This tipsheet will serve as a guide for small employers who want to learn different strategies for age-proofing the hiring and recruitment process, and in turn attract a multigenerational pool of candidates.

Building age-inclusive hiring and recruitment process can be broken down into three distinct phases:

1. Devising an Age-Inclusive Hiring & Recruitment Strategy
2. Sourcing Age Diverse Candidates
3. Designing Age-Inclusive Interviews and Onboarding Processes

Devising an Age-Inclusive Hiring & Recruitment Strategy

Bias in the hiring and recruitment process can stymie diversity, equity, and inclusion, and efforts to retain talent. One of the first steps towards hiring a more age-diverse workforce is to fine-tune hiring and recruiting strategies to attract a multigenerational candidate pool. There are many steps that small employers can take to develop more inclusive hiring and recruitment strategies, and they needn’t be complicated.

Practical Guidance

1. Debias Your Job Descriptions

A good first step that employers can take to debias job descriptions is to review how they are written to ensure they don’t include language that may deter older workers from applying. For example, older workers may be discouraged from applying for jobs that look for ‘digital natives’ or ‘recent graduates’. It is best to avoid using age-specific descriptors in job postings. Also, when listing required amounts of experience, remove upper limits – say “at least 3 years” rather than “3-5 years.” Including an upper limit indicates you don’t want someone with more experience.

2. Remove Age Indicators from the Application Process

The application process can sometimes unintentionally reveal a lot about the age of job candidates. Examples include high school or college graduation dates, birthdates, or number of years of experience in each role. Older workers have years of invaluable experience and a unique skill set that comes with long careers. Asking workers to share this information prior to accepting an offer can give away hints about age and can open up the interview process to unconscious age bias. To address this, employers can omit age indicators from their application process.
3. Expand Your Evaluation Criteria to Include Relevant Credentials as Proof of Skills

As the demand for specific skills continues to shift with technological advances, traditional qualifications such as a college degree aren’t always the default. Including relevant credentials in your evaluation criteria can both expand the talent pool and expand economic opportunity for non-traditional candidates.

Sourcing Age-diverse Candidates

Another way that small employers can create more age-diverse workplaces is by diversifying sourcing strategies. There are several ‘light lift’ strategies to recruit a more age-diverse candidate pool, from posting to age-diverse job boards to hiring and promoting from within the business.

Practical Guidance

1. Diversify Your Sourcing Strategies

Including age as a conscious element of diversity as you source candidates is a crucial first step towards creating a more age-diverse workforce. Employers should consider internal and external strategies for sourcing:

**Internal Strategies** can include promoting from within, advertising open positions to workers of all ages, and providing learning and development opportunities to prepare all workers for promotions. Keep an open mind about how older workers might pivot into different roles and offer transition support if they are interested. Often experienced workers bring a wealth of soft skills and specialized knowledge to newer roles you are having trouble filling.

**External Strategies** can include posting job openings to age diverse job boards (such as the AARP Job Board), offering flexible ‘return to work’ programs for workers who’ve taken a temporary hiatus from the workforce, and including age as a measure of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion efforts. Encourage your older workers to refer candidates from their networks for open positions, and have them share information on their LinkedIn or other professional profiles.

**Setting Goals and Objectives for Age Diverse Hiring** can help small employers recruit more age-diverse candidates. Setting goals can be a great way to track how many age-diverse candidates are interacted with, hired, and successfully onboarded.

2. Build an Inclusive Brand

Employers should take steps to signal to candidates that they welcome workers of all ages. Making your company stand out as an age-diverse employer can result in a candidate pool of strong and desirable talent. To send this message, employers can take simple steps, such as creating an equal opportunity hiring statement. Most employers post this statement at the end of a job application or posting. They can also build a brand around age inclusivity through the use of age inclusive imagery or by aligning themselves with programs such as the AARP Employer Pledge Program. Lastly, employers should include on their websites a diversity statement that is inclusive of age.
Designing Age-Inclusive Interviews and Onboarding Processes

Small employers should follow up age-inclusive recruiting processes with age-inclusive interviews and onboarding. For many small employers, the interview and onboarding processes are the first time someone closely interacts with their business, and it is important that they feel welcome.

Practical Guidance

1. Ask Questions that are Relevant to the Role

Interviews can be as casual or formal as the employer chooses, but either way, employers should only ask questions related to the candidate’s role. Avoid questions that could indicate age, such as college graduation dates or how many years one has been in the workforce. If you conduct panel interviews or interviews with multiple people, include workers of different ages on the panel where possible.

2. Provide All New Hires with the Same Onboarding

While some roles will require specialized training, employers should be sure to provide all new hires with the same onboarding and introduction to the business. This way, new hires will feel welcomed and have the reassurance that all employees have had similar experiences. If you use a buddy system to help acclimate new hires, consider pairing people of different ages – interactions across generations can help break down ageist attitudes.

3. Get Feedback

After new hires have completed the interview and onboarding process, provide the opportunity for them to share their feedback and ideas. They may have picked up on unconscious biases and could offer solutions, or they may have suggestions for further prompting age inclusivity in the recruitment, interviewing and onboarding processes.

Small employers are well-positioned to create age-inclusive workplaces in the same way they have championed other important measures of diversity. Many small businesses attract workers of all ages, from teenagers looking for their first job to older workers looking to return from retirement. That is why it’s important to holistically practice age inclusivity through the hiring and recruitment process.

AARP offers several resources for small employers, from the AARP Employer Pledge Program to the recently launched Small Business Resource Center. Both of these resources offer guidance for employers as it relates to age inclusivity and growing and scaling your business.