

Leadership Forum for Regional Talent Strategy

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.

What TRNE Can Build Next

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-based tables that allow employers and systems to 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.

Introduction

Purpose and Structure of the Forum

Commissioner Shannon Gilkey, Rhode Island Commissioner of Postsecondary Education, kicked off the **opening remarks**, by situating the TRNE Leadership Forum in a state and region where talent challenges already cross institutional and state boundaries. A keynote address by Amy Loyd, President and CEO of All4Ed and former Assistant Secretary for the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education at the U.S. Department of Education, reinforced higher education's public purpose and its role in connecting learners, workers, institutions, employers, and communities. Colleen Thouez, NASH's Vice President for Workforce Development, outlined the main components of TRNE highlighting it as a timely framework through which participating systems can organize shared regional work.

Kristen Fox, Chief Executive Officer of the Business-Higher Education Forum, moderated the first discussion session, **"Lessons from Other Regional Models,"** which featured Heather McKay of Strada Education Foundation, Ben Magill of the Texas Talent Accelerator, and Ahnna Smith of Education Strategy Group. The panel examined how other regions have moved workforce development initiatives from aspiration to implementation through shared infrastructure, employer engagement, data use, governance, and dedicated capacity.

The two **industry dialogues**, offering one-on-one exchange between industry and higher education leadership, tested those lessons against the realities of TRNE's priority sectors: **healthcare** and **advanced manufacturing**. The healthcare dialogue, moderated by Katherine Gebremedhin, Lead of Strategic Engagement for U.S. Policy and Practice at World Education Services, examined clinical placement capacity, program costs, faculty constraints, learner barriers, employer needs, and the policy and accreditation conditions shaping the region's healthcare workforce. The advanced manufacturing dialogue, moderated by Michael Thomas, President and Chief Executive Officer of the New England Board of Higher Education, examined talent gaps, equipment access, work-based learning, employer signaling, and the need for clearer structures through which industry and higher education can work together. The **lunch conversation** between Jeff Strohl, Director of the Georgetown University

Center on Education and the Workforce, and Jim Johnsen, Chief Systemness Officer at NASH, connected labor-market evidence with required transformations in education through adaptive leadership. The discussion reinforced that higher education and workforce development are not separate domains. From land-grant institutions to Pell, public higher education has long been tied to economic opportunity, workforce preparation, and mobility. Public systems are equipped for moments of transition: to absorb change, serve learners through economic disruption, and help states respond to generational shifts in work and opportunity. TRNE builds on that history by asking how systems can act together in a labor market that is increasingly regional, technologically dynamic, and unevenly accessible to learners and workers.

The afternoon working session, “**From Opportunity to Action,**” moved the Forum from concept to design. Facilitated by Rachel Kahn, Senior Strategic Impact Director at Education Design Lab, the session asked participants to review priority areas, identify what other stakeholders need to be part of Phase II, and propose practical actions for the next 60–90 days.

The Forum closed **with reflections and next steps** from Rob Anderson, President of the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO); Nancy Zimpher, President of NASH; and Commissioner Shannon Gilkey. The closing underscored the significance of the moment. TRNE is a disruptive and critically important initiative for the participating systems and the region, and it will require trust, resources, dedicated capacity, and sustained leadership to move from alignment to implementation.

The sections below summarize the key discussions held during the Forum, in the order in which they took place: Lessons from Other Regional Models, the Healthcare and Advanced Manufacturing industry dialogues, Labor Market Data and Leadership, From Opportunity to Action, and Closing Reflections.



Lessons From Other Regional Models

The regional models panel gave participants a practical frame for starting to shape TRNE’s Phase II. The strongest message was that regional workforce partnerships need a clear starting point. The work should begin with a shared problem that is specific enough to organize action, visible enough for systems, industry partners, and public leaders to recognize, and grounded enough in evidence to support decisions.

The panel also emphasized that regional collaboration should build on existing work. Regional collaboration should connect state, system, industry, and partner assets rather than create another disconnected initiative. Durable regional work usually depends on aligning existing efforts, reducing fragmentation, and identifying a trusted entity that can help partners coordinate across institutional, state, and sector boundaries. Dedicated capacity is essential. Regional coordination requires people whose job is to advance the work, prepare decisions, sustain communication, and follow through between meetings.



Key Takeaways

- Start with a narrow set of clear, shared problems.
- Build from existing state, system, industry, and partner assets.
- Use a neutral convenor that both systems and industry can trust.
- Begin with available data and improve the evidence base over time.
- Engage industry partners early in defining the problem.
- Resource the work beyond convening and planning, with philanthropic seed funding and other sustainable funding sources.
- Identify early proof cases that demonstrate the value of regional collaboration.

The panel also reinforced that regional collaboration needs to show value quickly. TRNE should identify early proof cases that demonstrate why a regional approach matters and gives systems, industry partners, and funders a reason to continue investing time and resources. Early proof can help build trust, clarify incentives, and show where multi-state collaboration can solve problems that individual systems or states cannot address as effectively on their own. A regional approach is especially important because New England's labor markets already cross state lines in many cases, while governance, funding, policy, and accountability structures remain largely state-based. TRNE is being built in response to that reality. The challenge is to organize regional action in ways that strengthen economic competitiveness, respect state-specific priorities, and create practical value for each participating system.

The discussion of data was especially important. Regional initiatives do not need perfect data to begin the work. A practical approach is to use available data carefully, make decisions where the evidence is strong enough to support action, and improve the data environment as the work matures.



Industry Dialogue: Healthcare



Key Takeaways

- Develop a regional clinical placement and capacity strategy that maps current placement capacity, identifies bottlenecks, and clarifies where systems and employers can coordinate more effectively.
- Build a shared healthcare workforce evidence base that helps TRNE partners understand regional shortages, program capacity, clinical placement constraints, learner barriers, and employer demand.
- Build and maintain a repository of healthcare workforce policy and partnership models, including examples of cross-sector alliance-building that have helped states advance legislative or regulatory change.
- Identify policy, accreditation, and licensing barriers that limit pathway expansion, while preserving quality, safety, and professional standards.
- Expand early healthcare career exposure and pathway visibility, especially in middle and high school, so learners understand the full range of healthcare roles and the steps required to enter them.
- Expand and test earn-and-learn models, including apprenticeships and other work-based learning approaches that reduce financial risk for adult learners and other priority populations (for example, foreign-trained professionals, justice-involved individuals, people in recovery, and rural learners).
- Test these priorities against employer demand, institutional capacity, available equipment, and state policy conditions before advancing them as formal TRNE activities.

Healthcare presents one of the clearest cases for regional action. New England faces acute shortages across nursing, diagnostic imaging, behavioral health, respiratory therapy, senior care, direct service roles, and a range of other technical positions. Many training programs have demand but cannot expand because of limitations on both the higher education side: limited clinical placements [depending on institution, and location], faculty capacity, and program costs, in addition to limitations on the employment side, such as healthcare system absorption capacity.

Clinical placement capacity is a central bottleneck. A regional approach could begin by mapping where placements exist, where capacity is constrained, and where systems and employers might coordinate placements more effectively. This work should include higher education systems, healthcare employers, accreditors, licensing bodies, and state policy partners, because placement capacity is shaped by institutional requirements, costs, employer capacity, location, regulatory expectations, and program-level constraints.

Participants also highlighted the lack of general awareness about the range of healthcare careers. High school students may know about doctors and nurses, but not about diagnostic imaging, respiratory therapy, behavioral health, medical assisting, phlebotomy, surgical technology, gerontology, or non-clinical healthcare roles. Earlier exposure to the range of healthcare fields in middle school and high school, and how to enter them, could help build clearer pipelines into training programs.

The dialogue also surfaced differences across geography. Rural learners and providers face distinct challenges, including travel distance, limited program availability, and difficulty accessing clinical or practical training sites. Regional work will need to account for the realities of smaller labor markets and long travel distances. Flexible delivery, hybrid models, local practical experiences, and employer partnerships will be especially important in these contexts.

Learner barriers also require attention. Many learners are adults balancing work, education, caregiving, transportation, and financial pressures. Foreign-trained professionals, justice-involved individuals, people in recovery, rural learners, and young men underrepresented in healthcare pathways also experience friction in existing pathways. Unpaid practicums, rigid schedules, transportation barriers, and hours-based requirements can make it difficult for learners to persist. TRNE should examine where existing rules and program designs create unnecessary barriers, while maintaining quality, safety, and professional standards.

TRNE can also help systems and states learn from existing healthcare workforce policy and partnership models. The dialogue pointed to the value of documenting examples where cross-sector alliances have helped advance healthcare workforce needs, citing one example of legislative or regulatory changes related to foreign-trained workers in Massachusetts. A shared repository of these examples would give systems, state leaders, and legislators practical precedents when considering new approaches.

The dialogue included healthcare employers, employer associations, public higher education systems, workforce and policy partners, and national organizations. Participants also identified that accrediting and licensing bodies, K-12 leadership, frontline workers and learners, and legislators or policymakers should be involved in future discussions.

TRNE will explore the following healthcare-related questions:

- What healthcare workforce data can be assembled before the TRNE Workforce Development Leads Meeting, and where are the most important gaps?
- Which healthcare challenges are best addressed regionally, and which should remain state- or system-level work?
- Where are the most significant clinical placement bottlenecks, and what would make additional capacity possible?
- Which accreditation, licensing, or regulatory issues limit pathway expansion across the region?
- What existing policy or partnership models should TRNE document and share across systems and states?
- How can earn-and-learn models, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning approaches reduce learner risk while meeting employer needs?



Industry Dialogue: Advanced Manufacturing



Key Takeaways

- Develop a regional advanced manufacturing asset and capacity map that identifies relevant training equipment, facilities, programs, employer capacity, and pathway infrastructure across K-12, higher education, industry, and workforce partners.
- Build a shared advanced manufacturing workforce evidence base across small to large employers that helps TRNE partners understand regional demand, common and specialized skill needs, program capacity, equipment access, learner barriers, and opportunities for work-based learning.
- Establish clearer employer engagement structures, including trusted sector tables that reduce fragmentation and give employers a consistent way to work with education and workforce partners.
- Define what advanced manufacturing employers can share as pre-competitive data, including information about hiring needs, training gaps, skill demand, and projected growth that can inform regional planning without exposing proprietary business information.
- Expand work-based learning, internships, early college, and employer-backed pathways so learners can gain hands-on exposure to modern advanced manufacturing roles before making education and career decisions.
- Test these priorities against employer demand, institutional capacity, available equipment, and state policy conditions before advancing them as formal TRNE activities.

Advanced manufacturing presents a different but equally important case for regional coordination. The sector is central to New England's competitiveness, with defense, aerospace, robotics, clean technology, precision manufacturing, and other high-growth industries powering economic opportunity. Participants also noted that some communities carry the memory of manufacturing job loss and remain skeptical of renewed promises about the sector. TRNE's advanced manufacturing work must account for both realities: the strength of current employer demand and the need to rebuild community trust, starting with stronger communication with the public about what modern manufacturing work involves. Across the region, employers need skilled workers, but many workers new to the sector require employer-provided training and continued upskilling. Participants discussed which skills are common enough to support shared curriculum or regional credentials, and which are specific to a particular employer, facility, or technology. This distinction will be important as TRNE determines which advanced manufacturing challenges are truly regional, which are subregional, and which should remain state- or employer-specific.

Equipment access is another concrete barrier. It is crucial that students are trained on the equipment they would use in advanced manufacturing jobs, but equipment changes quickly and can be expensive to procure. Colleges and schools may struggle to invest in equipment that could become outdated or sit idle. Participants discussed asset mapping across K-12, higher education, and employers to determine what equipment exists, where it is underutilized, and how institutions could share these resources.

A key coordination problem for employers is that they often receive duplicative requests for data, participation, and reporting from higher education institutions, workforce and economic development offices, and other partners, requiring employers to dedicate significant capacity to fielding these requests—which is especially taxing for small- and medium-sized employers.

TRNE can help create more centralized and trusted sector tables where employers, training providers, systems, and workforce partners define shared problems and coordinate action. This work should build on relevant existing coordination efforts, including sector partnerships and employer engagement models already active in the region, rather than creating a parallel effort.

A regional approach also requires better information about employer demand. In advanced manufacturing, some data can be sensitive or proprietary, but not all employer information needs to be treated that way. TRNE can help define what counts as pre-competitive data: information employers can share to clarify broad hiring needs, skill gaps, training constraints, occupational demand, and future growth areas without compromising business interests. This kind of shared signal would help systems understand where common curriculum, credentials, or training capacity may be useful, and where needs are too employer- or technology-specific to standardize regionally.

Work-based learning should be central to the advanced manufacturing strategy. Learners need to see modern manufacturing environments, use relevant tools, understand workplace expectations, and encounter the range of roles available in the sector. Internships, early exposure, employer agreements, on-the-job training, and early college models can reduce risk for both learners and employers. They can also help correct outdated perceptions of manufacturing by making the work visible and concrete. As TRNE explores these models, it should also consider where employer or industry investment may be needed to support equipment, training capacity, paid work-based learning, or shared pathway infrastructure.

In Phase II, TRNE can begin by connecting assets, organizing employer input, clarifying shared data needs, and identifying where work-based learning or equipment-sharing models can be scaled. These priorities can be tested against employer demand, institutional capacity, equipment access, and policy conditions before being advanced as formal activities.

TRNE will explore the following advanced manufacturing-related questions:

- What equipment, facilities, programs, and employer assets already exist across the region, and where is there underused capacity?
- Which advanced manufacturing skill needs are common enough to support shared curriculum, credentials, or regional pathways?
- Which needs are specific to particular employers, facilities, technologies, or subregions?
- What information can employers share as pre-competitive data, and under what conditions?
- What sector-table structure would be useful enough for employers to sustain participation?
- How can TRNE facilitate the expansion of work-based learning, internships, early college, and employer-backed pathways without creating additional fragmentation?
- Where might employer or industry investment be needed to support shared training capacity, equipment access, or paid work-based learning?
- Which parts of the advanced manufacturing strategy should be regional, and which should be state- or subregion-specific?



Labor Market Data and Leadership

The lunch conversation connected the morning's industry discussions to broader questions about postsecondary value and adaptive leadership by higher education systems. The discussion addressed how labor-market data should inform decisions, how higher education should explain its value, and how system leaders can act in a changing environment. The conversation also pointed to a broader measure of workforce success: whether higher education systems can support learners' continued learning over time, often involving stopping out, re-entry, transfer, and credential recognition across multiple contexts.

Workforce development is not new to public higher education. From land-grant institutions to Pell, public higher education has long been tied to economic opportunity, workforce preparation, and social mobility. As noted above, these systems are built to help states respond to major transitions, and TRNE extends that role to a labor market that is increasingly regional, technologically dynamic, and unevenly accessible.

Higher education needs better ways to communicate its value, as it has often been presented as a direct guarantee of employment. Rising costs and uneven returns make that claim less credible. A more defensible position is that education remains critical to economic mobility. Higher education systems should be able to explain where education creates value, where returns vary, and how different kinds of education help learners adapt over time.

The conversation also challenged a false division between general education and specific occupational preparation. Workers need both broad and specific education so they can respond to change. Regional workforce strategy should connect career preparation, transfer, credit mobility, on-ramps from non-credit to degree pathways, employer partnership, and learner success.

Key Takeaways

- Use labor-market data to identify changing employer demand, regional skill needs, and gaps in learner access and student success.
- Treat workforce development as part of public higher education's longstanding role, not as a new or separate obligation.
- Recognize that public systems were built to help states and learners respond to major economic, technological, and social transitions.
- Help systems explain the value of public higher education in ways that are specific, honest, and grounded in evidence.
- Approach regional workforce strategy as a leadership challenge that requires judgment, coordination, and shared public purpose.

For TRNE, the leadership implication is that regional workforce work requires diagnosis before action. That diagnosis includes data, values, culture, governance, and power. Leaders also need to understand who may experience loss, where disagreement is likely, and what can be learned from dissent. TRNE will involve institutional interests, state priorities, industry needs, learner concerns, and policy constraints that will not always align neatly.

TRNE should use labor-market evidence carefully, avoid chasing short-term signals without considering long-term educational value, and help higher education systems articulate what they can claim with confidence. The discussion reinforced that regional collaboration is a leadership task, as well as a technical planning exercise.



From Opportunity to Action

The afternoon working session asked participants to review four priority areas: cross-state workforce data and shared metrics; learner progression and transfer visibility; skills visibility and learner records; and system leadership capacity and collaboration. Groups were asked to rank priorities, identify who was missing from the next phase, and name concrete actions for the next 60-90 days.

The group results showed two essential starting points:

- cross-state workforce data and shared metrics; shared data is needed to define the problem, identify root causes, set baselines, understand supply and demand, and make the case to public leaders.
- system leadership capacity and collaboration; little else will move without leadership buy-in, political will, funding, and clear ownership. In this context, leadership capacity means system leadership buy-in, clear ownership, political will, funding, and the ability to make and sustain decisions across institutions, states, and partners.

Together, these two priorities point to a simple conclusion: TRNE needs shared evidence to focus the work, and system buy-in to act on it.

Participants also identified a broad set of possible areas for action: regional work-based learning and clinical placements in healthcare; clinical supply-demand analysis; occupational and educational alignment; early college for advanced manufacturing; Workforce Pell; employer engagement; and state or regional talent planning. These ideas should be treated as candidates for validation and sequencing, rather than as a final list of commitments. Participants also called for a regional labor-market snapshot in healthcare and manufacturing, more conversations with employers about root causes, infrastructure mapping, meetings with key stakeholders in each state, and identification of process gaps.

Key Takeaways

- Participants identified two priorities as essential starting points for Phase II: shared evidence and system leadership buy-in.
- TRNE should focus the next phase on a small number of specific regional problems, rather than advancing every possible workstream at once.
- The work ahead requires stakeholder and asset mapping, so TRNE can identify who has the authority, expertise, data, resources, or implementation responsibility needed for each priority.
- Before the TRNE Workforce Development Leads Meeting, NASH and TRNE partners should prepare a clear report-back from the Forum, initial sector-specific labor-market snapshots, stakeholder and asset mapping, and targeted follow-up where needed.
- The TRNE Workforce Development Leads Meeting should validate priorities for near-term action, bring select additional stakeholders into the work, and move from identifying possible workstreams to organizing specific lines of action.

The next phase should broaden the tent with purpose, sequencing in employer intermediaries, state workforce boards, economic development agencies, legislators, accreditors, K-12 and CTE partners, learners, researchers, and funders as each decision requires. Stakeholder and asset mapping will clarify which partners are needed for which decisions, and when.

A blue-tinted background image showing a group of people in a meeting. Some are wearing lab coats, and there are laptops and papers on the table.

Conclusion

The TRNE Leadership Forum established a clear foundation for the work ahead. Healthcare and advanced manufacturing face shared workforce constraints across the region, including clinical placement capacity, faculty and employer training capacity, equipment access, fragmented industry engagement, incomplete data, regulatory barriers, learner risk, and uneven pathway visibility.

The Forum also clarified where TRNE can add value: organizing regional problems, supporting system capacity, strengthening industry engagement, and helping partners move from shared understanding to focused action. The Forum also returned to the idea of systemness as one of TRNE's core assets. Higher education systems can align institutional capacity, state priorities, learner needs, and industry demand in ways that individual institutions may not be able to do alone. TRNE gives participating systems a regional structure for applying that capacity to shared workforce challenges. Systemness translates to a focus on the conditions that allow higher education systems to act together: shared evidence, governance, industry engagement, policy alignment, resources, and dedicated capacity for implementation. It is also a prism for understanding how systems can design around learners' full life trajectories and mobility, which increasingly requires re-entry, transfer, credential recognition across multiple contexts, and pathways for learners who move in and out of education and work overtime.

The closing reflections underscored that this work will require trust, honest communication, and a willingness to act with imperfect information. Regional collaboration cannot be sustained by adding another responsibility to leaders and staff who already have full portfolios. It requires infrastructure, dedicated capacity, clear expectations, and resources.

NASH will continue to steward this next phase as TRNE's neutral convener and capacity partner. That role includes helping systems and partners sustain momentum between meetings and build the resources needed for implementation. NASH will also continue developing the funding and financing strategy needed to support a durable regional model, including philanthropic support to launch and accelerate the work and longer-term consideration of public, corporate, employer, and other funding sources.

The next step is to determine what moves first, who participates, and what support is required. The TRNE Workforce Development Leads Meeting, hosted by the Maine Community College System in Wells, Maine, will bring together designated workforce development leads from TRNE's participating systems, with a small number of additional participants invited by NASH based on their specific role in the meeting. The meeting will provide an important opportunity to validate priorities for near-term action, bring additional stakeholders into the work, and move from identifying possible workstreams to organizing specific lines of action.

NASH is grateful to Commissioner Shannon Gilkey and the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner for hosting the Leadership Forum and serving as TRNE's launch host. Their leadership helped set this regional work in motion, and NASH looks forward to carrying it forward with systems, industry partners, and state, regional, and national partners across New England.

TALENT READINESS-NEW ENGLAND



Save the Date

October 1st, 2026 • Wells, Maine

TRNE Workforce Development Leads Meeting

Convened by NASH and hosted by the Maine Community College System (MCCS)

Looking Ahead:

The first TRNE Workforce Development Leads Meeting

The TRNE Workforce Development Leads Meeting, hosted by the Maine Community College System in Wells, Maine on October 1st, will validate priorities for near-term action, bring additional stakeholders into the work, and move from identifying possible workstreams to organizing specific lines of action. In preparation for this meeting, NASH and TRNE partners will focus on three areas: reporting back on what was learned at the TRNE Leadership Forum; preparing a preliminary evidence base to support decision-making, including initial sector-specific labor-market snapshots and stakeholder and asset mapping; and continuing targeted engagement with industry partners in healthcare and advanced manufacturing (see Annex).

Full preparation details are in the “Implications for TRNE’s Next Phase” section below.

Please note that participation will be limited to the 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.

More on the TRNE Workforce Development Leads Meeting agenda to follow.

Annex

Implications for TRNE's Next Phase

The TRNE Leadership Forum produced a strong base of input and clarified what should be tested next. The next TRNE in-person working session will be the TRNE Workforce Development Leads Meeting, which will take place in Wells, Maine, on October 1, hosted by the Maine Community College System.

Work before the Workforce Development Leads Meeting

Before the meeting in Maine, TRNE should prepare the materials and relationships needed for a decision-oriented conversation. This preparation includes:

- a concise synthesis of what was heard at the Leadership Forum;
- an initial regional labor-market snapshot for healthcare and advanced manufacturing;
- preliminary stakeholder mapping for each potential workstream;
- a clearer view of existing state, system, employer, and partner assets;
- continued sector-specific employer engagement;
- an initial assessment of what data is already available and where the gaps remain; and
- a proposed set of near-term workstreams for discussion.

The labor-market snapshot and stakeholder mapping should be treated as related but distinct pieces of work. The snapshot should clarify what the region knows about demand, supply, program capacity, and learner opportunity. Stakeholder mapping should identify who has authority, expertise, data, resources, or implementation responsibility for each potential workstream.

This preparation will help ensure that the Maine meeting begins from a shared evidence base and a clear sense of who needs to be involved.

TRNE Workforce Development Leads Meeting Agenda

The Maine meeting should move the work from a broad list of possibilities to a smaller set of organized priorities. The goal is to determine what should move first, what requires further validation, and what support systems and partners need from NASH and one another. The meeting will also give workforce development leads across the participating systems dedicated time to begin working as a regional peer group, building the relationships and shared understanding needed to sustain TRNE's next phase. The evidence base prepared for the meeting will provide system partners with materials they can use to socialize TRNE internally, brief state workforce boards, identify additional state leaders, assess what data is already available, and clarify how philanthropy can support the next phase.

The meeting should help answer several practical questions:

- Which regional problems are most urgent and most actionable?
- Which workstreams should be advanced first?
- Who needs to be at the table for each workstream?
- What data is needed to guide the work?
- What capacity is required to move from planning to implementation?
- What can realistically be accomplished in the following 60–90 days?
- What role should NASH play in organizing, facilitating, and supporting the work?

Possible Near-Term Workstreams

Based on the Forum discussions, TRNE can organize Phase II around several near-term workstreams. These workstreams will be sequenced rather than launched all at once. The first phase of work will establish the operating structure, preliminary evidence base, and stakeholder and asset maps needed to determine which sector-specific use cases are ready to move.

Two early sector candidates appear strongest for validation: healthcare clinical placement capacity and advanced manufacturing asset mapping.

Leadership and Governance

This workstream will define how TRNE operates. It will clarify the roles of NASH, participating systems, industry partners, state agencies, regional partners, and funders. It will also define which decisions are regional, which remain state- or system-specific, and how progress will be tracked.

Regional Data and Shared Metrics

This workstream will provide a foundation for decision-making. It can begin with a focused healthcare and advanced manufacturing labor-market snapshot, followed by a clearer set of shared metrics for TRNE partners. These may include program capacity, placement availability, completions, retention, industry demand, worker movement, and occupational-educational alignment.

Stakeholder and Asset Mapping

This workstream will identify the people, organizations, authorities, data sources, resources, and existing initiatives that matter for each potential line of action. It will help TRNE understand what is already underway, where there are gaps, and which partners need to be involved before sector-specific work advances.

Healthcare Clinical Placement and Capacity

This workstream will examine one of the clearest bottlenecks identified at the Forum. It can begin by mapping current placement capacity, identifying where capacity limits program expansion, and convening healthcare employers, systems, accreditors, and licensing bodies to explore practical options. It will also examine the burden of unpaid clinical or practicum requirements on adult learners and other priority populations.

Advanced Manufacturing Asset Mapping and Employer Engagement

This workstream will respond to equipment access and coordination challenges. It can map equipment, facilities, programs, employer needs, existing pathway efforts, and relevant sector partnerships. It can also test whether a regional or subregional sector table will help industry partners engage more consistently.

Learner Pathway Visibility

This workstream will examine where learners fall out of existing pathways and where credit, non-credit, transfer, work-based learning, and employer-recognized credentials fail to connect. This work will be tied to specific sectors and use cases rather than treated as a standalone learner-records project.

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June 25th, 2026 • Rhode Island

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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.