

**SKILLUP**



Opportunity  
@Work

June 2026

CASE STUDY:

# Bridging the Discovery- to-Action Gap in Public Sector Hiring



Featuring Public Sector STARS (from left to right):  
Winston H., Cherri M., and Jason G.

## Context

The public sector relies on a strong workforce to deliver essential services and support local communities. Persistent vacancies—worsened by the aftermath of the 2020 pandemic and rooted in longer-term trends dating back to the Great Recession—have left state and local governments struggling to fill critical roles.<sup>1</sup>

As government agencies grapple with hiring challenges, an opportunity gap remains clear: more than 70 million workers in the US are skilled through alternative routes (STARS), instead of a bachelor's degree. STARS have gained skills through military service, community college, certificate programs and bootcamps, apprenticeships, or on-the-job experience, preparing them with the skills needed to fill public sector roles.

To address hiring challenges in the public sector, SkillUp partnered with Opportunity@Work, a recognized leader in the skills-based hiring movement, to enhance its platform by spotlighting "Gateway" public sector roles—positions that do not require a four-year degree and unlock career pathways to mobility for STARS. By upgrading job search tools and landing pages with storytelling and personalized recommendations, the project aimed to shift perceptions of government work and inspire action to apply.

As part of this 2025 pilot, the team also consulted with state partners in Arizona, California, and Colorado—members of Opportunity@Work's 2025 Transformers in the Public Sector Cohort—to test strategies to increase awareness of and engagement with public sector careers, identify hiring challenges, and design resources, such as an application guide, tailored to help STARS overcome them.



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<sup>1</sup> Opportunity@Work. (2025). Activating talent in the public sector: The STAR mobility compass report. [https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/677c2459dcf44df291d3ed9b/68dbd12624c5dfaf96355c36\\_Public%20Sector%20STAR%20Mobility%20Compass%20Report\\_final%20092525.pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/677c2459dcf44df291d3ed9b/68dbd12624c5dfaf96355c36_Public%20Sector%20STAR%20Mobility%20Compass%20Report_final%20092525.pdf)

## The Challenge

Public sector careers face unique and compounding barriers to entry—many of which are amplified by today’s political, economic, and media climate.

Historically, government roles are perceived as:

- Degree-gated, difficult to access without connections
- Opaque in day-to-day responsibilities and growth paths
- Slow to hire, with unclear timelines and processes
- Complex application requirements that create barriers to entry

At the same time, public sector employment is highly sensitive to trust, framing, and external sentiment. News coverage, election cycles, and seasonal timing can significantly influence how workers perceive how the government works.

**Beyond awareness, an additional challenge arose related to readiness: how to help workers feel informed, confident, and motivated enough to take action, rather than passively exploring careers in the public sector.**



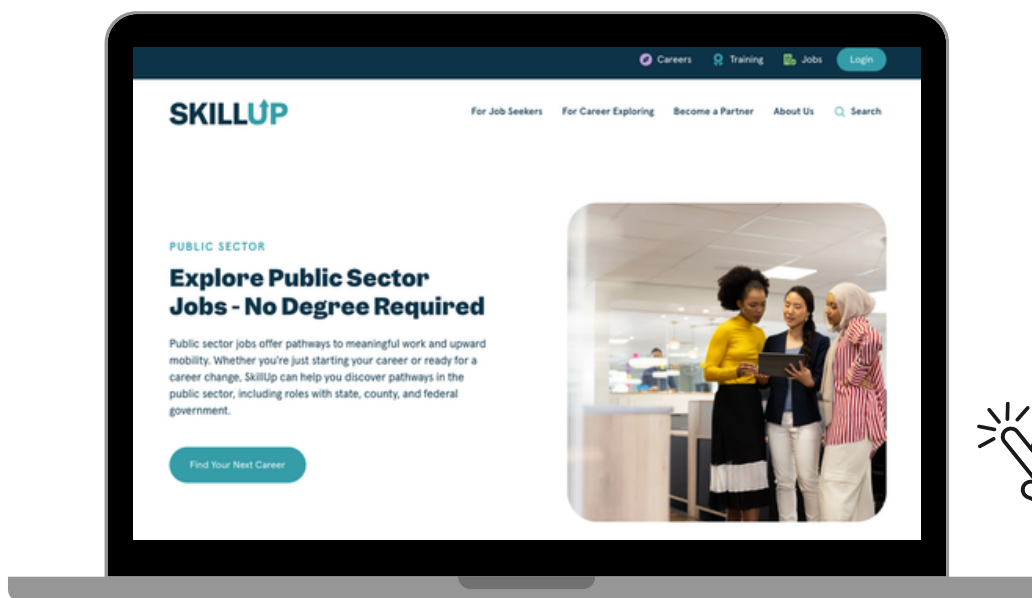
## The Solution

SkillUp focused on increasing visibility and credibility for public sector careers by surfacing them as skills-based, worker-first opportunities within our platform and public sector landing page.

To increase awareness of public sector jobs and shift STARs from awareness to action, we highlighted:

- Public sector roles in in-demand fields like business, healthcare, skilled trades, technology and logistics.
- Benefits of public sector jobs including job stability, competitive benefits, career advancement opportunities and role diversity
- Stories of STARs who successfully made transitions to careers in the public sector to take a peek behind the curtain and give visibility into these roles
- Tools and resources to support STARs from career exploration to application

**The solution centered on meeting workers where they already were—curious but cautious—and giving them the context they need to evaluate fit and dispel notions they have about the public sector landscape.**



Click to access public sector career exploration page



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The pilot aimed to address the dual hiring challenge and career navigation challenge in the public sector. Leveraging SkillUp as a job board and career exploration tool exclusively for STARs, we aimed to connect public sector employers with STAR talent, bring greater awareness to public sector career opportunities, change perceptions about public sector jobs, and support STARs in applying to and securing public sector jobs. Through this partnership, we tested innovative ways to source public sector talent, storytelling campaigns to help STARs see themselves in public sector jobs, and tools and resources to equip STARs with understanding and applying to public sector jobs.

**JALENCIA WADE**

Senior Manager, Public Sector and Policy | Opportunity@Work



## Our Approach

To test interest, intent, and conversion across the public sector job funnel, we launched a multi-month campaign focused on four strategic pillars. These tactics were designed to reduce friction and provide "top-of-funnel" discovery support for STARs navigating the job search process:

### Job Catalog Enhancements

We updated our career pages to spotlight high-demand public sector roles, specifically framing them as accessible "Gateway" careers for those without four-year degrees.

### Dedicated Public Sector Landing Pages

Using the functionality in our product where users manage their account with SkillUp, we served government content to users to explore and apply for jobs.

### Personalized "For You" Recommendations

We built centralized entry points to simplify the discovery of government pathways, providing a curated experience to reduce "search fatigue."

### Multi-Channel Nurture Campaigns

We deployed targeted Email and SMS sequences designed to shift user perception by highlighting the stability, benefits, and long-term public impact of these roles.

## Our Approach (cont.)

Throughout the campaign, we closely monitored engagement signals—job views, saves, applications, and profile creation—to understand not just what users clicked, but where hesitation emerged. We also conducted a survey of our users that highlights real people's responses to sentiment around Public Sector roles.

This survey gathered feedback from users who had explored or applied to public sector roles, helping us better understand their perceptions of the sector, experiences with the hiring process, and how those factors influenced their interest in and pursuit of public sector careers.

## Meet Winston:

### From Military to Public Sector with the State of Arizona



**Sell your skills, and if there's a way that you can demonstrate those skills, try to take advantage of that opportunity...**

**WINSTON HILL**

Chief Human Resources Officer,  
Veteran, and SkillUp Advocate



[Click here to read his story](#)

[Click to listen in on his experience](#)



# The Outcomes

## 1. Behavior Shift: From Local to State-Level Interest

Initially, user activity was almost entirely confined to "city-only" employers (e.g., City of Charlotte). Following our catalog enhancements, we saw a significant expansion in employer brand awareness:

- Diversification of Employer Base: By the final period, state-level bodies (e.g., State of Washington, Texas, Maine) dominated the Top-5 employer lists.
- Alignment with "Gateway" Theory: Users shifted their focus toward skilled trades—Water Operators, Mechanics, and Construction Inspectors—validating that STARs perceive these specific technical roles as high-value, accessible career paths.



## 2. Demographic Shift: Reaching a Diverse Group of STARs

The campaign successfully evolved the audience profile from general browsers to our target talent pool:

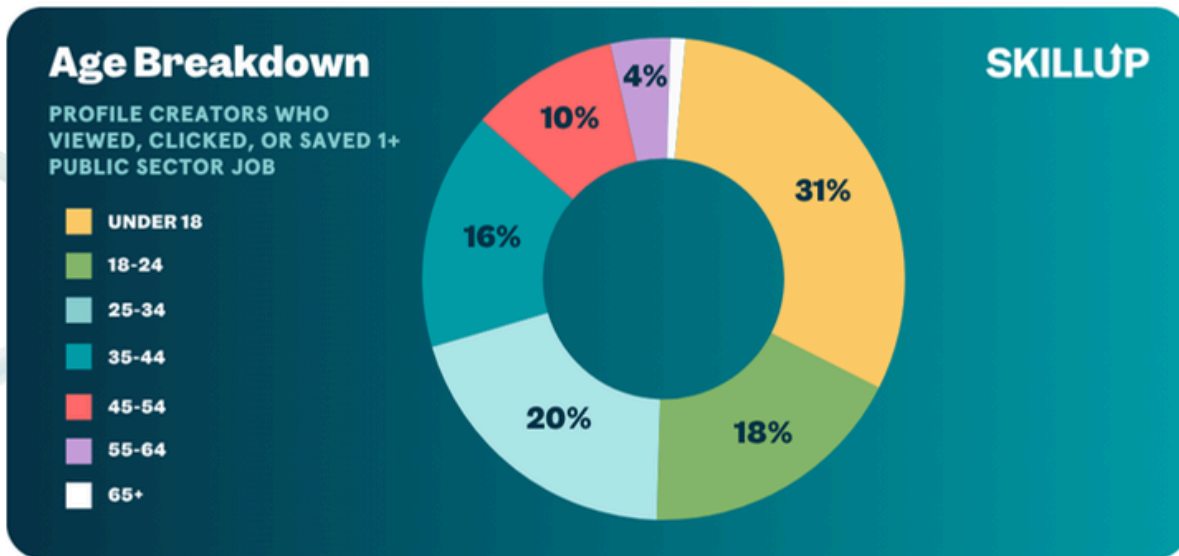
- Audience Maturity: We moved from an initial under-18 skew to a primary audience of working-age adults (18–34).
- Equity in Reach: The audience engaging with public sector opportunities included growing representation among BIPOC individuals and women, reflecting progress toward reaching a broader and more diverse talent pool.

# The Outcomes

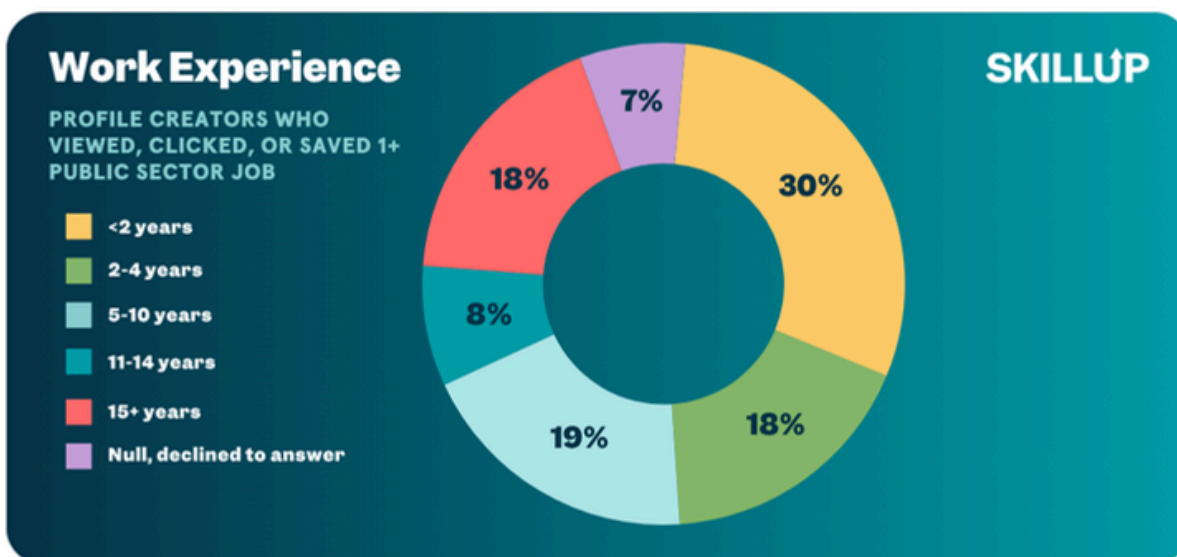
## 2. Demographic Shift: Reaching a Diverse Group of STARs (cont.)

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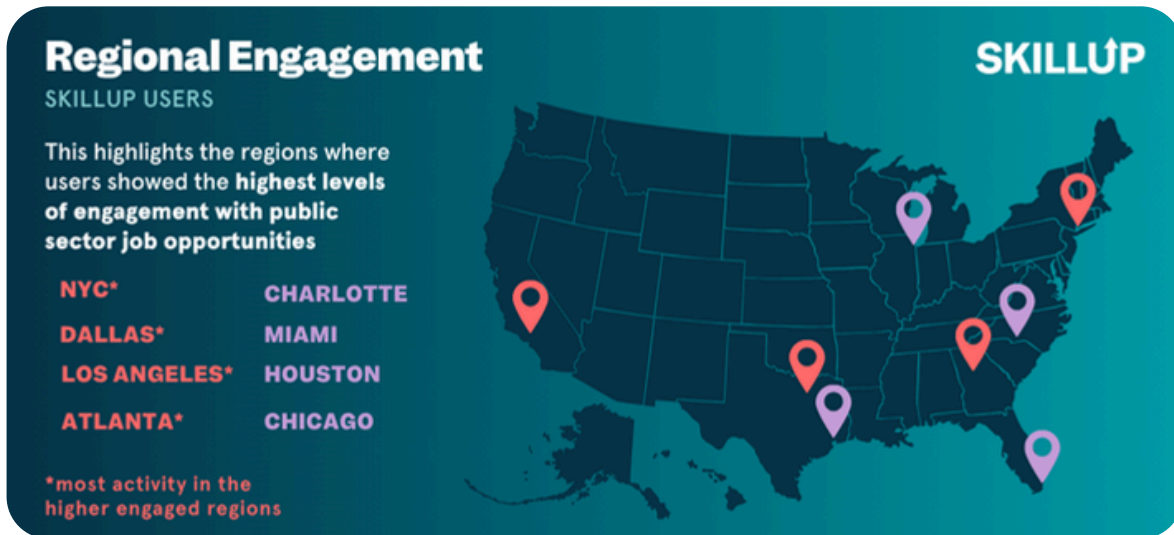
- Work Experience: 30% of users interested in public sector jobs had under two years of experience, indicating strong interest in early career explorers.



# The Outcomes

## 2. Demographic Shift: Reaching a Diverse Group of STARs (cont.)

- Regional Hubs: Engagement was most resilient in New York, Dallas, and Atlanta, which served as the core anchors for user activity throughout the pilot.



## 3. Intent Signal: Personalization as a Discovery Lever

The integration of public sector roles into the user dashboard generated hundreds of clicks per period, revealing a high baseline of intent for specific career "tracks":

- Public Safety Dominance: "Police Officer" was the #1 most viewed, saved, and applied-for role in 6 of 9 periods.



## The Outcomes

### 3. Intent Signal: Personalization as a Discovery Lever

- Sustained Interest: Despite external market fluctuations, the "For You" recommendations maintained steady engagement, proving that STARs are looking for stability when roles are surfaced contextually.

Survey Results: "Nearly half (48%) of respondents are 'very' or 'extremely interested' in public sector jobs."

### 4. The "Discovery-to-Action" Gap

The data highlighted a critical friction point where high interest (awareness) did not always translate into completed applications:

- The Conversion Cliff: The landing page initially saw very strong engagement and conversion, though performance declined over the course of the pilot.
- Passive Browsing vs. Active Intent: While interest in the roles remained steady, job saves declined over time. This suggests users were interested in exploring opportunities but may have needed additional support and guidance to navigate the complexity of government applications and move further through the decision-making process.
- Outside Influence in Play: Interest in public sector roles may also have been influenced by external factors beyond the scope of the pilot, including seasonality, labor market conditions, and broader economic trends.

Survey Results: STARs (78% of respondents) show strong interest but less confidence about fit.

## Meet Jason:

Read about Jason's Success  
Pivoting to the Public Sector

[Click here to read about his experience](#)



## What We Learned

### The “So What?”

The pilot proved that STARs are interested in these roles, but the "Discovery-to-Action" gap and external context remain a barrier. To drive hires, the strategy must shift from simple awareness to high-touch guidance that helps users navigate the friction between saving a job and clicking "Apply."

Survey Results: Most respondents (70%) agree that the hiring process for public sector jobs feels complex.

Survey Results: Unemployed job seekers are highly interested but find the process intimidating.



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“  
Working in the public sector has given me long-term stability, opportunities for growth, and meaningful work. For others considering this path, don't let a missing degree stop you. Apply even if you don't meet every requirement.”

**CHERRI MCKINNEY**  
SkillUp Advocate

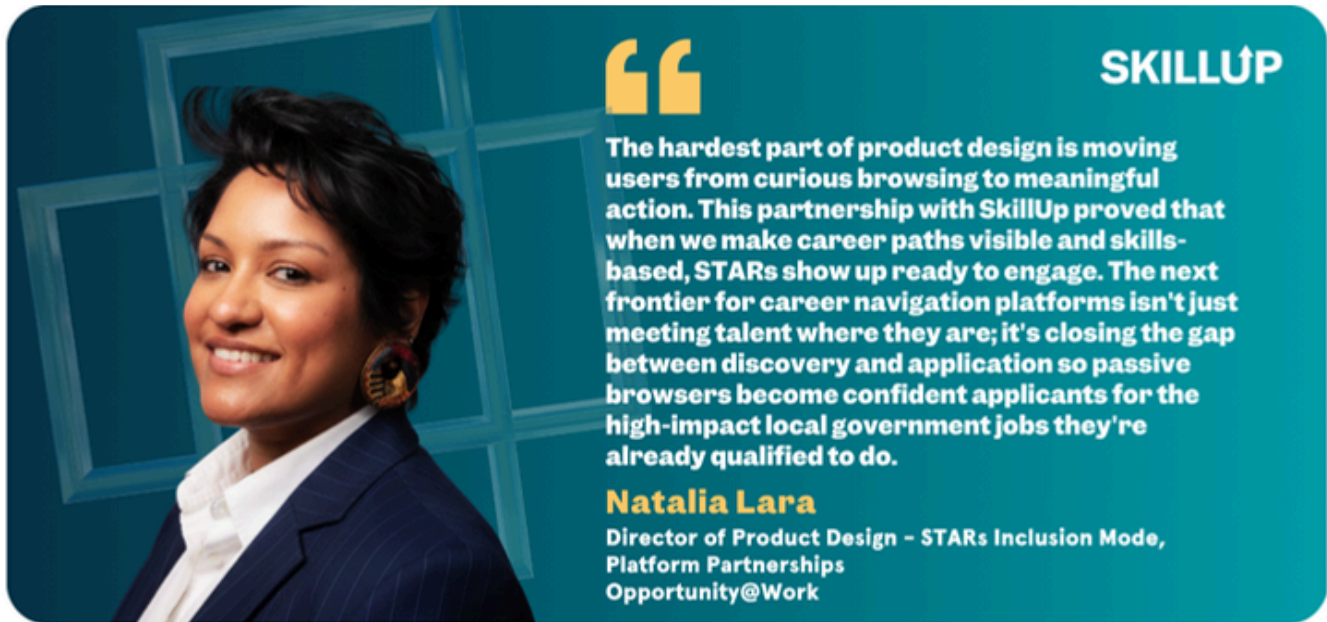
## What We Learned

### Public sector interest requires more context, not more volume

- Messaging fatigue can occur without mid-campaign refreshes
- Alignment between ads, landing pages, and featured roles is critical
- Equipping applicants with resources on skills-based hiring and the public sector application process (state government job application guide) can empower users to apply

## Public sector interest requires more context, not more volume (cont.)

- Conversion was reactive to external news cycles, suggesting that the perception of public sector work can be fragile and needs to be reinforced with consistent success stories.



Public sector job seekers exhibit a “browse now, act later” behavior, signaling the need for reassurance around hiring timelines, expectations, and career growth.

## Conclusion & Next Steps:

The pilot proved that awareness and positive perception of public sector roles among working-age STARs can be effectively generated, particularly for Gateway roles in skilled trades and public safety. While we successfully diversified the audience and expanded awareness of state-level opportunities, the action phase remains the primary challenge. Future iterations must focus on nurturing passive interest into active applications to overcome the hiring hurdles unique to the public sector environment.

This campaign validated demand while delivering actionable insight:

- Confirmed real interest in public sector roles among STARs
- Identified precise friction points in the exploration-to-application journey
- Provided clear guidance on how to refine framing, targeting, and education
- Strengthened SkillUp's approach to positioning public sector careers

## Conclusion & Next Steps (cont.):

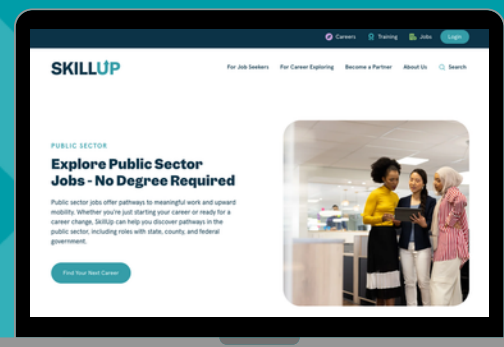
Building on these learnings, future efforts will:

- Continue to amplify the SkillUp public sector job filter by including it in our general Automation messages to all users as a product offering.
- Amplify educational content on timelines and application processes with our guide: [Unlocking Public Sector Careers For STARS: A State Government Application Guide for STARS](#)
- Refresh creative and landing page messaging
- Continue to learn why public sector roles interest our audience

## Check out our Public Sector Career Exploration Page:

FIND INFORMATION LIKE...

- STARS success stories
- [State government job application guide](#)
- Resource articles
- Job postings and more!



Click to access the public sector career exploration page



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[www.skillup.org](http://www.skillup.org)

