



# Guide to Recruiting at HBCUs



# Foreword

Employers have already caught on to the business benefits of recruiting students from underrepresented backgrounds: unparalleled innovation, heightened productivity, improved morale, and a bigger bottom line.

The national outcry over racial injustices following George Floyd's death last year further elevated commitments from organizations to diversify their workforces and level the playing field for talent from all walks of life.

These employers have pledged to do better: to hire more representative employees, and to promote leaders of all races, backgrounds, genders, and identities.

The pandemic has also fueled a desire to recruit more from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Instead of choosing a limited number of on-campus career fairs based on bandwidth, employers can now attend hundreds of career fairs virtually, including many at HBCUs. With such high demand for partnerships with these schools, how can *you* stand out as an employer?

**In this guide, we'll explore the history of HBCUs, their value to society, and detail a number of ways you can start recruiting from and engaging with qualified early talent at HBCUs.**



# From Inception to Acceptance: A Brief History of HBCUs

Created at a time when African Americans were denied acceptance to study at white institutions, the mission of HBCUs was to offer an equivalent post-secondary education.

**Today, there are 101 HBCUs operating in the United States, with the oldest being Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, founded in 1852.**

While HBCUs make up less than three percent of the colleges and universities in the US, they produce approximately 27% of all African American graduates with bachelor's degrees in STEM fields and are widely considered to be a doorway to success. HBCUs also serve as far more than just educational institutions. They emphasize a respect for the history of African Americans in our culture, instilling a sense of pride and a desire to be an active participant in the community.

HBCUs strive to nurture the whole student, providing a safe and supportive learning space removed from systemic racism or other hindrance to the success of their students. And with lower tuition rates by about 28%, these schools attempt to decrease the financial burdens faced by Black students to level the playing field and increase equity.

Many Black students look to HBCUs for safety, validation, and support. As Morgan State University President David Wilson, Ed.D told Howard Magazine, “They seek us out because they want their college experience to be in a place that says to them: ‘You’re OK. You don’t have to prove anything here based on your race.’

# The 2020s: HBCUs in the Limelight

The year 2020 was a record-breaker for many HBCUs, with dozens receiving multi-million-dollar donations from donors such as Mackenzie Scott and Reed Hastings, co-founder of Netflix. Apple and Southern Company recently announced a \$25 million investment in the Propel Center, a global innovation and learning hub for HBCUs at the Atlanta University Center.

HBCU alums dominated the news headlines as well. Kamala Harris, a graduate of Howard University, became the first HBCU alum to be elected Vice President of the United States. Stacy Abrams, a Spelman College graduate, was widely credited with the movement to turn Georgia blue in last year's presidential election. And Raphael Warnock, the Democrat she helped usher in as Senator of Georgia, is a graduate of Morehouse College.



## Why Employers Recruit at HBCUs

Why recruit at HBCUs? Because if you don't, you're missing out on a group of prospective employees who have been fully supported by their institutions and are well-equipped to enter the professional world. Like any highly selective college or university, HBCUs are a strong source of highly qualified students with a wide range of backgrounds.

## Centers of excellence

Removed from any reinforcing economic and social realities and inequalities, HBCUs offer a nurturing environment where Black students can truly excel. According to a Gallup report, Black HBCU graduates are more likely to say they are thriving in purpose and financial well-being than graduates who did not receive their degrees from HBCUs.

Black HBCU graduates are more likely than Black non-HBCU graduates to strongly agree that their university prepared them well for life outside of college (55% vs. 29%) and to be engaged at work (39% vs. 33%).

Black graduates of HBCUs are more than 2x as likely as Black graduates of non-HBCUs to recall having a professor who cared about them as a person, a professor who made them excited about learning, and a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their dreams.

The support, encouragement, and preparation HBCU students receive during their college years serve as strong pillars and a solid foundation for future success in the workplace.

## Empowered by diversity

Another reason to recruit at HBCUs is the wide diversity of students. And with over half a million HBCU students and recent grads on Handshake, there's no shortage of qualified talent to tap into.

It's widely known that companies reap many benefits from the multiple perspectives offered by a diverse employee population. Research shows that companies with more diverse workforces perform better financially. And the student populations of HBCUs offer a tremendous breadth of diversity.

They hail from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds; some are first-generation college students; some come from other countries as international students; and some from multiple generations of HBCU graduates—fully steeped in the culture.

## Rooted in character

A third reason to recruit at HBCUs is for the impact students have on a company's corporate culture.

The holistic approach HBCUs take to educate their students emphasizes not just excellence in education, but also the importance of stewardship and active community participation. Many students are focused on relationship-building and extra-curricular activities, adding to their qualifications. Many have had internship opportunities. HBCU students, when genuinely supported in bringing their whole selves to work, will add tremendously to your company culture.

## HBCU Students: What They Want from Work and Bring To the Table

Employers can be more successful at recruiting prospective employees from HBCUs with a greater understanding of what these students value as well as what they have to offer. Handshake's platform allows employers to personalize their outreach, and our research can offer insights and valuable information to incorporate into your recruiting strategy.

### Qualities Black students look for in an employer

- Value feedback
- Socially responsible
- Inspiring leadership
- High performance
- Mission-driven



### Top majors of HBCU students (60% STEM-related)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1.  Biology                 | 6.  Political Science      |
| 2.  Psychology              | 7.  Accounting             |
| 3.  Business Administration | 8.  Mechanical Engineering |
| 4.  Computer Science        | 9.  Nursing                |
| 5.  Criminal Justice        | 10.  Management            |

### Top skills listed on HBCU student profiles

Hard skills	Soft skills
Social media	Leadership
Event planning	Organization
Business communication	Communication
Marketing	Problem solving
Project management	Time management

# Tips for Recruiting at HBCUs

Understandably, there is widespread demand for HBCU graduates, even at smaller schools. To be successful in engaging students, employers need to develop thoughtful strategies and build long-term relationships with these schools. Transparency, integrity, patience, and grace will pay off in the long run, giving companies who put in the work a high return on investment.



## #1: Cast a wide HBCU net

Sure, you know the big three: Howard, Spelman, and Morehouse. But is LeMoyne-Owen College, where the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis recently endowed the school with a \$40 million gift—on your radar? Our advice: pay attention to the HBCUs whose names may not appear as frequently in the media.

“There is a ton of demand currently for students at HBCUs. Employers looking to recruit at these institutions need to put in the time to build relationships with the schools and to develop high-caliber programs.”

**-Adoley Ammah-Tagoe,**  
Handshake’s Associate Director  
of Education Success

If you’re trying to strengthen your brand and build a meaningful partnership, going to smaller HBCUs is an opportunity to make your dollars go further. You’re not competing with the Atlanta entertainment industry at Spelman or large government agencies and nonprofits at Howard. You can attract the attention of students and gain greater mind share.





## #2: Connect with career services

Some HBCU students aren't on digital platforms, so making the connection with career services is a key first step to reach the maximum number of students. Word-of-mouth marketing works. When students come in for career services appointments, a company can stay top-of-mind with a bit of creativity.

Be persistent. Don't send one email and wait to hear back. Pick up the phone and call—and try to do it at a time when staff is not directly serving students.

Oftentimes there are existing Employer Sponsorship Programs designed to increase brand awareness among students. "Employers should check the school's website to understand their employer relations programs instead of trying to come up with their own a la carte offerings," adds Ammah-Tagoe. "These centers have put together different ways for employers to meaningfully engage with their students—and they know their students best!"



### Handshake Premium Partner Spotlight:



Like many businesses, Enterprise Holdings strives to create a diverse and inclusive culture. But unlike many businesses out there, they celebrate everyone's unique background, culture, and abilities.

The company hires locally to ensure their teams reflect the diverse communities they serve and partners with local universities to recruit students from unique backgrounds. Enterprise Holdings also encourages employees to connect through their Diversity Teams and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), created a diversity council with training, and made a \$55 million commitment to organizations advancing social and racial equality.



### #3: Do your research & think like a true partner

One of the things employers often forget is that HBCUs have a lot on their plate.

Many of their career centers have thousands of students to place, and are crunched for time, investing all their energy into fully supporting our next generation of leaders. In order to build a strong partnership, do your research on each school to make your outreach personal. Visit their website and see if they already have a structured employer sponsorship program that you can work your way into—saving everyone valued time and effort.

This isn't just about what you need (early talent). It's about forming a partnership. How can you help career services serve their students? Mock interviews are a great way to meet students and build your employer brand. Can your team conduct resume reviews to help give candidates a leg up? Anything you can do to help HBCU career centers scale will build your credibility over time.



### #4: Engage students—but thoughtfully

To engage candidates effectively, employers need to invest a little time in getting to know the students at each school. HBCUs are not one-size-fits-all. Howard students—who attend college in the nation's capital—are not the same as the students at North Carolina Central University, a more rural environment whose students may be less likely to want to move out of state.

Once you have an understanding of your students, you'll be more successful in engaging with them.

On Handshake, engagement is mostly proactive through scalable outreach and virtual career fairs. Keep in mind that planning an event is more than just scheduling and hoping students hear about it. For best results, engage in a co-marketing strategy, partnering with career services to promote that event in advance, and follow up afterwards.

**"Despite all our anxiety, the experience hosting the 2020 All Majors Career Fair for Howard University was nothing short of great! The virtual career fair platform is extremely reliable, and the 2020 All Majors Career Fair was the most attended career fair in Howard history."**

**- Justice Brown-Duso, Recruitment Specialist at Howard University**

Be thoughtful in your messaging strategy (students hate spam and it will hurt your brand). Familiarize yourself with a student's profile before inviting him or her to your event. And make sure all messages are relevant. Inviting a Communications major to your Women in STEM event signals tone deafness. Be mindful of the quantity of messages as well. Aim for the 'Goldilocks' approach—not too few, not too many, just the right number.



### **Handshake Premium Partner Spotlight:**



While many organizations are proud to tout their diversity, equality, and inclusion efforts in their mission statements, Aflac takes it a step further. They are committed to an empathetic culture where everyone feels empowered to do their best work—something they extend into their communities. Aflac, their agents, suppliers, and business partners all do outreach to serve diverse communities. They have even adopted a Diversity Council that implements initiatives to further diversity-related efforts in their communities and globally.



## #5: Continue the culture of mentorship and support

An important way to show dedication and support to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is to support your employees, interns, and communities with programs and mentorships.

Connecting employees with ERGs is one way to emphasize your culture of support. These groups are organized around a shared identity and allow coworkers from diverse backgrounds to build a shared community.

One-on-one mentorships are another way to create a foundation of trust and openness—with dedicated leaders to mentor employees from similar backgrounds. Employees feel safe talking to their mentors because they know their mentors have similar experiences. Mentorship should begin as early as the recruitment process.

Finally, provide sponsorship for your Black employees to help them advance their career at your organization.

Handshake Premium partners, for example, are activating digital ambassadors from diverse backgrounds to connect with qualified students and serve as a familiar face in the recruiting process before a candidate is hired.



### Handshake Premium Partner Spotlight:

**GENERAL DYNAMICS**

When it comes to walking the walk, General Dynamics tops the list.

Not only do they advocate for inclusivity, they act on their words by partnering with diverse organizations like the National Society of Black Engineers and the Society of Hispanic Engineers. Their employee-led ERGs promote commonality around interests, backgrounds, and more. General Dynamics is so dedicated to diversity, equality, and inclusion that they made Forbes' 2019 list for Best Employers for Diversity.

# Handshake's HBCU Partners

With over half a million students and recent grads at HBCUs on Handshake, leverage the largest early talent network to empower your diverse workforce.

Use the strategies in this guide to strategically partner with the 56 nationwide HBCU partners (and counting) on Handshake. [Get in touch with our team](#) to learn how to accelerate your qualified pipeline today.



**Alabama A&M University**  
Huntsville, AL



**Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science**  
Los Angeles, CA



**Alabama State University**  
Montgomery, AL



**Cheyney University Of Pennsylvania**  
Cheyney, PA



**Alcorn State University**  
Lorman, MS



**Claflin University**  
Orangeburg, SC



**American Baptist College**  
Nashville, TN



**Clark Atlanta University**  
Atlanta, GA



**Arkansas Baptist College**  
Little Rock, AR



**Delaware State University**  
Dover, DE



**Bethune-Cookman University**  
Daytona Beach, FL



**Dillard University**  
Gentilly, LA



**Bowie State University**  
Bowie, MD



**Elizabeth City State University**  
Elizabeth City, NC



**Central State University**  
Wilberforce, OH



**Fayetteville State University**  
Fayetteville, NC



**Florida A&M University**

Tallahassee, FL



**Florida Memorial University**

Miami Gardens, FL



**Grambling State University**

Grambling, LA



**Graves School of Business -**

**Morgan State University**

Baltimore, MD



**Harris-Stowe State University**

St. Louis, MO



**Howard University**

Washington, DC



**Huston-Tillotson University**

Austin, TX



**Johnson C. Smith University**

Charlotte, NC



**Kentucky State University**

Frankfort, KY



**Langston University**

Langston, OK



**LeMoyne-Owen College**

Jefferson City, MO



**Lincoln University in Missouri**

Jefferson City, MO



**Lincoln University Pennsylvania**

Lincoln University, PA



**Livingstone College**

Salisbury, NC



**Miles College**

Fairfield, AL



**Mississippi Valley State University**

Itta Bena, MS



**Morehouse College**

Atlanta, GA



**Norfolk State University**

Norfolk, VA



**North Carolina A&T State University**

Greensboro, NC



**North Carolina Central University**

Durham, NC



**Paul Quinn College**

Dallas, TX



**Prairie View A&M University**

Prairie View, TX



**Rust College**  
Holly Springs, MS



**Savannah State University**  
Savannah, GA



**Simmons College of Kentucky**  
Louisville, KY



**South Carolina State University**  
Orangeburg, SC



**Southern University and A&M College at Baton Rouge**  
Baton Rouge, LA



**Southern University at New Orleans**  
New Orleans, LA



**Spelman College**  
Atlanta, GA



**Tennessee State University**  
Nashville, TN



**Texas Southern University**  
Houston, TX



**Tuskegee University**  
Tuskegee, AL



**University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff**  
Pine Bluff, AR



**University of Maryland Eastern Shore**  
Princess Anne, MD



**Virginia State University**  
Petersburg, VA



**West Virginia State University**  
Institute, WV



**Wilberforce University**  
Wilberforce, OH



**Wiley College**  
Marshall, TX



**Xavier University of Louisiana**  
New Orleans, LA