



**STAFF SENATE**

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

**A Report on Staff Feedback and Ideas on Alternative  
Compensation, Rewards, and Benefits for University of  
Nebraska Employees.**

**Commissioned by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Staff Senate**

**August 1, 2025**

## **Executive Summary**

Due to ongoing state and federal financial constraints and the decision to forgo across-the-board compensation increases for staff in Fiscal Year 2025-2026, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Staff Senate hosted two town halls on June 9 and July 14, 2025. These two forums engaged approximately 550 staff members and generated 72 unique ideas aimed at enhancing the staff employment experience through alternative rewards and benefits, workplace improvements, and institutional reforms.

The Staff Senate Executive Committee consolidated and condensed the 72 unique ideas into five broad themes, which include the following:

1. Compensation alternatives and financial relief;
2. Time off, flexibility, and work-life balance;
3. Professional and support resources;
4. Institutional culture and communication; and
5. Advocacy and collective action.

While this is a challenging time for the University of Nebraska and American higher education broadly, our most valuable resource remains our people. Investing in staff is essential in our [Odyssey to the Extraordinary](#). Staff are a vital partner in creating and sustaining an extraordinary culture and environment for the University of Nebraska. Moreover, investing in our employees is crucial for growing and sustaining excellence in teaching, research, service, and community engagement.

This report presents a synthesis of good-faith staff feedback and offers actionable recommendations for senior leadership consideration. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Staff Senate is committed to working with university leadership in a collaborative effort that is unified in purpose.

## **KEY THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Compensation Alternatives and Financial Relief**

Staff proposed creative, cost-conscious ways to address the university's budgetary constraints, while offering financial relief and equity through non-salary benefits.

#### **Retirement and Benefits**

- Lower the [university's 401\(a\)](#) eligibility age from 26 to 21 for voluntary participants.
- Offer an additional increased contribution rate to 401(a) plans (3.5% and 5.5% are currently offered).

#### **Parking and NUFlex Credits**

- Reinststate [NUcredits](#) for employees making under \$130,000 annually and provide each employee with a monthly \$63 allotment to spend on benefit choices.
- Allow staff with existing NUcredits to apply those credits to pay for their campus parking.
- Implement income-based parking permits or a parking subsidy program similar to the program at [Duke University](#).
- Provide free or discounted parking to staff employees, especially staff making under \$35,000 annually.

#### **Flat-Rate Raises and Administrative Pay**

- Prioritize equity through flat-dollar increases over percentage-based raises. Percentage-based increases favor individuals with higher salaries, typically managerial/professional and administrative classified roles.
- Decrease administrative salaries by three percent. This includes anyone at an assistant dean level and above.

#### **Childcare and Meal Support**

- Offer childcare subsidies for employees who are unable to enroll their child at the UNL Children's Center.
- Offer meal discounts akin to perks enjoyed by staff at [Husker Athletics Department](#). Examples include one free meal per week/month or discounted meal plans.

#### **Healthy Living Discounts and Subsidies**

- Support physical wellness through free or discounted on-campus and/or local gym memberships and offer free physical fitness and wellbeing classes on campus.
- Incorporate a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program similar to the [University of Kentucky](#), which provides vouchers to employees and retirees as part of our wellness benefit offerings.

## **2. Time Off, Flexibility, and Work-Life Balance**

A strong desire emerged for more flexible and equitable time policies or procedures for university staff.

### **Winter Shutdown**

- Make the [winter closedown](#) period an extended paid holiday from December 24, 2025, to January 2, 2026, without requiring employees to use vacation or floating holidays.

### **Inclement Weather Policies**

- [Standardize policies](#) across the university to avoid requiring remote work or vacation use during campus closures. Clarity is needed regarding what employees do if they cannot work remotely due to a lack of childcare, a lack of equipment, or an outage caused by the weather.

### **Leave Flexibility**

- Remove [vacation accrual caps](#) for office/service and managerial/professional classified staff.
- Align vacation and sick leave accrual rates for office/service employees with those of managerial/professional employees to promote equity and recognize the essential contributions of all staff classifications.
- Allow vacation to be cashed out to supplement lost compensation, and/or convert sick leave to vacation.
- Evaluate and modify the outdated [PTO allocation policies](#) that create inequities between managerial/professional and office/service classified staff. State of Nebraska employees no longer employ this tiered approach, but the university still uses this antiquated system.

### **Flexible Scheduling**

- Support the implementation of four-day work weeks and/or flexible Fridays during June and July. [Washington University in St. Louis](#) has a flexible work accommodations menu for reference.
- Provide one additional paid leave day per month in FY 25-26 similar to the [July 3 and December 24 announcement](#).
- Create time-based rewards for essential employees or employees who work remotely and cannot take advantage of the July 3 and December 24 additional paid leave holidays.

### **3. Professional Development and Support Resources**

Staff emphasized the importance of investing in their growth and well-being. This is a big reason why staff stay at the University of Nebraska.

#### **Tuition Benefits**

- Expand [employee and dependent scholarship program](#) from 15 credit hours per year to 20 or 30 credit hours annually.
- Extend the employee and dependent scholarship program eligibility to part-time staff.
- Extend the employee and dependent scholarship program to allow spouses/partners to use the program toward graduate-level courses.
- Increase the flexibility of the employee and dependent scholarship program by removing the "full-time student" requirement, allowing for part-time enrollment, and extending the age limit for dependents to 26.

#### **Organizational Development and Training**

- Expand the programming budget of the Office of Organizational Development and Training to offer more free professional development opportunities to staff, building on the success of [NRICH, NCLUDE, and the All-Staff Conference](#).

#### **Employee Assistance Program**

- Expand the capacity of this service by hiring an additional FTE. EAP is a highly used and valued staff support resource center that offers [counseling](#) and [workplace services for managers](#).

### **4. Institutional Culture and Communication**

There is a clear call for a more inclusive, transparent, and responsive university culture.

#### **Staff Representation**

- Increase staff involvement in budget decision-making processes, in addition to the current staff involvement in the Chancellor's Leadership Cabinet and the Academic Planning Committee.

#### **Leadership Accountability**

- Reevaluate budget priorities, particularly in areas of administrative growth versus core staffing needs.
- Clearly explain the principles and priorities guiding any budget cut or reallocation and communicate this to the campus community.
- Ensure consistent budget cut communication across UNL and the four NU campuses.

**Public Service Loan Forgiveness**

- Offer support for staff navigating [Public Service Loan Forgiveness](#) (PSLF), especially under the [Saving on a Valuable Education](#) (SAVE) plan.

**Feedback Mechanisms**

- Use surveys and polls to prioritize staff suggestions and ensure follow-through during a time of intense change and transition.

**5. Advocacy and Collective Action**

Staff have a desire to strengthen their collective voice.

**Formal Recognition**

- Pursue official recognition of the Staff Senate by the University of Nebraska Board of Regents, similar to our Faculty Senate colleagues across the four NU campuses.

## **Conclusion**

The feedback from these town halls reflects a committed, creative, and collaboratively minded staff community seeking meaningful alternatives to traditional compensation.

While some proposals are ambitious, most of the ideas and recommendations are grounded in practicality, equity, sustainability, and a desire to contribute to enhancing the University of Nebraska. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Staff Senate urges university leadership to consider these recommendations as part of a broader strategy to support and retain staff during this challenging fiscal period.

Moreover, the absence of across-the-board compensation increases for employees can amplify existing stressors like wage compression, inflation, and the increased cost of living. These factors impact individual employees and, by extension, pose a direct threat to the university's ability to maintain a high-quality workforce as well as create an extraordinary culture, morale, and workplace environment. These factors can impact our ability to improve the quality of service to our students and achieve our academic mission.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Staff Senate is ready to be an engaged and collaborative partner in helping solve these challenging problems. Please contact us if you have questions about the ideas and recommendations included in this report. Thank you for your consideration and leadership.

Jessie Brophy  
Staff Senate President

Jerri Harner  
Staff Senate Vice President for Internal Affairs

Morgan Green McConnell  
Staff Senate Vice President for External Affairs

Doug Pellatz  
Staff Senate Secretary-Treasurer

Jordan Gonzales  
Staff Senate Executive Advisor

Joann Ross  
Staff Senate Coordinator and Executive Secretary