



CASE STUDY #9

**LARGE
RESEARCH
INSTITUTION
ANNUAL
RECRUITMENT
BUDGET: \$30,000**

AUTHORS

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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 large research university aiming to develop an effective international student recruitment plan with a budget of \$30,000. The objective is to make sure to track ROI on a yearly basis to guarantee intent and commitment for the next 5 years.

The main goals are increasing international student enrollment, increasing brand name

recognition in target regions/countries, increasing awareness of the benefits of a large research university 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

Recruitment Initiative	Projected Cost	Projected Activity	Anticipated Outcomes (KPIs)	ROI
Community Partnerships	\$5,000	College Fairs, workshops, counselor information sessions, transfer fairs	Increase in applications Increase in enrolled students	Lead generation University partnerships, articulation agreements Increase in applications and enrollments Brand awareness
Education Partnerships	\$3,000	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	Workshops, college fairs, advertising, purchase leads	Increase in applications Increase in enrolled students	Lead generation Increase in applications and enrollments Brand awareness
In-House Recruitment Programming	\$4,000		Increase in applications Increase in enrolled students	Lead generation Increase in applications and enrollments Brand awareness
Digital Marketing	\$18,000		Increase in applications Increase in enrolled students	Lead generation Increase in applications and enrollments Brand awareness

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 large research universities will benefit from this wave.

Public universities typically operate under the supervision of state governments and are funded, in part, by tax dollars and subsidies from the state. Some of the world's most famous discoveries have been made through university research. Students are an integral part of university research: 56% of our nation's basic research is being conducted at universities.

Undergraduate courses at many research universities are often academic rather than vocational and may not prepare students for particular careers, but many employers value degrees from research universities because they teach fundamental life skills such as critical thinking.

International students may choose to study at a U.S. research university for several reasons. Higher education experts said they are drawn to the universities that offer in-the-field or lab experiences along with lower cost and field competitiveness.

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 lead generation within a market where some brand awareness may already exist as an advantage. 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:

Initial market research/insights and campaign pre-launch work: creative/content development & translation: \$8,000 - \$10,000

Media plan: Brand awareness/traffic campaign and lead generation \$10,000

Nurture campaign: Email drip campaign and/or WhatsApp (Free)

In-House Recruitment Programming

When considering prudent recruiting strategies, it's recommended to capitalize on the tools that are readily available to us: current robust CRM and communications platform, far-reaching social media platforms, virtual events hosting capabilities, and current partnerships. Below, is how to plan to utilize each of these tools, that combined, will help us: broaden our reach and diversify prospects pool and markets, strengthen our 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 your 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 testing the market 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 large research university, it is prudent to capitalize on cost-effective education fairs in target countries and cities.

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.

Inviting Faculty to talk about latest research trends, opportunities and how students are contributing to the discussion with preliminary results. Hopefully this will not only draw potential students pursuing the subject matter, but will also attract international universities looking to create a partnership.

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

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. It's also recommended 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.

In addition, the graduate student population will also be an important market to recruit. The university will want to pursue relationships with other 4-year colleges/universities and create a pipeline for undergraduate students looking to pursue graduate studies and/or extend their OPT or F1 visa. Promoting STEM programs will attract students that are looking to extend OPT.

Education Partnerships

There is a wide range of education partners that universities can partner with to promote the school and attract international students to the campus. In researching a variety of resources, we recommend partnering 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 Consortia 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 public large research university 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-Country Representatives will work on behalf of the university to recruit students and assist with the application and visa processes. It will be important for a large research university with limited resources to identify target markets for international applicants. Popular countries for international recruitment include India, China, and Vietnam, but please do not disregard emerging markets like Nepal, Nigeria, and the Philippines.

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, we would recommend exploring 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

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 large-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 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 target local efforts with high schools and affinity groups. Partnerships with community colleges will help promote brand awareness and create a pathway for international students.

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