizen, legally entitled to work in Canada, etc.). DRES provides support in three categories.²⁴

1) Job search supports:

- Supports Albertans with disabilities to find employment
- Examples of supports include software and technical devices rental, and sign-language interpreters

2) Workplace supports:

- Supports Albertans with disabilities in transitioning and maintaining employment
- Examples of supports include job coach, worksite modification, and assistive technology

3) Educational supports:

- Supports learners with disabilities through skill training and academic upgrading
- Examples of supports include sign-language interpreters, note takers, tutors, assistive technology

More information on DRES:

Website: <https://www.alberta.ca/disability-related-employment-supports.aspx>

Phone: 1-800-661-3753 toll-free; 780-422-4266 in Edmonton

In person: visit <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-supports.aspx> to find the nearest office

²⁴ Disability Related Employment Supports, <https://www.alberta.ca/disability-related-employment-supports.aspx>