

# Differentiated Recruitment

Factsheets

APS recruitment

## Overview

Differentiated recruitment is the term used to describe a recruitment process where candidates are assessed using different assessment methods.

Differentiated recruitment may increase candidate diversity by providing candidates with flexibility to choose the assessment method they feel will give them the best opportunity to demonstrate their suitability. Differentiated recruitment can be used on its own or in conjunction with existing diversity measures, such as affirmative measures recruitment, to support recruiting diverse candidates into the APS.

Generally, there are two types of differentiated recruitment processes:

1. candidates are provided with the opportunity to choose from more than one assessment method during the recruitment process (such as a work sample test or a written response addressing a set of questions) or
2. different assessment options are used for different types of candidates (for example internal versus external candidates).

All decisions relating to engagement and promotion in the APS must be based on merit in accordance with the APS Employment Principles.

To be consistent with merit, a differentiated recruitment process must provide each candidate with equal opportunity to demonstrate their suitability for the role regardless of the method of assessment.

This means that each candidate must have the same opportunity to show that they have the skills for the role even if there are different types of assessment methods used.

Using different types of assessment methods must not result in bias or unfairness. The process must be applied fairly to all candidates and enable an assessment of the candidate’s suitability for the role comparative to all other candidates.

The success of differentiated recruitment is dependent on:

* ensuring the requirements of merit are met
* undertaking sufficient planning to identify what skills are being assessed and how they can be assessed equally through a variety of methods
* ensuring selection panels understand what is being assessed and how to ensure the process is applied fairly to all candidates and
* clearly documenting the planned approach and application of differentiated recruitment.

## When to use differentiated recruitment

Differentiated recruitment requires comprehensive planning to ensure it meets the requirements of merit and is run effectively.

Differentiated recruitment methods may not be appropriate for all recruitment processes. It may be more suitable in circumstances where an agency:

* is seeking to attract diverse candidates
* is expecting has a high volume of applications or
* frequently conducts recruitment to particular high-volume roles within the agency

and there is clear guidance for the selection panel on how to assess candidates using the different methods. This enables an agency to leverage the planning required.

Differentiated recruitment can often be perceived as more challenging than other recruitment processes that use identical assessment methods. This is because effective planning, assessment, record-keeping and communication practices need to be implemented. Where differentiated recruitment methods are used consistently, agencies can gain maximum leverage off the initial work required to achieve an effective differentiated recruitment process. When applied appropriately, agencies can competitively assess candidate suitability in a way that is fair in its application to each candidate.

## Why use differentiated recruitment?

Differentiated recruitment methods may help agencies to attract and recruit diverse candidates, as well as increase candidate engagement.

### Supports building a diverse workforce

The APS is committed to fostering inclusive workplaces that are reflective of the broader community. Providing candidates the opportunity to choose from more than one assessment method recognises that not all candidates are the same and offers candidates the opportunity to select the option that enables them to best demonstrate the work-related qualities of the role.

For example, when assessing candidates for a particular work-related quality (e.g. the ability to effectively manage competing priorities) agencies may offer candidates the option to complete a written response to a question about time management, to answer a question about time management in an interview or to undertake a short test to rank tasks in order of priority.

Differentiated recruitment can also be used for Affirmative Measures vacancies. However, more broadly, it is a way of offering alternative assessment options without a candidate expressly having to seek an adjustment or declare a disability.

### Increases candidate applications and engagement

Using differentiated recruitment methods may result in an increase in candidate applications as it provides candidates with the flexibility to choose the assessment method they feel will give them the best opportunity to demonstrate their suitability for the role. This can improve the candidate experience reflecting positively on the agency and assisting in attracting candidates. Greater candidate engagement can lead to improved outcomes by increasing the quality of the pool of candidates.

Differentiated recruitment practices may also promote the agency to candidates as a desirable and supportive workplace by acknowledging that work-related qualities can be demonstrated in a variety of ways and that the APS is a workplace where various strengths are acknowledged and fostered.

## Planning

To ensure differentiated recruitment processes are merit-based

* the aim of the selection process must be determined in advance and
* the assessment activities must be designed to ensure candidates are being assessed on the same work-related qualities.

Developing a clear plan and implementing consistent guidelines for the conduct of a differentiated recruitment process is vital.

During the planning stage, the agency should identify:

* what work-related skills and qualities are required for the role
* how these will be assessed through the selected assessment methods.

Proper planning will assist the agency to clearly explain to candidates what differentiated assessment methods will be used.

Each of the assessment methods selected must assess the same work-related qualities and not any additional skills or qualities. For example, if one candidate submits a written response and another submits a video response, the candidate who submitted the written response cannot be assessed on their written skills, only the substance of the information in the written response. It is also important that the nature of the assessment task does not change the underlying work-related quality that is being assessed or increase the level of difficulty for the candidate. For this reason, agencies may wish to keep the question or scenario similar but enable different assessment pathways.

## Assessing

In a differentiated recruitment process the assessment of candidates must meet the merit principle by:

* determining the relative suitability of the candidates to perform the duties of the role using a competitive selection process
* being based on the relationship between the candidates' work-related qualities and the work-related qualities genuinely required to perform the relevant duties of the role
* focusing on the relative capacity of the candidate to achieve outcomes related to the relevant duties of the role and
* being the primary consideration in making the employment decision.

In practice, this means that all candidates must be assessed in competition with each other regardless of the assessment method used and all candidates must be assessed before a merit list or merit pool is created, or any employment decisions are made.

Selection panels must have a common understanding of the work-related qualities required for the role and how the different assessment tools or methods measure and assess those qualities. This can be achieved by conducting initial briefing sessions with selection panel members, providing further information or guidance on the different types of assessment methods (and what each are assessing) as well as establishing guidelines or policies for undertaking assessment in differentiated recruitment to enhance consistency. Agencies may also wish to consider further strategies, such as additional training, to improve selection panel capability.

The overall aim of the assessment process should be to assess a candidate’s suitability to undertake the role. If a selection panel uses different assessment methods it should enable the selection panel to make an evidence-based assessment, which is documented in the selection report.

## Record-keeping

A merit-based selection process must be clearly documented, and decisions must be clear and defensible. Proper record keeping ensures transparency and accountability of decision making. Sound record-keeping practices support agencies if a selection process is subject to review.

Agencies that maintain appropriate record-keeping practices for differentiated recruitment processes can demonstrate how a particular process provides candidates with equal opportunity to demonstrate their claims against the selection criteria.

For example, the selection report should show how the different assessment methods have allowed the selection panel to make a comparison between candidates when assessing the particular skills and qualities required. Including a summary of assessment methods in the selection report is recommended. This should outline what assessment methods were used and the work-related qualities each selection tool was used to assess.

## Communication and candidate care

Sound communication and candidate care practices are an important element of any effective recruitment process. In a differentiated recruitment process, it is particularly important to keep candidates informed and be transparent about what to expect during the recruitment process.

A merit-based selection process requires that information about the selection process is readily available to candidates. The advertisement for the role should include clear and concise information on the assessment methods that will be used to assess the candidates.

Good communication and candidate care can also be a useful tool to dispel any negative perceptions about fairness, allowing an agency to be transparent about the way in which differentiated methods of assessment will be used to assess the same work-related qualities and how the process is consistent with the merit principle.

Agencies may also wish to consider broader internal communications or policies about how differentiated recruitment processes work to promote greater engagement amongst their work force. This may also include information on circumstances in which differentiated recruitment may not be used, to manage employee expectations about recruitment processes.

## Case Study

An agency is recruiting APS4 Service Officers. The Service Officers will work in the National Contact Centre responding to communications from the general public. The role requires:

* excellent written and verbal communication skills
* problem solving and decision making based on evidence and sound judgment and
* the ability to manage multiple tasks, meet deadlines and adhere to schedules.

The candidate application pack clearly sets out the process for candidates and how they can choose the assessment method(s) that they would like to undertake.

The selection panel have conducted an initial briefing and are clear on the work-related qualities required for the roles and how the assessment methods will assess these.

If RecruitAbility has been applied to this vacancy, those candidates who have opted into the RecruitAbility scheme declare they have disability. The panel can then assess those candidates who have selected RecruitAbility to determine if they meet the work-related qualities required for the role and those shortlisted can then be progressed to the next stage in the process.

Once shortlisting has been conducted candidates are advised that they have been shortlisted, and they can select their assessment method.

Candidates are offered the opportunity to select:

* a written test and a pre-recorded interview or
* a written test and a standard interview or
* a presentation (pre-recorded or live) to the panel that includes written slides or notes.

This combination of assessment methods allows the panel to assess both written and verbal skills. The test and presentation would be designed to assess problem-solving and multiple-task management skills.

## Further information

The APSC have developed [Recruitment factsheets, case studies and templates](https://www.apsc.gov.au/working-aps/information-aps-employment/guidance-and-information-recruitment/aps-recruitment-guide/recruitment-factsheets-case-studies-and-templates)  to support recruitment in the APS. Further information on recruitment in the APS more broadly is available in the [APS Recruitment Guide](https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-07/Recruitment%20in%20the%20APS.docx).