

CASE STUDY

The State of Arizona & 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	HOW THE COHORT WORKED
• 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	• 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

Advancing Skills-Based Talent Practices Amid Uncertainty

ABOUT ARIZONA



3.1M

Active Labor Force

54%

Percentage of active labor workforce that are STARs

~39k

State government workers

1.7M

STARs in the state

Arizona’s Starting Point

In 2023, Arizona took a significant step forward with skills-based talent practices through [legislation](#) requiring the state to assess roles for eligibility based on skills people skilled through alternative routes (STARs) and to highlight those jobs on the state’s career website.

As the state moved from policy to implementation, Arizona used the Transformers in the Public Sector cohort through a Skills-Based Talent Management pilot project or high-need roles like Behavioral Health Technicians and Residential Program Specialists—while navigating hiring freezes, funding cuts, and organizational disruption that reshaped its original timeline.

As Arizona moved forward with implementation, several priorities emerged:

- **Pilot skills-based talent practices for critical roles** – Focus on launching a skills-based hiring pilot for high-need, hard-to-fill Behavioral Health Technician (BHT) and Residential Program Specialist (RPS) roles.
- **Prepare HR and hiring managers for implementation** – Develop and deliver skills-based hiring trainings, job postings, and interview tools to support consistent application in practice.
- **Strengthen cross-agency collaboration** – Build an interagency team to coordinate implementation and increase capacity for skills-based talent practices across departments and roles, with a goal of expanding the pilot.
- **Sustain progress amid disruption** – Maintain momentum and leadership support despite hiring freezes, funding cuts, and staffing disruptions.



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State Human Resource Director and Special Employment Counsel, Arizona Department of Administration



WINSTON HILL

Chief Human Resource Officer, Arizona Department of Economic Security



LASHANDA BROWN

Senior Human Resource Business Partner – Talent Acquisition, Arizona Department of Economic Security



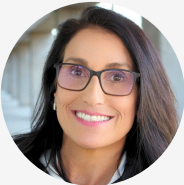
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THE CHALLENGE



Conditions Changed Mid-Implementation

As Arizona moved from planning to execution, unanticipated hiring restrictions, funding cuts, and staffing changes disrupted timelines and constrained the state’s ability to launch a skills-based hiring pilot as originally planned.

1.

Implementation was disrupted by external constraints

Shortly after the cohort began, Arizona faced statewide hiring limitations, followed by significant staffing reductions tied to federal funding cuts.

Downstream Effect: Original timelines for piloting skills-based hiring were delayed, and agencies had limited ability to initiate new hiring.

2.

Staffing changes strained capacity

Turnover among HR and training staff required constant backfilling and reallocation of responsibilities.

Downstream Effect: Progress depended on rebuilding capacity while continuing to move the work forward.

3.

Coordination across agencies was complex

The pilot required collaboration among multiple agencies, each with distinct roles, leadership structures, and constraints.

Downstream Effect: Aligning stakeholders and maintaining shared ownership required additional time and effort.

4.

Risk of losing momentum during delays

Extended pauses between planning and execution threatened internal buy-in and confidence in the pilot.

Downstream Effect: With uncertainty and unexpected delays, the work risked stalling before implementation took hold.

THE SOLUTION

Staying Focused While Adapting to Change



Rather than pausing the work, Arizona adapted its approach—focusing effort, strengthening coordination, and preparing for execution once conditions allowed.

What did the cohort actually do for Arizona?

- 1 Anchored the work around a single, high-need role and built an interagency team to support it**
Arizona focused its pilot on Behavioral Health Technicians (BHTs) and Residential Program Specialists (RPSs) — hard-to-fill roles in urgent need of support — to concentrate effort and reduce complexity during a period of disruption.

Leveraging the state’s centralized HR structure, Arizona was able to coordinate across agencies, create shared learning environments, and build early buy-in using the BHT and RPS pilot as an early proof of concept that could be scaled statewide.

To keep the project moving, the state assembled a dynamic, interagency team that included the state CHRO, agency CHROs, Classification, Communications, Data Analytics, Learning and Development, and Talent Acquisition. This structure distributed ownership across leadership, HR, and frontline recruiters, enabling coordination and continuity even as conditions changed, while also establishing a model that could be replicated across agencies or initiatives.



Staying Focused While Adapting to Change

Rather than pausing the work, Arizona adapted its approach—focusing effort, strengthening coordination, and preparing for execution once conditions allowed.

What did the cohort actually do for Arizona?

- 2 Focused on readiness rather than rushing execution**
When hiring was delayed, the team prioritized building and refining enabling tools—skills-based job postings, interview questions, classifications, and training—so they would be ready once hiring resumed.
- 3 Used formal project management to navigate uncertainty**
A structured project plan helped Arizona re-sequence work, manage dependencies, and adjust timelines as conditions changed.
It created visibility across agencies, clarified ownership, and helped the team stay aligned on priorities—even as timelines shifted and conditions evolved.
- 4 Backfilled capacity to sustain progress**
When turnover affected training and implementation staff, Arizona maintained momentum by drawing on a cross-agency, interdisciplinary bench. They tapped trainers with available capacity and relied on a distributed cross-functional team to ensure continuity and meet evolving needs.



“ When conditions slowed hiring, Arizona didn’t lose momentum—they shifted it. By investing in readiness, coordination, and the right tools, they positioned themselves to move quickly and effectively when the system reopened.

Allison Jones

Senior Advisor, Opportunity @ Work

THE SOLUTION

Staying Focused While Adapting to Change



Rather than pausing the work, Arizona adapted its approach—focusing effort, strengthening coordination, and preparing for execution once conditions allowed.

What did the cohort actually do for Arizona?

- 5 Maintained leadership sponsorship throughout disruption**
Consistent executive sponsorship kept the work moving, even as timelines shifted. Leadership provided steady direction and energy, while a co-led model between the Department of Health Services (DHS) and Department of Economic Security (DES) embedded ownership across agencies—reinforcing priorities, maintaining alignment, and enabling the project team to continue executing through disruption.
- 6 Developed new tools to collect data and measure success**
The project team developed a new survey to better understand hiring manager satisfaction with skills-based hiring X days post hire. This survey enables continuous improvement of skills-based hiring resources to increase the hiring and retention of STARs. It also helped the team refine the value proposition of skills-based hiring and to secure buy-in from hiring managers.



RESULTS

Progress Under Constraint



Despite significant disruption, Arizona made concrete progress by completing preparation, sustaining coordination, and launching recruitment once conditions allowed.

BHT & RPS Roles Redesigned End-to-End

Behavioral Health Technician and Residential Program Specialist priority roles redesigned end-to-end
Arizona fully redesigned the BHT and RPS roles using skills-based practices, updating job postings to focus on skills, interview questions, classifications, and candidate-facing materials to support a consistent, skills-first hiring approach.

Formal Interagency Team

Established a standing interagency implementation team
Arizona created a cross-functional team with representatives from five agencies—including the state Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO), agency CHROs, Classification, Communications, Data Analytics, Learning and Development, and Talent Acquisition—to coordinate the pilot and sustain progress across agencies.

A Leadership Model for Future Success

Built a leadership model for resilience under constraint
The cohort experience demonstrated that skills-based hiring work can continue—even during disruption and with limited resources —by focusing on preparation, coordination, and leadership support.

ARIZONA

Home

Current Openings

Benefits

Applicant Login

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TECH 2 (\$5,000 Hiring Incentive)

519653

PHOENIX

DEPT OF HEALTH SERVICES

Full-time

ADD TO FAVORITES

VIEW FAVORITES

ADHS

Arizona Department of Health Services

The Arizona Department of Health Services promotes, protects, and improves the health and wellness of Arizona's Children, adults, and communities. We strive to set the standard for personal and community health through direct care, science, public policy, and leadership.

Behavioral Health Technician 2

Arizona State Hospital

501 N 24th St, Phoenix, AZ 85008

www.azdhs.gov

Salary: \$41,465

Work Options: In-Hospital Setting

Requisition Closing Date: Open Until

Make An Impact With ADHS

Every day we strive to embody our mission and dedication. These core values are:

Click on the link to hear more about our values.

Why ADHS?

To Promote, protect, and improve the health and wellness of Arizona's Children, adults, and communities.

A culture of collaboration, innovation, and excellence.

Your Competencies and Skills

We're looking for someone who can:

- Lead and supervise direct patient care for various aspects of daily living.
- Provide therapeutic techniques in an individual or group setting
- Follow detailed oral and written instructions.
- Monitor behaviors and recognize, interpret, and respond to social signals.
- Provide crisis management that includes de-escalation and conflict resolution.
- Demonstrate solid decision making, problem solving, and judgement skills.
- Engage in active listening and effective communication

Real focus on skills-first requirements

RESULTS

Progress Under Constraint



Arizona’s team delivered new trainings in multiple formats to hiring managers and HR team members in pilot agencies, resulting more effective hiring practices to backfill roles during the hiring freeze and an increase in overall recruitments.

75

Number of hiring managers, training managers, and recruiters from multiple agencies and programs trained on skills-based talent practices.

24

Number of Behavioral Health Technicians (BHTs) hired using skills-based talent hiring during the pilot, an increase in overall recruitment year-over-year.

9

Number of Residential Program Specialists (RPSs) hired using skills-based talent hiring during the pilot, an increase in overall recruitment year-over-year.



To date, retention and advancement data is limited, but **hiring managers have reported higher overall satisfaction** with both new hires and the onboarding process using skills-based hiring.

KEY INSIGHTS

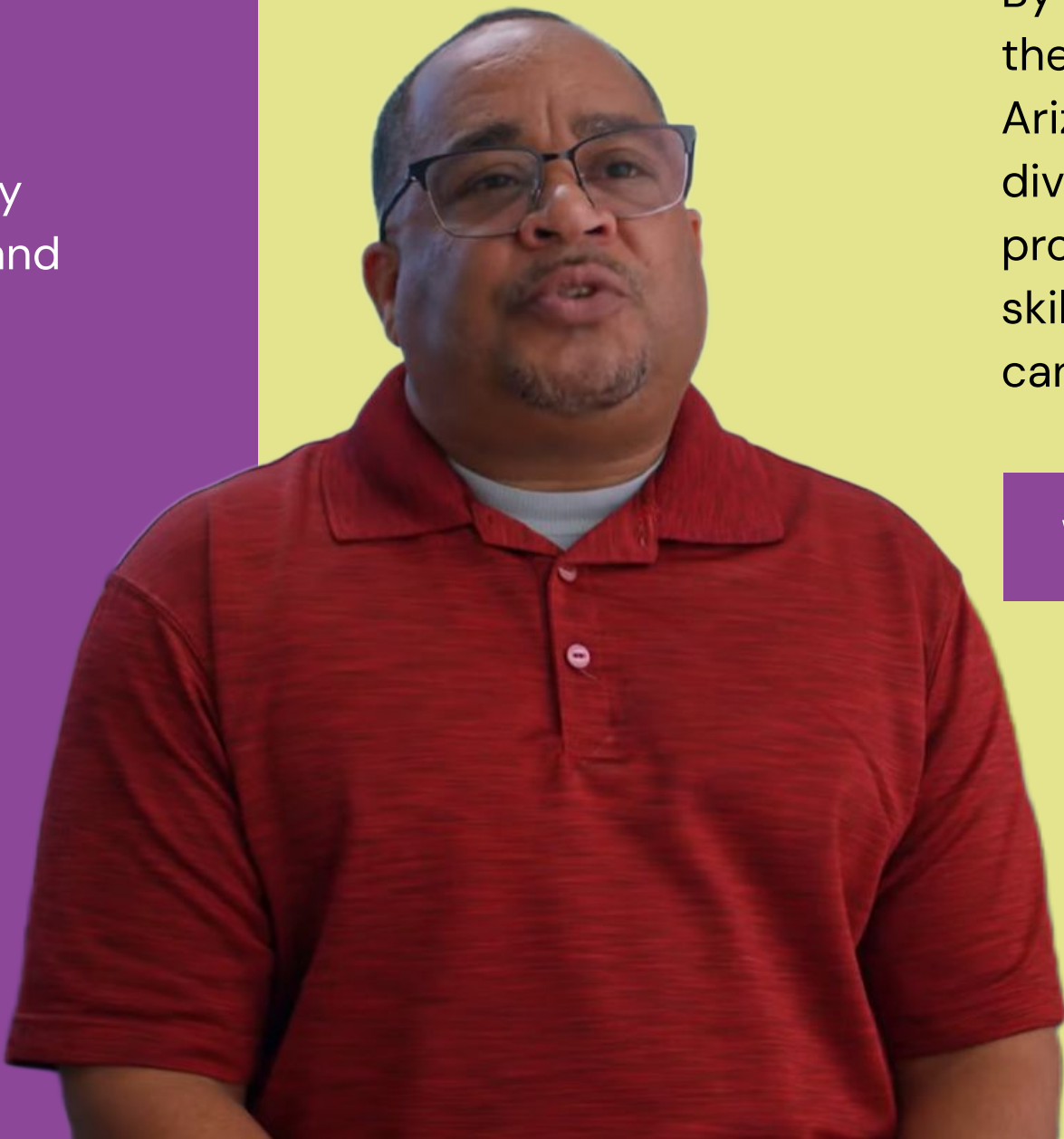
Lessons from Building Skills-Based Hiring from the Ground Up



Arizona’s experience highlights practical lessons about readiness, leadership, and focus that are critical to implementing skills-based hiring.

Storytelling helps humanize skills-based hiring

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



By highlighting Kenneth Whyllie’s journey—from the Marines, to the Department of Corrections, to behavioral health at the Arizona State Hospital—Arizona showed how skills gained across diverse careers can translate into public service roles. His progression to a lead behavioral health technician helped make skills-based hiring tangible, credible, and relatable for candidates and hiring managers alike.

Watch Kenneth’s Story



KEY INSIGHTS

The STARs Filter

1. Legislation created accountability and clarity

Through [HB 2225](#) (the Arizona Works Project), legislation required the Department of Administration to review roles listed on the state’s career site and classify them based on degree requirements. This included identifying which roles required a degree, which were already suitable for STARs, and which could be opened to STARs with updated requirements.

2. A simple filter made the change usable

Arizona translated that work into a visible, user-facing feature by adding a STARs filter to its job board. Applicants can now quickly sort roles by those that require a degree and those that do not, making it easier to find opportunities aligned with their skills and experience.

-Postsecondary Degree R▼
-Postsecondary Degree Required-
No (373)
Yes (114)

Search by Department below in order to return results by State Agency

RESET SEARCH

Search by job title, location, department, category, etc.

SEARCH

JOBS NEAR ME

-Categories-▼

-Departments-▼

-Employment Types-▼

-Cities-▼

-Postsecondary Degree R▼
-Postsecondary Degree Required-
No (373)
Yes (114)

Title	Requisition Identifier	Category	Department	Employment Type	Location		
PARK RANGER	539377	Forestry/Wildland Fire/Natural Resources	ARIZONA STATE PARKS AND TRAILS	Full-time	SEDONA	Mar 20 2026 - 23:55 MST	No
HUMAN RESOURCES ANALYST SENIOR (TALENT ACQUISITION SPECIALIST)	539146	Human Resources	DEPT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY	Full-time	PHOENIX REMOTE OPTIONS	Mar 8 2026 - 23:55 MST	No

KEY INSIGHTS



Lessons from Building Skills-Based Hiring from the Ground Up

Arizona’s experience highlights practical lessons about readiness, leadership, and focus that are critical to implementing skills-based hiring.



Readiness work matters as much as execution

Even when hiring is delayed, investing in tools, training, and coordination positions teams to move quickly once conditions change.



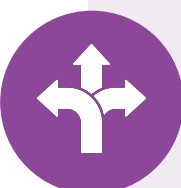
Leadership consistency stabilizes change

Steady executive sponsorship helped preserve confidence, reinforce priorities, and signal long-term commitment during uncertainty.



Focus enables progress under constraint

The pilot narrowed in on two high-need roles, which helped Arizona reduce complexity and sustain momentum during disruption.



Flexibility is essential for system change

Arizona’s experience shows that adapting timelines and sequencing—without abandoning goals—can keep reform efforts moving forward.



Cross-agency ownership builds resilience

A shared implementation team distributed responsibility and allowed the work to continue despite turnover and shifting priorities.



Multiple training formats increase access and adoption

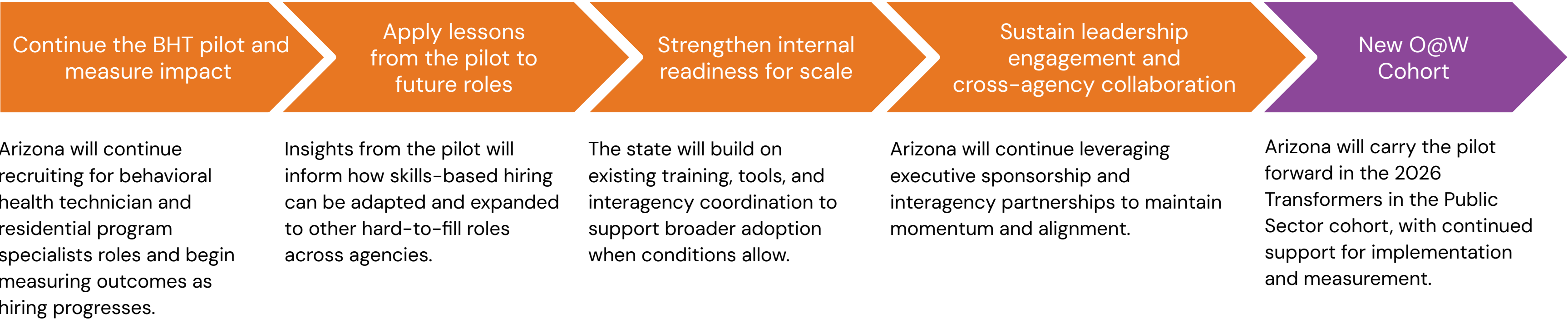
By offering both in-person and self-paced, computer-based trainings, Arizona made it easier for HR staff and hiring managers to build skills-based hiring capability within varied schedules and operational constraints. Building institutionalized training and development tools ensures continuous improvement endures beyond leadership transitions and becomes part of the state’s overall talent strategy.

WHAT'S NEXT

Moving from Pilot to Practice



With recruitment underway, Arizona is shifting toward measurement, learning, and future expansion.



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](#)

