HR TIP SHEET
Applicant Screening

Applicant screening involves the initial sorting through of applications to determine which individuals are qualified to move on to the next phase of the recruitment process. The objective of screening is to eliminate applicants that are poorly suited to the position and retain only the best potential candidates. This is achieved by evaluating applicants' resumes against the posted requirements for the job.

Why is applicant screening important?

■ Applicant screening can save an organization a substantial amount of time and money. Pre-screening is used to minimize costs by reducing the number of people assessed by more expensive means such as interviews and technical skills tests.

■ Pre-screening potential candidates can help determine if the applicant:
 – Possesses the required knowledge, skills, experience and behavioural / technical competencies
 – Expects a salary that is out of the organization's range
 – Retains values and expectations that are aligned with those of the organization.

■ Neglecting to utilize initial assessment methods may result in interviewing a variety of unqualified candidates, wasting both the time and resources of the selection committee.

Initial assessment methods typically used to screen candidates include:

■ Resumes and cover letters

■ Application blanks

■ Pre-screening phone interviews

■ Reference and background checks

■ Applicant testing

For fair and equitable screening, it is important to evaluate all of the resumes / application blanks that are received according to the following method:

1. Re-read the job description and list of essential criteria to ensure it is fresh in mind when analyzing the resume / application blank

2. Read all the resumes / application blanks and sort them into three different groups:
 A. Very close to the desired profile
 B. Quite close to the desired profile
 C. Not relevant to the job posting

3. Evaluate the resumes / application blanks in group A and B to confirm their qualifications relative to the job posting.

Once the most qualified applicants have been identified they should be contacted for a pre-screening phone interview. Group A should be contacted first and Group B should be contacted if there are an insufficient number of candidates in Group A. Group C, and all other applicants who were not selected, should receive a letter informing them they were not selected to move on in the staffing process and to encourage them to maintain interest in the organization.

Pre-screening phone interviews can further determine if the applicant possesses the required qualifications, further eliminate any person / job mismatches, and help verify the accuracy of the information provided in the applicant's resume / application blank.

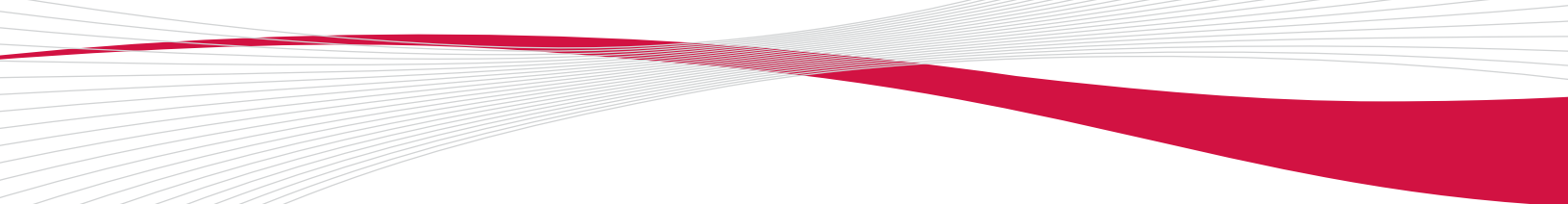## Common misleading information found in resumes, cover letters, and application blanks include:

■ Inflated titles

■ Inaccurate dates to cover up job hopping and employment gaps

■ Half finished degrees; inflated education

■ Inflated salaries

■ Inflated accomplishments

■ Inaccurate or enlarged roles and responsibilities

Other options for applicant screening include reference / background checks and applicant testing. References tend to be more common for applicants that are farther along in the recruitment process. They can be time consuming, but if conducted properly provide first hand information on the candidate's skill, experience, behavioural and technical competencies in a work setting.

A significant concern with reference checks is the reluctance of organizations to give out the requested information because they fear a law suit on grounds invasion of privacy or defamation of character. Employers should request the applicant's permission to contact their references before proceeding with reference checks. It is critical that questions be job related and that the same information is asked about all applicants.

On the other hand applicant testing, using Employment Assessment tools, provides organizations with an opportunity to screen for knowledge, personalities, past behaviours, and job fit. Employment Assessment tools can save organizations valuable time and money. Many companies have turned to this pre-interview applicant screening process as a way to avoid making a poor hiring decision. There are many types of tests available ranging from pen and paper tests, to web based systems complete with charts and graphs.

Regardless of which method of applicant screening you use, clear communication with both the successful and unsuccessful applicants is required.

For more tools and tips on how to screen your ICT human resources, go to the Information and Communications Technology Council website **www.ictc-ctic.ca** and inquire about their HR tools to help you manage your ICT human resources more effectively. Look for the *ICT Competency Profiles framework* to inform you of the competencies needed for 36 ICT work streams or ask about their latest version of the *Human Resources Management Guide.*