Recruiting diverse candidate pools is a top challenge and priority for most organizations. But many organizations fail to take some basic steps to set themselves up to attract candidates with diverse backgrounds and experiences, especially when it comes to job descriptions.

A job description is often a candidate’s first exposure to the job, but also to organizational culture and values. The way a position is scoped, the words that are used to describe the ideal candidate, and the information that is—and is not—included in a job description can speak volumes to candidates.

When a job description is inclusive, it allows for a wide range of different people to more easily see themselves in a role and decide to apply. On the flip side, job descriptions that are not inclusive may limit candidate interest and make it that much harder to attract diverse candidates.

Below are four tips for ensuring that your job descriptions are as inclusive as possible.

**Pay attention to how gender shows up in your job description**

This includes the use of pronouns as well as “gender-coded” words. When it comes to pronouns, more progressive organizations are eliminating gendered pronouns altogether and are using “they” rather than “he or she” or “s/he.” Don’t worry, the world’s foremost grammarians, including The Washington Post style guide, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, and the Oxford Dictionary, all recognize the singular “they” as a gender-neutral pronoun, so you will not be violating any grammar rules! When you avoid gendered pronouns, you are sending a clear message to candidates that your organization is a place where LGBTQ employees and/or those who do not identify in a binary gender structure will be welcome.

In addition to paying attention to pronouns, focus on eliminating gender-coded words. These are words that are biased toward one gender. Examples of words that may be biased toward men include “rock star,” “guru,” “competitive,” and “dominant.” Words that may be biased toward women include “collaborative,” “patient,” and “supportive.” There is a body of research that shows that these adjectives really do influence someone’s decision to apply for a job, whether it’s consciously or subconsciously. There are two online tools that can useful for flagging gender-coded language: Gender Decoder for Job Ads, which is free, and Textio Hire, which must be purchased.

**Limit required skills to those that are truly “must haves”**

Men apply for a job when they meet only 60% of the qualifications, but women apply only if they meet 100% of them. This is an often-quoted statistic from an internal Hewlett-Packard report that underscores an important guideline for creating inclusive job descriptions: Don’t limit your potential candidate pool with long lists of required skills, experiences, degrees, and levels of seniority that are probably not truly necessary for success. Focus instead on performance objectives, what a person needs to be able to do and achieve in a role, in order to attract candidates with diverse backgrounds and skill sets.
Display a growth mindset
Make it clear that you welcome candidates who have the skills AND are still learning and growing. Check your language. Does it ask for candidates who have already done everything? Or candidates who are learners who are motivated to take on challenges? Organizations that are dedicated to growing their employees and offering opportunities for advancement are more likely to attract candidates from underrepresented groups.

Highlight your organization's commitment to an inclusive workplace
Mention your organization's commitment to DEI and any inclusive benefits your organization offers, such as parental leave or flexible work arrangements. Make sure that you have a robust equal opportunity statement that showcases your commitment to diversity and inclusion.