

CASE STUDY

The State of Louisiana & Opportunity@Work



About the 2025 Transformers in the Public Sector Cohort



Transformers in the Public Sector is a 12-month, peer-learning community designed to help states implement skill-based talent practices. The cohort brings together state HR leaders to set clear priorities, test approaches, and learn from one another through monthly meetings, individualized coaching, and technical assistance.

The cohort is supported by [Opportunity@Work](#) and the [Volcker Alliance](#). Together we provided expertise on skills-first talent practices and pathways for all workers including those skilled through alternative routes (STARs). We support states in strengthening public-sector workforce systems, advancing civil service reform, and developing tools to measure progress and impact.

WHAT THE COHORT WAS DESIGNED TO ACCOMPLISH

- Support states in making **tangible progress toward skills-based talent practices**
- Help teams **move from policy intent to implementation**
- Build internal capacity to **hire, advance, and retain all workers using skills-based talent practices, especially STARs**
- Create accountability through **time-bound goals, peer learning, and test-learn-refine loops**

HOW THE COHORT WORKED

- **12-month engagement** structured around two **14-week implementation sprints**
- **Monthly virtual cohort meetings** with peer states and subject-matter experts
- **Monthly 1:1 technical assistance and office hours**
- Shared access to custom **workforce and STARs data**, implementation tools, and playbooks
- Focus on **learning-by-doing**, helping to shift from theory to practice

2025 PARTICIPANTS:

ARIZONA

CALIFORNIA

COLORADO

LOUISIANA

UTAH



Building a Workforce That Reflects Louisiana's Talent

ABOUT LOUISIANA



1.8M

Active Labor Force

61%

Percentage of active labor workforce that are STARs

~38k

State government workers

46%

Percentage of state government workforce that are STARs

Louisiana's Starting Point

Louisiana State Civil Service (SCS) has [long been a leader](#) in skills-based talent practices, using a statewide competency model and hiring framework to guide recruitment, hiring, and advancement across state government.

While this foundation was strong, SCS recognized that advancing toward a fully skills-based organization – and narrowing the gap between STAR representation in state government and the broader workforce – required deeper cultural alignment. **Many HR professionals and hiring managers needed clearer understanding of why the state was prioritizing skills and how these practices could support better hiring outcomes.**

The Transformers in the Public Sector cohort helped Louisiana identify this culture gap and develop a plan to shift from skills-first as an initiative, to being part of the state's identity.

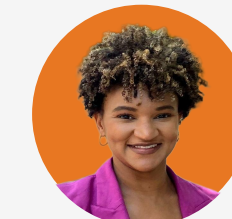
In order to narrow the gap between STARs representation in state government and the broader Louisiana workforce (46% STARs in government jobs vs. 58% in the workforce) Louisiana set out to:

- **Increase the use of skills-based pathways for priority roles**, including human resource analysts and tax revenue analysts
- **Establish a shared understanding across HR leaders and hiring managers** of the value of skills in hiring and advancement
- **Embed skills-first practices** into the culture of hiring and talent development across state agencies



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THE PROBLEM

Embedding Skill-Based Practices



Through cohort discussions and practitioner feedback, Louisiana identified four key challenges that were preventing skills-based practices from taking hold consistently across agencies.

Louisiana's challenge was not designing skills-based talent tools. The state had already developed many of the right components. The challenge was ensuring these practices were consistently understood, adopted, and applied across agencies. Through cohort sessions, peer discussion, and feedback from HR leaders and hiring managers, four root causes of this adoption gap became clear.

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| <p>1. Skills-based tools existed, but meaning was unevenly understood</p> <p>Although Louisiana had a competency model and hiring framework in place, many HR professionals and hiring managers did not clearly understand why the state was emphasizing skills or how to use these tools in practice.</p> <p>Downstream Effect: Skills-based hiring was applied inconsistently and often defaulted back to familiar, credential-driven approaches.</p> | <p>2. Change was framed as technical, not cultural</p> <p>Skills-based practices were introduced as processes and tools rather than as part of a broader shift in how the state values and develops talent.</p> <p>Downstream Effect: Without a shared purpose, adoption stalled and practices failed to take root across agencies.</p> | <p>3. HR leaders led by example but lacked a unifying message to build buy-in and broader support beyond HR.</p> <p>HR was expected to model skills-based practices for the rest of state government, but did not have a clear, compelling narrative to guide conversations with hiring managers and employees.</p> <p>Downstream Effect: Buy-in was difficult to build, slowing broader statewide adoption.</p> | <p>4. Existing success was not translating into visible pathways</p> <p>Even where skills-based hiring was working, the connection between competencies, hiring, and advancement was not always clear to candidates or employees.</p> <p>Downstream Effect: Early benefits of skills-based practices were not consistently visible, limiting understanding of their potential to improve access, mobility, and retention.</p> |
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Building the Conditions for Skills-Based Talent Strategies at Scale

Louisiana used the SHIFT narrative to create shared understanding of why skills matter, helping practitioners connect existing tools and practices to a clear, statewide approach to hiring and advancement.

How did the Cohort support the state of Louisiana?

- 1 Reframed skills-based hiring as a statewide strategy and culture shift**
SHIFT positioned skills not as a technical HR process, but as a shared responsibility across agencies, employees, and job seekers to modernize talent practices.
- 2 Using Narrative to Enable Skills-Based Practice Change**
Louisiana developed the SHIFT narrative to clearly articulate why the state is investing in skills-based practices and how they support better hiring, advancement, and public service outcomes.

About SHIFT: Shaping How Louisiana Invests in Future Talent

For more than a decade, Louisiana State Civil Service used a statewide competency model and hiring framework to support skills-based hiring and advancement. In 2025, stakeholder feedback made clear that while these tools existed, hiring managers and employees needed a clearer understanding of **why** the state was prioritizing skills and **how** this approach strengthened hiring and workforce outcomes.

To address this gap, SCS launched SHIFT — *Shaping How We Invest in Future Talent* — a statewide culture and engagement campaign that explains how skills are embedded across Louisiana's talent system. SHIFT helps agencies, employees, and job seekers understand their shared role in modernizing talent practices, highlighting that skills can be developed through many pathways and should be recognized consistently in hiring and advancement.

By leading with a clear and accessible narrative, SHIFT positions Louisiana to build a skilled, trusted public workforce that reflects the strengths of its people.

[Learn more about SHIFT](#)

THE SOLUTION

Building the Conditions for Skills-Based Talent Strategies at Scale



Rather than introducing new tools, Louisiana focused on helping practitioners understand and consistently apply the skills-based practices already in place.

How did the Cohort support the state of Louisiana?

- 3 Equipped HR leaders and partners to lead change together**
The campaign provided consistent language and messaging that enabled HR to lead by example while empowering hiring managers, applicants, and others to share responsibility for adopting skills-based practices.
- 4 Connected skills-based tools to real pathways and outcomes**
SHIFT helped link existing competency models and hiring frameworks to visible career pathways, making skills-based practices more concrete and actionable.
- 5 Used cohort support to refine and validate the approach**
Through the cohort, Louisiana pressure-tested its narrative, incorporated feedback, and strengthened its change management strategy before scaling statewide.



RESULTS

Changing How Skills Are Understood and Applied



The cohort helped Louisiana move skills-based hiring from tools and frameworks toward a shared cultural understanding.

SHIFT Launch

Launched a statewide culture and engagement campaign

Louisiana introduced SHIFT as a clear, shared narrative explaining why skills matter and how skills-based practices support hiring, advancement, and public service outcomes.

Empowered HR Leaders

Improved understanding among HR leaders and hiring managers

SHIFT equipped HR professionals with consistent language to explain skills-based practices, helping reduce confusion and increase confidence in applying existing tools.

Climbing Momentum

Built momentum for broader adoption

By framing skills-based hiring as a shared responsibility, Louisiana created a foundation for sustained culture change across agencies.



The conversations we're having in this cohort are light years ahead of where we were at the beginning of the year.

It gives me chills to see us finally addressing skills-based challenges across the workforce—and it's even more inspiring to witness the momentum building and these conversations taking place at the national level.

JENNIFER SCHUELKE

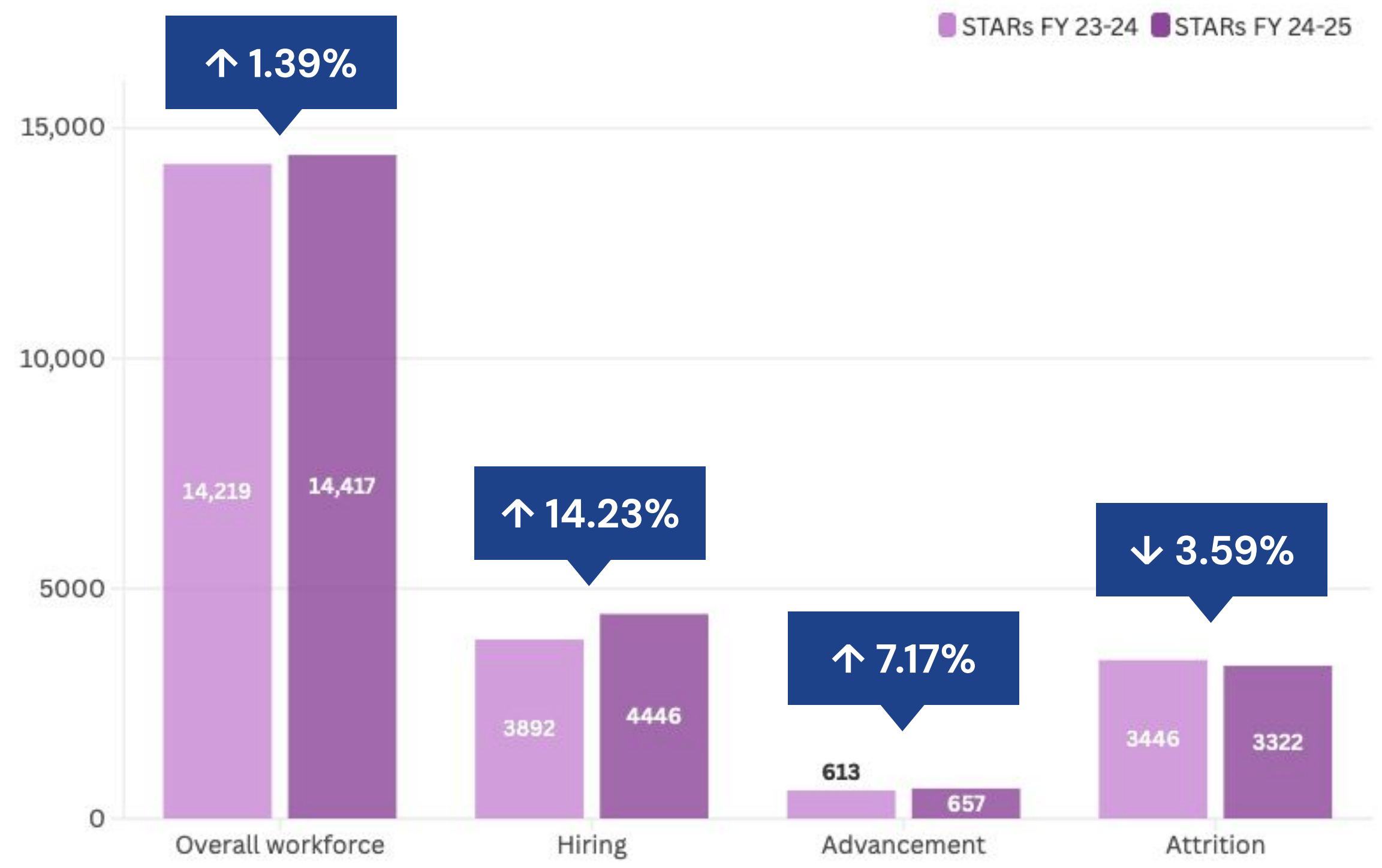
Assistant Division Administrator
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RESULTS



Louisiana's efforts show promise

Between FY23-24 and FY24-25, the number of STARs across the talent lifecycle increased. Fewer STARs also attrited in FY24-25.



KEY INSIGHTS

Lessons from Shifting Culture at Scale

Louisiana's experience offers practical lessons on how culture, narrative, and leadership shape the adoption of skills-based practices.



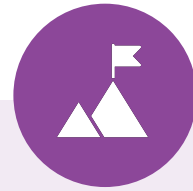
Tools alone do not drive adoption

Even well-established competency models require clear explanation and reinforcement to influence day-to-day hiring behavior.



Narrative strengthens implementation

A clear, human-centered explanation of why skills matter helped connect existing tools to real hiring and advancement decisions.



HR must lead with clarity and consistency

Equipping HR leaders with a common message enabled them to model skills-based practices and build trust across agencies.



Change management as a new way of doing business

Louisiana's experience shows the importance of integrating skills-based practices into the state's underlying talent management strategy, treating them not as a one-time initiative but as a fundamental shift in how workforce decisions are made over time.



Culture change is a prerequisite for scale

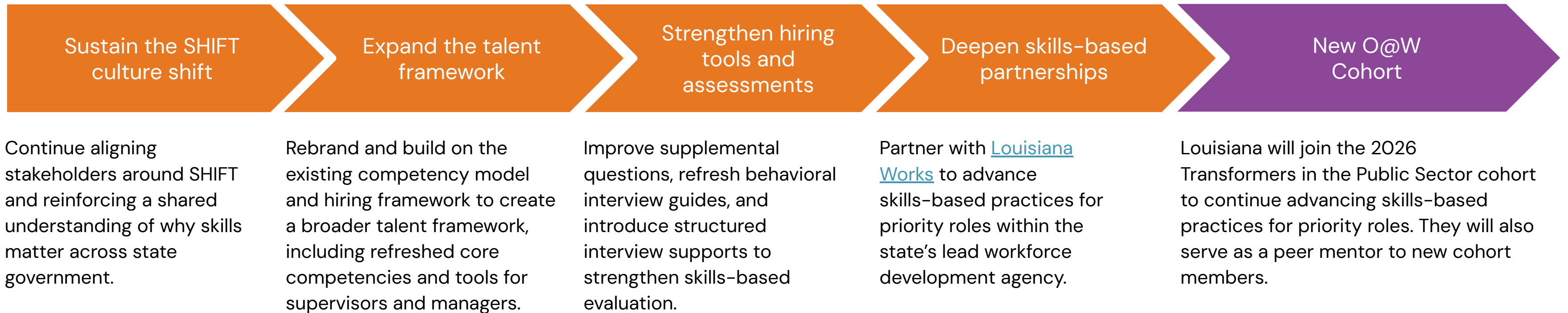
Skills-based practices gained traction when framed as a shared workforce value rather than an HR process.

WHAT'S NEXT

Deepening and Scaling SHIFT



The next phase focuses on extending SHIFT from narrative to deeper system alignment and practice.



About us



Opportunity@Work works directly with federal, state, and local governments to modernize hiring, expand career pathways, and implement skills-based talent practices that open public sector jobs to workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes (STARs).

We provide the data, tools, guidance, and peer learning environments that help public sector leaders remove unnecessary degree requirements, improve hiring efficiency, and build more inclusive and effective workforces.

JOIN THE HUB

