



Find the Most Qualified Candidates by Putting Skills First

A GUIDE TO SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING
SKILLS-BASED HIRING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

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Overview

Around the country, states are changing the way they hire to prioritize important alternative qualifications over unnecessary degrees. With more than 25 states passing either executive orders or legislation, and others taking additional policy initiatives to shift their criteria, skills-based hiring is quickly becoming the new standard for filling public-sector jobs.

Removing degree requirements from public sector roles requires state agencies to describe the minimum skills, training, or experience necessary to perform well in open positions. The process encourages state HR offices to look past college degrees in cases where prior work experience may be substituted as a skills validation technique. Shifting hiring practices requires multiple departments to work together and think differently about the roles they are trying to fill while also meeting the needs of today's workforce.

This can be an arduous task at first, but with the right implementation plan, state agencies can effectively and efficiently identify the skills needed for public roles as they become available. As skills-based hiring becomes more commonplace, states will be able to learn from each other, but those on the cutting edge will have to break new ground. The Cicero Institute has created this playbook to guide you through implementation.

In the subsequent pages, we provide you with a step-by-step guide to help you implement this strategy. From defining roles, responsibilities, and goals (including realistic deadlines) to encouraging organizational alignment, stakeholder buy-in, and developing a learning curriculum for skills training, this playbook will equip you for successful implementation.

Implementation Overview

1. Define Goals

- a. **Determine which agencies will participate** in this change.
- b. **Highlight applicable roles** for skills-based hiring and key personnel that will need to approve the change in hiring practices.
- c. **Communicate** the importance of removing degree requirements to stakeholders across all agencies affected to increase awareness and promote buy-in.
 - i. This should be communicated for the roles identified with a focus on highlighting reasons why this initiative will be beneficial to stakeholders.
 1. Communication should be across all agencies affected to increase awareness and promote buy-in.
 2. Explain how broadening the pool of workers who are qualified for these roles can help expand employment opportunities for workers in their state, increase the number of skilled candidates working in the public sector, and mitigate talent acquisition and labor costs.
 3. Explain that using skills-based criteria may require more effort upfront, but hiring more qualified individuals should lead to more satisfied employees, which leads to better employee retention and less turnover. This will ultimately benefit the hiring manager and associated team in the long run.



Identify the following information:

- a. Total number of state jobs.
- b. Number of vacant positions.
- c. Number of roles expected to turn over annually (contract positions).
- d. Number of positions that currently require a college degree.
- e. Number of positions that do not currently require a college degree.
- f. For the specific roles identified in Step 1b, identify the number of new applicants with and without college degrees.

2. Set Outcomes and Deliverables

a. **Determine which positions to start with** based on various criteria, including but not limited to:

- i. Positions to which some non-degree holders have been hired recently.
- ii. Positions in which training is required for degree holders after hire.
- iii. Positions in which there are alternative routes to obtaining similar qualifications.



b. **Develop key performance indicators (KPIs)** that can be used to measure progress and effectiveness. Examples include:

- i. Increase in number of positions which previously required a college degree but no longer do.
- ii. Number of new individuals without a college degree who have been hired.
- iii. Number of individuals without a college degree who have been promoted to new positions that formerly required a college degree.

c. If technological changes are needed as it relates to sorting criteria, **identify what is required and with whom to partner with** (either internally or externally).

- i. When implementing skills-based hiring, some states have made changes to their websites to include new filters.
- ii. Other states offer a “substitution form” applicants can submit in addition to an application which enables them to highlight relevant experience or qualifications.
- iii. Build (or work with others to build) other MVP tools and resources for employers to facilitate talent acquisition
 - Applicant portals
 - Tools for hiring managers to quickly build job postings
 - Tools for HR staff to manage job qualification standards and easily edit them, receive and approve requests for exceptions



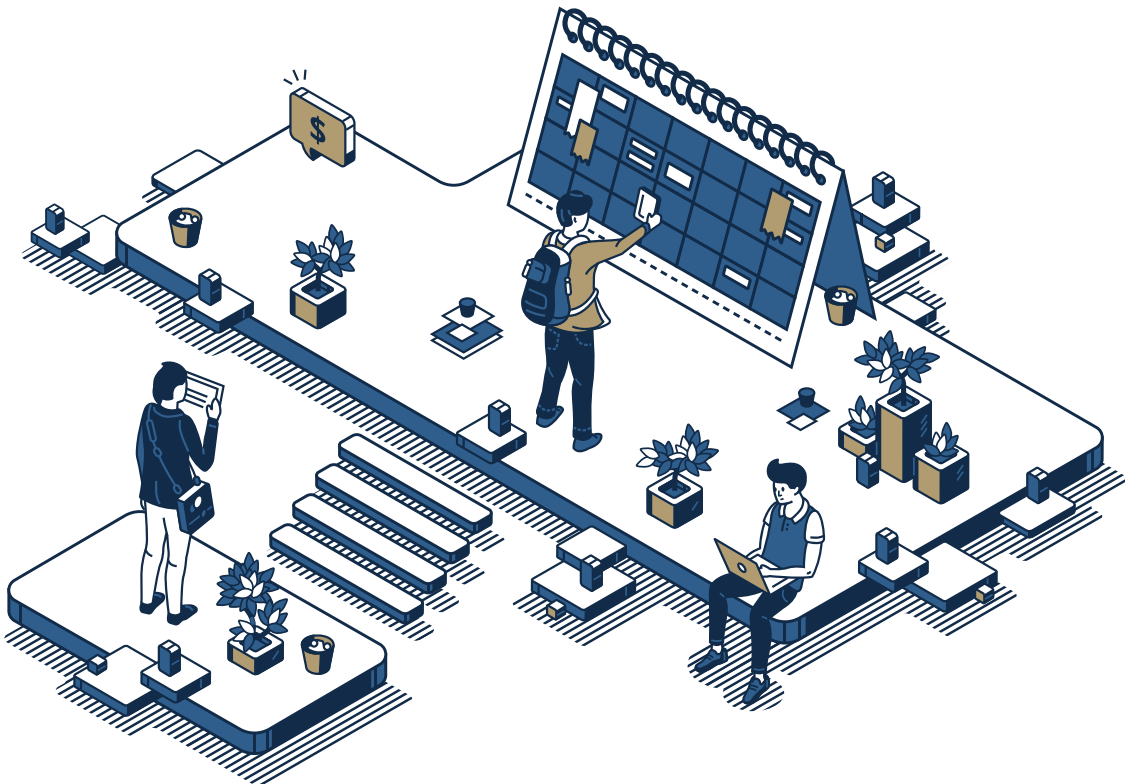
3. Set Realistic Deadlines

- a. **Develop a timeline** for reviewing available roles and for finalizing new job descriptions (ex: review X # of jobs per week with a goal of being done by X date).
- b. **Manage expectations** among the team. Change won't happen overnight, but weekly and monthly team check-ins will allow them to see ongoing progress.
- c. **Identify any problems or concerns** so they can be resolved quickly. Be flexible and adjust as needed.

4. Assign and Delegate Roles and Responsibilities

a. **Develop a day-to-day project management structure** that fits the agency (examples of roles are listed below):

- i. **Project Manager** – This person should oversee the day-to-day project activities and be responsible for developing and managing a cadence of check-ins to ensure the project is moving according to plan and on schedule.
- ii. **HR/Talent Professionals/Research Assistants** – These people should be tasked with reviewing upcoming job openings and identifying skills needed for each. They are also responsible for setting performance metrics that:
 - Ensure agency heads **set precise and measurable goals** for their departments.
 - Employees are **evaluated annually based on a set of objective criteria** tied to the competency frameworks and measured by the assessments.





5. Develop a Skills Validation Process

A process for identifying, vetting, and signaling for specific non-degree credentials:

During the Skills Validation Process:

- a. Each state agency should be required to **adopt a framework of at least three objectively measurable competencies** encompassing the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for success in each job category in state government, along with descriptive information necessary to determine how to measure each competency objectively.
- b. The state should **identify a lead human resources individual** who will be responsible for selecting existing tests and setting passing scores for each one in order to measure the competencies for each eligible job category. These assessments should:
 - **Screen for general aptitude** across all job categories using a norm-referenced standardized assessment of non-technical skills, problem-solving ability, and mastery of basic verbal and numeric abilities.

Skills Validation Process, *continued*

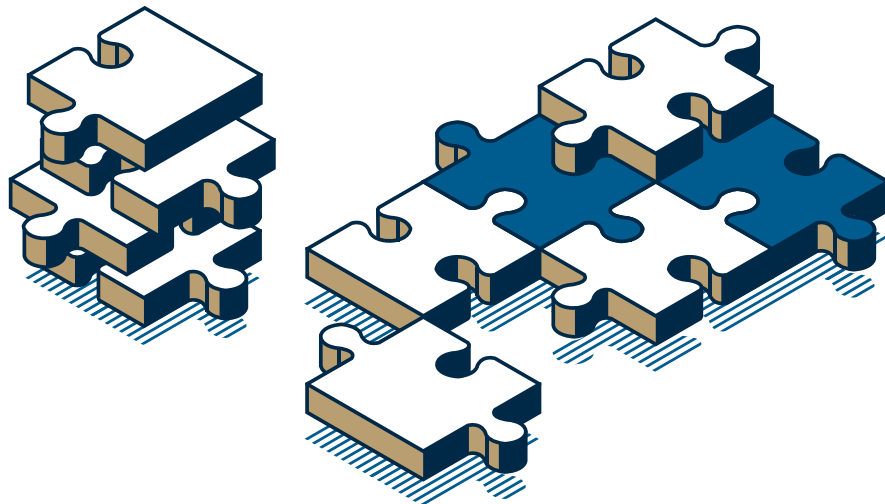
- **Objectively measure competencies** that are common across many job categories through formal assessment, such as written communication, proficiency with common office tasks, physical ability, and proficiency with commonly used computer hardware and software.
- **Validate job-specific skills using at least one formal assessment per job category.** Other competencies may be assessed using a variety of measures, such as formal and informal assessments, structured interviews, industry-recognized credentials, or completion of a recognized apprenticeship program or other post-secondary education or job training.

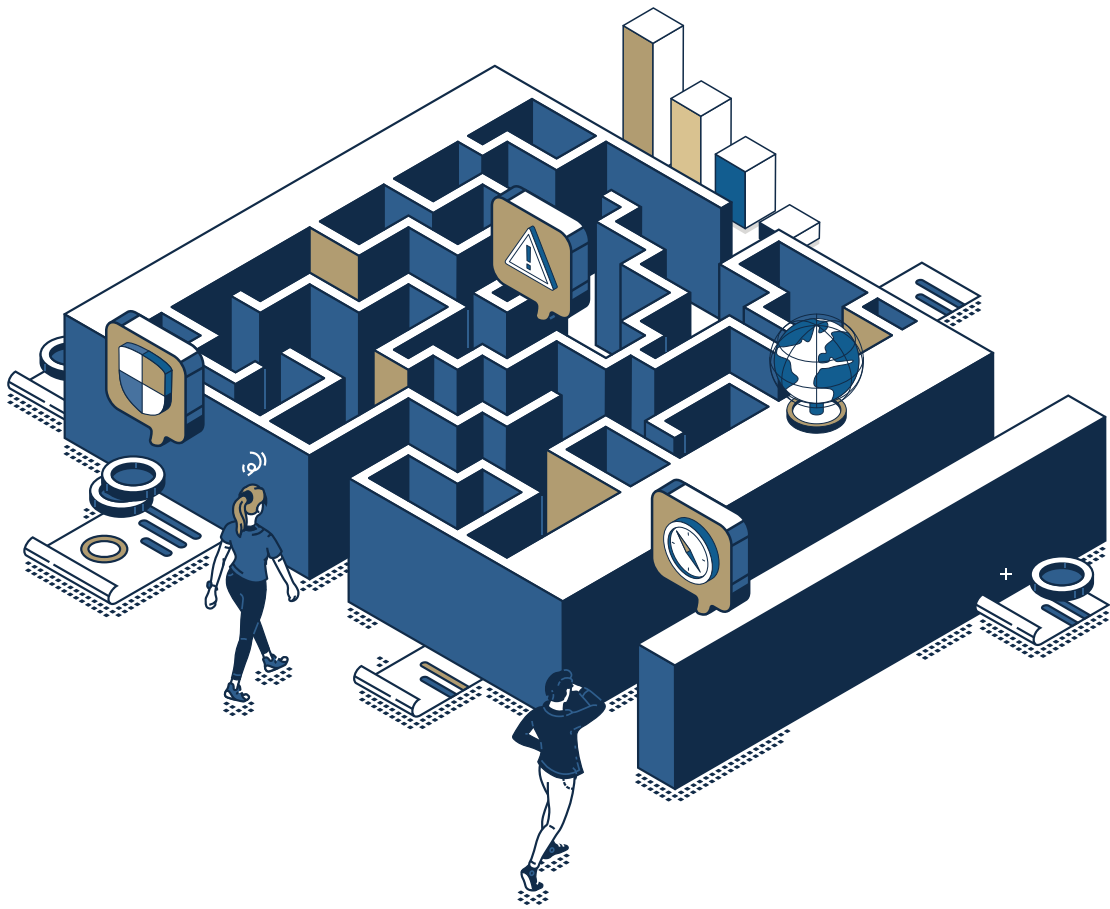
This individual should also:

- a. **Identify target populations** (military veterans, stay-at-home parents returning to the workforce, technical school students, etc.) and ensure they know to consider available state jobs during any job search.
- b. **Develop partnerships** with schools, training providers, nonprofits, religious institutions, and other entities that offer skills training to encourage them to develop programs that instill necessary skills for roles across government.
- c. **Partner with employers in the state and region** to identify key skills for jobs across industries, then identify the best entity to deliver and certify that training (skills validation programs).

6. Develop Learning Curriculum and Skills Training Programs (apprenticeships, etc.)

- a. **Identifying skills** may require individuals to reach out to the different departments to better understand the hard and soft skills required for each role.
- b. **Keep a record** of general skills to increase consistency and identify the technical skills requiring additional training.
- c. **Offer access** to online workforce training materials that can supplement individuals as they work through this process.
 - i. Determine what is available for free online and develop a curriculum for what is not currently available.
- d. **Develop apprenticeship programs** where non-degree-holders can obtain the skills they need for the job.
 - i. Many states have started developing apprenticeship programs. Consider building programs that incorporate hands-on training, additional online training, and skills assessments.
- e. **Leverage outside expertise** where needed.



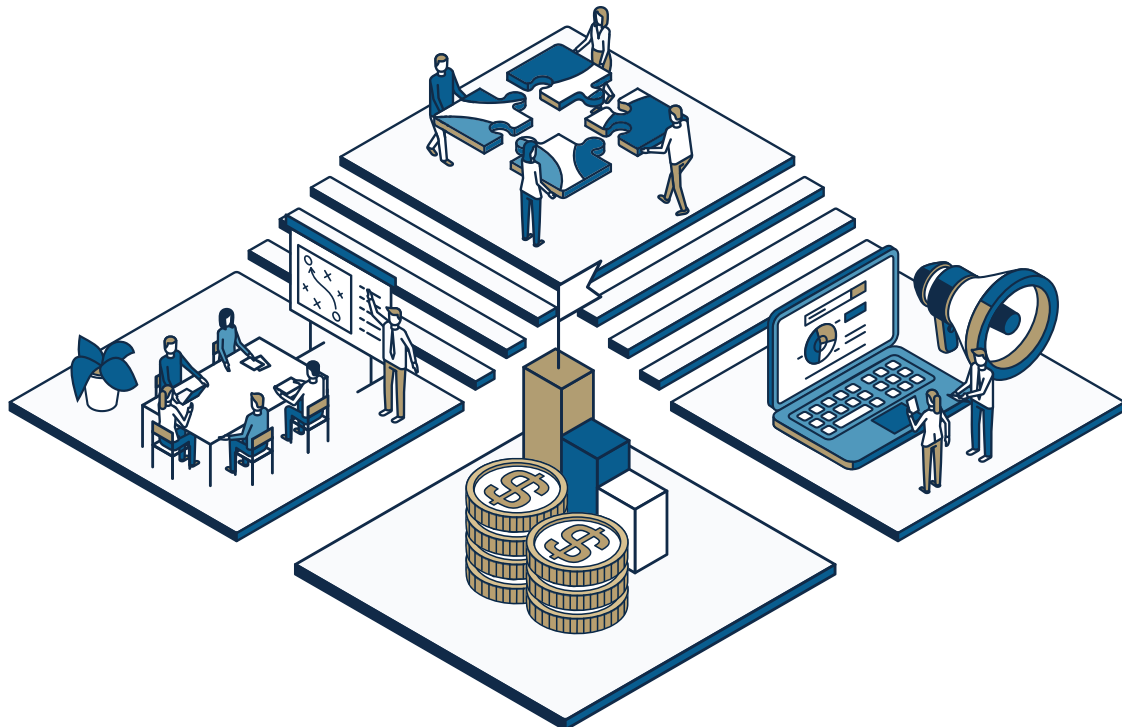


7. Identify Obstacles (known hurdles or expected areas of pushback)

- a. **Ensure your communication plan includes all impacted stakeholders** so everyone feels they have a voice in the hiring plan. This will help increase adoption among groups of people who may not immediately be in favor of this initiative. Show these individuals how this initiative will directly benefit them and their peers.
- b. **Regularly remind** management that new job postings cannot include an unnecessary degree requirement and that they should use caution when reusing old job descriptions.
- c. **Identify barriers** to promotion for non-degree holders once they are hired and how those can be overcome.

8. Hold A Kick-Off Meeting

- a. **Bring the team together for a kick-off meeting** for the larger group (this should include everyone from cabinet secretaries to department heads, managers, and assistants).
- b. The goal for this is to bring **enthusiasm** and **excitement** to everyone involved in this process, including those who are tertiary but can offer expertise when needed.
- c. Be **creative** and **bold** when planning the rollout. Emphasize that success depends on each and every individual involved.





9. Review Pain Points and Adjust

- a. **This is not a one-time process.** Instead, it is a living and breathing exercise. If something isn't working, change it, and do it more efficiently.
 - i. To better understand the progress being made, the HR office/Office of Administration should continuously track:
 - The total number of **jobs that no longer require degrees.**
 - The number of **applicants for jobs who lack a degree.**
 - The number of **employees who are hired based on skills** rather than a degree.

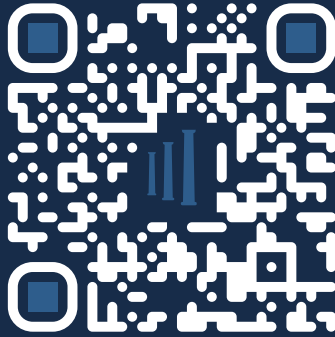


Maryland Case Study

In March of 2022, Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan enacted a first-in-the-nation executive policy to remove college degree requirements from more than 10,000 public job openings in administration, IT, customer service, and other roles. Half of Maryland's workforce lacks a bachelor's degree but has in-demand skills that qualify them for these positions.

As a result of changing to skills-based hiring, they experienced a 41% increase in non-degree-holding state hires in the first four months.

Source: The Office of Governor Larry Hogan, "Governor Hogan Announces Elimination of Four-Year Degree Requirement For Thousands of State Jobs," *Maryland.gov*, March 15, 2022. <https://governor.maryland.gov/2022/03/15/governor-hogan-announces-elimination-of-four-year-degree-requirement-forthousands-of-state-jobs/>.



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