

Employment Advocacy Strategy

The Canadian Stuttering Association's *Employment Advocacy Strategy* provides some context, a vision, theory of change, and missions to guide our actions to support people who stutter and our allies in the workplace.

Introduction

The [Canadian Stuttering Association](#) is a national, volunteer-driven, not-for-profit organization that promotes awareness and understanding of stuttering and provides support and resources for people who stutter, their families and allies, with a view to helping persons who stutter live as effectively as possible with their stutter and to achieve their full personal and professional potential.

The challenge

Approximately one to three percent of adults stutter and too many make up an untapped pool of skilled and capable talent due to:

- False stereotypes and misperceptions;
- Self and social stigma;
- Disabling work practices, processes, and structures; and,
- Limited job and career growth opportunities.

For example, people who stutter may be wrongly perceived as nervous, disengaged, or less competent and capable communicators.

Self and social pressure to be fluent can make speaking up during meetings, being interviewed, or delivering presentations challenging. Employees who stutter may attempt hiding it or avoid speaking situations altogether due to the uncertainty of what others might think or fear of judgement.

"Effective oral communication skills required" on job postings can be assumed to mean efficient and fluent speech by hiring managers and people who stutter themselves. Strong candidates who stutter can be consciously or unconsciously screened out. They may even screen themselves out.

Workplace structures and procedures, like rigid time constraints for presentations and interviews, or a lack of options to provide feedback beyond speaking up during a meeting, assume that everyone has fluent speech and the same access to time.

People who stutter can also be subject to microaggressions at work, like colleagues talking over them or finishing their sentences. In worse case scenarios, people who stutter are openly mocked, discouraged from taking on roles and career development opportunities, or even let go due to their stuttering.

The opportunity

Stuttering is a different way of speaking. It is **not** a reflection of intelligence, nervousness, or an inability to communicate.

In fact, people who stutter are bringing sought after attributes into their work that enable effective communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, like:

- Active listening;
- Empathy;
- Creativity;
- Vulnerability; and,
- Resiliency.

There are many people who stutter employed in an impressive variety of jobs and roles across all sectors in Canada, including leadership positions. They're demonstrating that people who stutter are as skilled, driven, and capable as our fellow colleagues who speak fluently in the workplace.

Progressive employers, talent teams, and employees are intentionally making their workplaces and ways of working more accessible through adjustments to recruitment, development, and organizational and team practices.

When combined with inclusive workplace structures and practices where it is okay to be and sound different, people who stutter can thrive.

Together, we can create better work opportunities and experiences for people who stutter. We can take practical actions, individually and collectively, that transform the world of work so everyone who stutters thrives at work, and organisations and allies across all sectors benefit from our talents and strengths.

Our employment advocacy vision

A Canada where everyone who stutters thrives at work, and organisations and allies across all sectors benefit from our talents and strengths.

Our theory of change

Realizing our vision is a complex challenge that will require systemic and behavioural changes within and across individuals, teams, organizations, and society. Our theory of change will guide our actions, monitoring, and learning as we go. We'll update and continuously improve it as we engage people who stutter, our allies, and potential allies.

Intentions and desired outcomes

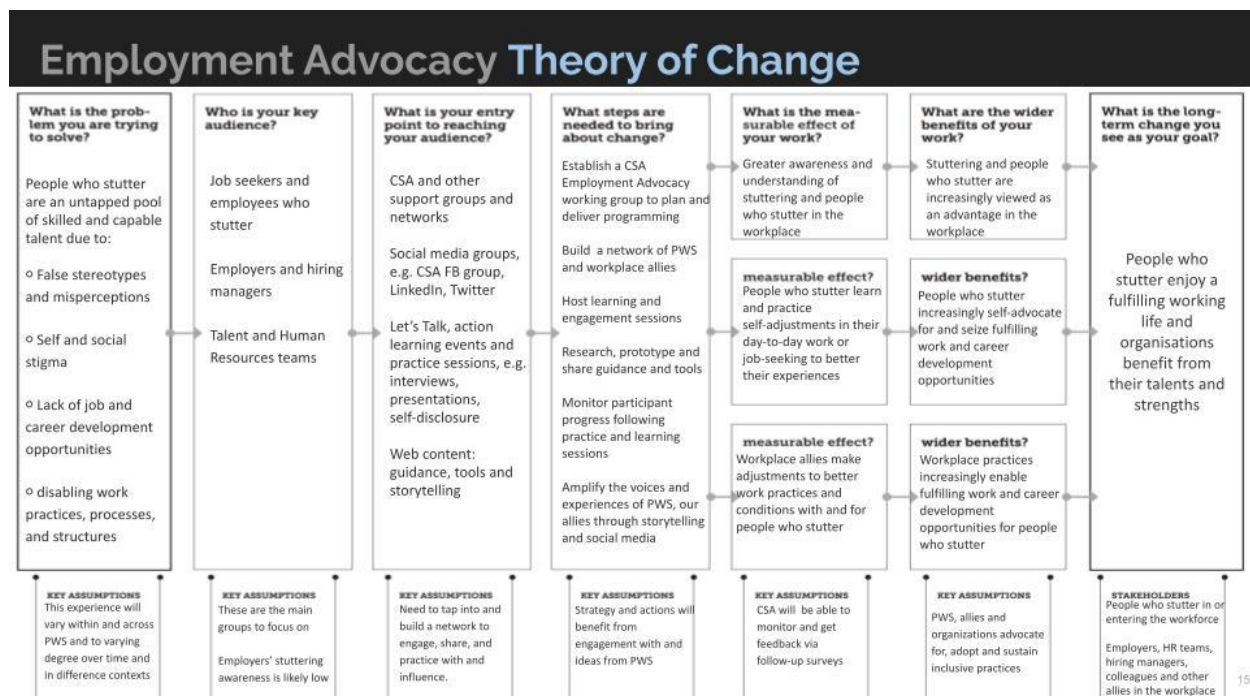
Our intention is to support people who stutter and our allies to enable better work life experiences and outcomes, such as:

- Greater awareness and understanding of stuttering and people who stutter in the workplace;
- People who stutter learn and practice self-adjustments to better their job-seeking or day-to-day work experiences; and,
- Workplace attitudes shift and stuttering is increasingly viewed as an advantage in the workplace.

We anticipate that people and organizations who enable the above experiences and outcomes will benefit from the following over time:

- Workplace allies make adjustments to better workplace practices, structures, and conditions with and for people who stutter (e.g. inclusive and accessible recruitment, development and/or on-the-job practices and structures);
- Job seekers and employees who stutter increasingly seize fulfilling work and career development opportunities; and,
- Workplace practices increasingly enable fulfilling work and career development opportunities for people who stutter.

And, ultimately, through the realization of those benefits, *people who stutter will enjoy a fulfilling working life and organisations will benefit from their talents and strengths.*



See also 'Where do I start as a person who stutters at work or as an ally?' below (pp. 9-10).

How do we get there?

The CSA's Employment Advocacy programming is in its early phases of development, but we're not starting from scratch. We know what it is like to speak differently and the challenges that can come with stuttering at work. We also know better work opportunities and experiences are possible. We know what it feels like to be truly empowered and thrive

on-the-job. It can be a difficult journey with ups and downs. That's why the CSA is here and with you on that journey.

This strategy and our proposed programming and service offerings below also includes engagement with YOU - job seekers and those in the workplace who stutter, our existing allies, and potential allies to inform and continuously improve CSA resources and tools, practice sessions, and learning events.

We're also grateful for our friends in stuttering associations, groups and networks around the world doing amazing work to support job seekers and employees who stutter, and our allies in the workplace, like:

- The National Stuttering Association's [We Stutter @ Work](#):
 - [Practice interviews](#); [webinars](#) and [conference](#); [career profiles](#); [resources for employers](#), including [Stuttering in the Workplace](#) [video] and [Stuttering: What Employers Should Know](#) [PDF]
- The British Stammering Association (aka Stamma)'s [Get Support At Work](#):
 - [Job hunting and interviews](#); [stammering at work](#); [reasonable adjustments](#); [bullying at work](#); [information for employers](#), including HR professionals and recruiters
- [StammeringLaw](#): UK disability discrimination law and stammering/stuttering
 - [Disability equality law and stammering](#); [reasonable adjustments](#); [employment](#); [services and accessibility](#); [sources of help and advice](#)
- [50 Million Voices](#):
 - Practice interview events; Best-practice recruitment workshops; Mentoring for employees who stutter
- The World Stuttering Network's [resources](#):
 - [Support Group Handbook](#) [PDF]

The CSA's employment advocacy missions

The CSA has drafted the following missions to guide our Employment Advocacy program and related service offerings. Consider them as starting points to get us moving in the direction we want to go and, in some cases, already heading.

The *proposed* actions are subject to prioritization and change considering:

- Input from the CSA Board, volunteers, and members;
- Learning with and from YOU - people who stutter and our colleagues at work;
- Our capacity to deliver; and,
- Our progress, learning, and pivots as we go.

Mission 1: Share and seek feedback on our intentions and where we're heading

Proposed actions:

- Share and call for input on the *CSA Employment Advocacy Strategy* via the CSA website;
- Share the *CSA Employment Advocacy Strategy* with the **CSA Board** for review and asynchronous input, and then present it to members for discussion and direct input;
- Share the *CSA Employment Advocacy Strategy* with **CSA volunteers** for review and input, and invite to get involved;
- Host and present the *CSA Employment Advocacy Strategy* to **CSA volunteers** for discussion and invite them to join the **CSA Employment Advocacy Working Group** to help refine and implement our strategy.
- Share the *CSA Employment Advocacy Strategy* with counterparts at the **NSA, Stamma, 50 Million Voices**, and **WSN**, and seek their feedback and advice.

Mission 2: Amplify the voices of people who stutter in the workplace and share our experiences at work

Proposed actions:

- Conduct **user research to understand and amplify the experiences and needs of people who stutter** and entering or already in the workforce, and to identify and prioritize guidance and support;
 - Incorporate **check-ins** or **pulse checks** before and after **Let's Talk**, learning sessions, and other events.
 - Create an **online survey** and/or **crowdsource a 'Stuttering at Work' diary study** to surface stuttering at work experiences and needs.
 - Conduct a scan of **existing primary and/or secondary research** and summarize insights related to topics like: stuttering and experiences of people who stutter in the workplace, and/or inclusive and accessible practices and ways of working with and for people who stutter.
- Crowdfsource, write and publish **blogs** and **career profiles**, including to:
 - Write a blog on the **CSA Employment Advocacy initiative and strategy** and **invite feedback**, and share progress updates as we implement it;
 - Share experiences and insights from **Let's Talk** and other action learning sessions and events, including **2021 CSA Virtual Conference** sessions;
 - Repurpose and adapt the NSA's **Career Profile Submission web form** and invite CSA volunteers, CSA members, and CSA Stuttering at Work Network members, and others who stutter to submit their career profiles to be shared on the CSA website. Include an option for people who stutter to nominate an ally at work to be profiled.

Mission 3: Share and continuously improve guidance and tools, and create spaces and opportunities for learning and practice

Proposed actions:

- Create the **Stuttering at Work landing page and structure** on the CSA website to publish resources and tools

For job-seekers and people who stutter at work:

- Create and share tested **guidance, tools and resources**, including from other stuttering associations, groups and networks, if and when applicable to the Canadian context.
 - For example, prepare and publish **practice interview guidance** on the CSA website, and offer practice interviews to CSA members and others who stutter.

For employers, HR teams and potential allies:

- Create, share and/or adapt tested **guidance, tools and resources**, including from other stuttering associations, if and when applicable to the Canadian context.
 - For example, prepare and publish guidance on **inclusive and accessible recruitment and development practices** for people who stutter.

For job seekers and employees who stutter, and potential allies:

- For every resource or tool we share, include **ways for people to reach out and connect with someone** with shared or similar experiences and intentions for peer-to-peer learning and support (see related actions under mission 4)
- Convene the **CSA Employment Advocacy Working Group** to generate ideas for CSA *Let's Talk* and other action learning sessions:
 - Plan and host the first **Stuttering at Work Let's Talk event** in September 2021;
 - Plan and (co)host 1-2 Stuttering at Work sessions at the **2021 CSA Virtual Conference** in November 2021;

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- Call out for other **Stuttering at Work-related presenters** for the 2021 CSA Virtual Conference in November 2021.
 - Establish **indicators and methods to collect data** related to our theory of change outcomes and service offerings, and report on progress.

Mission 4: **Grow our CSA Stuttering at Work Network**

- Convene the **CSA Employment Advocacy Working Group** to generate ideas for establishing and growing a **CSA Stuttering at Work Network**, including ways to reach and engage people who stutter at work and potential allies in workplaces across Canada.
- Establish a **peer-to-peer support service** for job seekers and employees who stutter, and employers and talent/HR teams who want to make their workplaces and practices more accessible and inclusive.
- Prioritize and engage employers and other potential allies in the workplace to join the **CSA Stuttering at Work Network**, and offer guidance on hiring and developing people who stutter as it gets created.
- Promote Employment Advocacy/Stuttering at Work events and share content and blogs via social media, including CSA Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn accounts.
- Set up a **CSA Stuttering at Work LinkedIn group** and encourage CSA Board, volunteers, members, and CSA Stuttering at Work Network members to join.

Where do I start as a person who stutters at work or as an ally?

Whether you're a person who stutters and seeking employment or already in an established career, or a potential ally who enables the recruitment, development, and on-the-job experiences of employees who stutter, the CSA anticipates that achieving "better" will require all of us to put the following principles into practice, individually and collectively:

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- **Start from wherever you are**

As a person who stutters, or, as an ally, what are your current work life experiences and practices related to stuttering at work?

- **Consider and identify 'what's possible from here' to make things better**

Reflect on what “better” means to you and in relation to your employment experiences.

What practical action(s) might you take in your context and with the intention of either improving your work experiences as someone who stutters, or, if you're an ally, the experiences of those who stutter at work?

Identify steps that are within and adjacent to your comfort zone, and ones that are beyond it that you want to move towards and take over time.

- **Take small, practical steps in the direction towards better**

Introduce a new practice that might help you as a person who stutters in the workplace, or, if you're an ally, someone who stutters at work.

Small is beautiful. Start moving in the direction you want to go incrementally.

- **Monitor and reflect on the results of your efforts**

Did your step(s) make your work-related experience better? If you're an ally, did it improve the work experience of someone who stutters?

Reflect on the experience, what went well, and what you might do differently next time.

- **Continue doing what makes things better in your context and dampen what doesn't**

If it helps, continue doing it! If it doesn't, consider what you learned from trying and either adapt what you did or try different adjustments and movements towards the direction you want to go.

- **Reflect on and repeat the process, if and as needed**

Reflect on where you're at, and the progress you've made.

When you're up for it and if needed, consider stretching into more challenging work situations to improve your career development and work experiences as someone who stutters, or as an ally supporting someone at work who stutters.

Repeat. 😊

Thanks for reading our CSA Employment Advocacy Strategy!

We need your engagement, input, and action!

Ways to get involved or contribute as a job seeker, employee, and/or leader who stutters, or as an ally of people who stutter at work:

- Submit input and ideas on this CSA Employment Advocacy Strategy by sharing a comment directly in the doc or send ideas and input to john.kenney@stutter.ca.
- Join the CSA Stuttering at Work network distribution list by getting in touch with john.kenney@stutter.ca.
- Become a CSA volunteer and join the Employment Advocacy working group to plan and coordinate events and web content. If you're already a volunteer, get in touch with john.kenney@stutter.ca to join the working group;
- [Join the CSA as a member](#) and stay tuned for events, action learning events, and updates!
- [Make a donation to the CSA!](#)