

# Skills-Based Hiring Policy

Issued by the Human Resources Division

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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## I. Introduction

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has long been a leader in establishing objective criteria and predictive metrics when identifying the knowledge, skills, and abilities for the successful performance of a position. Skills-based hiring is a more reliable predictor of future job performance than reliance on a candidate's educational attainment or a prior job title. In employing a skills-based approach in the hiring process, the Commonwealth will reduce unconscious bias in the workplace by mitigating the reliance on assumptions, preconceptions, or stereotypes during the hiring process.

Skills-based hiring not only fortifies the state's workforce but also broadens access to quality job opportunities for nontraditional candidates, dismantling structural barriers that perpetuate inequities in pay and employment access. Skills-based hiring opens the door to diversity in the workplace by acknowledging the value of relevant skills and experience. Additionally, skills-based hiring expands the talent pool and provides the potential for more high-quality applicants.

Executive Order #627 directed the Human Resources Division to establish a policy instituting skills-based hiring practices, urging Executive Department hiring managers to prioritize candidates' skills, competencies, abilities, and experiences, emphasizing the need to minimize unnecessary reliance on degree and credential requirements in job classifications.

This policy shall apply to all Agencies within the Executive Department of the Commonwealth.

## II. Definitions

**Skills-based hiring:** A holistic review of an applicant's skills, knowledge, and abilities without placing a premium on education. Skills-based hiring opens the door to diversity in the workplace by acknowledging the value of relevant skills and experience.

**Unconscious bias:** A quick and often inaccurate judgment based on limited facts and one's own life experiences. These judgments can give individuals and groups both unearned advantage and unearned disadvantage in the workplace because we have difficulty clearly seeing people's talents, motivations, and potential.

**Minimum Entrance Requirements (MERs):** Basic qualifications that a candidate must meet in order to be eligible for job consideration.

**Classification Specification:** A written description of the content and essential functions of a job. The Human Resources Division's classification specifications are written in general form and are intended to capture the knowledge, skills, abilities, duties, responsibilities, and qualifications for a given title.

**Job Posting:** An advertisement for a job opening or vacancy to attract qualified candidates. A job posting includes details about the position, including job responsibilities, information about the agency/unit, required qualifications, salary, and additional information.

**Hiring Manager/Hiring Team:** A manager or supervisor, or supporting team (i.e., Diversity Director, Diversity Officer, recruiter) who is responsible for overseeing the selection process for a position. The hiring manager determines job requirements, selects candidates to interview, and makes final hiring recommendations.

### **III. General Provisions**

It is the policy of the Human Resources Division that Executive Department hiring managers and recruiters will engage in skills-based hiring practices by:

- Utilizing skills-based employment practices in their efforts to attract, recruit, hire, retain, develop, and advance the careers of talented employees.
- Consistent with the terms of a collective bargaining agreement, if applicable, consider the full set of competencies that a candidate may bring to the job beyond traditional education during the hiring process.
- Developing job postings and interview questions that promote the equitable consideration of applicant skills during the hiring process.
- Prioritizing the alignment of job duties of the position with candidate skills at all steps of the hiring process.
- Eliminating any educational requirement as a preferred qualification in excess of a minimum entrance requirement unless there is prior approval of their cabinet secretary and the Human Resources Division.

## **IV. Procedures**

Agency Human Resources staff are required to add their Cabinet Secretary, or designee, and their Human Resources Division Classification & Compensation Analyst to the requisition approval path for any job posting that requires education in excess of the minimum entrance requirements. This includes any mention of education on a job posting, even if it is marked “preferred” or “desired”.

## **V. Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Human Resources Division (HRD)**

- Issue and distribute the Skills-Based Hiring Policy and Executive Order #627 to all Executive Department employees.

- Develop and promote the use of a skills-based hiring toolkit to educate, encourage, and support skills-based hiring and job posting best practices.
- Prior to the posting of a position, review and approve or deny agency requests to include educational requirements to be listed the job posting as preferred qualification in excess of the minimum entrance requirements.
- Ensure that all new or updated classification specifications will not include a specified level of education as a minimum entrance requirement unless a degree or certification is a requirement for performing the job duties of the position as determined by job analysis.
- Develop and administer a skills-based hiring training course to all Executive Department managers and other supporting teams as determined.
- Audit job postings to ensure compliance with this policy.

**Agencies:**

- Ensure that the Skills-based Hiring Policy is adopted and implemented for all agency new hires and promotions.
- Take steps to eliminate unconscious bias in the hiring process by adopting best practices identified in the HRD toolkit.
- Review existing agency practices and revise them as necessary to ensure that they are consistent with this policy and the collective bargaining agreements, if applicable.
- Ensure that all agency managers and supporting team (i.e., recruiters, Diversity Directors/Officers) complete the skills-based hiring training course. .
- Communicate importance and emphasis on skills-based hiring approach to hiring managers.

- Collaborate with Diversity Director/Officer throughout the hiring process to ensure alignment with Agency Affirmative Action and Diversity plans.

**Agency Human Resources/Payroll Staff:**

- Ensure job postings do not require education that is in excess of the minimum entrance requirements as indicated in the HRD official classification specification.
- Request prior approval from the Cabinet Secretary and the Human Resources Division to post a job opening with educational requirements included in the posting that are in excess of the minimum entrance requirements. Include justification as to why the educational requirement is necessary for the position.
- Assist agency hiring managers to draft job postings and interview questions that promote their ability to align the job requirements with the skills and abilities needed to accomplish the position.
- Assist agency hiring managers with drafting job descriptions and interview questions to minimize unconscious bias.

**Managers or Supervisors, Hiring Teams, Recruiters, Diversity Directors, and Diversity Officers:**

- Adopt the best practices identified in the HRD Skills-Based Hiring Toolkit.
- Draft job postings and interview questions with the goal of aligning the job requirements with the skills necessary to do the job.
- Review candidate applications prioritizing a candidate's skills over education or prior job title and with the intention of including non-traditional candidates in the interview pool.
- In conjunction with the terms of a collective bargaining agreement, if applicable, consider the full set of competencies that a candidate may bring to their ability to do the job beyond traditional education during the hiring process.
- Complete required HRD skills-based hiring training.

## **VI. Compliance and Remedies**

Agencies who fail to comply with this policy may be required to have all job postings approved by HRD.

## **VII. Related Policies or Resources**

- [M.G.L. c. 30 sec. 45](#)
- [Executive Order #627](#)
- [Skills-Based Hiring Toolkit](#)
- [HRD Hiring Guidelines](#)