

Project Insights Report

HireNext: Improving hiring and HR practices with AI



PARTNERS

CivicAction



LOCATIONS

Alberta

Nova Scotia

Ontario



INVESTMENT

\$300,000



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Executive Summary

Many Canadian employers across sectors are becoming more conscious of the benefits of a diverse workforce, but often don't have the knowledge or staff resources to attract and recruit diverse talent into entry-level jobs. Employers often cite an inability to find applicants.

At the same time, research showed young people want to see easy to understand job postings with more information about the job conditions, including salaries and benefits.

To address these challenges, CivicAction developed and investigated the capacity of the HireNext Tool, an online assessment, to help employers create more accessible and inclusive job postings. The tool uses a library of inclusive terms from an analysis by Accenture of 23,000 job postings and best practices around clarity, requirements, language, and tone.

The tool lets employers evaluate existing job postings' structure and wording through an equity, diversity and inclusion lens, using artificial intelligence to identify underlying and implicit biases. The modified job postings are designed to be more accessible to equity-seeking groups, thus providing employers with a larger, more diverse pool of candidates.

Although the project identified some challenges with respect to employer engagement with the tool, ultimately, this tool has the potential to help improve employment outcomes for Indigenous, Black, racialized, newcomer and LGBTQ youth and fill gaps in the labour market.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 50% of surveyed employers report attracting a more diverse candidate pool as a result of using the tool and modifying their job posting(s).
- 2 Employer organizations can help institutions prioritize youth-inclusive hiring practices with members as a means to close entry-level talent gaps and to diversify their talent pipeline.
- 3 Surveyed youth were more likely to apply to the modified job postings, especially youth with lower levels of education, lower incomes, disabilities, who were women and those who were unemployed.

The Issue

Many Canadian employers are becoming more conscious of the benefits of a diverse workforce, but often don't have the knowledge or staff resources to attract and recruit diverse talent into entry-level jobs. Employers often cite an inability to find applicants.

And yet, pre-COVID-19, close to 800,000 Canadians between the ages of 15-29 were not employed or in education or training. Black, Indigenous, newcomers or members of the 2SLGBTQ+ communities experienced higher rates of unemployment in comparison to their white counterparts due to barriers like a lack of social networks, structural discrimination and implicit bias.

COVID-19 further exacerbated this situation. According to StatsCan, the economic shutdown had an unequal impact on certain groups – in Ontario youth aged 15-24 suffered an unemployment rate of 30% at the height of the pandemic, more than double the general unemployment rate at that time. Those from racialized groups and lower-income households were disproportionately affected, specifically people who identified as Black.



What We Investigated

In an effort to address these challenges, in collaboration with NPower Canada, CivicAction surveyed 200+ youth on barriers they face when considering and responding to job postings. These youth wanted to see simpler language, the removal of unnecessary qualifications and to get more information about the job conditions, including salaries and benefits. Their feedback suggested a new approach to job postings was key to increasing opportunities for youth who have been marginalized in the labour market.

In response to this feedback, this project developed and tested the HireNext Tool – an online, AI-powered assessment, to help employers create more accessible and inclusive job postings. The tool was developed using a library of inclusive terms, a result of IT firm Accenture's analysis of 23,000 job postings and best practices surrounding clarity, requirements, language and tone.

The employer-focused, AI-powered recruitment tool aimed to give employers practical advice and specific edits to make their job postings more inclusive and effective. It was also intended to help employers remove discriminatory practices in entry-level positions and in turn, improve the supply of young under-represented talent with entry-level roles.

The tool was offered at no-cost, and promoted in Ontario, Nova Scotia and Alberta targeting employers in construction, manufacturing, retail, transportation and warehousing, finance and insurance, health care and social assistance, and accommodation and food services.

✔ What We're Learning

Youth preferred the modified job postings

A sample of 1,000-plus youth between 18-35 completed an online survey that asked them which job posting they would be more likely to apply to: one that had not been modified using the tool and a version that had been modified using the tool. For nine out of 10 job postings used, participants preferred the one that had been modified using the tool. This preference was stronger among survey participants with lower levels of education, lower incomes, disabilities, women and those who were unemployed.

In total, 126 employers used the tool to modify 187 job postings during the project. The top 5 recommendations made from a total of 2,605 were:

1. Elaborating to describe outcomes for the role.
2. Reducing the length of the job posting.
3. Emphasizing skills over professional experience and education.
4. Being more specific in the job title.
5. Only including the most important responsibilities in the job description.

An easy user-experience must be balanced with the need to collect data on impact

In order to use the assessment tool, there was a multi-step registration process, which may have discouraged potential employer-users. Despite significant traffic to the landing page, with 8,200 unique visitors over the project period, only 3.3% (270) converted to registrants, and only 1.5% (126) went on to use the assessment tool. While the registration step could have been eliminated to make the process simpler, that would have resulted in the loss of the ability to collect user data.

Iterate, iterate, iterate

To get to a functional final product, it is imperative to have multiple testers. By having user-testing with multiple assessment users across a variety of job postings, the project partners identified challenges with the assessment process and made changes to address them.

Employer need does not always translate to action

Despite virtual launch events in Toronto and Halifax, eight virtual training events and other promotional activities across partners, employer engagement was a challenge. The launch of the tool coincided with the pandemic, when many employers struggled to simply remain open and had to de-prioritize inclusive hiring practice goals and activities in order to focus on keeping their businesses running. The project tried a monthly email campaign targeting assessment registrants and employers to help keep the assessment top-of-mind, but that tactic did not result in a significant increase in users. Ongoing marketing and promotion of the tool with employers was required.

★ Why It Matters

Research indicates young people entering a labour market during a recession experience long-term impacts on their earnings and careers — a scarring effect. Employment and financial concerns aren't the only effect as research shows a negative impact on mental and physical health. The pandemic was hard on most youth entering the labour market, but it was especially challenging for Indigenous, Black, racialized, newcomer and 2SLGBTQ+ youth, who face discrimination as well as broader economic pressures.

This tool has the potential to help improve employment outcomes for these youth and others by tackling systemic racism embedded within the first step of hiring – the job posting. While there is increasing employer appetite to better align workforce representation with labour market availability and address barriers in hiring and HR, particularly given the increased attention on anti- Black and anti- Indigenous racism, more needs to be done to connect employers across sectors to practical tools that can make a difference.



State of Skills: Unleashing AI into the skills development ecosystem

AI's impact on employment is complex. It can automate routine tasks, potentially enhancing productivity and safety but may also disrupt job roles.

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Employers and those in job hiring should consider youth-inclusive hiring practices such as:

- Expanding recruitment efforts to popular social media platforms used by youth.
- Creating easy-to-understand job postings.
- Streamlining the application process.
- Finding new ways to get to know young applicants rather than relying on cover letters and resumes.
- Offering and communicating about employment benefits and professional development opportunities.
- Facilitating networking opportunities between youth and potential mentors and senior leadership.

► What's Next

To address the challenges reaching employer-users, plans are underway to partner with organization(s) that support inclusive hiring, already serve as a destination for employers, offer products/services that complement the assessment, and have the infrastructure in place for frequent and ongoing communications. In pursuit of this, the project will be partnering with the CharityVillage Foundation and transferring the HireNext tools and resources to CharityVillage and its sister company TalentEgg. CharityVillage and TalentEgg, HireNext's new permanent home, reach more than 170,000 charitable and nonprofit organizations across Canada, in addition to the young adults reached through its job board and online career resource for students, graduates, and early career professionals.

Have questions about this report? Contact us communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report

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