



Employment and  
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# ***Inclusive Workplaces – Creative Testing***

## **Executive Summary**

### **Prepared for Employment and Social Development Canada**

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For more information on this report, please contact Employment and Social Development Canada at:  
[nc-por-rop-gd@hrsdcc-rhdcc.gc.ca](mailto:nc-por-rop-gd@hrsdcc-rhdcc.gc.ca)

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**Canada**

## **Inclusive Workplaces – Creative Testing**

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared for Employment and Social Development Canada by Environics Research

AUGUST 2023

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) commissioned Environics Research to conduct six online focus groups with persons playing leadership roles in SMEs in order to test reaction to creative materials.

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## Executive summary

### Background and objectives

The mandate of ESDC includes taking measures to encourage and assist businesses across Canada in having workplaces that are inclusive and a key feature of this is to be inclusive of people living with disabilities. The 2020 Throne Speech and the 2022 federal budget both made commitments to accomplish the following objectives:

- increase participation by Persons with Disabilities in the labour market and make workplaces more inclusive and accessible;
- ensure fair and inclusive working conditions that remove barriers to accessibility for Canadians with Disabilities and allow all Canadians to participate in an inclusive and efficient labour market; and
- develop a robust employment strategy for Canadians with Disabilities, as part of a Disability Inclusion Plan.

ESDC's Inclusive Workplaces Phase 4 Campaign is a plan to support these commitments and builds on the initial success and lessons learned from the previous three campaign phases (2019-2022). It will contribute to reducing cultural employment barriers and creating workplaces that are more inclusive for Persons with Disabilities. A small media buy will also launch in 2023 that will target Canadian small and medium-sized employers. The goal of the campaign is to increase awareness and knowledge among employers that 1) persons with disabilities are a significant untapped source of labour and 2) tools and resources are available to help hire persons with disabilities. Prior to designing new creatives for the campaign, ESDC wishes to test the creative concepts with small and medium-sized employers using online focus groups to ensure they resonate with their intended target audience and meet objectives. Insights from the creative testing will inform further development of the campaign. ESDC also wishes to test the creative materials among persons with disabilities to ensure that they feel that the campaign is respectful of them.

### Methodology

**Focus Groups with SME decision makers.** Environics Research conducted a series of six online focus groups in January 2023. The groups were conducted using the Zoom platform and were composed of Canadian business owners, C-level administrators, employers, senior leaders, and hiring and human resources managers. Each session consisted of 6 to 8 participants and lasted 90 minutes. Environics recruited participants via industry-standard methods to ensure participation in all the sessions across all regions. Participants were offered a \$200 incentive to thank them for their time.

Half of the focus groups were composed of participants working for small businesses with less than 100 employees and the other half were composed of participants working for medium-sized businesses with 100 to 499 employees. Two of the focus groups were composed of participants from Ontario and Atlantic Canada, two were with participants from the Prairie provinces and BC and two were composed of participants from Quebec. The two Quebec sessions were conducted in French and the other four were conducted in English.

The following topics were explored in each focus group:

- Current human resource challenges facing SMEs
- Attitudes toward hiring persons with disabilities

- Reaction to creative concepts
- Reaction to website mock-up

**Focus Groups and Individual Interviews with Persons with Disabilities.** Environics Research also conducted four online focus groups and six individual interviews with persons across Canada who are living with a range of physical, developmental, and/or mental-health related disabilities, to test their reactions to the “Right Here” campaign materials. The groups and interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform. Each of the four groups was conducted with participants from a specific region of Canada, including Atlantic Canada (June 20<sup>th</sup>), Ontario (June 20<sup>th</sup>), Québec (June 21<sup>st</sup>) and Western Canada (June 21<sup>st</sup>). Each focus group lasted from 70 to 90 minutes and consisted of 7 to 8 participants.

The six individual interviews were conducted among those who qualified for the study but for whom a focus groups environment was not appropriate, such as those with mental health or developmental issues, or disabilities related to vision and hearing that would make an individual interview more accommodating. These interviews lasted a maximum of 60 minutes and took place between June 20<sup>th</sup> and June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Environics recruited participants via industry-standard methods to ensure participation in all the sessions across all regions. An incentive of \$125 was offered to participants to thank them for their time.

The following topics were explored in each focus group and interview:

- Experience as Persons with Disabilities in the workplace
- Reactions to “Right Here” social media posts
- Reactions to “Right Here” overall video and three scenes
- Perceived respectfulness of the ads and portrayal of Persons with Disabilities

**Statement of limitations:** Qualitative research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population, rather than the weights of the opinions held, as measured in a quantitative study. The results of this type of research should be viewed as indicative rather than projectable to the population.

## Contract value

The total contract value was \$192,320.35 (including HST).

- Quantitative research phase value: \$85,315.00 (including HST).
- Qualitative research phase 1 value: \$53,556.35 (including HST).
- Qualitative research phase 2 value: \$53,449.00 (including HST).

## Key findings – Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

### Human resource challenges

- Virtually all participants experience challenges in hiring staff at this time, regardless of location and size of business. It was stated in the majority of the groups that hiring has become more difficult in recent years, with only one group from BC/Prairies feeling this had been a more longstanding problem.
- Participants discussed the lower response rate to online job postings than has been seen in the past, and a shift in attitudes among potential candidates. They also attributed these challenges to changes in expectations on the part of prospective employees.
- Beyond the general challenge of finding candidates, participants also noted challenges recruiting individuals with specialist skillsets, especially at the senior level.
- When asked directly if there were categories of potential employees that might be “untapped resources”, participants identified groups such as new graduates and referenced hiring strategies they have used. There was little spontaneous mention of persons with disabilities in this context.

### Attitudes toward hiring persons with disabilities

- Participants were asked what comes to mind when they think of hiring someone with a disability. Most of the initial responses were focused on physical disabilities, particularly those relating to mobility.
- Participants were very positive when speaking about the idea of hiring persons with disabilities, using words such as “opportunity”, “inclusivity”, and “unique perspectives” and many were open to the idea. There was some concern about safety, particularly among those working in industries involving physical labour.
- Experiences hiring persons with disabilities were limited within these groups.
- There was little to no awareness of where to find resources to help employers hire persons with disabilities, but a high level of interest in learning.

### Reaction to creative concepts

- Participants were shown scripts for video ads from three creative concepts along with associated social media and banner ads and asked to use their imaginations about what each completed ads might look like. They were known as Concept One: Ready to Hire, Concept Two: Right Here and Concept Three: We Can.
- Concept One: Ready to Hire was seen as having a clear main message related to resources available for employers, but the slogan was confusing and participants found the video to be too focused on the employer. The message did not feel especially authentic, and it made participants feel like they were already behind on hiring persons with disabilities.
- Concept Two: Right Here had a clear message that presented a problem and offered a solution. Participants found the video ad script to be engaging and understood the message that talent is out there, employers just need to be more open-minded in how they look. The digital ads held a clear call-

to-action and participants appreciated the web URL that was present on each asset. They noted that images would enhance this concept overall.

- Concept Three: We Can was viewed as a more positive, holistic message encouraging employers to create a more inclusive workplace in order to open up new possibilities and allow for diverse perspectives. This ad was viewed as more positive in that it showcased the advantages of hiring persons with disabilities and presented the point of view of both the employer and the candidate.
- There was an overall preference for Concept Three: We Can, though there were aspects of each of the concepts that were appealing to the groups. When asked to mix-and-match, participants preferred Concept Two: Right Here with images from Concepts 1 (Ready to Hire) or 3 (We Can), or Concept Three (We Can) with video from Concept Two (Right Here).
- While Concept Three as a whole received the most votes, there were several aspects of the other two concepts that were favoured. Other important aspects to include that were seen in concepts one and two were large images, stating a problem and providing a solution, and an obvious call-to-action that directs people to the website.
- The preferred messages used language focusing on being an inclusive employer in general, and how doing so could help solve their own hiring issues. This focus on the positive was apparent in both concepts two and three. People want to see non-stereotypical images representing persons with disabilities but also felt confused when the disability was not readily apparent.
- The website mock-up met participants' expectations and was generally reviewed in a neutral to positive way. Suggestions were made to move the important information (e.g., Steps to hiring persons with disabilities) closer to the top of the page, to change the first image on the webpage, and to include testimonials.

## Key findings - Persons with Disabilities

### Experiences in the workplace

- Most participants initially focused on the degree to which their disabilities had been accommodated in the workplace, as opposed to how their disability had an impact during the hiring process. They reported varying experiences when it came to requesting and receiving accommodations from their employers and co-workers.
- When asked specifically about the experience of job searching and interviewing, almost all participants expressed a feeling of stigma and of being at a disadvantage in the hiring process as a result of having a disability.
- Many believed that employers would perceive them as unreliable or as a potential liability. For this reason, some felt reservations about disclosing their disability to potential employers.

### "Right Here" social media posts

- Reactions to the three "Right Here" social media posts were largely positive. Almost all participants agreed that these social media posts were respectful towards persons with disabilities.

- Most participants understood the goal of the ads and felt that the message was clear. There was some preference for posts 2 and 3, which featured images of persons with disabilities working and collaborating with others.
- Some participants were critical of the text in Post 1 because they felt that it presented hiring persons with disabilities as a “last resort” in the eyes of the employer.
- Participants were appreciative of the inclusion of people with both visible and invisible disabilities in the posts, though some expressed a desire to see persons with disabilities represented in more skilled or high-level positions.

#### **“Right Here” digital ad**

- Most participants had a positive initial reaction to the ad with many finding it to be a refreshingly light-hearted portrayal of persons with disabilities. They enjoyed the metaphor of “looking in places where you don’t usually look” and considered the ad, as a whole, to be witty and entertaining.
- A small minority of participants had a more negative reaction and objected to the way persons with disabilities were portrayed. They felt it trivialized persons with disabilities by showing them in unrealistic situations such as standing on a roof or hanging outside a window.
- The initial theatre scene was well-received by most participants who appreciated how it was amusing and light-hearted, as opposed to more stereotypical “tragic” portrayals of persons with disabilities.
- A minority of participants found the theatre to be inappropriate. They felt it was condescending toward persons with disabilities such as Down’s Syndrome and portrayed them as ridiculous and childish.
- Participants had the most positive reaction to the construction scene, which was viewed as more serious than the other scenes. The man with a disability was represented in a positive way and he seemed ready and able to do the job.
- There were some negative comments about the construction scene focused on how the man was not wearing a hard hat or other safety equipment and that it did not show him working at first. There were mixed reactions to the employer not noticing him at all.
- Most participants had a positive reaction to the boardroom scene. It was described by some as “sad but meaningful” due to the woman with an apparent hearing disability being shown outside of the building. They found this scene relatable and congruent with their own experiences.
- Some participants were confused by the boardroom scene. They did not understand why the individual was hanging in the window and was then inside the building. It was unclear what type of job the individual was applying for, with some thinking she was supposed to be a window cleaner as opposed to wanting to work in the boardroom.
- Participants had some suggestions to improve the digital ad that mainly relating to the depiction of activities being performed by the persons with disabilities. They wanted to see the inclusion of depictions of persons with disabilities in jobs with more responsibility, in roles that showcased their skills, or in leadership positions, and not portraying them in unrealistic situations such as on the roof or hanging in the window.

- Most participants felt that the depictions of persons with disabilities in the digital ad were respectful and positive.
- A small minority expressed negative views of the representation of persons with disabilities in the digital ad and felt these representations were disrespectful. They felt the ad depicted them in roles that were limiting, that it seemed to treat them as not being first-choice candidates, and that it showed them in unrealistic situations that were seen as ridiculous or demeaning.

## Political neutrality statement and contact information

I hereby certify as senior officer of Environics that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada, and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Derek Leebosh  
Vice President, Public Affairs  
Environics Research Group  
derek.leebosh@environics.ca  
(416) 820-1963

**Supplier name:** Environics Research Group  
PSPC contract number: CW22236197  
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For more information, contact: nc-por-rop-gd@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca