COMMUNITY COLLEGE
SKILLS-BASED HIRING PLAYBOOK

A toolkit for community colleges partnering with the public sector to create career pathways for STARs.

By Sean Robins, CiCi Flanagan, and Steve Jurch

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) is a non-profit educational organization of governing boards, representing more than 6,500 elected and appointed trustees who govern over 1,000 community, technical, and junior colleges in the United States and beyond. ACCT's mission is to foster the principles and practices of exemplary governance while promoting high-quality and affordable higher education, cutting-edge workforce and development training, student success, and the opportunity for all individuals to achieve economic self-sufficiency and security. **www.acct.org**

Opportunity@Work's mission is to rewire the U.S. labor market so that all individuals Skilled Through Alternative Routes (STARs) can work, learn, and earn to their full potential. To rewire the labor market to value skills over pedigree, Opportunity@Work uses a data-driven, two-pronged strategy – focused on supply resources and demand – to achieve greater economic mobility and racial equity on behalf of STARs. **www.opportunityatwork.org**

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis, Indiana committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. Lumina Foundation envisions higher learning that is easy to navigate, addresses racial injustice, and meets the nation's talent needs through a broad range of credentials. Lumina Foundation is working toward a system that prepares people for informed citizenship and success in a global economy. Funding for this project was generously provided by Lumina Foundation. **www.luminafoundation.org**

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INTRODUCTION

The Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) is a non-profit educational organization of governing boards, representing more than 6,500 elected and appointed trustees who serve on over 500 governing boards of community, technical, and junior colleges in the United States and beyond. ACCT's mission is to foster the principles and practices of exemplary governance while promoting high quality and affordable higher education, cutting-edge workforce and development training, student success, and the opportunity for all individuals to achieve economic self-sufficiency and security.

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Community colleges and our government agencies are both natural partners in the mission to drive economic mobility for STARs. Community colleges are essential training providers that are deeply embedded in their local labor markets and economies. The public sector's many roles – employer, policymaker, and program operator – mean that government leaders are motivated not by profit, but by the quality of citizen and intergovernmental services in the short run and outcomes for citizens, society, and the environment in the long term. These mandates and well-aligned incentives have led to the Public Sector playing the role of exemplar in the trend toward skills-first hiring. The purpose of this guide is to enable community college leaders to more easily ensure that pathways for STARs are clear, remunerative, and navigable. Although this resource was created to support community colleges in partnering with the public sector to create career pathways for STARs, it can also be leveraged in establishing partnerships with the private sector because much of the process is consistent with partnering with the public sector.

The Maryland Example:

To address Maryland's labor shortage, Governor Larry Hogan signed an executive order to remove degree requirements from most state jobs in 2022. This opened up over 19,000 jobs to more than 1.3 million STARs in the State.

Since 2022, **22 states**[1] have opened up more than 467,000 state jobs to STARs, and as the natural first resort for tapping into this talent pool, community colleges can use this playbook to build on the great work they are already doing.

1 **https://opportunityatwork.org/stars-policy-project/**

How the State of Maryland Opened Its Door to STARs

State of Maryland

38,000
State Employees

1.35M
STARs workers in the state:

58% Black

46% Hispanic

63% rural

Recovering from the pandemic labor shock, the State of Maryland was motivated to address the needs of workers across their state. Consistent with conventional wisdom about "workers without degrees," their initial hypothesis was that their primary role would be to invest in upskilling workers. Upon seeing date describing the existing skills of people who are Skilled Through Alternative Routes (STARs) across Maryland, they shifted their lens: from policymaker to employer. A coalition of stakeholders – starting at the top with Governor Hogan – realized the more immediate and significant opportunity was to change their own hiring practices to tap into the pool of talented STARs.

**Governor
Larry Hogan**
State of Maryland

Amelia Alcivar
Chief of Staff

Joe Farren
Chief Strategy
Officer, Department
of Labor

Mark Townend
Director,
Recruitment

50%
of the state's 38,000 jobs no longer have degree requirements

34%
year-over-year increase in STAR applicants in the first 6 months

75+
Press hits

"It's more important than ever that we work together to find new ways to build a steady pipeling of talented, well-trained, skilled workers for the jobs of the future."

– Governor Hogan

CONTENTS

PLAYBOOK IMPLEMENTATION

To successfully implement this playbook, we believe that it is useful to understand the public sector employment lifecycle. The model depicted here is meant to identify the range of factors that comprise the discipline of Human Resources (HR) in large, complex organizations and the success factors that contribute to a robust employee experience. While talent acquisition is a critical phase of this lifecycle, it is helpful to recognize it as one part of a broader system. Below is an image Opportunity@Work developed with the National Governors Association (NGA) that demonstrates the timeline of the public sector employment lifecycle.

Image 2

Skills-based hiring in the Public Sector: Skills-based practices can be implemented across the entire employee journey to hire, retain and grow talent

Start with right people in the pipeline				Retain and engage employees		
Skills-based workforce planning	**Recruit quality candidates**	**Select candidates for hire**	**Convert top candidates to employees**	**Onboard employees**	**Engage & retain workforce**	**Offboard former employees**
Talent Planning (e.g. understand current workforce skills, determine future skill needs, determine which jobs require degrees)	**Pay & Benefits** **Recruiting efforts** (e.g. job fairs, internships) **Employer value prop** (e.g. promoting brand)	**Convert to skills-based job descriptions** **Remove degree requirements** **Create skills-based interview guides and evaluation rubrics** **Skills-based hiring trainings for managers**	**Initiatives** **Conversion** (strong communication throughout hiring process, provide opportunities to connect with colleagues, managers, mentors)	**Skill building training** (providing skills/tools to be successful in role, apprenticeship programs)	**Career pathways** (e.g. upskilling opportunities, education partnerships/ benefit) **Manager Training** (e.g. how to support / lead teams) **Performance framework** (e.g. how to track and assess skills over time)	**Succession Planning** (e.g. upskilling for promotion preparation) **Knowledge retention** (e.g. skills transfer, exit interviews)

Ongoing activities:
Data collection from managers to prioritize most important skills, change management practices, consistent skill taxonomy, HR dashboards and process maps, innovative technologies (e.g. GenAI)

Source: Inspired by presentation by BCG at National Governors Association Skills in the States National Summit on April 24, 2024

Building Foundational Knowledge: Skills-Based Hiring

Who are STARs

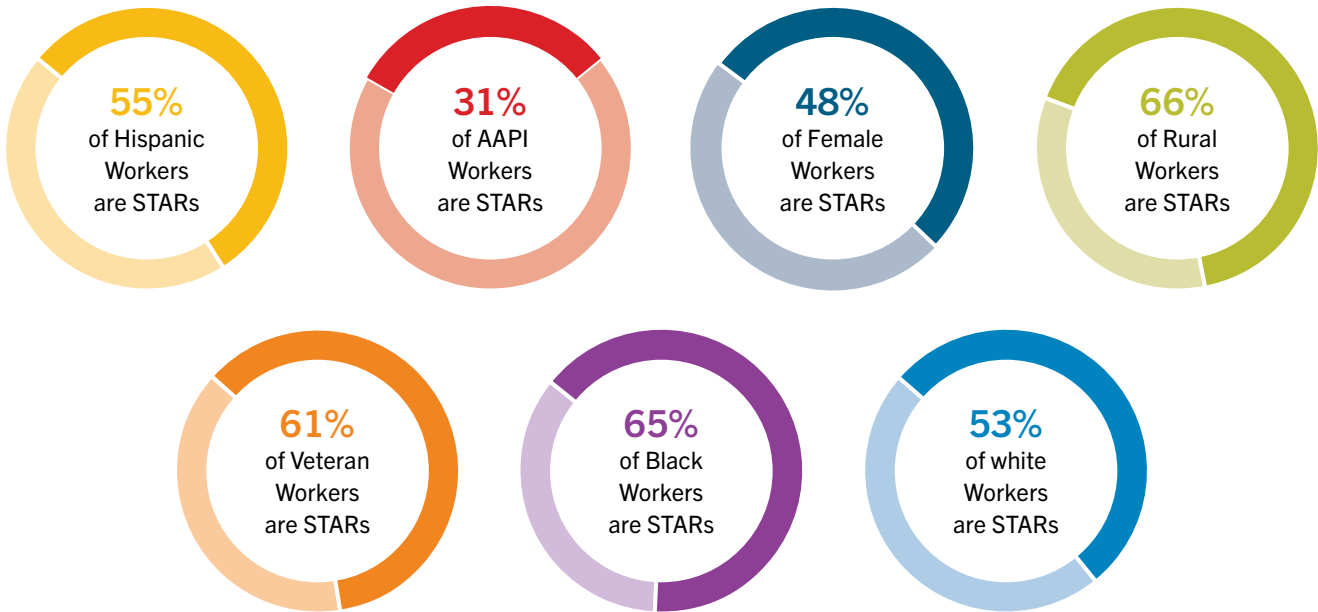STARs are talented individuals Skilled Through Alternative Routes, rather than a bachelor's degree. STARs have developed valuable skills on the job, through community college, in the military, or through other alternative routes.

STARs are a 70+ million strong talent pool that makeup half the U.S. workforce, work in nearly every field and occupation across the labor market, and reflect our country's diversity in a way that college graduates do not. When employers include STARs in their hiring strategy, they open their doors to:

Image 3

- **55%** of Hispanic Workers are STARs
- **31%** of AAPI Workers are STARs
- **48%** of Female Workers are STARs
- **66%** of Rural Workers are STARs
- **61%** of Veteran Workers are STARs
- **65%** of Black Workers are STARs
- **53%** of white Workers are STARs

Source: Opportunity@Work Analysis of the 2021 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

For decades, community colleges have been an **engine of economic mobility** for STARs because they are flexible, affordable, and accessible. The majority of STARs (56%) have some college credit, and nearly 1 out of every 5 STARs has an associate degree. As a primary pathway to acquiring skills for many STARs today, community colleges play a critical role in developing skilled talent.
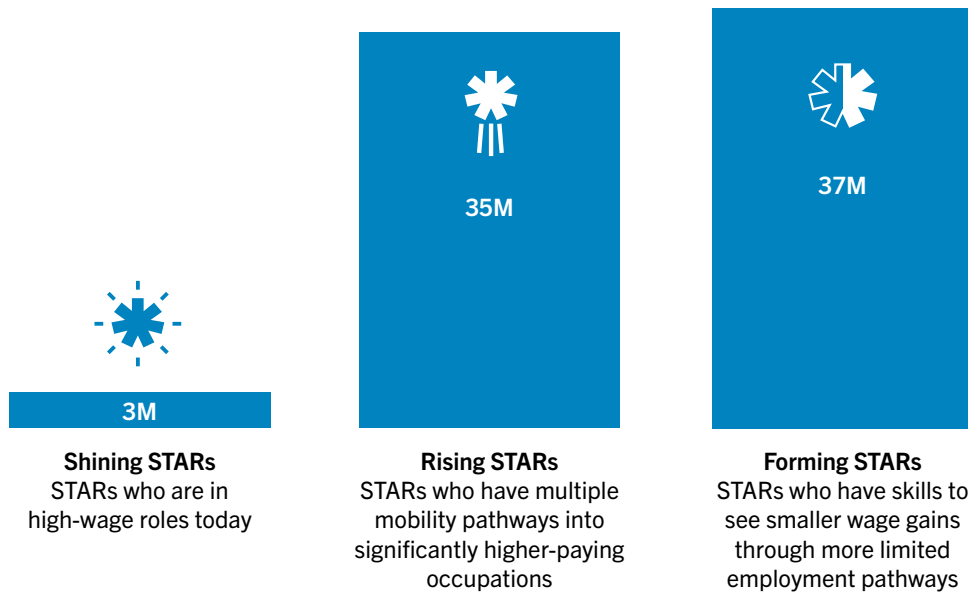
Skills-based Hiring Benefits

Skills-based hiring works to combat problematic proxies such as a focus on degrees, prior company affiliation, a focus on years of experience instead of expertise or skill level, and job titles as primary indicators of a candidate's capabilities. Instead, it focuses on the specific skills needed to do the actual job an employer is hiring for.

Implementing skills-based hiring leads to five key impacts:

1. Diversify an employer's hiring pool

2. Increase the likelihood of a quality hire

3. Improve retention rates

4. Broaden an employer's access to relevant, qualified candidates

5. Position the workforce to be more competitive in the future[2]

Degree screens relegate the majority of STARs to lower-wage roles. Since many people assume lower-wage jobs require few or low-level skills, employers often don't consider STARs for higher-level roles. Our research shows that almost half of all STARs in the U.S. (32 million) have the skills to move into higher-wage positions now. Removing unnecessary bachelor's-degree requirements, hiring STARs, and promoting them based on skills can make an organization stronger, more diverse, and more resilient.

Image 4

35 Million STARs Have Skills for Higher-Wage Work

Shining STARs
STARs who are in high-wage roles today — 3M

Rising STARs
STARs who have multiple mobility pathways into significantly higher-paying occupations — 35M

Forming STARs
STARs who have skills to see smaller wage gains through more limited employment pathways — 37M

Source: Opportunity@Work analysis of the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) 28.2 Database; 2013 to 2022 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement; 2022 1- and 5-year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

Relationship Building:

Typically, community colleges already have a relationship with their state government whether it is through the Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, WIOA programs, or other partnerships. While there is familiarity with the state, the involvement in a hiring strategy for state positions is something that may be new for community colleges.

We know that community colleges have an ideal pool of candidates for public-sector job opportunities but communicating that and getting started as a part of the hiring strategy takes some planning. A critical piece of the process is to have a clear understanding of what the current job environment is and how the college can support the hiring efforts of the state.

Community colleges typically will have access to Labor Market Information (LMI) and will be able to research the employment landscape. To get an idea of the types of opportunities that are at the state, they can review the job postings and see if they match with the general LMI information. They can lean into contacts at the state to validate the information and in the process get a better understanding of the needs of the state.

Before any meeting with the state, it is important that the community college has a deep understanding of their student population, what they bring to the table, and an initial idea of their training programs that can help fill the roles the state is posting. Community college students are a tremendous resource for the state and have direct ties to their communities, tend to remain in their communities after program completion, and will fill the "sweet spot" of individuals who have postsecondary education but not a bachelor's degree.

Once the community colleges have done their due diligence to prepare to establish new partnerships, they can leverage their contacts to find their "champion" or someone they can work with to move the partnership along. There are some strategies when it comes to identifying and working with a champion which are listed below.

1. Identifying Champions

Identify champions within the government agency that will be your main collaborating partners. Some key means for determining champions in the public sector include:

   a. Ensure champions have a demonstrated commitment and/or interest in skills-based hiring.

      i. Individual(s) understand the value STARs can bring to their workforce and have stated interest in making changes to their existing workforce practices to enable a skills-based approach to hiring.

   b. Identify a primary champion with decision-making power and a direct influence on talent acquisition practices at the given agency.

      i. Within each public sector partner, it is possible there will be multiple champions required to enact change to their hiring process and enable a skills-based approach. The primary champion will have knowledge about who else from their organization will need to be involved in driving change internally and providing feedback to community college partners.

   c. Involve those who have subject-matter expertise on the skills required to be successful in the selected roles for the partnership.

      i. It is essential to have on-the-ground knowledge of what a job requires to determine the curriculum needed to train talent.

An example of identifying champions for a tech/IT-related job at a government agency:

a. Your primary champion would be a Technical Director, Digital Services, or a similar role, as this individual has decision-making power and the knowledge of key skills associated with selected IT roles.

b. Your secondary champion would be a Talent Acquisition Manager, IT, as the person in this role knows processes and hiring systems. They also have the ability to help enact changes decided on by the Technical Director.

c. Finally, regarding subject matter expertise, the Technical Director should be able to provide detailed feedback on the skill needs for a given job and loop in others from their team to fill knowledge gaps.

2. Kick-Off Meeting

Schedule a kick-off meeting with the government champion and relevant hiring managers/HR staff involved in the individual role hiring process. At some point, you should have someone from the operational area as part of any meeting. If possible, have some examples of training programs that can be leveraged to provide the skills they are looking for (even if they are not in their final form) to help demonstrate the partnership.

a. The kick-off meeting should go over the following:

   i. Purpose of a discovery process

   ii. 4 areas of focus per role

      1. Skills

      2. Talent Sourcing

      3. Role Requirements

      4. Candidate Journey

   iii. Proposed Discovery Session Frameworks

   iv. Proposed Discovery Timeline

Utilize the **Discovery Analysis Kick Off Slide Deck Template**

Discovery

Every organization has roles or job families well-suited for intentional STARs hiring, especially in the Public Sector, given the diversity of roles available. Like all high-value candidates, STARs can have direct experience in the role and can hit the ground running, but the way they have built their skills differs from traditional candidate profiles.

Skills Analysis: STARSight

By reviewing job descriptions and publicly available data on skills and career pathways through STARSight[3], and comparing those to the positions that are posted on the state's HR portal, community colleges can begin to identify the top skills for each role.

Opportunity@Work's STARs Talent Strategy Dashboard, **STARSight**, utilizes a number of data sources to help better understand the opportunities available for STARs. 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.

Community colleges already work with this data, as many of the sources include data from the U.S. Census Bureau as distributed through the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), as well as data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Occupational Information Network. Private datasets on employer job postings are available through Lightcast™.

i. Using STARSight, navigate to the *Compare - Discover skills across jobs* tab on the main menu.

ii. Select the job title you are interested in learning more about in the "*Selected Job*" drop-down. Note that these job titles are from the list of ONET occupations, thus not all job titles may be available for the user to choose from.

    1. *"Which roles prepare workers for the selected role?"* section: This section outlines the roles that have a high skill overlap with the selected job. This information can help with your recruitment strategy when thinking about what students are best suited for the roles needed by the employer partner. (Image 5: STARSight "Which Roles prepare workers for Retail Salespersons?" Chart)

    2. *"Which career paths are possible with skills from the selected role?"* section: This section illustrates what skills align with jobs that can prepare a STAR for the selected role. Within this section, there are two interactive infographics that provide details on what roles have a high skill overlap and what are ideal destination jobs[4] (middle to high-wage occupations that provide a wage gain) from the selected job.

iii. Begin to brainstorm around what training programs align with the skills you are seeing.

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3 **https://starsight.org/**

4 **https://www.starsight.org/data-guidance#1.1**
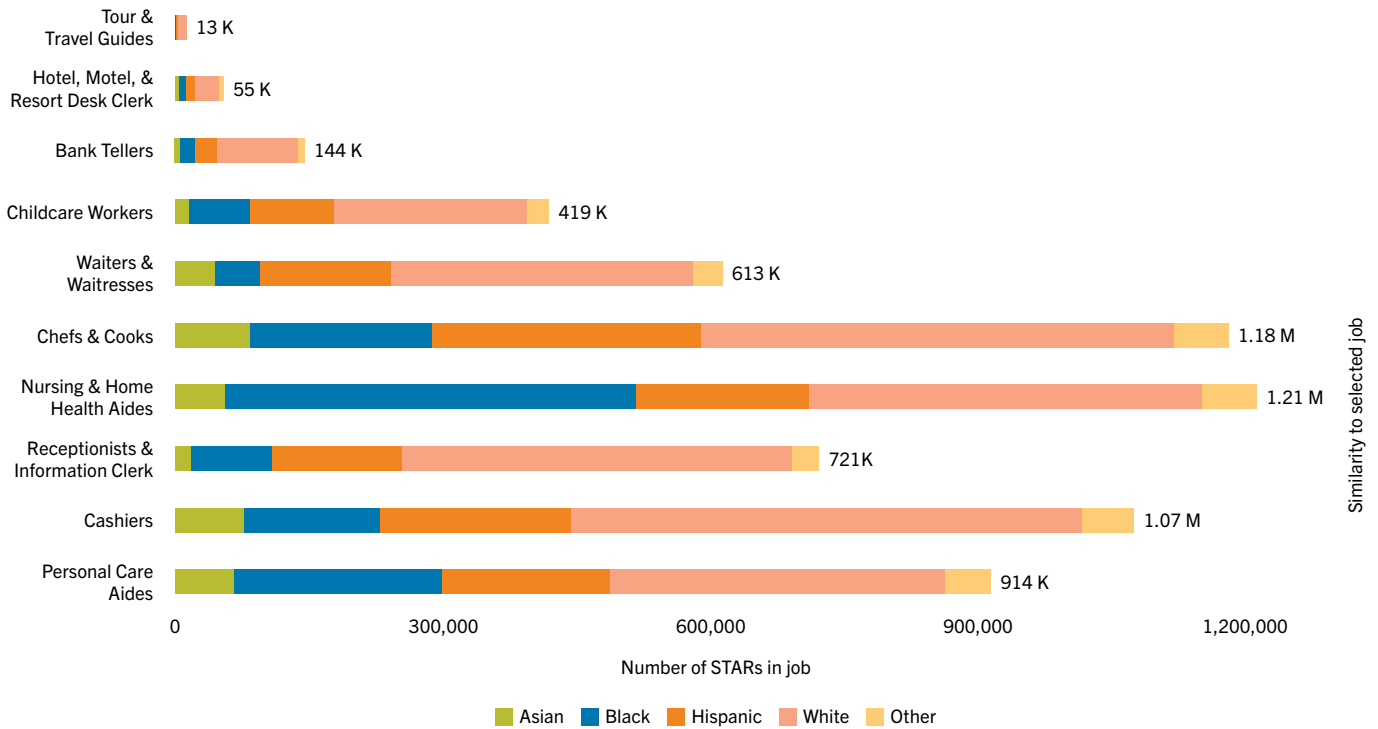
Image 5

STARSight "Which roles prepare workers for Retail Salespersons?" Chart

Review lower-wage roles with the most relevant transferable skills for your selected job.
Job titles are sorted from most similar skills to least similar.

Source: https://www.starsight.org/match-skills?region=national&job_title=retail+salespersons&geo_type_id=1&region_code=national

Skills Analysis: Skill Identification

At Opportunity@Work, we categorize skills into two buckets: Occupational and Foundational skills.

- **Occupational Skills (OS)** are technical skills and subject matter expertise that are specific and required to perform specific tasks and use specific tools and programs.

- **Foundational Skills (FS)** are a mix of interpersonal and general workplace skills. Many of these skills are applicable to any job and can be transferable to many different work settings.

Using the selected job descriptions and STARSight[5], you can identify the skills needed for each of the selected roles. *STARSight sources its information from O*NET, Lightcast, and various other surveys from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.* Below are the steps a community college can take to complete a skills analysis.

1. Identify if the skills listed by the employer are occupational or foundational.

2. Using STARSight, identify the most necessary skills per role and identify if the skill is occupational or foundational.

   a. *Compare - Discover skills across jobs* tab:

   i. Utilize the STARSight *Compare* tab and select the role you would like to learn more about

   ii. Scroll down to the *"Which career paths are possible with skills from the selected role?"* section to see what skills align with jobs that can prepare a STAR for the selected role. (Image 6: STARSight "Which career paths are possible with skills from Retail Salespersons?" Chart)
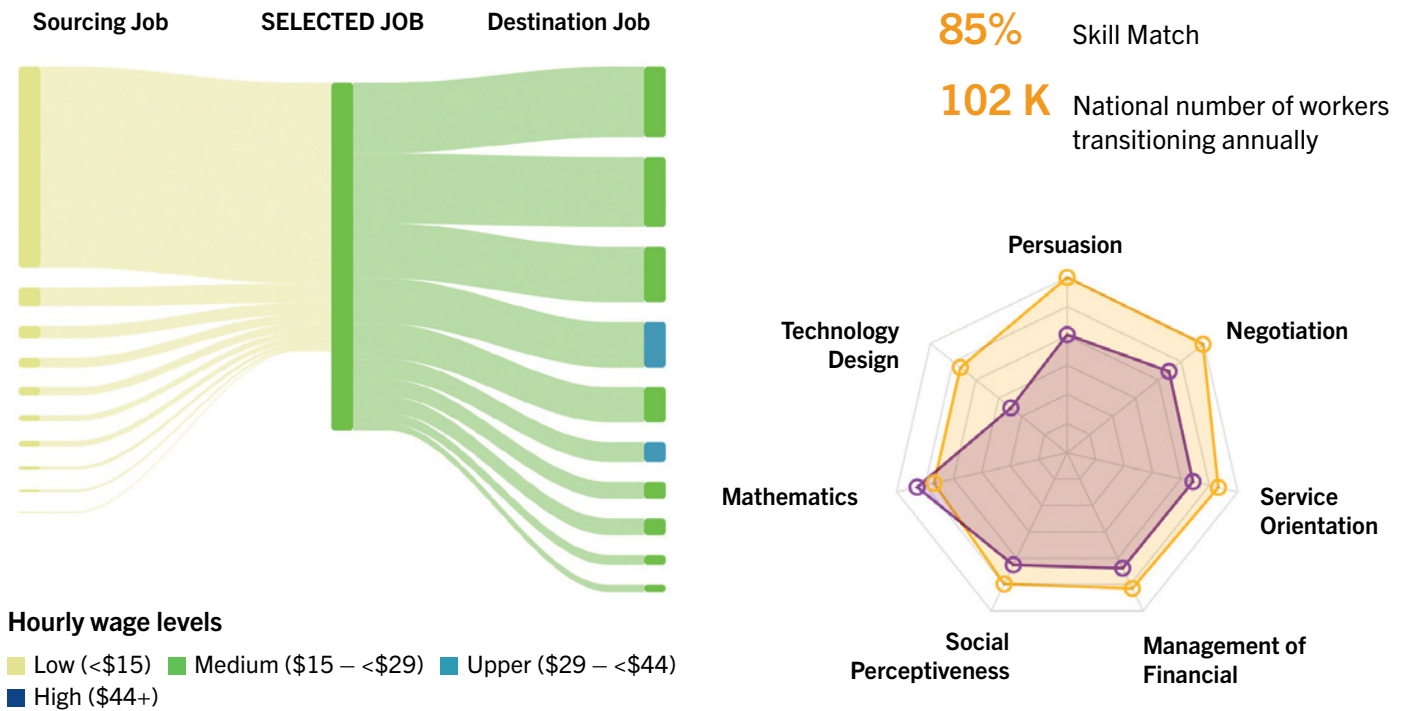
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5 **https://starsight.org/**

STARSight "Which career paths are possible with skills from Retail Salespersons?" Chart

This chart illustrates how skills can create job mobility across common career paths. The colors indicate hourly wage levels.

Opportunity@Work defines this as an origin job, meaning it is primarily entry-level, low to middle-wage occupation.

Hourly wage levels

Low (<$15)   Medium ($15 − <$29)   Upper ($29 − <$44)
High ($44+)

85% Skill Match

102 K National number of workers transitioning annually

Source: https://www.starsight.org/match-skills?region=national&job_title=retail+salespersons&geo_type_id=1&region_code=national

a. *Assess* tab:

   i. In the STARSight Assess tab, the "How do job requirements for selected role impact the available talent pool?" infographic lists the top skills from O*Net from your selected job.

   ii. There is also the "What skills are most frequently required for the selected role?" section, which displays the skills frequently required on job descriptions according to Lightcast data. (Image 7: STARSight "What skills are most frequently required for Retail Salespersons?" Chart)

3. Once you have the skills identified from the job description and the publicly available data sources, compare the two sets and see if there are any commonalities or differences.

Image 7

STARSight "What skills are most frequently required for Retail Salespersons?" Chart

Larger boxes indicate greater numbers of job postings that require this skill.

Sales	Merchandising	Selling Techniques	Cash Register	Product Knowledge
Customer Service	Communications / Retail Sales / Management	Cash Handling	Bagging Merchandise
		Leadership / Stocking Merchandise	
		Visual Merchandising / Lifting Ability	

Most required ▬▬▬ Least required

Source: https://www.starsight.org/hire?region=national&job_title=retail+salespersons&geo_type_id=1&region_code=national
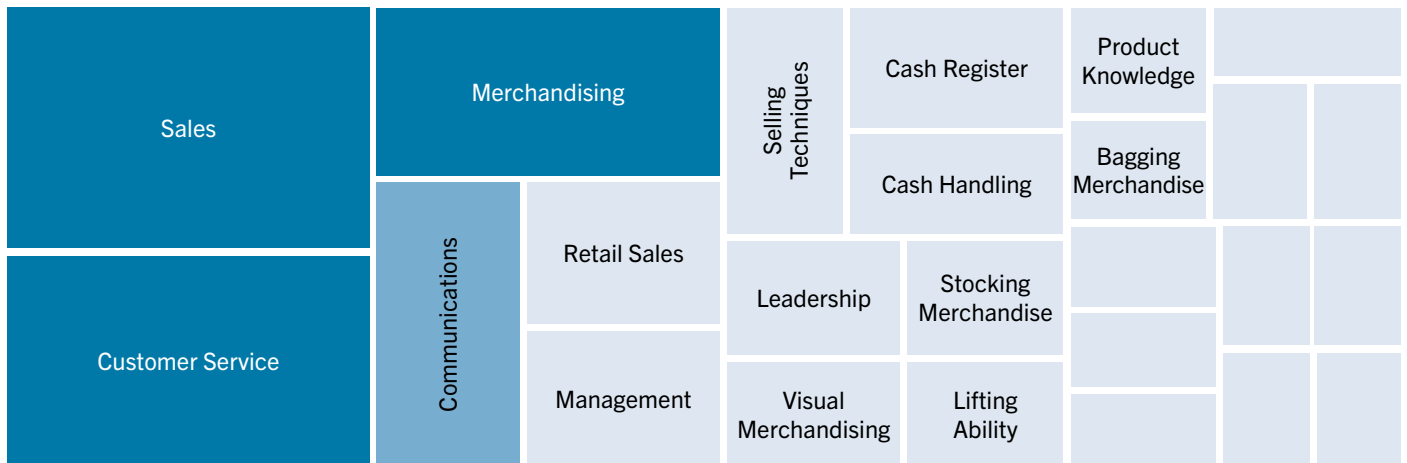
Variables to Consider

Job descriptions not only have skill requirements but other variables that are important to the role as well. During the discovery process, community colleges may want to consider other factors, such as:

- **Target Role Selection:** When thinking about role identification, ideal target roles should be the highest-need, hardest-to-fill roles that fall into proven pathways for STARs (Image 8). This is something that can be discussed with the champion and hiring manager. Read Opportunity@Work's analysis of career pathways that yield mobility for STARs **here**.

- **Role requirements:** Being aware of particular role requirements (e.g., having a valid driver's license, passing certain background checks) is something to discuss when having discovery conversations with employers.

- **Training Requirements or Position Structure:** Positions in the public sector may have certain training requirements or credentials required in state regulations making training programs for them more challenging to adapt. Positions that are part of a bargaining unit have certain considerations that need to be planned for.

- **Sourcing:** Understanding the current talent pipelines an employer has access to can help community colleges identify existing curricula and programming aligned with the selected roles.

- **Hiring process:** Having a grasp of the hiring process (e.g., number of interviews, assessments, timeline) is something to consider during discovery conversations.

Image 8

Highest-need, hardest-to-fill roles | Initial target roles | Proven pathways for STARs
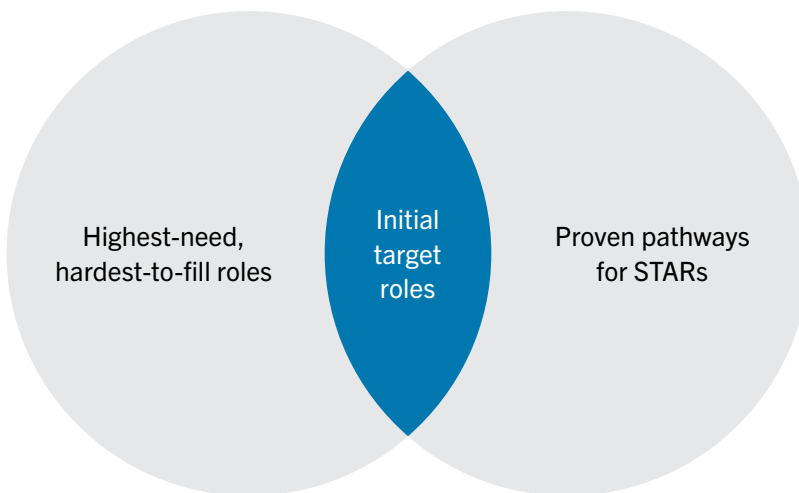
Source: Opportunity@Work

1. Navigating with the STARs Report[6]:

    a. Gateway jobs are the middle job on a journey from a lower-wage origin job to a higher-paid destination job. These jobs are like skeleton keys. They are accessible from origin jobs that employ high volumes of STARs and they open up multiple upward mobility pathways to higher wage positions. Opportunity@Work's skills similarity analysis shows that Gateway jobs allow for skills-based transitions to higher-wage occupations. Below are the ten most common gateway jobs for STARs.

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6 **https://opportunityatwork.org/our-solutions/stars-insights/navigating-stars-report/**

b. After analyzing the 79.5 million job transitions that STARs made from 2010-2019, Opportunity@Work found a set of 292 destination jobs that provide wage gain to STARs. These 292 destination jobs provided insights into pathways that STARs can travel to achieve upward mobility. Out of these 292 jobs, 51 jobs accounted for 41% of these transitions[7].

Select Gateway Jobs for STARs Within the Public Sector[8]	
Job Title	**Job Family**
1. Customer Service Representatives	1. Office and Administrative Support
2. Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	2. Office and Administrative Support
3. Office Clerks	3. Office and Administrative Support
4. Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	4. Office and Administrative Support
5. Computer Support Specialists	5. Computer and Math Occupations
6. Computer Scientists And Systems Analysts/Network Systems Analysts/Web Developers	6. Computer and Math Occupations
7. Licensed Practical And Licensed Vocational Nurses	7. Healthcare
8. Welding, Soldering, and Brazing Workers	8. Production
9. Machinists	9. Production

Discovery Completion

Community colleges should be engaged as early as possible and can provide insight into what types of skill building other employers are doing in regards to similar roles that can be leveraged at the state. They can help brainstorm throughout the entire timeline of skills-based hiring strategies to make sure all the steps are aligned with the necessary training to source the right talent, onboard them properly, and help retain them through career pathway development. At a basic level, based on the discovery findings, some potential next steps you can take include:

1. Evaluate Existing Curriculum:

   a. Reviewing your existing curriculum and comparing the skills needed by your government partner vs what is taught in the classroom.

2. Gap Identification:

   a. Identify what skills are missing from your existing curriculum and how you can solve that.

3. Program Updates:

   a. Think through what materials you may have from other courses/academic departments that can serve as supplemental materials.

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7 **https://opportunityatwork.org/our-solutions/stars-insights/navigating-stars-report/#section2**

8 **https://opportunityatwork.org/our-solutions/stars-insights/navigating-stars-report/#section2**

An example of this occurred at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) in response to some health care sector employers around Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA). CNA programs in the state of Maryland are regulated through the Board of Nursing and are required to contain certain curriculum and skills. In order to be approved to run a program, colleges must complete an application and submit a training program for evaluation by a committee. Once approved, any changes must go through a lengthy process of recertification and can often delay program implementation.

CCBC is regularly involved in employer discussions around the quality of their graduates and if they are meeting the needs of employers. One piece of feedback that began to be received regularly was that graduates were highly skilled in the technical areas but were not meeting expectations in what are commonly referred to as "essential," "foundational," or "durable" skills. These include communication, time management, conflict resolution, team-building, organization, decision making, and active listening skills. Specific information was gathered through additional conversations to help narrow down desired skills and what was most important to be successful in the role.

The CNA program at CCBC consisted of the core CNA theory and clinical course and a CPR course. There were a couple of paths that CCBC could have taken to build these skills into the program. These additional skills could have been incorporated into the CNA curriculum but the process involved in modifying the core CNA curriculum is time consuming and would have delayed implementation. The second option was to build out a separate "Essential Skills for Healthcare Providers" course and add it as part of the CCBC program. To quickly meet the needs of the employers and better prepare the graduates for success, a separate course was initially added to the CCBC program. Eventually, the critical content of the Essential Skills for Healthcare Providers course was incorporated into the core CNA course when the program was set for renewal so the additional course was no longer necessary. While this course was originally developed for the CNA program, it was leveraged for other health care programs such as Medical Assisting and Sleep Technician to lead to a more successful graduate in other areas.

SERVING AS A BRIDGE

Community colleges serve not only as a bridge for students on pathways to careers, but also as a bridge for employers to reach new recruits. With the growing incentive for skills-based hiring, many states and employers are looking for opportunities to establish these practices and identify partners to make it actionable. Employers do not have to look too far for partners in making skills-based hiring feasible. Community colleges are pillars in the community eager to engage with employers to create programs and pathways that support individuals, such as those Skilled Through Alternative Routes (STARs).

Following the announcement of Maryland's initiative to remove degree requirements from state positions, the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) in partnership with Opportunity@Work, the State of Maryland, and four community colleges, launched the Skills-Based Hiring Initiative. ACCT serves the nation's community colleges to foster the principles and practices of exemplary governance while promoting high quality and affordable higher education, cutting-edge workforce and development training, student success, and the opportunity for all individuals to achieve economic self-sufficiency and security. The Skills-Based Hiring Initiative at ACCT is leading in the space of skills-based hiring through the initial pilot program with the State of Maryland.

This playbook was created for community colleges and the leaders looking to establish or enhance partnerships with state and local government agencies. Community colleges already work and collaborate with local employers to create and enhance workforce development programs to support the needs of employers and their workforce. ACCT is aware that skills-based hiring is a shift in hiring practices and just removing degree requirements is only a starting point. Employers (including state and local government agencies) should undergo a skills discovery process to understand the skills that are needed for their vacant positions. Community colleges should be included in these conversations from the beginning to understand the skills needed and how the institutions can support the development of these skills for potential candidates. Community colleges already enroll nearly half of all college learners and are already a gateway to higher education and skill building for learners who would not otherwise have access.

Leading in this space, ACCT can share the insights of our pilot program in Maryland with community colleges across the nation to provide guidance on how these institutions can start the conversation with their state and local government agencies. Establishing these partnerships will support pathways for STARs through skills-based hiring and allow employers to undertake a skills discovery process to better understand their needs for their teams.

Current Community College and Employer Partnership

Creating new programs and courses for employers is not something new to community colleges. Community colleges across the U.S. have been working with local employers to create programs to provide the necessary skills needed for employees to succeed in their roles and opportunities for individuals to obtain the skills needed for possible promotions with their employer.

Each college may follow its own process but they often share some common processes based on the Developing A Curriculum (DACUM) model. This is similar to the discovery process in that it involves the analysis of a job, skill identification, process analysis, and functional analysis. For future positions or those that may evolve based on technology, a tech scan is utilized to brainstorm around trends, issues, expectations and anticipated growth in certain sectors. It can also be utilized to help identify where the skills gaps are in the incumbent workforce and think about where future gaps may appear.

The most critical component of this process is the skill identification as it will guide the creation or modification of training programs. It is vital to have the right people included in the conversation. In addition to the hiring manager, an operations staff who either does the job currently, or supervises that position should be included because they are able to describe and define the job more accurately than anyone else. They can precisely describe the tasks which can inform which skills should be included in the training program. Throughout this entire process, the college can work together with the state to design the curriculum so that it best meets the requirements of the position. This ensures graduates will have the skills necessary for the role as well as creating a pathway for incumbents to increase their skill level.

A regular review process should be established to validate the most current information available to adjust the training program as needed.

"Employers do not have to look too far for partners in making skills-based hiring feasible. Community colleges are pillars in the community eager to engage with employers to create programs and pathways that support individuals."

Planning for a New Hiring Process

Removing degree requirements from vacant positions opens employment opportunities for many individuals known as STARs. However, this can create uncertainty for hiring managers and teams because degrees historically serve as a means for hiring managers to validate candidates as a fit for a vacant position. Therefore, removing degree requirements should follow a skills discovery process to help identify what skills are needed within a role. This guide serves as a means for state/local agencies and community colleges to walk through this process together. Once the skills have been identified for a position, the next question is how can a higher manager validate a candidate's background and knowledge of these skills?

If community colleges build programs with employers, then the design of the program would serve as a point of validation. Removing degree requirements from job descriptions should not be considered as being against higher education. In fact, individuals that are attending, have attended community college, or obtained a degree or certificate from a community college are STARs and a part of the higher education community.

Additionally, STARs obtain their skills from a variety of avenues — community colleges, military service, boot camps, and workforce training programs. Leveraging these experiences, hiring managers can identify the top candidate(s) for open positions. The paper ceiling — the invisible barrier that comes at every turn for workers without a bachelor's degree — limits STARs upward mobility and makes it harder for employers to fill their open roles. An intentional skills discovery process which has been cultivated through relationship building between employers, hiring managers, and community colleges leaders can help champion a new approach to creating pathways for employment of STARs. STARs represent a 70+ million strong talent pool that make up half the workforce, work in nearly every field and occupation across the labor market, and reflect our country's diversity.

Success Stories

Creating and enhancing programs for employers is something that is not new for community colleges. These institutions are already partnering with employers to equip employees and future candidates with the skills needed to be successful in identified roles. In the section below, we share some of the success stories that have come as a result of these partnerships that community colleges have with employers. Working with intentionality and an understanding of the skills that are necessary will help pave new pathways for STARs.

Carroll Community College

Carroll Community College (CCC) partners with Carroll County Workforce Development (CCWD) providing in demand licensure and certification programs that can be funded by CCWD. Carroll residents who are unemployed or under-employed can apply for funding to begin a career. The certification programs provided are vetted by the Maryland Department of Labor and are placed on an eligibility list.

"In the time I have worked at the college, I have seen this mission-critical relationship change the lives of members of our community for the better, both economically and through empowerment," offered Steven Berry, Senior Director, Career and Continuing Professional Education at Carroll Community College.

Cecilia Adams, 22, is a shining example. Cecilia completed the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant program at Carroll Community College on July 4 of 2023. Here is her story:

"Carroll County Workforce Development has been a huge aid in helping me get to where I am now. I first found the program, along with a few others, in the Carroll Community College non-credit program catalog that gets sent out in the mail. I then made an appointment with someone at Carroll Community College to talk about what the different programs were, and which one sounded the best for me. She suggested I go to the CCWD to get more detailed information for a better match up with a program. From there I was paired up with Darian who was very intentional, knowledgeable, understanding, and useful to navigate the course and resources. We would meet regularly to make sure I was reaching my goals with the course and making sure I was able to continue to the next steps. My instructors in the course at the college were very attentive to each student, knowledgeable in their field, they really took their time to make sure everyone understood the content and felt confident about their skills.

I loved that during my experience of the course and the CCWD, everything was very personal. It was a small class size which led to close classmates and frequent study sessions outside of class. At the CCWD getting paired with one-on-one guidance led to encouragement and the ability to succeed.

I am currently working my first ever medical job at a Pediatric and Family Medicine private practice where I can learn new skills, become confident performing known skills, enhance my teamwork and communication skills when working with patients, coworkers, and management. After working as an MA for a few years gaining experience and knowledge in the field I plan on going back to nursing school and eventually pursuing something in graduate school. Being pushed out of my comfort zone taking the course has forced me to grow, learn and mature in new ways that have added to character traits as a person."

Cecilia's counselor Darian Rahnis, Youth Program Specialist at Carroll County Workforce Development, was instrumental in her success, as well as the overall success of the partnership between CCWD and the College to build career pathways for those under employed or unemployed in the county.

"At Carroll County Workforce Development (CCWD), I work in the Youth and Young Adult Program as a case manager. The Youth and Young Adult Program is responsible for developing and implementing programming under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including occupational training, apprenticeships, paid work experiences, and the Summer Youth Employment Program. I began working with Cecilia as her case manager around a year ago. In that role, I prepared fiscal vouchers to fund Cecilia's training, helped her register for her medical assistant classes, and assisted her in registering for her certification exam. I also guided Cecilia in learning lifelong career skills, such as developing her resume and preparing for interviews. Cecilia always took the initiative in her training and employment; it was clear to me that she was intent on reaching her goal of becoming a medical assistant. Many students like Cecilia utilize CCWD to support them in their training and employment goals, and we at CCWD prioritize maintaining strong relationships with Carroll Community College. By hosting regular partner meetings, participating in joint workforce initiatives, and promoting each other's services, CCWD and Carroll Community College can seamlessly transition students into occupational training that ensures they receive the benefits of working with both organizations."

Frederick Community College

FCC's Biotech Bootcamp was first highlighted through the City of Frederick Economic Development blog.

The Biotech Bootcamp at Frederick Community College (FCC) was established to support the workforce needs of life science businesses in Frederick County, Maryland. FCC partners with Frederick County Workforce Services, The City of Frederick Department of Economic Development, and the Frederick County Office of Economic Development to make this program possible. The bootcamp utilizes resources and collective expertise of economic and workforce development partners to develop pathways for new qualified workers.

The program runs 4 days a week for 4 weeks and is offered in both the morning and evening. The bootcamp features a combination of classroom and hands-on training experience in local lab space. Crafted in partnership with regional biotech companies, the curriculum introduces basic industry-specific skill sets such as gowning, aseptic techniques, documentation, and good manufacturing practices. The Biotech Bootcamp is fully funded for participants and requires no previous background experience in life sciences. Following the successful completion of the program, students are matched with participating local companies for job interviews.

Frederick's first four Biotech Bootcamp sessions were highly successful. 49 participants have completed the program. Approximately half of these graduated participants are already working in their new career. The jobs that graduates have been placed in offer an average starting salary of $22-$25/hr. Additionally, through the program experience, participants have received a combined total of 104 Microcredits through the Bioscience Core Skills Institute (BCSI). Interest in the program continues to be overwhelming — with a combined total of over 120 applications to consider for 15 available spots per class in Biotech Bootcamps three and four.

One of these participants was Thomas Braile, who became aware of the Biotech Bootcamp from an FCC staff member. Thomas indicated that he chose to participate in the program "to add to my skill set as a manufacturing professional." With over 15 years of experience in manufacturing his hope for participating in the program "was to learn about bio-pharma manufacturing and to gain employment in that industry." When asked how the program set him up for career success, Thomas responded, "the bootcamp training gave me knowledge of the biotech industry. I gained new skills and knowledge that made me confident in pursuing employment in the field of biotech." Thomas was excited to share that "having the opportunity to take the biotech training program changed my life. I gained new skills and knowledge, and I increased my income to livable wages. I am employed with a major biotech company and have the opportunity to increase my education with the financial support from the company." Thomas shared, "the Biotech Bootcamp helped me get a career, not just another job."

Employer partnerships with FCC have led to new pathways for STARs, employers, and the Biotech Bootcamp program being recognized. In recognition of program successes and the collaborative nature of this program, Frederick's Biotech Bootcamp received a prestigious Silver Award in the category of "Partnerships with Educational Institutions" from the International Economic Development Council at its 2022 annual conference.

FINAL THOUGHTS: CALL TO ACTION

Whether you are a community college leader, a state agency employee, or a local government official, partnering with community colleges to create and enhance pathways for STARs is an opportunity to identify the skills needed for new and vacant positions. Identifying the skills needed for these positions is a step in the right direction to ensure that individuals have the skills necessary for the roles for which they are candidates. Community colleges are able to provide upskilling programs and courses for employers to ensure that candidates have the necessary skills for the positions they are applying for with state and local agencies. Community colleges train and educate numerous STARs and should be a first resort for public-sector employers like state and local government agencies.

This playbook outlines how individuals can establish partnerships between community colleges and state and local government agencies to create pathways for STARs. Identifying your champions and developing relationships, building your foundational knowledge of STARs and Skills-Based Hiring, and conducting a sound skills-discovery process will allow state and local government agencies to better understand their needs and how community colleges are great partners in establishing new programs which provide the skills needed for roles. Leveraging this playbook along with the resources outlined within can support community colleges looking to establish these partnerships. We are aware that not all community colleges have access to current labor-market data to help anchor these conversations with state and local government agencies. STARSight is a wonderful resource that community colleges can use to compare roles and the skills needed across industries, while being informed through current labor market data. Anchoring these partnerships in data can help lead to successful career pathways for STARs which result in employment.

Individuals looking to learn more about ACCT's Skills-Based Hiring Initiative and possibly join us on this journey, please go to **https://www.acct.org/center-for-policy-practice/skills-based-hiring**.

APPENDIX

Resources and Templates

1. **Discovery Analysis Kick Off Slide Deck Template**
   https://acct.org/skills-discovery-analysis-kickoff-template

2. **The Tear the Paper Ceiling: STARs Hiring Playbook**
   https://www.tearthepaperceiling.org/stars-hiring-playbook

3. **Navigating with the STARs Report**
   https://opportunityatwork.org/our-solutions/stars-insights/navigating-stars-report/

4. **STARSight, STARs Strategy Dashboard Website**
   https://starsight.org/