

State Approaches to Tear the Paper Ceiling

State Leadership to Date

Since 2022, more than 30 states have committed to removing unnecessary degree requirements or advancing skills-first talent practices — expanding access to good jobs for STARs, workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes. States are using a variety of strategies that are already [generating results](#). This overview highlights the different approaches states are taking to eliminate degree requirements and prioritize skills, along with the key features of each.

30+

States committed to skills-first reform since 2022

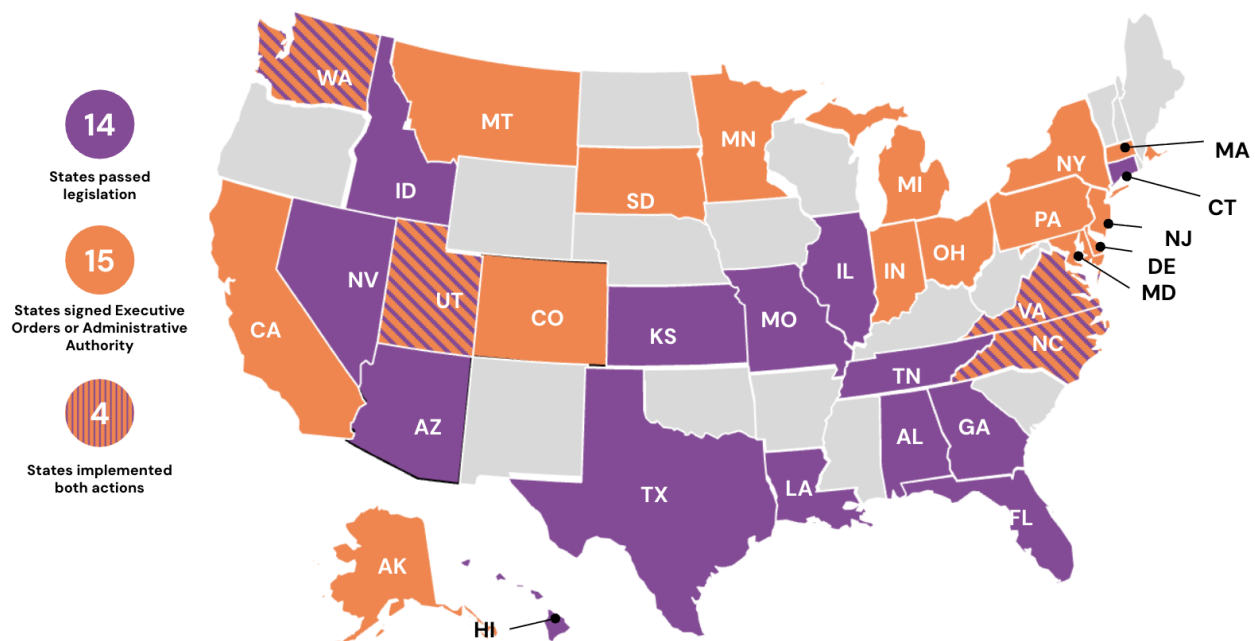
70M+

Americans are STARs — Skilled Through Alternative Routes

9

State approaches detailed in this overview

WHERE STATES ARE ACTING



More than 30 states have acted to advance skills-first hiring through legislation, executive authority, or both.

STATUTORY ACTION

Approaches to Legislation 4 STATES

Statutes that write skills-first hiring into law — durable, binding, and harder to reverse.

Arizona

Legislation

Passed legislation requiring the Department of Administration to assess state positions and determine whether people skilled through alternative routes — job training, community college, military service, or apprenticeship — are eligible for each role. Qualifying jobs must be highlighted on the state's career website.

Hawaii

Legislation

Passed legislation prohibiting state and county governments from requiring a bachelor's degree as a condition of employment. The law applies across all four counties: Hawaii, Honolulu, Kauai, and Maui.

Missouri

Legislation

Passed legislation prohibiting state agencies from rejecting applicants without a degree, allowing experience and certifications to be considered instead. It also offers tax credits for hiring interns and apprentices and expands adult education programs to prioritize skills over degrees.

Washington

Legislation

Passed legislation eliminating unnecessary two- and four-year degree requirements for state employment, unless a degree is legally required for the job. Candidates can demonstrate they qualify through alternative pathways, recognizing that skills like writing, analysis, and presentation can be gained outside traditional degree programs.

EXECUTIVE ACTION

Approaches to Executive Orders 3 STATES

Directives from the governor's office that move quickly and set implementation in motion across agencies.

Colorado

Executive Order

Issued several executive orders to reduce degree requirements, transition toward skills-based hiring, and increase apprenticeship and work-based learning across the state workforce. The skills-based hiring order set clear implementation timelines and milestones and required monitoring of job postings for compliance. The state paired this with a comprehensive strategy and dedicated resources to build the Department of Personnel and Administration's capacity to lead implementation.

Indiana

Executive Order

Issued an executive order to review and update all job classifications and postings — determining whether a degree is truly required to perform the duties and replacing degree requirements with skills. It encourages hiring managers to prioritize skills-based practices, directs agencies to fund

workforce partnerships that align training with local needs, and requires the State Personnel Department to report regularly on implementation progress and impact.

Pennsylvania

Executive Order

Issued an [executive order](#) immediately removing degree requirements for 65,000 jobs — 92% of commonwealth positions — and directed the Office of Administration to review classifications for the remaining 8% to determine whether a degree is still required. The order also mandates a [new website](#) focused on skills-based job postings.

COMBINED ACTION

Legislation & Executive Orders 2 STATES

States that paired executive action with legislation — moving fast, then codifying the change to make it last.

North Carolina

Legislation

Executive Order

In 2023, issued an [executive order](#) allowing work experience to replace formal education in state job qualifications, directing the Office of State Human Resources to update postings and trainings, and partnering with agencies to reduce unnecessary degree requirements — while encouraging internships, apprenticeships, and trainee programs. In 2025, North Carolina [passed legislation](#) codifying the order, going further to prohibit unnecessary degree requirements and require OSHR to regularly assess and update education, training, and experience requirements.

Utah

Legislation

Executive Order

In 2021, [passed legislation](#) removing degree requirements for state jobs where a degree was not legally necessary, allowing comparable experience and ability as equivalents to education in minimum qualifications. In 2022, Gov. Cox [launched the Skills-First Hiring Initiative](#) to prioritize skills and experience and broaden the qualified talent pool — announced alongside leaders from large private- and public-sector employers.

RESOURCES & SUPPORT

Partner with the Policy Team

The Opportunity@Work Policy Team can share additional insights on state action and support you with other state examples, model language, data and research, and narrative design.

Contact us at policy@opportunityatwork.org and join the [STARs Public Sector Hub](#) — our growing community of public sector leaders — to access these resources.

* **O@W Templates:** [Model Executive Order](#) and [Model Legislation](#)

* **O@W Research:** [“Tearing the Paper Ceiling: The Impact of State Commitments to Remove Degree Requirements on Public Awareness and Job Opportunities for STARs”](#)

- * **O@W Case Study:** [How the State of Colorado Is Transforming Its Workforce Through Skills-Based Practices](#)
- * **O@W Case Study:** [Building a Skills-Based Talent System in the Public Sector — Learnings from a Decade-Long Talent Transformation at Louisiana’s State Civil Service](#)
- * **O@W Case Study:** [How to Get Started Tearing the Paper Ceiling in Your State Government — Learnings from Iowa’s Auditor of State](#)
- * **O@W Playbook:** [Government as Employer Playbook](#)