



INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION ON SELECTION COMMITTEES: GUIDE

INDIGENOUS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
FRAMEWORK: ACTION 1.2

Background/Introduction

In 2021, the Department of Finance launched the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Framework and Action Plan. That work started by engaging with various partners to identify barriers that are present in the recruitment, retention, and advancement of Indigenous employees.

Based on what we heard, the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Action Plan outlines clear objectives and deliverables to address the Frameworks two main goals:

1. Increase Indigenous representation, and
2. Support Indigenous leadership opportunities.

With the purpose of increasing Indigenous representation, one of the objectives is to address bias, racism, and discrimination throughout the staffing process, resulting in improved cultural competency in the public service.

Action 1.2: Review recruitment and retention practices to address barriers. A deliverable that supports this action item includes:

- The Department of Finance will develop a process for applicants to request Indigenous representation on selection committees.

The hiring process and interview is normally the first step in someone's interaction with the GNWT. Through engagement we heard having Indigenous representation on selection committees can:

- Make an Indigenous person feel more comfortable if they have Indigenous representation within the selection committee;
- Show our commitment to increasing Indigenous representation within the Public Service by having a selection committee representative of the people of NWT;
- Provide more understanding of Indigenous knowledge/social norms;
- Provide insight on systemic barriers in interview questions and suggest changes; and
- Make Indigenous applicants feel they can have more trust in the process.

Having a diverse selection committee, especially one with an Indigenous representation, can reduce bias and help see candidates from different perspectives. This guide will provide departments and agencies guidance on how to address the action item, achieve the deliverable, and address systemic barriers that are present within the hiring process.

This guide is a working document and will continually be updated to reflect best practices and resources available within the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) to support this work.

Systemic Barrier

Indigenous peoples make up just over half of the NWT's population, yet Indigenous employees make up only about 30% of the GNWT public service. Systemic barriers can create barriers to employment; understanding potential barriers that Indigenous people face will help in removing them from the hiring process. Systemic barriers include intergenerational impacts from Residential Schools, 60's scoop, poverty, lack of quality education, loss of culture, unequal access to services, discrimination, and lack of access to reliable internet in remote communities. The list below outlines the kinds of barriers which can occur:

- **Attitudinal barriers** exist in unconscious biases and stereotypes that result in unequal opportunities for Indigenous people.
 - E.g., A manager provides more opportunities to a non-Indigenous employee who has shown interest in the past, assuming the Indigenous employee is not interested because they did not initiate the conversation and are quiet.
- **Social barriers** such as differences in worldview on work-life balance which may result in inflexibility and a perceived inability to accommodate Indigenous family/community responsibilities.
 - E.g., An Indigenous employee requests time off frequently to participate in traditional activities which leads to manager denying time as they believe the employee is overusing the time off; the manager sites operational requirements as a means for denial.
- **Cultural barriers** include language barriers, lack of cultural competency, and conflicting worldviews resulting in disagreements on the process of completing tasks in the workplace.
 - E.g., Generally, non-Indigenous people tend to value tasks over relationships and Indigenous people tend to value relationships over tasks – these two different perspectives could lead to different processes and priorities in work settings.
 - Important note: While the above examples are a generalization of two different worldviews context, personal experiences, and specific cultural practices also all play a role in shaping how tasks and relationships are valued and managed.
- **Physical barriers** such as the centralization of most jobs in the larger communities, location of post-secondary institutions in the larger hubs or the south, lack of available housing and reliable internet may result in an inability to access available jobs.
 - E.g., An applicant misses the deadline for a job they are applying for because of an internet outage in their community.
 - Important Note: not all Indigenous people want to move away from their community for work as they may have familial and community responsibilities. Consider the remote work policy.
- **Credential/Educational barriers** in which educational and/or experience requirements listed are greater than what is required to perform the job competently, and equivalencies considered do not always recognize links between different ways of acquiring knowledge and the job to be performed.
 - E.g., Educational requirements, particularly advanced degrees (i.e. Bachelor's or Master's degree), could be biased against individuals with relevant experience but lacking a college education due to other barriers.
 - Important Note: Indigenous people thrive on and value ancestral knowledge (traditional knowledge) which may be a greater benefit than western education.

Step 1 – Getting Ready to Recruit

Before beginning the process of recruiting a potential employee consider the following:

- Everyone has biases, whether they are socio-economic or related to race, age, culture, gender, sexual orientation, disability etc.). Understanding why and how these can impact our decision-making process helps mitigate their impact.
- Understanding the needs of the applicants you are looking to recruit through awareness of lived experiences can help with mitigating systemic barriers to employment.
- Complete the Mitigating Unconscious Bias Training, and the Living Well Together: Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training.
- Consider the potential Systemic Barriers that Indigenous applicants experience. See ‘*Systemic Barriers*’ section for some examples.

STAFFING OPTIONS

Staffing Priority Lists **MUST** be reviewed for affected employees to be considered, and processes followed before proceeding with any staffing option. Please check the following:

- ☐ **Cross Departmental Accommodation**
- ☐ **GNWT Staffing Priority**
- ☐ **GNWT Pre-Qualified List – Indigenous Candidates Only**

Besides competitions there are some programs that can be used to try recruiting and Indigenous applicant for the position. Consider the following staffing Programs:

- **Indigenous Career Gateway Program (ICGP)** – Targets Indigenous candidates for entry-level and trainee positions. Departments are provided with a prorated payment of \$40,000 per year to be put towards the employee’s salary and/or training needs. There are 2 streams under the program:
 - **Entry-level position** – A one-year term direct appointment, or indeterminate direct appointment, where a candidate meets the qualifications.
 - **Trainee position** – An up to two-year direct appointment under trainee MOU where a candidate does not meet the qualifications of the position. Trainee rate of pay will be based on a percentage of step one under the training program. The Department will provide their Human Resources Representative with a comprehensive training plan as outlined in the MOU.
- **Regional Recruitment Program** – An on-the-job training program that links vacant regional positions to potential candidates by providing financial and human resource support to departments, boards and agencies limited to the home community.
 - Up to \$15,000 per trainee position is provided with the number of available funded positions varying each year depending on the number of trainee positions that require maximum funding.
 - Successful applicants are directly appointed on an indeterminate basis, with the requirement to complete a maximum one-year developmental trainee period.

- Additional funding up to \$6,000 is provided per annum per trainee for on-the-job training (mentorship).
- **Internship Program** – Offers up to two-year work experience placements to registered eligible Northern Graduates.
- **Summer Student Program** – Offers short term casual employment to northern students between April 15 and August 15.

In addition to the programs previously listed the following are more staffing options to consider:

- **Transfer Assignment** – A temporary redeployment of an employee to another position within the public service, for one year or less to address an immediate operational need.
- **Developmental Transfer Assignment** - A temporary redeployment of an employee to another position within the public service, for two years or less to address the development needs of an existing employee. A learning and development plan is required.
- **Expression of Interest (EOI)** – Internal staffing process, “limited” to employees, either in a particular Department, Division or Unit resulting in a temporary redeployment / transfer assignment opportunity. *Cannot be used to fill positions on an indeterminate basis.*
- **Direct Appointment** – Appointment of individual to Public Service via Cabinet approval, rather than through the competition process. Recommend to departments when seeking a term direct appointment for positions the length should not exceed two (2) years continuous employment.
- **Casual Employment Opportunity** - Short term employment opportunities for periods not less than five (5) days and not to exceed six (6) months of continuous employment and must have scheduled hours (i.e.: pre-determined days per week and hours per day an employee will work). For example: Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Once a casual employee reaches six (6) months of continuous employment they require, at least, a thirty-one (31) working-day break before they may be rehired.

Step 2 – Considering Advertising Location

When advertising the job, not including the usual GNWT careers website, the usual additional locations for advertising GNWT jobs postings tend to be:

- LinkedIn
- Online job banks (e.g. Monster, Workopolis, etc.)
- Membership/Professional Affiliation sites
- Southern Newspapers
- Local (community) advertising (local band office, GSO office, etc.)

Each location provides an opportunity to reach a wide group of people, but consider the following when deciding on a location to advertise the position:

- Not all Indigenous applicants have access to a computer in the more remote regions to look up potential jobs.

- All communities have a band office, hamlet office or Indigenous government building in them who, in working in the community, have a better chance at sharing information that benefits their community members.
- Some communities may have community boards where details about potential jobs are shared.
- GNWT Government Service Offices are located in 21 communities in the NWT. Consider asking them to post the job poster.

Step 3 – Deciding to include an Assignment?

In some cases, having an assignment for a position, especially if you are trying to recruit Indigenous applicants, can be seen as a barrier as it is perceived to be a way to screen out applicants before going to the interview phase. When debating whether to include an assignment for the position consider the following:

- Does the position require the applicant to have strong writing skills. If not, consider removing this requirement. Written assignments can be removed and training can be provided on the job. I.e.: correctional officers, fire fighters.
- Not all Indigenous applicants have access to a computer for completing the assignment in the given timeframe.
- Potential applicants may have strengths that cannot be perceived using an assignment.
- As Indigenous people tend to focus on relationships over tasks, having an assignment for a position may not allow Indigenous applicants to demonstrate their strong points as potential employees.
 - Having an interview instead of assignments allows Indigenous people to get a better sense of who they may be working with and start the potential working relationship off to a better start. Or consider a combination grading system where the interview and assignment are assessed together as a final grade. Another option is to have the written assignment after the verbal interview.
 - Are there interview questions that would be able to get at the skill you are trying to get at in an assignment?

Step 4 – Reviewing the Competency Based Interview Questions

Please review interview questions for any potential systemic barriers. **As Hiring Managers, you can change the way interview questions are worded to address any systemic barriers.** Having an Indigenous Committee Member at this stage would provide an alternate perspective to interview questions and help in addressing questions may have systemic barriers by making suggested changes.

[**Please note that while the Indigenous Committee Members may be able to provide an alternate perspective on questions, everyone on the selection committee should review the questions for systemic barriers, NOT just the Indigenous Committee Member]. Below are some examples of Competency Based interview questions that can be changed to remove any barriers.

When designing context statements and questions for a competency, consider how your unconscious biases or assumptions may influence your choices (e.g., a bias that provides advantages to internal candidates and excludes external candidates). In addition, imagine Indigenous candidates reading the statements and questions: will the questions you ask allow them to feel safe and welcome in the space? Do you need to re-think your statement and questions? What can you learn from this?

Examples

Here are some examples of interview questions that can be changed to remove any potential barriers:

Example 1:

Give a specific example of a time when you failed to handle a problem or situation effectively. Why do you think your solution was ineffective? What, if anything, did you do after you recognized the program was not handled appropriately?

Competency: Problem Solving/Judgement

Definition: Problem Solving/Judgement is the ability to analyze problems systematically, organize information, identify key factors, identify underlying causes and generate solutions.

Potential Issue: Failure/failed – To fail means there is finality in being unable to meet standards or objectives for a task, which is a bit different in how in Indigenous culture the learning is prioritized rather than getting something correct or not. And the competency is centered around the learned problem-solving skill.

Corrected Question: Give an example of a time when you think you did not handle a problem or situation effectively. Why do you think your solution was ineffective? What, if anything, did you do after you recognized the program was not handled appropriately?

Example 2:

Tell me about a situation in which you had to adjust to changes over which you had no control. How did you handle it? What was the situation? What did you do? What was the result?

Competency: Flexibility

Definition: Flexibility is the ability and willingness to adapt to work effectively within a variety of diverse situations with diverse individuals or groups. Flexibility entails understanding and appreciating different and opposing perspective on an issue, adapting one's approach as situations change and adapting changes within one's own job or organization.

Potential Issue: The way the question is originally worded is confusing. Applicants may think the competency being sought is problem solving or conflict resolution. Rewording this question will make the competency being sought clear.

Corrected Question: Tell me about a time when you had to be flexible when completing a task.

Step 5 – Discussing Roles and Responsibilities of Selection Committee

The Selection Committee includes, but is not necessarily restricted to, the Hiring Manager, the Human Resources Representative, and, when requested, the Indigenous Committee Member. In addition, where it is appropriate, a member with technical expertise or community representative may be added to the Selection Committee, either as a full participant or in an advisory capacity with no vote in the final hiring decision.

- a) If all the members of the Selection Committee are non-Indigenous and an Indigenous applicant makes a request for an Indigenous Committee Member to be present in the selection process, the following efforts are made to locate and include an Indigenous individual:
 - i. Management and Recruitment Services Division (MRS) will look internally to locate an Indigenous HR staff to assist. This can be achieved by first looking within the region and then by expanding to additional regions for support if required.
 - ii. Review and select from the pool of Indigenous employees who have received training in the hiring process and have agreed, with supervisor approval, to take part in the hiring process.

What is the role of the Hiring Manager in a job competition?

The hiring manager is generally the direct supervisor of the position being filled. They are the department's representative and responsible for approving or obtaining approval for all decisions in the competition process.

What is the role of the Human Resources Representative in a job competition?

The Human Resources Representative coordinates the recruitment process and provides advice and guidance to hiring managers to help ensure that all policies and procedures are adhered to throughout the recruitment process. The Human Resources Representative also ensures fairness for all applicants throughout the recruitment process.

What is the role of the Indigenous Committee Member in a job competition?

The Indigenous Committee Member is an equal member of the selection committee and assists in reviewing resumes, the interview questions, and any other assessment and participates in the recruitment process from start to finish. The Indigenous Committee Member also assists with ensuring there are no systemic barriers or bias present throughout the recruitment process.

If the Indigenous Committee Member is not an employee of MRS, they will be required to have completed the Staffing Workshop modules or received training in the processes by Human Resources.

Step 6 - The Job Description

Job descriptions are the formal document that initiate the recruiting process and provides valuable information regarding the position to candidates. This document helps candidates decide whether to apply to a department or organization. Please refer to the [Indigenous Recruitment and Retention: Job Description Review Guide](#) for additional information.

Qualifications ("Typically attained by" or "TAB" statement) and Equivalencies

This section of a job description should list the minimum levels of combined education and experience required to competently perform the roles and responsibilities of the position. All job descriptions should now include this line at the end of their TAB section: "Equivalent combinations of education and experience will be considered." This is to encourage applicants whose qualification may not exactly match the TAB statement to still apply.

Specific equivalent levels of education and experience are discussed and confirmed by the selection committee as part of the staffing process before resumes are reviewed; these equivalencies should be clearly defined and noted.

Step 7 - Reviewing the Applications

Prior to releasing applicant resumes for screening, the HR Representative reviews all applications to determine if any Indigenous applicants requested Indigenous Representation on the Selection Committee. If a request has been made, an Indigenous Committee Member is included in the committee (if not already present) as per *Step 5 - Discussing Roles and Responsibilities of Selection Committee*.

If a new member has been added to the Selection Committee, they are asked to review and approve all assessment materials prior to the resumes being released for screening.

Once the Selection Committee has been established, members will review the submitted applications. This includes reviewing resumes to assess whether they align with the approved screening criteria. Candidates who have been identified as moving on to the next stage of the process will be contacted by the HR Representative.

The Indigenous Committee Member can provide insight on transferrable skills and equivalent community-based experience that may not match up exactly with the TAB statement but would still allow the applicant to perform the duties of the position.

Step 8 - Conducting the Interviews

At the beginning of the interview most people tend to introduce themselves and their positions. Some Indigenous applicants may introduce themselves by using their community introduction. This typically includes:

- Who is their family and who raised them? (i.e., who are you the child and/or grandchild of)

- What is their ancestry? (e.g., Dene, Inuvialuit, Gwich'in, Métis, Settler, French, etc.)
- Which Indigenous territories were they born, raised, and now reside on?

It is important to recognize that this way of introducing themselves is customary, builds relationships and provides locationality in how we are all connected. Although it is not necessary for the selection committee to introduce themselves in this way it is important to acknowledge the Indigenous applicant's introduction in a respectful way and thank them for sharing; sharing this piece of who they are is very personal. If any members of the selection committee are comfortable introducing themselves through their community introduction here are some questions to consider and a template below.

Community Questions to Consider and Template

Please reflect on the following questions:

- Who is your family or who raised you? (i.e., who are you the child and/or grandchild of)
- What is your ancestry? (e.g., Dene, Inuvialuit, Gwich'in, Métis, Settler, French, etc.)
- Which Indigenous territories were you born, raised, and now reside on?
 - a) Are you a guest on this territory? If yes, you are not Indigenous to this territory.

Reminder: Using a community introduction can demonstrate awareness and acknowledgement of our shared colonial history and respect for the peoples whose territories we reside and prosper on. Our personal introduction is the first step to begin a good relationship.

Sample Introduction:

Hello/Good (Morning/Afternoon/Day/), my name is _____. My parents are _____ and _____, I am **[Feel Free to share your ancestry]** and I am from **[Place of origin, where you use to live, where you were born and/or raised]** but now live in **[Current Place of residence]**. [Then go on to share your role]

** This section is based on the Community Introduction part of the training offered by the Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism team at the Department of Health and Social Services.

Providing Feedback

As mentioned in the beginning, this is a working document and will continually be updated to reflect best practices and resources available within the GNWT to support this work.

If you have any feedback on the process or any additional resources that should be added please feel free to contact the Diversity and Inclusion Unit by emailing: diversityandinclusion@gov.nt.ca.