



CASE STUDY



How Colorado is Transforming its Workforce through Skills-Based Practices



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Colorado is at the forefront of a movement to transform state workforces

STATE OF COLORADO FACTS



5.8M

Number of Citizens

\$40.6B

2024-2025 Budget

~1.3M

STARS

1876

Achieved Statehood

28K

State Employees

The Centennial State

State Nickname

Since 2019, the State of Colorado has been experimenting with skills-based practices as a means to build a state workforce that reflects its citizens, meet its hiring goals in a competitive market, and prepare for the expected talent challenges of tomorrow.

In 2022, Governor Polis issued an [executive order to formally transition the state to skills-based hiring](#). Since then, he has signed two other [executive orders to promote work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities in state government](#).

Together, these orders constitute a significant commitment to move away from traditional talent practices that rely heavily on degrees and explore ways to hire, develop, and retain workers based on the skills they demonstrate in the workplace. To implement this complex organizational change and implement its vision, the state is taking a multi-pronged approach at three levels of government.



JARED POLIS

Governor of State of Colorado



KATHERINE KEEGAN

Department of Labor and Employment



MELISSA WALKER

Department of Personnel and Administration



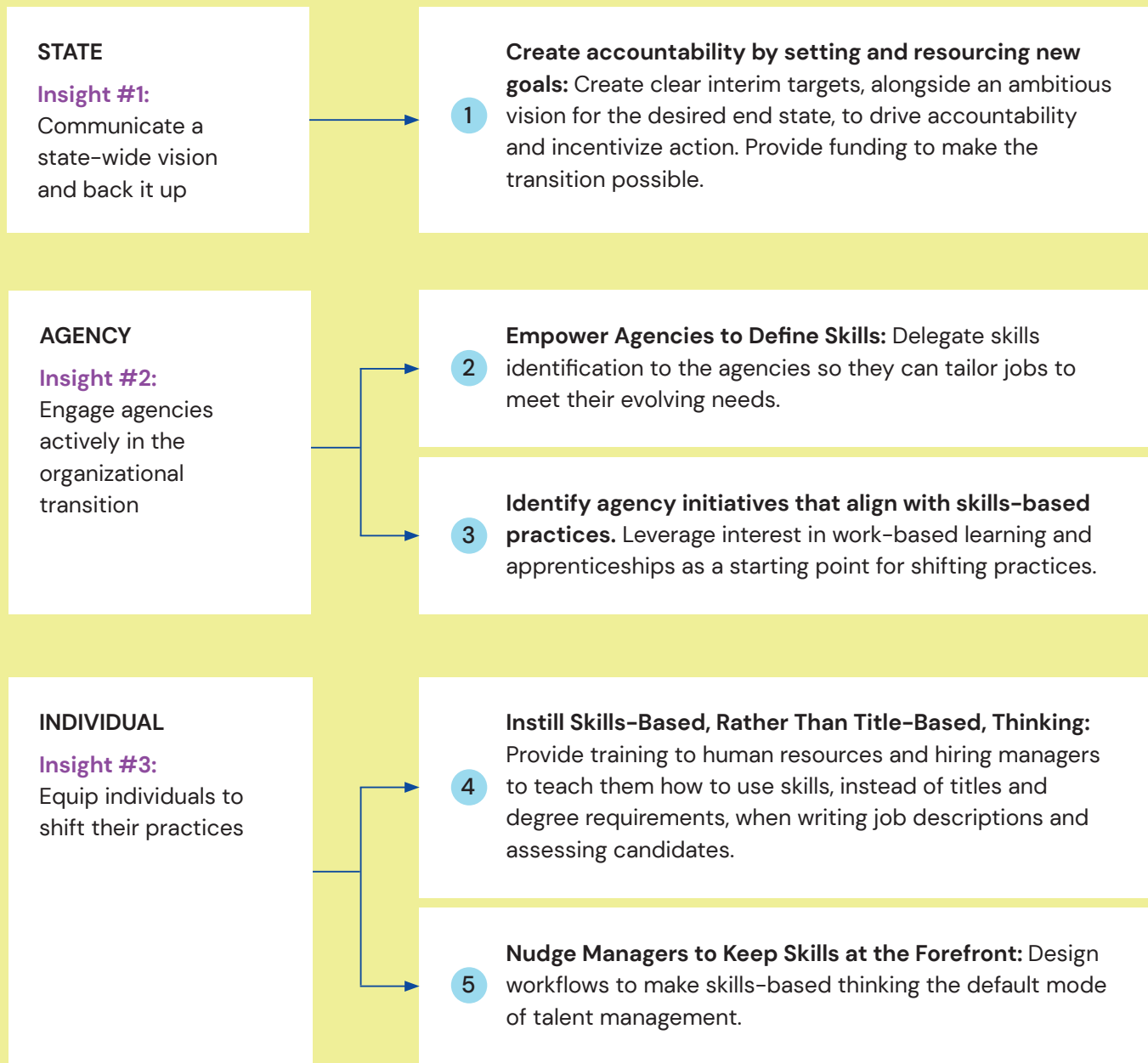
JENNIFER CECERE

Department of Personnel and Administration

THE BIG PICTURE

Systems Change Requires Top To Bottom Commitment

Skills-based hiring and advancement is about much more than removing Bachelor's degree requirements from job descriptions. Colorado is taking a holistic approach to changing its talent acquisition and management practices at the state, agency, and individual level.



1 Create Accountability By Setting And Resourcing Goals

Create clear interim targets, alongside an ambitious vision for the desired end state, to drive accountability and incentivize action.



Governor Polis **signed executive orders to formalize the state's commitment** to skills-based hiring and work-based learning. Together, these send a clear signal that building a state government hiring and advancement system based on skills is a priority for his administration.

- Skills-based hiring: By 2025, 100% of eligible positions will reflect alternatives to educational requirements and be flagged in Talent Acquisition system
- Work-based learning: By June 30, 2025, 10 additional WBL programs for high vacancy or multi-department positions

The orders **set specific targets to guide a collective effort**, including goals and annual milestones at the agency level for the removal of degree requirements and the creation of work-based learning programs.

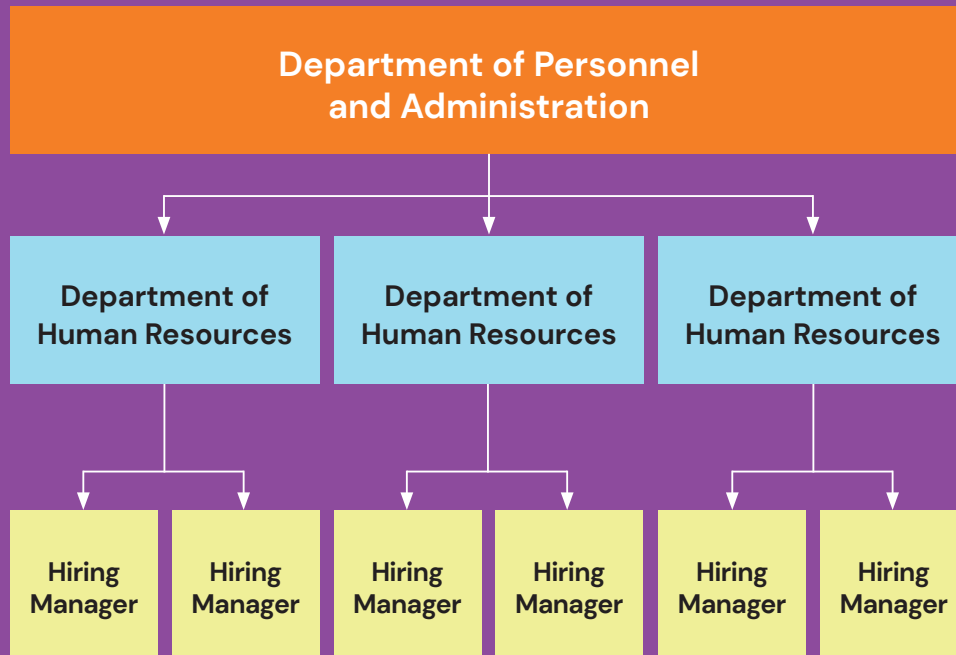
- By 2024, 50% of eligible roles reflect alternatives to educational requirements
- By 2024, increase registered apprenticeship enrollment by 20%
- By 2025, each agency will develop 2 work-based learning programs

To facilitate transition to an ambitious vision, **Governor Polis allocated a \$700K budget** for staffing and other related expenses.

- 80% managers trained in skills-based hiring annually

2 Empower Agencies to Define Skills

Give agencies the flexibility and tools to identify skills and tailor job descriptions as their jobs and needs evolve.



While the Department of Personnel and Administration is the lead on this effort, they recognized that they are not well-positioned to identify skills for every role in the state. Instead they **established baseline skills, guidelines, and training materials**, and provided those to agency HR departments.

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**.

With support and coaching from their trained HR liaisons supported by templates and worksheets, individual hiring managers are able to develop better **job descriptions tailored to the needs of the agency and the role**. For example, the Department of Labor and Employment uses this template.

GUIDANCE ON SKILLS IDENTIFICATION

Instructions: Use this worksheet to identify skills relevant for the role.

Required Baseline Skills: Ability to communicate complex information in a clear and concise manner.

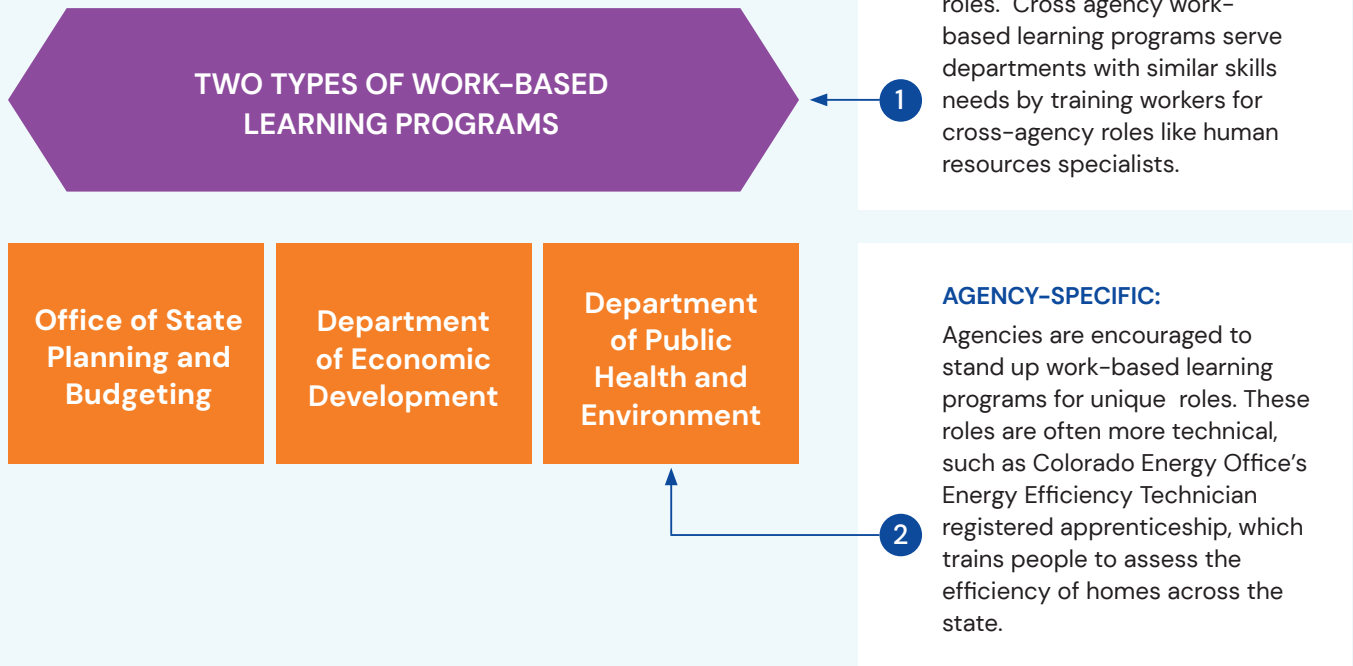
Questions to Help Identify Additional Relevant Skills:

1. What are the 5-10 core responsibilities and task of the role?
2. Does the current job descriptions accurately reflect the responsibilities and tasks of the role? What has changed?
3. What do the critical stakeholders this individual will interact with say this role entails and how it may be changing?
4. What are the priorities for this role?
5. Identify the 5-10 key skills needed to perform these core responsibilities.

3 Identify Agency Initiatives That Align With Skills-based Practices

Leverage interest in work-based learning programs, such as apprenticeships, as a starting point for shifting practices.

When agencies develop apprenticeships and other work-based learning programs, they walk through a process of skills identification, participant selection, and worker training that builds confidence in a skills-based approach.



We consistently get our best and most diverse workers, in terms of background and experience, from apprenticeships.

If we can just get agencies to experience for themselves the goodness that comes from skills-based hiring by posting a single opening and seeing the kinds of candidates who apply, it will make them want to do it again.



KATHERINE KEEGAN

4 Instill Skills-based, Rather than Title-based Thinking

To encourage this change in mindset, 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 improved practice to one based fully on skills.



Some hiring managers love degrees because it's a simple check the box requirement.

When we asked managers to think in terms of skills, they gravitated towards stating titles, creating another barrier for candidates. What we truly needed to do is clearly delineate skills. This was the drive behind our training.



JENNIFER CECERE

5 Nudge Managers to Keep Skills at the Forefront

Design workflows to make skills-based thinking the default mode of hiring.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

Summary of this Position

We are seeking a dynamic Training and Development Manager to join our team. The ideal candidate will be responsible for leading our training programs, developing internal capacities, and ensuring effective communication and coordination across departments.

Key Responsibilities

- Develop and implement comprehensive training programs to enhance employee skills and competencies.
- Identify training needs through regular assessments and consultations with department heads.

Skills, Knowledge, and Expertise

- Leadership Skills: Inspiring and motivating teams to achieve their full potential, delegating tasks and responsibilities effectively, providing constructive feedback and guidance for improvement.
- Communication and Coordination Skills: Ability to convey complex information in a clear and concise manner, active listening and interpersonal skills, and collaborating with cross-functional teams to achieve common goals.
- Training and Internal Capacity Building: Assessing training needs and designing customized programs, developing engaging and interactive training materials, facilitating engaging and effective training sessions.

Educational Requirements

A degree is not required for this role.

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

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.

The template includes educational requirements last and includes language to explicitly state if a degree is not required.

Nudge hiring managers to consider removing degree requirements before posting the job description.

I have considered removing the degree requirement for this role.

Yes

RESULTS

Colorado Has Made Progress But Knows There Is More Work To Do

Jobs Without Degree Requirements



By 2025, the State aims to remove unnecessary degree requirements from all eligible jobs. Half way into this effort, they are roughly halfway there.

33

New work-based learning programs since September 2023

6

Including new apprenticeship programs

1

Intermediary specifically for state agencies to facilitate registration of new apprenticeship programs



Embracing skills-based hiring has significantly expanded our talent pool and created a more inclusive workforce, positioning us well to meet our future milestones.



MELISSA WALKER

Lessons Learned



Bring resources to bear.

The Governor used \$700,000 of WIOA discretionary funding for staff in the 2022 budget, which signaled the importance of the effort and provided funds for critical investments in staff learning. This also enabled them to hire 3 individuals whose roles were specifically to implement the EOs.



Build the infrastructure for skills-based hiring.

Colorado recognized that this change could not be accomplished with the flip of a switch. They needed to socialize the idea with staff and prove that it worked. For example, the Department of Personnel and Administration met with human resource leaders in all the agencies to communicate the rationale for skills-based hiring. A shift to skills also requires an enabling environment. The administration issued an Executive order focused on work-based learning opportunities to reinforce its commitment to a skills-based approach, while also building new avenues to assess, onboard, and advance candidates based on skills. This allows agencies to experiment with work-based learning and establish proof points for their efforts.



Make a multi-year plan.

Changing culture and procedures takes time. The State needed to train people, implement new procedures, and adapt as they learned new lessons. Further, the length of hiring cycles means that it will take time for staffing metrics to reflect real changes in hiring patterns. Colorado set realistic goals to manage expectations and planned for a two-year implementation period to give appropriate time for changes to be made.



With three staff to support the implementation of skills-based practices, we could speed up the pace of change. These new positions allowed us to provide technical assistance, ensure accountability, and keep the momentum going. They made it much easier for busy hiring managers to make changes in their processes.



KATHERINE KEEGAN