

# 2026 nace AWARDS

→ HONORING EXCELLENCE IN EARLY TALENT SUCCESS

Winners +  
Honorable  
Mentions



## ABOUT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES + EMPLOYERS

Behind this member recognition is a community advancing what's next in early talent and student success.

Founded in 1956—and now celebrating 70 years—our professional association brings together nearly 18,000 college career services leaders, early talent recruiting professionals, and the solution providers who support them.

We're a trusted voice in the transition from college to career—sharing the data, insights, and standards that shape how employers hire and how students launch their futures. We track hiring trends and starting salaries, elevate best practices and ethical standards, and help shape the future of work.

Our work advances yours. Through research, professional development, and a strong peer network, you're equipped to lead with confidence, adapt to change, and create better outcomes for the next generation of talent.

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**Help talent find their way faster.**

[naceweb.org](https://naceweb.org)

**Business Affiliate Innovation Award | Winner**

Ford Kirkmyer, Abode and Mollie Wasser,  
Fidelity Investments

**Abode Matchmaking**

Abode and Fidelity Investments collaborated to develop Abode's Matchmaking tool, a scalable solution that transformed Fidelity's intern-mentor matching process. What was previously a manual, months-long effort now takes mere hours. Matchmaking in Abode uses customizable matching rules that streamline the process and reduce unconscious bias, while fostering quality connections.

**Business Affiliate Innovation Award | Honorable Mention**

Pounce Career Tools

**Rob Hernandez**

**Pounce HUB, a talent platform to bridge the gap between employers and grads.**

Pounce is a talent platform that enables post-secondary career services to showcase grads to employers in a dynamic, skills-based profile, rich with context and proof of ability, far from traditional PDF resumes. Our hand in hand collaborative work with schools and partners has led to streamlined WIL workflows, increased student engagement and scaled tactical student support.

## Career Readiness Excellence Award | Winner

Laurie Riley '82 Center for Career Success,  
Moravian University

**Kristin Eicholtz, Ryan Smolko, Christina Crawford, Amy Hudock,  
Kelly Gallagher, Taylor Patino, Jaclyn Rodick, Josh Knepp, Emily  
Overholt, Jennifer McKinley, and Lori Boyle**

### **The Moravian Elevate Experience: A Competency-Based, University-Wide, Career Readiness Model**

The Moravian Elevate Experience is a competency-based, university-wide, career-readiness model aligned with the NACE Career Readiness Competencies. It integrates academics, experiential learning, advising, and digital badging to ensure students can develop and demonstrate essential workforce skills through structured milestones and verified experiences. Since its launch in 2021, Elevate has significantly increased student engagement in career readiness and created a scalable, equitable framework for post-graduate success.

Career Readiness Excellence Award | Honorable Mention

## Center for Personal & Professional Development, Berry College

**Marc Hunsaker, Phillip Edge, Sue Dudt, Hope Willoughby,  
Allison Hattaway, Joy Wooddell, Alisa Elmore, and Macy Hackett**

### **LifeWorks**

For more than 120 years, student employment has been central to Berry College's educational mission; however, it historically lacked consistent assessment, supervisor training, and scalable structures to ensure graduates' career readiness across 180+ campus departments. Although 90% of Berry students voluntarily participated in LifeWorks, their experiences varied widely with limited alignment to professional competencies or assessment rubrics. To address these gaps, Berry reimagined student employment as LifeWorks in 2019 and launched the LifeWorks Optimization Project (LWOP) to transform its traditional campus employment program into an intentional, equity focused, NACE competency-based, career readiness ecosystem that ensures every student engages in eight semesters of paid personal and professional development.

**Career Services Excellence Award | Small School | Winner**

**Colgate University and Taylor L. Buonocore Consulting**

**Teresa Olsen, Colgate University and Taylor Buonocore Guthrie, Taylor L. Buonocore Consulting**

**Sophomore Connections Facilitated Networking**

Sophomore Connections is an annual two-day career development conference that engages 120+ alumni and almost 65% of the class. Over the past five years, the team has re-engineered this long-standing program to create an immersive networking and career exploration event that has redefined networking from a transactional to transformative process. Shifting this mindset required us to strategically reframe networking as a process starting in the career exploration phase before students move conversations and tactics toward strategic networking.

**Career Services Excellence Award | Small School | Honorable Mention**

**The Career Exploration Center, Agnes Scott College**

**Lucy Moran, Irene Foran, Catherine Johansson, Emily Danzig, Emily Myanna, Tomeka Stephens, and Machamma Quinichett**

**Achieving Excellence by Reimagining Career Education at a Small Women's Liberal Arts College: The SUM 120 Career Exploration Lab**

The SUM 120 Career Exploration Lab is an innovative, required, first-year program at Agnes Scott College that embeds equitable, hands-on career education early in the student experience, helping students build confidence, identify transferable skills, and connect academic experiences to future opportunities. Since its launch, the program has produced measurable gains in career readiness, networking confidence, internship participation, and student engagement, establishing it as a scalable model for integrating career development into a liberal arts curriculum.

## **Career Services Excellence Award | Large School | Winner**

The Walter Center for Career Achievement,  
Indiana University – Bloomington

### **Joe Lovejoy and the entire Walter Center for Career Achievement team**

#### **The Walter Center for Career Achievement - Faculty Engagement**

The Walter Center for Career Achievement strengthens career readiness across the College of Arts and Sciences by engaging faculty as key partners in delivering its Pillars Undergraduate Experience. Through such initiatives as the Career Readiness Requirement, Career Connections Fellowship, Faculty Advisory Board, and Career Advocate Award, the Center collaborates with faculty to integrate career exploration, competency development, and experiential learning into the academic journey. This ecosystem expands the Walter Center's reach while creating a more cohesive and impactful student experience.

## **Career Services Excellence Award | Large School | Honorable Mention**

University of South Carolina Career Services

### **Alan Buck**

#### **South Carolina Internship Program**

The University of South Carolina offers \$3,000 financial supplements to students who obtain internships and co-ops that support high-demand industries within the state. Such industries include Manufacturing, Aerospace, Automotive, Energy, Health and Life Sciences, Financial Services and Insurance, with consideration given to other high-priority occupations.

## **Champion of Opportunity Award | College | Winner**

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

### **University Career Center Team**

#### **University Career Center Clothes Closet**

The University Career Center (UCC) Clothes Closet at U-M empowers students by providing free, professional attire for interviews and career events that they can keep, removing barriers to building their professional brand. By sourcing and redistributing gently used clothing, the program champions sustainability and reduces campus textile waste. Through campus partnerships, style consultations, and the purchase of gender-neutral and adaptive items, the Clothes Closet fosters confidence, belonging, and equity. This innovative initiative merges career readiness with environmental stewardship, allowing every Wolverine to pursue their ambitions and present themselves authentically, advancing U-M's commitment to opportunity and sustainability for all.

## **Champion of Opportunity Award | College | Honorable Mention**

Binghamton University, Fleishman Center for Career and Professional Development

### **Aly Novi and Jessica Lane-Rwabukwisi**

#### **The Career Collaborative**

The Career Collaborative, led by the Fleishman Career Center at Binghamton University, expands access to career education by embedding it into classrooms and student experiences across campus. Since its launch in fall 2023, classroom reach has more than doubled, significantly increasing the number of students engaged across disciplines. By partnering with faculty and staff and providing tools, resources, and support, the initiative integrates career development into existing academic and co-curricular spaces, ensuring students are reached regardless of major, background, or prior exposure.

## Champion of Opportunity Award | Employer | Winner

Medtronic

### Ashley Leonard and Becky Kieffer

#### Women in Science and Engineering (WISE)

Medtronic's WISE internship program is an early outreach program designed to engage women at a critical decision point in their STEM journey. Through hands-on projects, mentorship, and real-world experience, WISE builds confidence, strengthens STEM persistence, and creates lasting pathways into STEM careers.

## Chevron Innovation Award | Winner

Fleishman Career Center, Binghamton University

### Kelli K. Smith and Lexie Avery

#### Binghamton University Career Center Skills Lab

The Binghamton University Fleishman Career Center Skills Lab is a collaborative space where students practice high-demand industry-relevant skills, offering an innovative approach to talent needs, brand building on campus, and a way to observe a student's skill set before they even apply to an organization. Skills labs are led by employers and Binghamton alumni who wish to give back to their alma mater, and each skills lab runs 75-90 minutes focusing on skills crucial for entry-level roles within a specific industry/organization. The success of this initiative led to the university's commitment to build a new, 5,000-square-foot Skills Lab space to open next year.

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**Recruiting Excellence Award | Small Employer | Winner**

**American Heart Association**

**Kathy Young and Heather Daneker**

**Interns of Impact**

The American Heart Association's Interns of Impact program addresses a critical exposure gap: although many students are drawn to meaningful work, those studying business, communications, finance, technology, and marketing often don't realize nonprofit organizations offer viable long-term career paths. At the same time, growing interest in public health underscores the need for clear pathways into mission-driven careers. Interns of Impact expands access to hands-on nonprofit experience and introduces students to career pathways that support both nonprofit sustainability and the future of the public health workforce.

**Recruiting Excellence Award | Large Employer | Winner**

**GE Aerospace**

**Alissa Friedman, Julie Grzeda, MaryBeth Kuntz, Lauren Kutz, Maeve Madsen, MacKenzie McMichael, and Suzanne Wolff**

**The LIFT Summit: GE Aerospace's annual early-access recruiting event**

The LIFT Summit (Leaders Innovating Flight for Tomorrow) is a three-day conference each July for roughly 80 university students to learn about GE Aerospace and how it is advancing flight for future generations. Students are immersed in GE Aerospace's company, culture, community, products, and people and are the first to be interviewed for roles in the coming year. LIFT Summit applications have soared year-over-year, and the event has secured the highest acceptance rates across all hiring sources. The event has also been GE Aerospace's gateway in truly casting a "wide net" and diversifying its early careers pipeline.

**Technology Excellence Award | College | Winner**

University of Connecticut,  
Center for Career Readiness and Life Skills

**Mary Malerba, Gabrielle Comella, and Lee Hameroff**

**Employer + Alumni Career Connections Directory**

The Employer + Alumni Career Connections Directory is a volunteer-matching resource that connects university program organizers with alumni and employer partners for career development programming. The directory allows faculty, staff, and student leaders to filter volunteer data to efficiently identify volunteers whose experiences align with program goals. By centralizing employer and alumni contacts and streamlining outreach, this resource enhances student career readiness, strengthens partnerships, and significantly reduces the time spent securing volunteers.

**Technology Excellence Award | Employer | Winner**

Grant Thornton

**Missy Heusinger, Meredith Carr, Marie Love, Shannon Karpovich,  
and Holly Zavoda**

**Internship Program Powered by Intrepid**

Grant Thornton's national internship program leverages the Intrepid learning platform to deliver a centralized, technology-enabled orientation experience for 800–1,000 interns annually across service lines and locations. By consolidating schedules, training content, communication, and interactive learning tools into a single digital hub, the program improves clarity, engagement, and consistency while reducing administrative burden. Built-in analytics and engagement features enable scalable delivery, real-time visibility, and continuous improvement across cohorts.

→ INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

**Business Affiliate Award for Excellence in Leadership**

Jillian Ferry and Dr. Anh Lee,  
Durable Minds Everboarding

**Career Services Champion Award Winner**

Chancellor Andrew D. Martin,  
Washington University in St. Louis

**Employer Recruiting Champion Award Winner**

Rachel Stevens, Indianapolis Airport Authority

**The Kauffman Award Winners**

Dawn Carter, New Dawn Strategy Group  
Mimi Collins, National Association  
of Colleges and Employers

**Mackes Leadership Award Winners**

Dr. Antoinette Boyd, Maryville University of St. Louis  
Adam Bufka, Purdue University Global

**Mentor of the Year Award | Employer Winner**

Julie Grzeda, GE Aerospace

**Mentor of the Year Award | College Winner**

Carly Smith, Toppel Career Center,  
University of Miami

**NACE Catalyst Award Winner**

Ben Shackelford, Lowe's Companies Inc.

**Northwestern Mutual Rising Star Award Winner**

Christina Igl, College of Natural Science,  
Michigan State University

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- Alicia Rodriguez** | Co-Chair, Toppel Career Center, University of Miami
- Luis Amaro** | Board Advisor, Noviam Inc
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- Ryan Colvin** | Millsaps College
- Kimberly Dixon** | Career Center, Stony Brook University
- Bethany Eisenhart** | Montgomery County Community College
- Juli Flores** | San Antonio College
- Holly Foshier** | School of Education, University of Wisconsin – Madison
- Rebecca Krick** | The Cigna Group
- Rachel Larson** | University of Nebraska – Lincoln
- Valerie Mandel** | Rollins College
- Scott McQuillan** | Deloitte
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