



Creating Workforce Agility in a Time of Change

The 2025 higher education landscape will undergo significant changes, driven by evolving student preferences, technological advancements, national policy, and economic factors.

We will continue to see trends that prompt academic institutions to redefine what constitutes an "advanced education." Students, and their prospective employers, will continue to focus on practical skills and career readiness, leading to a greater demand for flexible, affordable, and industry-aligned options such as apprenticeships, cooperative education programs, and alternative credentials or certifications. Additionally, the need for flexible learning formats, including online courses and hybrid models, is rising. Each option presents an opportunity, but success depends on academic institutions having an agile workforce – the right people at the right time - equipped with the technological expertise and creativity to deliver these flexible learning pathways.

In addition to teaching staff, higher education institutions require a diverse range of non-instructional professionals to support operations, including administrators, IT staff, finance personnel, and student services professionals. Technical proficiency in educational technology, data analysis, learning management systems, and cybersecurity is in especially high demand. To fill these positions, institutions often compete against high-profile commercial enterprises able to offer rich compensation packages.

The Challenges: How can schools successfully access needed talent while controlling costs? How can they maintain a flexible workforce that can add or eliminate resources as internal priorities and market conditions demand?

A Solution: Creating a flexible workforce that combines “permanent” employees with contract talent can help organizations manage costs effectively without compromising quality. Over the past 25 years, the nextSource higher education practice has assisted clients in developing strategies to successfully incorporate alternative workforces as a key component of their talent strategy.

Three examples of programs that have generated great results include:

- **Adjunct Professor Program Reimagined.** Higher education institutions have increasingly turned to part-time, adjunct instructors as a cost-saving measure. The shift to remote learning has made it

easier to access adjunct professors who may live far from the university's primary location. These instructors can enrich the learning experience offered by our client by specializing in teaching, drawing on insights gained through their experience with multiple institutions, perhaps in a concurrent private sector job, or earlier, in a public service or military career. However sourced, these adjuncts diversify the classroom experience, while allowing full-time professors to devote more time to research. In this case, the administrative tasks associated with hiring, screening, compensating, and offboarding adjunct faculty were outsourced to nextSource who managed the adjuncts as employees for the duration of their engagement, often offering benefits that increased their commitment to the university. The university reduced the internal administrative costs of engaging their adjunct community by 16% while receiving an overall satisfaction rating from the adjunct population of 9.5 out of a possible score of 10.

- **Delivering a Skills-Based Education:** nextSource administered an extensive internship program that brought together a public university and our private sector clients. The university collaborated with participating companies to develop and offer courses aligned with industry needs, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and real-world experience. nextSource took on all administrative responsibilities for onboarding and paying the interns. As a result, the university experienced higher intern placement rates, the host companies gained access to qualified candidates, and many interns were offered permanent positions with their host companies.
- **Transitioning from Talent Pipelines to a Talent Pool.** A research department within a major R1 university faced challenges in finding specialized talent, which led to delays in project schedules. The required skills were often needed only for limited periods during different phases of the project. It was not economically feasible to retain these professionals during “down periods,” resulting in the need to initiate a new search whenever those skill sets were required again.

To address this issue, nextSource established a “talent community” composed of current and former professionals engaged by nextSource on behalf of the university. We designed and organized the program structure to give hiring managers expanded access to resources while maintaining the existing approach to requesting and selecting those resources. By identifying positions that could be filled remotely, nextSource was able to reach out to professional associations and organizations in a wider geographic area to attract candidates.

Once the community was established, we actively nurtured communication with members throughout the entire recruiting and deployment process—when they joined, while they were idle, during assignments, and after assignments. We sent messages about open positions, provided market insights, and offered career development tools to keep engagement high and increase interest among members. Additionally, we encouraged members to nominate friends and colleagues to expand the community further.

As a result of this initiative, the client reported \$1 million in cost savings over four years. Furthermore, more than 85% of talent community members expressed interest in being redeployed, attributing their continued interest to their ongoing interactions with the client.

To discuss how nextSource can assist you in accessing sought-after talent, increasing operational efficiency, controlling costs, and reducing risk, please [contact us](#). We'll be delighted to respond.

