

No college required: County removes need for degree from some jobs

By Mary Ann Barton Apr. 15, 2019



Facing a shortage of candidates and hoping to attract a wider range of applicants, Boulder County removed the college degree requirement from 84 job categories.

For years, people who didn't go to college or didn't finish college often hit stumbling blocks when applying for certain jobs.

In Boulder County, Colo., depending on their work skills and experience, they might be welcomed with open arms.

"I think we are one of the first counties to be dipping our toe into this water," said Julie Yager, the county's HR director.

The county recently removed college degree requirements from 84 of 375 of its job categories. Some of the jobs that will not require a degree, as of last month, now include agricultural resources specialist, budget analyst, communications specialist, geographic information systems manager, human services program manager, law enforcement records manager, volunteer coordinator, web applications developer and wildfire mitigation specialist.

The change has two goals — increasing applications and increasing diversity of the county workforce, she said. A county taskforce began looking at the issue about five years ago and about a year ago, the HR department began looking at its job descriptions, seeking advice from each department on whether degrees were necessary.

For the position requirements that changed to "no college required," the salaries will remain the same, she noted.

With a 3.8 percent unemployment rate across the nation, finding workers to fill jobs can be a challenge for companies, as well as counties. In 16 states, including Colorado, the rate is even lower.

By removing degree requirements from some of its job descriptions, Boulder County will likely see more applicants, but it's too soon to tell, Yager said, since the change was just implemented last month. Boulder County Commissioner Deb Gardner is optimistic.

“We think this is an important step to take in today’s competitive job market to help our departments attract larger pools of qualified candidates for their open positions,” she said. “We believe this change will allow a more diverse group of highly capable candidates to apply who may have extraordinary experience and were previously excluded from applying simply because they are lacking a degree,” Gardner noted.

The county is following in the footsteps of companies such as Google, Apple and IBM which no longer require applicants to have a college degree. Apple CEO Tim Cook has said there is a “mismatch” between skills taught in college and skills needed by businesses.

In Oregon, Gov. Kate Brown (D) and child welfare leaders there want to remove college degree requirements for caseworkers to increase workforce diversity and the candidate pool for openings they’re struggling to fill.

A bill has been introduced in the House to repeal a mandate requiring degrees for the job.

Back in Boulder County, the county Human Resources team reviewed all of its jobs with degree requirements.

The review was part of the county’s recruitment, hiring and retention efforts and further efforts to support and sustain equity, cultural responsiveness and inclusion — part of the county’s Guiding Values and Strategic Priorities.

The degree requirements for some jobs were found to be unnecessary for essential job performance, according to the Fair Labor Standards Act, according to the county.

Meanwhile, county hiring managers are undergoing training to screen and hire candidates without degrees. The county’s HR department will help them by:

Rewriting job postings with required and preferred competencies and skills.

Identifying true competencies absolutely required for positions.

Providing training and/or coaching to help hiring managers conduct skills-based interviewing and hiring.

When proposing a change to education requirements, it is important to be prepared with other valid and reliable means of selecting candidates, the Society for Human Resource Management reported.

“After all, the goal is not to lower hiring standards, it’s to focus on the methods of assessment that directly relate to job performance,” the group states.

Earning power varies nationally between those with a degree and those without a degree. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in early 2019 that the median weekly earnings for workers with a high school diploma were \$730 in 2018; for workers with a bachelor's degree, the median was \$1,198.

ABOUT MARY ANN BARTON [\(Full Bio\)](#)

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Mary Ann Barton is the County News editor and senior staff writer and is returning to NACo after previously working at the association. She comes to NACo after covering local news for Patch.com in Northern Virginia.



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