



Skills-Based Talent Practices

Legislation Toolkit



Opportunity
@Work™

How to Use this Toolkit

This toolkit provides policymakers and their staff with practical guidance, best practices, and a customizable model bill to help remove unnecessary degree requirements and advance skills-based talent practices in state or local government. Use it to understand the key components of effective legislation and to draft a bill tailored to your jurisdiction.

What's In this Toolkit



Guidance. Recommendations for what to include in draft language based on national best practices from states, counties, and cities that have passed similar legislation.



Model language. A fill-in-the blank template you can adapt to draft legislation that reduces educational barriers in public-sector hiring and supports skills-based talent practices. This template serves as a starting point that can be customized to your context.



Resources. Opportunity@Work's data and insights can help you make the case for skills-based practices and learn from similar efforts around the country.

- [Activating Talent in the Public Sector: The STAR Mobility Compass](#) helps build a narrative for why skills-based hiring is an effective strategy to fill critical roles, improve service delivery, and expand mobility pathways for STARS.
- [STARSight](#) provides data on STARS in by geography and estimates the impact of opening up more jobs to STARS.
- O@W compiled a summary of [state](#) and [local](#) approaches to tearing the paper ceiling. For more examples, reach out to policy@opportunityatwork.org.

Considerations for Drafting Legislation to Remove Degree Requirements in the Public Sector

These considerations outline the key components that make legislation effective and provide options you can adapt to your state or local context.

Make the case for removing unnecessary degree requirements. If the bill opens with a policy statement or legislative findings, include a clear rationale for eliminating unnecessary degree requirements for government jobs. Demonstrate how many workers in the state are [skilled through alternative routes \(STARs\)](#), the government's hiring challenges and/or talent needs, and how skills-based talent practices can expand talent pipelines and improve public service delivery.

Define key terms. Define key terms that may need further clarity or explanation. Some examples of key terms you may want to define include:

- **STARs.** STARs are workers skilled through alternative routes.
- **Alternative routes.** Alternative routes are pathways to develop skills instead of a bachelor's degree, like military service, community college, talent development programs and bootcamps, partial college completion, apprenticeships, or on-the-job experience.
- **Skills-based hiring.** Skills-based hiring is hiring based on a candidate's demonstrated skills and abilities rather than degrees or previous job titles, using activities that enable candidates to demonstrate how they would perform the duties of the job through different means, like as simulations, apprenticeships, skills assessments, work samples, or competency-based interviews.
- **Skills-based talent practices.** Skills-based talent practices focus on a person's actual skills and competencies, rather than relying on traditional proxies like degrees, job titles, or years of experience, to guide talent management across the entire employee lifecycle, including hiring, development, and advancement.

Define the scope. Determine which levels of government and which workers the bill applies to: state, county, and/or city employees, contractors, or all public-sector workers.

For example, if your state also oversees and/or supports the talent acquisition and management of cities and counties, you could consider including updates to both state and county personnel practices in your bill.

Remove unnecessary degree requirements. State that government agencies may not require a four-year degree or a specific educational credential as part of the minimum qualifications unless the hiring agency provides a written justification showing why the skills needed for the job cannot be learned or acquired through alternative routes. The most effective way to ensure this is to require updating the job classification system to be based on skills and work experiences.

Clarify exceptions to removing degree requirements. Specify that certain jobs, such as those requiring professional licensure or specialized skills, may be exempt from removing degree requirements. These exceptions should be narrowly tailored and based on legal or job-specific requirements.

State the intent is to move to skills-based talent practices. Removing degree requirements alone is only the first step towards moving to a talent system based on skills. Make that clear and reinforce the expectation that the system is moving towards skills-based talent practices.

Ensure fair talent practices. Add a statement to maintain equal protection and anti-discrimination when prioritizing skills, and ensure workers can contest unfair employment practices.

Emphasize skills as the core measure of talent. Explain why focusing on skills is the most effective way to find qualified candidates, especially as work continues to evolve at a rapid pace with the introduction of emerging technologies and artificial intelligence. Skills-based talent practices enable human resource leaders and hiring managers to determine whether a person has the ability to do a job, especially for jobs of the future.

Establish clear directives and timelines. Outline clear expectations to support timely and effective implementation with opportunities for report or other oversight measures to ensure requirements are met and to understand progress towards goals over time.

- **Designate a timeline and key milestones.** Give agencies enough time to prepare for changes and establish clear benchmarks to monitor progress around degree removals from classification systems and movement to a skills-based talent system.
- **Establish a reporting requirement.** Require agencies to report regularly on implementation progress and the impact of removing degree requirements, including hiring outcomes and any challenges to help with sustainability of and sustained dissemination of practices across agencies.
- **Build the capacity and infrastructure to transform talent practices.** Name a strong team and/or office to guide the transition to skills-based practices. Allocate dedicated funding to update technology, train HR teams and hiring managers, develop tools and resources, and support implementation across agencies.

Other Considerations. Here are a few more ways you can refine the bill to align with your policy priorities.

- **Acknowledge STARs as a talent category.** Define STARs in legislation and the alternative pathways through which workers gain skills and experience.
- **Apply the bill to public sector employment as a whole.** Broaden the scope to include local governments (counties, cities, townships, etc.) to promote consistent practices at all levels.
- **Build on or connect to existing workforce initiatives.** Introduce the bill as a standalone initiative or connect it to an existing workforce or HR modernization effort to increase alignment and support.
- **Expand skills-based talent practices to the procurement process.** Introduce a stand-alone bill for the procurement process or add the removal of unnecessary degree requirements from the procurement process, such that all solicitations should not require an educational requirement, unless necessary. Provide incentives for employers who utilize skills-based talent practices when competing for a contract by giving them priority.
- **Establish an employer network of public and private entities focused on advancing skills-based talent practices.** To support cross-sector learning and statewide adoption of skills-based talent practices, consider convening public and private sector entities to share insights on their efforts to advance skills-based talent practices.
- **Follow-up with appropriations to support implementation of skills-based talent practices.** Allocate dedicated funding to update technology, train HR teams and hiring managers, develop tools and resources, and support implementation of skills-based talent practices across agencies.

Legislation Template

Findings and Purpose: The Legislature finds that unnecessary degree requirements restrict access to skilled workers and limit economic opportunity. Skills-based talent practices strengthen the public sector workforce by aligning job requirements with the skills needed for each job and expanding access to qualified candidates, including STARS – workers skilled through alternative routes.

The purpose of this Act is to ensure that job qualifications reflect actual job needs, remove unnecessary educational barriers to employment, and support agencies in adopting skills-based talent practices.

Short title: Expanding Public Sector Career Opportunities in [X state, city, and/or county]

Section 1. Definitions

“STARS” means workers skilled through alternative routes. See [Opportunity@Work’s definition.](#)

“Alternative routes” means pathways to develop skills instead of a bachelor’s degree, including military service, community college, talent development programs and bootcamps, partial college completion, apprenticeships, or on-the-job experience.

“Written justification” means a statement explaining why a degree is necessary for a job and why the required skills cannot be learned through alternative routes.

“Skills-based talent practices” means focusing on a person’s actual skills and competencies, rather than relying on traditional proxies like degrees, job titles, or years of experience, to guide talent management across the entire employee lifecycle, including hiring, development, and advancement.

Section 2. Review Job Classifications for Degree Requirements and Remove Unnecessary Degree Requirements for Public Sector Jobs

- a. The [head of the \[state, county, and/or city\] Personnel Department](#) shall within [\[insert timeframe\]](#) after the effective date of this Act:
 - i. Consult with [\[state, county, or city agencies\]](#) to identify the job classifications within the [\[state, county, or city\]](#) classification plan that require applicants to possess a four-year college degree and determine which job classifications are appropriate to include practical experience in lieu of a four-year college degree requirement. For job classifications that do require four-year degrees, agencies must provide written justification explaining why a degree is necessary for the job and why the required skills cannot be learned through alternative routes.
 - ii. Where practical, the [\[State, County, or City Personnel Department\]](#) shall propose and present amendments to the [\[state, county, or city’s\] personnel rules](#) to the [\[Personnel Board or Civil Service Commission\]](#) recommending the replacement of any requirements for a four-year college degree for all [\[state, county, or city\]](#) jobs in which a degree is not legally required with comparable relevant work experience, skills, or competency-based training requirements.
 - iii. Require agencies to remove language for a four-year college degree in position descriptions, to the extent practicable, when they are not necessary for the position.

- b. Nothing in this section prevents hiring agencies from requiring a degree when it is required by law or professional licensure to perform the job duties.
- c. Beginning [insert date], and then annually thereafter, the [state, county, or city HR department] shall report to the [insert authority] on its efforts to reduce barriers to [state/county/city] employment as required by this section.

Section 3. Remove Unnecessary Degree Requirements for Public Sector Contractors and Incentivize Skills-Based Talent Practices

- a. The head of [state, county, and/or city] procurement shall not require solicitations for all goods and services to require degrees for contractors unless the contracting agency provides a written justification explaining why a degree is necessary for the job and why the required skills cannot be learned through alternative routes.
- b. As a rule, no contracts can require degrees for roles that do not require them in the state workforce.
- c. The head of [state, county, and/or city] procurement shall incentivize the utilization of skills-based talent practices in solicitations for goods and services, such that vendors that demonstrate a verifiable commitment to and implementation of skills-based talent practices within their organization, are given priority in the procurement process.
- a. Nothing in this section prevents the contracting agency from requiring a degree when it is required by law or professional licensure to perform the job duties.

Section 4. Implementation

- a. The [State/City/County Personnel Department] shall be the lead in establishing skills-based talent practices and ensuring compliance across all departments and designate a department leader for statewide, cross-agency coordination.
- b. The State Personnel Department shall develop and disseminate comprehensive training and resources for all [state/city/county] human resources managers, hiring supervisors, and relevant personnel.
- c. Training shall be mandatory for all [state/city/county] hiring personnel and shall, at a minimum, include:
 - i. Guidance on restructuring job descriptions to emphasize specific skills and core competencies over degree requirements,
 - ii. Methods for evaluating candidates based on skills, rather than educational attainment, and
 - iii. Policies for identifying opportunities for internal advancement based on proven proficiencies or expertise.
- d. Implementation guidance to agencies must be issued by [insert date – typically within 90 days after enactment].

Section 5. Support Private Sector Adoption and Cross-Sector Learning

- a. The [insert executive office and/or head of state, county, or city agency or department responsible for engagement with private industry] shall develop and publish resources to assist [insert, state, city or county name]'s employers in adopting skills-based talent practices as a strategy for addressing workforce challenges and attracting and retaining talented employees.
- b. [Insert state, city or county name] shall host a [insert level of government: state, city or county name]-wide employer roundtable at least one time per year to share lessons and advance shared practices to support the advancement of skills-based talent practices among all employers.

Section 6. Annual Reporting and Data Collection Requirements

- a. No later than [insert time frame – typically within 12–18 months or aligned to an existing reporting cycle] days after the date of enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter, the head of the [state, county, and/or city] HR agency shall report on:
 - i. the number and percent of job classifications updated to remove degree requirements
 - ii. the number and percent of job postings without degree requirements
 - iii. the number and percent of applications and new hires that are STARS
 - iv. the number and percent of applications for advancement that are STARS
 - v. Wage differences among STARS and non-STARS for same roles
 - vi. the impact of skills-based hiring on time to hire, candidate quality, retention, and any other relevant HR metrics
- b. No later than [insert time frame] days after the date of enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter, the head [state, county, and/or city] procurement officer shall report on:
 - i. the number and percent of solicitations updated to remove degree requirements
 - ii. the number and percent of contractors that are STARS
 - iii. the impact of skills-based contracting on the quality of the procured goods and services, and any other relevant procurement metrics

Section 6. Fair Talent Practices

Agencies shall maintain non-discrimination and equal protection employment practices, and ensure workers can contest unfair employment actions.

Section 7. Appropriation.

[insert \$ amount] is appropriated from [insert funding source] to [insert agency] to implement the requirements of this Act.

Section 8. Effective Date

This Act takes effect on [insert date].

Legislation Toolkit Appendix

Examples

This appendix highlights state legislation tearing the paper ceiling and advancing skills-based talent practices in the public sector.

Component	Examples
Make the Case	Washington – House Bill 2216, Chapter 70 Hawaii – Senate Bill 1065
Define Key Terms – STARs and Alternative Routes	Arizona – House Bill 2225 Idaho – House Bill 443 Washington – House Bill 2216, Chapter 70
Define the Scope	Hawaii – Senate Bill 1065 – focuses on state and county government Utah – House Bill 139 – clarifies which municipal employees are subject to certain conditions of employment
Specify Degree Equivalencies or Work Experience	Florida – Senate Bill 1310
Clarify Exceptions to Removing Degree Requirements	Florida – Senate Bill 1310 Tennessee – House Bill 1916
Prioritize Skills-Based Hiring for State Jobs	Kansas – Senate Bill 166 Virginia – House Bill 1611 Hawaii – Senate Bill 1065
Prioritize Skills-Based Hiring for State Contracting	Florida – Senate Bill 1310 Kansas – Senate Bill 166

Continued

Component	Examples
Establish Clear Directives	Arizona – House Bill 2225 – required job classification review, updating job boards to make it easier to identify jobs with no four-year degree requirements, and a report on updates made to minimum qualifications Connecticut – Senate Bill 1124 – required the Commissioner of Administrative Services to conduct a study regarding the hiring practices for state service) and House Bill 5524, Section 125 directs that a bachelor's degree cannot be required unless necessary; directs the Commissioner of Administrative Services to perform a compensation study of roles in state service in comparison to compensation for similar positions outside of state service; directs a periodic review of all job classifications to ensure job descriptions matches duties performed Florida – Senate Bill 1310 – provides directives on substitution of work experience for postsecondary education requirements North Carolina – Senate Bill 124 – directs State Human Resources Commission to regularly assess minimum qualifications for state positions and remove unnecessary degree requirements; make applying for state jobs easier; make job postings easier to understand and easier for employees to qualify; allow agencies to create continuous postings without the need for outside approval; grant employing agency flexibility in hiring, pay, and classification; allow agencies to immediately hire one of the most qualified candidates from a previous posting; build new performance management and evaluation system; allow allow Office of State Human Resources to more quickly modernize the personnel system for local and state employees that are subject to the human resources act; and to provide a report on modernizing and simplifying the State Human Resources Act) Texas – House Bill 3923 – provides recommendations to review job classifications, remove unnecessary degree requirements, evaluate ways to expand career advancement opportunities for STARS, and provide a report on the information gathered Utah – House Bill 139 – precludes the Department of Human Resource Management from requiring a minimum educational requirements for employment, except where educational qualifications are legally required to perform the duties of the position; requires the Department of Human Resource Management to: consider comparable experience or ability as equal to education when determining a candidate's satisfaction of minimum qualifications, with specific exceptions; ensure that job descriptions and job postings are based on the skills and competencies required to perform each job; and create supporting materials that may be used by a political subdivision that chooses to implement competency-based hiring principles
Designate a Timeline and Key Milestones	Alabama – Senate Bill 55 Arizona – House Bill 2225

Continued

Component	Examples
Establish Reporting Requirements	Arizona – House Bill 2225 Connecticut – Senate Bill 1124 North Carolina – Senate Bill 124 Texas – House Bill 3923
Build Capacity and Infrastructure	Arizona – House Bill 2225 Utah – House Bill 139
Ensure Fair Talent Practices	Florida – Senate Bill 1310 Washington – House Bill 2216, Chapter 70
Standalone Bill Focused on Removing Unnecessary Degree Requirements for State Jobs	Alabama – Senate Bill 55 Arizona – House Bill 2225 Georgia – Senate Bill 3 Florida – Senate Bill 1310 Hawaii – Senate Bill 1065 Idaho – House Bill 433 Louisiana – House Bill 655 Tennessee – House Bill 1916 Texas – House Bill 3923 Utah – House Bill 139 Virginia – House Bill 1611 Washington – House Bill 2216, Chapter 70
Bill Connected to Another HR and/or Workforce Effort	Illinois – Senate Bill 1884 Missouri – House Bill 417 Nevada – Assembly Bill 547 North Carolina – Senate Bill 124
Incentivize Employer Use of Skills-based Talent Practices	Missouri – House Bill 417

