

# Addressing challenges in state and local hiring: a skills-based approach

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# Agenda

- 1. The case for a strategic hiring approach in state and local government**
- 2. By the numbers**
- 3. Factors influencing declines in hiring**
- 4. Solutions**
- 5. Case study**

# The case for a strategic hiring approach and strong investments in state and local government



## **Critical services for constituents**

State and local governments deliver or facilitate services we interact with every day.



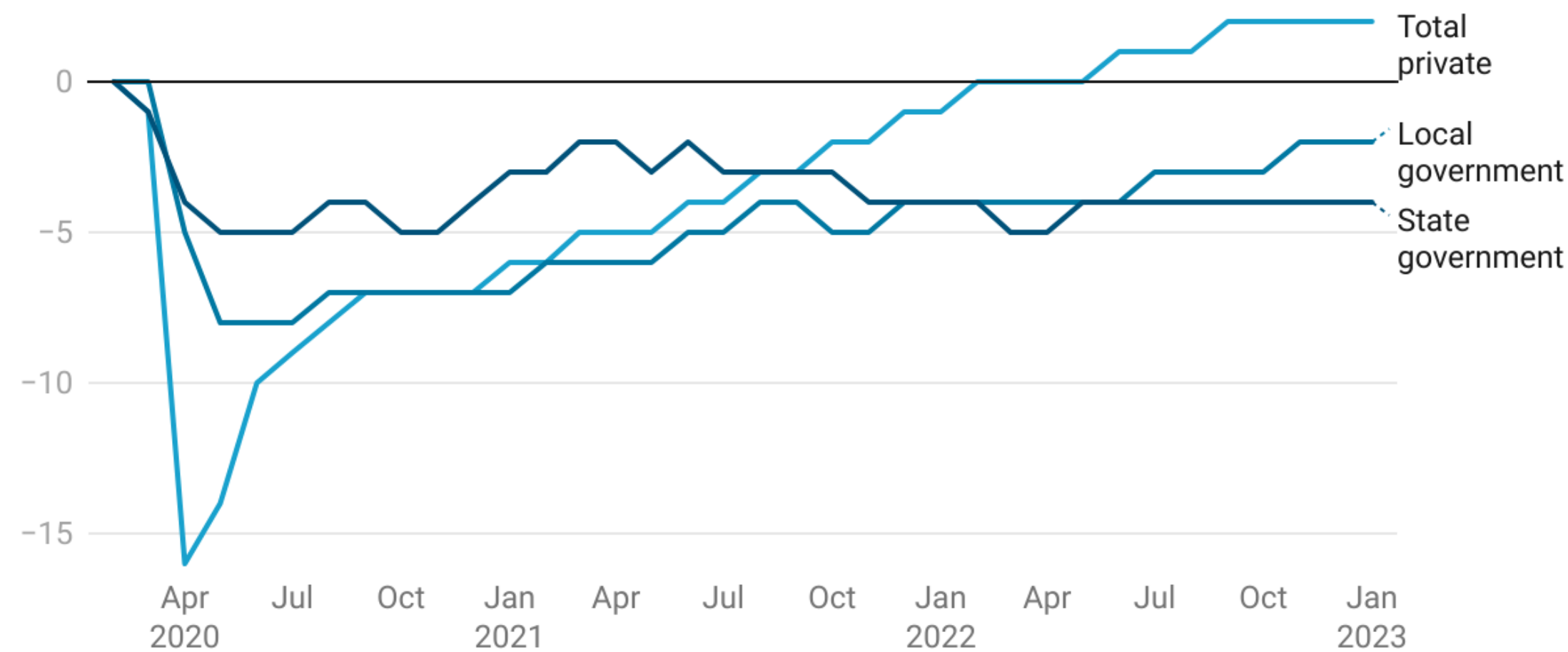
## **Economic security for workers**

State and local governments have historically provided strong employment opportunities for many workers, who are disproportionately women and workers of color

# The state and local sectors are underperforming the private sector

## State and local government employment has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels

Percentage change in employment, February 2020–January 2023



Note: The value "0" refers to the pre-pandemic baseline.

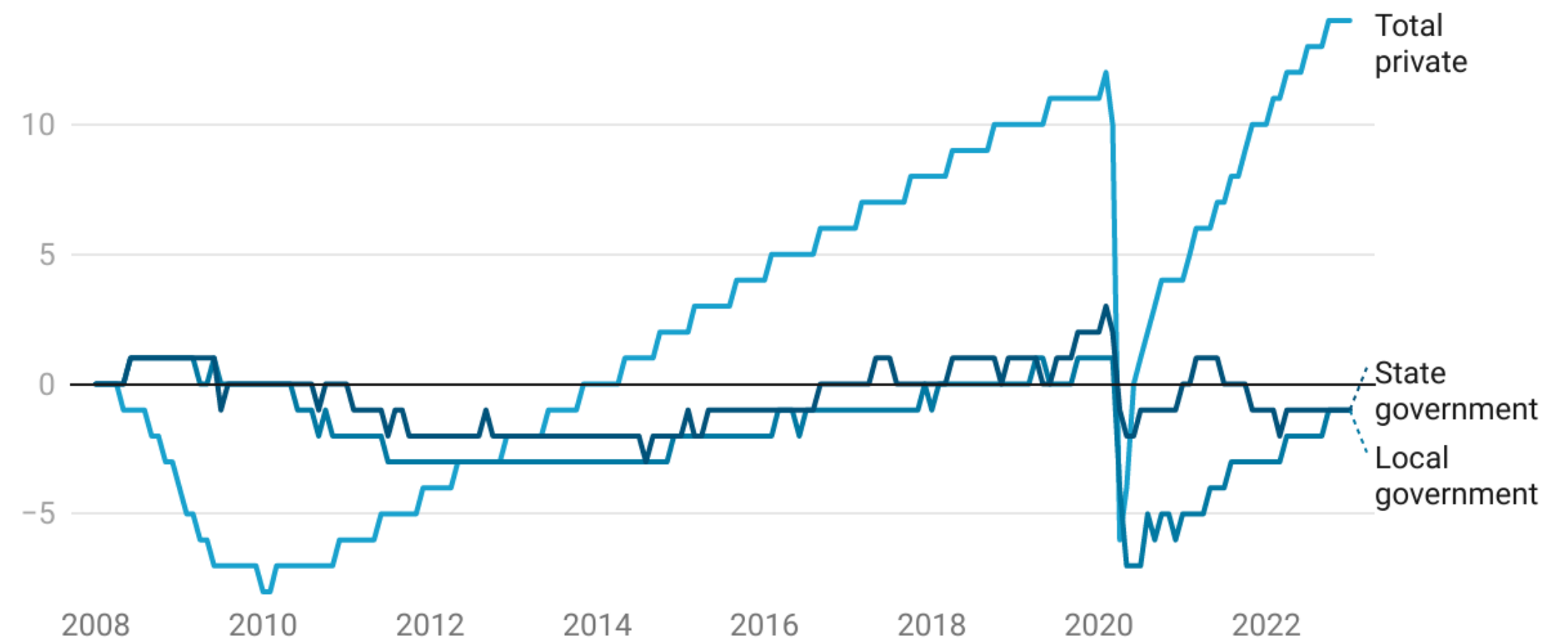
Source: calculations based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Current Employment Statistics - CES (National)," <https://www.bls.gov/ces/> (last accessed March 2023) • Created with Datawrapper

# But the sector was struggling before the pandemic

- Pre-pandemic: Employment had not reached pre-2008 levels in many parts of the country.
- Currently: The sector is operating not just at below pre-pandemic levels but also below Great Recession levels

## State and local government employment not recovered to Great Recession levels

Percentage change in employment, January 2008–January 2023



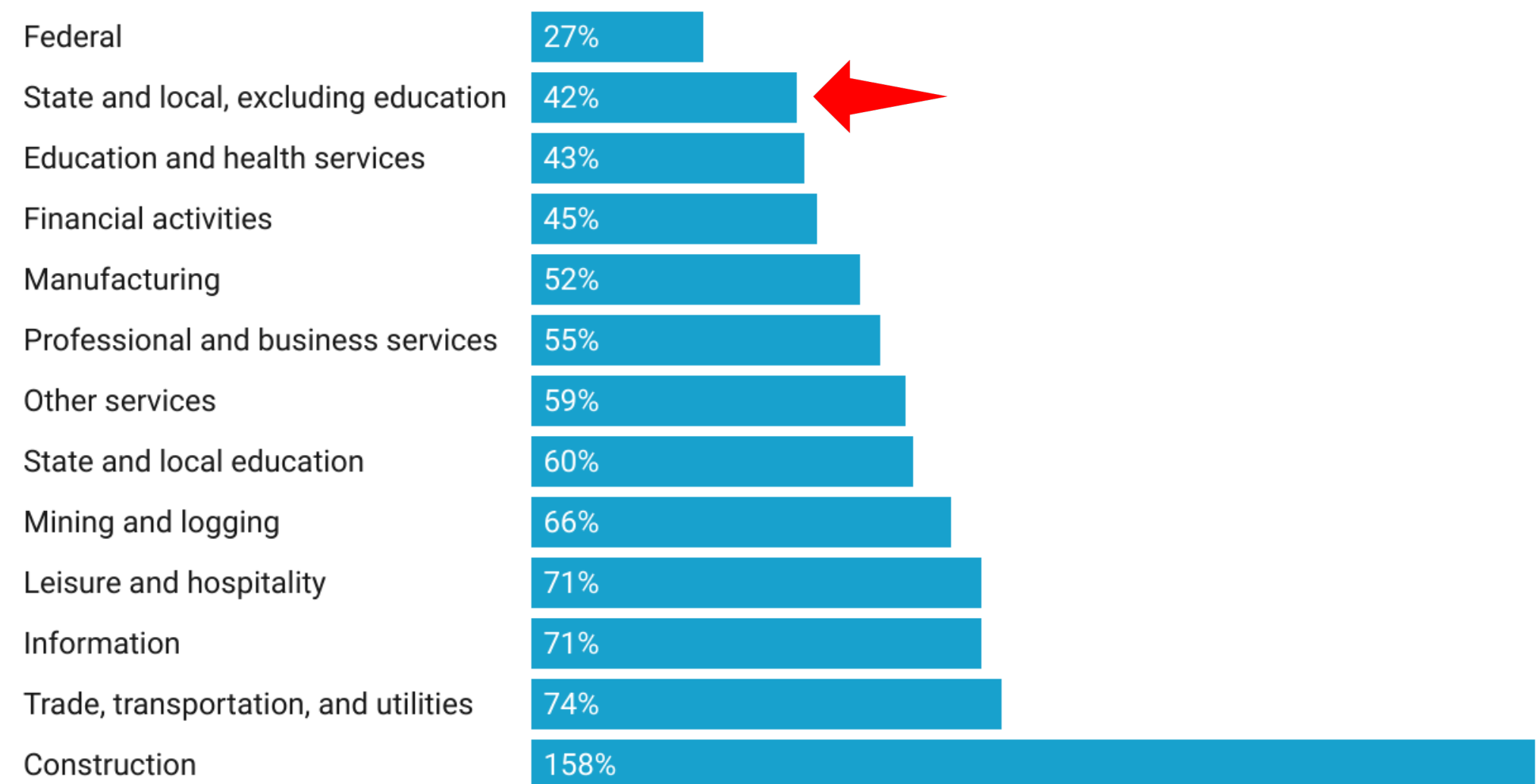
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Source: calculations based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Current Employment Statistics - CES (National)," available at <https://www.bls.gov/ces/> (last accessed January 2023) • Created with Datawrapper

# State & local governments are struggling to hire

- The workforce is aging, retirements are on the rise, and interest in leaving is up (MSI)
  - 38% of surveyed respondents moved up their retirement dates
  - 52% are considering leaving their jobs
- No pipeline to replenish:
  - Between 2019-2021, applications for state & local jobs dropped by 32% (Route Fifty)

Hires-to-openings percentage, by industry, January 2023



*BLS data for January 2023 is preliminary as of March 2023*

Source: calculations based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey – Industry," available at <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/dsrv?jt> (last accessed January 2023). • Created with Datawrapper

# Deep dive: occupations

## Hardest roles to hire for, according to NACAA member responses:

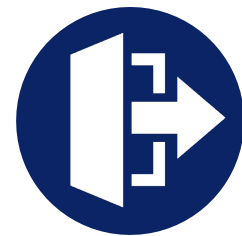
- **Bachelor's and above**
  - Engineers
  - Environmental scientists
  - Attorneys
- **Does not require a Bachelor's degree**
  - Administrative staff
  - Support staff
  - Managers
  - Analysts
  - Inspectors
  - Compliance and enforcement staff

## Hiring challenges include:

- Competing with private industry salaries
- Lack of career advancement opportunities
- Bureaucracy/long hiring or onboarding process
- Lack of diversity
- Educational requirements for support staff



# Factors influencing declines in employment



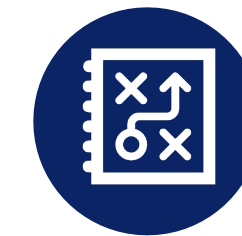
## Wages and working conditions

- Wages, particularly for hard to fill roles, not competitive w private sector
- Preference for flexible work arrangements, i.e. remote work



## Health & safety

- Many are front-line employees
- At least 74% of surveyed workers said their jobs were somewhat risky for COVID exposure
- Significant increase in risks of violence and threats
- Working at reduced capacity leads to larger workloads and burnout



## Barriers to entry

- Applications are down
- Little active recruitment (v. passive posting on websites)
- Hiring processes slow to change
- Specialized roles are difficult to fill
- **High barriers to entry – including credential requirements – posted or in practice**



# State & local employees hold BAs at higher rates than other sectors

*Hiring in state & local government reveals a preference towards BAs*

*Older workers in these jobs are less likely to have a BA than younger workers, suggesting that the credential barrier to entry has increased over time*

Percentage of government workers with a bachelor's degree, by government level

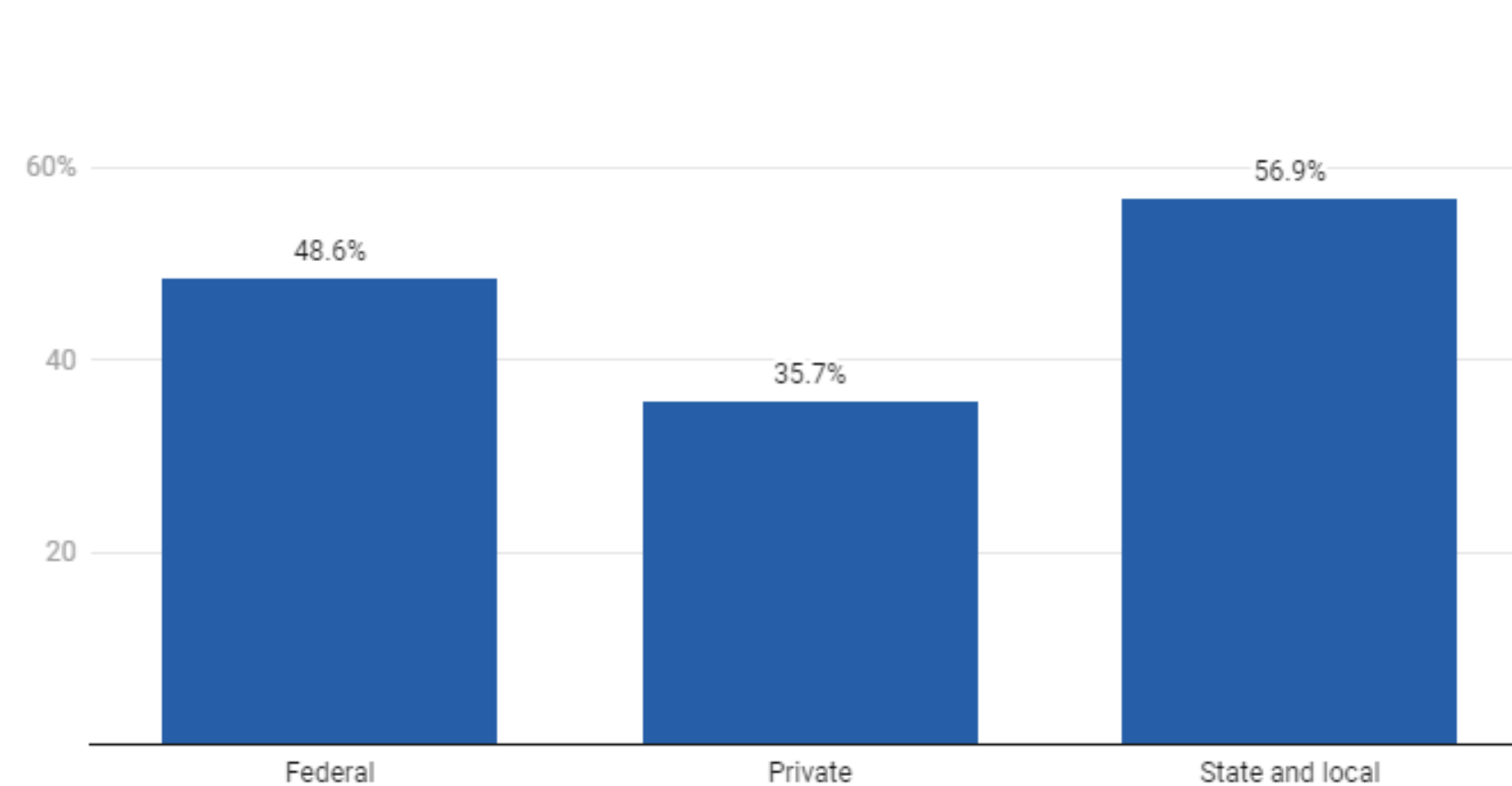
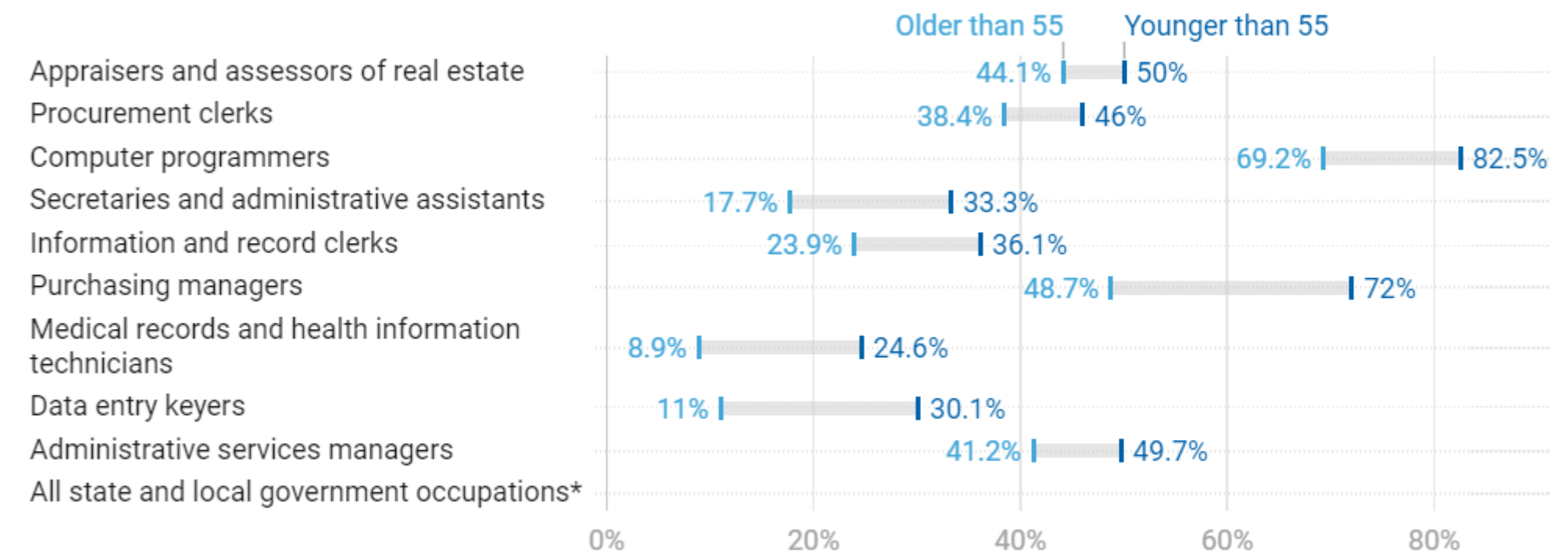


Chart: Center for American Progress • Source: Opportunity@Work calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, "ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample: YEAR 2019 ANALYZED," available at <https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/> (last accessed October 2022).

Occupations by percentage of workers who hold bachelor's degrees and age group



\*"All occupations" is the total of all occupations, not the sum of the occupations in the table.

Note: Only postings with minimum education levels are included in this analysis.

Chart: Center for American Progress • Source: Opportunity@Work calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, "ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample: YEAR 2019 ANALYZED," available at <https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/> (last accessed October 2022).

# A skills-based strategy

## What is a skills-based strategy?

- Defines job by the skills required to perform it, with employers then considering all applicants by assessing whether their skills align with those that are needed
- Moves away from degrees serving as proxies for skills
- Often includes on the job training or upskilling

## Benefits of a skills-based approach


- Open up jobs to a **larger, more diverse pool of applicants**
- Get a **better fit** for the job you're hiring for
- Leverage the **expertise of experienced workers** in a mentoring capacity

# Recent public sector momentum towards skills-based practices

## Governor Cooper Issues Executive Order to Emphasize Skills, Experience in State Hiring

Order Aims to Encourage More State Job Applicants, Help State Agencies Recruit Skilled Workers

Governor Roy Cooper today issued Executive Order No. 278 to encourage more North Carolinians to apply for state jobs and to help state government recruit additional skilled workers.



**COLORADO**  
Governor Jared Polis

About Key Issues Press Releases

### Gov. Polis Takes Innovative Action to Attract New & Skilled Talent to State Workforce

THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 2022

## Maryland will no longer require four-year degrees for thousands of state jobs

March 16, 2022

FROM **WAMU 88.5**  
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY RADIO

## Governor Shapiro Signs First Executive Order, Announcing 92 Percent of Commonwealth Jobs Do Not Require a Four-Year Degree

January 18, 2023

## OPM Releases Skills-Based Hiring Guidance

**Guidance encourages federal agencies to value applicants based on what they can do — regardless of where they learned it**

### Gov. Cox launches skills-first hiring initiative for state government

SALT LAKE CITY (Dec. 13, 2022) – Utah Gov. Spencer Cox announced the state's efforts to eliminate the requirement for bachelor's degrees in its employee recruitment and emphasized similar support by local governments and the private sector.

# Case study: MA Department of Labor Standards

## **Identify target roles:** *Industrial Safety & Health Inspector*

- Low levels of applicants
- Aging workforce
- Lack of diversity
- Very specialized skill set

## **Involve key stakeholders:**

- Bring in the union
- Build buy-in with existing staff

## **Reconsider degree requirements & build a skills-based description:**

- New role: Apprentice Health & Safety Instructor

- Previous role required a BA; new role required a HS diploma and an interest in the field
- “No experience? No problem. The apprenticeship is designed to provide you the education and experience you need to succeed.”

## **Build recruitment partnerships:**

- Target workers outside of traditional sources

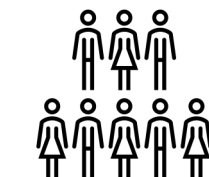
## **Invest in worker training:**

- New apprentice program registered w/state
- Apprentices engage in on the job training & classroom instruction
- Upon finishing program, graduate to fill ISH role & receive commensurate wage increase



# Outcomes: MA Department of Labor Standards

- **Significant increase in applicants: 6-10 -> 280**
- **3 new apprentices with different professional backgrounds, levels of educations, reflecting the diversity of the Commonwealth**
- **All graduated apprentice program**



“ I changed my career to something I really enjoy, not knowing that I would end up there.... That’s only because I was an apprentice, because I wouldn’t have had those safety qualifications they were looking for. I only got those because of the apprenticeship program ... They weren’t looking for someone who had experience; they wanted to grow somebody.”

# Solutions: how can you implement this at your agency?

## 1. Involve key stakeholders

- Executive level champions, unions, agency leaders, workforce development partners, & more

## 2. Identify target job roles

- What jobs are hard to hire for and why?
- Are they standardized?
- Are they a good fit for on the job training?
- Do they need a credential?

## 3. Reconsider degree requirements to build a skills-based job description

- Review job description language & articulate skills needed

## 4. Build recruitment partnerships

- Proactive recruitment
- Community groups, unions, workforce development orgs, etc

## 5. Invest in worker training

- Expect to train workers, particularly for highly specialized jobs



Want to talk further?

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