

Top 10 Tips- Accessibility In Virtual Recruitment

1. Ask Candidates for Their Accessibility Requirements

First and foremost, you should ask candidates if they require any accommodations(s) for any recruitment process done virtually. Most organisations know to ask for accessibility requirements for an in-person interview, however it is important not to neglect to do this for a virtual interview also. There are many cohorts of people for whom this is particularly important; for example, a remote sign language interpreter will need to be booked in advance for candidates who are Deaf and it's possible a tech run-through will be required in advance of the actual interview.

2. Conduct a Trial Run

A trial run is so important to check that the process runs smoothly, and to be aware in advance of any technical issues that may need to be rectified. This trial run - which can be done either the day before the interview or earlier that same day - can be delegated to your organisation's tech team, or it can be carried out by interviewers themselves.

3. Know and Take Measures to Combat Your Implicit Bias

Implicit bias - which refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner - is always one of the most important factors to be mindful of generally, in any type of recruitment process. However, it is particularly important to take implicit bias into account in relation to virtual recruitment, whereupon you may become aware of more information about a candidate than you would for an in-person interview. For example, given that you are seeing people in their home, they may have a religious relic behind them, or a flag of their home country. It is very important that you don't let what is in their backdrop either positively or negatively impact your perception of the candidate.

If we relate this to disability specifically, there are various disability-related situations that may arise in a virtual interview which could feed into an interviewer's unconscious bias. For example, an individual with a visual impairment may not have the camera set up in a way that perfectly frames their face, which may, unconsciously and negatively impact the interviewer's perception of that candidate. In order to mitigate the potential for unfounded negative perceptions of a candidate because of this, you must do your utmost to both acknowledge and address any area of unintentional internal prejudices you may have that could manifest unconsciously and hinder fairness in your virtual hiring initiatives.

4. Conduct Virtual Interviews in a Quiet and Well-Lit Space

It is vitally important that you have a designated quiet and well-lit space to conduct interviews; not only for yourself and your own comfort, but also for that of the candidates. If we look at this from a disability perspective, if you are in a loud environment this could be very disconcerting for a candidate with autism who may experience sensory overload. It is also very strongly advised that you have a blank backdrop behind you, not only for professionalism, but also because 'visual noise' - for example lots of objects or decorations in the background - can be off-putting for people who are hard-of-hearing who may be trying to focus on your face to lipread.

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5. Be Transparent with Candidates

It is very important to inform candidates clearly of all essential aspects of your virtual recruitment process; expectations, timelines, and names of interviewers etc. Remember, effective communication is when someone achieves a desired outcome by sharing key information. In order for you to achieve your desired outcome of a successful and smoothly run virtual recruitment process, you must keep your candidates informed of all information they need to know in this regard.

6. Be Conscious to Make the Candidate Feel at Ease

This is a highly unusual climate we are living in due to Covid-19. Don't be afraid to acknowledge that at the beginning of the interview in a light-hearted manner. This addresses the elephant in the room early on. Then you can move on with the interview, hopefully having put the candidate more at ease.

Remember to introduce yourself and the panel, to speak as clearly as possible, and to check in with the candidate both at the beginning of the interview and at various intervals throughout it; 'can you hear me?', 'do you need that question repeated'? Make sure to consistently make efforts to put the candidate at ease and ensure that they are comfortable enough to speak up and say if they can't hear something, or can't see the interpreter.

Allow extra time for the candidate to respond to questions. You cannot allocate the same amount of time to a virtual interview as you would an in-person interview. There are a number of reasons why extra time will be needed: video lag time, problems with audio meaning a question needs to be repeated, potential break down of connection, etc.

Most importantly from a disability perspective, be conscious and empathetic regarding the fact that the candidate could be experiencing disability symptoms that are heightened through the virtual recruitment process, and also they could be experiencing additional impacts/stress resulting from the pandemic that may influence their engagement with you.

7. Be Mindful of the Absence of Physical Cues

Be mindful of the fact that turn taking in conversation is far more difficult during virtual engagement, due to the fact that you don't have the benefit of body language indicating when you should stop talking and the other party should begin. This is especially pertinent for people with autism, who may have difficulties in this domain to begin with. If, during the interview process, the candidate is interrupting you a little bit try not to judge them too harshly for this.

In order to minimise the potential for a candidate to speak for too long on one question, give them an estimate as to how long each one should take (of course with the allowance that this is flexible should technology issues arise). Furthermore, don't be afraid to say - in a polite and kind manner - to stop the candidate speaking in order to move onto the next question.

8. Treat Virtual Interviews as You Would an In-Person Interview

When you are working from home, it is easy and natural for you to feel more relaxed and complacent. But remember that that a virtual interview is just as important as an in-person interview and that you should do the same amount of preparation for it. Have your set of interview questions ready and review the candidate's information in advance: CV, cover letter, and any

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additional documentation. This is important not just for yourself, but for the candidate. You having a well-structured interview and being clearly prepared will put them at ease, whereas if you're notably flustered and unprepared, that could make the candidate feel thrown.

Where possible, turn off your phone and computer notifications to avoid distractions to ensure that you're giving the candidate your undivided attention. If you foresee the potential for interruption, it's understandable if you have children at home and they interrupt without warning, just be conscious to say this to the candidate at the beginning of the interview so they're not caught completely unaware.

9. Be Aware That Technology Issues May Arise

Problems with internet connectivity is a likely possibility, and it is important that you are conscious of and prepared for this. Be patient and stay calm should you encounter technology issues. Most importantly, have a contingency plan, for example regrouping and conducting the interview at a later date.

Most importantly, don't let broadband issues during the interview impact negatively on your perception of the candidate. **Don't conflate a bad experience with technology with a bad interview on the part of the candidate.**

Some practical advice in relation to technology during virtual interviews:

- If you're having issues with broadband, turn off your video (and your VPN if you're using one) which might help.
- If your work set up is close to a modem, use an ethernet cable to plug your computer directly into it, as opposed to using wireless. This will likely improve your internet connectivity.
- Make sure if you are wearing a headset not to cover your mouth with the microphone, this is particularly important when interviewing people who are Deaf or are hard of hearing. It's also important not to have the mic too close to your mouth as it can make the audio uncomfortably loud.
- If all else fails, use the chat feature on the platform you are using to communicate with the interviewee!

10. Be Ready for the Possibility of Remote Onboarding

Looking forward from the recruitment phase, be ready and prepared for the possibility of remote onboarding. If you haven't done it before, the notion of a new person starting without coming into an office and meeting with the team may seem impossible. This is a new and altered world we are heading into post Covid-19, and the strong likelihood is that we will see an increase in remote working and remote processes, not just in recruitment, but in relation to onboarding as well. Preparation is paramount in this regard, and some tips you might want to look into are:

- Writing a thorough welcome email.
- Having everything necessary in place with HR

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- Giving the new employee a solid work plan; what will they be expected to do in the first week, the second week, and so on.
- Organise a virtual induction meeting with the team the new candidate will be working with.

Most importantly, in your onboarding considerations, ensure that accessibility is taken into account. Carry on and implement the same accessibility measures in your virtual onboarding process as you have done in your virtual recruitment process.

For more information and resources on accessible recruitment practices, please visit the AHEAD website – www.ahead.ie/wam.