The institution is a large, public, Carnegie R1 research university situated in an urban area in Florida with an overall enrollment of approximately 30,000 students. The university offers an expansive range of academic programs and encourages students to pursue research in their degree programs. The university focuses heavily on recruitment of both domestic and international students and currently, approximately 10% of the university’s enrollment is from international students, primarily from Latin America. The institution’s leadership has set a goal to diversify the international population by increasing enrollment from Asia and the Middle East over the next five years. They have a five-person team dedicated specifically toward international recruitment efforts. The institution already has a robust customer relationship management (CRM) system, uses Unibuddy, has an on-campus Intensive English Program, and already has a sophisticated virtual campus tour and viewbook.

The team has been given a $60,000 annual international recruitment budget and has identified the following five strategies to help launch the international recruitment efforts at the university: 1) participation in education fairs; 2) contracting with third-party vendors; 3) developing an international ambassador program; 4) participation in at least one conference; and 5) flying in EducationUSA advisors from the conference to visit the university.
Through the use of these five strategies within the established budget and an institutional commitment to the success of the initiative, the institution can expect to see an increase in enrollment from targeted regions to be able to meet their goal within five years. In the first year of implementation, the university should not expect to see dramatic increases, as return on investment for such initiatives is never immediate and prospective international students typically begin researching schools several years in advance of actual enrollment.

## Budget Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment Initiative</th>
<th>Projected Cost</th>
<th>Projected Activity</th>
<th>Anticipated Outcomes (KPIs)</th>
<th>ROI/Worth Repeating?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education Fairs</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>Participate in all available free fairs</td>
<td>Number of prospects/leads generated</td>
<td>Track source codes to see yield (continue tracking source codes for each fair for at least 3 years following participation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Budget allocated to cover fair fees (virtual &amp; in-person), travel, materials, shipping</td>
<td>Number of conversions (applications/enrollments)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-party vendors</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>Set up profile on third-party vendor sites to collect leads</td>
<td>Number of leads imported into CRM</td>
<td>Track source codes to see conversion rates - evaluate annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number of conversions (applications/enrollments)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Ambassador Program</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>Hosting gatherings, swag, promotional materials for ambassadors to distribute</td>
<td>Incoming student sense of belonging and connection to institution (survey students to measure impact)</td>
<td>New leads in target markets, and completion of enrollment tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number of student contacts per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number of social media posts/ activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Case Study #10

**Large, Public Research Institution**

**Annual Recruitment Budget:** $60,000  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Expected Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambassadors performance reviews</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Opportunity for students to grow professionally</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Conferences** | $10,000 | Each staff member should attend at least 1 conference (i.e. NAFSA, IACAC, etc.) | Collection of notes & best practices from sessions  
Networking  
Offer abbreviated sessions to share knowledge with appropriate campus |
| **EdUSA Fly-in visit** | $5,000 | Send targeted invitations to EducationUSA advisors from growing regions  
Plan visit around NAFSA - budget allocated to cover domestic flights & accommodations | Visibility  
Targeted invitations  
Increase in applications from partners in 1-2 years |

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BACKGROUND

During the 2020-21 academic year, international student enrollment in the United States decreased by 15% from the prior year (IIE, n.d.). This decrease in international student enrollment in the U.S. is largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the decrease, the U.S. remains a top destination for international students who want to study abroad. According to the “Emerging Futures” survey of more than 10,000 international students conducted by IDP, Canada was the top first-choice destination with 26% of the responses, with the U.S. being in second place with 20% (IDP Connect, 2022). Post-pandemic, international students may measure the cost and quality of U.S. higher education on a new scale. Students may be more inclined to focus on campus life and student activities following many months of lockdowns and virtual learning. Large universities which offer more diverse clubs and extracurricular activities will be more attractive to students seeking socialization and community.

RATIONALES

Proposed Recruitment Modalities

Education Fairs

When entering a new region to recruit students, it is vital to connect with students and partners both virtually and in-person. When traveling abroad, in addition to meeting students, the university would schedule meetings with educational agents, as such relationships often require in-person interaction to be successful. With a budget of $30,000 for education fairs, the university would be able to travel to attend a few in-person fairs as well as participate in some virtual fairs. This budget would cover fair fees, transportation, accommodations, materials, and shipping costs.

Third-Party Vendors

Marketing efforts that target prospective students are necessary to attract students from untapped markets. Using third-party vendors is generally an affordable way to reach many prospective students and generate leads. A budget of $10,000 would allow the university to partner with 1-2 vendors. The university will focus on vendors that are able to offer a targeted solution focusing on Asia and the Middle East. They could also work with additional vendors on a commission basis (similar to agent payments).

International Ambassador Program

When attempting to attract students from a region that is not yet present on campus, it is important to build community among these students during the recruitment process. Peer-to-peer engagement is an effective tool to build community. International student ambassadors are current international students who play an important role in helping prospective international students decide if the university is the right fit by sharing their experience. A budget of $5,000 would support ambassador events and allow materials to be purchased for the ambassadors to use as a recruitment tool.

Conference Participation

Participation in professional organization conferences such as NAFSA is important in order for the school to stay abreast of ever changing regulations in international education, best practices amongst peers, and gain exposure to partners, EducationUSA advisors, and agents. $10,000 has been allocated for NAFSA conference participation for team members which includes airfare, lodging, meals, and transportation.

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EducationUSA Campus Hosting

“EducationUSA is a U.S. Department of State network of over 430 international student advising centers in more than 175 countries and territories” (EducationUSA, n.d.). These advisors meet with students in their home countries to promote higher education in the U.S. on an international scale. From NAFSA, the university should work with EducationUSA to fly in one to two of their advisors to visit the university’s campus and surrounding region. A $5,000 budget should be sufficient for these activities.

Incompatible Recruitment Strategies

There are several solutions that come at little to no cost to the recruitment budget that the university should also consider.

International Agents

The university should also consider contracting with agents to improve international visibility, generate applications, and increase enrollment. This solution will not be funded through the recruitment budget, as generally, agents are paid on commission with the commission paid through enrollment fees/tuition after an international student they have recruited on behalf of the university is admitted and enrolled. This model for funding agents is preferred as it helps to ensure that agents are appropriately screening potential applicants and only encouraging qualified applicants with a high likelihood of enrolling to apply.

Transfer-In Fairs

As part of normal recruitment activities, the university regularly participates in community college transfer fairs in the region. Therefore, participation in these fairs will not come out of the dedicated international recruitment budget, but collaborating with the domestic team is an advisable, low-cost way to increase visibility. This is a good opportunity for the university to recruit in-country international applicants, and an opportunity to partner with community colleges to create transfer pathways for international students.

Ambassador Scholarships

The international recruitment team should work with the Financial Aid office to offer scholarships to their student ambassadors, rather than allocating part of the budget for ambassador scholarships. Given the high cost of tuition at large universities, a substantial, renewable scholarship for ambassadors is recommended.

Rejected Alternatives

Several alternatives were discussed but ultimately ruled out. These include, active in-country recruitment, in-country advertising, marketing material translations, prospect name buys, and SMS messaging campaigns.

In-Country Representative

Hiring an in-country representative would be expensive and would not be feasible given the budget. Perhaps as international enrollment grows, the university can reconsider this solution. However, the proposed solutions will provide broader reach and larger returns on investment.

In-Country Advertising

Likewise, in-country advertising can be costly, will be difficult to determine return on investment, and other proposed solutions will provide larger returns.

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Gold Key Service

Gold Key Service is a service offered through the U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration which provides assistance in identifying and setting up appointments with interested potential partners in a foreign market (International Trade Administration, n.d.). With limited funding, this was not a recommended solution, but one the university should consider allocating funds to. With Gold Key Service’s standard package, they will identify potential partners, arrange meetings and attend the meetings with the university representatives for around $5,000 not including transportation and lodging costs. This is an option the university should strongly consider allocating a minimum of $8,000 to, which would cover the standard package and transportation and lodging costs for one International Recruitment team member, and allow for the team member and any other university representatives to meet with more than five potential partners in one region. It is recommended that deans or department chairs be encouraged to participate. They would be responsible for paying the cost of transportation and lodging but the cost of the Gold Key Service package would be centrally funded. This option would help increase visibility and build potential future partnership pipelines in the target regions.

Marketing Materials Translation

Translating marketing materials can be costly, is difficult to do well, and is a service that can be provided by many third-party vendors (included in budget). Given the budget, it is recommended that the university utilize services provided by third-party vendors rather than translate university materials such as brochures. In the long run, they can revisit this solution and may consider translating strategic recruitment pieces into a few key languages. For example, as they are hoping to increase enrollments from Asia and the Middle East, they may want to consider Mandarin and Arabic as starting points.

SMS Messaging Campaigns

While text messaging/SMS campaigns can be effective, they can also be costly and complicated given many of their inquiries will have international phone numbers which may not receive SMS messages. It is recommended that they rely on services provided through the third-party vendors.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Education Fairs

The biggest advantage of education fairs is the personal connections the recruiters are able to make with students and their families. The disadvantage is that it can be difficult to know which fairs are most beneficial until after participating in them. To measure ROI, the university would track source codes using their CRM, keeping in mind many students may not enroll for a few years.

Third-Party Vendors

Leads from third-party vendors would receive communications as part of the international communication plan after being entered in the CRM. Using a CRM makes it easy to track how many students from each vendor apply, are admitted, and enroll. When reassessing vendors each year, the university would consider lead conversions in addition to overall student reach in the target markets from each platform.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

International Ambassador Program

An international ambassador program can benefit a university by not only engaging international students on campus, but also fostering a sense of belonging with prospective students. One way to track ROI is to track the yield of students who chat via Unibuddy. Additionally, social media engagement from the ambassadors content can be tracked.

Conference Participation

The advantages of conference participation are that staff will be better equipped to satisfy the institutional goals of international enrollment, learn best practices, improve visibility of the institution, and make connections with potential partners. The disadvantage of conference participation is that returns on this investment are difficult, if not impossible to quantify and measure. Regardless, conference participation in the international education space is critical, as information sharing, industry best practices are important to an institution just launching its internationalization efforts.

EducationUSA Campus Hosting

As with conference participation, key performance indicators and return on the investment of hosting EducationUSA advisors can be difficult, if not impossible, to quantify. However, the university’s reputation within the community of EducationUSA advisors and the increased visibility with the advisors are valuable. The institution should use discretion when inviting EducationUSA advisors for visits and target advisors from regions where the institution seeks to gain more applications. Within the application for admission, the university should be sure to add an EducationUSA advisor to the question of how the applicant heard about the college so the institution can track whether any applicants apply due to meetings with EducationUSA advisors.

Education Fairs

When selecting education fairs to participate in, the university should consult with colleagues in the international education field to learn which fairs have been effective in the past, being that they are entering a new market that they have not visited in the past. The university should work with their marketing department to create market-specific marketing materials for each fair.

Third-Party Vendors

In addition to considering cost when selecting third-party vendors to work with, the university should consider the territories covered by each vendor, and the time commitment required to successfully partner with each vendor. It is also important that the university designs an international communication plan so that the leads receive consistent, relevant follow-up.

International Ambassador Program

By developing an International Ambassador Program, the university will be able to connect current students with prospective students. The ambassadors would participate in recruitment events, create content for social media, and chat directly with students via Unibuddy. It is important to also provide value to the ambassadors by giving them access to networking and professional development opportunities. The International Recruitment team should operate the International Ambassador program so that they can stay connected with current students to be able to provide realistic expectations to prospective students. Additionally, these ambassadors can be a great resource for alumni engagement in the future.
Conference Participation

Conference participation will allow team members to obtain market research, learn industry best practices, connect with potential third-party vendors, international agents, and help to advance the university’s internationalization goals. Regular, annual participation is recommended as the international educational landscape is ever changing. Conference attendees should compile and share notes, slide decks, and handouts from sessions in an organized, accessible manner for future reference and for the benefit of any team members who were not able to attend. Lunch and learn sessions once team members have returned from the conference is also a great way to share information, debrief, and brainstorm next steps.

EducationUSA Campus Hosting

Under the EducationUSA Campus Hosting program, the university would be responsible for “lodging, meals, domestic airfare or ground transportation, and local transportation, including travel to/from the campus for arrival and departures” (EducationUSA, n.d.). The university can use this opportunity to increase visibility, put their institution at the top of mind for these advisors, and help to encourage them to promote the university to the students they meet with. The university should specifically target EducationUSA advisors from Asia and the Middle East to help increase visibility in their target area.

A campus visit should be facilitated by the international team and include a tour of the campus, meetings and/or meals with current international students, meetings with faculty, staff, and campus leaders who support the internationalization efforts on campus, and visits to regional landmarks or points of interest.

Increase International Recruitment Budget

With a larger budget, the university would be more likely to reach their goal and do so on a quicker timeline. Investing in scholarships for international students will help with recruitment. The current allocation of $30,000 for education fairs will likely cover the cost of just one or two trips annually, and with Asia and the Middle East, relationship building in those regions is very important. Allocating more funds to allow staff to attend these fairs would help to foster these relationships and improve visibility. Additionally, the university should plan to invest in emerging technology solutions such as AR.

For more information on these services, please visit
https://gatewayinternational.org/gateway-leadership-institute-s2022/
REFERENCES


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