International student recruitment requires the pillars of research, resources, and budget to produce an effective and sustainable process. In many cases, these three pillars are not fully accessible or possible. Below, recruiting options are explored for a private liberal arts college aiming to develop an effective international student recruitment plan with a budget of $30,000.

The main goals are increasing international student enrollment, increasing brand name recognition in targeting regions/countries, increasing awareness of the benefits of a private liberal arts college education, and exploring new markets.

Defining a recruitment strategy is imperative at any scale, but more so when limited in such a competitive landscape. The five strategies defined to support this recruitment plan include: community partnerships, partnerships with education networks, educational agents, in-house recruitment programs development, and digital marketing.
# BUDGET SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment Initiative</th>
<th>Projected Cost</th>
<th>Projected Activity</th>
<th>Anticipated Outcomes (KPIs)</th>
<th>ROI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Partnerships</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>College Fairs, workshops, counselor information sessions, transfer fairs</td>
<td>Increase in applications &lt;br&gt; Increase in enrolled students</td>
<td>Lead generation &lt;br&gt; University partnerships, articulation agreements &lt;br&gt; Increase in applications and enrollments &lt;br&gt; Brand awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Partnerships</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>Workshops, college fairs, advertising, purchase leads</td>
<td>Increase in applications &lt;br&gt; Increase in enrolled students</td>
<td>Lead generation &lt;br&gt; Increase in applications and enrollments &lt;br&gt; Brand awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-House Recruitment Programming</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase in applications &lt;br&gt; Increase in enrolled students</td>
<td>Lead generation &lt;br&gt; Increase in applications and enrollments &lt;br&gt; Brand awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Marketing</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase in applications &lt;br&gt; Increase in enrolled students</td>
<td>Lead generation &lt;br&gt; Increase in applications and enrollments &lt;br&gt; Brand awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information on these services, please visit [https://gatewayinternational.org/gateway-leadership-institute-s2022/](https://gatewayinternational.org/gateway-leadership-institute-s2022/)
BACKGROUND

According to IIE’s Open Doors report, as of the 2020-21 school year, higher education institutions reported a 68% increase in new international student enrollment, year over year. As visa offices catch up on processing, travel restrictions lift, and the world unifies in seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, it’s certain that private liberal arts colleges will benefit from this wave.

Liberal arts colleges offer four-year degrees that are broad in breadth – providing the ability to explore other interests beyond an academic major – and are focused on the humanities, sciences and social sciences.

For international students coming from a system that requires them to pick a specialization from the first semester of college, a liberal arts education provides a more expansive opportunity to explore other areas of study and the flexibility to change and/or combine areas of interest.

International students may choose to study at U.S. liberal arts colleges for several reasons. Higher education experts said they are drawn to the close-knit communities offered by the small campuses, which are often tucked away in rural locations.

The private liberal arts college has adopted test-optional admission where we offer more than 90 majors with a student body of 13,000 students in bachelor’s, and master’s programs.

RATIONALES

Prioritized Recruitment Strategies

Digital Marketing

Unlike many other forms of advertising, digital media is trackable and therefore provides a tangible return on investment.

Facebook (including Instagram) is a cost-effective and ideal channel for this effort (depending on the country determined). Facebook is utilized by 37% of the world’s population, making it one of the largest utilized channels, surpassing YouTube and just under Google. The structure of this campaign would focus on brand awareness/traffic generating, and lead generation. Before getting started, in-depth market research is required to determine the ideal country/region and persona to target.

The cost includes fees for an outsourced agency:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial market research/insights and campaign pre-launch work: creative/content development &amp; translation</td>
<td>$8,000 - $10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media plan: Brand awareness/traffic campaign and lead generation</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurture campaign: Email drip campaign and/or WhatsApp (Free)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the current strengths to position the college for the prospective students will be ideal for a private liberal arts college in this position. Using in-house developed materials like webinars, one-sheeters, and student life updates makes for great social content that can be further promoted with a paid campaign. Insights from the paid campaign results can be further utilized in the future for organic (free) strategies.

In-House Recruitment Programming

When considering prudent recruiting strategies, capitalizing on the tools that are readily available is needed: current robust CRM and communications platform, far-reaching social media platforms, virtual events hosting capabilities, and current partnerships.
The tools below help broaden the reach and diversify prospect pools and markets, strengthen partnerships, communicate effectively with leads to transition them through the admissions funnel and reduce attrition rate.

**CRM AND COMMUNICATIONS PLATFORM**

Developing an email campaign for prospective students to nurture leads at every step in the admissions process is key to staying high-touch and converting leads to applications, and ultimately enrollment.

Email campaigns can be carefully crafted once and adjusted periodically for content updates. Most agile CRM systems have an email drip campaign system that can be utilized. Other options that exist are mailing systems like MailChimp at zero to low cost. Having an automated email system alleviates staff time and allows for prospective students/parents to still have contact and reference important information.

**SOCIAL MEDIA [Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WeChat, WhatsApp]**

Managing a successful social media presence may not necessarily yield new leads. However, it is a highly effective way to showcase the institution and engage with existing prospects/leads as well as current students and their networks, and with partners. Social media is perfect to meet the students where they are at and connect with them effectively.

**VIRTUAL RECRUITING TOOLS**

It is imperative to utilize diverse virtual recruiting opportunities, such as virtual fairs, webinars and workshops, independently or collaboratively with a partner(s), e.g., community colleges, other 4-year colleges and universities, or a study state consortium. Virtual recruiting allows for:

- Exploration of new regions and test the market for private medium institutions without the cost associated with in-person travel.
- Maintaining already established relationships with counselors, prospective students and alumni. Below is a list of free or affordable virtual recruiting options:

**Virtual Education Fairs (4 virtual fairs per year)**

EducationUSA offers virtual education fairs at the undergraduate level in different regions with a cost ranging from free to about $600. For a medium sized private liberal arts college, it is prudent to capitalize on cost-effective education fairs that are offered at the local, state, and regional level.

**Virtual Recruitment Programming**

Another cost effective way to reach a captive audience is to offer webinars on relevant topics to the target audience and/or a series of themed virtual events for different target audiences (prospective students, parents, counselors, agents, etc.) in target regions (Latin America, India for example):

- Collaborating with EducationUSA advising centers in specific countries or regions to offer valuable information for the advisors and their prospective students.
- Hosting a series of themed virtual events/webinars through Zoom and inviting partners to have their students register for the events.
- Inviting current prospective students and applicants to register for these events.
- Broadcasting the webinars on social media and tagging the different partners.
- Webinars can feature current students from the target region/country.
- Virtual campus tour

For more information on these services, please visit https://gatewayinternational.org/gateway-leadership-institute-s2022/
Establish and Nurture Community Partnerships

It will be important for the university to partner with a variety of organizations of the local, regional, national and international levels. These partnerships can create exposure, brand awareness, and help to develop a pipeline of international student leads. When it comes to community partnerships, it’s recommended to explore opportunities with local high schools and community colleges located throughout the state. We recommend that the university seek out articulation agreements with community colleges in the state where they are located. Articulation agreements will allow students to easily transfer from the community college to the four-year institution. It will be important for the university to identify popular academic programs among international students including STEM and business majors.

In addition to articulation agreements that allow for ease of transfer, it’s also recommended to explore 2+2 partnerships with community colleges. This will provide a guarantee to international students that if they begin their studies at the community college and meet defined academic requirements, they will be guaranteed admission to the university. This type of program could be favorable to international students and provide academic assurance when going through the visa process.

Along with targeting students in different international markets, the university should take advantage of international students that are living in the United States. Researching demographic information and contacting high schools with large international populations can create a strong pipeline of applicants. Medium sized universities can work with the high schools to create programming for international students including application and financial aid workshops at little to no cost.

Education Partnerships

There are a wide range of education partners that medium sized universities can partner with to promote the school and attract international students to the campus. In researching a variety of resources, we recommend that the private college partner with EducationUSA on a national level. EducationUSA is a U.S. Department of State network of over 430 international student advising centers in more than 175 countries and territories. The network promotes U.S. higher education to students around the world by offering accurate, comprehensive, and current information about opportunities to study at accredited postsecondary institutions in the United States. EducationUSA also provides services to the U.S. higher education community including professional development and recruitment events.

Along with EducationUSA, we would encourage the university / college to partner with an advocacy consortium such as Study USA (state-specific). The Study USA State Consortiums are grassroots organizations of colleges and universities that are dedicated to promoting international education. It includes advertising opportunities and partnership opportunities with higher education institutions throughout the state. Finally, we would recommend the college explore partnerships with organizations that promote the United States as a study destination for international students. There are a variety of services that charge a fee to promote the private college and generate leads. At a minimum this type of service would cost around $2500. A partnership with an education consortium can also create opportunities to have international counselors visit the campus at a minimum cost to the university.

Many universities abroad seek partnerships with U.S. institutions on 2+2 programs. Such partnerships are mutually beneficial, they
add value to the foreign institution’s curriculum and secure a steady flow of international students into the U.S. institution.

**Third-Party Recruitment**

Agents or In-County Representatives will work on behalf of the university to recruit students and assist with the application and visa processes. It will be important for the private college to identify target markets for international applicants. Popular countries for international recruitment include India, China, and Vietnam.

In-Country Representatives are typically employed through a third-party vendor. The representative is based in a specific country and does recruitment work on behalf of the college or university. At a minimum, this model would cost the university around $80,000.

With such a small budget, it would be recommended that funding for an agent(s) or In-Country Representative would come from a different department.

In addition, it’s recommended to explore peer-to-peer networking to assist with the recruitment of international students. Through this platform, prospective international students can communicate directly with international students that are enrolled at the university. This form of recruitment can be developed in-house or through a third-party vendor.

**INCOMPATIBLE RECRUITING STRATEGIES**

Despite their effectiveness, it is not feasible within a budget of $30,000 to utilize the following strategies because of the significant cost associated with them:

Country Offices & Representatives - a contracted, third-party resource can cost $80,000.

International Education Fairs/School visits - travel expenses and cost to attend.

Frequent Partner Fly-in Campus Visit - cost of travel and accommodations.

**KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

- Number of international students enrolled
- Home country for enrolled student
- Number of leads generated from digital marketing campaigns
- Prospects’ interactions with digital marketing campaigns: E.g., drip campaigns (unique) opens and (unique) clicks or response to call to actions
- Number of leads generated from partnership opportunities
- Leads that converted to applications

Applications that converted to enrollments

For more information on these services, please visit

https://gatewayinternational.org/gateway-leadership-institute-s2022/
RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the challenges of a small budget, it’s recommended that the majority of the budget be used on digital marketing. Through digital marketing, the medium sized university will be able to cover the most ground in terms of outreach in a cost effective manner.

Leveraging partnerships on the local, regional, national and international levels will help support and supplement the digital marketing efforts. A small investment will need to be made in these partnerships, especially on the national and international levels.

Grass-roots programming with educational entities in and around the community college will also be important to the success of recruiting international students. Market research into the international communities near the university will help shape programming and targeted local efforts with high schools and affinity groups. Partnerships with community colleges will help promote brand awareness and create a pathway for international students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With sincere gratitude to the generous sponsorship of the following organizations, Gateway was able to offer the Spring 2022 Gateway Leadership Institute and produce these case studies focused on international enrollment management. These inspiring organizations are truly committed to preparing the next generation of international education leaders.