



Inclusive Casting Guidelines

CMA DEI Committee | May 2023

Casting is the process of hiring key, supporting and background talent for a role and is therefore important to make conscious choices about representing the diversity of our communities. The following are guidelines for inclusive casting to authentically subvert stereotypes, actively avoid microaggressions and intentionally include people who identify as racialized, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, women, people with disabilities and beyond.

Cast for the role, not the actor

When creating specs for casting agents, create a description of the character or role, not the actor. Avoid starting with the appearance, describing your ideal actor, reverting to stereotypes or casting people who only look or sound like you.

- Specify if the casting is open to all ethnicities. List all who may attend rather than being generic.
- Specify gender only if needed and include those who identify as non-binary.
- Keep age as broad as possible, e.g., adult, child or looks like 40-70 year-old.
- Specify role, e.g., mother, gardener, home chef, or grandparent.
- Describe character traits, e.g., gregarious, stern or loving.
- List key actions, e.g., swimming, dog walking or assembling furniture.
- List skills, if required, e.g., screwing in a wall plug.
- Indicate that you are willing to meet any special accommodations for those who need them.

Inclusive language

When creating language for castings, ask a vital question: Is identifying ethnicity, gender, ability, age or physical characteristics necessary to describing the character/role?

When casting a role that can be played by an actor that doesn't need specific requirements, make it clear in the casting notice that you want to see actors of all backgrounds. List and call them out intentionally so that all individuals feel invited and confident to step forward.

Race and Ethnicity

Instead of using a term like "ethnically ambiguous" or "mixed race," list the ethnicities you want to include. For example: "working mom, Caucasian, Hispanic, South Asian or Black."

Use proper terms for naming ethnicities. For instance, avoid "LatinX" and use "Hispanic". When someone has a multiracial background, it can be triggering to say you're not "full <insert race/ethnicity> and therefore unable to represent that community." If someone is partly Indigenous, they are Indigenous. If someone is partly Asian, they are Asian.

Gender identity	When casting roles that are not gender-specific, list "all genders" or "any gender identity" instead of "male" or "female." If there is a specific gender you are looking for, say "male-identifying," "female-identifying," or "gender non-conforming." If looking for an actor who identifies with they/them pronouns, consider that many are not in a safe space to announce their pronouns openly.
Ability	Specify all abilities and acknowledge the necessary actions or skills so people can self-select the roles they feel fit to pursue. Encourage people with disabilities to get in touch before the casting so their accommodation needs can be met during their audition.
Age	Consider broadening age ranges significantly. What benefit does the casting have by limiting it to "40-60 years old. Would an 80-year-old be just as capable and exciting? Indicate that you are looking for someone who "looks like" they're of a certain age, rather than their actual age.

When to get specific and how

Providing context about why connecting with a specific target audience is essential. There are times when there is a need to specify talent in a shoot, for example for highly targeted products or when casting for a particular holiday such as Diwali. Use straightforward language so people understand the "why" in each case. This will help them understand the ask within the brand's broader commitment to diversity.

- Specify what's required and leave everything else as open as possible.
- Use inclusive and respectful language.
- Continue to focus on the role and not the actor for your general description of what's needed.

Conclusion

To summarize, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you representing real Canadians in all their diverse forms?
- Does your casting brief define the role, not the actor?
- Are your casting specs as broad as possible?
- If you require specific talent, have you used inclusive language and shared the context for this requirement?
- Are you ensuring your casting reflects your brand's values?
- Have you reviewed the current request against your last few shoots to ensure you are creating a diverse body of work?

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