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STARs
SKILLED THROUGH
ALTERNATIVE ROUTES

**SKILLS-BASED ASSESSMENTS
FOR PUBLIC SECTOR HIRING**

**Common strategies and practices for
assessing workers' skills and capabilities**

Acknowledgements



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Introduction

As the public sector moves to skill-based talent practices, a new approach is needed to assess workers' skills and capabilities.

The public sector has embraced skills-based talent management practices. These practices, which prioritize a candidate's skills over their educational attainment, have opened up public sector jobs to thousands of workers, including STARs, while helping governments secure qualified talent for hard-to-fill roles.

Who are STARs?

STARs are workers who are Skilled Through Alternate Routes other than a bachelor's degree.

They make up half the workforce, having gained valuable in-demand skills through community college, the military, partial college, training programs, and most commonly, on the job.



Skills-based talent practices offer a more expansive and inclusive way to think about talent, and they require adjustments to longstanding processes and procedures. When a bachelor's degree is no longer a key factor in evaluating talent, hiring managers need new ways to screen and assess candidates.

This resource outlines a variety of approaches to skills assessments that are currently being utilized in the public sector. This list is not exhaustive, and notes the most common approaches—from job descriptions through onboarding, highlighting practices used by states and the Federal government.

Understanding and educating staff on skills is core to understanding the requirements of a role

Clarity on skills is a prerequisite for effective assessment.

What are 'skills'?

An individual's application of knowledge to successfully complete specific tasks, often acquired through training or experience.

Skills vary by role, level of complexity and expertise required, and in type (ex "hard" and "soft" skills).¹

Knowing skills is a skill

Being able to identify and articulate the skills required for a job is a fundamental competency in and of itself. For human resources staff and hiring managers, this ability is the critical first step for understanding the true requirements of any role, writing effective job descriptions, and developing meaningful assessments.

This clarity is essential before an employer can accurately evaluate a worker's capabilities.

What is a 'skills assessment'?

Evaluating an individual's ability to demonstrate specific skills, in order to determine whether the performance meets a desired level of proficiency.²

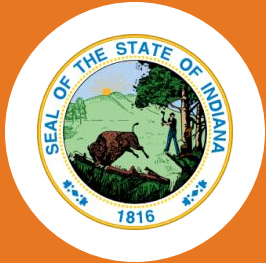
^{1,2} This definition of skills and skills assessment comes from Education Design Lab's [Glossary of Key Terms & Concepts in Skills Validation](#).

Ensuring that your job classification system includes skills as part of minimum qualifications for a role

A skills-based approach allows for a more accurate and inclusive way to define roles, moving away from outdated proxies for skills that can create unnecessary barriers for qualified candidates.

Simply copying and pasting from old job classifications may seem efficient, but is a lost opportunity to reconsider the skills a role requires, which may have evolved over time.

FROM TRADITIONAL JOB CLASSIFICATION	TO SKILLS-BASED JOB CLASSIFICATIONS
Focus on requirements necessary to qualify for the job	Focus on responsibilities and tasks necessary to do the job
Prioritize credentials gained in academic settings	Prioritize specific skills gained through experience and work
Provide a general description of job tasks and goals with no prioritization	Provide a robust description of specific job tasks, goals, and performance metrics and differentiates between required and preferred skills
Over-index on years of experience in the consideration of job fit	Focus on type of experience and acquisition of skills in the consideration of job fit
Include technical terms , jargon and other language that can discourage non-traditional applicants from applying	Are intentionally reviewed and revised for inclusive language that invites people of diverse professional backgrounds to apply



INDIANA EXAMPLE

Shifting to a skills-based job classification system

The Indiana State Personnel Department developed a formal policy for all executive branch agencies that are part of the State Civil Service System, updating their classification system to incorporate skills and skill level directly into their classification system.

Distinguishing between minimum, required, and preferred qualifications

Utilizing the different types of qualifications appropriately is key to attracting a broad and skilled talent pool. While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, distinguishing between them helps clarify what is truly essential for a role and what can be learned on the job. This will allow for job descriptions to be focused on what candidates can do, what they must be able to do on Day 1, and not just the credentials they hold.

	WHAT THEY ARE	YOUR ROLE	YOU CAN WORK TO
MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS (MQS)	• These are the non-negotiable baseline criteria a candidate must meet to be considered eligible for a role. • They are often broad and apply to all positions within a specific job classification. • While the MQs for a job classification are often fixed by policy, they create the foundational framework where you can introduce skills-based practices.	• While you may not have the direct authority to change a job classification’s MQs, you play a critical role in how they are interpreted and applied. • Your primary leverage is in how these MQs are communicated and evaluated in your recruitment efforts.	• Update job postings to be more inclusive of skills-based experience. • Actively review job postings to ensure that equivalencies for education, such as on-the-job experience or alternative training, are featured prominently and not relegated to fine print. • If you don’t have a skills- or competency-based classification, you can collaborate with hiring managers, to translate formal MQ language into clear, skills-focused language on job postings. This helps STARs and other candidates recognize that their experience is relevant and encourages them to apply.
REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS	• The job-specific skills and competencies a candidate must have on Day 1 to perform the duties of that particular position successfully.	• Within the framework of the MQs, your most critical task is to collaborate with hiring managers to pinpoint the truly non-negotiable skills for a specific role.	• Help hiring managers identify 3 to 5 (at most) required qualifications that are absolutely essential for a new hire and are needed on Day 1. This can help differentiate what can be learned.
PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS	• These are skills that can be learned or developed through onboarding and on-the-job training. • They often make a candidate more competitive but shouldn’t be used as a barrier to entry.	• Advise hiring managers to use preferred qualifications to help differentiate between otherwise equally qualified candidates.	• Frame the "Trainability" of skills. For each skill the manager lists, ask: "If we found an ideal candidate who met all our required qualifications, how long would it take to train them on this specific skill?" This question reframes preferred qualifications as a matter of training investment, not a lack of core capability.

Example of how minimum, required, and preferred qualifications connect

Utilizing minimum, required, and preferred qualifications appropriately helps maintain the throughline from one qualification to the next, clarifying what is truly essential for a role and what can be learned on the job. Below is an example for a Human Resources Associate role. A full job posting example for this same position can be [found on page 11](#).

	EXAMPLE	THROUGHLINE
MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS	Two years of professional experience in an office, customer service, or administrative role, demonstrating skills in customer service, data entry, attention to detail, and communication.	- This is the broad, foundational entry point. It establishes that a candidate has a professional background with transferable skills like customer service and data management. - It intentionally does not demand prior experience with an "HR" job title. This allows a diverse pool of applicants, including STARs, to be considered. - Candidates who meet this MQ could have backgrounds as retail shift supervisors, patient intake coordinators, or administrative assistants in various sectors.
REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS	At least one year of experience where a primary function involved entering and maintaining accurate information in a digital system (e.g., spreadsheets, databases, scheduling software).	- This is the non-negotiable, essential experience needed on Day 1. It directly connects to the MQ by specifying what kind of professional experience is necessary for this particular role. - A candidate's "two years of professional experience" must include demonstrable work in accurately managing digital information. - This narrows the pool to candidates who can perform a central function of the job immediately, regardless of their specific credentials or industry.
PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS	Experience with employee onboarding processes or familiarity with a Human Resources Information System (HRIS).	- This is the final, value-add layer. A candidate who has experience accurately managing data (the required qualification) is fully capable of doing the job. However, if they also have experience with specific HR processes like onboarding or have used an HRIS, they will require less training. - This skill is used to differentiate between highly qualified candidates who have already met both the minimum and required qualifications; it is not used to screen applicants out. - A strong candidate can easily be trained on a new software tool or process.

A skills-based job description is a prerequisite for any skills-based assessment

To evaluate a worker's skills, an employer must have clarity on the skills needed for a job. A skills-based assessment, therefore, requires a skills-based job description. The State of Colorado provides some useful tips:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Analyze your jobs to identify core responsibilities , tasks, and skills, and listing these "responsibilities" and "skills" in a specific and prioritized way. | 2 Use existing tools to develop inclusive, unbiased and plain language that invites a broad pool of applicants to apply and is easy to understand. |
| 3 Differentiate clearly between "required" and "preferred" skills. Adjust minimum qualifications where possible. | 4 Test the position description and job posting with the current team to confirm accuracy. |
| 5 Review job descriptions on a regular basis to assess the continued relevance of the skills and requirements. | 6 Provide all critical information about salary, benefits, etc. |



COLORADO EXAMPLE

Shifting to skills-based job descriptions

In Colorado, the State Department of Labor and Employment developed a skills identification template* to help their hiring managers develop skills-based job descriptions. By 2025, the State aims to be able to define all eligible jobs through skills. One year into this effort, they are roughly halfway there. You can read a [case study on Colorado's work](#) to learn more.

* See page titled, "Insight #2: Engage Agencies Actively in the Organizational Transition: Empower Agencies to Define Skills" for template.

A progression from traditional to skills-based qualifications

Encourage a change in mindset through training and coaching on how to write skills-based job descriptions and assess for skills.*

TRADITIONAL HIRING	IMPROVED PRACTICE	FUTURE STATE
QUALIFICATIONS • Degree in Business Administration or Business Management	QUALIFICATIONS • 4 years of experience as a Customer Relationship Manager	QUALIFICATIONS • Ability to support the needs of various constituents by using active listening, problem solving, and communication skills • Experience and ability to advocate on behalf of customers
Check the box requirement that screens out candidates who have learned relevant skills on the job	Hiring managers look at a candidate's past job titles and years of experience as a substitute for a degree	Hiring managers signal to candidates that they will consider a variety of experiences to validate their skills

* See the [appendix](#) for example skills-based job descriptions and a job description template.

Equip individuals to shift practices

Provide hiring managers the tools, such as example [job descriptions](#) and skill banks, to support this shift.

HUMAN RESOURCES ASSOCIATE

This job description was developed using a skills-based hiring template.

POSITION OVERVIEW

We strongly encourage STARs (workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes) to apply—no bachelor's degree is required. Whether you've built your skills through work experience, military service, training programs, or other nontraditional paths, we welcome your application.

The Human Resources Associate will assist in driving fair, effective, and inclusive HR practices that empower employees and strengthen organizational performance. From managing classification and selection processes to ensuring compliance with state personnel rules and statutes, the associate provides expert guidance in areas such as equal employment opportunity, ADA accommodations, FMLA, Workers' Compensation, benefits administration, dispute resolution, and supervisor and employee training. You will play a key role in maintaining and updating employee records, managing position creation and abolishment, entering critical data into the payroll system, onboarding new staff, and serving as a central point of contact for internal and external HR inquiries—ensuring smooth operations and responsive service across the department.

WHAT YOU'LL DO

Under the direction of upper level HR Operations staff and leadership, you will:

- Process a variety of personnel actions using internal HR and payroll systems.
- Notify eligible new hires of their retirement plan options and distribute relevant forms and informational materials.
- Update employee records in the HR information system to reflect retirement selections and upload completed documentation into the appropriate retirement administration platform.
- Run and audit HR and payroll reports to ensure data accuracy and compliance with reporting requirements.
- Route incoming mail, emails, phone calls, and information requests to the appropriate HR staff for timely resolution.
- Respond to internal and external requests for position descriptions and related documentation.

To ensure skills are clear and specific, the job requisition asks hiring managers to articulate the minimum requirements and cite several types of experiences that meet the requirements.

SKILLS WE'RE LOOKING FOR			
Minimum Qualifications Two years of professional experience in an office, customer service, or administrative role, demonstrating skills in customer service, data entry, attention to detail, and communication.	Required Skills (Required Day One): • Interpersonal Communication: Build rapport across organizational levels • Problem-Solving: Navigate complex employee situations with empathy • Confidentiality Management: Handle sensitive information appropriately	Preferred Skills (Can be developed on the job): • HRIS Systems: Database management and reporting • Employment Law: Stay current with regulations and compliance • Project Coordination: Manage multiple HR initiatives simultaneously	These skills can be demonstrated through: • Customer Service: Call center experience translates to employee relations • Healthcare: Experience with confidential information and diverse populations • Military: Leadership experience, attention to detail, protocol adherence

Building a Job Description: Find the Most Relevant Skills for a Role

A skills-based job description is a critical part of implementing skills-based talent practices. Without clarity on the skills needed for the job, it is hard to assess candidates. In addition, job descriptions that detail skills encourage STARS to apply.

Opportunity@Work's tool, STARSight, can be leveraged to identify the top skills for a job title and to understand how frequently those skills appear in job posts.



Understanding the top skills for a job title can:

- **Enhance job descriptions:** Incorporate the top skills identified into your job descriptions to attract candidates who are a strong match for the role.
- **Inform hiring decisions:** Use this information to identify candidates who possess the necessary skills.
- **Identify skill gaps:** Determine which skills your current employees or potential candidates may need to develop.
- **Tailor training programs:** Develop targeted training programs to upskill your workforce."

By leveraging STARSight, you can make data-driven decisions that will help build a more skilled and competitive workforce.

STARSight provides three dashboard tabs: Explore, Compare, and Assess.

[Access this how-to guide to learn how to navigate between the dashboards used for this task.](#)

Skills assessments happen over the entire employee lifecycle

With skills-based job descriptions in place, employers need to ensure they have developed ways to evaluate and maintain visibility into the skills of job candidates, new hires, and current employees.



Tools and tactics that can be used across the talent lifecycle include*:		
Reviewing applications for skills	Probationary periods	Details & secondments
Skills or competency-based assessments or civil service exams		Transfers
Job simulations		Internal Talent Marketplace
Work-based learning / Apprenticeships		
Credentials		
Pathways, Service Years and Fellowships		
Learning and employment records (LERs)		

* Additional tools and resources not featured throughout this brief can be found in the appendix.

Skills-based hiring practices put skills at the center of candidate assessment

To assess candidates’ skills during the hiring process, human resource leaders should:

Prepare

1

Define the Role

- Review job descriptions to ensure they focus on skills needed to perform the job.
- Determine if required qualifications are needed for success in the role or if they can be trained for.
- Make changes to minimum qualifications where not limited by classification guidelines.

Determine the Appropriate Assessments

- Review existing assessment, and research other potential assessments, to be used to assess for the top skills required for the job.

Align the Team

- Field a diverse hiring team with a range of perspectives, ideally team members who will interact with the person in this role and individuals who hold the same or similar position.
- Discuss the demands of the role and the core skills needed.
- Provide all hiring team members with an overview of the process and evaluation rubrics for each stage of the process.

Create the Tools

- Develop standard rubrics, interview guides, and resources and tools to support the development and delivery of the assessment before the search begins.

Execute

2

Screen for Potential

- Create a standard set of questions and criteria, derived from the key skills identified for the job, to evaluate resumes.
- Skills will be articulated differently across resumes so provide hiring team members with guidance on how to recognize skills in different contexts.

Prioritize "Show, Don't Tell"

- The best way to assess how someone will be in a job is to see that person in a job.
- To the extent possible, anchor more heavily on assessment opportunities where you are able to witness candidates doing the types of tasks that they would do in the job.

Interview for Skill, Not Style

- Use open ended questions that allow a candidate to draw on their full range of experiences to demonstrate their capabilities.
- Remember that conducting interviews, and interviewing as a candidate, require a specific set of skills that may not map well to some roles.

Be Fair & Consistent

3

Standardize Everything

- To minimize affinity bias, recency bias, and other biases, ensure that everyone in the process uses the same rubric with room for qualitative and quantitative assessments. Encourage the hiring team to fill these out immediately after each interaction.

Be Transparent

- Inform candidates about the entire process, including the types of assessments they should expect. Candidates perform better when they know what to expect.

Capture Real-Time Feedback

- Have the hiring team complete rubrics immediately after each candidate interaction.

Hiring a Human Resources Associate: A Skills-Based Approach in Practice

Below is an example of the hiring process in practice for the job description we reviewed earlier.



1 Defining the Role

Let's put the skills-based job description we reviewed earlier into practice. Following that template, we removed the bachelor's degree requirement and defined the role by its essential minimum skills: Communication, Customer Service, Attention to Detail, and Data Entry. This immediately broadened our potential applicant pool.

2 Screening Applications

We designed a screening rubric based on those four key skills. Instead of focusing on previous job titles, we gave credit to candidates who had experience handling customer inquiries, managing information, or performing accurate data entry in any professional setting.

3 The Interview

Our structured interview centered on the preferred skills identified in the job description: Employee Onboarding and HRIS experience. We asked behavioral questions like, "Describe a time you had to guide someone through a new or complex process. How did you ensure they had the information they needed?" to assess their onboarding capabilities.

4 The Assessment

The final step was a short work-sample test mirroring the job's core functions. Candidates were given a sample new-hire form and asked to enter the information into a mock HRIS database. This practical exercise gave us direct evidence of their attention to detail and data entry skills.

5 The Hire

We hired a STAR who previously worked as a patient intake coordinator at a medical clinic. While they had no formal HR title or degree, their experience managing patient records, explaining intake forms, and entering sensitive data with precision made them a perfect fit. They excelled in the work-sample test, proving they had the practical skills to succeed from day one.

State Civil Service Hiring Framework

Provide formal, structured tools and training to human resource and hiring managers.

The Louisiana State Civil Service (SCS) recognized that most people involved in their hiring process had not been trained on how to define skills. To support hiring managers, SCS developed its [Competency Model](#), which identifies the most common competencies of high-performing employees, provides guidance on how to think about required and preferred competencies, and defines skill proficiency at three levels.

They also built a set of practical tools to support hiring managers in utilizing skills throughout the hiring process.

The SCS [Hiring Framework](#) and [Competency Model](#) are interconnected tools designed to modernize the state's approach to talent acquisition by focusing on skills over traditional proxies like test scores or degrees.

[Learn more about Louisiana’s work.](#)



SCS HIRING FRAMEWORK*

6 steps to Modernize State Hiring Practices

Define the Job and the Roles	#1 Develop a competency map Review the job description and the provided core competency map. Select the core and preferred competencies that best align with your position
Source and Attract Talent	#2 Select Work Tasks Select examples of work from the job specification and/or the position description to showcase competencies
Screen Applicants	#3 Select Supplemental Questions Select supplemental questions to assist in the screening of candidates
Systematically Assess Candidates	#4 Select Interview Questions Select behavior-based interview questions from the SCS banks
	#5 Select Interview Activities Select interview activities from the SCS competency-based bank
Make Data-Driven Hiring Decisions	#6 Download structured interview templates and candidate comparison chart - Create structured interviews by choosing from a bank of interview templates - Easily compare candidate scores to help inform the decision-making process

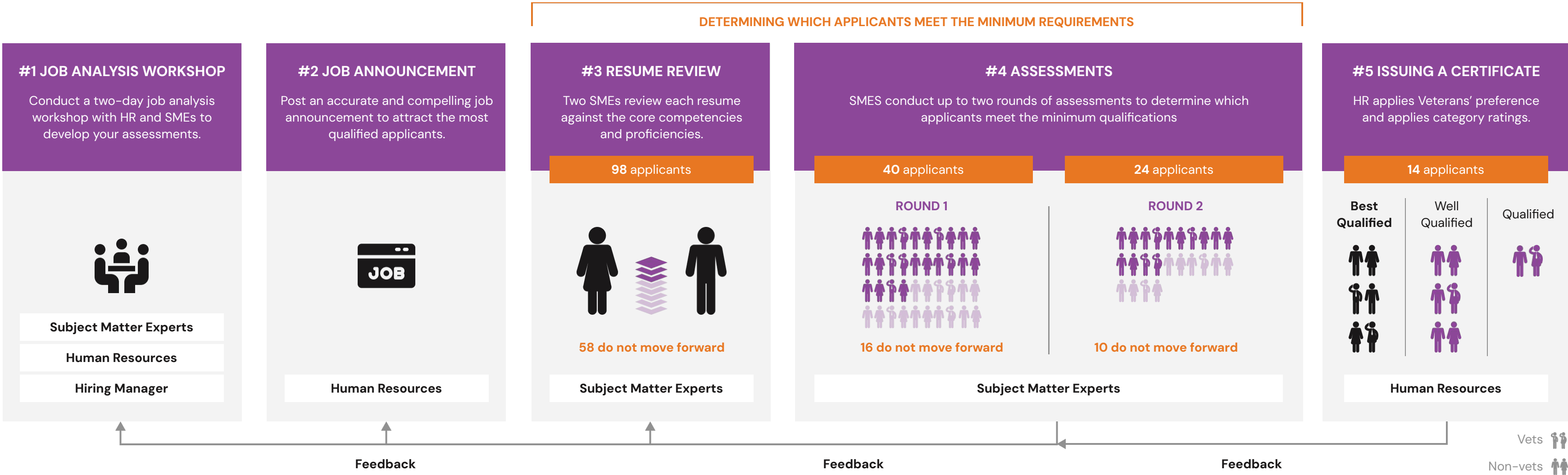
*This is a representation of the SCS Framework.

Subject Matter Expert Qualification Assessments*

Using Subject Matter Expert Qualification Assessments to assess for technical skills.

Subject Matter Expert Qualification Assessments (SME-QA) is a skills-based hiring method developed by the United States Digital Service (USDS) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to improve how the federal government hires technical talent. It shifts the focus from reviewing resumes for credentials to directly assessing a candidate's ability to do the job.

The SME-QA process addresses common challenges in traditional hiring, where qualified applicants for technical roles are often mistakenly screened out before a hiring manager ever sees them.



Training the Trainer

Provide training and coaching to human resource and hiring managers to shift mindsets.

As the State of Colorado implemented skills-based hiring, they recognized a skills gap in their own staff.

Human resource staff and hiring managers were not well prepared to screen and assess for skills.

The State's Department of Personnel and Administration (DPA) is leading the effort to shift to skills-based hiring across state agencies. To encourage this change in mindset to skills-based hiring, Colorado trained their human resource staff and hiring managers in skills-based hiring and HR staff engaged in active coaching of hiring managers. They are working toward policy change to move from experience to one based fully on skills.

HR departments, as the agency leads, serve as force multipliers for spreading awareness, by conducting training, responding to agency concerns and addressing sources of resistance.

[Learn more about Colorado's work.](#)



What is skills-based hiring and the benefits for hiring and HR professionals?



Determine SBH best practices and apply them during the hiring process



Walk through hiring scenarios



Implement skills-based hiring in conversations with hiring managers



Complete a knowledge check to receive credit for the training

Simulating real-world on-the-job experience using simulations

Some are leveraging simulations as a mechanism for skills validation.

The State of Maryland has a high concentration of cyber talent, but has a difficult time competing for cyber talent. Maryland and the DC region has the largest supply-demand gap nationally with far more cyber job openings than available workers.

Recognizing that Maryland is a national leader in cybersecurity, the state started a nearly decade-long effort to invest in and strengthen the cyber workforce in Maryland.

With front-line cyber roles experiencing the greatest hiring demand and the vast majority of Maryland community college graduates remaining in state, BCR Cyber saw an opportunity to partner with the community college system.

BCR Cyber, together with the Maryland Association of Community Colleges, launched the Cyber Workforce Accelerator. The accelerator placed a BCR Cyber Series 3000 Cyber Range in all 16 community college campuses. As a result, community college students will be trained using experiential and simulated cyber training experiences, while an ecosystem of 40+ cybersecurity employers and community partners align on skill needs, and intentionally connect grads with good, local cyber jobs.

WHAT IS CYBER RANGE

A virtual environment that simulates real-world scenarios where people can practice identifying, responding to, and mitigating cyber threats and enhance their cyber security skills. Cyber ranges also allow individuals to showcase their cyber skills to prospective employers.

Employers report progress lowering vacancy rates for cyber jobs. Utilizing real-world simulations is one way to not only assess for skills while hiring, but can also be leveraged for onboarding and learning and development. Take a deeper dive by reading a [case study on BCR Cyber's work](#) with the State of Maryland.

Competency-based Assessment

How the state of California is shifting to competency-based assessments



In an effort to expand recruitment and hiring initiatives to include applicants from professionally diverse backgrounds, the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) launched a pilot to shift from traditional evaluation of applicants to a skills-based approach for the Research Data series.

In evaluating the overall competencies of the general applicant pool, CalHR determined that there was a need to expand consideration of the skills applicants bring to the table, which led to a shift from the overall modality for examinations.

CalHR partnered with [ioPredict](#) to develop a competency-based examination that focused on the overall skills the classification requires, without being restricted by historical traditional barriers. The reformed competency-based examination provides a structured approach for applicants to be evaluated based on real-life experience instead of defaulting to standardized, and often limiting, tasks.

In addition to updating the assessment required for the Research Data Analyst classification, CalHR identified pathways for which candidates could meet minimum qualifications without specific degree requirements. CalHR piloted this approach with departments hiring for the Research Data Analyst position. To support hiring managers with the shift in assessment practices, CalHR launched an educational campaign to inform them of the benefits of skills-based hiring and brought forth success stories to garner buy-in.

ioPredict

ioPredict offers customizable and off-the-shelf entry-level and promotional hiring exams that assess critical candidate aptitudes and knowledge areas required for success on the job. ioPredict's exams are specifically developed with questions that "look and feel like the actual job." ioPredict is led by a team of Industrial-Organizational Psychologists with more than 15 years of test development and validation experience and who have conducted job analyses and developed and/or validated high stakes pre-employment and promotional tests for numerous public and private sector organizations.

CalHR continues to work with departments on a skills-based hiring approach, and is currently working on identifying a skills-matching tool to better support candidates in demonstrating their skills.

Service Year

How Maryland's Service Year Option and Maryland Corps create pathways to careers

In April 2023, Maryland Governor Wes Moore signed into law the SERVE Act, enacting his signature Service Year Option initiative for recent high school graduates and GED recipients.

The Service Year Option allows participants to spend nine months supporting a community-building organization while gaining skills and professional experience to transition into employment, an apprenticeship, or a postsecondary degree program.

The legislation also funds Maryland Corps, a similar service-to-careers program open to adults of all ages. Both programs engage nonprofits, government agencies, and businesses as "host partners" who provide job training, mentorship, and other resources..

Governor Moore established the cabinet-level Maryland Department of Service and Civic Innovation via executive order to oversee and promote service and volunteerism statewide, including implementation of both programs.

Key features of the Service Year Option model:

- Open to recent high school graduates and GED recipients
- 9-month community service placement with host partners
- \$15/hour living stipend + \$6,000 tuition award
- Exit pathways: employment, apprenticeship, or postsecondary education
- Maryland Corps extends similar benefits to adults of all ages



Learning and Employment Records

Some are leveraging Learning and Employment Records (LERs) as a mechanism for skills validation.

In response to the Alabama Governor Kay Ivey, and her goal of adding 500,000 more credentialed workers and increasing labor force participation across the state, Alabama leaders launched the [Alabama Talent Triad](#) in 2018.

The Triad is a comprehensive skills-based talent marketplace that connects job seekers, employers, and education and training providers.



This public-private partnership built a common vision and worked collectively to build an ecosystem using technology and data to develop a common skills ontology and credential registry that ensures skills are equally as valuable as degrees. **The Alabama Talent Triad is comprised of the following:**

SKILLS-BASED JOB GENERATOR

Employers can create customized job descriptions that help discover potential candidates.

DIGITAL LEARNER WALLET

Individuals can manage and curate their **learning and employment records** in a single place.

CREDENTIAL REGISTRY

Individuals can discover & explore learning opportunities and pathways through a robust credential registry by navigating through open linked data that showcases required, related and equivalent credentials.



Skills-based hiring practices allow for a clearer assessment of the candidate

By focusing on skills-based hiring, recruiters and hiring managers are better positioned to identify a candidate’s strengths and weaknesses for the specific role.

FROM TRADITIONAL EVALUATION AND SELECTION THAT	TO SKILLS-BASED EVALUATION AND SELECTION THAT
Uses degrees and credentials as proxies for skills	Uses behavioral questions, simulations, and skills assessments to objectively measure skills proficiency
Does not adequately prepare members of the hiring team to identify the skills needed for the role	Prepares all recruiters and hiring team members with a clear understanding and prioritization of the skills needed for the job
Over-indexes on cultural fit	Indexes on skills while seeking a cultural add
Takes an unstructured approach to interviews that can lead to inconsistency	Employs standard evaluation rubrics to ensure fairness and consistency
Fails to standardize candidate evaluation metrics and methods	Counteracts unconscious bias with intentional process elements and awareness-building efforts



Onboarding is an excellent opportunity to assess skills and set a new employee up for success

Effective skills-based onboarding requires employers to:

Set the Foundation

1

Provide Pre-Start Context

Quell new hire anxiety by sending a brief, targeted packet of information before day one. Outline what (and who) they can expect when they arrive to give them confidence and context.

Clarify the Role & Goals

On day one, conduct a comprehensive review of the role's specific responsibilities and immediate objectives to ensure a mutual understanding of the job ahead.

Build Connections

2

Foster Key Relationships

Immediately assign a buddy, mentor, or coach. This provides a crucial support system, especially for employees from diverse backgrounds joining a new and different environment.

Offer Broader Exposure

Create opportunities for the new hire to meet people beyond their immediate team. This provides valuable perspective for future collaboration, problem-solving, and career advancement.

Enable Growth

3

Initiate a Training Roadmap

A Training Roadmap will help to assess initial skill gaps and create a personalized plan for growth for each new hire. Provide them with a clear schedule and expectations for how and when they will gain the skills needed for their role.

Discuss Long-Term Development

Use the initial goal-setting conversation as a starting point to begin discussing the employee's longer-term professional development objectives and potential career paths within the organization.

Apprenticeship

Integrate ongoing skills assessment and learning into onboarding.



Apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities provide a unique opportunity for employers to evaluate potential hires for full-time positions while they're performing the very same tasks.

In the past decade, employers have expanded apprenticeships to more than half of all occupations, including many in the public sector.

Today, 40 percent of workers in new registered apprenticeship programs are going into high-wage roles that have historically required a bachelor's degree.* These apprenticeships open jobs to STARs in fields in which they have been underrepresented, which not only boosts their economic mobility, but also helps employers expand and diversify their talent pipelines.

The Council of State Governments and the Urban Institute launched [a civil service apprenticeship program](#) to support low-income workers in Idaho and Maine as they seek civil service jobs. CSG and Urban provide resources, guidance, technical assistance and incentive funding to support state and local agencies in developing apprenticeships to meet their workforce needs, and in recruiting, enrolling and supporting low-income rural apprentices.

Over the next three years, CSG and Urban will collaborate with apprenticeship stakeholders in Idaho and Maine to*:

- **Assemble state teams** focused on developing new civic sector apprenticeships. Teams will consist of sponsor agencies and organizations providing related a and support to apprentices.
- **Train and guide state team members** in overcoming key challenges in developing and operating apprenticeships, including aligning registered apprenticeship and civil service requirements.
- **Identify localities and positions for apprenticeships**, including locations with high concentrations of low-income rural learners and high-quality jobs.
- **Develop and register 3-4 new civic sector apprenticeship programs** in each state.
- **Enroll and support 20-25 low-income rural apprentices** in newly created programs in each state.

Probationary Period

Leverage probationary periods to understand a new hire's skills

An underutilized way to assess talent once on-the-job, **the probationary period is an invitation to pay attention to a candidate's skills and abilities and set them up for success in their new role.**

Federal agencies now send supervisors two reminders about an employee's probationary period as the end approaches, to spur supervisors to assess their new hires and provide practical tips and best practices for improvement. This strategy can be replicated by state and local governments.

The federal Office of Personnel Management previously issued [guidance](#) directing agencies to make better use of probationary periods to assess a new employee's skills.

WHY IS THE PROBATIONARY PERIOD UNDERUSED?*

Making a final job offer and having a new employee agree to join the federal government is not the end of the hiring process.

The probationary period for newly hired federal employees –in recent times, a period of about a year–has been around since the 1880s. That's just about the same time as the start of the nonpartisan civil service itself. So why renew attention to this tool in the age of practically instant global communication, advanced technology and new ways of working?

Unfortunately, despite being a long-standing assessment tool in the hiring toolbox, few agencies and supervisors use the probationary period to its full potential, allowing deadlines to pass and probationary employees to gain permanent status on autopilot.

Some hiring managers worry about being unfairly dinged for a new hire that doesn't work out. Others believe that the trouble of creating new vacancies and going through additional hiring processes is worse than simply keeping struggling employees in their position and hoping for the best.

The Office of Personnel Management is working to reverse these trends. In its December guidance, OPM directs agencies to send reminders to supervisors four months before new employees' probationary periods end, and then once again one month prior. It also suggests that agencies advise supervisors to make affirmative decisions about probationers' fitness for continued employment, providing practical tips and best practices. The Partnership **has long advocated for federal supervisors to document explicit decisions** on whether to retain new employees, and we're pleased to see OPM reinforce this idea here.

*From the Partnership for Public Service's "[Using the probationary period for skills-based hiring](#)" blog post.



Skills-based onboarding allows you to address skills gaps early and improve long-term performance

A skills focus during onboarding can identify skilling needs quickly and improve the likelihood that your new hire quickly becomes productive.

FROM TRADITIONAL ONBOARDING THAT

TO SKILLS-BASED ONBOARDING THAT

Focuses on compliance and HR issues only	Focuses on setting up the new hire for success across the spectrum of their experience (role and responsibilities, belonging, growth and development)
Is exactly the same for every employee	Can be tailored to the individual needs of the position and employee
Ends after a day or a week	Extends throughout the first year to provide continued engagement and support
Is focused only on the short term	Includes connection to ongoing professional development and opportunities for internal mobility
Does not include any assessment of or feedback to the new hire	Incorporates regular assessment of progress, the celebration of successes, and the solicitation of feedback

EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING INCREASES PRODUCTIVITY BY OVER 70% AND NEW HIRE RETENTION BY 82%.

Source: In [this report](#) on the cost of a bad hire, the Brandon Hall Group cites the value of strong onboarding.

Learning and development programs allow for the development and assessment of skills

To implement strong skills-based learning and development programs:

Strategic Program Design

1

Build for Future Needs

Design L&D programs that are forward-looking, creating deliberate pathways to address the organization's anticipated skill needs.

Embed Practical Application

All training must include built-in opportunities for employees to apply what they learn in real-time and test their knowledge acquisition.

Clear Employee Pathways

2

Create Custom Career Plans

Provide every employee with a tangible, personalized progression plan that maps the skills and competencies needed for growth.

Illuminate Internal Mobility

Clearly communicate the breadth of roles across the company and illustrate the specific pathways an employee can take to acquire skills for internal moves.

Culture of Growth & Support

3

Train & Empower Managers

Ensure managers understand the value of L&D to the organization and their own performance metrics, transforming them into essential advocates for employee growth.

Establish a Feedback Loop

Actively and consistently collect employee feedback on all L&D programs, starting from day one, and use that input to drive continuous improvement.

Learning and development can foster internal mobility through details and transfer

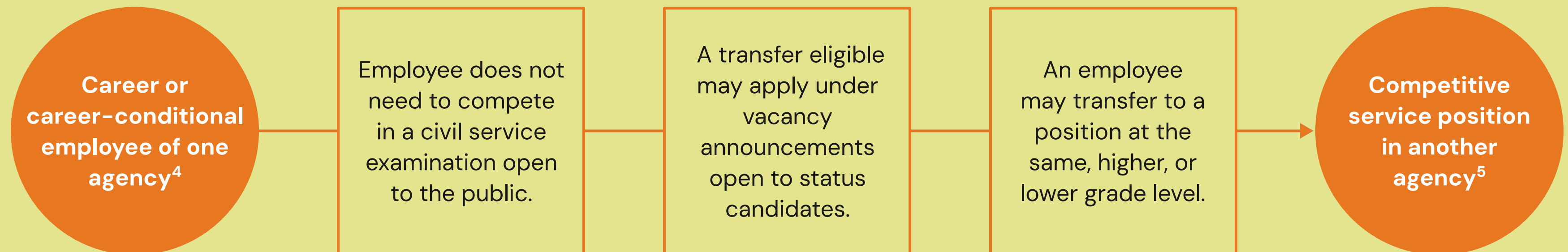
Fostering internal mobility through details and transfers.

Details are assignments where **employees can move to a new temporary position** within their agency or another agency.

When the detail ends the employee moves back into their original position. Transfers, on the other hand, allow employees to **move into a new position permanently**.³

The federal government utilizes both details and transfers. When an employee transfers they are able to do so without having to retake the civil service exam or begin a new probationary period. Employees interested in transferring can apply for open roles that are at a higher, lower, or identical pay-grade level than their current position.

AN EXAMPLE OF DETAILS & TRANSFERS IN PRACTICE FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:



³ A similar example to federal details and transfers is the federal Intergovernmental Personnel Act, a skillshare mobility program for federal, state, and local governments and non-profit personnel.

⁴ Career employee: The status that is attained after a permanent employee has completed a 1-year probationary period and a total of 3 years continuous creditable service. Career-conditional employee: The status under which new permanent employees are hired for federal service.

⁵ Competitive service: The merit-based hiring process open to the public

Learning and development creates pathways across public sector jobs

Creating pathways across public sector jobs.

A decade ago, federal agencies began using **a new strategy for hiring people in the early stages of their careers**. The plan, called the [Pathways Programs](#)⁴, offers two avenues for employment that are open to STARs, all of which can convert into full-time civil service roles:

AVENUE 1: INTERNSHIPS

AVENUE 2: ONE- OR TWO-YEAR DEVELOPMENTAL EXPERIENCES WITHIN A FEDERAL AGENCY

In Hennepin County, Minnesota, the county government has leveraged the Pathways Program to create their own program, [Hennepin County Pathways Program](#), and hire over 400 workers — including many in roles that no longer require a bachelor's degree.



Results of the Hennepin Pathways Program from 2014 to 2025 ([Read the case study](#))

460
Hired

43%
Eventually
promoted

92%
Retained for more
than a year

⁴ A third path, not formally part of the Federal Pathways Program, but fairly similar, and also open to STARs, is the [Presidential Innovation Fellows Program](#).

Internal Talent Marketplaces

Foster professional development and internal mobility through Internal Talent Marketplaces.

Internal Talent Marketplaces are a way to **bridge supply and demand needs with your organization** while providing employees access to development opportunities that allow them to share or build new skills and enables talent mobility opportunities through micro-details.



The federal government's [Open Opportunities program](#) was a government-wide initiative that offered employees experience-based learning assignments with any agency across the federal government. This program was a way for current federal employees to share, develop or grow their professional skills and experience- all while keeping their current federal job.

Agencies benefited too because Open Opportunities was a great way to get extra help, learn from other agencies, and develop, engage and retain employees. Open Opportunities is an example of a micro-detail because some projects could take as little as 1-2 hours, while others could take 20% of an employee's time over several months.



Skills-based learning and development practice improves performance and retention

When L&D incorporates skills assessment, you gain better information about employees’ readiness and aptitude for other roles in the organization.

FROM TRADITIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

TO SKILLS-BASED LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Prioritizes current needs over future skills needs	Considers the future needs of the organization and opportunities for internal mobility
Offers a standard curriculum	Is offered in a customizable way that allows employees to focus on skills needed for development in their roles
Does not incorporate the use or assessment of skills in learning modules	Incorporates opportunities to apply what is learned to real life work scenarios and assess learning
Is geared towards individual learning	Activates peer learning and ongoing support
Is measured by the completion of units	Is measured by outcomes and both individual and organizational advancement

Lessons Learned

Skills-based hiring is an organizational change that requires adapting processes and procedures as well as habits and mindset.



Understanding skills needs to be a core competency of all HR and hiring managers.



Skills needed for jobs will continue to rapidly change in the coming decade. Reviewing classifications and job descriptions regularly will be important to bringing in the right skills and experience needed into your workforce.



Understanding the core skills of the job should inform the selection of the assessment. HR and hiring managers should be assessing the things that folks will actually do in the job.



Skills assessment is an ongoing process. It starts at hiring but remains a constant throughout the talent management lifecycle.



This is a change management initiative, given the significant mindset and process changes it will require. Individuals throughout your organization need to be bought in to shattering stereotypes and misconceptions to see people for all of their experiences, skills, and diverse perspectives.

Join the [STARs Public Sector Hub](#) for insights, learning sessions, and examples of skills assessments and skills-based talent practices across the public sector!

Skills-based Job Posting Template

This template is designed to help you create clear and effective job postings to attract a broader pool of talent, including STARs.



HIRING RESOURCES

Introduction: Include a short blurb to encourage candidates to apply even if they don't feel they meet every requirement. This is an opportunity to highlight that your organization is excited to hire STARs because you are dedicated to building a diverse, inclusive, and authentic workplace.

#HASHTAG TO ENCOURAGE ENGAGEMENT

Job Summary (approx. 300 words): The first sentence should clearly state the job title, the core expectation of the role, and the division or department.

- **Paragraph 1:** Describe the key components and public impact of the role. What essential services will this person support? Who do they serve? Frame the work around its contribution to our community and the agency or department's mission.
- **Paragraph 2:** Focus on what an ideal candidate will bring to the job. This will disclose some of the key skills needed for the job.
- **Paragraph 3:** Disclose who they will report to, and ensure the location and remote/hybrid status are clearly stated. This will be the shortest paragraph.

Include a sentence here that encourages applicants to apply even if they do not have experience with all responsibilities.

APPLY NOW! (EMBED LINK)

Essential information about the job will go here. Include:

- Apply By: [Date]
- Department: [Department Name]
- Employment Type: [e.g., Permanent, Classified, Full-Time]
- Location: [City, State]
- Workplace type: [e.g., Fully Remote, Hybrid, In-Person]
- Salary Range & Grade:
- Bargaining Unit: [Applicable Union, or "N/A"]
- Reporting To: [Job Title]

Key Responsibilities: List 5–7 core responsibilities for the role. Use clear, action-oriented language and avoid internal jargon. Sample skills-based verbs to use in this section: Support, Manage, Develop, Execute, Anticipate, Identify, Demonstrate, Assist.

* Template adapted from Opportunity@Work's [STARs Hiring Playbook](#)

Skills, Knowledge, and Expertise: This section is one of the most critical for attracting talent. Use the guidance below to define the qualifications for your role in a way that is clear and focuses on the skills that truly matter for success.

1. **Minimum Qualifications:** If a degree is not required, state it explicitly and in bold: "A bachelor's degree is not required for this position." Acknowledge that skills are gained through many routes, including on-the-job experience, military service, apprenticeships, or community college.
 - If you have an experience substitution: If your formal job classification lists a degree, explain that direct, relevant experience can be substituted for some or all of the educational requirements. This is key to encouraging STARs to apply.
 - Frame "Experience" as "Expertise": Encourage applicants to think of their experience in terms of the knowledge and expertise they've gained, not just the number of years they've worked.
2. **Required Skills:** List the 4 to 6 non-negotiable skills, competencies, or technical abilities a candidate must have on day one to be successful in the role. Avoid listing skills that can be easily trained.
 - Proficiency in [specific software, technical skill, or competency like CRM Tools].
 - Demonstrated ability in [soft skill like project tracking or relationship building].
3. **Preferred Skills:** List 3 to 4 skills that are valuable but are not essential for a candidate to start the job. These can be used to differentiate between highly qualified candidates.
 - Familiarity with [a specific process or system, like state procurement rules].
 - Experience working within a [specific environment, like a start-up or public sector setting].

Benefits & Work Environment: Include your EEO statements, benefits, and physical demands of the job. Try to keep this section succinct and organized; candidates will judge organizational culture based on the benefits offered, but also skim through this section. Use this section to demonstrate the advantages to working in government.

[Download the Word Doc Template](#)

Skills-based Job Posting Example

The State of Washington Office of Financial Management provides best practices for managers and HR. As part of this resource they include a strong example of a skills-based job posting.

HIRING RESOURCES

Job Title: Community Engagement Specialist

Location: Remote/hybrid within Washington State

Salary: \$65,000 – \$75,000 per year

Application Deadline: MM/DD/YYYY

About the role

We are looking for a Community Engagement Specialist who can develop outreach programs that connect Washington residents with critical public services. This role involves public speaking, stakeholder coordination, and digital content creation.

What you'll do

- Build relationships with community partners to expand outreach efforts.
- Plan and deliver presentations to various audiences.
- Develop accessible, engaging digital content for social media and websites.
- Analyze engagement data to improve outreach strategies.

Skills we're looking for

- Strong communication and public speaking skills.
- Ability to develop community partnerships.
- Experience using social media for professional outreach.
- Comfort analyzing data to improve engagement efforts.

What we don't require

- A specific degree—if you have the skills, we want to hear from you!
- A traditional career path—skills gained through volunteer work, self-learning, or non-traditional jobs are valued.

By following a skills-based hiring approach, you can attract the best talent based on real-world abilities, not just credentials. Start creating job postings that focus on skills, expand opportunities, and build a more inclusive workforce!

Examples of how to [eliminate degree requirements](#) on job postings.

Browse our [diversity recruiting resources](#) page for help reaching candidates at hundreds of various diverse organizations!

[Access template from Washington State Office of Financial Management](#)

Additional resources for skills validation throughout the talent lifecycle for Hiring

This is a compilation of resources and does not necessarily denote endorsement.

Have a resource to share with us?



SUBMIT HERE!

HIRING RESOURCES

VALUES

RESOURCES

- Prioritize "Show, Don't Tell"
- Interview for Skill, Not Style
- Screen for Potential

[LinkedIn's How to Conduct an Effective Skills-Based Interview](#)
[LinkedIn's A Step-by-Step Guide to Structuring an Effective Interview Process](#)

- Prioritize "Show, Don't Tell"
- Interview for Skill, Not Style

[Education Design Lab XCredit Partnership](#) with Muzzy Lane Author platform for auto-assessing applicant's existing skills

- Interview for Skill, Not Style
- Screen for Potential:

[eightfold.ai](#): A paid platform with agentic AI that screens candidates and flags top talent – so you can focus on final decisions, not first-round

[TestGenius](#): A paid platform that places applicants into situations that mimic the typical work environment, so that employers can determine which applicants truly possess critical skills and abilities for the job position you must fill.
[ioPredict](#): A paid platform that has a library of entry-level and promotional hiring exams that assess critical candidate aptitudes and knowledge areas required for success on the job.

[BCR Cyber](#): This case study provides insight into using simulations for assessing and training for skills.

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SUBMIT HERE!

HIRING RESOURCES

VALUES

RESOURCES

- Define the Role

[STARsight](#): The insights you need to unlock half of U.S. workers are at your fingertips. StarSight aggregates the latest national labor market data for the 70M+ skilled workers who are STARs, providing a complete picture of regional talent pools. Organizations and communities can more confidently build an inclusive workforce strategy that meets today’s talent demands and provides greater upward mobility.

[O*NET Online](#): Find, search, or browse across 900+ occupations based on your goals and needs. Then use comprehensive reports to learn about requirements, characteristics, and available opportunities for your selected occupation.

[European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations \(ESCO\)](#): ESCO works as a dictionary, describing, identifying and classifying professional occupations and skills relevant for the EU labour market and education and training. ESCO provides descriptions of 3,039 occupations and 13,939 skills linked to these occupations.

[Credential Engine Credential Transparency Description Language \(CTDL\)](#): CTDL is the family of de facto standards for making descriptions of credentials and other resources available as data for search and discovery and cross-system interoperability. You can think of the CTDL as a large dictionary of terms that is at your fingertips for creating descriptions where you can use all of the terms or only those terms that meet your needs.

[Credential Engine Credential Registry](#): The Credential Registry holds detailed information on all types of credentials and skills in an easily-accessible format. Users can explore competencies, learning and employment outcomes, up-to-date market values, and career pathways and reference data on credential attainment and quality assurance at schools, professional associations, certification organizations, the military, and more. This data is a dependable and powerful source for systems, web and mobile applications, and other tools.

- Screen for Potential

[George Washington University’s Leveraging AI for Skills Extraction & Research \(LAI SER\)](#): LAiSER bridges the gap between skill acquisition and labor market needs by extracting and aligning skills from text, empowering individuals to showcase their talent and helping organizations make smarter hiring decisions.

- Support across the entire talent lifecycle

[Commonwealth of Massachusetts Skills-Based Hiring Toolkit](#): This toolkit offers tips, resources, and best practices to succeed in skill-based hiring efforts.

[Washington State Office of Financial Management State Human Resources Skills-based hiring and recruitment toolkit](#): This resources offers tips, best practices, and examples for supporting skills-based recruiting and hiring.

[OPM’s Multipurpose Occupational Systems Analysis Inventory – Close-Ended \(MOSAIC\) Competencies](#): A comprehensive listing of critical competencies and tasks employees need to perform successfully in nearly 200 Federal occupations, as well as for leadership positions, as identified through studies conducted by OPM.

[Alabama Talent Playbook: Building a Talent Marketplace – A Playbook for States](#): A playbook designed specifically to share lessons learned and emerging best practices related to skills-based hiring to support state policy and implementation teams as they address talent in their own states.

Scaling Skill Development and Job Placement into Cyber Careers

[BCR Cyber Case Study](#): A statewide initiative uses hands-on training and public-private partnerships to build STAR-friendly cyber talent pipelines

Additional resources for skills validation throughout the talent lifecycle

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Have a resource to share with us?



SUBMIT HERE!

ONBOARDING	
VALUES	RESOURCES
● Provide Pre-Start Context ● Clarify the Role & Goals ● Offer Broader Exposure ● Initiate a Training Roadmap	Opportunity@Work Government as Employer Playbook StarSight: Real-time labor market insights on the 70M+ STARs workforce Rework America Alliance’s Skills-Based Sourcing & Hiring Playbook
● Initiate a Training Roadmap ● Discuss Long-Term Development	O*NET Online: Find, search, or browse across 900+ occupations based on your goals and needs. Then use comprehensive reports to learn about requirements, characteristics, and available opportunities for your selected occupation. Credential Engine Credential Registry: The Credential Registry holds detailed information on all types of credentials and skills in an easily-accessible format. Users can explore competencies, learning and employment outcomes, up-to-date market values, and career pathways and reference data on credential attainment and quality assurance at schools, professional associations, certification organizations, the military, and more. This data is a dependable and powerful source for systems, web and mobile applications, and other tools.

Additional resources for skills validation throughout the talent lifecycle

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Have a resource to share with us?



[EMAIL US](#)

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION

VALUES

RESOURCES

- Build for Future Needs
- Illuminate Internal Mobility
- Train & Empower Managers

[Education Design Lab XCredit Partnership](#) with Muzzy Lane Author platform for auto-assessing applicant’s existing skills

- Build for Future Needs
- Create Custom Career Plans

[Credential Engine Credential Registry](#): The Credential Registry holds detailed information on all types of credentials and skills in an easily-accessible format. Users can explore competencies, learning and employment outcomes, up-to-date market values, and career pathways and reference data on credential attainment and quality assurance at schools, professional associations, certification organizations, the military, and more. This data is a dependable and powerful source for systems, web and mobile applications, and other tools.

- Train & Empower Managers

[CompetentU from C-BEN](#): CompetentU helps you understand, create, and launch competency- and skills-based education (CBE) initiatives for your workforce — no prior knowledge needed. CompetentU is the only online, on-demand learning and development experience of its kind: a CBE-based environment that both models and teaches the principles of CBE and skills-based program design.