

Empowering Progress: Harnessing Skills-Based Strategies to Drive Public Sector Excellence - National Governors Association

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Executive Summary

This National Governors Association report examines the adoption of skills-based hiring practices across U.S. state and territorial governments. The analysis focuses on how over half of state governments have implemented policies removing degree requirements from public sector job postings, prioritizing skills and experience instead. Key findings include that 22 of 25 states with skills-based policies saw faster growth in non-degree job postings compared to states without such policies. The report presents case studies from Maryland, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Delaware showing positive outcomes including reduced vacancy rates and increased applications. However, implementation challenges are identified including lack of foundational data systems, increased screening costs, and the need for cultural change in hiring practices. The authors argue that government leadership in skills-based hiring could influence up to 22 million jobs nationally and address critical workforce shortages as Baby Boomer retirements accelerate.

Key Insights

1. Over half of U.S. state governments have adopted skills-based hiring policies, with 22 of 25 states showing increased non-degree job postings faster than states without such policies
2. Delaware's targeted approach removing degree requirements for specific roles resulted in significant improvements: 575% increase in Family Service Specialist applicants and 0-7% vacancy rates for Probation and Parole Officer positions
3. Implementation challenges include the need for new data systems, increased screening costs, cultural resistance from hiring managers, and lack of standardized skills assessment tools

Practical Takeaways

- States implementing skills-based hiring should develop robust data collection systems to track hiring outcomes, vacancy rates, and candidate quality metrics
- Successful implementation requires comprehensive job analysis, skills-based assessment tools, and training for HR teams and hiring managers, not just policy changes

Frameworks Mentioned

SMEQA — Subject Matter Expert Qualification Assessments - federal skills-based assessment program

USA Hire — OPM's online assessment platform for federal hiring

Pathways — Federal early career talent program expanded to include non-degree pathways

Critical Analysis

The report presents a comprehensive policy analysis with specific state-level data and measurable outcomes. Strengths include concrete examples from multiple states, quantified results, and acknowledgment of implementation challenges. However, the analysis is heavily promotional of skills-based hiring without examining potential negative consequences such as skills assessment validity or unintended discrimination. The report relies primarily on job posting data rather than long-term employment outcomes. The source (National Governors Association) suggests potential advocacy bias toward state government initiatives.

Organizational Practice

State governments removing bachelor's degree requirements from job postings, implementing skills-based assessments, conducting comprehensive job requirement reviews, and developing work-based learning programs. Examples include Maryland increasing non-degree postings from 32% to 47%, Colorado modernizing its labor exchange system, and Delaware achieving significant reductions in vacancy rates through targeted degree requirement removal.

Strategic Implications

The report suggests skills-based hiring in government could catalyze broader adoption affecting up to 22 million jobs nationally. With 27% of state government workers aged 55+, demographic pressures may accelerate adoption. The federal transition to 70% non-degree positions by 2024 indicates systematic policy momentum that could influence private sector practices.

Validation Status: passed
