

Higher Education and Industry Leaders Advance Regional Talent Strategy at NASH's Talent Readiness-New England Forum

New England public higher education systems and industry partners align around coordinated action to address region's high-demand workforce needs

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- The [National Association of Higher Education Systems \(NASH\)](#) convened leaders from across its seven public higher education systems in New England, alongside industry and workforce partners, on June 25, 2026, for the Talent Readiness–New England (TRNE) Leadership Forum. TRNE is a first-of-its-kind multi-state effort aimed to tighten the alignment between higher education programs and regional workforce demands.



Hosted by the [Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner \(RIOPC\)](#), the Forum convened system heads, senior academic and workforce leaders, and industry partners to

accelerate shared regional talent pipelines grounded in employer needs and real-time workforce pressures, including demographic shifts and skills mismatches.

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A Turning Point for Regional Collaboration

Following a foundational period in which [NASH's Office of Workforce Development](#) gathered insights from individual state systems representing more than 1.1 million students,

the Forum launched TRNE into its next phase: coordinated regional action to address shared workforce shortages in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and the blue and marine economy.

"True innovation in workforce development requires us to look beyond state lines," said Nancy L. Zimpher, President of NASH. "By leveraging collective impact, New England's public higher education systems can address talent shortages at a scale no single institution or state could achieve alone. This forum represents a unified commitment to the power of systemness."

"Rhode Island is proud to host this pivotal gathering of minds," said Shannon Gilkey, Rhode Island Postsecondary Commissioner. "The economic challenges facing our region don't stop at state borders, and neither should our solutions. Hosting this forum reinforces our shared belief that a stronger, more resilient New England workforce relies on deeply integrated regional partnerships."

Key Outcomes and Next Steps

Leaders discussed workforce needs in healthcare and advanced manufacturing, and explored how regional coordination can address challenges including fragmented data systems, uneven employer engagement, and scaling programs across state lines.

Outcomes include:

- Regional priority areas for coordinated action
- A shared regional framework for talent development
- Commitment from leaders to advance implementation

"The rapidly changing workforce needs in healthcare require agility on the part of higher education systems" said Debbi Perkul, Consultant, Impact Workforce Strategies, Healthcare Anchor Network. "To close crucial skills gaps in the healthcare sector, businesses need a direct, unified pipeline into higher education. This forum is a critical next step, giving employers a seat at the table to help set collaboration priorities and co-design career pathways that meet real-time market demands."

"We are navigating an unprecedented shift in how the world works, driven by automation and artificial intelligence," said Colleen Thouez, Vice President for Workforce Development at NASH. "Our workforce needs to be reskilled and upskilled at a pace we've never seen before. Today's conversations proved that New England's higher education systems are ready to meet that urgency head-on, ensuring our students and our economy remain competitive in a rapidly changing world."

TRNE's next phase will advance targeted regional pilots, with convenings through year-end to build infrastructure for implementation through 2028.

For more information about TRNE, visit <https://nash.edu/workforce/>

About NASH

Founded in 1979, the National Association of Higher Education Systems (NASH) works to advance the role of multi-campus systems and the concept of systemness to create a more vibrant and sustainable higher education sector. NASH represents the 110 public higher

education systems in the U.S., which include more than 1,450 institutions and serve 16.2 million students nationwide. Learn more at www.nash.edu.

About the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner

Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner supports the work of the Board of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education in providing an excellent, accessible and affordable system of higher education designed to improve the overall educational attainment of the citizens of Rhode Island, support economic development, and enrich the civic, social and cultural life of all living in the state of Rhode Island. Go to riopc.edu for additional information.

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