2025 Marketing and Recruitment Practices for Undergraduate Students

Effective practices for undergraduate recruitment at four-year and two-year institutions

Key Findings From Marketing and Recruitment Leaders

In today's competitive higher education landscape, colleges and universities must adopt innovative marketing and recruitment strategies to attract top talent. This report unveils the most effective tactics for the four-year private, four-year public, and two-year institutions based on a recent survey of 114 institutions across the US.

The findings from these leaders highlight the importance of a multichannel approach, with strategies as varied as in-person meetings, digital advertising, and personalized communication rising to the top of the most effective practices. Social media and search engine optimization (SEO) also are crucial advertising and recruitment tools across institution types. Marketing and recruitment leaders also said that leveraging technology such as AI-powered chatbots and data analytics is key to streamlining enrollment operations and fostering engagement.

Top 3 most effective recruitment strategies

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE
- In-person meetings (on and off-campus)
- Mobile responsive website
- Text messaging

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
- In-person meetings (on and off-campus)
- Personalized videos sent directly to your students
- Text messaging

TWO-YEAR
- Digital advertising
- In-person meetings (on and off-campus)
- Personalized videos sent directly to your students

Top 3 most effective advertising strategies

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE
- Social media advertising
- Re-targeted ads
- Video advertising

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
- Paid display ads
- Television ads
- Social media advertising

TWO-YEAR
- Social media advertising
- Paid display ads
- Re-targeted ads

Top 3 most effective digital advertising strategies

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE
- SEO
- RFI forms
- AI-powered chatbots

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
- RFI forms
- SEO
- AI-powered chatbots

TWO-YEAR
- Paid display ads
- RFI forms embedded into video or website
- Search engine marketing

Top 3 most effective management practices

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE
- Admissions tracking to monitor and predict students' incremental rates of movement toward enrollment
- SEO
- Using artificial intelligence to analyze and assist with enrollment operations

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
- SEO
- Use of behavioral/ engagement scoring with digital/web tracking
- Using artificial intelligence to analyze and assist with enrollment operations

TWO-YEAR
- Leveraging your CRM
- SEO
- Leveraging analytics (such as Google Analytics)

Annual Recruitment and Marketing Plan

Institutions that have an annual recruitment and marketing plan to guide institutional enrollment efforts

80% Four-year private

70% Four-year public

60% Two-year

Quality of annual recruitment and marketing plan

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
Excellent	15%	6%	25%
Good	80%	65%	50%
Fair	3%	19%	25%
Poor	3%	10%	0%

High School Student Search Practices

Percentage of institutions that purchase names of high school students to generate inquiries and applicants

94% Four-year private

80% Four-year public

35% Two-year

Approximate number of high school student names purchased for marketing campaigns to generate inquiries and applicants

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
Fewer than 50,000 names	9%	22%	86%
50,000-100,000	32%	18%	14%
100,001-125,000	21%	24%	0%
125,001-150,000	9%	6%	0%
150,001-200,000	13%	6%	0%
200,001-350,000	13%	15%	0%
More than 350,000	3%	9%	0%

Institutions that purchase names from these grade levels

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
Prior to 10th grade	19%	11%	43%
10th grade	83%	38%	43%
11th grade	98%	85%	71%
12th grade	94%	96%	100%

Preferred methods for first contact

Sorted alphabetically

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
Digital advertising	40%	46%	57%
Direct mail	64%	57%	71%
Email	79%	83%	100%
Email with a link to a personalized URL	34%	14%	29%
Phone call to all or a selected subset	26%	6%	29%
SMS	36%	26%	71%
Video (whether delivered digitally or via email)	17%	26%	14%

Strategies for Non-Responders

Percentage of institutions that communicate with search non-responders

83% Four-year private

65% Four-year public

57% Two-year

Preferred methods for subsequent contacts with non-responders

Sorted alphabetically

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
Digital advertising	80%	60%	66%
Direct mail	65%	70%	67%
Email	95%	87%	100%
Email with a link to a personalized URL	41%	19%	0%
Phone call to all or a selected subset	47%	24%	67%
SMS	40%	35%	100%
Video (whether delivered digitally or via email)	44%	36%	67%

Number of contacts with search non-responders before giving up

Sorted alphabetically

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	<5 CONTACTS	6-12 CONTACTS	13> CONTACTS
Digital advertising	55%	26%	19%
Direct mail	82%	18%	0%
Email	43%	35%	22%
Email with a link to a personalized URL	61%	32%	7%
Phone call to all or a selected subset	77%	17%	6%
SMS	78%	15%	8%
Video (whether delivered digitally or via email)	84%	16%	0%
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	**<5 CONTACTS**	**6-12 CONTACTS**	**13> CONTACTS**
Digital advertising	67%	33%	0%
Direct mail	71%	21%	7%
Email	45%	40%	15%
Email with a link to a personalized URL	68%	32%	0%

Four-year public cont'd

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	<5 CONTACTS	6-12 CONTACTS	13> CONTACTS
Phone call to all or a selected subset	50%	50%	0%
SMS	83%	17%	0%
Video (whether delivered digitally or via email)	67%	17%	17%
TWO-YEAR	**<5 CONTACTS**	**6-12 CONTACTS**	**13> CONTACTS**
Digital advertising	50%	50%	0%
Direct mail	0%	100%	0%
Email	50%	50%	0%
Email with a link to a personalized URL	0%	0%	0%
Phone call to all or a selected subset	100%	0%	0%
SMS	67%	33%	0%
Video (whether delivered digitally or via email)	100%	0%	0%

Practical Implications

Combine digital and traditional tactics

- While digital methods dominate, traditional tactics such as direct mail and phone calls still have a place in outreach strategies

Personalization matters

- Personalization highlights the importance of tailoring communication to individual students' interests and needs. Students expect personalization across channels, including digital advertising, website visits, email, text, video, online chat, and in-person visits.

Video's potential

- Video can be a powerful way to showcase campus life and academics. Institutions should consider investing in high-quality video content and platforms for distribution.
- Video can generate more engagement, with universities encouraged to put as much effort into personalized video content as they do into in-person visits.

Persistence vs. respect for silence

- Institutions must balance persistent follow-up with respect for non-response.
- Monitoring response rates and adjusting outreach frequency accordingly can help achieve this balance.

Invest in high-quality annual marketing and recruitment plans

- Institutions must create high-quality annual marketing and recruitment plans to enhance enrollment outcomes that strategically align student name purchases, first-contact methodologies, and re-engagement with non-responders.
- A comprehensive plan provides a framework to coordinate efforts across departments, ensuring consistent messaging and sustained engagement throughout the recruitment cycle. These plans should be data-driven, adaptable, and informed by past performance metrics, ensuring that institutions maximize efficiency and effectiveness in reaching prospective students.

Digital Advertising Channels Leveraged for Targeting Search Name Purchases

In the quest to reach and engage prospective students, institutions are increasingly leveraging digital advertising channels. A review of the use and effectiveness of various platforms for targeting search name purchases reveals the prominence of social media and the nuances of institution type.

Digital channel use and effectiveness

Sorted by effectiveness

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

CHANNEL	USE	EFFECTIVE
Instagram	93%	**94%**
Display/Banner (i.e., Google Ads)	94%	**86%**
TikTok	60%	**82%**
YouTube	81%	**79%**
Facebook	81%	**77%**
Snapchat	51%	**75%**
X/Twitter	51%	**63%**
Streaming services	38%	**61%**

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

CHANNEL	USE	EFFECTIVE
Streaming services	40%	**100%**
Instagram	87%	**90%**
YouTube	66%	**86%**
Display/Banner (i.e., Google Ads)	77%	**86%**
X/Twitter	52%	**83%**
Facebook	89%	**76%**
TikTok	35%	**74%**
Snapchat	45%	**69%**

TWO-YEAR

CHANNEL	USE	EFFECTIVE
Display/Banner (i.e., Google Ads)	86%	**100%**
Facebook	85%	**100%**
Instagram	86%	**100%**
Streaming services	58%	**100%**
YouTube	57%	**100%**
TikTok	71%	**80%**
Snapchat	28%	**50%**
X/Twitter	43%	**33%**

Messaging and calls to action via digital advertising are effective methods to targeting search name purchases

In the digital landscape, crafting the right message is crucial for capturing prospective students' attention and encouraging engagement. Reviewing the messaging and calls to action used in digital advertising to target search name purchases reveals commonalities and nuances across institution types.

Key Findings

- **Specificity and storytelling**: Major, program, or department-specific messaging and showcasing student/alumni stories and outcomes are highly effective strategies used by most institutions across all types.
- **Events and deadlines**: Many institutions find promoting virtual or on-campus events and application/enrollment deadlines are highly effective strategies.
- **Brand messaging**: Brand messaging is nearly universally used. All institutional types report high effectiveness for brand messaging in creating recognition and affinity.

Sorted by effectiveness

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

MESSAGING/CTA	USE	EFFECTIVE
Promoting virtual or on-campus events	94%	**96%**
Major, program, or department-specific messaging	87%	**95%**
Showcasing students/alumni stories and outcomes	81%	**95%**
Brand messaging	98%	**94%**
Promoting application and enrollment deadlines	98%	**94%**

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

MESSAGING/CTA	USE	EFFECTIVE
Major, program, or department-specific messaging	89%	**100%**
Promoting virtual or on-campus events	86%	**97%**
Brand messaging	95%	**94%**
Promoting application and enrollment deadlines	92%	**93%**
Showcasing students/alumni stories and outcomes	83%	**93%**

TWO-YEAR

MESSAGING/CTA	USE	EFFECTIVE
Brand messaging	86%	**100%**
Promoting application and enrollment deadlines	85%	**100%**
Promoting virtual or on-campus events	86%	**100%**
Showcasing students/alumni stories and outcomes	57%	**100%**
Major, program, or department-specific messaging	57%	**75%**

Practical Implications

Display and video advertising

- Maximize display ad reach with targeted demographics and compelling messaging.
- Leverage YouTube video ads for storytelling.

Specificity and storytelling

- Develop major/program-specific content highlighting unique aspects.
- Showcase authentic student and alumni success stories.

Events and deadlines

- Prominently advertise virtual and on-campus events.
- Clearly communicate application and enrollment deadlines.

Brand messaging

- Maintain a consistent brand voice reflecting the institution's mission and values.
- Tell compelling stories illustrating the institution's impact.

Focus your resources

- Digital advertising is essential for putting your institution in front of prospective students and building brand recognition. It offers a cost-effective and versatile way to deliver personalized messages compared to traditional media like direct mail. With many platforms available (Instagram, display ads, TikTok, YouTube), it's easy to feel overwhelmed and spread budgets too thin. The key is to focus on the best platforms for your institution and execute them exceptionally well rather than trying to be everywhere.

The Volume of Recruitment Communication by Stage

As prospective students journey through the college search, they receive varying volumes of written communication from institutions' marketing and recruitment efforts. A review of the mean number of communications at each stage reveals similarities and differences across institution types.

Mean number of communications by enrollment stage

STAGE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
Purchased names/prospects	10	6	8
Inquiry stage	16	10	9
Applicant stage	15	9	10
Admit stage	16	13	9
Deposit/confirmed stage	12	9	6

Top 10 Most Effective Outreach Strategies and Tactics

We asked respondents to rate 16 outreach strategies for recruitment and marketing. The following are the **10 most effective strategies** sorted by 2024 effectiveness and how they compare to our 2020 results (see the Appendix for a complete list).

Key Findings

- **The rise of personalized videos.** Personalized videos are becoming increasingly popular with four-year institutions. While they are still not as widely used as other strategies, their effectiveness ratings are high.

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
In-person meetings (on and off-campus)	98%	**98%**	98%	**100%**
Mobile responsive website	92%	**77%**	99%	**100%**
SMS	93%	**100%**	100%	**100%**
Social media	98%	**100%**	97%	**98%**
Email communications	100%	**100%**	96%	**96%**
Personalized videos sent directly to students	28%	**49%**	88%	**96%**
Videos embedded on website	96%	**85%**	95%	**93%**
Digital advertising	91%	**99%**	93%	**91%**
College planning/application-specific apps	47%	**58%**	78%	**90%**
Video calls	65%	**53%**	93%	**89%**

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
In-person meetings (on and off-campus)	98%	**90%**	98%	**100%**
Personalized videos sent directly to students	27%	**33%**	92%	**100%**
SMS	86%	**87%**	100%	**100%**
Email communications	100%	**97%**	100%	**98%**
Publications	98%	**93%**	96%	**98%**
Digital advertising	96%	**90%**	98%	**98%**
Mobile responsive website	90%	**69%**	100%	**97%**
Social media	98%	**98%**	96%	**95%**
Video calls	67%	**39%**	94%	**95%**
Videos embedded on website	98%	**82%**	98%	**94%**

TWO-YEAR

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Digital advertising	100%	**100%**	96%	**100%**
In-person meetings (on and off-campus)	91%	**100%**	100%	**100%**
Personalized videos sent directly to students	61%	**30%**	79%	**100%**
SMS	87%	**80%**	95%	**100%**
Social media	96%	**95%**	95%	**95%**
Online chat	74%	**60%**	76%	**92%**
Phone calls	91%	**100%**	100%	**90%**
Videos embedded on website	91%	**95%**	95%	**84%**
Mobile responsive website	96%	**90%**	95%	**83%**
Email communications	100%	**100%**	96%	**80%**

Practical Implications

Segment and personalize

- Segment your prospective student list to tailor communications. Personalization, from the student's name to relevant academic programs, can increase engagement and make messages feel less like mass marketing.

Prioritize mobile optimization

- Ensure your website provides an excellent user experience on mobile devices. Prospective students will likely access your site on their smartphones, so prioritize clear navigation, fast loading times, and easy-to-find information.

Leverage personalized videos

- Invest in creating personalized videos sent directly to students. The high effectiveness rates across institution types suggest this tactic can make a strong impression and foster connection.

Build on core strategies

- While the channel mix may vary, certain tactics remain consistently effective across institution types. Ensure in-person meetings, SMS, social media, email, and digital advertising form the foundation of your recruitment and marketing plans.

Optimize digital advertising

- With increasing effectiveness across institution types, refine your digital advertising efforts. Leverage targeted demographics, interests, and behaviors. Ensure clear, compelling ad copy and eye-catching visuals that align with your brand.

Invest in in-person meetings

- Host engaging on-campus events and attend relevant off-campus recruitment fairs. Train staff and current students to have meaningful conversations with prospective students.

Advertising Strategies

We measured **eight** advertising strategies, with the following results showing the percentage of institutions using these practices, their perceived effectiveness, and how they compare to 2020.

Key Findings

- **Digital first**: There is a clear trend towards digital-first advertising strategies. Social media advertising, re-targeted ads, video advertising, and paid display ads are widely used and highly effective.
- **Personalization**: The rise of re-targeted ads suggests an increasing focus on personalization in advertising.

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Social media advertising	84%	**98%**	91%	**98%**
Re-targeted ads	29%	**86%**	79%	**98%**
Video advertising	99%	**79%**	94%	**91%**
Paid display ads	61%	**89%**	60%	**90%**
Radio ads	90%	**48%**	91%	**73%**
Television ads	71%	**33%**	62%	**73%**
Billboard, bus, or other outdoor advertising	62%	**58%**	88%	**72%**
Print media ads	51%	**66%**	71%	**64%**

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Paid display ads	65%	**70%**	71%	**97%**
Television ads	79%	**36%**	76%	**94%**
Social media advertising	81%	**92%**	97%	**92%**
Video advertising	96%	**64%**	96%	**92%**
Print media ads	79%	**71%**	79%	**86%**
Re-targeted ads	63%	**69%**	80%	**86%**
Billboard, bus, or other outdoor advertising	73%	**65%**	94%	**82%**
Radio ads	88%	**46%**	98%	**74%**

TWO-YEAR

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Social media advertising	70%	**95%**	88%	**95%**
Paid display ads	83%	**85%**	84%	**94%**
Re-targeted ads	74%	**80%**	82%	**94%**
Video advertising	100%	**95%**	100%	**89%**
Print media ads	96%	**85%**	86%	**82%**
Billboard, bus, or other outdoor advertising	96%	**85%**	95%	**76%**
Television ads	100%	**75%**	83%	**73%**
Radio ads	96%	**90%**	95%	**67%**

Practical Implications

Embrace a digital-first approach

- Prioritize digital advertising channels like social media, re-targeted ads, video ads, and paid display ads.

Leverage social media advertising

- Given its universal adoption and high effectiveness, make social media advertising a cornerstone of your strategy. Understand each platform's unique audience and advertising options (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) to maximize reach and engagement.

Invest in re-targeted ads

- Re-targeted ads have seen significant growth in usage and effectiveness. Implement re-targeting to deliver relevant messages to prospective students who have already visited your website and are demonstrating interest in your institution.

Personalize ad content

- Tailor your ad content to align with the interests and needs of your target audiences. Personalization can increase ad relevance and make messages feel less like mass marketing.

Optimize video advertising

- While video ad effectiveness has varied, it remains a widely used strategy. Consider the platform when deploying video ads, as social media or website videos may perform better than television. Ensure concise, engaging video content that showcases your institution's unique aspects.

Maximize paid display ads

- Paid display ads have shown consistent effectiveness across institution types. Use targeted demographics, interests, and behaviors to display ads to relevant audiences. Ensure clear, compelling ad copy and eye-catching visuals.

Digital Marketing Strategies

We measured **12** digital marketing strategies used to generate new prospective undergraduate inquiries (not including search names), the percentage of institutions using these practices, their perceived effectiveness, and how they compare to 2020.

Key Findings

- **Data-driven marketing:** There is a clear trend towards data-driven digital marketing strategies like SEO, RFI forms, AI-powered chatbots, social media advertising, search engine marketing (SEM), and paid display ads.
- **Personalization**: The rise of AI-powered chatbots suggests an increasing focus on personalization in marketing.
- **Emerging technologies**: AI-powered chatbots are rated as highly effective across institution types.

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Search engine optimization	83%	**90%**	94%	**100%**
RFI forms	59%	**81%**	91%	**98%**
Social media advertising	93%	**98%**	90%	**95%**
Search engine marketing	83%	**91%**	95%	**95%**
Streaming TV advertising	13%	**32%**	80%	**94%**
Student storytelling via video or blogs	62%	**73%**	91%	**93%**
Video advertising	53%	**70%**	85%	**93%**
Organic social media marketing	82%	**90%**	87%	**90%**
Paid display ads	79%	**88%**	88%	**90%**
Marketing on the institutional website	49%	**63%**	95%	**78%**
Website chatbots with subscriber capabilities	17%	**30%**	62%	**77%**
AI-powered chatbots*	N/A	**20%**	N/A	**55%**

**Note: AI-powered chatbots were not surveyed in 2020.*

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
RFI forms	56%	**59%**	93%	**100%**
Search engine optimization	76%	**59%**	100%	**100%**
AI-powered chatbots*	N/A	**20%**	N/A	**100%**
Student storytelling via video or blogs	62%	**64%**	97%	**92%**
Paid display ads	81%	**62%**	100%	**92%**
Search engine marketing	79%	**61%**	100%	**92%**
Organic social media marketing	79%	**85%**	100%	**91%**
Social media advertising	85%	**85%**	100%	**91%**
Website chatbots with subscriber capabilities	23%	**29%**	91%	**90%**
Video advertising	64%	**46%**	100%	**83%**
Marketing on the institutional website	53%	**44%**	92%	**82%**
Streaming TV advertising	32%	**36%**	100%	**72%**

TWO-YEAR

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
AI-powered chatbots*	N/A	**32%**	N/A	**100%**
Paid display ads	73%	**79%**	94%	**100%**
RFI forms	36%	**79%**	100%	**100%**
Search engine marketing	82%	**74%**	100%	**100%**
Search engine optimization	86%	**74%**	100%	**100%**
Student storytelling via video or blogs	55%	**73%**	100%	**100%**
Social media advertising	95%	**95%**	95%	**95%**
Marketing on the institutional website	59%	**63%**	100%	**92%**
Organic social media marketing	86%	**90%**	94%	**88%**
Video advertising	68%	**85%**	93%	**87%**
Website chatbots with subscriber capabilities	32%	**37%**	71%	**86%**
Streaming TV advertising	27%	**37%**	67%	**70%**

**Note: AI-powered chatbots were not surveyed in 2020.*

Practical Implications

Embrace data-driven marketing

- Prioritize digital marketing strategies like SEO, RFI forms, AI-powered chatbots, social media advertising, SEM, and paid display ads. These tactics allow for targeted outreach and provide measurable return on investment.

Invest in SEO

- Given its universal adoption and consistent effectiveness, make search engine optimization a cornerstone of your strategy. Ensure your website has relevant keywords, meta tags, and high-quality content to improve organic search rankings.

Explore AI-powered chatbots

- AI-powered chatbots have emerged as a highly effective strategy. Consider implementing chatbots to provide real-time personalized support to prospective students and enhance their recruitment experience.

Optimize SEM

- Search engine marketing has shown consistent effectiveness across institution types. Use targeted keywords and compelling ad copy to deliver relevant ads to prospective students searching for related terms.

Personalize the recruitment experience

- Leverage data and emerging technologies like AI-powered chatbots to personalize the recruitment experience. Tailor communications and support to the needs and interests of individual prospective students.

Outreach Strategies for High School Counselors

Effective college recruitment strategies recognize high school counselors' crucial role in advising students. Our data highlights the trends and most impactful approaches for outreach to counselors, emphasizing personalization, relationships, and targeted digital communication.

We measured **10** approaches for outreach to counselors, the percentage of institutions using these practices, their perceived effectiveness, and how they compare to 2020.

Key Findings

- **Personalization and relationships**: There is a clear trend towards personalized and relationship-focused outreach strategies like one-on-one meetings, email communication, and high school counselor events.

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Meeting with high school counselors one-on-one	78%	**95%**	91%	**98%**
Email communication to high school counselors	44%	**89%**	73%	**92%**
On-campus meetings/events	55%	**80%**	85%	**91%**
Calling high school counselors after visits	81%	**41%**	94%	**90%**
Direct mail to high school counselors	42%	**61%**	83%	**85%**
Live or on-demand webcasts	6%	**23%**	100%	**83%**
Banquets, scholarship receptions, etc.*	N/A	**61%**	N/A	**82%**
Newsletter delivered over email	67%	**55%**	93%	**80%**
Texting high school counselors	39%	**19%**	73%	**79%**
High school counselor area on website	38%	**54%**	84%	**69%**

**Note: The items on banquets/receptions was added in 2024.*

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Live or on-demand webcasts	46%	**14%**	91%	**100%**
Meeting with high school counselors one-on-one	77%	**83%**	97%	**98%**
Newsletter delivered over email	56%	**47%**	89%	**96%**
High school counselor events	85%	**91%**	98%	**95%**
Email communication to high school counselors	92%	**88%**	100%	**92%**
Texting high school counselors	15%	**14%**	57%	**86%**
Direct mail to high school counselors	73%	**60%**	89%	**83%**
Calling high school counselors after visits	54%	**55%**	77%	**82%**
Banquets, scholarship receptions, etc.*	N/A	**50%**	N/A	**80%**
High school counselor area on the website	54%	**50%**	88%	**66%**

TWO-YEAR

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Banquets, scholarship receptions, etc.*	N/A	**65%**	N/A	**100%**
Newsletter delivered over email	70%	**55%**	81%	**100%**
High school counselor events	74%	**95%**	88%	**95%**
Email communication to high school counselors	70%	**90%**	100%	**94%**
Meeting with high school counselors one-on-one	83%	**95%**	89%	**89%**
High school counselor area on the website	91%	**40%**	90%	**88%**
Calling high school counselors after visits	57%	**55%**	92%	**82%**
Direct mail to high school counselors	70%	**50%**	100%	**80%**
Texting high school counselors	26%	**20%**	67%	**75%**
Live or on-demand webcasts	43%	**25%**	90%	**60%**

**Note: The items on banquets/receptions was added in 2024.*

Practical Implications

Prioritize one-on-one meetings

- Given their consistent effectiveness, prioritize one-on-one meetings with counselors. Prepare personalized information about your institution and be ready to address specific questions and concerns.

Host counselor events

- Institutions should continue to invest in counselor events, such as banquets, scholarship receptions, and local or on-campus meetings, as they remain highly effective. These gatherings not only share institutional updates but also build goodwill and trust. Including regional recruitment data or personalized student outcome reports at these events can increase impact. Offering virtual attendance options can further expand accessibility.

Understand counselor needs

- Use targeted outreach and research to understand the needs, challenges, and preferences of the counselors you work with. Tailor your communications and information accordingly.

Provide relevant, timely information

- Ensure the information you provide counselors is relevant to their students' needs and interests. Keep them updated on important deadlines, new programs, and unique opportunities at your institution.

Admissions Events

In today's competitive recruitment landscape, institutions adopt experiential strategies that allow prospective students to immerse themselves in authentic campus experiences. Our data highlights the growing effectiveness of experiential recruitment events, alongside the importance of personalization and consistently effective tactics like campus visits and open houses.

We measured **13** admission events, the percentage of institutions using these practices, their perceived effectiveness, and how they compare to 2020.

Key Findings

- **Experiential recruitment**: There is a clear trend towards experiential recruitment events that allow prospective students to immerse themselves in campus life.
- **Personalization**: Targeted recruitment events like special interest workshops and college-paid trips allow institutions to personalize the recruitment experience for different student segments.

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

EVENT	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Campus visit days for high school students	85%	**93%**	99%	**100%**
Special interest workshops, seminars, or camps	80%	**87%**	93%	**100%**
Overnight campus visits or group campus visits by academic division or program	61%	**42%**	98%	**100%**
Campus open house events	94%	**93%**	100%	**98%**
Weekend visit days	79%	**82%**	97%	**98%**
Campus visit events for high school counselors	69%	**78%**	88%	**97%**
College-paid trips to campus for prospective students	41%	**46%**	89%	**96%**
Off-campus group meetings for prospective students and their families	67%	**69%**	91%	**94%**
Regional college fairs*	N/A	**96%**	N/A	**89%**
National college fairs	93%	**94%**	81%	**70%**
Podcasts and webinars	66%	**47%**	89%	**68%**
Virtual visit days	81%	**56%**	90%	**50%**
Online college fairs	85%	**76%**	60%	**20%**

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

EVENT	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Campus open house events	100%	**86%**	98%	**100%**
Campus visit days for high school students	100%	**95%**	98%	**100%**
Overnight campus visits or group campus visits by academic division or program	33%	**19%**	88%	**100%**
Off-campus group meetings for prospective students and their families	71%	**48%**	97%	**96%**
Campus visit events for high school counselors	88%	**81%**	95%	**94%**
Weekend visit days	79%	**71%**	97%	**93%**
College-paid trips to campus for prospective students	35%	**26%**	88%	**92%**
Regional college fairs*	N/A	**93%**	N/A	**89%**
Special interest workshops, seminars, or camps	85%	**65%**	93%	**89%**
Podcasts and webinars	46%	**30%**	91%	**83%**
Virtual visit days	94%	**54%**	98%	**81%**
National college fairs	94%	**78%**	89%	**78%**
Online college fairs	83%	**61%**	70%	**56%**

**Note: Regional college fairs were added in 2024.*

TWO-YEAR

EVENT	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Campus open house events	91%	**95%**	95%	**100%**
Campus visit days for high school students	48%	**95%**	55%	**100%**
College-paid trips to campus for prospective students	57%	**35%**	85%	**100%**
Off-campus group meetings for prospective students and their families	70%	**60%**	94%	**100%**
Virtual visit days	61%	**30%**	86%	**100%**
Weekend visit days	35%	**40%**	75%	**100%**
Special interest workshops, seminars, or camps	30%	**90%**	86%	**89%**
Campus visit events for high school counselors	83%	**75%**	89%	**80%**
Regional college fairs*	N/A	**75%**	N/A	**80%**
Overnight campus visits or group campus visits by academic division or program	48%	**20%**	82%	**75%**
Podcasts and webinars	74%	**20%**	94%	**75%**
National college fairs	91%	**50%**	95%	**60%**
Online college fairs	17%	**35%**	75%	**29%**

**Note: Regional college fairs were added in 2024.*

Practical Implications

Prioritize immersive experiences

- Given the trend towards experiential recruitment, prioritize events that allow prospective students to immerse themselves in campus life. Campus visit days, open houses, and special interest workshops are all highly effective.

Leverage technology for scalability

- While in-person experiential events are highly effective, technology can also be leveraged to create immersive experiences at scale. Consider virtual tours, webinars, and online workshops to reach a broader audience.

Prioritize experiential recruitment opportunities

- Institutions should focus on offering immersive events that allow prospective students to experience campus life firsthand. High-impact events such as campus visit days, open houses, and special interest workshops should be central to recruitment strategies. These experiences create emotional connections, which are critical in influencing enrollment decisions. Institutions should develop event calendars aligning with recruitment cycles to ensure steady student opportunities to visit campus throughout the year.

Personalize recruitment events for specific student segments

- Personalization is key to creating meaningful recruitment experiences. Institutions can offer specialized events, such as academic program-specific workshops or division-led visit days, to cater to the unique interests of prospective students. College-paid trips and small-group visits can further personalize engagement, particularly for high-interest or underrepresented students.
- Personalizing events based on a student's academic interests, demographics, or geography strengthens relationships and increases conversion rates. Offering flexible attendance options, such as weekday and weekend events, ensures accessibility for students and families with varying schedules.

Incorporate digital and virtual engagement strategically

- While virtual visit days and online college fairs have declined, these formats still provide valuable alternatives for students who cannot attend in person.
- Institutions should consider offering hybrid or on-demand options to complement in-person events, ensuring broader accessibility.
- Digital tools like webinars or podcasts can be pre-event engagement tools or follow-up resources, reinforcing key messages shared during live events.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Emerging Trends and Practical Implications

Percentage of institutions that have an AI governance plan

11% Four-year private

2% Four-year public

10% Two-year

STRATEGY	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE		FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC		TWO-YEAR	
	USE	EFFECTIVE	USE	EFFECTIVE	USE	EFFECTIVE
Using AI to create communications for marketing and recruitment	41%	**100%**	21%	**86%**	50%	**100%**
Using AI to analyze and assist with enrollment operations	14%	**100%**	16%	**100%**	25%	**100%**
Using AI to analyze marketing and recruitment data	16%	**88%**	11%	**100%**	5%	**100%**
AI-powered chatbots to engage students and/or families	20%	**55%**	20%	**100%**	32%	**100%**

Practical Implications

Develop AI governance

- With AI use expanding, institutions must prioritize developing comprehensive governance plans. These should address ethical use, data privacy, transparency, and accountability.

Leverage AI for personalization

- AI can help create personalized experiences in recruitment and potentially other areas like advising or student support. Institutions should explore how AI can facilitate tailored engagement strategies.

Enhance data analysis

- By leveraging AI for data analysis, institutions can uncover insights to inform enrollment strategies, identify at-risk students, and improve operational efficiency.

Implement chatbots strategically

- While chatbots offer the potential for enhanced support, institutions must carefully assess their implementation. Clear communication about chatbot functionality and boundaries is crucial.

Management Practices

Our data provides a roadmap of the most effective strategies, showcasing how institutions embrace data analytics, AI, and targeted engagement to attract prospects, predict enrollment, and retain admitted students. From admissions tracking to financial aid leveraging, these insights reveal the tactics driving success.

We measured **14** management practices, the percentage of institutions using these practices, their perceived effectiveness, and how they compare to 2020.

Key Findings

- **Data-driven practices**: There is a clear trend towards data-driven admissions management practices like admissions tracking, SEO, AI analysis and application, and leveraging analytics and CRMs.
- **Emerging technologies**: The rise of AI-powered practices suggests an increasing focus on leveraging emerging technologies to enhance efficiency and personalization in admissions.
- **Personalization**: The most effective practices allow personalized communication and engagement with prospective students.

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

PRACTICE	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Admissions tracking to monitor and predict students' incremental rates of movement toward enrollment	70%	**80%**	96%	**100%**
Search engine optimization	86%	**91%**	96%	**100%**
Using AI to analyze and assist with enrollment operations*	N/A	**14%**	N/A	**100%**
Using AI to create communications for marketing and recruitment*	N/A	**41%**	N/A	**100%**
Leveraging analytics (such as Google Analytics)	93%	**86%**	95%	**98%**
Communication and/or social platform to foster parent/family engagement of admitted and enrolled students	78%	**75%**	97%	**97%**
Using a statistical, analytical approach to determine financial aid award levels by predicting enrollment rates based on award amounts (aka "financial aid leveraging")	72%	**73%**	98%	**97%**
Leveraging CRM	92%	**100%**	95%	**96%**
Social platform(s) to connect admitted students to support summer melt prevention	74%	**82%**	93%	**94%**
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of a prospective student enrolling	78%	**80%**	95%	**94%**
Systematically contacting admitted students to code their level of interest in enrolling ("qualifying admits")	76%	**76%**	98%	**93%**
Systematically contacting inquiries to code their level of interest in enrolling ("qualifying inquiries")	71%	**75%**	95%	**91%**
Use of behavioral/engagement scoring with digital/web tracking	54%	**50%**	89%	**90%**
Using AI to analyze marketing and recruitment data*	N/A	**16%**	N/A	**88%**

**Note: AI-items were added in 2024.*

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

PRACTICE	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Search engine optimization	88%	**65%**	100%	**100%**
Use of behavioral/engagement scoring with digital/web tracking	38%	**24%**	94%	**100%**
Using AI to analyze and assist with enrollment operations*	N/A	**16%**	N/A	**100%**
Using AI to analyze marketing and recruitment data*	N/A	**11%**	N/A	**100%**
Leveraging CRM	94%	**94%**	98%	**97%**
Admissions tracking to monitor and predict students' incremental rates of movement toward enrollment	63%	**67%**	97%	**96%**
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of a prospective student enrolling	67%	**62%**	100%	**95%**
Social platform(s) to connect admitted students to support summer melt prevention	77%	**53%**	95%	**94%**
Using a statistical, analytical approach to determine financial aid award levels by predicting enrollment rates based on award amounts (aka "financial aid leveraging")	67%	**46%**	100%	**93%**
Systematically contacting admitted students to code their level of interest in enrolling ("qualifying admits")	60%	**68%**	100%	**93%**
Communication and/or social platform to foster parent/family engagement of admitted and enrolled students	73%	**66%**	94%	**92%**
Leveraging analytics (such as Google Analytics)	92%	**65%**	98%	**92%**
Using AI to create communications for marketing and recruitment*	N/A	**21%**	N/A	**86%**
Systematically contacting inquiries to code their level of interest in enrolling ("qualifying inquiries")	58%	**48%**	100%	**83%**

TWO-YEAR

PRACTICE	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Communication and/or social platform to foster parent/family engagement of admitted and enrolled students	43%	**30%**	80%	**100%**
Leveraging analytics (such as Google Analytics)	96%	**75%**	100%	**100%**
Leveraging CRM	57%	**85%**	100%	**100%**
Search engine optimization	91%	**80%**	90%	**100%**
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of a prospective student enrolling	36%	**15%**	75%	**100%**
Systematically contacting admitted students to code their level of interest in enrolling ("qualifying admits")	57%	**55%**	92%	**100%**
Systematically contacting inquiries to code their level of interest in enrolling ("qualifying inquiries")	52%	**55%**	100%	**100%**
Use of behavioral/engagement scoring with digital/web tracking	32%	**10%**	86%	**100%**
Using a statistical, analytical approach to determine financial aid award levels by predicting enrollment rates based on award amounts (aka "financial aid leveraging")	32%	**20%**	86%	**100%**

**Note: AI-items were added in 2024.*

Two-year cont'd

TWO-YEAR

PRACTICE	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Using AI to analyze and assist with enrollment operations*	N/A	**25%**	N/A	**100%**
Using AI to analyze marketing and recruitment data*	N/A	**5%**	N/A	**100%**
Using AI to create communications for marketing and recruitment*	N/A	**50%**	N/A	**100%**
Admissions tracking to monitor and predict students' incremental rates of movement toward enrollment	41%	**55%**	100%	**100%**
Social platform(s) to connect admitted students to support summer melt prevention	43%	**40%**	90%	**100%**

**Note: AI-items were added in 2024.*

Practical Implications

Prioritize admissions tracking

- Given its consistent effectiveness, prioritize admissions tracking to monitor prospective student behavior, predict enrollment, and inform recruitment strategies.

Personalize the recruitment experience

- Leverage data and analytics to personalize the recruitment experience for prospective students. Tailor communications and outreach based on their interests, academic goals, and engagement with your institution.

Leverage AI to enhance efficiency and personalization

- AI tools should be incorporated to streamline operations and improve outreach personalization. AI-powered solutions can assist with enrollment predictions, create automated yet customized communications, and analyze large datasets to inform recruitment strategies. Institutions using AI to tailor marketing messages see increased engagement and improved yield, making AI an asset for competitive admissions.

Mitigate summer melt with social platforms and parent engagement

- Institutions can use social platforms to connect admitted students with peers and mentors, building a sense of community that helps prevent summer melt. Engaging families through communication platforms or parent portals further reinforces support. Institutions should maintain frequent, personalized contact with students and families during the summer to ensure smooth transitions from deposit to enrollment.

Outsourced management practices

Institutions must think beyond their campus capabilities to succeed in today's competitive market. This analysis reveals the growing trend of outsourcing key recruitment and enrollment functions, showcasing how institutions leverage partnerships to enhance their reach, expertise, and impact. From international recruitment to data-driven market research and targeted yield campaigns, these insights highlight the power of strategic outsourcing in shaping the future of college admissions.

We measured **nine** outsourced management practices, the percentage of institutions using these practices, their perceived effectiveness, and how they compare to 2020.

Key Findings

- **Data-driven practices**: There is a clear trend towards data-driven outsourced practices like market research, telephone qualification, modeling, and student record purchase.
- **Targeted marketing**: The most effective practices allow for targeted marketing and communication with prospective students.

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

OUTSOURCED PRACTICE	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
International recruitment	19%	**23%**	80%	**100%**
Market research (lost applicant analysis, brand perceptions, pricing analysis, SEO, etc.)	47%	**56%**	89%	**100%**
Telephone qualification to rate the interest levels of prospective students by phone	21%	**19%**	63%	**100%**
Print or electronic campaigns to generate applications from the search or inquiry pool	57%	**51%**	93%	**96%**
Print or electronic campaigns for student search	64%	**56%**	98%	**91%**
Parent/family engagement of admitted and enrolled students	19%	**20%**	100%	**90%**
Modeling/student record purchase*	N/A	**65%**	N/A	**89%**
Print, electronic campaigns, or other strategies to impact student yield	32%	**37%**	92%	**81%**
Print, electronic campaigns, or other strategies to impact summer melt	21%	**26%**	94%	**81%**

**Note: Modeling/student record purchase was added in 2024.*

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

OUTSOURCED PRACTICE	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Print or electronic campaigns for student search	47%	**29%**	91%	**90%**
Parent/family engagement of admitted and enrolled students	33%	**24%**	84%	**88%**
Market research (lost applicant analysis, brand perceptions, pricing analysis, SEO, etc.)	19%	**21%**	100%	**86%**
Modeling/student record purchase*	N/A	**34%**	N/A	**85%**
Print or electronic campaigns to generate applications from the search or inquiry pool	21%	**42%**	100%	**81%**
Print, electronic campaigns, or other strategies to impact summer melt	27%	**26%**	100%	**81%**
Print, electronic campaigns, or other strategies to impact student yield	39%	**36%**	82%	**78%**
International recruitment	40%	**28%**	86%	**64%**
Telephone qualification to rate the interest levels of prospective students by phone	33%	**10%**	84%	**50%**

TWO-YEAR

OUTSOURCED PRACTICE	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Print or electronic campaigns for student search	45%	**35%**	100%	**100%**
Print or electronic campaigns to generate applications from the search or inquiry pool	50%	**35%**	91%	**100%**
Market research (lost applicant analysis, brand perceptions, pricing analysis, SEO, etc.)	41%	**30%**	89%	**100%**
Print, electronic campaigns, or other strategies to impact student yield	27%	**30%**	83%	**100%**
Print, electronic campaigns, or other strategies to impact summer melt	27%	**30%**	100%	**100%**
Telephone qualification to rate the interest levels of prospective students by phone	9%	**20%**	100%	**100%**
Modeling/student record purchase*	N/A	**15%**	N/A	**100%**
Parent/family engagement of admitted and enrolled students	14%	**10%**	100%	**100%**
International recruitment	14%	**0%**	100%	**N/A**

**Note: Modeling/student record purchase was added in 2024.*

Practical Implications

Prioritize market research

- Given its consistent effectiveness and growing adoption, prioritize market research to understand better your target student population, their needs and preferences, and the competitive landscape.

Invest in modeling and student record purchase

- Modeling and student record purchase have consistently been effective. Use these strategies to identify and target prospective students who align with your institution's admissions criteria and goals.

Telephone qualification

- While adoption is variable, telephone qualification remains a consistently effective practice. Use phone calls to connect with prospective students, answer questions, and assess interest and fit.

Recruitment Strategies for Underrepresented Students

Recognizing the transformative power of higher education, institutions increasingly prioritize recruiting first-generation students. This data highlights the growing trend across institution types to actively seek out and support students who will be the first in their families to attend college. As campuses strive for greater diversity and inclusion, these efforts are crucial in expanding access and opportunity.

Does the institution have a recruitment strategy for underrepresented students?

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	2024
Yes	
Hispanic	51%
African American	40%
First generation	51%
No, but currently studying strategies	
Hispanic	28%
African American	29%
First generation	29%
No, not currently considering	
Hispanic	21%
African American	31%
First generation	20%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	2024
Yes	
Hispanic	37%
African American	42%
First generation	53%
No, but currently studying strategies	
Hispanic	34%
African American	32%
First generation	21%
No, not currently considering	
Hispanic	29%
African American	26%
First generation	26%

TWO-YEAR	2024
Yes	
Hispanic	42%
African American	32%
First generation	47%
No, but currently studying strategies	
Hispanic	32%
African American	37%
First generation	37%
No, not currently considering	
Hispanic	26%
African American	31%
First generation	16%

Practical Implications

Prioritize first-generation recruitment

- Given the increasing trend, prioritize strategies to recruit and support first-generation students actively, recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities they present.

Assess and adapt Hispanic and African American recruitment

- Analyze the mixed trends and assess your institution's specific efforts to recruit Hispanic and African American students. Adapt strategies as needed to address gaps and improve outreach.

Regularly consider new approaches

- Make considering new recruitment strategies an ongoing process. Stay updated on best practices, research, and changing student demographics to inform innovative approaches.

Culturally relevant recruitment

- Develop culturally relevant recruitment materials and messaging. Ensure authenticity in communications and highlight the value of diversity on your campus.

Build relationships with feeder high schools

- Develop strong relationships with high schools that serve large populations of underrepresented students. This can include partnerships for dual enrollment programs, college prep initiatives, and counselor outreach.

Summer programs and campus visits

- Offer summer programs and campus visit opportunities specifically for underrepresented students. These can provide valuable experiences to familiarize students with campus life and build connections.

Recruitment communications in other languages

Our data suggest varying levels of language support in recruitment by institution type, with private institutions showing more current use and plans. However, all types have opportunities to expand language support to better reach and engage diverse prospective students.

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	SPANISH	OTHER LANGUAGES	DON'T HAVE, BUT PLANNING ON HAVING	DON'T HAVE AND NO PLANS TO HAVE
Search emails	7%	7%	37%	49%
Direct mail search pieces	16%	2%	33%	49%
Phone calls	36%	7%	20%	38%
Viewbook	16%	2%	35%	47%
Website	29%	13%	31%	27%
Campus visits	31%	2%	24%	43%
Virtual tour	15%	2%	27%	56%
Personalized videos	12%	2%	22%	63%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	SPANISH	OTHER LANGUAGES	DON'T HAVE, BUT PLANNING ON HAVING	DON'T HAVE AND NO PLANS TO HAVE
Search emails	14%	0%	30%	57%
Direct mail search pieces	19%	0%	30%	51%
Phone calls	32%	3%	24%	42%
Viewbook	18%	5%	24%	53%
Website	26%	8%	28%	38%
Campus visits	32%	3%	24%	41%
Virtual tour	8%	0%	35%	57%
Personalized videos	8%	0%	30%	62%

TWO-YEAR	SPANISH	OTHER LANGUAGES	DON'T HAVE, BUT PLANNING ON HAVING	DON'T HAVE AND NO PLANS TO HAVE
Search emails	16%	5%	37%	42%
Direct mail search pieces	30%	10%	20%	40%
Phone calls	40%	5%	10%	45%
Viewbook	25%	5%	30%	40%
Website	38%	14%	10%	38%
Campus visits	29%	10%	24%	38%
Virtual tour	5%	5%	30%	60%
Personalized videos	11%	0%	21%	68%

Practical Implications

Assess current practices

- Evaluate your current recruitment materials and communications. Identify areas where language support could be expanded to reach diverse prospective students and their families better.

Website translation

- Ensure your website has a Spanish version and consider adding versions in other relevant languages. This is a critical first point of contact for many prospective students.

Multilingual recruitment staff

- Train recruitment staff to be bilingual or multilingual. Phone calls and in-person conversations in a student's native language can build strong connections.

Translated print materials

- Provide direct mail and print materials in Spanish and potentially other languages. Two-year institutions are already seeing value in this approach.

Personalized videos

- Explore using customized videos in Spanish and other languages. While underutilized, video is an engaging format that showcases campus life and opportunities.

Culturally relevant messaging

- Beyond language, ensure all recruitment messaging and visuals are culturally relevant and inclusive. Avoid stereotypes and highlight the value of diversity on your campus.

Prospective Family Engagement

Parents, families, and other adults who care for high school students are pivotal in guiding them through the college planning experience. Our data provides insight into how institutions proactively engage families and what resources are offered to help them guide their students.

Channels used to communicate with prospective families

CHANNEL	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR
Email	98%	97%	79%
Direct mail	90%	79%	68%
Text message	69%	44%	53%
Telephone	67%	41%	42%
Parent/family portal	45%	38%	26%
Application specific to the institution	17%	32%	0%

Channels used to communicate with prospective families

	WEBSITE AREA FOR PARENTS OR FAMILIES OF PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS	PARENT/FAMILY PORTAL	PARENT/FAMILY NEWSLETTER
Four-year private	53%	40%	44%
Four-year public	49%	27%	41%
Two-year	16%	0%	16%

Practical Implications

Family engagement and support

- View families as partners in the college search, with engagement strategies fostering a sense of community to increase enrollment likelihood. Ensure counselors and staff availability through multiple contact methods.
- Be aware of socioeconomic diversity, tailoring communication and support to the needs of first-generation, low-income, and working-class families.

Leverage of technology

- Utilize technology (email, text, family portals) to facilitate communication, allowing for personalization and targeted messaging.
- Invest in a dedicated website area for families, with two-year institutions potentially needing more investment. Portals offer a differentiated, interactive experience.

Tailor resources for family engagement

- Institutions should provide specific resources to help families navigate the enrollment process. This can include family-specific sections on the institution's website, newsletters, or dedicated family portals. These resources should cover key topics such as financial aid, academic programs, housing, and orientation, empowering families to guide their students through college planning actively.

About the Participants and Methodology

Data in this report reflect responses from 114 colleges and universities. The respondents completed the RNL electronic poll of undergraduate practices for marketing and student recruitment in the fall of 2024.

The poll was emailed to enrollment and admissions officers at accredited degree-granting institutions across the United States.

Respondents to the survey included **50 four-year private, 44 four-year public, and 20 two-year institutions**.

To report the findings as accurately as possible, the rankings of effectiveness were based only on the relative effectiveness options that were given to respondents: “effective” (responses of “very effective” or “somewhat effective”),” and “not effective.” This approach of excluding “practice not used,” allowed promising, less-frequently-used practices to be included.

Appendix

Strategies and tactics for prospective first-year students' recruitment/ marketing efforts

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
In-person meetings (on and off-campus)	98%	**98%**	98%	**100%**
Mobile responsive website	92%	**77%**	99%	**100%**
SMS	93%	**100%**	100%	**100%**
Social media	98%	**100%**	97%	**98%**
Email communications	100%	**100%**	96%	**96%**
Personalized videos sent directly to students	28%	**49%**	88%	**96%**
Videos embedded on website	96%	**85%**	95%	**93%**
Digital advertising	91%	**99%**	93%	**91%**
College planning/application-specific apps	47%	**58%**	78%	**90%**
Video calls	65%	**53%**	93%	**89%**
Aid/scholarship calculator	89%	**94%**	69%	**86%**
Publications	90%	**95%**	96%	**81%**
Live or on-demand webcasts	78%	**55%**	88%	**73%**
Phone calls	93%	**96%**	80%	**72%**
Virtual tours	92%	**92%**	89%	**72%**
Online chat	56%	**53%**	76%	**64%**

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
In-person meetings (on and off-campus)	98%	**90%**	98%	**100%**
Personalized videos sent directly to students	27%	**33%**	92%	**100%**
SMS	86%	**87%**	100%	**100%**
Email communications	100%	**97%**	100%	**98%**
Publications	98%	**93%**	96%	**98%**
Digital advertising	96%	**90%**	98%	**98%**
Mobile responsive website	90%	**69%**	100%	**97%**
Social media	98%	**98%**	96%	**95%**
Video calls	67%	**39%**	94%	**95%**
Videos embedded on website	98%	**82%**	98%	**94%**
Live or on-demand webcasts	73%	**46%**	94%	**89%**
Phone calls	86%	**91%**	93%	**87%**
Online chat	73%	**53%**	97%	**87%**
Virtual tours	98%	**81%**	98%	**85%**
Aid/scholarship calculator	88%	**83%**	90%	**83%**
College planning/application-specific apps	52%	**50%**	92%	**76%**

TWO-YEAR

STRATEGY	USE		EFFECTIVE	
	2020	2024	2020	2024
Digital advertising	100%	**100%**	96%	**100%**
In-person meetings (on and off-campus)	91%	**100%**	100%	**100%**
Personalized videos sent directly to students	61%	**30%**	79%	**100%**
SMS	87%	**80%**	95%	**100%**
Social media	96%	**95%**	95%	**95%**
Online chat	74%	**60%**	76%	**92%**
Phone calls	91%	**100%**	100%	**90%**
Videos embedded on website	91%	**95%**	95%	**84%**
Mobile responsive website	96%	**90%**	95%	**83%**
Email communications	100%	**100%**	96%	**80%**
Publications	96%	**95%**	86%	**79%**
College planning/application-specific apps	57%	**70%**	77%	**79%**
Video calls	26%	**40%**	83%	**75%**
Live or on-demand webcasts	52%	**55%**	58%	**73%**
Virtual tours	61%	**50%**	64%	**60%**
Aid/scholarship calculator	78%	**65%**	72%	**46%**

About RNL

RNL is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. The firm serves more than 1,500 colleges and universities through data-driven solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, ensuring students find the right program, graduate on time, secure their first job in their chosen field, and give back to support the next generation. With a deep knowledge of the industry, RNL helps institutions scale their efforts by tapping into a community of support and resources.

Visit RuffaloNL.com

WHAT ARE YOUR BEST STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING AND ENROLLING STUDENTS?

RNL works with four-year and two-year institutions around the country to strengthen their marketing and recruitment in order to reach their enrollment goals. Find out how we can help you with:

- Student search
- Yield campaigns
- Financial aid and net revenue
- Omnichannel outreach
- AI and analytics
- Strategic enrollment planning

Visit RuffaloNL.com/Enrollment

Email **ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com**

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