

Leadership Forum for Regional Talent Strategy | Summary Report

June 25th, 2026 • Rhode Island

Convened by NASH and hosted by the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC)

Executive Summary

Hosted by Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC), the Talent Readiness-New England Leadership Forum took place on June 25th in Providence, Rhode Island, at the Rhode Island Nursing Education Center. It brought together leaders of public higher education systems and industry in two key sectors, along with other state, regional, and national partners, to examine where regional collaboration could help New England address shared workforce challenges. The Forum tested the region's commitment to a multi-state, multi-system approach; validated the need for shared action in healthcare and advanced manufacturing; and began to define the structures, relationships, and evidence base required to move from alignment to implementation. This Forum moved TRNE from Phase I, which focused on collecting input from each participating system about its workforce development challenges and opportunities, and into Phase II, translating shared understanding into action.

The central conclusion is that New England needs a regional plan for talent readiness, and that key actors are ready to be part of building one. TRNE's systems collectively serve a significant learner population, regional employers are already operating across state lines, and the workforce challenges facing New England are too interconnected for any one state or system to address alone. TRNE is being designed to organize that shared work, with NASH serving as a neutral convener and capacity partner as we move to Phase II.



“True innovation in workforce development requires us to look beyond state lines. 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.”

Nancy Zimpher, President, NASH

Key Takeaways

A regional framework for problems that require regional action.

TRNE will focus first on challenges that are difficult to solve through individual programs or state-level action alone. These include shared labor-market data, clinical placement capacity, employer signaling, equipment access, cross-state pathway visibility, accreditation and licensing barriers, and the coordination of employer engagement. TRNE is not only responding to immediate workforce pressures but also building a concrete collective vision for public systems to address regional economic and learner mobility challenges, including by connecting relevant partners and complementary work that is already underway.

A dedicated unit for moving from alignment to implementation.

Regional collaboration needs more than goodwill. TRNE will be built around addressing a clear set of challenges defined in part by industry and learner needs. The work will require dedicated capacity, trusted convening tables, useful data (not 'perfect'), and a resource strategy that supports implementation beyond a single convening. The Forum reinforced that NASH is a neutral and natural convener for TRNE during this incubation period.

A stronger way for industry and higher education to work together.

Healthcare and advanced manufacturing partners need consistent and credible ways to engage with public higher education systems. TRNE should build sector tables that allow employers and systems to streamline points of contact, identify bottlenecks, share information, and shape solutions connected to hiring, training, retention, advancement, and regional competitiveness. To avoid duplicative efforts, TRNE may also start by connecting and expanding existing sector tables active across New England.

A shared evidence base that supports action.

TRNE should begin with useful data, not wait for perfect data. Phase II should include an initial regional labor-market snapshot in healthcare and advanced manufacturing, paired with stakeholder mapping and clearer shared metrics. The purpose is to define problems, guide decisions, and support conversations with public leaders and funders.

A broader coalition with the capacity to move the work.

This next phase will require sustained leadership from public higher education systems and active participation from employers, state agencies, workforce boards, economic development leaders, legislators, accreditors, licensing bodies, K-12 partners, learners, and funders. TRNE will broaden the tent deliberately and with attention to preferred sequencing, bringing in the right partners for the right decisions. At the same time, TRNE will provide participating systems a structured way to build their own workforce capacity: clearer priorities, shared tools, regional evidence, peer learning, employer engagement structures, and support from NASH as a neutral convener and capacity partner.



Next Meeting: TRNE Workforce Development Leads Meeting, October 1, 2026 | Wells, Maine

Please note that participation in this meeting is limited to designated workforce development leads representing each participating system, with a small number of additional participants invited by NASH based on their specific role in the meeting.

For further details, including session overviews, strategic takeaways, and next steps, please see the Forum Summary Report.