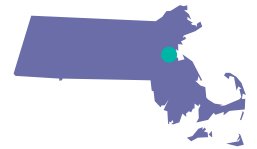


Innovative Resources Can Make Data Actionable and Meaningful for Students and Job Seekers



How NextGen Talent Fills the Gap in Existing Data Systems for the Boston Region

Schools, state and local education and workforce agencies, colleges, career education and training programs, and employers collect and use education and workforce data. But without a connected, cohesive system through which students, job seekers, and college and career counselors can get that information, it often remains just out of reach for those who need it to make important decisions. In an increasingly digital world, information can open doors to opportunities that students and job seekers may have never known existed or that felt far out of reach—if they have access to that information in timely, accessible ways. **NextGen Talent is an example of how organizations are stepping in to close that information gap, providing a way for students, families, and the organizations that serve them to plan for students’ futures and find high-quality pathways that match their goals.**

Using Data to Solve a Community Need

Started in Boston, Massachusetts, NextGen Talent works to address a disconcerting trend. Fewer and fewer students graduating from high school in Boston are enrolling in college, and those numbers are dropping even more dramatically for students of color. Yet the high-quality careers these students seek require education and training beyond high school. For many students, pursuing post-high school pathways that involve college or career training seems expensive and out of reach. With little information about which programs and options are affordable, are high quality, and align with their goals, students are opting out of further education rather than trying to navigate a maze of confusing, costly options that ultimately may not prepare them for a high-quality career.



NextGen Talent Executive Director and Co-Founder Norma Rey-Alicea grew up in Boston, Massachusetts, and after college worked with a local community organization that supported students in Latinx communities in and around

the city. Many students the organization worked with would excel in school; move on to a college or career program; and end up stuck in a cycle of student debt, low-paying jobs, and no useful degree or certificate. As Norma says about the students who dropped out of college owing money, “It was debt without a degree.” After hearing from counselors around the country that data could help them identify high-value postsecondary programs that were good matches for their students, she co-founded NextGen Talent.

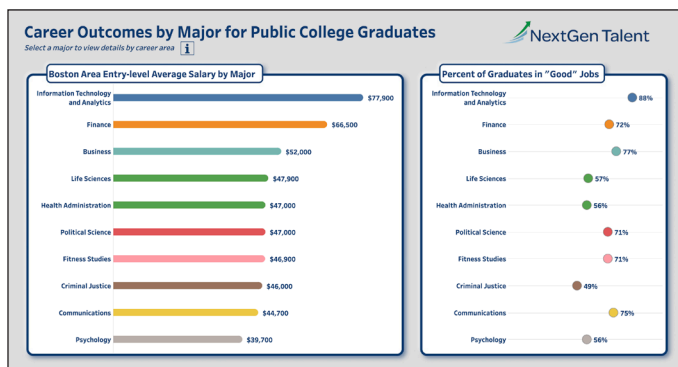
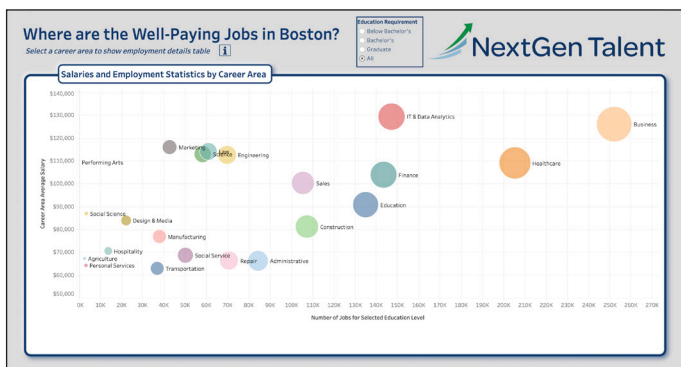
NextGen Talent's Tools Make Data Actionable

Through NextGen Talent, counselors and students at partner organizations and schools, along with their families, have access to a suite of tools that provide data on jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage in the Boston region, as well as detailed information on the college and training programs that are required for those jobs. Two tools in particular are worth noting:

- **Labor Market Literacy Tools** enable students and advisors to explore where the well-paying jobs are in their region and filter that information by postsecondary education level, employer demand, local salary, etc.
- **Navigator** postsecondary program finder pulls together data on a wide range of postsecondary education programs that offer a good return on investment as assessed by NextGen Talent, allowing students and counselors to filter and search through

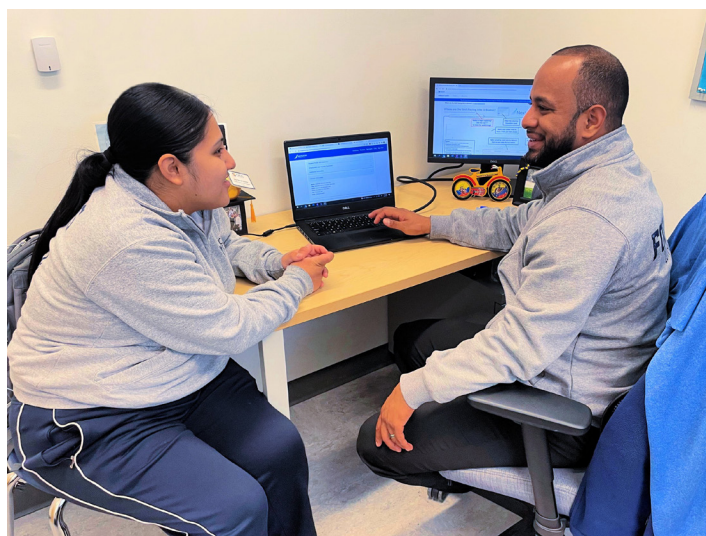
information on everything from apprenticeships to college degree programs. More than a simple directory, the tool shares program-level outcomes data, application information beyond what is posted publicly, regional occupational wages for associated careers, and other curated programmatic information to help students identify the right high-value postsecondary program for them.

NextGen Talent doesn't just supply tools, however. It also provides data capacity-building training programs that help counselors, students, and families understand how to use the tools in a wide variety of scenarios. "Spotlights" on NextGen's blog address in a timely fashion questions and issues identified by students and counselors while also providing deep dives on programs and opportunities.



Data Changes the Game for Students and Job Seekers

NextGen Talent's tools are a game changer for students and job seekers in the Boston region. The tools mean a student can sit with their college counselor or college access program staff and learn what's needed for them to become a successful information technology specialist, teacher, public health administrator, or whatever career they choose. They can explore regional salary information, career paths, skill-building opportunities, and more. They can learn which training programs or degrees are required for entry-level positions just a few miles away. And they can search for college programs, apprenticeships, and other career training that fit their schedule, offer the best value, and have the most success for students like them. Employers in the region also benefit, with the ability to draw from a local, better-informed group of job seekers skilled and trained by high-quality programs for the jobs they need to fill.



State Data Systems That Provide Meaningful Access Could Level Up Innovative Efforts

The data-driven approach NextGen Talent takes is crucial and, unfortunately, made more cumbersome by disconnected, inaccessible data systems. To make their innovative tools function, NextGen Talent staff spend a significant amount of time pulling together information from a vast array of data sources ranging from interviews with program staff to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics to regional directories of training programs and colleges. A statewide longitudinal data system that provides better access to this data across sectors could remove the time-consuming data combing and combining that the NextGen Talent team has to spend their time on, freeing them up to focus on honing their tools for students.

More importantly, NextGen Talent's approach offers a model for how states can make their data systems more useful to students, parents, and counselors. States have spent recent years making significant investments in data collection, infrastructure, and connecting data across

sectors. The next chapter is to provide the meaningful access that empowers individuals with the information they need to make decisions. Meaningful access is not just about providing a backward look at achievement or outcomes gaps but also about enabling action—just as NextGen Talent does in Boston.

“As a community, as a society, we need to really reinvent the way that we deliver career guidance and development services—especially to students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college-goers. They need the tools to make better informed postsecondary choices as they invest in a path to a career.”

—Norma Rey-Alicea

For more information on how states can provide meaningful access to data and maximize impact for students, job seekers, and the education and workforce sectors their local economies depend on, read the Data Quality Campaign's [*What Now? A Vision to Transform State Data Systems to Inform People's Pathways through Education and the Workforce.*](#)