

Recommendations For Improving the Experience of Neurodivergent Job Candidates

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Introduction

In January 2023, Dean Chadwell charged the DCOA's Accessibility working group with researching and identifying best practices for interviewing neurodivergent candidates.

We would like to present the following Best Practices and Checklist with a few reminders:

- A welcoming and inclusive library culture is essential for success in diverse recruitment and retention efforts. Library-wide education to promote awareness and acceptance are the first steps towards progress, which hopefully leads to advancement.
- Making the library accessible for neurodivergent audiences is as essential as providing physical accommodation for those in need.
- By prioritizing inclusivity, we create a welcoming environment for everyone.

Themes to keep in mind

- Specificity
- Flexibility
- Predictability
- Non-distracting (environments)
- Awareness/Education (for all interviewers)

Best Practices

- Provide bias awareness training to interviewers before the interview process begins to facilitate the following:
 - Assess candidates by specific job skills rather than signs of sociability such as eye contact, amount of smiling, strength of handshakes, charisma, charm, or appearance (dress, hairstyle, etc.). Be aware of your primary bias and the tendency to judge candidates based on your first interaction with them.
 - Be accepting of stimming, fidgeting, posture issues, eye contact reluctance.
 - Allow candidates to disclose on their own terms rather than pressuring anyone to do so. Some people may choose not to disclose at all while others may wait.
- Avoid relying on AI (Artificial Intelligence) screening tools since these cannot interpret nuance and can eliminate viable diverse candidates unfairly.
- In the job description, use clear, specific language related to skills
 - Phrases like “lift up to 30 pounds,” “hear a telephone ring,” “sit for extended periods of time,” or “thrives in bright environment” might deter applicants with disabilities.
 - Only list skills essential to the job rather than wish list items. Some applicants may interpret these non-essential, wish list items literally and as strictly required, which could then discourage them from applying for the position.
- Give an outline of what will happen during the interview in advance. This can reduce anxiety and distraction for candidates and allow them to feel more confident going into the process.

- Provide written questions before the event. This helps the candidate to focus and better prepare for the interview by knowing what to expect.
- To accommodate individuals who may find interviews overstimulating, it is important to provide an opportunity for candidates to follow up with additional responses after the interview is over. This allows them to provide more thoughtful and articulate insights that may not have emerged during the live interview, thereby fostering a fair and comprehensive evaluation process.
- Consider offering alternative evaluation options during the hiring process, such as requesting sample work or providing other opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their skills in a practical context. This approach allows candidates to directly showcase their abilities by completing tasks (such as cataloging a book or answering a reference question). Ask specific, concrete questions based on experiences. Some candidates may find abstract questions or hypothetical scenarios confusing and difficult to interpret. For this reason, aim to ask more closed questions than open ones.
- Allow candidates to turn off their cameras during Zoom interviews. This is helpful for some candidates who may become over-stimulated / distracted being on camera.
- Offer opportunities for breaks, or to step away to decompress, throughout the interview.
- Make lunch or other unrelated social events optional. Focus on specific skillsets rather than if a candidate “seems like a good culture fit.” Assessing candidates on sociability and “culture fit” can introduce bias and draw attention away from the question of which candidate is best qualified for the position.
- Conduct interviews in quiet, peaceful environments (applies to both in person and virtual interviews).
 - Example: Where possible, try to use spaces with low background noise levels (such as buzzing or people talking), and environments that are visually clean- uncluttered, with soft or neutral colors, and no intense smells.

- Consider allowing candidates to choose between facing the interviewers, sitting side-by-side, or walk-and-talk mode since candidates may be more comfortable when they do not have to focus on demonstrating correct levels of eye contact, “focused” expressions, etc.
- Provide timely decisions regarding position openings and encourage candidates to request notes on how they could improve their performance in future evaluations.

Checklist

Before interview:

- When reaching out about arranging an interview, give the opportunity for candidates to ask for any accommodations that they need, phrased in an affirming way such as "Is there anything you need to help make your interviewing experience as successful as possible?" This wording does not require candidates to disclose anything they might not want to disclose, but opens the door for everyone to ask for what they need.
 - Provide a list of possible accommodations (including but not limited to):
 - Guidance getting to and from campus
 - An interpreter
 - A different format for the interview such as walking side by side
 - When offering hotels, ensure that options for physical and neurodivergent-friendly accommodations are available.
 - Provide the candidate with the hotel’s contact information so, if needed, they can directly ask questions about accommodation without disclosing.
- Send a detailed schedule to the candidate before the interview day that lays out what they can expect (including but not limited to):
 - Clear directions to the interview room (ideally with visual cues) if in-person
 - Length and format of interview
 - Number of participants and their names/job titles

- Provide a dress code with examples and list anything the candidate should bring with them
- Remind fellow interviewers to avoid primary bias before the interview and provide LRN (Learning Resource Network) resources if anyone wants to challenge their biases further. (See Resource Suggestions, Pg 8.)
- Provide interview questions at least one week before the event. Also be open to requests from interviewees to expand on their answers in writing.
 - Documents should be in sans serif fonts such as Arial.

During Interview:

- Make sure transcripts are turned on if using Zoom/Teams. Be prepared to provide an interpreter if requested.
- Provide the option to walk or sit side-by-side as opposed to facing directly.
- Provide meaningful opportunities for breaks, since meeting a variety of people and attending back-to-back interviews may wear more on some than others. Some candidates might also have medical schedules unknown to you. Consider offering a return to the hotel room or time in a quiet, private space for breaks.

After interview:

- Provide a survey after the recruitment process for the candidate to give feedback.
- Make sure to provide a timely response to candidates letting them know the results and encourage requests from candidates for how to improve their performance in future evaluations.

Survey Questions

1. How satisfied were you with the overall experience of this recruitment process?
 - a. Very dissatisfied
 - b. Dissatisfied
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Satisfied
 - e. Very satisfied

2. How comfortable did you feel during the process?
 - a. Very uncomfortable
 - b. Uncomfortable
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Comfortable
 - e. Very comfortable

3. Did you feel that all your support needs were met during this recruitment process?
 - a. No, strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree

4. Was there anything we could have done to make this process a better experience for you?

Research Citations

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Resource Suggestions

In the LRN (lrn.psu.edu), search the term “neurodiversity.” Watch some of the related courses, such as the following:

- “Make Meetings More Inclusive of Neurodivergent Coworkers” (7 minutes)
- “Make Communication Inclusive of Neurodivergent Coworkers” (4 minutes)
- “Common Misconceptions About Neurodivergent People” (7 minutes)