



Skills-Based Talent Practices

Executive Order Toolkit



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How to Use this Toolkit

This toolkit provides executive leaders and their staff with practical guidance, best practices, and a customizable model executive order 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 executive orders and to draft an order 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 enacted similar orders.



Model language. A fill-in-the blank template you can adapt to draft an executive order 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 an Executive Order to Remove Unnecessary Degree Requirements and Expand Skills-based Talent Practices in the Public Sector

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

Make the case for removing unnecessary degree requirements and emphasize skills as the core measure of talent. Include a clear rationale for eliminating unnecessary degree requirements for government jobs in the opening WHEREAS clauses. Highlight how many workers in the state are [skilled through alternative routes \(STARs\)](#), the government's hiring challenges, and how skills-based practices can expand talent pipelines and improve public service delivery. Demonstrate why focusing on skills is the most effective way to find qualified candidates.

Name and 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 tools such as skills assessments, work samples, or competency-based interviews..

Define the scope. Determine which workers the executive order applies to—employees or contractors or both.

Remove unnecessary degree requirements. State that agencies or departments may not require a four-year degree or a specific educational credential as part of the minimum qualifications unless the hiring agency or department provides a written justification showing why the skills needed for the job cannot be learned through alternative routes. Some states require updating job classifications and allow work experience to be substituted for or considered equivalent to a degree.

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.

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.

Establish clear directives and timelines. Outline clear expectations to support timely and effective implementation.

- **Designate a timeline and key milestones.** Give agencies enough time to prepare for changes and establish clear benchmarks to monitor progress.
- **Establish a reporting requirement.** Require agencies to report on implementation progress and the impact of removing degree requirements, including hiring outcomes and any challenges.
- **Build the capacity and infrastructure to transform talent practices.** Name a strong leader and team 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 executive order 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.
- **Build on or connect to existing workforce initiatives.** Connect the executive order to an existing workforce or HR modernization effort to ensure it aligns with and reinforces other strategic priorities.



Executive Order Template

TITLE: Expanding Public Sector Career Opportunities

WHEREAS, sustained efforts to build and maintain a strong and effective public workforce are essential to the State/County/City of [BLANK's] commitment to delivering high-quality services to residents;

WHEREAS, the State/County/City of [BLANK's] faces ongoing workforce challenges, including labor shortages for critical roles and a growing need to prepare workers for high-demand, high-wage careers;

WHEREAS, as State/County/City of [BLANK's] largest employer, the [State/County/City] must take action to modernize, innovate, and expand recruitment, advancement, and retention efforts to attract and maintain a strong pool of qualified candidates for careers in public service while competing effectively in an evolving labor market; and

WHEREAS, the State/County/City of [BLANK's] recruitment and advancement efforts must not only reflect the realities of this market, but also acknowledge the importance of practical work experience and skill development without unduly restricting qualified candidates from competing for good jobs in the public sector; and

WHEREAS, [X number] of the [State/County/City's] workforce are STARs, workers who have gained skills through alternative routes, such as community college, workforce training, bootcamps, certificate programs, military service, work experience, or on-the-job training such as apprenticeships, rather than a bachelor's degree;

WHEREAS, the State/County/City of [BLANK] acknowledges the significant value of postsecondary education while equally recognizing and honoring the contributions of workers who have developed their skills through alternative routes; and

WHEREAS, the State/County/City of [BLANK], through this executive order and as an employer, models the development of a talent system that connects people to in-demand careers and provides access to good-paying jobs that could be replicated across sectors;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, [Governor/County Executive/Mayor's name], by virtue of the authority vested in me as the [Governor/County Executive/Mayor] of the State/County/City of [BLANK], do hereby order that:

1. The [State/County/City HR agency/department] shall:
 - a. Identify the job classifications within the State of [BLANK's] classification plan that require applicants to possess a postsecondary or graduate degree;
 - b. Review and consider whether each such position necessitates such a degree to perform the job duties; and
 - c. If the degree is not necessary to perform the job duties, adjust the classification system to indicate no degree is required to fill the position and update minimum qualifications to the required skills and competencies
2. The [State, County/City HR agency/department], in coordination with state agency hiring managers, shall review all current and future job postings to evaluate whether a degree is necessary to perform the job duties, and, if the degree is not necessary, then the job posting shall state that no degree is required to fill the position and outline the required skills and competencies to perform the job.

3. All hiring managers are encouraged to prioritize skills-based hiring practices, emphasizing relevant skills, competencies, and experience.
4. All [State, County/City agencies/departments] are directed to modernize personnel rules, replacing degree requirements with minimum skill-, competency- and experience-based standards, wherever feasible.
5. All agencies shall prioritize the allocation of funding and resources for regional partnerships that align education, workforce and training programs with local workforce needs.
6. By [insert date – typically within 12-18 months], and each year thereafter, the [State, County/City HR agency/department] shall provide a written progress report on implementation of this executive order to the [Governor/County Executive/Mayor's Office], including:
 - the number and percent of job classifications updated to remove degree requirements,
 - the number and percent of job postings without degree requirements,
 - the number and percent of new hires that are STARs, and
 - the impact of skills-based hiring on time to hire, candidate quality, retention, and any other relevant HR metrics.
7. Nothing in this Executive Order prevents the hiring agency or department from requiring a degree when it is genuinely necessary for the job.
8. Hiring agencies and departments shall maintain non-discrimination and equal protection employment practices, and ensure workers can contest unfair employment actions.
9. Nothing in this Executive Order shall be construed to remove a degree from a job classification if the degree is required by law or professional licensure to perform the job duties.



Executive Order Toolkit Appendix

Examples

This appendix highlights examples of state executive orders that demonstrate key components of our recommendations for designing policy that focuses on tearing the paper ceiling and advancing skills-based talent practices in the public sector.

Component	Examples
Make the Case	Addressing Workforce Shortages - Alaska – Administrative Order 343 - North Carolina – Executive Order No. 278 Expanding Access - Colorado – Executive Order D 2022-015 - Pennsylvania – Executive Order 2023-03 - Indiana – Executive Order 25-15 - Minnesota – Executive Order 23-14 - North Carolina – Executive Order No. 278 - Washington – Executive Order 24-04 Building a Strong and Effective Workforce - California – Executive Order N-11-23 - Colorado – Executive Order D 2022-015 - Michigan – Executive Directive No. 2026-3 - Minnesota – Executive Order 23-14 - New Jersey – Executive Order 327 - South Dakota – Executive Order 2023-05 Focusing on Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement - Massachusetts – Executive Order 627 - Michigan – Executive Directive No. 2026-3 - Minnesota – Executive Order 23-14 - North Carolina – Executive Order 278
Define Key Terms – STARs and Alternative Routes	Pennsylvania – Executive Order 2023-03
Define the Scope	Montana – Executive Order 5-2025 (406 Jobs Initiative)
Specify Degree Equivalencies or Work Experience	Pennsylvania – Executive Order 2023-03

Continued

Component	Examples
Clarify Exceptions to Removing Degree Requirements	Indiana - Executive Order 25-15
Prioritize Skills-Based Hiring	Colorado - Executive Order D 2022-015 Michigan - Executive Directive No. 2026-3 Montana - Executive Order 5-2025
Establish Clear Directives	Colorado - Executive Order D 2022-015 Ohio - Executive Order 2023-10D
Establish Clear Directives	Colorado - Executive Order 2022-015 Washington - Executive Order 24-04
Designate a Timeline and Key Milestones	Colorado - Executive Order 2022-015 Indiana - Executive Order 25-15 Ohio - Executive Order 2023-10D Washington - Executive Order 24-04
Establish a Reporting Requirement	Colorado - Executive Order 2022-015 Massachusetts - Executive Order 627 Washington - Executive Order 24-04
Build Capacity and Infrastructure	Washington - Executive Order 24-04
Ensure Fair Talent Practices	California - Executive Order N-11-23 Montana - Executive Order 5-2025
Executive Order Connected to another HR and/or Workforce Effort	California - Executive Order N-11-23 Montana - Executive Order 5-2025
Executive Order Aligning with Skills-Based Talent Ecosystem	California - Executive Order N-11-23 Colorado - Executive Order 2022-015 Massachusetts - Executive Order 627 Montana - Executive Order 5-2025