A resource guide on hiring in a justice-oriented research space

Based on practices and tools from CLEAR lab

CLEAR

Created by

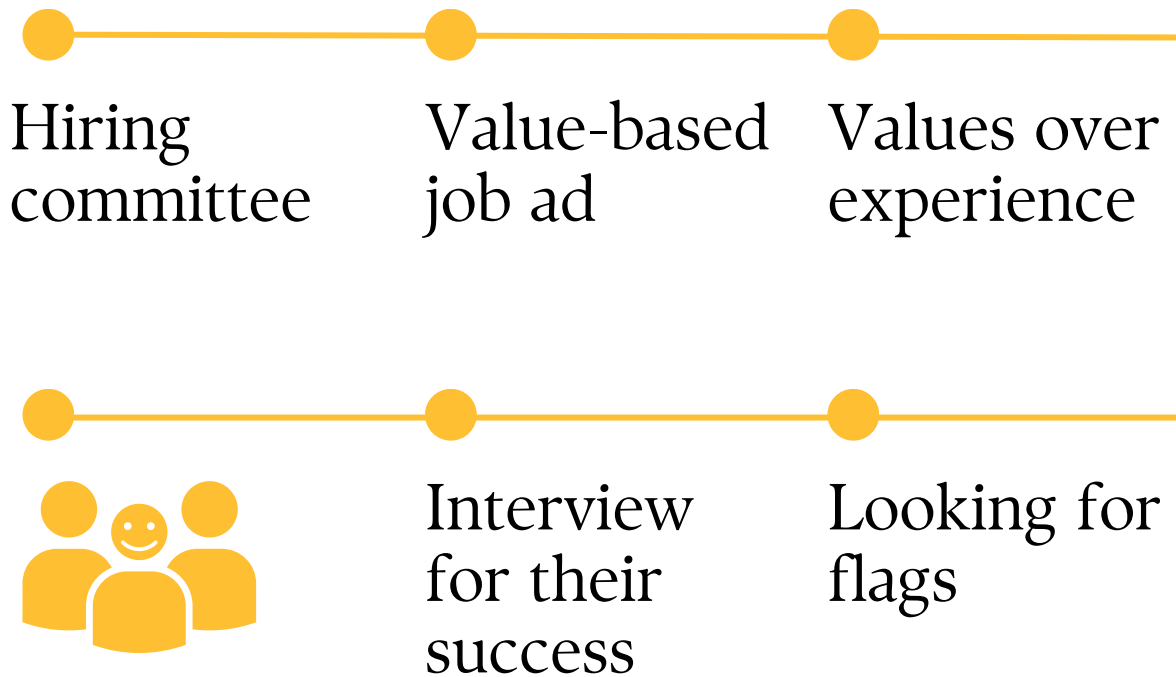Max Liboiron, Jess Melvin, and Melissa Morgan

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Table of Contents

Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR) does science in a way that foregrounds humility, accountability, collectivity and good Land relations. Over time, we've become a safer space for people who are often pushed out of science. That means our "inclusive" lab must also be stringently *exclusive*, making sure our lab members are safe and we are accountable to our partners and co-research communities.

While it may seem harsh or uncomfortable to judge people who apply to the lab, we've learned the hard way that "excluding well" is essential to a strong lab culture, to lab values, and is paramount in our accountabilities to existing labmates. We hope this guide, largely based on our past mistakes, helps you to do the same.

Hiring principles

Hiring committee

Value-based job ad

Values over experience

Interview for their success

Looking for flags

Hiring committee

We've learned that it's best to have more than one person involved in hiring decisions, particularly when interviewers are drawn from more than one type of position in the lab. We tend to have at least the lab director/PI and lab manager. Not only does it offer useful training to those with less experience hiring, but people at different levels of lab management have different responsibilities in the day-to-day running of the lab and may notice things in an application that others do not. We compile our reviews of applications together so that everyone on the hiring board can see how our interpretation of applications may differ, and talk about why that might be. The next page shows a Google sheets template we use.

This is a standard Google Sheet template. When we review an applicant, each person on the committee puts their notes in the Interview Notes section, and then colour codes their overall evaluation: Green for "yes, I would recommend an interview," yellow for "I have some issues, questions, or uncertainty," and red for "there is a problem here and I do not recommend them for an interview." More on our colour coding and "flags" in a future section.

A spreadsheet like this also helps us stay organized so all applicants are properly reviewed, informed of decisions, and no one falls through the cracks.

Recruitment_applicants1

Applicant	Stage	Position	Cover letter	Resume	Score	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
Name	Hire	position 1	File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
Name	Interviewing	position 2	File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
Name	Decision needed	position 2	File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
Name	No hire	position 3	File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
Name		position 3	File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
Name			File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
Name			File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
Name			File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
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Name			File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
Name			File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
Name			File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3
Name			File	File	☆☆☆☆☆	Notes- interviewer 1	Notes- interviewer 2	Notes- interviewer 3

Value-based job ad

Job ads are crucial for making strong hires for a value-based lab culture. We put our values in the ad directly, and emphasize how we make hiring decisions. Legally and ethically, you can not exclude someone from an applicant pool that meets the requirements listed in a job ad, so crafting a job ad well also helps you make decisions (as well as making those decisions ethically). The next pages have examples of CLEAR job ads.

Full-time lab technician position in plastic pollution research
CLEAR Lab
Geography Department, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador
St. John's Campus
Contractual Position: Start date any time between May 15 and September 1, 2024 (negotiable), until October 1, 2025.
CLEAR lab at Memorial University, led by Dr. Max Liboiron, is seeking a full-time (30-35 hrs/week) lab technician. Based on the St. John's campus, CLEAR is a training lab specializing in plastic pollution research and anticolonial, justice-based methods. We support a vibrant community of graduate, undergraduate, and high school students and visiting and affiliated faculty and community members. Our lab methods and culture are based on humility, accountability, collectivity, and good land relations. We are engaged in long-term plastic monitoring with partners in Nunatsiavut (Inuit land claim area in northern Labrador), as well as overseeing multiple monitoring contracts for other Inuit and First Nations communities. All of our science is community-oriented.

We are looking for a full-time Lab Technician to join our team. We are looking for someone
with some laboratory research experience, but you do not have to be an expert in plastic pollution. All training will be provided. We are interested in applicants who align with our values of humility, accountability, collectivity, and good land relations, and who will flourish working in a self-described feminist and anti-colonial lab space with diverse colleagues (we have many queer, non-binary, Indigenous, and generally fabulous lab members).

JOB DESCRIPTION

The Lab Technician processes animal and environmental samples for plastic pollution and partakes in day-to-day lab activities. Specific duties of the position include:

• Practice and model lab values of humility, accountability, collectivity, and good land relations in interactions with samples, colleagues, and collaborators (see our lab book for examples of what this looks like);

• Dissect, process, and visually examine animal gastrointestinal tracts (guts) provided by community partners for microplastics;

• Examine samples of environmental media (such as water, snow, and ice) for microplastics, which may involve the creation, testing, and validation of new methods, particularly those that are accessible to community research;

• Train student research assistants in the processing of animal and environmental samples for plastic pollution, and the visual verification and characterization of recovered microplastics;

• Maintain quality assurance in the laboratory environment (i.e. limiting and monitoring microplastic contamination) and follow quality control protocols to ensure microplastic recovery is at or above industry standard. This may include the creation of innovations in contamination prevention and quality assurance more broadly;

• Conduct data entry during sample processing;

• Attend weekly lab meetings; and

• Work independently and as part of a collective. CLEAR is a team-based lab.

OPPORTUNITIES

• Co-analysis of data and co-writing of results is possible, depending on the successful candidates' interests.

• The lab uses anti-oppressive facilitation techniques and engages in consensus-based decision-making. All lab members are trained in these techniques and take part in making lab-wide decisions together.

• CLEAR engages in both natural and social science. Participation in social science projects is possible, based on the successful candidates' interests (for example, our last Lab Tech was part of CLEAR's Citaitonal Politics working group).

• Funding is available for professional development in areas that align with the job description and the successful candidates' interests.

QUALIFICATIONS

All training in plastic pollution research and lab culture is provided. This is an entry-level position ideal for a recent university graduate, a retiree returning to the workforce, or for those with non-traditional career paths. The following are required:
• Demonstration of working within CLEAR values of humility, accountability, and collectivity;
• Attention to detail and patience; and
• Legally able to work in Canada.
The following are assets and are not required. However, if you have these please comment on them in your application:
• Experience in plastic pollution research;
• E experience conducting research;
• Knowledge of feminist, anti-colonial, queer, Indigenous, or abolitionist sciences.

CONTRACT DATES: Start date any time between May 15 and September 1, 2024 (negotiable), until October 1, 2025.

WAGES: $30-35/hr, based on experience. This position is Band 6. Benefits are included. Final wages are based on experience and determined via HR. Annual raises (~2%) are automatically part of this position. This position is funded through an external grant.

CLOSING DATE: Please submit applications by May 6, 2024.

APPLICATION: Please send:
1) a cover letter discussing your experience and qualifications concerning the qualifications, opportunities, and job description above (please specifically address the section: "We are interested in applicants who align with our values of humility, accountability, collectivity, and good land relations, and who will flourish working in a self-described feminist and anti-colonial lab space with diverse colleagues (we have many queer, non-binary, Indigenous, and generally fabulous lab members)"). Include examples from your experience;
2) a resume or CV (see our interpretation of resumes and CVs here).
Email these to Max Liboiron (mliboiron@mun.ca) and Jess Melvin (jmelvin@mun.ca) by the end of the work day on May 6, 2024. If you miss the deadline, please reach out.

Job Posting: 591TK - Position: Laboratory and Project Manager
Application Deadline 04/30/2019 11:59 PM
CLEAR lab, Dept of Geography, Memorial University
Job Contact: Max Liboiron

Hours Per Week 35
Hourly Rate $30-45/hr

Job Description
The lab and project manager for Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR) will oversee the functioning of day-to-day laboratory operations, as well as organize several scientific projects. Lab management includes: conducting regular health and safety checks and procedures, organizing and submitting lab member hours; ensuring supplies and materials are stocked; cleaning and updating equipment and infrastructure; and duties such as mailing, packing, ordering, and organizing as needed.
Project management includes: coordinating members to ensure timely completion of projects, data management (including metadata and storage), providing training as needed, organizing writing or processing sessions, and other tasks as needed for specific projects. It is expected that the manager will be involved in some of these projects in terms of conducting research, analyzing data, writing results, and disseminating knowledge.
Overall, the most important task of the lab and project manager is to exemplify the values, commitments, and goals of CLEAR as a feminist and anti-colonial marine science lab in all aspects of what we do.

Training and guidance will be provided. More information on CLEAR and our values is here: https://civiclaboratory.nl

Only applications with a cover letter will be considered. Job hours are somewhat flexible, but will largely occur during regular business hours.
Application Procedure Online

Undergraduate Lab technician (plastic pollution, anticolonial science)

Lab technicians work as part of a collaborative team in CLEAR laboratory (http://civiclaboratory.nl/). Their main task is processing environmental samples (animal gastrointestinal tracts, water, and sediment) for plastics, using sieves and microscopes and logging the information. Other laboratory tasks may include: conducting shoreline data collection, literature reviews of existing research, data entry and analysis, data visualizations, and building and using open-source scientific tools. At the same time, all lab members participate in activities and collaborations focused on changing the way research is done. We aim to do science that is humble, accountable, and in good land relations. **Please look at the lab website before applying to ensure CLEAR is a good fit.**

Except for mandatory weekly lab meetings after initial training, undergraduate CLEAR members work to their own schedule. We have accommodations for members with disabilities and for when members' lives and families take precedence over wage labour.

Job Requirements

Rather than hire undergraduate students based on previous experience (since we provide all training and many undergrads do not yet have track records of research positions), we hire people whose values and practices exemplify CLEAR lab values: humility, accountability, working within a collectivity, and good land relations. *You do not need to submit a CV or resume for this job.* We know that CVs and resumes can be mysterious and frustrating documents to work with, and they rarely highlight the characteristics we are looking for. Instead, please provide a cover letter answering the following questions:

1. How has where you are from influenced your view of or priorities around research and collaboration?
2. Why do you want to work with the CLEAR collective?
3. What do you think are the most important principles or values in research? How have you or will you bring these into your work?

We realize the my.mun system may make you upload a CV or resume, but these will not be the basis of interview decisions. Rather, we will focus on the cover letter and the questions above. Please do not send transcripts.

Values over experience

When we make hiring decisions, we foreground values rather than skills. Trial and error has shown us that this results in a much stronger lab culture, a safer space for lab members, and more robust collaborators. It also means lots of training, but we're a university-based lab where training is central to our employer's mission so it's a good fit. Because we hire values over experience and professional skills, the cover letter is a *much* more important document than the resume or CV. We mention this in our job ads. When evaluating, we start with the cover letter, and if it doesn't fit the lab values we often do not need to read the resume. One thing to remember is that job applications are people's best face, so if there are yellow or red flags in a cover letter the reality is likely more stark.

▶ Green flag: I recommend an interview. The cover letter shows either direct knowledge, experience, or intuition of the values and justice-oriented skills we're looking for.

▶ Yellow flag: Discussion required. I have some questions, uncertainty, or issues, but they aren't major. Or there is a discrepancy between the cover letter and resume.

▶ Red flag: I do not recommend for an interview. Either the lab values were not addressed at all, or the cover letter raises issues that indicate the applicant may cause harm in the lab due to existing values, expectations, biases, or actions.

Below are annotated cover letters, where we've created cover letters based on the types we've received before, and created a running commentary on how we might evaluate them .

Hiring Committee
CLEAR Lab, Geography Department
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, NL

Dear Hiring Committee,

We always include interviewer names in our job ads. This helps our analysis when people don't use them, or when people address the lab director but not the lab manager. This might be a yellow flag. Did they read the ad? Can they follow directions?

I am writing to express my enthusiasm for the Lab Technician position in plastic pollution research at the CLEAR Lab, as advertised. With a solid background in laboratory work, a strong alignment with the values of humility, accountability, collectivity, and good land relations, and a commitment to working in a diverse, feminist, and anti-colonial lab environment, I am excited about the opportunity to contribute to your innovative and community-focused research.

We can tell that sentences like this (and many that follow) are written by ChatGPT when someone puts a job ad into the prompt and asks the software to generate a cover letter.. While using AI to help write is fine by us, cover letters that ONLY use AI can only duplicate the job ad and there is no expansion or examples, which means there is no reflexivity and we cannot evaluate the cover letter for values.

I hold a Master's degree in Chemistry from Memorial University, where I gained comprehensive laboratory experience. In my previous role as a student research assistant in the Chemistry Department, I was involved in sample processing, data entry, and maintaining stringent quality control protocols.

"sample processing, data entry, and maintaining stringent quality control protocols" is a list directly from our ad. When applicants do not use their own terms to describe common things (especially things that would have been part of previous experience) it puts that experience into question.

I am particularly drawn to the CLEAR Lab's emphasis on community-oriented science. During my Master's degree, I collaborated with diverse stakeholders to ensure research methods were culturally respectful and accessible. This involved engaging with local communities to understand their concerns and integrating their feedback into our research practices.

This is a red flag. We cannot tell what the master's project was, and not naming "diverse stakeholders," "local communities," or which "culture" was respected shows a lack of protocol in terms of using community's own names to refer to themselves.

In addition to my technical skills, I bring a strong alignment with the values you uphold. My commitment to humility and accountability is reflected in my approach to collaborative work and my willingness to continuously learn and adapt.	We are unsure of what humility and accountability mean to the author, and how they specifically play out in collaborations. When values are conflated (humility AND accountability as a unit) this is a yellow flag for reflexivity.
The opportunity to train and mentor student research assistants is particularly appealing to me. I have experience in educational roles where I supported and guided individuals through complex processes, fostering their development while ensuring high standards of work. I am confident in my ability to convey intricate lab techniques in an accessible manner, enhancing the learning experience for students.	We get concerned when people volunteer to mentor lab members without being lab members themselves. We are weary about the combination of "Development" and "high standards" given the values of our lab and the disjunction of these terms with named values of humility and collectively mentioned above. Even if this is boiler plate borrowed from a template, we need candidates to show an awareness that terms have politics.
Sincerely, Jazzy Jess	We always look at how people introduce themselves. Listing pronouns, mentioning where they are from, including their current or recent position are all things we notice.

Overall, we would not interview this person, even if they were the only applicant. While we often use ChatGPT to aid writing, it has been used to the extent that the applicant has very likely committed fraud and claimed professional experience and familiar in places they do not have it. Even a less overt version of this cover letter would have too many red flags through a lack of specificity and true engagement with CLEAR's values.

Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR) Geography Department, Memorial University of Newfoundland & Labrador (MUNL) 232 Elizabeth Avenue St. John's, NL, A1B 3X9 To the wonderous members of CLEAR Lab,	We always mention whom to address materials to in our ads, so we notice when those instructions are not followed. While this salutation looks positive, as a justice-oriented lab, we've found that it does not go well when we hire people who over-identification with the lab or put the lab on an impossible pedestal. This would be a yellow flag to be considered with the rest of the cover letter.
I was so excited to see a posting for Full Time Lab Technician at CLEAR this Fall. I have long followed CLEAR's work and I am in awe of the decolonial and feminist methods that your lab uses in all of your work.	It's often a green flag when someone is already familiar with our work. Yellow flag for terms like "awe," as we find that hires that inflate the lab's reputation are always "let down" by the lab when we turn out to be real people with zits and farts. Occasionally this has negatively impacted the safer space of the lab.
I am a queer scientist with a Master of Science in Marine Biology from here at Memorial University.	We always love position statements and introductions. This is done well without sharing too much personal information. The order also tells us the values of the two aspects of introduction. Green flag.
Your lab's feminist values would present a welcome change to the many laboratory environments I have worked in to date.	When applicants indicate understanding that oppression happens in science and professional spaces, or that they have lived experience of oppression, we green flag it.

Additionally, with lots of close friends of indigenous heritage, I have in recent years become well versed in the persistent harms of colonialism in our Western Society and I feel a strong calling to take part in the resistance.	Mentioning "diverse" friends and acquaintances is always a red flag (" I have a Black friend" is not ok, so it's not ok with other Peoples). We wonder about consent, tokenism, and borrowing other people's positionalities for gain. Red flag. We would note that Indigenous is not capitalized, but Western Society is. Yellow flag. "The resistance" is a red flag since it's a romanticized version of social movements, particularly in its lack of specificity and indication that the call to participate came from the social movement itself.
Since I was a small child, I have always felt a strong connection to the outdoors.	While this seem innocuous, this statement is a yellow flag when combined with other individualistic statements (such as the "feel a strong calling" line above). When connection to a place or peoples is articulated as an individual force of desire rather than a community force or invitation, we note it.
An insatiable curiosity to know more about everything I encountered in our natural world is what first drew me to a degree in the natural sciences.	For us, not being able to sate desire is a reg flag, particularly in the context of Land relations. We note all discovery and terra nullius statements, even in their mildest forms. Because they are so common and are often rewarded, we think about them in combination with other things in the cover letter (yellow flag) but when they are paired with individualistic drives, the flag goes red.
Living here in Newfoundland on the homelands of the Beothuk, respect for land has always been important to me.	While Land acknowledgements are often a green flag that indicates people know some of the protocols for good Land relations, this Land acknowledgment is incomplete-- it's missing Mi'kmaq, one of the other First Nations groups whose Homelands are on the island of Newfoundland. In some ways, a wrong land acknowledgement is a worse than a missing one since it indicates an awareness of protocol but not the skills to do the (in this case, very basic) research of fulfilling them.

Growing up in a small town "around the bay" in Newfoundland, is what further narrowed my path to Marine Biology. I grew up surrounded by fishermen, but also by researchers visiting the area to do research on seabirds. The knowledge that those researchers were able to bring to our small community was really inspiring and that is why I am so excited at the prospect of working in a lab that aims to improve communities.	Deficit narratives, where local communities do not know things but researchers do, and/or where research can pull up, educate, fulfill, develop, improve, or enrich non-academic communities is a red flag. As above, because these terms are often the only ones available to people we consider them in relation to other statements. But the fact that this applicant is from this place gives us pause, since we usually find rural applicants are keenly aware of deficit narratives.
Over the years, I have honed my skills both in the lab and in the field. For my honours thesis in my Bachelor of Biology, I worked in the lab, logging hundreds of hours at dissecting with compound microscopes to measure the response of nematocysts in sea anemones under different stressors brought on by climate change.	Yellow flag. We always appreciate when someone defines specialized terms. We do not know what a nematocyst is. We also wonder about a thesis project designed based on harming animals and seeing their responses—if we interviewed we might ask them where that design came from in case they inherited it from their advisor. If they choose it, it would be a red or yellow flag. The previous lab experience is a green flag.
My Master's thesis took me to Labrador, where I partnered with DFO aboard The Teleost to conduct water sampling in the Labrador Sea.	There are several red flags here that require local knowledge. First, Labrador is split into a few different Indigenous Nations, some of which include areas of the Labrador Sea. While there is a land acknowledgement above, there is none here. Red flag. DFO (Department of Fisheries and Oceans) has a complex standing in communities because of their role in the cod collapse and tensions with regulation of Indigenous fisheries. We'd look for an awareness of that since it's a very public, highly contentious issue. But perhaps they don't mention that in a cover letter where they are bringing their best face. Yellow flag.

I spent 3 intensive weeks at sea and learned to be innovative and adaptable to get the best results possible in all kinds of conditions. I followed strict Quality Assurance and Quality Control protocols, and adapted my field protocols on the fly to ensure they were maintained in the face of extenuating circumstances.	Overall, sounds great. We'd look for some examples (one comes up in a moment). We'd note the use of the phrase "extenuating circumstances" and think about whether they are misdescribing normal conditions of Arctic homelands (red/yellow flag), or whether they mean something else.
One of the metrics I investigated from my water sampling in the Labrador Sea was nanoplastics in the surface microlayer, a research question I developed during the trip when I became concerned about plastics onboard. This required adaptable thinking to gather samples in a particular way so quality assurance could be maintained. This was one of the most interesting facets of my Master's research and I believe it prepared me well to be a technician at CLEAR.	This is a large red flag because it is in contravention of research ethics and permits for doing research in areas of the Labrador Sea that fall within land claim areas. All research, including new sampling, has to go through Indigenous review. We cannot tell exactly where this research took place, but geographically it was very likely in a land claim area and/or an area where receiving Indigenous permission to change research is required.
Humility, accountability, collectivity and good land relations are values that are important to me in every aspect of my personal and professional life.	It's a red/yellow flag when someone conflates our different values together. It can indicate they did not look at our website, where we different them. It can indicate a lack of reflexivity, where the person might differentiate between them.
These are all qualities that are pivotal to maintaining healthy relationships with our colleagues and contributing to a collective safe space. I pride myself in knowing when it's time to step up, when it's time to step back, and when it's time to acknowledge my mistakes.	This would normally be a green flag. It shows the person has some experience with safer space protocols and their terms of art. We'd like some examples of this and could ask during the interview.

I have always found that diverse perspectives make for a better outcome, and giving everyone an equal voice in the discussion regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity or background is absolutely required in a good project.	On the surface, this is a good statement. It's also a fairly generic and common idea, so we'd look for additional indicators for a deeper knowledge of difference (that difference matters and some people do indeed have more say than others when it comes to addressing oppressive structures that target them), the relationship between social location and knowledge (that some people get more or less say based on their experiences and commitments), or examples about when the applicant had participated in this and what they learned. This is particularly important in an Indigenous-led lab where settler input is not at all equal to Indigenous input in projects based on Indigenous self-determination in community-based research.
In fact, I have found that travelling to experience different cultures has enriched my understanding of the world, and I look forward to continuing this journey with CLEAR.	This is a yellow or red flag, where the applicant uses difference to enrich themselves. "Different cultures" is generic and lacks the specificity we would expect from a robust or place-based understanding. Also, we "different culture" folks at CLEAR do not want to be someone's enrichment material. This is a yellow or red flag for safer space considerations.
I look forward to hearing you. Regards, Jazzy Jess (she/her)	Including pronouns is a green flag.

Overall, we would not interview this person, even if she was the only applicant. There are too many red flags around hyper-individualism, which means existing lab members would have to take on supporting the applicant as they unlearned and relearned and would bear the burden of mistakes. However, even if the lab was in a place where they would welcome this, the issue of research ethics and not acknowledging the Nations who govern or co-govern the Labrador Sea is too much colonial legacy for the lab to take on, particularly given our partnerships and commitments. In the past, we would have interviewed and possibly hired this applicant to "give them a chance" , and we learned about red flags the hard way.

Hello Max, Thank you for reaching out to me; I hope you are doing well too. I would definitely be interested in applying to work at CLEAR again, specifically for the Mapping and Data Assurance or Historical Research positions.I have put my cover letter below and attached my resume to this email, and I would really appreciate it if you could review them.	Green flag: while the applicant already worked with CLEAR in the past, they are being careful to say that they would like to apply for a position rather than assuming they have the position already. We don't care if cover letters are sent as introductory emails or more final cover letters.
Working at CLEAR for the summers of 2021 and 2022 was an amazing experience for me. As someone who had not yet been exposed to the typical academic or corporate worlds, CLEAR's anti-colonial and feminist methodologies and values allowed me to see the importance of the values of humility, accountability, collectivity and good land relations, and how these values are unfortunately almost non-existent in many academic, corporate and other spaces.	A light green flag, mainly the indication that values in different professional spaces are different.
Even outside of the lab space, I try to incorporate these values into my daily life. [example provided but redacted for privacy]	Examples that show us how they understand the values are always a green flag, even if they understand them differently than we do.
As well, the previous and current CLEAR lab members are truly wonderful. I appreciated the kindness and collectivity of the lab space and meetings, and especially the respect for pronouns and queerness.	Green flag. This is a light position statement, indicating the importance of gender affirmation and queer space. We don't expect people to overshare or put something in writing they may not want to circulate, so these lighter statements are the norm in cover letters.

I would love the opportunity to be involved in the lab space again.	Even though this person was sent the job ad by the lab director, they still position themselves strongly as an applicant rather than assuming they have the position.
[Redacted details of education for privacy] My university education has greatly improved by research, time-management, and written communication skills, which I believe will benefit me in both of these positions, especially in regards to researching the location of samples and what the relationship of who has them is with Inuit communities for the Historical Research Position. Additionally, for the Mapping and Data Assurance position, I have some previous familiarity with maps and cleaning data through working at CLEAR, and I would be very interested in learning more about mapping and the Nunatsiavut plastic data.	Green flags for combining the technical aspects of the position with the ethical/relational aspects. The part about "what the relationship of who has them [museum samples] is with Inuit communities" is a paraphrase of the job ad, and highlighting this aspect of the position shows us the applicant is aware of the most important part and stakes of the project.
Working for CLEAR–along with my experience working as a sales associate for [redacted for privacy]–has also greatly improved my interpersonal and teamwork skills, allowing my once shy self to gain comfortability with coordinating with lab members/coworkers and talking to customers. This would benefit me in regards to potentially discussing with community researchers for the Mapping and Data Assurance position or Nunatsiavummit for the historical research position, as well as for participating in lab meetings.	While not a flag, the applicant addresses what may have been considered a weakness in their previous work (shyness) and how they have worked with/through it. The green flag is showing an understanding of what is required in collaboration outside of the assets listed in the job add as it shows reflexivity and thoughtfulness. Green flag for using correct term for Nunatsiavummit in the right place.

I would really enjoy the opportunity to be involved in CLEAR's work again and learn more about mapping and plastics in Nunatsiavut, or community research and colonial sample collection.	One thing we see fairly often is the declaration that "I'm a perfect fit for you" even when people lack specific experience, or "I will learn ethics and social relations in CLEAR". Both are yellow flags since they assume too much. This assertion of specifically what might be learned is a green flag.
Thank you again for reaching out to me, and let me know if you have any questions about anything. Best wishes, [name redacted] they/them	While it is a small green flag, we appreciate the opening to ask question or clarifications in the outro. Often cover letters imply the next step is the interview ("I look forward to the opportunity to tell you more in an interview") so we appreciate the extra space for more communication. It bodes well for lab processes. Green flag to see pronouns.

This is a real cover letter, taken from someone we have hired not once, not twice, but three times (and counting). We highlight it here to show that cover letters do not have to be massively articulate in models of justice with beautiful definitions of values to be strong cover letters. There are several types of green flags here, no yellow or red ones, and there are points for mutual appreciation (they appreciate some things about CLEAR, the interviewers appreciate some things about the cover letter).

Looking for flags

We wanted to mention some "red flags" we look for in cover letters and interviews based on mistakes we've made in the past. The flags mentioned below are more likely to come up in justice-oriented spaces, and once upon a time, we considered them green flags because they use terms common in justice spaces. But we've learned some subtleties the hard way. We hope our mistakes serve you well.

Terms of art. First, we want to mention a caveat. For applicants who are not experienced in social movements, sometimes the only "terms of art" that are available to them aren't great. Equality, outreach, helping, and "learning from diversity" might all be icky terms for those fluent in justice work, but they're the only terms some people might be familiar with. Likewise, if someone doesn't know what feminism is exactly, it doesn't mean they don't understand gendered oppression. If we have an applicant who seems good but is using "icky", shallow, or out-of-date terms we do a couple of things:
1) we look for examples of what they're talking about to get a feel for the underlying value, model of justice, or issue rather than having the term over-define it.
2) we can ask them more in an interview.

Accumulated flags. One yellow or red flag doesn't mean much on its own. We consider all flags in the context of the rest of the cover letter (and the interview) rather than determinants in a hiring decision. There are some exceptions (like someone going to a reservation during COVID even though the community asked people not to) that are deal breakers, but these are rare and when there is a strong fed flag there are usually other red flags as well. Having a committee to talk through red and yellow flags (and even green ones!) is crucial to this process.

Red flag #1: Fetishism. There is a type of toxic essentialism that hides in extreme positivity. Applicants can express enthusiasm about interacting with Indigenous people, queers, or trans people, while not being members of those communities themselves. Terms like beauty, wonder, awe, love, and destiny might be used alongside words like opportunity, growth, and enrichment. This can be a sign of excited racism/essentialism, foregrounding extractivism and boundary problems.

Red flag #2: Overidentification with the lab or job. Applicants who write about the job opportunity as something that will solve their problems, give them healing, serve their destiny/sense of belonging, ease oppression, or those who state the lab will be a type of paradise or home rather than a safer space that is still their employer are red flags. While we used to be excited to offer places to people who understood oppression and needed a space to flourish or heal, we have found that overidentifying with the lab and putting us on an impossible pedestal resulted in lateral violence within the lab Every. Single. Time. We no longer perform rescues simply because someone would benefit from rescuing. This might sound harsh, but we learned the hard way that this can cause real harm to the existing lab membership, partners, and even ethics protocols.

Red flag #3: Benevolent deficit filling. It sounds dirty because it is. This usually looks like applicants talking about communities or groups as lacking knowledge about their environment and needing academics to save them or educate them. Terms of art include education, outreach, ignorance, capacity building, development, and understanding. The problem is, these are also terms of art in justice spaces, NGOs, and academia so you may have to do some work to find out if the applicant is invested in deficit models

and benevolence or whether they're just using terms they've inherited.

Red flag #4: Conflating values. One type of conflating values is outlined in our cover letter annotations above, where people simply list different justice words together and move on without explaining what they are or how they are practiced. Another type is when an applicant believes that because the lab does one type of value or form of justice, other types are also addressed. For instance, queer labs therefore do good trans justice, or anti-colonial labs are ideal for neurodivergent thinkers. This may or may not be true of your research space, but it is certainly not automatically true and can lead to some hard lessons when a justice-oriented space doesn't meet someone's rights-based needs. See Red flag #2.

Red flag #5: **Takers, not givers**. We fully expect (and appreciate) when an applicant talks about what they can learn in the lab. That's our job! But we note when a narrative is dedicated entirely to an applicant's own gains, enrichment, and education without a sense of reciprocity. CLEAR is a collective and applicants should understand they can and must meaningfully contribute to that collective.

Interview for their success

Interviews are hard for interviewees. This is especially true for people who have never done them before, introverts, people whose first language isn't English (assuming the interview is in English), and people who are systematically pushed out of professional, scientific, and academic spaces. In short, interviews are especially hard for the type of people we most want to hire.

There are some best practices to make more space for interviewees.

1) For entry-level positions, require a cover letter or introductory email but not a resume (see job ad examples).
2) Always send the interview questions ahead of time.
3) Include any dress code expectations in the interview invitation and an outline of what will happen.
4) Provide a written copy of the interview questions during the interview, either on paper during in-person interviews or via chat via online interviews.
5) Pay people for the hour they spend in the interview (we're still working on this one)

Over the years we've refined our interview questions. Below is an annotated table of the kinds of questions we ask, why we ask them, and if we don't use them anymore if that's the case.

| Interview question	Explanation
Tell us a little about yourself and why you want to work with CLEAR in particular?	We don't use this one anymore because it is too broad and we now start with question #2 below. This wide open question did let us see what the person prioritizes. Since the lab is run by and has a lot of Indigenous people, it is the opening for a traditional land-based or kin-based introduction (we always model this when we introduce ourselves to the applicant at the start). It tells us whether the applicant is aware that CLEAR is a justice-oriented lab, and if they're able to articulate the way we work in their own terms, ideas, and values (a good sign!). This is also were we tend to notice if people over-identify with the lab. Sometimes people articulate the good of CLEAR via bad experiences elsewhere, which tells us they know about oppression or exclusion, even if they can't yet articulate their opposites.
How does where you come from (broadly interpreted) impact how you collaborate or do research? Prompt: if you haven't done research, tell us how it impacts how you learn	This is our first question now. This is the second place for a traditional Indigenous introduction, or even a Land acknowledgement (formal or informal). It is also where feminists, disability studies, ethnic studies, STS peoples can do a position statement. Less formally, we can see whether people identify with a place or a group of people in terms of "where you're from", including showing experience with intentional communities. We can see the way people articulate place-based knowledge and if they're familiar with it (whether they articulate it that way or not). Place-based knowledge, local knowledge, and Indigenous knowledge are all important in our lab. This is often where we see "deficit" and saviour narratives about rural, BIPOC, sustenance, and youth communities, two of our red flags. Note that this question has the most capacity to bring up trauma, especially by displaced people, so sending this ahead of time and framing this well is crucial.

Interview question	Explanation
What do you think are the key ingredients to valuable collaborative research?	Sometimes this is already answered if the person focused on collectives in earlier questions. This is where we see values that matter to collectivity such as how they imagine collaborators as homogenous or different, what sort of experience and tools they might bring to the lab (classroom group work answers tend to focus on getting things done, while social movement experience tends to talk about organization). This is also a specific values-based question where we can see how people think of what is "good" and not desirable. We can keep an ear out for ableism and elitism, though these require follow ups and prompts if we think we hear them (e.g. if someone says "everyone should contrbute the same" we might ask "what about if someone is new to research and is inexperienced or doesn't work full time in the lab-- what does 'the same' mean then?")
Tell us a little about your previous experience with: (list of tasks or skills we're looking for, such as what is your experience working with large, shared datasets? Tell us about good data practices (like data quality assurance)	We listen for a general gist or specifics, which usually indicate level of experience. We also prompt people about coursework, their hobbies, and other places where they might have experience outside of formal employment. We listen for the processes rather than formal names (e.g. someone doesn't have to say "quality assurance" if they list two things that are quality assurance tasks)
How did you prepare for this interview?	People always seemed pleased to answer this question, since they almost always prepared and could get a question "right." It told us a little about initiative, research skills, and investment in getting the job. We don't tend to use it anymore because it didn't tend to provide input into our decisions. We don't hire based on initiative, research skills, and investment in the job. But maybe you do?

Interview question	Explanation
This is a scenario question. There's no right or wrong answer. It more tells us about how you like to work. Which kind of collaboration would you prefer: 1. You consult with other scientists/community groups on a research question, work on the project independently and with full autonomy, then report back to them. You publish some papers from this as first author, and other as second author. 2. You facilitate a research project with a community group where you basically work for them— you don't have autonomy over the project, your main task is to give them resources and help build capacity where they say it's needed. Your work does not get published, but the research is extremely useful to the community. 3. You work in a lab on a lot of different projects. You aren't the head of any of them, but you do a little here and there, getting middle or end author on a few papers, doing a variety of tasks and developing a lot of skills.	We had this question for a number of years and it was pretty fun. We'd preface by saying "I'm going to give you three scenarios and choose which you'd prefer. There are no wrong answers-- we're just getting to know you." Since there were no wrong answers it was a fairly freeing question for both interviewees and interviewers. It is another way to get at values, since most applicants said why they preferred one over the other. Often, if we hired the person, it told us the kind of position or roles they might excel in. Occasionally, people would read into certain parts of the question in terms of things that are "good" or "bad" which also allowed it to be another question about values, and/or told us where someone was in their learning about community research, collaboration, or accountability. We don't tend to ask this anymore because it takes a lot of time to ask and answer. It also has to be sent in advance because it is a lot to track with your brain while listening.
What questions do you have for us?	Note this is not: "do you have any questions for us"? It shows not only is the person welcome to ask questions, but we expect it. We evaluate whether they have questions and what kinds of questions they ask (about values, questions that show they can extrapolate values into a work place, about skills, practical things, etc)

Thank you!

We have a video that elaborates on some of this content at CLEAR lab and the IndigeLab Network's websites, where we maintain resources for building justice-oriented research spaces, broadly defined.

If you have resources you'd like to share with us, please reach out.
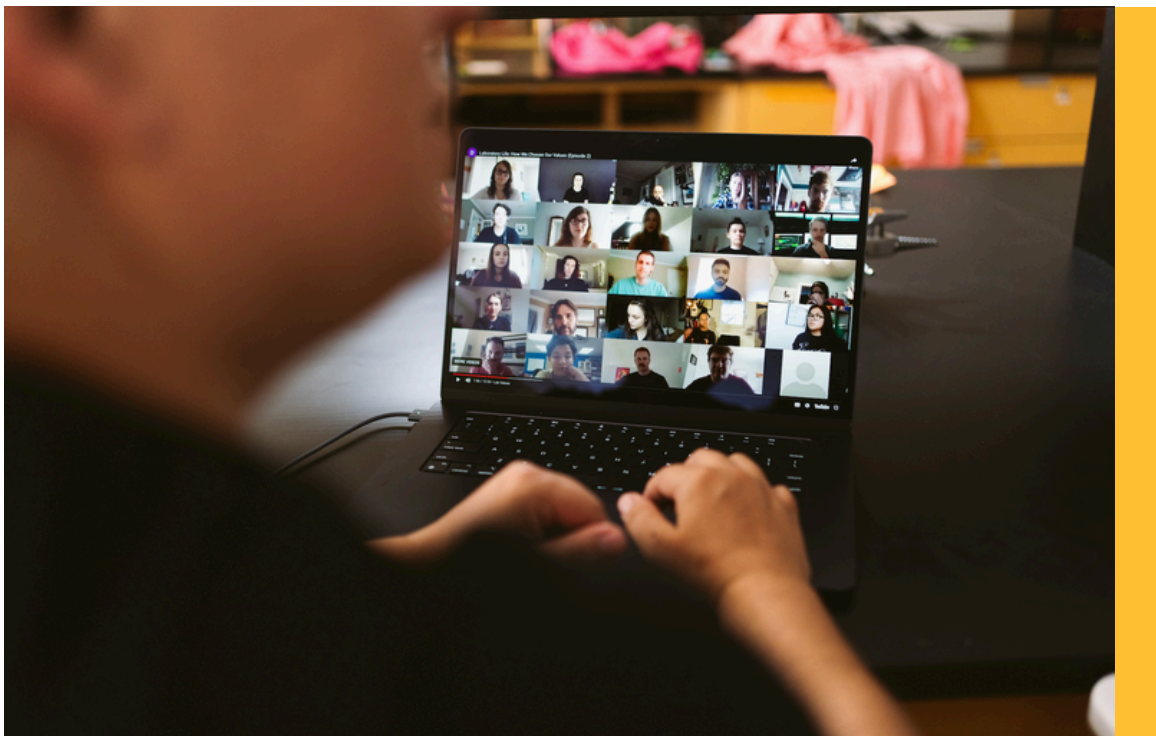
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