

CASE STUDY #6

PRIVATE MEDIUM-SIZED INSTITUTION ANNUAL RECRUITMENT BUDGET: \$60,000

AUTHORS

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The institution is a medium-sized, private liberal arts institution, situated in an urban area in Florida with an overall enrollment of approximately 15,000 students. The college prides itself on a prestigious reputation and a strong sense of campus connectedness among its student body. The college focuses heavily on recruitment of both domestic and international students and currently, approximately 5% of the college's enrollment is from international students. The institution's leadership has set a goal to increase that enrollment to 8% in the next five years with continual incremental increases thereafter. They have a four-person team dedicated specifically toward international recruitment efforts. The institution already has a robust customer

relationship management (CRM) system, uses Unibuddy, 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 college:

- 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) Hosting EducationUSA advisors.

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 overall increase in international student enrollment and should be able to meet their goal within five years.

In the first year of implementation, the college 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

Recruitment Initiative	Projected Cost	Projected Activity	Anticipated Outcomes (KPIs)	ROI
Education Fairs	\$25,000	Participate in all available free fairs Budget allocated to cover fair fees (virtual & in-person), travel, materials, shipping	Number of prospects/leads generated Number of conversions (applications/enrollments)	Track source codes to see yield (continue tracking source codes for each fair for at least 3 years following participation)
Third-party vendors	\$15,000	Set up profile on third-party vendor sites to collect leads	Number of leads imported into CRM Number of conversions (applications/enrollments)	Track source codes to see conversion rates - evaluate annually
International Ambassador Program	\$5,000	Hosting gatherings, swag, promotional materials for ambassadors to distribute	Incoming student sense of belonging and connection to institution (survey students to measure impact) Number of student contacts per week Number of social media posts/activity	Track source codes/interactions to see yield

			Ambassador performance reviews (opportunity for students to grow professionally)	
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	Any actionable insights
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	interest from the region

BACKGROUND

During the 2020-21 academic year, total 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. While private, liberal arts colleges are generally more costly than large public universities, they tend to have smaller class sizes and encourage a strong sense of community among students, which can be appealing to international students.

RATIONALES

Prioritized Recruitment Modalities

Education Fairs

Unlike many other forms of advertising, digital media is trackable and therefore provides a tangible return on investment. Connecting with international students both virtually and in-person is particularly important for private liberal arts institutions given their relatively high cost in comparison to other types of institutions. The college would attend all available free virtual education fairs to maximize opportunities to connect with prospective students. With a budget of \$25,000 for education fairs, the college 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

Top of funnel marketing is an effective way for the college to increase their international enrollment and reach markets that are not targeted through other methods. Using third-party vendors is generally an affordable way to reach many prospective students and generate leads. A budget of \$15,000 would allow the college to partner with 2-3 vendors. They could also work with additional vendors on a commission basis that would be paid from enrollment fees/tuition (similar to agent payments).

International Ambassador Program

Student life is an important factor in recruitment, and peer-to-peer contact is a vital element of this. Being that location and close-knit student communities are an important differentiator for private, liberal arts colleges, an international ambassador program is an important tool to validate the student 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.

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 college should work with EducationUSA to fly in one to two of their advisors to visit the college 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 college should also consider.

International Agents

The college 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 college 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 college 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 college to recruit in-country international applicants, and an opportunity to partner with community colleges to create transfer pathways for international students.

Tuition Discount Scholarships

As part of maintaining their prestigious reputation, the college has a relatively high cost of attendance, in line with many private, liberal arts colleges. However, to make their offers of admission more accessible to international students, the college should offer tuition discounts framed as scholarships.

Ambassador Scholarships

The international recruitment team should work with the Financial Aid office to offer tuition discounts to their student ambassadors, rather than allocating part of the budget for ambassador scholarships.

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 college 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.

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. Additionally, private, liberal arts colleges typically require higher English proficiency scores for admission. Given the budget, it is recommended that the college utilize services provided by third-party vendors.

In the long run, they can revisit this solution and may consider translating strategic recruitment pieces into a few key languages. For example, as the majority of their current international enrollment is from Caribbean and Latin American countries, they may want to consider Spanish and Portuguese translated pieces as a starting point. SMS

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 college 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 college would consider lead conversions in addition to overall student reach from each platform.

International Ambassador Program

An international ambassador program can benefit a college 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 college'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 college 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Education Fairs

When selecting education fairs to participate in, the college should start by focusing on markets where their current students are from. To expand their reach, they should also participate in at least one fair in a new market each year. When attending fairs, the college representatives should also make time to meet with local agents and visit local high schools. The college 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 college 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 college designs an international communication plan so that the leads receive consistent, relevant follow-up.

International Ambassador Program

By developing an International Ambassador Program, the college 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 college'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 college 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 college 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 college to the students they meet with.

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.

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