



Guide to respectful and inclusive recruitment of Indigenous talent



1. Introduction

Recruiting Indigenous talent requires more than simply adjusting existing hiring practices; it requires a thoughtful approach that recognizes diverse career paths, values lived experience, and builds meaningful connections with Indigenous communities.

Traditional hiring methods, such as rigid qualification requirements and standardized interview formats, can overlook quality candidates whose skills and leadership have been shaped outside of conventional career paths.

This guide offers practical advice to help organizations create a culturally safe and respectful recruitment process.

From writing job postings that reflect a broader range of experiences to ensuring that positions are visible within Indigenous networks, this guide outlines concrete steps to make your recruitment process more effective.

By rethinking outreach strategies, removing unnecessary barriers, and fostering authentic relationships, organizations can create a recruitment approach that is ready to welcome Indigenous applicants and promote long-term success.

2. Start with relationships and build connections with the community

Before even thinking about posting a job or launching a visibility campaign on social media, it is essential to ask yourself one key question: “Does the community know us?” In the Indigenous context, visibility is no substitute for relationship. If your organization is not known or recognized by the community, your communication efforts are unlikely to bear fruit. So, before you even start recruiting:

- Get in touch with community organizations, band councils, and Indigenous employment services to hear about their priorities.
- Ask how you can contribute, support, or get involved, without conditions or immediate expectations.
- Participate in cultural or community events, not to “recruit,” but to build relationships, learn, and show your genuine interest.
- Support collective projects (sponsorships, local initiatives, long-term collaborations, internship or mentoring programs).

*Relationships are built with **consistency**, **patience**, and **reciprocity**. It cannot be bought; it must be earned.*

3. Create a culturally inclusive job posting

Before you start writing your job posting, take a moment to review some key elements. First, the type and number of requirements: instead of focusing solely on degrees or years of experience, think in terms of transferable skills and human qualities. Next, pay attention to how you present your organization and the position so that Indigenous candidates can identify with it. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

a) Rethink traditional requirements

Degrees and years of experience do not always reflect a person's potential or competence. By requiring only formal criteria, you risk excluding highly qualified Indigenous candidates whose professional careers have developed in community, volunteer, or non-traditional settings.

The current trend, which is becoming increasingly widespread, is to favor skill-based hiring. This approach values concrete skills, adaptability, and the potential to succeed, regardless of how these skills were acquired.

Studies show that the more formal criteria a job posting contains, the fewer applications it attracts. According to Harvard Business Review, many candidates, especially those from non-traditional backgrounds, do not apply if they do not meet 100% of the criteria. This is particularly true for women, underrepresented groups, and indigenous people, who may not identify with standardized requirements that do not reflect the reality of their experience.

To promote more inclusive recruitment in your job postings:

- Narrow it down to the skills that are truly essential for success in the position (ideally between 5 and 8 at most).
- Frame expectations in terms of knowledge, skills, and observable behaviors, rather than years of experience or academic qualifications.
- Replace fixed criteria with success indicators that are accessible to a variety of backgrounds, for example: “Ability to mobilize a community around a common goal” rather than “5 years of management experience.”
- Question each requirement: does this condition risk unnecessarily excluding competent people who have acquired their experience in other ways?



b) Use clear and transparent language

In the context of Indigenous recruitment, how you communicate the role and your intentions is just as important as the position itself. A clear, honest job offer that is rooted in a relational approach not only provides better information, but also builds trust. Here are a few practices to keep in mind to ensure your message is respectful, relevant, and engaging.

- **Use relational language:** Indigenous leadership is often based on relationships, collaboration, and community impact. Instead of simply listing responsibilities, try to define the role in terms of its contribution to a broader goal.
- **Emphasize a commitment to Indigenous inclusion:** Make it clear that the organization values Indigenous perspectives and actively seeks Indigenous talent.
- **Avoid a promotional tone:** a common approach in recent years with the rise of employer branding is to “sell” the position using a promotional or catchy tone. In the context of Indigenous recruitment, this approach can create distance or even mistrust. It is better to opt for clarity, transparency, and concrete details. Here are a few examples:

Instead of this...	Try that instead...
“Are you a champion of change?”	“This position allows you to make a real contribution to a collective goal.”
“Competitive salary”	“The salary ranges from \$55,000 to \$62,000, depending on experience.”
“Flexible hours”	“35 hours/week, with the option to work from home 2 days/week or required presence from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.”
“Paid leave and work-life balance”	“Four weeks of vacation, five wellness days, summer hours from June to August.”
Other details to be specified	“We offer cultural leave to participate in important events within your community.”



4. Ensure good visibility within indigenous communities

Hiring Indigenous talent requires more than just adapting your job postings: it requires intentional commitment. Building on what we discussed earlier about the importance of being known and recognized by communities, the following offers concrete approaches to strengthening your presence, building lasting relationships, and expanding your recruitment efforts beyond traditional methods. These strategies aim to reach talent in a proactive, respectful manner that is aligned with a long-term vision.

a) Post on Indigenous-specific job sites and networks

To effectively reach Indigenous candidates, you need to go beyond traditional platforms such as LinkedIn or Indeed. Post your job openings on recognized Indigenous websites, collaborate with community employment centers, and promote your opportunities through sector-specific Indigenous organizations. Partner with Indigenous chambers of commerce, business councils, or local groups to increase your visibility and build real credibility with talent.

b) Establish partnerships with training programs

Build lasting relationships with educational institutions, Indigenous professional associations, and career development programs. Participate in Indigenous job fairs, support Indigenous-led initiatives, and collaborate with community representatives who can identify potential talent. These partnerships build trust and position your organization as a committed player in equitable access to employment.

c) Be connected to the field—physically and digitally

An approach rooted in local realities is essential. It's not just about being visible; it's about being present. This involves:

- Connecting with communities where they are active, including on platforms such as Facebook, which are often more widely used than LinkedIn.
- Participating in community events not only to recruit, but to learn, listen, and build trust.
- Organizing open houses, offering tours for students, or going to schools to meet the next generation.
- Actively supporting mentoring programs, internships, or workshops in communities.

These actions will also give you a better understanding of the local context, issues, and dynamics, enabling you to engage in more relevant conversations with talent.

d) Rely on relationships and word of mouth

Many Indigenous professionals do not apply through traditional channels, preferring to rely on recommendations. To be included in these circles of trust, you need to cultivate relationships:

- Build a positive reputation with talent you have already recruited. Their experience counts.
- Leverage word of mouth by collaborating with leaders or influential people who can relay your offers informally but powerfully.
- Be consistent in your presence: this is not a one-off approach, but a long-term anchoring strategy.

5. Embrace reverse recruitment: prioritize talent over the position

In traditional recruitment, we look for a candidate for a specific position. But to attract Indigenous talent, we need to take a different approach: evaluating and building relationships with talented individuals even when there are no open positions.

This means that instead of interviewing someone solely for a specific role, we need to get to know their skills, values, and potential beyond a single position. You can then interview the person for several possible types of positions within the organization to understand where they would fit in best. Once this assessment has been made, it is important to actively promote their profile internally to managers and teams, even if no position is immediately available. In this way, the organization creates a pool of qualified and committed talent, ready to be mobilized when opportunities arise.

This approach, known as **reverse recruitment**, involves recruiting with the person in mind, not just the position. It relies on building authentic and lasting relationships, which are essential for attracting and retaining Indigenous talent. Here are some key practices to adopt:

- Meet and evaluate indigenous talent without waiting for a position to open up.
- Conduct interviews that explore transferable skills and career aspirations beyond a specific role.
- Share and promote talent profiles internally with teams and managers.
- Stay in touch and continue to build relationships for future opportunities.



6. Conduct interviews with respect and openness

An interview with an Indigenous person should never be limited to a series of technical questions. It is, above all, a human encounter. To create a welcoming, respectful, and inclusive space for dialogue, it is essential to approach the interview with a relational intention, a humble attitude, and an understanding of the cultural differences that can influence the dynamics of the exchange.

a) Lay the groundwork: train, raise awareness, humanize

- **Train everyone involved** in the interview process on inclusive recruitment principles and Indigenous realities (past and present). This includes cultural intelligence, unconscious biases, systemic issues, and Indigenous values that influence communication and workplace relationships.
- **Adopt a relational approach:** start the interview by creating a climate of trust. Introduce yourself, talk a little about yourself (your role, your background, why you are looking forward to meeting them). This helps break the ice and establish a more equal relationship.
- **Be fully present:** don't allow interruptions, calls, or distractions. Show that you are giving your full attention to the person in front of you.

b) Understand differences in perspective

Here are some important distinctions to keep in mind, along with practical tips:

Indigenous worldview	Western worldview	Implications for the interview
Collectivism (the group before the individual)	Individualism (personal fulfillment is emphasized)	Don't expect the person to highlight their individual achievements. Ask questions about their contribution to the team, the community, or collective projects.
Cooperative	Competitive	Don't mistake a calm tone or refusal to stand out as a lack of ambition. Look for ways in which the person contributes to the collective effort.
Pauses, silences, reflection	Quick responses valued	Be respectful of moments of silence. Don't rush to fill in the gaps. Allow time for a response, especially if French or English is their second language.
Humility, modesty	Highlighting yourself and your achievements	Don't interpret a lack of bragging as a lack of experience. Explore experiences in depth with open-ended questions.
More relaxed attitude towards eye contact	Sustained eye contact seen as a sign of interest	Don't force eye contact. This is not a sign of a lack of confidence or respect, but rather a cultural difference.



c) Practical tips for conducting an inclusive interview

- **Start by establishing a connection:** be prepared to introduce yourself beyond your title or responsibilities by sharing a little about yourself. This is an excellent way to break the ice and build a relationship of trust and mutual respect before moving on to more formal questions.
- **Ask open-ended, non-intimidating questions:** avoid overly rigid or closed-ended wording.
- **Confirm understanding:** ask if any questions need to be clarified, especially if the interview language is not their first language.
- **Incorporate scenarios or context:** concrete stories or examples can help the person express their experiences more easily.
- **Allow for extra time:** don't rush the interview. This shows that you value the person and what they have to share.
- **Recognize that the journey may not be linear:** remain open to different career paths or informal experiences.

d) The interview as a bridge, not a test

The interview is not a test. It is a commitment to an authentic human encounter.

It starts with adequate preparation, full presence, and a genuine desire to understand the other person. But the most transformative element remains your **inner attitude**.

Too often, the interview starts with this insidious question: *“Why shouldn't I hire this person?”*. This is the trap. Because there is no such thing as a perfect candidate, a perfect manager, or a perfect company. Looking for reasons to say no is setting yourself up to find them.

What if, instead, you made it your mission to discover why you should hire them by asking yourself this question: *“What can this person teach me, inspire me, or help me see differently?”*?

Not by turning a blind eye to what might seem like limitations, but by sincerely seeking out their gifts, their unique strengths, and how they can enrich not only your team, but your entire company.

This attitude is a call for active kindness and open-mindedness: valuing what makes each person unique and recognizing the richness that diversity of talent brings.

This simple shift transforms the interview into a bridge between two worlds, a lively dialogue rather than an interrogation. It is this humble, open, and connected attitude that will make all the difference.

7. End the interview with respect and clarity.

How an interview ends is just as important as how it begins. A well-structured conclusion allows candidates to leave with a clear idea of the next steps, to feel valued for the time they have devoted to the interview, and to have the opportunity to ask questions or share their final thoughts. Here are some key steps for concluding the interview in a meaningful way:

Express sincere appreciation

Take the time to sincerely thank the candidate for their time and for sharing their ideas and experiences. Acknowledge that the interview process is a two-way exchange and that you appreciate their generosity and transparency.

Give them the opportunity to make a few final remarks

Instead of simply asking if they have any questions, you can invite them to add any points they feel are important but have not yet been addressed. This approach respects Indigenous storytelling traditions, where important ideas may emerge at the end of a conversation.

Clearly describe the next steps

Transparency is essential to ensure that candidates feel informed and respected throughout the recruitment process. Clearly explain the decision-making timeline, any additional steps, and when candidates can expect to receive a response.

Reaffirm the organization's commitment

If your organization is firmly committed to recruiting Indigenous talent and workplace inclusion, briefly highlight this commitment to reassure the candidate that this is about much more than just hiring.

End on a positive note

Conclude the interview in a warm and respectful manner, ensuring that the candidate feels valued and appreciated. Consider offering them a way to follow up on their application or stay in touch. By concluding the interview in a thoughtful, clear, and respectful manner, you help reinforce the positive experience and lay the foundation for a lasting and fruitful working relationship.



Beyond recruitment - A lasting commitment

Attracting and recruiting Indigenous talent is an important step, but it is only the beginning. True commitment means ensuring that Indigenous employees feel valued, respected, and supported throughout their journey within the organization. Organizations must bring the same care and intention to integration, career development, leadership opportunities, and workplace culture. This involves:

- Creating spaces where Indigenous employees feel confident to be themselves at work.
- Recognizing and respecting Indigenous ways of working, managing, and making decisions.
- Offering mentoring, development opportunities, and career paths that value diverse experiences.
- Addressing systemic barriers that may exist in workplace structures and policies.

If recruitment is approached with sincerity, but the workplace does not reflect the same commitment, new Indigenous recruits will quickly notice and leave. Recruitment must be done for the right reasons, not as a mere box-ticking exercise, but as part of an overall effort to create workplaces where Indigenous talent can thrive.

Organizations that approach this work with humility, openness, and a long-term perspective will not only benefit from diverse experiences, but will also foster stronger, more inclusive workplaces that are more representative of the communities they serve.





ABOUT OUR FOUNDER

Brigitte Skeene – Innu from Mashteuiatsh



Talent IQ reflects the vision of Brigitte Skeene, an Indigenous leader deeply committed to creating meaningful opportunities for Indigenous talent. With nearly three decades of experience, Brigitte believes that the way we hire and build teams shapes the future of our workplaces and communities.

A proud Innu woman from Mashteuiatsh, Brigitte's personal journey of reconciliation has been a profound source of inspiration for her work. Over the past decade, she has rediscovered her roots, learned her language, and embraced her culture. This evolution has shaped her approach to talent strategy, where she prioritizes authenticity, deep connection, and lasting impact.

Brigitte's mission is to help companies integrate Indigenous perspectives into their hiring strategies and to help create meaningful opportunities for Indigenous talent. She fosters environments that are inclusive, human-centered, and built for long-term success. Her work goes beyond recruitment—she is dedicated to creating spaces where Indigenous talent can grow, contribute, and make a lasting impact on organizational success.

- Harvard University – Certificate in Communications
- First Nations Executive Education – Academic Co-Lead and Facilitator
- Cultural Intelligence Centre – Certified CQ Facilitator
- CoachingOurselves – Facilitator, Leadership Coach
- AIHR – Certified Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Specialist
- Facteur H – Author and Speaker
- Working Effectively With Indigenous Peoples®
- Management and Strategy Institute – Certified Project Management (PMEC)
- Acuity Institute – Certified Kaizen Leader