

HATTAWAY COMMUNICATIONS

PATHWAYS & WORKFORCE FUNDER COLLABORATIVE

A New Way to Talk About Skills-Based Hiring

Research Insights, Narrative Framework, and Practical Tools for Employer Communications

November 2026

Helping Employers Move from Interest to Action

Hiring managers want to build strong, reliable teams. They take pride in recognizing talent, making good decisions, and finding employees who can contribute today and grow with the company.

And many already see the potential of skills-based hiring. Our research found that nearly four in five hiring managers recognize that positions in their companies could be filled by people with nondegree training. More than three in four are willing to advocate for skills-based hiring internally.

But recognizing the value of an approach and feeling confident putting it into practice are two different things.

Hiring managers are accountable for the people they bring onto their teams. They may see the potential of skills-based hiring but hesitate to depart from familiar practices without knowing they can make good decisions—and defend those decisions to others.

That's where communications can make a difference.

This workbook builds on the research, narrative framework, and practical resources developed through the Pathways and Workforce Funders Collaborative. It offers three guiding principles for helping employers move from interest to action, along with tools you can adapt to your own communications.

Three Guiding Principles for Employer Communications

1. Build Confidence

Show employers how they can assess candidates' skills and make informed hiring decisions.

More than half of hiring managers want information about how to assess the skills of candidates without bachelor's degrees.

Our communications can help employers see how skills are demonstrated and evaluated. Share concrete examples of structured interviews, practical assessments, work samples, or apprenticeships. Show how employers are using these approaches to make hiring decisions.

The goal isn't simply to tell employers that skills-based hiring works. It's to help them understand how they can do it well.

2. Equip Them to Make the Case

Give employers evidence and stories they can use to build support for skills-based hiring.

Hiring managers may personally support skills-based hiring but need to persuade colleagues or leadership before changing established practices.

In our research, 57% of hiring managers wanted data showing how other companies benefited from skills-based hiring, while half wanted talking points they could share internally.

Help them make the business case by gathering and communicating evidence of outcomes employers care about:

- **Faster hiring:** Reduced time-to-hire, fewer unfilled positions, or a larger pool of qualified candidates.
- **Stronger retention:** Lower turnover, longer employee tenure, or improved retention among skills-based hires.
- **Better performance:** Job performance, productivity, supervisor assessments, or employees successfully taking on new responsibilities.
- **Cost savings:** Reduced recruitment costs, lower turnover-related expenses, or improved return on training investments.
- **Long-term growth:** Employee advancement, promotions, and opportunities to develop talent from within.

Pair these proof points with stories from employers who have tried skills-based hiring. Show what they changed, what happened, and what others can learn from their experience.

Use actual, documented results whenever possible. If you don't yet have the evidence, these outcomes can guide what you begin measuring.

3. Make It Easy to Say Yes

Show employers how skills-based hiring can build on what they're already doing.

Employers don't have to choose between degrees and skills—or overhaul their hiring practices overnight.

Our research suggests that employers are more receptive when skills-based hiring is presented as a complement to familiar approaches. As one roundtable participant put it, "Both/and is doable."

Communications can reinforce that message by showing how employers are already evaluating skills, where they could expand those practices, and what a manageable first step might look like.

Rather than asking for an organization-wide commitment, invite employers to explore one position, one hiring challenge, or one new way of evaluating candidates.

The Narrative Framework

A Research-Backed Way to Tell a More Compelling Story

People are more likely to pay attention to, remember, and share information when it connects to their goals and helps them see a path toward achieving them.

That's the thinking behind our Narrative Framework. Grounded in behavioral science and audience research, it organizes communications around a familiar story structure: people pursuing something important, facing a challenge, and finding a way forward.

The key is to **make your audience the protagonist of the story—not your organization, program, or solution.**

For employer communications, that means starting with hiring managers and what they want to accomplish. Skills-based hiring enters the story as a way to help them succeed.

The framework has five elements:

Element	The question it answers
 People	Identify the audience at the center of the story.
 Goal	Connect with what they want to achieve.
 **Problem**	Show what's standing in their way.
 Solution	Explain how your approach can help them overcome that challenge.
 Call To Action	Give them a clear, meaningful way to move forward.

This structure helps people make sense of new information by connecting it to something they already care about. It also gives communications a coherent story that can be adapted across messages, presentations, outreach, and other materials.

Our Research-Based Employer Narrative

Based on our research with hiring managers, we developed the following narrative to help communicate the value of skills-based hiring.

Element	Employer Narrative
People	Hiring Managers Looking for Proven Performers
Goal	Build Strong, Reliable Teams That Grow with the Company
Problem	Good Candidates Passed Over. Key Jobs Stay Empty.
Solution	Skill-Based Hiring Helps Employers Find Great Talent, Faster
Call To Action	The Right Skills. The Right Hire.

The One-Minute Message for Employers

The One-Minute Message brings the five elements of the narrative together into a short, compelling story.

Use it as a starting point for your communications, adapting the language to your audience, organization, and work.

People

Hiring managers know that building strong teams starts with finding the right people. They take pride in spotting talent, making smart choices, and helping their teams succeed.

Goal

They want teams that work well together, trust each other, and grow stronger over time.

Problem

But today's hiring often focuses on formal credentials, like a college degree, because they are easier to compare than skills and experience. Because of this, strong candidates can be missed, and important jobs stay open longer than they should.

Solution

Skill-based hiring offers another way. It emphasizes what truly drives success: a person's experience, abilities, and motivation, which all translate into job-ready skills.

Call to Action

And it works. Employers across the country are using skill-based hiring to make better decisions and build stronger, more reliable teams.

By focusing on skills and experience—not education alone—companies can find more qualified people and create teams built for long-term success.

Your Employer Narrative

Use the framework to develop a narrative for the employers you work with. Start with what they want to achieve, then show how your work can help them get there.

Narrative Framework	Your Narrative
 **People:** Who are you trying to reach?	
 **Goal:** What do they want to accomplish?	
 **Problem:** What's standing in their way?	
 **Solution:** How can your work help?	
 **Call to Action:** What's a useful next step?	

Gathering the Evidence

Build a Business Case Employers Can Share

Hiring managers need credible evidence they can use to make the case for skills-based hiring within their organizations.

Use this worksheet to identify the strongest proof points from your work—and where you may need additional evidence.

Business Outcome	Your Evidence or Example
Faster hiring: Time-to-hire, vacancies filled, qualified applicants	
Stronger retention: Retention rates, employee tenure, turnover	
Better performance: Productivity, job performance, supervisor feedback	
Cost savings: Recruitment costs, training costs, documented savings	
Long-term growth: Promotions, advancement, employee development	

Which proof points will matter most to the employers you're trying to reach?

What evidence could you begin collecting to strengthen your case?

Strategic Stories

Help Employers See Themselves in the Story

A compelling story can make the difference between understanding an idea and imagining yourself putting it into practice.

In our message testing, exposure to Strategic Stories and proof points increased the share of employers who were *very interested* in advocating for skills-based hiring internally by eight percentage points.

Strategic Stories build on the same five-part Narrative Framework. They show a relatable person pursuing a goal, confronting a challenge, taking action, and achieving a result.

For employer communications, the most useful stories don't simply celebrate a successful hire. They show **how a hiring manager made a different decision—and why it worked.**

Employers' Strategic Stories Framework

Narrative Element	What to capture
 **People**	Introduce a hiring manager responsible for building a strong team.
 **Goal**	Show what they wanted to achieve for their team or organization.
 **Problem**	Describe the hiring challenge they faced and what made change difficult.
 **Solution**	Explain what they did differently, how they evaluated skills, and what happened.
 **Call to Action**	Show where the choice took them and what opportunities it opened up. What might another learner take from their experience?

The most persuasive details are often the ones that reveal the decision-making process: What made the employer hesitant? What gave them confidence? How did they get started?

Those are the details that help another hiring manager think, *I could see us doing that.*

Stories About Employers

Help Employers See Themselves in the Story

Use this worksheet to develop a Strategic Story from your work with an employer.

Story Element	Your Story
People: Who is the hiring manager?	
Goal: What were they trying to achieve?	
Problem: What challenge stood in their way?	
Solution: What did they do differently, and what happened?	
Call to Action: What could other employers learn or try?	

Evidence to Strengthen Your Story

What results, quotes, or examples could make this story more credible and compelling?

Putting It to Work

Strengthen One Employer Communication

Choose an employer-facing communication you're already developing—an outreach email, presentation, webpage, talking points, or success story.

Consider what would help your audience take the next step.

- **Build confidence:** Have we shown how employers can recognize and evaluate skills?
- **Equip them to make the case:** Have we included credible business outcomes or stories they can share?
- **Make it easy to say yes:** Have we offered a manageable, practical next step?

The communication I want to strengthen:

One change I'll make:

Find additional research, tested messages, and adaptable communications resources at PathwaysLibrary.org

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