

Creating a More Equitable Recruitment and Hiring Process

With thanks to the Maine Environmental Education Association (MEEA) and The Nature Conservancy in Maine (TNC Maine) for offering their guides, which were modified to create this version. Please note: several individuals with years of combined equity training put this together, but it is not the work of equity professionals. MEEA and TNC Maine offer their best practices currently, in the spirit of ongoing learning together as an environmental and conservation community in Maine.

1. Planning

- a. Confirm targeted salary range for position
 - Is this a livable wage?
 - Will hiring at this salary range create any inequities with existing staff?
- b. Discuss job description, targeted date of hire; define requirements vs. desired skills;
 - Is the language inclusive? (i.e. they vs. He/she, consider physical ability)
 - Is everything on the minimum requirements section *actually* required, as opposed to merely a desired characteristic that could be taught on the job?
 - i. For example, why is a college degree required? What is it that a college degree would tell us about a candidate, and could they have other experiences that provide the same aptitude? *Ask ourselves this question for each minimum requirement we want to include.
 - Include salary range and any general benefits for transparency.
 - i. Consider offering benefits even for part-time folks, which could even be a stipend to offset health care costs as a start.
 - Be explicit about the logistics of the job, regarding location (office location vs fully remote vs hybrid), roughly how much time will be spent on different parts of the job (i.e. computer, meetings, specific projects, etc), and other day-to-day realities.
 - Make it clear that all aspects of life experiences are welcome, not just past jobs, and that an explanation of how past life/work experience translates to aptitudes required for the job in the cover letter is beneficial.
- c. Finalize and approve position description
 - Who else on the staff/team needs to give input, to provide a unique perspective on the description?
 - If we are hoping to hire candidates from historically/currently marginalized communities and are committed to making that happen we can say something like, "at [organization name] we are committed to building a more diverse, equitable and inclusive [sector name] in Maine. We highly encourage candidates from marginalized/under resourced communities or identities to apply for this position."
 - i. Ensure that the current staff (and Board, ideally) really grasps what this means for them before offering it.
 - ii. Have we done our equity work internally so we are ready to be a positive work environment for folks with nondominant identities?

- d. Clarify hiring guidelines
 - Define what won't happen. Some examples could include: looking at personal referrals before determining interview pool, considering relationships with staff until after interviews, accepting late applications, etc.
- e. Find clarity on what kind of 'diversity' the organization is seeking.
 - Consider all aspects of diversity and which the organization is prepared to welcome. This includes educational background, work history, culture/geography, socioeconomic status, race, age, gender, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, parental status, etc.
 - If finding and selecting 'non-traditional' candidates is a goal, be clear how each person on the hiring team defines 'non-traditional'.

2. Posting and Advertising

- a. Post on sites for jobseekers of a variety of communities and identities and local sites.
 - Look for specific diversity sites related to that position. Consider community-based organizations that work with communities from whom we are interested in recruiting.
 - Is there enough money budgeted for these postings?
- b. Determine which networks/partners should this be sent and who on staff can make the connection.
 - What contacts do folks in the office have?
 - We can't assume folks will come to us or see us if we want to engage with new communities. Who do we know and have trust and relationship with? Do we work with folks/networks that we have trust with that can share our job posting more broadly with new and more diverse audiences?
 - Is staff given time to make personal outreach to new connections?
 - How do we motivate people to share job postings?

3. Narrowing the Pool of Interviewees

- a. Prepare for the process by taking anti-bias training and/or affirmative action training.
- b. Determine what parameters to use to screen applicants
 - Consider carefully which metrics are either consciously or unconsciously given more weight in the mind of the reviewer(s).
 - Consider cultural experience different than that currently on staff as a skill/aptitude.
 - Consider what could be considered 'over-qualified'.
 - As much as possible, select parameters that speak to skills rather than specific experiences or formal qualifications.
 - i. For example, unpaid internships are a privilege that many folks trying to enter the environment/conservation sector from a low-income background could not have on their resume.

- c. Set up Interview Panel and Interview Dates
 - Who is being asked to be in the room to interview? Why? Share with all staff – are all perspectives being covered?
 - Is the group balanced in terms of racial and gender diversity? In terms of role, tenure, position level?
 - What options are there for candidates who cannot meet during the day?
 - Are there options for both in-person and Zoom and how do we ensure we are evaluating people the same in both situation?
 - Consider how many total people will interview the candidate, and how many at a time. Is it 2 interviewers at a time, more? Will ever interviewer talk to each interviewee, or will there be some rotation? It is important to consider how many people of what identities may be interviewing a candidate at the same time, and how this might influence them.
- d. Begin reviewing resumes and ranking candidates based on skill level.
 - Have a system for the reviewers to track and make notes on their assessments of candidates, to be shared for transparency.
- e. Narrow it down to a list of candidates who will be offered phone interviews.
 - Consider any known demographics – is this a diverse group?
 - i. If not, then what?
 - How many in the selected group are non-traditional candidates, as the team defined?
- f. Create list of phone screening questions or questionnaire (see below for ideas).
 - Consider providing one question that will be given to the candidates ahead of time, to allow those who process slowly or are nervous about interviewing a chance to prepare an answer with confidence.
- g. Send screening questionnaires to high potential candidates or conduct phone screen interviews.
 - What prep information do we share? Consider providing bios of all those conducting interviews, and any more relevant information to the position.
 - Make sure all information is shared with candidates equally
- h. Narrow pool to develop a group of prospective candidates for further screening and/or 1st round interviews.
 - Assess the demographics of the group – is this a diverse group (with regards to those identities available)?
- i. Create interview questions.
 - Are we asking questions that get to skills vs. experience?
 - Are we asking questions that address the candidate's awareness of and engage in diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice?
 - Are we asking questions that get to candidate emotional competency?
 - Are we determining what kind of environment they thrive in, regarding physical location, supervisor interaction, and office culture?

- j. Confirm preparation with interview panel members, including anti-bias training, familiarity with the questions being asked, etc.
 - Consider if we will share full applications with the interview team, or try and redact certain information to reduce bias before meeting the applicant in the interview – this could include gender, age, name of school attended, or others.
- k. Send dates to candidates and have them share availability
 - What prep information do we share? Consider sending bios of the interview panel, information on how to prepare, using Zoom background, etc.
 - Are we allowing for flexibility for those with day jobs?
- l. Send final dates and calendar holds for both candidates and interview panel

4. Interviews

- b. Confirm decision-making process with interview panel.
 - Who gets to make the decision?
 - What happens if the hiring manager is showing bias?
- c. Conduct 1st round interviews.
 - Share with the group that that anyone who is comfortable doing so might include their preferred pronouns when introducing themselves. Ideally, at least some of the interview team is comfortable, to model that it is welcome.
 - To reduce bias, refrain from discussing individual interviews until all the interviews are complete and the interviewing team can debrief together.
- d. Debrief: narrow candidate pool and plan 2nd round interviews, if needed
 - Have someone on staff who has a pulse on the entire set of skill sets represented by the staff included in the debrief conversation, to allow for consistent tracking of skills needed across all roles.
- e. Follow-up with all candidates regarding next steps or elimination from pool
 - How do we follow up in ways that promotes continuing the relationship?

If needed:

- f. Schedule logistics for 2nd round interviews
- g. Conduct 2nd interviews followed by debrief with the Hiring Manager
- h. Select final candidates, hold additional interviews, or continue recruiting

5. Offer

- a) Reference checks
 - Are we asking questions about skills over personality?
 - Is bias showing up in the reference?
 - Consider just what we NEED to know
- b) Job offer made to selected candidate.
 - a. Are we offering more or less than we would to other candidates?
 - b. Will salary and full package produce inequities among the existing staff?
- c) Job offer is accepted to Hiring Manager

6. Wrap-up

- a. Final decision shared
- b. Reject other candidates
 - How do we follow up in ways that promotes continuing the relationship?
- c. Start the onboarding process.
 - Consider what we expect people to know about working in the organization.
 - Be clear about expectations with CLEAR definitions (i.e. if there is any kind of explicit or implied dress code, say exactly what it is, rather than use coded language such as 'professional dress' which could mean very different things to different people).
 - Consider very carefully if the expectations are necessary for the job, vs simply a factor of the culture created by current colleagues. Recognize where the culture may need to shift to truly welcome and be inclusive of other ways of being.
 - Consider what trainings managers should receive to mentor someone who isn't just like them.
 - Make sure enough time is cleared from the manager's plate to properly focus on coaching and onboarding.

Interviewing Ideas and Tips

**Racial equity tip: If you are trying to hire the first Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC) person in your organization and applicants ask about that, be up front and honest that they would be the only BIPOC person on the team. Talk with them about the work you have already done to prepare your organization to be an equitable workspace and how they would be supported in this role.*

During the interview, ask questions about equity and inclusion so you can get a sense of the candidates' equity lens. A *behavioral interviewing approach* is more focused on explaining stories, rather than just stating why equity is important to you. This approach helps you will find out quickly who has been truly working on equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice issues with these types of questions (you can't fake your way through them)!

Behavioral Interview Questions

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, nor an assertion that any interview should contain them all. These are options from which we can pick what we are most interested in knowing

Inclusion

- Our work at [organization] is [characteristic of the work, such as 'highly collaborative and spans many sectors']; as such, we have to be aware of power imbalances that exist across age, race, and class. How does your identity influence your role in this collaborative space?

- What opportunities have you had working and collaborating in diverse, multicultural, and inclusive settings?
- How do you approach collaborating and working with people from different cultural backgrounds, or different levels of ability?
- What is a [State in which the organization is located] community you haven't worked much with? What communities have you worked with the most?

Justice and Equity

- How have you advocated for something to be fairer in your life, community, or society?
- How would you describe climate/environmental justice? Can you explain why environmental justice is important to you?
- Justice and equity are very important to our organization. Can you describe strategies you have applied in other settings to center equity in your work?

Diversity

- In your experience, what are the challenges faced by members of historically underrepresented groups [in the workplace]? What strategies have you used to address these challenges, and how successful were those strategies?

Relationship Building

- Tell us about how you communicate.
- Tell us a time when you experienced communication barriers.
- Tell us about a time when your voice wasn't heard on a project. How did you handle it?

Compassion/Empathy

- Tell us about a time when you had to deal with a person or group who could only see their side of the issue and were not open to other views.
- Tell us about a time you had to get along with someone with a very different manner or speed of doing things.
- Tell us how you best take criticism? How do you give criticism?

Process

- Describe a time a group project had a conflict. How did this get addressed?
- How do you give feedback, how do you prefer getting feedback?