

SUPERVISORY GUIDE
**Creating a Trauma-Informed
and Disability Inclusive Workplace**
PART 1: HIRING

Created by MASS Collaboration:
Movement for Access, Safety, and Survivors



This project was supported by Grant No. 2016-X1371-MA-FW awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication / program / exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

Design by Jennifer Strickland, <https://ux-ui.org>

To request this manual in alternate formats, contact disability@barcc.org.

About the MASS Collaboration (Movement for Access, Safety and Survivors)

The MASS Collaboration is a collaboration between:

- Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)
- Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL)
- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
- MBTA Transit Police

The goal of our collaboration is to create lasting systemic change within and between our organizations. Our improvements will help survivors/victims of sexual violence with disabilities in the Boston area receive accessible, safe and empowering responses and services that promote healing and justice, as they define it for themselves.

We are committed to understanding the barriers that survivors/victims with disabilities experience. We are also committed to building on our existing strengths to address gaps and improve our responses and services.

Vision Statement

The MASS Collaboration envisions Boston as a city in which the culture within and between victim services, criminal justice, transportation, and disability advocacy and service systems promote the healing, empowerment, and safety of people with disabilities who have experienced sexual violence. Survivors/victims with disabilities will receive equal, responsive, safe, barrier-free services from compassionate professionals, staff, and volunteers who are knowledgeable about and comfortable with supporting survivors/victims with disabilities.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to change the culture within and between all collaborating organizations to enhance services to promote healing, empowerment and safety for people with disabilities who have experienced sexual violence.

We will accomplish this by incorporating the voices of survivors/victims with disabilities to:

- Build formal and informal connections between our organizations;
- Increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of professionals, staff, and volunteers;
- Enhance and develop policies and protocols based on best practices and current research about serving survivors/victims with disabilities to increase access to safe, responsive services.

Intro to this Guidance Document

Our collaboration has been working since 2011 to make changes in our organizations to improve response and services for survivors with disabilities. As we've explored how to create sustainable change within our organizations, we've identified that supervisors play a critical role in ongoing support of staff who may be working with survivors with disabilities. Additionally, we talked about the importance of inclusion of survivors with disabilities in this work, including as staff at our agencies.

BARCC and BCIL discussed how rape crisis centers and independent living centers can create workplaces that are welcoming to staff who identify as survivors with disabilities and also who work with survivors with disabilities. Some of the major themes raised by BARCC and BCIL in the needs assessment and throughout the course of our work include:

- Support with the emotional impact of work including vicarious trauma
- Staff safety and assistance with navigating boundaries
- Support with problem-solving with client/consumer work
- Inclusion of employees with disabilities in victim-services

We also identified that creating a workplace that is inclusive of survivors with disabilities results in a workplace that is more inclusive of all staff who bring with them different learning, communication, and work styles. This guidance document on Creating a Trauma-Informed and Disability-Inclusive Workplace was written from those discussions.

This document includes 4 manuals:

- Part 1: Hiring
- Part 2: On-boarding
- Part 3: Supervision
- Part 4: Boundaries and Safety

The goal of this guidance document is to provide information for how agencies, and in particular executive leadership, human resources and supervisors can create a disability-inclusive and trauma-informed workplace. It is best used along with in-person, interactive training to allow executive leadership, human resources, and supervisors the opportunity to practice skills and discuss challenges and ideas with each other. In addition, information in this guidance document can be useful for advocates assisting survivors with disabilities with employment issues.

***Please note that this document is not meant to provide legal guidance or advice.**

Outline

- Ableism in the Workplace 9
- Inclusive Job Descriptions 10
 - Essential Job Functions 11
 - Putting Together a Job Description 14
- Interviewing 19
- Appendix 22
 - Essential Job Functions Tool 23
 - Template Job Description 25

Learning Objectives

By the end of using this manual and subsequent training, executive leadership, Human Resources (HR) and hiring managers will be able to:

- Recognize discrimination against survivors with disabilities in hiring
- Identify essential job functions
- Create job descriptions that are inclusive of survivors with disabilities
- Create job descriptions and an interview process that communicates that the agency is vicarious trauma-informed and responsive
- Create an interview process that is inclusive of survivors with disabilities

Ableism in the Workplace

Ableism is discrimination in favor of able-bodied people. Ableism in the workplace can take a variety of forms. Most notably, people with disabilities are underemployed. The Bureau of Labor statistics in 2016 showed that 17.9 percent of persons with a disability were employed. In contrast, the employment-population ratio for those without a disability was 65.3 percent.

In one study by Rutgers University, 6,000 fictional applications for an accounting position were sent out with some disclosing disability. While the disabilities disclosed would not impact the accounting work, applicants with disabilities received 26% fewer responses from employers. Of those more experienced applicants, people with disabilities were even less likely (34% less likely) to get responses than other equally experienced applicants without disabilities.

Common reasons we have heard include assumptions that people with disabilities will not be able to perform well and the belief that accommodations are too expensive.

Similar to assumptions made about people with disabilities, stigma against survivorship can also create barriers for survivors of sexual violence in the hiring process. Some survivors wonder whether they should disclose that they are a survivor in order to receive appropriate accommodations. Survivors may also have concerns about whether the hiring process will be inclusive, such as having an interview room that is in a less sensory stimulating to reduce triggers. Fears about whether working environments will be sensitive to needs of survivors with disabilities can keep them from participating in hiring processes. Being transparent throughout all steps of the hiring process about considerations your agency has made to accommodate survivors with disabilities is one way to communicate that your agency is, in fact, accommodating.

Inclusive Job Descriptions

Creating an inclusive workplace starts from the hiring process. Agencies can start communicating that they are inclusive workplaces that consider accessibility and trauma, including vicarious trauma, in their job descriptions. This includes creating job descriptions that:

- Are clear about essential job functions;
- Do not include discriminatory language;
- Clearly state that reasonable accommodations will be provided in the hiring process; and
- Acknowledge the impact of our work on employees.

**“I want to see that the advertisement is visually accessible.
I also look at the specific language.
I do research about the agency.
How accessible is the website?
Are there irrelevant requirements that prevent a person with a disability from applying, such as ‘can you lift 20 pounds’? This doesn’t matter in most jobs and shouldn’t be included unless it’s part of the specific job.”**

–Person with Disability

Essential Job Functions

Essential job functions are the tasks a person holding a position must be able to do. An employee is protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act if they can complete the essential job functions with or without reasonable accommodations. If a function is essential, and an employee or potential employee cannot perform the function even with a reasonable accommodation, then that person is not qualified for the job and is not protected under the ADA.

By being thoughtful and transparent about what is required for the job and what is flexible, you communicate that you are actively considering how to be inclusive to people with a range of abilities. You also help all applicants, including survivors with disabilities, consider whether the job is a good fit for them.

How Do I Determine Which Job Functions are Essential?

In determining whether a job function is essential, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (the federal agency that enforces the ADA and other discrimination laws) looks at these factors:

- Whether the position exists to perform that function. For example, a project manager's job is to ensure that projects are completed on-time, so creating and managing timelines are essential functions of the position.
- The experience of current or past employees who have actually held that position.
- The time spent performing the function. For example, it is common to see job post templates that include the ability to lift a certain weight. If the majority of the job includes loading and unloading boxes, this would be essential. If a staff person occasionally needs to lift boxes and this could be completed by another staff person, this would not be essential.
- The consequences of not performing the function.
- Whether other employees are available to perform the function. For example, opening up the office might be an essential function for an operations staff at a two-person agency, but might not be for a larger organization with multiple operations staff where another staff person could be responsible for unlocking the office.
- The degree of expertise or skill required to perform the function. For example, clinicians require licensure.

[Here is a link to a tool to help you determine the essential job functions of a position. This tool is located in the appendix of this document on pp 23-24.](#)



Review your own job description using the tool.

- Can you identify the essential job functions?
- Is there anything in your job description that can be considered non-essential?

Putting Together a Job Description

Be specific

List the position's requirements and all the essential steps it would take to complete that task. For example, 'manage donors' could be expanded with: 'enter donor information into database, contact donors to thank them, send monthly newsletter via Constant Contact,' etc.

Use Disability Inclusive Language

Consider whether certain commonly used words would exclude individuals with disabilities. Be sure your language conveys the requirements of the job without limiting the physical demands to certain abilities.

Examples:

Instead of...	Write
Ability to read materials	Ability to learn materials
Talk or hear	Ability to clearly communicate agency mission and needs to donors
Types data	Enter data

 *Try it out*

1. Change some of these tasks to more inclusive language.

- o Position requires ability to drive to multiple office locations in the Boston area.

- o Position requires ability to carry A/V equipment to different classrooms.

2. Review your own job description. Are there any words in there that are not inclusive?

Be Clear about the Work Environment

Part of universal access is being honest about any accessibility concerns your worksite may have and being flexible to make accommodations as much as possible. Some questions to help you think about accessibility of your workplace are below.

- What is the physical layout of the work site?
- What equipment is used in the work setting?
- What conditions are required for task completion? For example, deadline driven job, some evenings and weekends required etc.
- Is the office accessible (parking, entrances and exits, doors)?
- Does the job require working in different locations? Does the job require travel?
- Does the job require the employee to always be present in the office? Are there options for some remote work?
- Are there opportunities for flexible work hours in the position?

“As a wheelchair user I look for access beyond the entry to the door – all the hallways and rooms such as bathrooms etc. I also look to see if there are other visibly disabled people either working in the office or coming for services.”

–Person with Disability

“I look for a space I can get through the office without asking people to move. I don’t like to keep feeling as if I am in the way.”

–Person with Disability

 **Reflect**

What accessibility concerns does your office have?
(For example, is there anything that isn't ADA compliant? Is your office noisy?). How would you describe your office (in terms of accessibility) to someone who is thinking about working for your organization?

Make a Statement about Impact of this Work

Include language that recognizes that the work at your agency can have an emotional impact on staff and communicates that your agency supports staff with this. This can be brief but communicates to survivors and staff worried about the emotional impact of this work that your agency is being proactive about this.

Example:

BARCC's job posts include information about what BARCC offers which includes the following language:

“An investment in your health, well-being, and professional development through competitive benefit offerings, generous time off policies, dedication to mental health and proactively managing vicarious trauma, and professional development funds and opportunities.”

Job Description/Job Post Template

[You can find a sample job description template in the appendix on pp. 25-30 or by clicking on this link.](#)

Interviewing

Some things to consider when interviewing candidates to be inclusive of survivors with disabilities include:

- Ask all candidates whether accommodations are needed for the interview.
- Use a rubric or set guidelines with your must-have essential skills to help prevent bias. For more information about rubrics go to:
<http://www.managementcenter.org/resources/mitigate-bias-hiring-simple-rubric/>
- Be aware of potential barriers that survivors with disabilities may experience and don't make assumptions. For example, someone taking paratransit may be late because of paratransit delays. Find out reasons why a candidate is late and examine how they handled the situation.
- Avoid asking stacked questions (multiple questions in one question); instead ask questions one at a time.
- Be aware of the space in which you're interviewing. For example, using a space in a loud environment with lots of stimuli can make it difficult for survivors with disabilities to concentrate and could potentially be triggering.
- Allow time for the candidate to write down questions.
- Talk about the impact of the work and ask a question about what the candidate does for self-care. Let the candidate know what your agency does to support staff around this.
- Consider different ways of conducting the interview when appropriate for the type of job. Here is a think piece about what people with autism have to say about work interviews:

<http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/5524/4652>



Try it out

Choose one of your commonly asked interview questions. How could you break this question up to make it more understandable? (for example, is there more than one question asked per sentence? Could you rephrase it in a simpler way?)

How would you describe the impact of your work and importance of self-care to someone who is considering working at your organization?

“Reading that accommodations will be provided in the interview process lets me know that an organization values hiring and supporting people with disabilities.”

–Survivor with Disability



Reflect

What is one thing you learned about ableism in the hiring process?

“Recently, I had an interview held in, essentially, a large closet in the middle of a very active co-working area. I was directed to sit in a corner, and there were three individuals surrounding me. There was loud activity outside this closed box we were in, including laughter and dropping things. I felt cornered, vulnerable, almost no longer there.... When I answered questions, I felt defensive and insecure, and wound up saying things I knew I shouldn’t... trying to negotiate for safety, I guess, in retrospect.”
—Survivor with Disability

APPENDIX

This section includes the following documents:

- Essential job functions tool p23
- Template job description p25

Essential Job Functions Tool

The following questions can help determine whether the job functions listed in your job description are essential. This tool can be used to review existing job descriptions and when creating new job postings. First, look at the job description you have created for this position. Then, think through the following questions to determine if it should be listed as an essential function.

Position Title _____

1. Does the job exist to do this function?

Yes No

2. Would removing the function fundamentally change the job?

Yes No

3. What would the consequences be if this function were not performed or not performed on time?

4. Can other employees do this function if necessary?

Yes No

5. How much time is spent doing this function?

- o Less than 25% of time
- o Approximately 25% of time
- o Approximately 50% of time
- o Approximately 75% of time
- o Almost 100% of time

6. What critical skills, experience, training, education, and/or license are needed to perform this function?

7. Can the function be performed in a different way? If so, how?

Yes No

8. Is the setting in which the function is performed
(e.g. office, client's home) a critical part of the job?

Yes No

TEMPLATE Job Description

Organization Name

Date:

Indicate date Job Description was created, reviewed or updated.

Company description:

Company vision and mission:

Title of Position

Department

FLSA Status:

Exempt or non-exempt

Reports to _____

Position Type/Expected Hours of Work

- Full or part-time
- What hours someone works regularly
- Whether any times outside of regular work hour is required and if so, how much. E.g. Occasional evening and weekend work required.
- Whether this job would require any overtime and if so, how much. E.g. Overtime to meet deadlines may be required.

Salary Range

Job Description

Summary/Objective:

Provide a brief summary of the position here.

Essential Functions

Reasonable accommodations statement: e.g. To perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

- List in order of importance
- List regular duties and responsibilities.
- Be sure to use inclusive language, e.g. 'input data' instead of 'type in data'

Supervisory Responsibility

- Who will this position supervise? Position of staff, interns and/or volunteers.
- Briefly describe expectations around supervision at your agency. This can be a place to include language around providing support to staff around the impact of their work.

E.g. This position manages all employees of the department and is responsible for performance management, managing staff workload, professional development, and coaching and supporting employees, including supporting staff with vicarious trauma.

Required qualifications

Specific skills

Education.

Be sure to consider whether certain education requirements are absolutely required for the position. For example, many job templates show a requirement for a bachelor's degree, which may not actually be required for the position.

Experience.

Capping experience levels — for example, “Must have five to eight years of experience” — can isolate people that fall outside the range but might still be qualified. Instead, be more detailed about required skills instead of required years. For instance, say “Must have experience leading a team” or “Must have experience setting and managing a budget.”

Licensing requirements.

Work Environment

- Provide basic information about the work environment. E.g. Work in a busy office with many people coming and going.
- If the job requires being in the office full time, be clear about this.
- If there are remote options for this position, be clear about this.

Travel

- Amount of travel. E.g. Twice a month, weekly, etc.
- Location of travel. Local, state-wide, national, international
- It is recommended not to restrict the mode of travel in order to be inclusive. For example, consider whether a requirement to drive or have a car is actually needed or whether it's possible for the employee to travel by public transportation, cab and/or ride-share.

Statement of Commitment to Diversity

A straightforward, universal statement communicates that diversity is a priority that you're committed to. Include equal opportunity language and also consider adding language that is unique to your agency. This shows that your agency is thinking about diversity beyond just copying the generic equal opportunity language.

E.g. At _____, we don't just accept difference—we celebrate it and are always seeking to learn from diverse people in order to continually build a more inclusive work environment.

BARCC strives to represent the communities we serve and values the interest of diverse candidates. We are committed to equal employment opportunity regardless of race, color, ancestry, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, age, citizenship, marital status, disability, gender identity, veteran status, or any other status protected by applicable law.

Benefits

Benefits you can include may be:

- Insurance offerings such as health, dental, disability
- Sick time, vacation time, comp time, sick leave, parental leave, etc.
- Flex time, remote work options
- Here is a good place to talk about commitment to emotional impact of work on staff and an environment that supports staff's ability to take care of themselves.
- Other benefits unique to your organization which can include work culture, etc.

Signatures

(for job descriptions)

This job description has been approved by all levels of management:

Supervisor _____

HR _____

Employee signature below constitutes employee's understanding of the requirements, essential functions and duties of the position.

Employee _____

Date _____