



SUSTAINABILITY IN RECRUITMENT GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

Sustainable recruitment is the practice of attracting, assessing, and selecting talent in a way that supports long-term organisational health, social impact, and environmental responsibility. For FuturePlus members, it is closely tied to your Leadership and Workforce indicators, and works best when grounded in a strong DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) lens.

This guide outlines:

- How to apply a DEI lens to your recruitment strategy
- What to look for when hiring leaders and board members committed to sustainability
- Additional sustainable hiring practices relevant to global SMEs

EMBEDDING A DEI LENS IN YOUR TALENT ACQUISITION STRATEGY

Building diverse and inclusive teams is important because it brings together a wider range of perspectives, experiences, and problem-solving approaches, driving better decision-making, sparking innovation, and helping organisations understand and serve their customers more effectively. When people feel valued, respected, and able to contribute authentically, engagement and retention improve, creating stronger teams and leading to better business & social outcomes.

Start with internal and external understanding. A DEI-informed hiring strategy must be grounded in the lived experience of your workforce and evidence from your recruitment data. Before adjusting your hiring processes, understand:

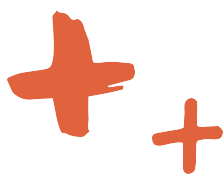
- Current employee sentiment about inclusion and barriers to progression (via survey).
- Where achievable, external perceptions of your organisation from prospective applicants and local communities (via stakeholder survey or online platforms such as Glass Door).
- Your existing metrics on diverse representation, turnover, and candidate pool diversity.

Build foundational structures:

- Establish a DEI committee or Green Team, with visible senior sponsorship and representation across identities and job levels.
- Train all hiring managers on bias, inclusive communication, and interview practices.

Implement inclusive hiring practices:

- Expand talent pipelines by partnering with community groups, diverse professional networks, universities, colleges, and NGOs.
- Use bias-free, skills-based job descriptions and ensure essential criteria are truly essential.
- Use anonymous or blind screening tools where possible.



Review progress and maintain transparency:

- Communicate internally and externally about your DEI values and progress.
- Regularly assess policy effectiveness, employee sentiment, and representation.
- Report progress to leadership and, where appropriate, publicly.

RECRUITING LEADERSHIP & BOARD TALENT WITH SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENT

Hiring senior leaders is one of the highest-impact sustainability interventions an organisation can make. Boards and executives set the tone at a governance level, allocate resources, and determine how deeply ESG values become operational reality.

COMPETENCIES AND VALUES TO LOOK FOR

Demonstrable personal commitment to sustainability

- Sustainability-related qualifications or professional certifications.
- Evidence of sustainability advocacy or action in previous roles.
- Involvement in initiatives such as circular economy projects, community engagement, responsible supply-chain development, environmental policies, DEI initiatives, etc.
- Membership in sustainability-focused groups, networks, or professional bodies.

Experience integrating ESG into business strategy

Ideal candidates should be able to articulate how they have:

- Embedded sustainability into KPIs, budgets, or commercial strategy.
- Balanced short-term operational needs with long-term sustainability goals.
- Used ESG performance as a driver for innovation, risk mitigation, or market differentiation.

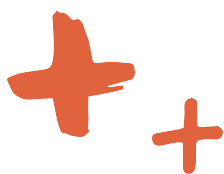
Inclusive, equitable leadership behaviours to look for

- Experience building diverse and inclusive teams.
- Track record of mentoring or sponsoring underrepresented talent.
- Past decisions showing fairness, transparency, and accountability

Systems thinking and long-term orientation

Sustainability-aligned leaders:

- Think long-term, beyond single quarters or financial cycles.
- Understand interconnected systems (environmental, social, economic).
- Make decisions with consideration for multiple stakeholders, including communities and the planet.



DUE-DILIGENCE ACTIONS

When conducting due diligence on senior candidates, start by examining their sustainability track record through public statements, reference checks, past reporting, and any ESG-linked performance indicators. Request concrete case studies or examples where they personally initiated or led meaningful sustainability efforts, and look for clear evidence of impact rather than high-level claims. It's also helpful to explore their professional network and affiliations. Memberships in sustainability institutes, community organisations, or climate-focused groups can signal genuine engagement rather than superficial interest.

During interviews and interactions, pay attention to how candidates communicate and behave. Leaders with strong sustainability and DEI values typically demonstrate inclusive language, comfort with complexity, and a willingness to acknowledge trade-offs and uncertainty. Look for humility, accountability, and awareness of bias. These behavioural cues are often more revealing than prepared answers and help you assess whether a candidate will authentically champion sustainable and equitable practices at the highest level.

SUSTAINABLE RECRUITMENT PRACTICES FOR GLOBAL SMES

PRIORITISE LOCAL HIRING WHERE POSSIBLE

- Supports community well-being and reduces travel-related emissions.
- Where roles can be distributed, offer flexible, hybrid, or remote options that widen your talent pool.

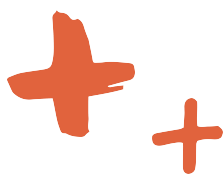
REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF HIRING PROCESSES

- Conduct digital-first interviews
- Avoid unnecessary travel for candidates
- Use sustainable promotional materials and digital documentation

CHOOSE RECRUITMENT PARTNERS WHO ALIGN WITH YOUR VALUES

Ask agencies or search partners:

- What is your DEI performance?
- What steps do you take to reduce bias in shortlisting?
- Do you have sustainability or ethical sourcing policies?



EVALUATE JOB DESIGN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

- Does the role meaningfully contribute to your sustainability strategy?
- Can responsibilities be structured to promote employee well-being, manageable workloads, and long-term retention?
- Are there opportunities to integrate sustainability outcomes into performance reviews?

PROVIDE FAIR, SAFE, AND EQUITABLE EMPLOYMENT GLOBALLY

For SMEs operating internationally:

- Align hiring with international labour standards
- Ensure roles pay living wages (not only minimum wages)
- Offer equal opportunity regardless of geography, nationality, or employment type
- Build policies that protect workers in regions vulnerable to instability or climate impacts

MEASURING SUCCESS

Track metrics such as:

- Diversity of candidate pools
- DEI representation in shortlists and senior appointments
- Retention and engagement rates across different demographic groups
- Sustainability knowledge/competency levels among senior leadership
- Reduction in recruitment-related emissions
- Candidate experience and perceptions of fairness

Consistent measurement ensures your recruitment system evolves as your sustainability goals mature.

NEED MORE HELP?

When SMEs embed DEI into their talent acquisition systems and intentionally seek leaders with authentic sustainability commitment, they set the stage for organisational resilience, innovation, and meaningful impact.

If you'd like more information on how our FuturePlus Advisors or Consultancy team can help, contact us at: info@future-plus.co.uk

