

A photograph of three people in a meeting. A man with a beard in a tan sweater stands in the center, leaning over a woman with braids on the right and a man in a purple suit on the left. They are all looking at a laptop screen. The background is a bright office with large windows. There are decorative orange and yellow curved shapes in the corners.

# Building a Skills-Based Organization in the Public Sector

A Strategic Guide for Executive Human Resource Leaders in Government



Opportunity  
@Work.

# Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest gratitude to the dedicated public servants who participated in our working sessions for the Building a Skills-Based Organization in the Public Sector Playbook. Your invaluable insights, candid feedback, and real-world expertise were instrumental in shaping this resource.

By sharing your unique perspectives, drawn from various roles, agencies, and levels of government, you helped ensure this playbook is a practical, relevant, and actionable tool for skills-based transformation. Thank you for your generous contribution of time and expertise.

**Byron P. Decoteau, Jr.**

*Director*

Louisiana State Civil Service

**Greg Hargis**

*Assistant Director*

Utah Division of Human Resource Management

**Winston Hill**

*Chief Human Resource Officer*

Arizona Department of Economic Security

**Nicole Sornsin**

*Chief Human Resource Officer*

State of Arizona

**Kathy Thiriot**

*HR Program Manager*

Utah Division of Human Resource Management

**Nicole Tucker**

*Chief Operating Officer*

Louisiana State Civil Service

**Rob Waddell**

*Chief Human Resource Officer*

Arizona Department of Health Services

**Jennifer Wakefield**

*Director of Recruiting*

Utah Division of Human Resource Management



# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
The Public Sector and Skills-Based Talent Strategies.....	7
A Skills-Based Organization Framework.....	10
Becoming a Skills-Based Government Organization.....	13
The Talent Practices – In Depth.....	16
Workforce Planning .....	16
Talent Acquisition.....	24
Onboarding & Development .....	27
Partner with Opportunity@Work .....	32
Appendix.....	33

# Introduction

In government, our workforce is our greatest strength. Every public service – from emergency response to child welfare, transportation to unemployment insurance – depends on the skills and commitment of the people who deliver it. Yet as the nature of work changes and competition for talent grows, our systems must evolve to ensure that we’re not only hiring the right people with the right skills, but also empowering them to succeed and grow.

Building a skills-based organization in the public sector is about more than modernizing HR practices – it’s about transforming how we recognize, value, and grow the skills in our workforce. By embedding skills into every part of the talent lifecycle, we create a more clear, fair, and agile system for both employees and the residents we serve.

As chief human resources officers in state government, we know this work requires both vision and persistence. Across the country, the public sector is redesigning job descriptions, rethinking hiring and promotion processes, and equipping hiring managers with tools to identify and grow talent based on skills. In Arizona, we’re working with a large, cross-agency team all dedicated to leading with and integrating skills into our talent practices. We’re also communicating why these changes matter: how they strengthen our workforce, expand opportunity, and help us deliver better outcomes for the people we serve.

This playbook, **Building a Skills-Based Organization in the Public Sector**, offers a practical roadmap for embedding skills-based practices across every HR function. Whether you’re new to skills-based approaches or are ready to scale, this playbook can help you set and refine your skills strategy. The [Government as Employer Playbook](#) is a complementary resource that offers tactical guidance and real-world examples to help you take action, no matter where you are on your skills-based journey.

Use this resource to clarify your starting point, identify opportunities to elevate skills in your HR systems, and take targeted action. Learn from what has worked in other states, adapt ideas to your context, and use it to spark new conversation.

By aligning our talent strategies with the skills our mission demands, we can strengthen service delivery, increase engagement, and build the next generation of public sector leaders.

Together, we can shape the future of government – one where the skills of our people drive the success of our state.

## **Winston Hill**

*Chief Human Resource Officer  
Arizona Department of Economic Security*

## **Rob Waddell**

*Chief Human Resource Officer  
Arizona Department of Health Services*

## How to Use this Strategic Guide

The Opportunity@Work Public Sector and Policy Team designed “Building a Skills-Based Organization in the Public Sector” as a guide for executive human resource leaders in developing a strategy to start implementing and scaling skills-based talent practices across HR functions. It offers a roadmap specific to the public sector with a variety of action steps to embed skills across your organization.

### How this guide can help

- **Clarify your starting point:** Use the Skills-Based Organization Maturity Model to understand where your organization is in the skills-based talent journey
- **Take focused, practical action:** Find clear action steps, real-world examples, and resources that make it easier to apply to your organization
- **Learn from what has worked:** Leverage insights from other public sector organizations and leaders with valuable experience and learnings

### What the guide does not do

- **Does not offer a one-size-fits-all solution:** Every public sector organization is unique and this playbook is designed to be adapted to your environment
- **Does not replace policy or HR guidance:** It complements existing policies and structures by helping you make strategic shifts within them
- **Does not prescribe a specific timeline or mandate:** You decide where to begin, what to prioritize, and how to pace your implementation

### How to approach using the guide

- **Start where you are:** Use the Maturity Model guidance to identify a starting point that aligns with your current capacity and opportunities
- **Use what resonates:** Not every action step may apply to you – skip around, revisit sections, or focus on the areas that are ready for change
- **Let it inspire action:** Use it to challenge old assumptions, rally stakeholders, and begin building a public sector workforce that puts skills at the forefront

No matter where you start, you have the ability to lead change. This strategic guide is here to help you get started.

For more tactical support, Opportunity@Work’s [Government as Employer Playbook](#) is a practical, action-oriented resource to help the public sector leaders at all levels adopt and scale skills-based talent practices.

The [STARs Public Sector Hub](#) runs yearly cohorts to help leaders implement and scale skills-based talent practices in government. Check out our website for more information on upcoming cohort opportunities.

# Opportunity@Work and the Case for Skills-Based Talent Practices

Opportunity@Work’s mission is to rewire the U.S. labor market so that all workers, including **STARs** — workers **Skilled Through Alternative Routes**, rather than through a bachelor’s degree — can access upward mobility. Over the next decade, **our goal** is to open 10 million jobs to STARs, enabling 1 million workers to move into higher-wage roles and increase earnings by more than \$100 billion.

We envision a labor market where skills matter more than where you got them. To achieve this, we promote skills-based talent strategies and advocate for removing unnecessary degree requirements that become an invisible barrier to good jobs and economic mobility. When skills are recognized and rewarded, all workers can work, learn, and earn to their full potential.

## Who are STARs?

**STARs** are workers who are active in the labor force and who have gained skills through military service, community college, talent development programs and bootcamps, partial college completion, or, most commonly, on-the-job experience, instead of through a bachelor’s degree.

STARs make up half of the U.S. workforce and are working across occupations and sectors.

## Skill in Government

Skills-based **approaches** improve talent matching and broaden access to qualified candidates, including the estimated 70+ million STARs in the U.S. workforce. In government, this can help deliver better public services.

The **public sector** — at the federal, state, and local levels — is leading the way in adopting skills-based talent practices and can help contribute to reaching our goal to expand opportunity for STARs. This guide provides:

- 1 An executive-level **overview of what it takes to become a skills-based organization**, and
- 2 A practical and strategic **roadmap to implement these practices in public-sector contexts**.



# The Public Sector and Skills-Based Talent Strategies

## What Skills Mean — and Why They Matter in the Public Sector

In today's rapidly changing labor market, skills-based talent strategies are critical for the public sector. They help public sector employers attract qualified candidates, improve hiring efficiency, and strengthen service delivery. Leveraging skills effectively ensures agencies can meet evolving talent needs and deliver better outcomes for the people they serve.

### What are “skills”?

A skill is an individual's application of knowledge to successfully complete specific tasks, often acquired through training or experience.<sup>1</sup> Skills vary by role, level of complexity, expertise required, and in type. For example, they can include:

- **Technical skills** such as coding, data analysis, and accounting;
- **Durable skills** such as critical thinking, communication, and emotional intelligence; and
- **Future skills** that can be developed over time.

A focus on skills opens pathways for people who gained capabilities through a variety of ways, including community college, apprenticeships, military service, bootcamps, and on-the-job experience.

### What is a “skills-based organization”?

Skills-based talent practices focus on the capabilities needed to perform a job. A skills-based organization uses skills to drive talent decisions across the talent lifecycle — from workforce planning and job design to hiring and advancement — improving service delivery and organizational agility.

### Why this matters in the public sector

Public sector employers face persistent vacancies and retirements<sup>2</sup> — a trend expected to continue. In times of budget surpluses and budget constraints, skills-based talent practices make governments more efficient and effective, which strengthens retention and service delivery.<sup>3</sup> They also widen candidate pools, recognize transferable skills, and improve role fit.

Focusing on what candidates and employees can do — not just where they've been — helps the public sector hire faster, adapt to emerging skill needs, and deliver better services.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Education Design Lab](#), *Employer Validation: Working with the T-Profile*

<sup>2</sup> [Work for America](#), *From the Frontlines: Insights from state and local leaders on the government staffing crisis*, June 2024

<sup>3</sup> [Opportunity at Work](#), *Skills-First Hiring*

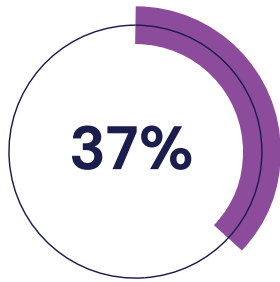


## What the Data Shows

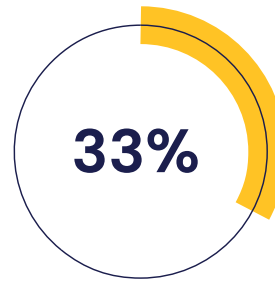
In January 2025, the National Association of State Personnel Executives (NASPE) and Deloitte surveyed 46 states' HR leaders — including Chief Human Resource Officers — to understand adoption of skills-based talent practices in government. The survey achieved a 59% completion rate.

### Top Line Survey Results

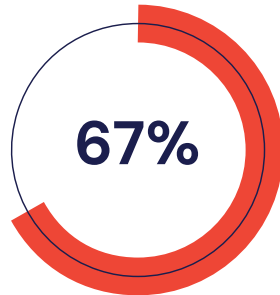
To compete for talent, public sector employers are modernizing their strategies across the talent lifecycle — not just hiring. State HR leaders expressed needing more information about the skills in their existing workforce, how skill needs will change in the future, and a strategic plan to upskill their workforce to meet this need.



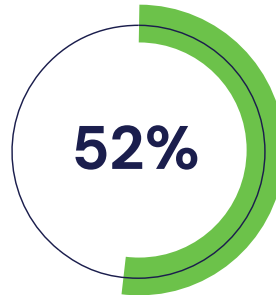
say their **state government's workforce skills match the skills needed for the current jobs.**



currently do **not know what skills its workforce possesses now.**



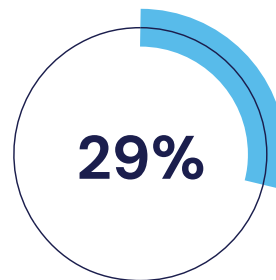
say they **cannot effectively anticipate the skills the organization will need from their workforce over the next three years.**



have modified or are **actively modifying their job architecture with defined skills.**



**expect to experience skills shortages in the next three years.**



believe that **their state government's current upskilling and reskilling efforts can adequately meet future talent and skill needs.**

Based on these survey findings, public sector employers have an opportunity **to apply a skills-based approach to all talent practices across the employee lifecycle.**

## Where the Public Sector Can Lead

The NASPE/Deloitte survey identified several opportunity areas for public sector employers to advance skills-based talent practices. These areas represent opportunities for policy and practice change and a starting point for the 30% of state governments that have not started adopting talent practices that prioritize skills.

### Opportunities to Lead



**Redesign job postings and classifications around skills to expand access and better match talent**

**48%** of participants said their state government has not updated their job architecture around skills



**Communicate early and often about the value of skills-based practices to accelerate adoption**

**48%** of participants said they have shared organization-wide communications on the value of a skill-based strategy in hiring and talent management, but only 8% have held trainings to educate non-hiring staff and leadership on skill-based hiring and talent management



**Invest in tools and systems to track internal skill supply and demand**

**59%** of participants responded that their state government is not using a tool to capture and track their people's skills; of those leveraging tools to track internal skills supply data, HR information systems (22%) and excel (4%) are the top tools



**Explore the role of AI in matching skills to jobs while addressing risk and fairness considerations**

**74%** of participants said their state government does not use nor plans to use AI for skills-based matching

# A Skills-Based Organization Framework

## Maturity Model for the Public Sector

The **Skills-Based Organization Maturity Model** helps public sector leaders assess where they are today and chart a path toward embedding skills across all talent practices. By offering a structured framework, the model highlights how an organization can shift from awareness to a fully embedded and sustained skills-based approach.

Becoming a skills-based organization is a strategic imperative for government. Use this model as a diagnostic tool: identify your current state, highlight gaps, and set priorities for action. Each stage offers clear markers to help government HR leaders take the next step.

<b>Exploring Awareness</b>	The organization is building awareness of skills-based practices. Hiring, development, and advancement remain largely credential- or experienced-based, with skills used only informally.
<b>Activating Partial Implementation</b>	Leaders recognize the value of skills, but formal policies and dedicated structures for skills-based practices are limited. Pilot initiatives map skills in key roles and test skills-based practices, but adoption is uneven.
<b>Building Integrated Processes</b>	Skills are integrated into core HR processes and supported by formal policies, active leadership, and dedicated structures to scale adoption. Policies and technology increasingly ensure consistent and sustainable use of skills across the organization.
<b>Actualizing Fully Embedded &amp; Sustained</b>	Skills are embedded in all talent practices across the employee lifecycle, guided by strong policies, active leadership commitment, and dedicated structures to sustain widespread implementation.

This maturity model assumes some familiarity with skills-based talent practices. For more background on STARs and skills-based talent practices, check out O@W's [A Guide to STARs for the Public Sector](#) and O@W's [Government as Employer Playbook](#).

# Core Enablers and Talent Practices

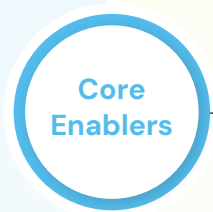
Using the **Skills-Based Organization Maturity Model**, leaders can evaluate current practices and plan for broader adoption.

The **Skills-Based Organization Framework** identifies the **core enablers** and **talent practices** that work together to embed skills into all aspects of workforce management.

## Core enablers

**Core enablers** are the mindsets, structures, and systems that make skills-based practices possible and sustainable. This Skills-Based Organization Framework has four core enablers that support skills-based policies and practices.

- 1 Talent Philosophy**  
 A shared organizational commitment to valuing skills as the foundation for hiring, development, and advancement decisions.
- 2 Skills Framework & Common Language**  
 A standardized way of defining and categorizing skills so they can be consistently recognized, assessed, and applied across the organization.
- 3 Data & Technology**  
 The tools and systems that collect, store, and analyze skills information to inform workforce planning and talent decisions.
- 4 Governance**  
 Clear roles, decision-making structures, and accountability mechanisms to guide and sustain skills-based practices over time.



## Talent practices

**Talent practices** are the day-to-day HR functions where skills are applied to attract, develop, and retain talent. The core enablers support the integration of skills into each of the nine talent practices, an organization can transform every stage of the employee lifecycle toward a skills-based approach.



## Applying the Maturity Model to the Core Enablers

The Maturity Model helps public sector leaders assess where their organization stands in adopting the core enablers of a skills-based approach. By identifying the current stage, leaders can prioritize actions that will strengthen systems, structures, and mindsets—and chart a clear path toward fully embedding skills into workforce management.

	Talent Philosophy	Skills Framework & Common Language	Data & Technology	Governance
Exploring	Leaders acknowledge skills as important but rely primarily on education and experience for most decisions.	No shared skills framework exists and terms vary across roles and departments.	Skills data is rarely collected and provides little insight into workforce needs or capabilities.	Skills-based practices lack formal oversight, leadership, or accountability structures.
Activating	Leaders start linking skills to job tasks and workforce priorities, adjusting select HR policies and practices.	Basic skills framework emerges for select roles and definitions are not consistently applied.	Skills data is gathered manually for select roles, with limited accuracy and application.	Informal champions coordinate skills initiatives in select areas with limited consistency.
Building	Skills are a stated priority and integrated into several workforce policies and practices.	A standardized skills framework and common language are adopted and embedded across most talent practices.	Technology supports skills data collection and informs workforce planning, hiring, and development decisions.	A designated leader or governance body oversees skills integration across multiple functions and practices.
Actualizing	Skills consistently drive hiring, development, and advancement decisions across the organization.	A comprehensive skills framework fully guides all workforce planning, hiring, development, and mobility decisions.	Integrated systems maintain real-time skills data and enable predictive planning across the entire workforce.	A clear governance structure with defined roles, accountability, and resources ensures skills are sustained enterprise-wide.

# Becoming a Skills-Based Government Organization

## Practices Across the Talent Lifecycle

Moving from the maturity model to practice, agencies can embed skills into the talent lifecycle in ways that reflect their unique context. Implementation is rarely linear. Organizations often begin where there is a strong leadership commitment, momentum, or urgent need — whether that is in planning, hiring, or development. The maturity model and core enablers offer a foundation to assess readiness, set priorities, and choose actions that generate early impact, while laying the groundwork for broader integration.



Core Enablers			
Talent Philosophy	Skills Framework & Common Language	Data & Technology	Governance

## Setting a Vision and Taking the First Steps

Transitioning to a skills-based approach starts with a clear, shared vision. Leaders must define what skills-based means for their organization, why it matters, and how it will improve service delivery. Early actions — such as aligning leadership, building awareness, and sharing a compelling case for change — lay the groundwork for long-term success.

### Getting Started

- **Align leadership commitment** around the benefits of a skills-based approach.
- **Partner with agency HR leads, hiring directors, and any other HR staff** that will inform and implement an organizational strategy early in the planning process.
- **Look for opportunities to incorporate STAR voices** along the way.
- **Assess the current state** of skills-related practices and systems, leveraging any skills-based practices already in place.
- **Identify and engage key stakeholders** (agency heads, department heads, HR staff, hiring managers) early to build momentum.
- **Allocate resources** to ensure implementers have the capacity and capabilities to drive organization-wide strategies.
- **Identify early wins** to demonstrate value quickly.

### Communicating the Vision

- **Define a clear message** that connects skills-based practices to organizational goals.
- **Tailor communications** to different audiences (agency heads, department heads, HR staff, hiring managers, prospective applicants).
- **Use data and stories** to show the impact on service delivery and employee growth.
- **Reinforce regularly** through multiple channels and leaders.

### Sustaining Engagement

- **Establish feedback loops** to regularly capture insights from employees, managers, and partners.
- **Create shared accountability** by involving stakeholders in decision-making and governance.
- **Adapt based on input** to keep the approach relevant and responsive to changing needs.
- **Celebrate progress** by recognizing employee contributions, including STARs, and highlighting success stories.



# Questions to Ask Before Taking the First Steps

The transformation of government into a skills-based organization requires integrating skills across the entire talent lifecycle. By more strategically leveraging employee capabilities, this shift can reshape operations and service delivery — enabling government to work with greater efficiency, effectiveness, and impact for the people it serves.

As you embark on your journey to build a skills-based organization, here are questions you can ask yourself to ensure this work mitigates organizational risk, reimagines work, and builds a stronger workforce ecosystem.

## Questions for a Skills-Based Government Organization to Consider



### Mitigate Risk

**By mapping and understanding workforce skills in detail, governments can spot gaps early and address them before they become risks.** This skills-based approach ensures critical capabilities are in place and enables faster adaptation to shifting demands and unexpected challenges.

What skills do we need now and in the future? How can skills-based practices enhance our organizational skill set?

How can we integrate skills-based insights to mitigate risks and enhance our organizational agility?

How can we update the skills in our workforce to align with strategic goals?



### Reimagine Work

**A skills-based approach reimagines how work gets done.** By breaking down job responsibilities and tasks into skills, governments can more easily identify gaps, deploy talent to priority needs, and adapt quickly to change. This creates greater agility, better decision-making, and the ability to respond to complex challenges with the right skills at the right time.

How do we advance our mission by changing the way we approach work with skills at the forefront?

How can we map skills to roles to maximize employee potential?

How can we partner with our entire workforce to reimagine how we define our work and how it gets done?



### Support the Workforce Ecosystem

**A skills-based government can radiate impact across the workforce ecosystem by extending skills-based practices to other employees, contractors, workforce development system partners, and external networks.** Through collaboration, these partnerships can build future skills that lead to economic growth and mobility for an entire community, region, or state.

How can we work with partners across agencies or organizations to develop a skills-based workforce ecosystem?

How can we continuously monitor and adapt to the evolving skill requirements in the job market?

How can we design our workforce ecosystem to align skills with opportunities and support long-term economic mobility?

# The Talent Practices – In Depth

## WORKFORCE PLANNING

Government organizations can begin implementing skills-based practices at any point in the talent lifecycle. Workforce planning focuses on identifying workforce needs and positioning the organization to attract talent with the right skills. These serve as a foundation to building a skills-based organization. Using the Skills-Based Organization Maturity Model, leaders can assess their current state, set priorities, and make decisions that align with capacity and strategic goals.



### JOB ARCHITECTURE

Organizing roles into families and levels through a structured framework, with clearly defined skills — both required and preferred — at each stage.



### CAREER AGILITY

Enabling employees to move into new roles or projects based on skills, creating more flexible career pathways.



### LEADERSHIP & SUCCESSION PLANNING

Identifying and preparing future leaders using skills data to guide readiness and development.



### CULTURE & ENGAGEMENT

Fostering an organizational culture that values continuous learning and skill development.



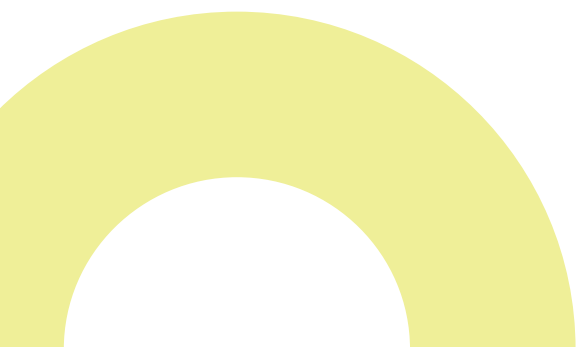
### TOTAL REWARDS

Designing compensation and recognition programs that incentivize skills growth and application.

**WORKFORCE PLANNING**

**Skills-Based Organization Maturity Model for Workforce Planning**

	Job Architecture	Career Agility	Leadership & Succession Planning	Culture & Engagement	Total Rewards
Exploring	Roles are defined inconsistently, with limited information about required skills.	Career paths are unclear, and employees rely on personal networks to find opportunities.	Succession planning is ad hoc, and leadership development opportunities are inconsistent.	Engagement is measured inconsistently, with little focus on skills or development.	Pay and recognition are tied primarily to length of service and job titles.
Activating	Initial job families and groupings are introduced, and some skills are documented.	Some career pathways are identified, but few tools support movement across functions.	Basic leadership programs exist, but tracking of future leadership needs is limited.	Regular surveys are conducted, but employee input is not connected to workforce strategy.	Compensation policies are under review, with limited consideration of skills or performance.
Building	Transparent job families and levels are established, with required and preferred skills defined for each role.	Skills are mapped to mobility pathways, and employees can access resources for internal opportunities.	Skills and competencies are defined for leadership roles, and pipelines are established for critical positions.	Skills-based practices begin shaping culture through recognition of growth in career pathways.	Skills, contributions, and performance begin shaping compensation and recognition programs.
Actualizing	A comprehensive skills-based job architecture is embedded in HR systems and supports growth careers and consistent decisions.	Transparent skills-based pathways support advancement and lateral mobility, embedding agility in planning and development.	A comprehensive skills-based succession strategy builds broad talent pools and prepares leaders across the organization.	A culture of transparency and growth links engagement to organizational performance and skills-based values.	Rewards consistently reflect skills, growth, and impact through transparent systems that reinforce development.



WORKFORCE PLANNING



## Job Architecture

A skills-based job architecture organizes roles into families and levels through a structured framework, with clearly defined skills — both required and preferred — at each stage. It clarifies the skills needed for success at different levels, ensures consistency in how jobs are defined, and provides employees with a transparent roadmap to develop and advance in their careers.

A **mature** job architecture in a skills-based organization...

Creates a dynamic work and skills architecture where the nature of work is being prioritized over job hierarchies.

Provides a well-defined job architecture describing jobs in terms of skills and what you will learn on the job instead of tasks and responsibilities.

Here are five steps that can help you get started with building a skills-based job architecture in your organization:

- **Develop a skills taxonomy** to define and inventory workforce skills, enabling assessment of strengths and gaps against organizational goals.
- **Modernize job classifications and minimum qualifications** to reflect the skills needed for success.
- **Map roles and career paths** to define job families, levels, and required skills consistently across the organization.
- **Establish a system** for ongoing updates to job classifications, minimum qualifications, and career paths to keep them current and relevant.
- **Refresh job descriptions and postings** with hiring managers to lead with required and preferred skills.

### Outcomes and Benefits

#### Organizational Value

Provides a consistent framework to design roles, align talent with strategic objectives, and enable data-driven workforce planning across agencies.

#### Employee Value

Creates transparency in career paths and mobility by clearly defining the skills required at each level, supporting fair pay and opportunities for advancement.

#### Technology Value

Establishes a common architecture that can be embedded into HR systems, powering analytics, AI-enabled matching, and skills-based decision-making at scale.

## WORKFORCE PLANNING



### Career Agility

Career agility enables employees to adapt, grow, and move fluidly across roles based on skills, interests, and organizational needs. By fostering continuous learning and proactive career development, employees can navigate change, stay relevant, and pursue new opportunities, while government retains talent and builds resilience aligned to evolving priorities.

#### Mature career agility in a skills-based organization...

Creates transparent pathways that allow employees to navigate lateral and upward moves based on current and potential skills.

Provides tools and supports for employees to explore career options, plan progression, and pursue reskilling or upskilling aligned with organizational needs.

#### Here are four steps that can help you get started with skills-based **career agility** in your organization:

- **Promote flexible career paths** — horizontal, vertical, cross-functional — that support both personal growth agency workforce needs.
- **Strengthen retention by empowering employees to explore roles** that align with their skills, strengths, and career interests.
- **Encourage employees and their managers to have regular career conversations** to discuss opportunities for skills development and promotion.
- **Integrate reskilling and upskilling programs** to support leadership transitions into high-need and future-focused roles.

#### Outcomes and Benefits

##### Organizational Value

Increases workforce adaptability and retention by building a pipeline of talent ready to fill critical roles.

##### Employee Value

Expands visibility into growth opportunities, helping employees feel supported and motivated to advance.

##### Technology Value

Leverages talent platforms and data to match employees to opportunities based on skills, not just titles.

WORKFORCE PLANNING



## Leadership & Succession Planning

Embedding skills into leadership and succession planning enables agencies to identify, develop, and sustain future leaders while preparing for transitions and knowledge transfer. A skills-based approach creates transparent pipelines, strengthens core leadership capabilities, and enhances organizational resilience.

### Mature leadership & succession planning in a skills-based organization...

Focuses leadership development and succession planning on critical skills, aligning leader readiness with organizational needs.

Uses skills data and analytics to identify, develop, and advance emerging talent into leadership pipelines.

### Here are four steps that can help you get started with skills-based leadership & succession planning in your organization:

- **Assess leadership strengths and gaps** with skills assessments and analytics to anticipate future needs.
- **Develop targeted programs** to build critical leadership skills, using technology to track proficiency and provide feedback.
- **Provide coaching and mentorship** that prepares emerging leaders with the skills needed to succeed in future roles.
- **Establish a proactive succession planning process** with structured knowledge-transfer practices for incoming leaders.

### Outcomes and Benefits

#### Organizational Value

Anticipates leadership challenges, strengthens leadership continuity, and reduces risk of talent and knowledge gaps in critical roles.

#### Employee Value

Expands access to leadership opportunities and deepens commitment by valuing skills and potential over length of service.

#### Public Value

Builds trust and confidence in government by ensuring leadership is skilled, capable, and prepared to deliver.

WORKFORCE PLANNING



## Culture & Engagement

A skills-based culture prioritizes employees’ capabilities and potential over traditional markers like job titles, degrees, or years of experience, focusing on what people can do and learn. By embedding skills into culture, organizations can better recognize and value unique contributions that strengthen both employee belonging and organizational performance.

### Mature culture & engagement practices in a skills-based organization...

Fosters an innovative and collaborative environment that leverages diverse skill sets and perspectives.

Enhances employee engagement by offering personalized career opportunities, skill development, and mentorship to support individual growth.

### Here are four steps that can help you get started with building a culture of skills in your organization:

- **Communicate the organization’s priority to use skills** as the primary way to recruit and advance talent, linking the approach to values and goals.
- **Engage employees on the importance and benefits of a skills-based culture** through dialogue and storytelling that builds buy-in from the ground up.
- **Encourage employees to reflect on the skills they bring**, the skills they want to develop, and how they can contribute to a culture of skills.
- **Sustain your focus on skills** by embedding them into long-term goals, policies, and everyday practices.

### Outcomes and Benefits

#### Organizational Value

Improves the organization’s ability to adapt by embedding a culture of continuous learning, bringing in and developing new skills to meet evolving needs.

#### Employee Value

Increases retention and job satisfaction by fostering a culture that values skills—aligning jobs to strengths, offering transparent growth opportunities, and recognizing contributions.

#### Public Value

Expands access to good public sector jobs by valuing demonstrated skills, democratizing opportunity, and strengthening economic mobility.

WORKFORCE PLANNING



## Total Rewards

Total rewards in a skills-based organization recognize and incentivize employees for the skills they apply and grow – not just their job title or length of service. By valuing skills development, organizations align rewards with improved performance, applying new skills, and motivating continuous professional growth. This approach to rewards is more transparent in helping employees see how their contributions connect to advancement and recognition.

### Mature rewards practices in a skills-based organization...

Aligns rewards with demonstrated skills and abilities, ensuring compensation and recognition reflect employee contributions.

Incentivizes critical skill growth linking the learning and development function with rewards.

### Here are four steps that can help you get started with advancing skills-based rewards practices in your organization:

- **Assess current pay and promotion practices** to identify where rewards can be better aligned to demonstrated skills and introduce new ways to compensate for skills like pay adjustments and skill bonuses.
- **Define transparent criteria** that link rewards (pay, promotion, recognition) directly to skill application and growth, and regularly update criteria to compensate for critical or in-demand skills.
- **Equip managers with resources and frameworks** to evaluate and reward skill development fairly.
- **Evaluate the adoption and effectiveness of skills-based rewards** to ensure fairness and alignment with organizational skill development goals.

### Outcomes and Benefits

#### Organizational Value

Optimizes reward investments by aligning dollars with priority skills, filling capability gaps, and improving productivity and quality of work.

#### Employee Value

Offers employees more control over income and career growth.

#### Culture Value

Promotes fair compensation by recognizing skills and contributions rather than length of service or credentials

## WORKFORCE PLANNING

## In Action

Workforce planning serves as the foundation to building a skills-based organization, shifting toward clearly defining jobs, career progression, and applications in terms of skills. The following example from Louisiana State Civil Service highlights how governments can change the narrative around skills to build and scale a skills-based culture within state government.



### Workforce Planning Practices In Action Louisiana State Civil Service | Culture & Engagement

For over a decade, Louisiana State Civil Service (SCS) has been using a statewide [competency model](#) and [hiring framework](#) as a foundation for skills-based hiring and advancement. HR staff and hiring managers use these tools to identify the competencies and behaviors needed for success in specific roles and to evaluate candidates against those skills.

In 2025, in response to stakeholder feedback, SCS recognized the need to help hiring managers and employees better understand why the state is building a skills-based culture. To meet that need, SCS launched SHIFT — [Shaping How we Invest in Future Talent](#) — a statewide campaign highlighting how Louisiana is embedding skills across its talent system to build a skilled, trusted public workforce.

The SHIFT narrative helps agencies, employees, and job seekers see their shared role in modernizing talent practices and delivering better public services. By leading with a clear and inspiring message about why skills matter, Louisiana is positioning itself to give every candidate the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities — no matter how or where they gained them — and to build a workforce that reflects the strengths of its people.

### Building Capacity to Take Action

Building capacity for workforce planning doesn't always require new resources — governments can start with what they have by repurposing existing resources and rethinking roles and responsibilities. While this approach stays within existing budgets, progress may take longer.

Dedicated investments and people can help build momentum to reach goals faster. They can also help provide support and technical assistance to agencies to enable ongoing implementation.

For additional [Workforce Planning](#) resources, see the [Appendix](#).

# TALENT ACQUISITION

In a skills-based talent lifecycle, talent acquisition involves screening candidates for skills, validating the skills needed on day one, and establishing a structured process with clearly defined selection guidelines to evaluate candidates based on their skills and ability to perform the job.



## INTERVIEW & SELECTION

Recruiting and selecting candidates based on demonstrated skills, expanding access to qualified talent from a variety of sources.

### Skills-Based Organization Maturity Model for Talent Acquisition

	Interview & Selection
Exploring	Hiring decisions rely primarily on degrees and prior experience, not demonstrated skills.
Activating	Some job postings reference skills, but alignment with job tasks remains limited.
Building	Skills are central to postings, assessments, and interviews, broadening access to STARs and candidates from a variety of backgrounds.
Actualizing	Hiring consistently prioritizes validated skills assessments, ensuring fair selection and stronger quality of hire.



## TALENT ACQUISITION



## Interview & Selection

Skills-based hiring is the process of interviewing, assessing, and selecting candidates based on demonstrated skills, rather than relying primarily on degrees or years of experience. In this approach, agencies focus on the capabilities needed to succeed in a role, opening access to STARS, broadening talent pools, and strengthening government's ability to fill critical positions.

**Mature** interview & selection practices in a skills-based organization...

Posts roles and assess candidates based on skills and capabilities, addressing both current gaps and future needs.

Evaluates candidates on demonstrated skills, capabilities, and potential rather than degrees or years of experience.

Here are four steps that can help you get started with **Interview & Selection** in your organization:

- **Rewrite job descriptions and postings** to highlight required and preferred skills, rather than degrees or years of experience.
- **Use skills assessments**, such as structured interviews, behavioral questions, work samples, and simulations that allow candidates to showcase their skills and enable hiring managers to evaluate capabilities.
- **Broaden your sourcing channels** by partnering with local workforce development boards, training providers, and community-based organizations.
- **Equip hiring managers** with tools and training to apply skills-based interviewing and selection practices.

### Outcomes and Benefits

#### Organizational Value

Broadens applicant pools and reduces time-to-hire through skills alignment.

#### Employee Value

Expands access for candidates without degrees to compete based on proven skills.

#### Applicant Value

Improves fairness by reducing degree inflation and recognizing alternative pathways.

## TALENT ACQUISITION

## In Action

The public sector has emerged as a national leader in skills-based hiring, with most states removing unnecessary degree requirements for many state jobs. This shift is transforming hiring practices by focusing on demonstrated skills rather than credentials or years of experience. Pennsylvania stands out as a leader, expanding access to state jobs for STARS, rebranding the Commonwealth as an employer of choice, and strategically recruiting skilled talent to strengthen its workforce.



### Workforce Planning Practices In Action

#### Commonwealth of Pennsylvania | Interview & Selection

In 2023, Governor Shapiro signed [Executive Order 2023-03](#) to remove the four-year degree requirement for 92% of state jobs, or 65,000 positions, widening the applicant talent pool and streamlining the hiring process. The commonwealth updated the minimum requirements on job postings and rebranded state careers to focus on community impact and personal and professional growth. To date, the commonwealth has reduced hiring times by 32% and filled nearly 600 previously vacant permitting, licensing, and certification jobs.

In 2025, Governor Shapiro built on this foundation and signed [Executive Order 2025-01](#) to expand opportunities for Pennsylvanians seeking careers in public service. This initiative aims to help fill critical vacancies in the commonwealth's workforce with experienced former federal employees. The order directs the Office of Administration to accept federal government experience as equivalent to Commonwealth work experience for civil service roles, allowing these individuals to translate their skills and experience more easily for essential positions. Finally, Pennsylvania launched the [Hire, Improve, Recruit, Empower \(HIRE\) Committee](#) to recruit the next generation of public servants, including people with in-demand skills, and make the Commonwealth the best employer in Pennsylvania.

### Building Capacity to Take Action

Organizations can begin the transition to skills-based hiring by leveraging existing trainings and resources, and adding targeted modules where needed. While the shift requires upfront investment of time, coordination, and staff capacity, these costs are offset by long-term efficiencies – shorter time-to-hire and improved retention.

Success also depends on collaboration between recruiters and hiring managers to apply the process consistently and refine it over time. With deliberate investment and shared ownership, governments can build the capacity to make skills-based hiring a sustainable practice that strengthens both recruitment and organizational performance.

For additional [Talent Acquisition](#) resources, see the [Appendix](#).

## ONBOARDING & DEVELOPMENT

In a skills-based talent lifecycle, onboarding & development involves developing a purposeful onboarding program that highlights the skills employees can develop overtime, continuously offers employees opportunities to upskill and navigate internal mobility pathways, and creating clear criteria for promotion based on mastery of skills. Providing clear skills-based pathways for advancement can enhance employee retention.



### LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Offering targeted learning opportunities to build critical skills and support career growth for current employees.



### PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Evaluating and rewarding employees based on how they apply and develop their skills to achieve results.



### TALENT MARKETPLACE

Matching employees to internal opportunities — projects or short-term assignments — based on skills.

### Skills-Based Organization Maturity Model for Onboarding & Development

	Learning & Development	Performance Management	Talent Marketplace
Exploring	Training is offered on an ad hoc basis and primarily focused on compliance.	Reviews are infrequent, look back on recent performance, and based on supervisor judgement.	Internal opportunities are shared informally through personal networks, with no formal system in place.
Activating	Core training programs exist, but alignment with organizational skill needs is limited.	Annual reviews include some performance metrics but place limited emphasis on skills.	Some postings or projects are shared, but transparency and access across the organization are limited.
Building	Learning pathways are mapped to priority roles, and employees build in-demand skills through targeted programs.	Regular feedback connects role-specific skills to organizational goals and informs development plans.	A centralized platform connects employees to projects, and matching begins to reflect skill needs.
Actualizing	Continuous, personalized learning is embedded in career paths and integrated with workforce planning and goals.	Continuous, skills-based performance management is fully embedded in organizational systems and processes.	A skills-based marketplace enables transparent mobility, project-based staffing, and career growth across the organization.

## ONBOARDING & DEVELOPMENT



### Learning & Development

Skills-based learning and development provides employees with targeted opportunities to build critical skills, grow in their careers, and prepare for future roles. By aligning learning directly with organizational needs, agencies strengthen workforce capabilities, enhance performance, and foster a culture of continuous growth.

#### Mature learning & development in a skills-based organization...

Embeds a strong learning culture where skill development is prioritized and integrated into daily work.

Provides targeted learning, reskilling, and upskilling opportunities that address skill gaps and leverage adjacencies to unlock untapped potential.

#### Here are four steps that can help you get started with skills-based Learning & Development in your organization:

- **Align training with skills** by mapping internal programs to defined skills, competencies, and clear pathways for mobility.
- **Target critical skill gaps** by prioritizing learning & development investments that build capabilities essential to mission success.
- **Broaden access to learning** by offering multiple modalities (online, in-person, self-directed, peer-to-peer) and embedding opportunities into the flow of work.
- **Measure impact** through feedback loops that track how learning translates into skill development, employee growth, and organizational performance.

#### Outcomes and Benefits

##### Organizational Value

Strengthens workforce agility and retention by closing skill gaps and aligning employee capabilities with mission needs.

##### Employee Value

Expands career growth opportunities by helping employees build in-demand skills and demonstrate them in meaningful ways.

##### Culture Value

Embeds a continuous learning mindset across the workforce, cultivating a culture that values skills and high performance.

## ONBOARDING & DEVELOPMENT



### Performance Management

Performance management in a skills-based organization evaluates and rewards employees for how they apply and grow their skills to achieve results. It emphasizes clear expectations, continuous feedback on skill growth, and development-focused reviews that build both employee potential and organizational capability.

#### Mature performance management in a skills-based organization...

Assesses performance based on the acquisition, application, and demonstration of relevant skills, rather than solely on meeting job responsibilities.

Integrates continuous feedback on skill growth and performance to support ongoing development and future success.

#### Here are four steps that can help you get started with skills-based performance management in your organization:

- **Define performance expectations** that prioritize both results and continuous skill development.
- **Embed skills into reviews and systems** by integrating demonstrated skill growth into evaluations and capturing it consistently in HR platforms.
- **Equip managers to coach for skills** with training and resources for meaningful feedback on skill proficiency.
- **Recognize and reward skill growth** by valuing employees who apply and expand critical skills, reinforcing a culture of development.

#### Outcomes and Benefits

##### Organizational Value

Provides a more clear picture of workforce capabilities, strengthening talent decisions and leadership pipelines.

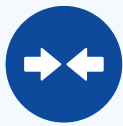
##### Employee Value

Increases engagement, continuous learning, and career growth by ensuring employees feel their contributions and skills are valued.

##### Operational Value

Reduces reliance on external hiring and training by evaluating and developing existing talent, lowering costs and improving workforce agility.

## ONBOARDING & DEVELOPMENT



### Talent Marketplace

A skills-based talent marketplace matches employees to internal opportunities – such as special projects or short-term assignments – based on their skills and interests. By creating visibility into opportunities across the organization and building professional networks, a talent marketplace surfaces complementary skill sets, supports career exploration, and strengthens workforce agility.

A **mature** talent marketplace in a skills-based organization...

Creates an efficient, dynamic, and innovative platform to match the supply and demand of skills with projects and and gigs.

Expands access to opportunities and relationship-building outside of an employee’s current agency, division, or program supporting cross-agency learning.

Here are four steps that can help you get started with building a **talent marketplace** in your organization:

- **Communicate the value of project-based work** as a way to match skills to discrete projects beyond traditional job roles, supported by clear messaging and change management.
- **Select and integrate the right platform** by leveraging existing HR systems or new tools with capabilities to match skills, track development, and enable ongoing upskilling.
- **Promote sponsorship and adoption** by encouraging employees and leaders to bring projects into the marketplace, strengthening project outcomes and increasing platform use.
- **Encourage employees to showcase and grow their skills** aligned to their performance goals.

#### Outcomes and Benefits

##### Organizational Value

Unlocks hidden and potential skills to quickly redeploy talent and meet changing skill demands without the need to hire additional people.

##### Employee Value

Opens doors to projects, new networks, and career opportunities, enabling employees to showcase skills, explore interests, and advance their careers.

##### Operational Value

Fosters a culture of continuous learning and innovation by normalizing project-based work and skill growth across the organization.

## ONBOARDING &amp; DEVELOPMENT

## In Action

Learning and development, performance management, and talent marketplaces are key levers for embedding skills into the employee experience after they are hired. Together, these practices ensure employees have opportunities to grow, receive actionable feedback, and access projects or roles that align with their skills. The following example from the State of Utah highlights how these practices can be applied through a statewide leadership development program.



### Onboarding & Development Practices In Action State of Utah | Learning & Development

The **State of Utah Leadership (SOUL) Certification** is a statewide leadership development program designed to cultivate high-performing managers and future leaders across Utah's state agencies. The program builds the skills and knowledge required for effective management and leadership in the public sector, with a strong emphasis on the unique responsibilities of state government. SOUL also supports Utah's Good Government priorities by strengthening customer service, improving retention, and promoting responsible use of public resources.

Each year, approximately 150 directors, managers, and supervisors participate in the 30-week program, which centers on **five core leadership competencies**: You as a Leader; Positive and Productive Employees; Team Dynamics and Culture; Organizational Capacity and Value; and Political Acumen and Network Building. Through a mix of in-person sessions, self-paced online learning, applied assignments, peer coaching, and networking opportunities, participants develop practical leadership skills they can immediately apply on the job.

Beyond individual skill development, SOUL creates space for reflection, cross-agency collaboration, and lasting peer connections among emerging leaders. When combined with Utah's broader talent mobility efforts, the program serves as a key lever in the state's shift toward a skills-based organization—embedding skills into leadership development, strengthening the leadership pipeline, and supporting long-term career progression across state government.

### Building Capacity to Take Action

Many governments already have professional and leadership development programs and performance management systems that can be augmented with a skills-based lens. Leveraging these existing structures is an efficient way to deliver new content and support skill development without starting from scratch. At the same time, dedicating new resources and capacity to skill development — and linking those skills directly to advancement opportunities — can accelerate progress and scale impact.

A talent marketplace can become a new feature of an existing career opportunities site or be launched as a stand-alone platform. Either approach provides employees with transparent access to new projects and roles that support their professional growth.

For additional **Onboarding & Development** resources, see the [Appendix](#).

# Partner with Opportunity@Work

We're making progress rewiring the labor market to focus on skills, but no organization can do it alone — we must work together. **Join us!**

## Join the STARs Public Sector Hub

Be part of a growing community committed to advancing STARs in government. As a [Hub member](#), you'll gain access to practical resources, exclusive events, and webinars designed to strengthen your skills-based talent practice efforts.

Driven by the needs of government practitioners, the STARs Public Sector Hub, in partnership with its members, provides support with Analytics & Insights, Research, and Narrative Design. Build networks with peers and nonprofit partners, share challenges and solutions, and accelerate your impact.

Explore the membership option that fits your role and goals.

### Individual Membership

**Equips government leaders** with research, best practices, and peer learning opportunities to strengthen their own skills-based knowledge.

**Access resources to advance change** and grow your skills-based talent strategies expertise.

### Institutional Membership

**Empower state and local government teams** with data-driven tools, technical assistance, and peer networks to accelerate workforce innovation through adoption of skills-based talent practices across government and agencies.

**Access hands-on support** and position your government as a national implementation leader.

## Reach Out

Our workforce challenges can be solved faster when we work together. Contact us today at [publicsector@opportunityatwork.org](mailto:publicsector@opportunityatwork.org).



Opportunity@Work is a nonprofit social enterprise dedicated to advancing economic opportunities for the more than 70 million U.S. workers who are Skilled Through Alternative Routes (STARs) instead of through a bachelor's degree. Opportunity@Work's research capabilities inform the nation's understanding of STARs and uncover insights that show how to make positive change within regions and industries. The organization engages with corporate, public sector, and philanthropic partners to directly address the barriers that STARs face and equip organizations to make hiring STARs for higher-wage roles the norm.

Learn more at [www.opportunityatwork.org](http://www.opportunityatwork.org).

# Appendix

## Additional Resources

### Workforce Planning

#### Job Architecture

- [JobSIDE](#): A web-based resource developed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation to help employers more easily produce skill profiles for in-demand jobs to use in skills-based hiring and support educators and workforce development professionals to more easily align their education, training, and credentialing offerings.
- [Education Design Lab Job Posting Skillitizer](#): Free online tool that converts job descriptions or job titles into skills-based language.
- [State of Utah's HR Analyst Training](#) and [Job Posting Aid](#): This template was developed by the Utah Division of Human Resource Management to assist HR Generalists and Hiring Managers in the development of job postings. Additionally, they developed a training to educate and train HR staff on the why of skills-based hiring in the state and what implementation of this looks like at various stages in the talent lifecycle.
- [Opportunity@Work Competency-based approach reference guide](#): This guide provides a detailed competency-based approach forming the basis for job descriptions, job postings, screening, interviews, performance evaluations, and internal career pathways.

#### Career Agility

- [SkillUp Coalition](#): SkillUp is a nonprofit that helps individuals secure high-opportunity employment, including in the public sector. They focus on non-degree career pathways that provide livable wages and support the job-seeker from start to finish.
- [Career Paths for Federal Program and Project Management Guide](#): This guide outlines a Federal Program and Project Management Competency Development Framework, including differentiating job titles, understanding career paths, success factors, and relevant credentials and certifications, to support career navigation in federal service.

#### Total Rewards

- [Deloitte's Breaking Tradition with Skill Based Reward](#): This article proposes that Skills-Based Rewards (SBRs), which base a worker's pay on demonstrated skill proficiency rather than solely job title, are critical for successful Skills-Based Organizations (SBOs) and incentivize continuous reskilling and upskilling in a dynamic work environment.
- [Indeed's What Is Skill-Based Pay? \(With Benefits and Drawbacks\)](#): This resource defines skill-based pay as a compensation model that uses an individual's skills and experience to determine their salary, contrasting it with job-based pay and highlighting its benefits like fostering a culture of improvement and increasing employee retention.
- [Skill based pay strategies in the knowledge economy](#): This article details how skill-based pay strategies directly link compensation to an employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities, and explains the integral role of skills management software in defining, implementing, and monitoring these strategies to promote continuous learning and combat skill gaps in the knowledge economy.
- [State of Indiana Personnel Department Compensation Policy](#): Check out Indiana's innovative compensation policy, which incorporates skills into their compensation structure.

# Additional Resources

## Talent Acquisition

### Interview & Selection

- [Opportunity@ Work's Government as Employer Playbook](#): A practical, action-oriented resource to help the public sector leaders at all levels adopt and scale skills-based talent practices.
- [Opportunity@Work's State of Louisiana Case Study](#): This resource provides an overview of Louisiana's journey to implement a competency-based hiring process toward building a skills-based organization.
- [State of Louisiana's State Civil Service \(SCS\) Hiring Framework](#): Louisiana's SCS Framework provides a tool to build a competency framework tailored to a role. When building the framework, users are provided with preferred competencies they can add. Once competencies are selected, users are provided with examples of behaviors to screen for along with potential supplemental questions to include, and interview questions and activities.
- [State of Louisiana's How to Showcase Skills for Hiring Success](#) and [Learn How to Apply Pages](#): Both of these resources were created for use by job seekers during the application stage to educate the state's approach to hiring.
- [Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Skills-Based Hiring Toolkit](#): This resource provides an overview of skills-based hiring and practical guidance for hiring managers on how to lead a skills-based recruitment.
- [LinkedIn's How to Conduct an Effective Skills-Based Interview](#): Addresses effective ways to conduct interviews with a focus on skills-based hiring.
- The [Subject Matter Expert Qualification Assessments](#) (SME-QA) process introduces subject matter experts (SMEs), in partnership with HR specialists as guides, to create and conduct job related assessments before an applicant is considered qualified. HR specialists protect merit principles and ensure the integrity of the process.
- [Education Design Lab's What + How Formula for Skill Validation Methods](#): This formula provides a framework for validating skills by identifying sources of evidence of skills and methods of evaluation.

# Additional Resources

## Onboarding & Development

### Performance Management

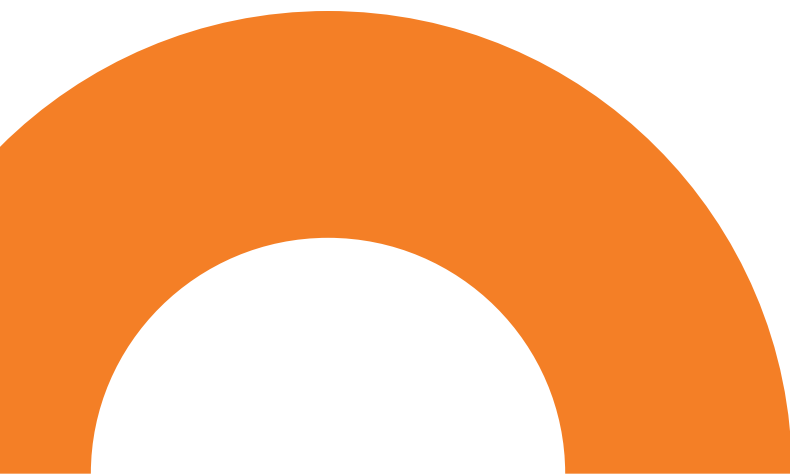
- [Phenom's Performance Management in a Skills-Based Organization](#): This article describes how to approach performance management through a skills-based lens, and how performance management software and AI tools can assist.

### Learning & Development

- [Opportunity@Work's City of Philadelphia Case Study](#): This resource showcases Philadelphia's efforts to build the City College for Municipal Employment that provides both a dedicated pathway into city careers and upskilling and career advancement opportunities for current employees.
- [Deloitte's Learning for a Skills-Based Future](#): This article how organizations can adopt a skills-based learning strategy that supports a culture of learning and employee development in the immediate- and long-term.actors, and relevant credentials and certifications, to support career navigation in federal service.

### Talent Marketplace

- [State of Ohio's Skills-Based Hiring Guidance](#): This resources gives applicants guidance on what the skills-based hiring process is, how they can build a skills profile, and explore careers that match their skillset on Ohio's career website.



# The Skills-Based Organization Maturity Model In-depth

	Job Architecture	Career Agility	Leadership & Succession Planning
EXPLORING	Roles are defined inconsistently, with limited information about required skills. Job titles and descriptions are often generic, providing little guidance on the capabilities needed. No structured job architecture framework is in place, and skills are not consistently tied to roles. Workforce planning relies heavily on credentials and experience rather than skills.	Career paths are unclear, and employees rely on personal networks to find opportunities. Leaders begin to raise awareness of career agility through discussions, workshops, or introductory programs. The focus is on explaining how flexibility and continuous learning can benefit both employees and the organization. At this stage, support is limited and efforts are largely exploratory.	Succession planning is ad hoc, and leadership development opportunities are inconsistent. Governments begin by identifying current leaders and immediate gaps, often relying on informal networks or performance history. Efforts are reactive, with little structure or consistency across agencies. Leadership needs are addressed only as vacancies arise, without a clear pipeline or strategy.
ACTIVATING	Initial job families and groupings are introduced, and some skills are documented. Early efforts focus on mapping skills to select roles and identifying visible skill gaps. The framework provides a starting point for greater consistency in role definitions, though coverage is incomplete. Application across departments remains uneven, limiting its usefulness for talent decisions.	Some career pathways are identified, but few tools support movement across functions. Governments begin introducing structured programs such as mentorships, training sessions, or career planning workshops that highlight skill development. Departments collaborate to identify critical skills and start tailoring development opportunities accordingly. Employees are encouraged to take more ownership of their growth, though resources remain uneven.	Basic leadership programs exist, but tracking of future leadership needs is limited. Governments introduce more structured processes, such as early skills assessments, mentoring, or coaching opportunities. Some targeted programs begin to prepare employees for potential leadership roles, though participation is limited. The approach is more proactive than before but still lacks consistent tracking and alignment with long-term workforce priorities.
BUILDING	Transparent job families and levels are established, with required and preferred skills defined for each role. A clear hierarchy and progression pathways support employee mobility and career growth. Skills are used to inform workforce planning, hiring, and development decisions across multiple functions. The framework is consistently applied and begins shaping organizational policies and practices.	Skills are mapped to mobility pathways, and employees can access resources for internal opportunities. Clear frameworks and policies embed agility into everyday HR practices, aligning career development with organizational goals. Regular assessments and feedback loops ensure employees build skills needed to adapt to new roles. Career agility becomes a visible performance measure for both employees and the organization.	Skills and competencies are defined for leadership roles, and pipelines are established for critical positions. Regular assessments and development programs identify emerging leaders and match them with growth opportunities. Clearer succession plans outline who is being prepared for which roles and the skills they must develop. These processes are increasingly data-driven, transparent, and integrated into broader workforce planning.
ACTUALIZING	A comprehensive skills-based job architecture is embedded in HR systems and supports career mobility and consistent decisions. Roles and skills are continuously updated to reflect organizational priorities and changes in the labor market. The architecture provides transparency for employees and clarity for leaders making talent decisions. Over time, it fosters a culture of fairness, consistency, and continuous improvement.	Transparent skills-based pathways support advancement and lateral mobility, embedding agility in planning and development. Advanced tools and technologies support continuous learning, personalized pathways, and internal mobility. Leaders routinely review and update career agility strategies to respond to changing workforce needs and priorities. Employees are empowered to navigate careers confidently, creating a resilient, future-ready workforce.	A comprehensive skills-based succession strategy builds broad talent pools and prepares leaders across the organization. Leadership transitions are managed seamlessly, minimizing disruption and ensuring continuity. Development programs are strategic and continuously updated to reflect evolving needs. Skills-based succession planning becomes a cultural norm, ensuring a resilient pipeline of leaders ready for the future.

# The Skills-Based Organization Maturity Model In-depth

	Culture & Engagement	Total Rewards	Talent Acquisition
EXPLORING	Engagement is measured inconsistently, with little focus on skills or development. Culture and engagement efforts lack structure and are not connected to organizational goals. Employees often feel undervalued and disconnected, leading to low motivation and collaboration. Formal mechanisms for feedback, recognition, or skill development are absent, creating higher risks of dissatisfaction and turnover.	Pay and recognition are tied primarily to length of service and job titles. Skills are not considered in compensation or advancement decisions, and rewards are viewed as static and inflexible. This approach can undervalue employee contributions and limit motivation. As a result, the system reinforces length of service over skill growth or performance.	Hiring decisions rely primarily on degrees and prior experience, not demonstrated skills. Recruitment is reactive, focused on filling immediate vacancies without a long-term strategy. Employer branding rarely emphasizes skills, and processes are often cumbersome, leading to poor candidate experience. The organization struggles to adapt to changing skill needs and lacks a clear framework for skills-based hiring.
ACTIVATING	Regular surveys are conducted, but employee input is not connected to workforce strategy. Early frameworks for culture and engagement begin to take shape, with basic feedback and recognition programs introduced. Employees start to feel more valued, and collaboration improves in pockets of the organization. Skills are acknowledged but not yet fully integrated into engagement or culture initiatives.	Compensation policies are under review, with limited consideration of skills or performance. Organizations begin identifying critical skills and exploring how to reflect them in pay and recognition. Early adjustments are modest, and alignment between rewards and skill development is inconsistent. Employees see progress but still experience gaps in fairness and transparency.	Some job postings reference skills, but alignment with job tasks remains limited. HR leaders begin mapping key skills and identifying gaps across roles. Recruitment becomes more structured, and employer branding highlights skills in select areas. Candidate experience improves in parts of the process, though the use of skills in hiring decisions is inconsistent.
BUILDING	Skills-based practices begin shaping culture through recognition of growth career pathways. Employees feel motivated and aligned with organizational goals as robust feedback and recognition mechanisms are introduced. Continuous learning and skill development become part of the culture, promoting collaboration, innovation, and adaptability. Engagement strategies are regularly evaluated and adapted to meet evolving needs.	Skills, contributions, and performance begin shaping compensation and recognition programs. Clear metrics and processes link skill development to rewards, supporting growth and mobility. Employees are recognized for the value of their skills as well as their contributions to outcomes. This stage strengthens both fairness and alignment with organizational goals.	Skills are central to postings, assessments, and interviews, broadening access to STARs and candidates from a variety of backgrounds. Recruitment strategies are data-driven, with strong employer branding to attract skilled talent. Processes are streamlined to enhance candidate experience, and skills are fully integrated into workforce planning. Hiring decisions increasingly reflect demonstrated capabilities rather than credentials alone.
ACTUALIZING	A culture of transparency and growth links engagement to organizational performance and skills-based values. Employees are highly engaged and motivated, supported by clear opportunities for learning, mobility, and recognition. The organization fosters a shared vision and values that reinforce, innovation and adaptability. Continuous feedback, assessment, and adaptation embed skills into culture, driving high retention, productivity, and long-term success.	Rewards consistently reflect skills, growth, and impact through, transparent systems that reinforce development. Compensation strategies are dynamic, adapting to evolving business needs and emerging skill requirements. Employees feel consistently valued as their skills and growth are recognized. This alignment builds a motivated workforce and reinforces organizational success.	Hiring consistently prioritizes validated skills assessments, ensuring fair selection and stronger quality of hire. Talent acquisition is dynamic, agile, and responsive to changing skill needs. Advanced analytics optimize recruitment and align skills with organizational priorities. The organization provides an excellent candidate experience and builds a reputation as a leader in skills-based hiring.

# The Skills-Based Organization Maturity Model In-depth

	Learning & Development	Performance Management	Talent Marketplace
EXPLORING	<p>Training is offered on an ad hoc basis and primarily focused on compliance. Programs are reactive, designed to meet immediate needs rather than long-term priorities. There is little awareness of the benefits of a skills-based approach, and development lacks a structured framework. As a result, employees see limited opportunities for growth and career advancement.</p>	<p>Reviews are infrequent, look back on recent performance, and are based largely on supervisor judgment. The focus is on compliance and task completion rather than skills or growth. Performance management is treated as an administrative task, not a strategic tool. Employees receive little feedback to guide development or strengthen organizational capability.</p>	<p>Internal opportunities are shared informally through personal networks, with no formal system in place. Employees have little visibility into available projects or roles, limiting mobility and growth. Leaders may begin exploring the concept of a talent marketplace but have not yet invested in structure or tools. Early awareness is focused on the potential benefits of improving transparency.</p>
ACTIVATING	<p>Core training programs exist, but alignment with organizational skill needs is limited. HR leaders begin identifying priority skills and mapping them to select programs. Early measurement of learning impact is introduced, though application is inconsistent across departments. Employees gain access to some structured opportunities but still face gaps in skill development.</p>	<p>Annual reviews include some performance metrics but place limited emphasis on skills. Goal setting begins to include skill development, and managers introduce basic coaching. Employees start to receive feedback that highlights their capabilities, though practices remain uneven across departments. Awareness of the value of skills in evaluations is growing but not yet embedded.</p>	<p>Some postings or projects are shared, but transparency and access across the organization are limited. A basic system or pilot program begins to catalog opportunities, though coverage is inconsistent. Employees may use it in select areas, but participation is not widespread. Feedback is collected to refine processes, and leaders begin to recognize the value of connecting skills to opportunities.</p>
BUILDING	<p>Learning pathways are mapped to priority roles, and employees build in-demand skills through targeted programs. Skills data informs program design, ensuring alignment with organizational goals. Assessments and feedback loops track skill development and connect learning to performance outcomes. A culture of continuous learning begins to take hold across the workforce.</p>	<p>Regular feedback connects role-specific skills to organizational goals and informs development plans. Skill-based evaluations help employees understand both current strengths and future growth needs. Managers engage employees in conversations about development, creating stronger alignment between performance and organizational objectives. Feedback is used to close skill gaps and prepare for new opportunities.</p>	<p>A centralized platform connects employees to projects, and matching begins to reflect skill needs. Employees use the marketplace to explore mobility options and build experience beyond their primary roles. Managers and HR actively promote the system to support resource allocation and development. Data from the platform informs workforce planning and skill deployment.</p>
ACTUALIZING	<p>Continuous, personalized learning is embedded in career paths and integrated with workforce planning and goals. Robust systems support ongoing skills assessment, adaptive learning, and opportunities tailored to employee growth. Employees are empowered to develop skills that advance their careers while strengthening organizational resilience. A culture of lifelong learning drives engagement, retention, and long-term success.</p>	<p>Continuous, skills-based performance management is fully embedded in organizational systems and processes. Skills are central to all evaluations, coaching, and goal setting, driving both employee effectiveness and organizational agility. Feedback is ongoing, tailored, and tied directly to development opportunities and career mobility. Performance management becomes a cultural norm, fueling innovation, retention, and long-term success.</p>	<p>A skills-based marketplace enables transparent mobility, project-based staffing, and career growth across the organization. Employees have fair access to opportunities that align with their skills, interests, and career aspirations. Leaders continuously optimize the marketplace using data-driven insights to improve adoption and outcomes. The marketplace becomes part of the culture, reinforcing agility, innovation, and career development.</p>



### **About Opportunity@Work**

Opportunity@Work is a nonprofit social enterprise dedicated to advancing economic opportunities for the more than 70 million U.S. workers who are Skilled Through Alternative Routes (STARs) instead of through a bachelor's degree. Opportunity@Work's research capabilities inform the nation's understanding of STARs and uncover insights that show how to make positive change within regions and industries. The organization engages with corporate, public sector, and philanthropic partners to directly address the barriers that STARs face and equip organizations to make hiring STARs for higher-wage roles the norm. Learn more at [www.opportunityatwork.org](http://www.opportunityatwork.org).