



# SKILLS-FIRST HIRING STARTER KIT

A guide for hiring better, faster.



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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## INTRODUCTION



### What is this document?

**The Good Jobs Initiative's Skills-First Starter Kit** is a short guide on hiring, promotion, and talent management built around worker skills. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) created it in partnership with the Department of Commerce (Commerce) and in consultation with corporate, labor, nonprofit, and philanthropic leaders in skills-first hiring and related issues.

Skills-first talent strategies are meant to recognize talent no matter how a worker got it: associate's degrees, earn-and-learn Registered Apprenticeships, credentials or certificates, self-teaching, past experience, or any other way.



### What is the purpose of this document?

The Starter Kit explains in concrete terms what is skills-first hiring and how private employers can move successfully to a skills-first strategy. It shares resources and best practices that could help with this move while meeting employment law requirements.

In recent years, many [employers](#), [governments](#), and [nonprofits](#) have [championed](#) hiring and promoting workers based on their skills, not whether they have college degrees or other potential indicators of skills. The federal government also [included skills-first hiring in its frameworks](#) for helping workers get good jobs. But skills-first hiring is not without challenges: [recent research](#) found employers struggled to hire based on skills after ending degree or education requirements.

To help, DOL and Commerce partnered to prepare employers for success in skills-first strategies and further the national conversation about job quality.



### Who is this document for?

We wrote this document for private employers in plain language friendly to readers new to these topics. We estimate that you can get the essentials of this topic in a fewer-than-15-minute read.

We anticipate that

- For **small employers**, the Starter Kit may provide the tools needed to try skills-first strategies.
- For **medium-sized and larger employers**, this Starter Kit likely is a conversation starter with your leaders, human resources teams, or hiring managers on skills-first hiring.



### Is the Starter Kit's approach the only method for skills-first hiring?

No, there is no single approach for skills-first hiring. Employers and their labor partners should find a strategy that best fits their needs and goals.

To best explain key concepts, the Starter Kit walks through how to move one job to skills-first hiring. In practice, an employer may find it easier to blend one skills-first tactic into its hiring process or move multiple related roles or whole lines of business to a skills-first hiring strategy.



## Who made the Starter Kit?

DOL's **Good Jobs Initiative (GJI)** created the Starter Kit in consultation with **the Department of Commerce**. GJI partners with employers, workers, and government to expand access to jobs that help workers get ahead. Commerce helps employers meet the need for talent and workers connect to good jobs by investing in employer-driven education and training systems, fostering transformative employer practices, and producing timely data to help Americans develop and advance.

The Initiative also sought the expertise of organizations with years of experience in skills-first hiring and related issues. The following organizations attended consultation sessions on this guide. The Initiative did not seek consensus in these sessions, but feedback based on skills-first experience and related expertise.

- **American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)**
- **American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)**
- **American Federation of Teachers (AFT)**
- **Burning Glass Institute**
- **Business Roundtable**
- **Grads of Life**
- **Indeed**
- **Jobs for the Future**
- **LinkedIn**
- **National Education Association (NEA)**
- **National Fund for Workforce Solutions**
- **North American Building Trades Unions (NABTU)**
- **Opportunity@Work**
- **Service Employees International Union (SEIU)**
- **Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Foundation**
- **Strada Education Foundation**



## What related federal resources should I know about?

The Starter Kit builds upon the foundation of DOL and Commerce's [Good Jobs Principles](#), a shared vision of job quality informing billions of generational investments in infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, and clean energy. The "Recruitment and Hiring" Principle urges use of skills-first hiring strategies. The Starter Kit expands upon [Commerce's Job Quality Toolkit](#), a tool for leaders and organizations to improve the quality of every job.

At [GoodJobs.gov](#), GJI has produced a library of resources for employers seeking to adopt Good Jobs practices to reduce turnover costs and improve productivity, including:

- [DOL's Good Jobs Toolkit](#)
- [Good Jobs Initiative's Fact Sheet on Implementing the Good Jobs Principles](#)



## What else do I need to know about the Starter Kit?

This Starter Kit is for informational purposes only. The materials in this starter kit reflect topics that employers and employees may voluntarily choose to address. The Starter Kit does not constitute legal advice by the U.S. Department of Labor and does not reflect all laws that may apply in every situation, including state and local requirements. Employers should review local, state, and federal laws to ensure compliance and address additional legal requirements as needed in recruitment and hiring.

In this guide, links to non-federal websites provide additional information consistent with the document's intended purpose. But linking to such sites is not the U.S. Department of Labor's endorsement of the information or the organization providing it. For more, please visit [this link](#).



## WHAT IS SKILLS-FIRST HIRING?

**“Skills-first hiring”—also known as “skills-based hiring”—means hiring or promotion of workers around skills, knowledge, and abilities that workers can show they actually have, regardless of how or where workers got those skills.**

Examples of workers who could benefit from these strategies include:

- A restaurant assistant manager who handles bookkeeping despite no formal training.
- A high school student who taught herself to code to make her own video games and earned an Unreal Engine online certification.
- A former servicemember who managed people in the military and earned an associate’s degree in business management at a community college.
- A previously incarcerated person who earned a community college certificate in electrical systems in a prison skilling program.
- An older adult with several uncompensated lived experiences, such as helping a family member’s small business or picking up skills through hobbies and interests.

You may be familiar with skills-first hiring based on news coverage of [employers removing degree requirements](#). **Removing a four-year degree requirement is only one consideration in a building a skills-first strategy. The key to successful skills-first hiring is to focus on the skills an employer needs and hiring or promoting based on those skills.**

**Skills-first talent strategies are meant to recognize talent no matter how a worker got it:** associate’s degrees, earn-and-learn Registered Apprenticeships, credentials or certificates, self-teaching, past experience, or any other way.

### Not just for new employees

Companies that [overlook internal candidates](#) miss opportunities to retain and elevate high performers. You should consider skills-first promotion for existing staff, especially experienced staff who long have been capable of more significant roles but could not reach them due to education or credential requirements.

### Helpful for people who went to college, too

Skills-first hiring opens paths to workers who took college classes but never finished a degree— and workers with degrees who want to move to a field unrelated to their degree. These practices also increase access for students with associate’s degrees or who completed community college programs.

### Leading by example

70% of federal jobs now do not require four-year degrees, and the government overhauled [100,000 information technology jobs](#) to move toward skills-first hiring.



## WHY USE SKILLS-FIRST HIRING STRATEGIES?

**Because hiring is hard.**

[Nearly half of all new hires exit within two years.](#) That [costs a lot](#). For you and your workers.

**Skills-first hiring can reduce risk by better finding workers who can do the job on Day One.**

Here are some reasons why:

- **Skills-first strategies zero-in on workers who can do the job and do it well.** These sometimes “hidden workers” [tend to be more productive and stay in a job longer](#). Skills-first strategies also can open more opportunities to veterans, who frequently have [high skill levels and great workplace preparedness](#).
- **More workers than you know have the skills you need.** Research shows [nearly half of American workers](#) could be excluded by hiring methods focused on shorthands like degrees, not skills. [Thirty million workers have skills for jobs paying 50% higher salaries](#).
- **There are financial, systemic, or other barriers keeping you from hiring skilled talent.** For example, 70% of people of color and rural workers [face barriers to completing a four-year degree](#). An unneeded degree requirement, then, could keep you from hiring talented workers from these underserved populations.
  - **This barrier also could unfairly impact students with associate’s degrees and students who gained skills through community college certification programs.** A significant and diverse population of underserved students [find community colleges easier to access](#) and more affordable than four-year degrees.

### Payoffs for success

Skills-first hiring strategies take careful and thorough work, but employers report that they have seen significant benefits.

[A recent survey](#) found that 81% of employers that adopted skills-first strategies have reduced the time to hire, 78% reduced costs in hiring, and 91% improved retention.

### Hiring veterans

Veterans have deep and diverse skillsets transferable to many civilian roles. Veterans also tend to [quickly learn new skills and stay with an employer for longer](#), reducing skilling and turnover costs. DOL’s Veterans’ Employment Training Service (VETS) provides [a guide for hiring veterans](#) and a tool on the [skills that servicemembers acquire in certain ranks and roles](#).

## Who is using skills-first hiring and what did they find?

Employers across several industries have experimented with skills-first hiring. Here are some examples:

- **Optimax Systems**, a precision optics manufacturer, enrolled 20 workers each year in on-the-job training programs, contributing to consistent revenue growth over the past three years.
- **Cleveland Clinic** moved to a skills-first hiring approach in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. It started work-based learning programs, removed degree requirements, and set up skills-oriented career fairs. The first fair ended with offers to more than 90 people, 90% of whom accepted.
- **CF Industries**, a fertilizer manufacturer, changed to a skills-first strategy for certain roles, ending degree requirements and setting up career progression. It credits its 7% turnover rate to adopting a skills-first strategy.



# 1. GETTING STARTED

**Successfully using a skills-first strategy requires careful and ongoing review of how your company and its employees work. You will need early buy-in from leadership, hiring managers, human resources, workers, and collective bargaining representatives.**

Below are some considerations for getting buy-in and early wins to build momentum. For the sake of simplicity, we focus on work needed to change one job to skills-first hiring.

- **Know your why and be transparent:** Are you trying skills-first hiring to hire more quickly? Improve performance? Increase retention? Pick a clear reason for trying the switch and a method to track results. Share those results with all affected so they feel comfortable with moving forward as you refine your hiring practices.
- **Find the right job: The best role for trying out a skills-first strategy can be easily broken down into discrete skills and responsibilities.** If a job wears many “hats,” or its responsibilities change often, they may be a poorer start for your skills-first strategy.
  - **Talk to your staff or union:** The people who do the job right now know best the skills needed for the job. Ask workers or their representatives what skillsets workers need to do their work well.
  - **Consult licensing and other requirements:** Some jobs have legal or professional requirements—including degree requirements—to maintain high safety and work standards, among other reasons. These jobs likely are a poorer fit.
  - **Use publicly available resources:**
    - ◊ [O\\*Net](#) is a Department of Labor website summarizing skills and responsibilities for job types. It can help fill in details you may have overlooked and show what other employers expect from a type of job.
    - ◊ DOL’s Office of Apprenticeship offers [occupational frameworks](#) that can help identify discrete and assessable skills for specific jobs.
    - ◊ Education Design Lab’s [Skillitizer](#) generates skills-first job listings, identifying skills that might be needed for certain job types.
    - ◊ The [National Initiative for Cybersecurity Education \(NICE\) Workforce Framework](#) provides common definition to cybersecurity competencies, roles, and knowledge and skills.
- **Create benchmarks and timelines:** These can keep your work on track amid your day-to-day grind and make the strategy feel achievable. Some examples:
  - **Within one month, settle on one role to hire using a skills-first strategy.**
  - **Within six months, create a job posting and share it on a job board.**
  - **Within one year, hire three staff members through skills-first methods.**

## Starting with promotions

You do not need to look outside your company to start using skills-first strategies. First trying these strategies with existing staff through internal promotions and staff details can allow you to refine your approach before you dip into the talent pool outside your workplace.



## 2. IDENTIFYING A JOB'S SKILLSETS

**The next step is breaking a job into discrete skills and choosing how to weight those skills.**

**Step One is figuring out your “core” skills and “great-to-have” skills.** You can group and rank skills many different ways, and other guides on this topic provide highly detailed skills breakdowns. For the sake of simplicity, though, we recommend starting your process by thinking of skills in these terms:

- **Core skills** are critical to performing a role. Generally, a worker cannot succeed in the position without these skills. You should provide the most weight in hiring to these skills.
  - Most frequently, these will be the skills a worker needs on their first day of the job. These can be technical skills (like knowing a coding language or using certain tools) or harder-to-teach personal skills (like organization and handling conflict).
- **Great-to-have skills** make a worker more likely to succeed in a job, but they are not essential to the role. You should provide them less weight than core skills.
  - These can be highly technical skills unique to your organization (like using proprietary software for tracking work matters) or less technical skills that help a worker do the job (like the ability to clearly explain technical concepts to audiences with limited technical knowledge).

**These four questions can help you start identifying skills and prepare to weigh them.**

1. **What is the purpose of the job?** Define what a successful person in this job does for your organization each day, month, and year.
2. **What are all the skills someone needs to be successful in this job?** Not just basic competencies, but how successful workers use those competencies.
3. **How important is each skill to success?** Some skills help an individual excel in a job, but they may not be required (core) to doing it—which makes them great-to-have skills.
4. **What skills can be learned on the job?** Teachable on-the-job skills could include:
  - Basic data entry and management.
  - Gaps in technical skills
  - Minor business and operational strategies unique to your organization.

**Step Two is using public resources to check for other relevant skills for the job.** This may seem repetitive, but these tools will help build a complete list. Also: **knowing common names for skills can help find ways to evaluate them and help you in writing a job posting.**

Some available resources include:

- [O\\*Net](#) provides information on skills, job tasks, and detailed work activities.
- [Education Design Lab's Job Posting Skillitizer](#), in addition to building job postings, identifies skills for many occupations and offers ideas on how to articulate them.

- [LinkedIn's Career Explorer](#) is a worker-oriented tool that offers insights on skills for different positions and how they overlap with different job titles.
- [SkillsEngine](#) is another online tool that helps employers identify skills needed for roles.

**Step Three is building a rubric—or scoring tool—for grading a candidate's skills.** Group skills by core and great-to-have to help figure out where to put your time and resources during the hiring process. For example, if the ability to manage multiple projects is a great-to-have skill, it might not be worth creating an extensive simulation just for that skill.

## EXAMPLE 1

### Settling on what skills to evaluate

A manager hiring for a sales role talks with staff. All workers mention the same two skills:

1. "People skills," also known as durable or soft skills, to manage customer relationships.
2. Data skills to track sales activities and avoid redundant outreach.

After further discussion, the manager finds dealing with customers is essential to the job. **The manager determines that "people skills" are core.**

The manager concludes that she has training tools that can teach new workers any needed data skills within a few weeks. **The manager determines database skills are great-to-have.**

## EXAMPLE 2

### Examining how vital skills are success

At an information technology firm, a human resources specialist builds a skills-first hiring plan for hiring a network technician. She finds that four skills are key to success:

1. Advanced coding skills to address problems blocking customers from accessing systems.
2. Problem solving.
3. Working carefully and swiftly under pressure.
4. People skills for handling panicked customers.

The specialist finds that a technician must have all four skills when hired. Technicians regularly deal with panicked customers who need to access sensitive information. **The specialist determines all four skills are core.**

**EXAMPLE 3**

**What could a skills-first rubric look like?**

The human resources specialist from Example 2 talks to the position’s hiring manager and a union representative. They share two great-to-have skills: using customer management software and working with a team. The specialist develops the below rubric.

<b>CORE SKILLS = UP TO 2 POINTS</b>				
<b>Skill</b>	<b>Assessments</b>			
	Interview	Hands-On Assessment	Simulated Customer Call	<b><u>SCORES</u></b>
Coding				
Pressure				
People Skills				
Problem Solving				
				<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>

<b>NICE-TO-HAVE SKILLS = 1 POINT EACH</b>				
<b>Skill</b>	<b>Assessments</b>			
	Interview	Hands-On Assessment	Simulated Customer Call	<b><u>SCORES</u></b>
Customer Management Software				
Performance in Team Settings				
				<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>
				<b><u>GRAND TOTAL</u></b>

## Competency Model Initiative

DOL's Employment and Training Administration partnered with industry groups to build dynamic competency models needed by workers in vital sectors. These models:

- Identify specific employer skills needs.
- Develop competency-based training models.
- Develop performance indicators.

You can find more information [here](#).

## Work-based learning and Registered Apprenticeship

Work-based learning programs like internships, on-the-job training programs, and staff loans or details provide workers an opportunity to learn and earn and employers an opportunity to hire quality staff trained to their specific needs.

Another strategy is Registered Apprenticeship, a DOL-administered program that provides existing skills-first hiring frameworks for many roles. Registered Apprenticeship programs receive free help from DOL's Office of Apprenticeship or State Apprenticeship Agencies. For more information, visit [apprenticeship.gov](https://www.dol.gov/apprenticeship). To start building a program, click [here](#). You also can find information [here](#) to connect with your state's apprenticeship experts.



### 3. HOW TO EVALUATE SKILLS

**Ultimately, the best approach to evaluating skills will be one you can perform consistently for each candidate based on your time and resources.**

**Step One is finding how you will screen for core skills and great-to-have-skills.** Frequently, an employer’s first interaction with a worker is a brief read of a resume—or a resume filtered through a computer program, algorithm, or artificial intelligence. Before judging a candidate on paper, you should **organize a list of experiences or credentials that show that a worker has relevant skills that a quick review might miss.**

For example, a manager hiring a convention coordinator could look for experiences in hospitality and managing large groups of people such as:

- Waiting tables because it involves managing several different people’s needs at once in a high-stress environment.
- Military service preparing and carrying out efficient interactions with large groups.
- Student teaching because it involves organizing and sharing with large groups.

**Section 4** of the Starter Kit provides more information on skills evaluations and screening.

**Step Two is picking how to evaluate candidates who make it through screening. One method alone is unlikely to provide a fair sense of a candidate’s skill level. Multiple methods ensure you have gathered enough evidence to be sure of their skills.**

Below are a few example methods for evaluating skills. **You may not need all these methods, but using more than one provides richer evidence of a candidate’s skills.**

- **Interviewing using structured questions** focused on skills. For example, you could offer theoretical scenarios to see how a candidate reacts to problems.
  - **Standardized interviewing provides more consistent data and reduces the impact of biases.**
    - ◊ Utah State University has compiled [a list of skills-first interview questions](#).
    - ◊ The Society for Human Resource Management has published a [guide for drafting interview questions based on competencies](#).
    - ◊ Indeed also provides [a guide on skills-based interviewing](#) and example questions.
- **Hands-on skills evaluations** like completing a brief coding exercise, organizing different materials into a report, or using a type of tool needed to make the employer’s products.

- **Simulations and role-playing** recreating scenarios in your work. For example, if a job alerts managers to key trends, you could simulate presenting at a leadership meeting.
- **Written tests** checking a candidate's technical knowledge or how they might handle scenarios. For example, a written test can evaluate whether a candidate knows commands vital to efficient coding or how she structures customer communications.

**Take steps to make your evaluation accessible. This will expand your talent pool and avoid miscommunications that can cost you talented candidates.** For example, you could:

- Avoid jargon or technical language not needed for evaluating skills.
- Test in a place reachable by people with different levels of physical ability and use technology usable by people with different levels of ability.
- [Diversify review panelists](#) to account for different backgrounds and life experiences.
- Offer optional phone interviews for candidates without broadband internet.
- Share interview questions in advance to fairly evaluate workers with anxiety disorders.

**Step Three is scoring skills in your rubric.** You should personalize the rubric to the needs of your workplace and the skills needed to do a job well.

### Reasonable accommodations

Reasonable accommodations help a person with a disability apply for a job or perform a job. Examples include:

- Organizing recruitment tables, interviews, and evaluations in accessible locations.
- Offering breaks during interviews.
- Offering written materials in accessible formats (like large print or Braille).
- Providing readers or sign language interpreters.

For more, see DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy's (ODEP) [resources for inclusive hiring](#), which include the [Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion \(EARN\)](#). You also can learn more at the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) [website](#).

### Double-check your applicant tracking system

Some commercially available applicant tracking systems automatically remove candidates without degrees. They also may not identify skills in resumes. Your vendor can help find options that fit skills-first evaluations so you do not accidentally miss quality candidates.

## Getting the most out of screening

Even with a skills-first focus, [biases](#) and other factors could remove high-skilled applicants. Some steps you can take:

- **Double-check your applicant tracking system:** These systems and artificial intelligence can [replicate unfair biases that could lose talented candidates](#). You should contact your vendor to see what steps it takes to avoid these issues.
- **Include skills evaluations in screening:** Questionnaires and scenario responses can provide a sense of a candidate's skills not evident from resumes or cover letters.
- **Create a blind evaluation process:** Studies show [a 30% increase](#) in women's successful selection through blind skill-evaluation processes, for example.
- **Remove education sections from applications:** This can minimize biases toward people with degrees and communicate your openness to applicants without degrees.
  - Another option is a **blind college review process** that masks a candidate's school to avoid unconscious biases. A British law firm [diversified entry-level hires by 30%](#) using this strategy.

## Know your equal employment obligations

All hiring practices must comply with antidiscrimination laws like Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Whether you rely on particular credentials or move to a skills-first approach, the [Uniform Guidance on Employee Selection Procedures outlines three different ways](#) employers can show that job selection criteria and how they evaluate candidates are both job-related and consistent with business needs. The Guidelines outline a set of principles for how employers should validate the hiring process to demonstrate it actually assesses the skills needed for a job and does not make it harder for one group to get a job.

For more, please visit the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(EEOC\)](#) and [OFCCP](#).



## 4. RECRUITING

**Once you design your hiring process, the next step will be posting the role in plain language and ensuring that candidates know about it—and feel comfortable applying for it.** For example, workers who other employers turned down for not having four-year degrees may not think you will consider hiring them. **Your job posting should include that you plan to consider applicants without degrees, the skills needed, and the ways you will evaluate those skills. [Use language](#) that makes workers feel like it is possible for them to get the job.**

**Use plain language:** Because you are invested in your work, it can be easy to write long job descriptions loaded with jargon and technical details. This can cause alternatively skilled workers to self-select away from jobs for which they are great fits. Use short, simple sentences. Offer clear statements of the skills needed and the roles the worker will play in the organization.

**Say that skills take priority:** Your job posting could include language like:

- *We will evaluate you only on what skills you show during the hiring process, not the way you gained those skills.*
- *There is no required education background for this role. Candidates from all learning backgrounds will be considered during the hiring process. We will use evaluations to assess your skill level during the hiring process.*
- *Workers will be evaluated based on the skills described in this application.*

**Make it OK to share alternative learning experiences:** Many skills learned at one job can be useful in another, even if those jobs do not look the same on paper. Use language that helps candidates feel comfortable sharing experiences they might have assumed are not useful for your role. For example, if an employer is looking for a convention coordinator, the employer's listing or formal application could say:

*Please feel free to share about any role where you managed large groups of people. Any type of experience could be important to determining your fit for the job, and these experiences could include retail and restaurant experience.*

**Tell candidates what to expect:** In the listing, describe your expected process, the time each step will take, and an expected salary range. For example, a posting for a machinist job could read as follows:

*This position pays between a range of \$50,000 and \$60,000. Applicants for this position will be evaluated based on skills and work experience. These evaluations include:*

- *A 30-minute interview discussing work experiences and ability to manage processes.*
- *A 20-minute written examination identifying basic tools and their use by machinists.*
- *A 30-minute hands-on demonstration of basic CNC machine operation to determine skill level and expected training needs.*



## Broadening your talent pool

Once you have your job listing, you should try to put it in front of the broadest possible audience and [avoid language that discourages some applicants from applying](#). Below are some suggested strategies and resources to blend into your broader plan to ensure a complete and diverse applicant pool:

- [American Job Centers](#) and [CareerOneStop.org](#) offers resources for reaching a broader pool of job seekers.
- [DOL Women's Bureau's Equity Module Toolkit](#) provides insights on building partnerships that can reach more diverse groups of workers.
- The [Office of Apprenticeship's Job Finder Tool](#) provides a free space to post apprenticeship opportunities.
- Find local community or affinity groups (including those through local colleges and universities) to share your job listings with their members or audiences.
- DOL's Office of Apprenticeship has a [free universal outreach tool](#) that helps connect employers to groups that share postings to diverse audiences.
- [Business Roundtable's Onramps Guide](#) offers 100 practices for hiring and integrating workers returning from incarceration.
- This [free gender decoder tool](#) identifies subtle gender-based bias in job postings that could discourage applicants from applying.



## 5. HIRING AND ONBOARDING

**Finally, it's time to hire!** You will review how candidates performed in evaluations and settle on potential hires. Here are some key considerations:

- **Focus on the skills that candidates have:** Skills-first hiring moves hiring from looking for signs a candidate might have skills to determining the skills the candidate actually has.
  - **Some candidates may have all the core skills but need development on great-to-have skills. This does not mean they cannot do the job. You should think about if you can develop these skills in onboarding or on the job.**
- **Value skills in pay:** In settling on pay, keep in mind that many workers already have the skills of higher-paying positions. You should not offer lower pay because they do not have a degree or credential, and you should not ask for their salary history. As more employers adopt skills-first hiring, this could disadvantage you in the market for talent.
- **Set up success:** Skills-first hiring could bring in new workers underrepresented in your workplace. Creating inclusive workplaces can ensure your whole team's success.
  - **Additionally, be mindful of equal employment legal obligations**, including requirements for reasonable accommodations. DOL's ODEP provides free and confidential help on reasonable accommodations. EEOC also provides guidance on legal obligations regarding workers with disabilities.

### Registered Apprenticeship

By design, Registered Apprenticeship provides an on-the-job learning structure that can help fill skill gaps and provide mentorship to workers—meeting many of the goals described in this section. You can learn more [here](#).

### Some good ideas for onboarding

A good onboarding process can improve productivity and retention by 82%. It is especially key if a hire is from a background underrepresented in your workplace. Considerations include:

- **Making a plan for filling skills gaps:** A roadmap to filling skills needs avoids these needs getting lost and reassures the worker that you are invested in their success. If it would help a worker's long-term prospects (and yours) to earn a missing certification, tell them what that is and what it will take to get it.
- **Creating connection:** Partner new hires with a mentor and expose them to the work of other departments to show them how they will contribute to your organization's success.
- **Reducing surprises:** Let the new hire know what they will do on their first day, who they will meet, and what expectations you have for their work. This reduces anxiety for skills-first hires who might not feel like they "belong" because they lack degrees.
- **Providing ongoing feedback and encouragement:** Offer regular input and reassurance to show new hires you are invested in their success.
- **Make sure they know about helpful resources:** Some workers struggle to get and keep jobs because of childcare and other barriers like the cost of uniforms and tools. If you offer resources that help with these needs, emphasize them during onboarding and make clear that is OK for workers to use them.

The Department of Commerce's Job Quality Toolkit provides specific suggestions for onboarding and hiring practices. For more information, explore the Job Quality Toolkit [here](#).

## 6. CONCLUSION: WHAT COMES NEXT?

**After your first hire based on skills, think about what worked well and what could work better.** Track your new hire’s performance and talk with your team—leadership, human resources, hiring managers, staff, and union representatives—about any organizational pains they felt in the new process. Grade how you did on addressing the “why” you established in Section 1. How well did the process get you to meeting these goals? If it did not meet your goals, what prevented success?

**For some employers, it may take years to enjoy the full benefits of a skills-first hiring strategy.** Unless your organization is very small, it is unlikely these changes will come from a single hire. Or a handful of hires. **But employers committed to hiring based on skills have seen better performance and retention.**

A few final considerations:

- **Buy-in is vital:** Remaking hiring systems—or building new ones—needs leaders’ buy-in for needed resources and patience, as well as managers’ and employees’ buy-in for success.
- **Personalize the process:** A skills-first process must fit your organization, not the other way around.
- **Continue to rethink the process:** Re-evaluate your process quarterly or annually, looking for changes needed to improve results and make implementation easier.



## LEARNING MORE

The Skills-First Starter Kit is certainly not the first guide on this topic. Many organizations have published research and how-to guides based on their years of experience in building skills-first strategies. You may find the following resources helpful for digging deeper into skills-first concepts described in the Starter Kit.

- **Business Roundtable** has published multiple resources on this topic:
  - [Innovative Skills-Based Talent Practices](#) offers case studies on companies that adopted skills-first hiring and their successes, including discussion of selection and sourcing practices.
  - [Skills-Based Internal Mobility Playbook](#) describes strategies for creating opportunities for promotion and transition of existing staff.
- **Business Roundtable, Lightcast, and The Burning Glass Institute** collaborated on [A Guide to Improving Recruitment, Retention, Advancement, and Equity](#). It describes four pillars of skills-first talent strategies as well as insights on providing opportunities for existing staff to make lateral or upward moves.
- **Indeed** has published multiple resources on skills-first hiring, including:
  - [A Beginner's Guide to Skills-First Hiring](#) describing skills-first hiring and ways to get started.
  - [AI Has the Power to Unlock Skills-First Hiring](#) describes ethical artificial intelligence practices that can help in skills-first strategies.
  - [Skills-First Hiring: What It Is and Why It's Important Now](#) covers the basics of skills-first hiring and relates it to the interests of jobseekers and employers.
- **Jobs for the Future** offers multiple resources, including:
  - Jobs for the Future's **Rework America Alliance** published a [Skills-Based Sourcing and Hiring Playbook](#) collecting considerations and strategies for skills-first hiring.
  - [Skills-Based Practices: An Employer Journey Map](#) describes the importance of institutional change in skills-first hiring. It provides a skills-based maturity diagnostic assessment to evaluate your current talent management practices, a readiness assessment, and considerations for using skills-first hiring.
- **Lightcast's Skills-Based Hiring Toolkit** offers a twelve-step, multi-phase approach to adopting skills-first hiring, including strategies for assessing your hiring infrastructure.
- **LinkedIn** offers multiple resources including:
  - [Skills-First: Reimagining the Labor Market and Breaking Down Barriers](#) describes business cases for skills-first approaches in the future of work.
  - [Understanding the Green Transition](#) discusses transferable skills in clean energy.
- **Opportunity@Work** has published [Tear the Paper Ceiling: STARS \(Skilled Through Alternative Routes\) Hiring Playbook](#), which thoroughly examines the need for skills-first hiring as well as considerations for ensuring success.
- **Society for Human Resources Management Foundation** published [Ready for Success: Adopting a Skills Mindset in Employment Practices Toolkit](#) to help organizations move to skills-first talent strategies.
- **U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Skills-Based Hiring and Advancement Brief** describes benefits and considerations related to skills-first hiring