CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Career Connected Learning for All Students

ICCB
ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARD

Successful Recruitment

and Communication

Strategies for
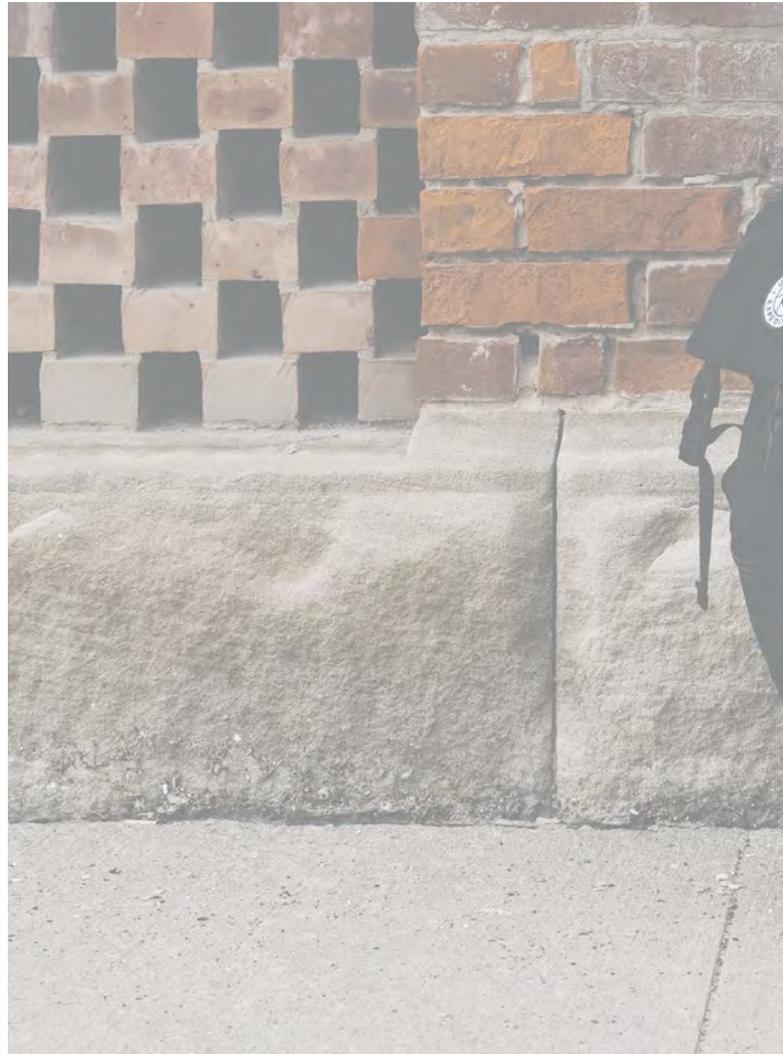
Community Colleges

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Intro

Rethinking Communication

Illinois, like many states, has experienced declining enrollment in its community colleges, including in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs (Barrington, 2019). This is even more problematic considering that skill shortages continue to exist for many of Illinois' top industries, such as healthcare, information technology, and manufacturing. Stigmas and misconceptions about CTE have deterred students from enrolling or participating in CTE, while our system's inflexibility has prevented them from persisting. In order to combat this message, colleges must 'rethink' the ways we communicate and provide outreach to potential students.

This document exemplifies selected strategies for recruitment and communication that have proven to be effective in enrolling students in Illinois community colleges. Illinois is committed to continuously sharing effective practices of recruiting students in CTE in Illinois community colleges.

Informed by labor market data, CTE prepares students for tomorrow's careers. CTE offers education and advanced training to support high-wage, high-skill, and in-demand occupations, including in Healthcare, Information Technology, Agriculture, Finance, and Education.

Middle and high school CTE programs in Illinois serve more than 283,000 students with Illinois community colleges serving 131,000 students.

Method ology

Interviews

Across the State

Representatives from community colleges across the state were recommended by the Illinois Community College Board to be interviewed. These community colleges provided successful recruiting and communication strategies being used to enroll students into CTE programs. The following representatives participated: Roy Walker, City Colleges of Chicago/Malcom X College; Laura Williams, Danville Area Community College; Joanne Ivory, Harper College; Rita Ali, Illinois Central College; Kristina Shelton, Rend Lake College; and Bradley Sparks, Southwestern Illinois College. The questions focused on CTE Recruitment and Communication Strategies, Targeted Recruitment Strategies for Non-Traditional and Traditional Students, and Data that Support Recruitment Strategies Work. After each interview, notes were compiled for each community college. In order to synthesize the information collected from the interviews, a "Key Takaways" piece was created to use as the basis of this document. Additional resources were referenced and are listed in the Endnotes and Citations.
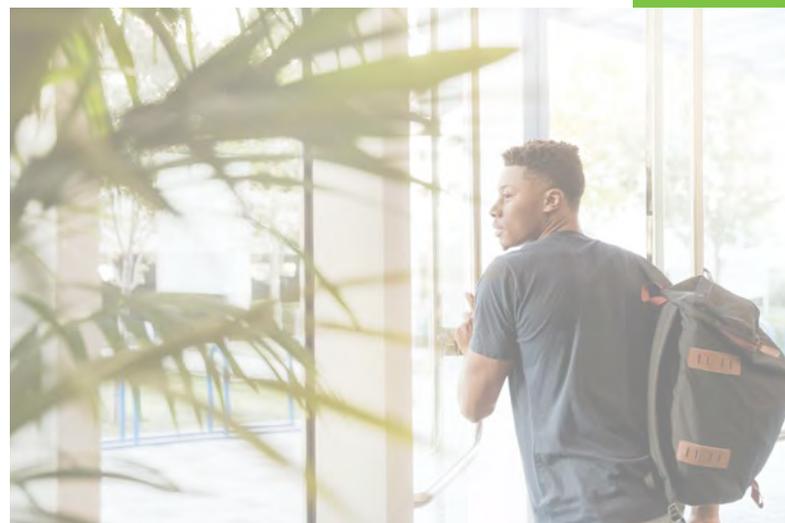
Strategies for Recruitment Communication

There are many strategies when recruiting and communicating with potential students for enrollment in your CTE program. There is not just one approach that will work to recruit all students. Recruitment strategies need to be implemented simultaneously. Persistence is key. All students want to be successful regardless of age. They may need help in achieving their goals. Be kind, sincere, and relatable when recruiting.
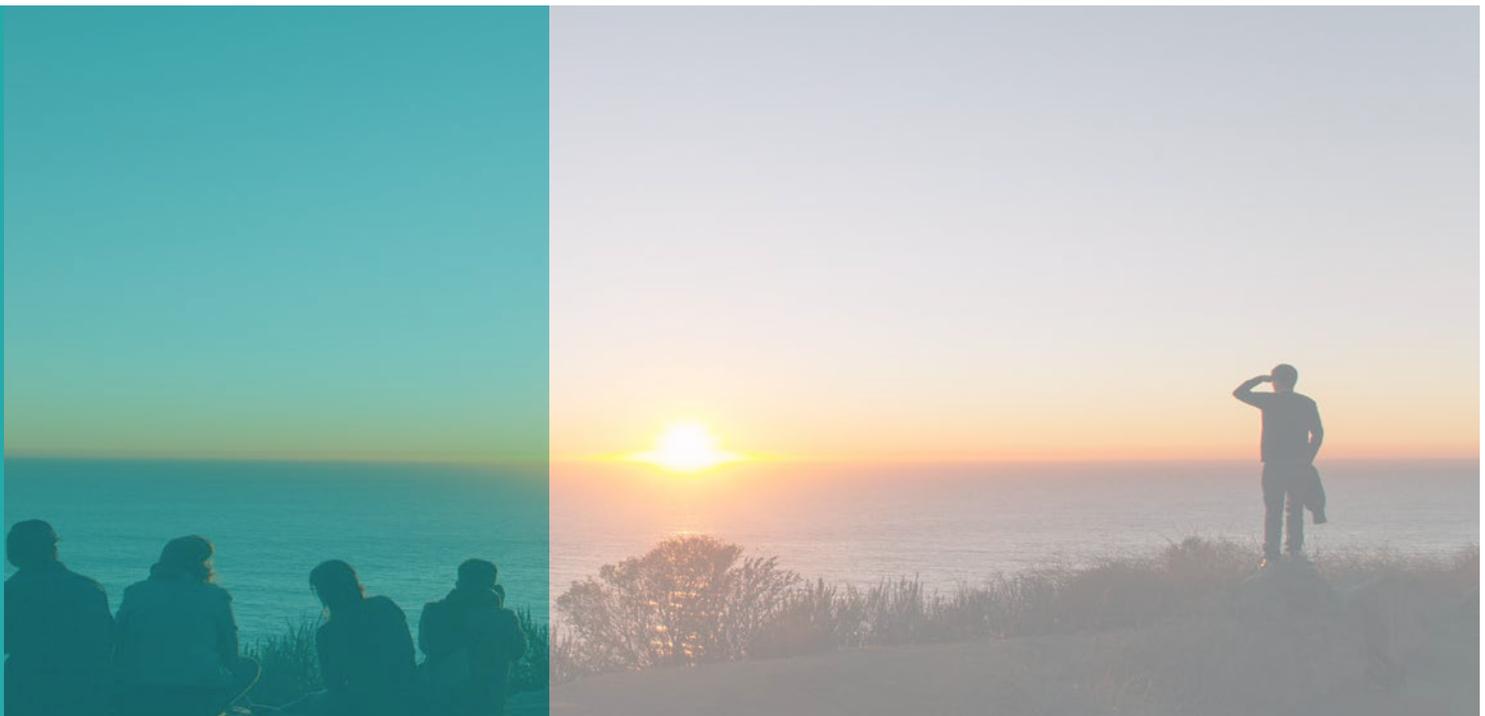
Connect with Current and Potential Students in Multiple Ways

You must develop a personal connection with the students you are recruiting (Ashford, 2020). Students need to know there are services available to them and that they will have the support needed to be successful in the program (Ashford, 2020). The interest shown in assisting them to overcome their challenges to enroll in class will make a difference. These are some of the activities:

Invite Potential Students to Events - There are potential students who just need a little encouragement to come. These may be those who have visited your website and shown an interest in the program and requested material.

Send Letters to Students Enrolled Last Semester - Provide program information for upcoming semester, support services available, and dates of events you will be attending.

Call Students Enrolled Last Semester - Find out what they have been doing and talk with them about the program and support services available. Find out what they need in order to continue in the program.

Email Students Enrolled Last Semester - Provide program information for upcoming semester, support services available, and dates of events you will be attending.

Follow up with Students who Attend Events – This can be done in a variety of ways: emails, letters, calling, Facebook, Twitter etc.

Get Students
On Campus

Students need to feel comfortable with the community college and know what programs are available. There are numerous events that can be held on campus for students. The earlier the students are exposed to available programs the better. This may not be feasible during a pandemic, but institutions should still consider ways to bring potential students to campus in a safe way. What about a virtual tour?

Ideas of different events that may be offered:

Career Events for Elementary, Middle and H.S. Students

Students learn about careers from employers and activities are provided to expose them to the careers and various programs.

Manufacturing Day

This is a specific career day. It has a focus on particular careers and programs that prepare them for the career within the community college. Students explore career opportunities and programs. Many times industry tours for students are offered.

Information Sessions

These are sessions that potential students attend to gain information about programs.

Competitions for Programs

Students come to campus to compete in a skills competition in a particular program area. Students win awards and those who are in the top levels may also receive reduced tuition.

Reach Out
To High Schools

Students are not always able to attend events at the community college, yet need to know what programs are available. Understanding program requirements and expectations, as well as what support services are available, could encourage participation. It is important to reach out to potential students at their high schools to make sure they have access to this information. This makes it as easy as possible to register them and answer their questions without them having to go to campus. Here are a few of the activities that may be offered:

- **Train and Mentor Postsecondary Faculty** – Staff need to be trained and mentored on how to recruit. Provide support for postsecondary faculty so they are successful when they are recruiting for their programs.

- **Information Sessions** – Sessions that students can attend to gain information about the programs and support services available at the community college. Examples include: college for a day programs or college nights on campus.

- **Career Events** – Events that allow students to learn about careers. Activities are provided to expose them to the various careers and programs.

- **Advisors Register (CTE Staff as Advisors) Students** – An opportunity to register the students at the high school and then be able to take photos of the group of students and utilize in a newsletter.

- **Faculty Relationships** – It is key for postsecondary program faculty to have a good relationship with the secondary program faculty. These relationships will assist in promoting the program to potential students.

- **Educate Counselors** – Counselors are critical to advising high school students. They need to know about programs. Invite them to learn about the programs through breakfasts meetings, lunches, professional development etc.

- **Articulation/Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment** – Students obtaining postsecondary credit prior to leaving high school gives them ability to shorten the time it takes to obtain a college degree.

- **Certificate/Credential** – Students obtaining a certificate/credential while in high school gives them ability to shorten time in a program and getting out into the workforce.

- **Collaborate with Education for Employment (EFE) Regional Delivery System** – Partnerships with EFEs assist with the transition of students to postsecondary education.

Engage
Business, Industry and Labor

S tudents need to see there are opportunities to be employed once they have obtained their degree or certificate/credential. It is important business, industry and labor partners are engaged in your programs and assist with your recruiting. They can help you reach non-traditional students.

Here are a few ways that employers may engage:

Hire Students — Students need to see that there is employment available during and after completion of a program. Employers work with the program to provide internships, part-time and full-time employment.

Provide Resources – Employers provide books, uniforms, supplies, equipment, laptops etc. to assist students in being successful in the program.

Refer Students – Employers work with the community college to refer current employees for programs designed to obtain the skills for the current technology or those who want to advance to the next level in their career.

Work-based Learning Opportunities – Employers work to create apprenticeships. If there is a need of skilled labor in a particular industry, this is one way to build the pipeline to obtain a skilled workforce. Students will be able to learn and earn at the same time. The employer assists in recruiting the students for the apprenticeship.

Build Your
Network

Networking Does Not Just Happen

You have to build your network. Make sure you are at the table with community leaders to know what is happening. By being present at their meetings, you have the opportunity to create beneficial relationships to assist students. You can discuss the details of your program. There are many community organizations and agencies to build relationships such as: Faith Based Organizations, Not for Profits, Economic Development Council, Workforce Investment Boards, Housing Authority, Minority Business Organizations, Illinois Department of Human Services, Public Aid, Local Water Department, Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions Club, etc. Working with these organizations provides the ability to target populations that are in poverty, underrepresented, mobile, first generation students, those without a high school diploma, women, Veterans, Ex-Offenders, African Americans, etc. Many students need additional support to ensure the equity they need to succeed.

These are a few ways community organizations may assist:

• **Promote Program Through Mailings** – Request they send your information to their clients/members through monthly newsletters, utility bills, rent bills, etc.

• **Table at Events** – Request the opportunity to set up a table to distribute information about the program at their community events.

• **Formal Agreements with Organization or Agency** – Agreements will define what the organization or agency agrees to provide. These include assisting with getting the word out about an information session regarding programs and the support that will be provided for the student while they are taking classes. These may include:

• Food	• Mentoring
• Housing/Shelter	• Transportation
• Childcare	• Laptops
• Rent	• Hot Spots
• Financial Aid	

If your potential students can relate to the message. they are more likely to respond.

Join Forces

with Communications and Media

Students need to know about the programs and be able to see themselves in the program. Work with your internal marketing department to use multiple media outlets to share program information. These may include:

- **Website** – Should include current and up-to-date information about your program:
  » Diverse Images – Photos should represent a diversity of students, especially females in male-dominated programs. This helps all types of students see themselves participating in the program.
  » Highlight Programs
  » Career Cluster/Pathway Information
  » Labor Market Data
  » Articulation/Dual Credit
  » Credentials Available
  » Videos of Programs in Action
  » Student Success Stories
  » Available Support Services

- **Brochures** – Should include:
  - » Highlights of the Program
  - » Career Cluster/Pathway Information
  - » Certificates/Credentials Available

- **Digital** – Should include connecting with students through:
  - » Tablet
  - » Mobile
  - » Laptop

- **Social Media** – Should include:
  - » YouTube
  - » Facebook
  - » Twitter

- **Television, Radio, Billboards, Newspapers** – Should include:
  - » Student Success Stories
  - » Events

Highlight Flexible

Delivery of Programs and Support Services

Students need to be able to see that they are able to take programs while still maintaining employment and caring for a family. They also need to know that you have their best interest in mind and are willing to assist them to be successful. This assistance should include a variety of formats:

- **Flexible Delivery – Should include:**
  - » Online Classes
  - » Classes at a Variety of Times – Morning, Afternoon and Evening
  - » Distance Learning
  - » Programs Offered Where Targeted Populations Reside – Make sure there is transportation that can get students to location of program being offered.
  - » Short-term programs. May be 16-weeks, 12-weeks, 8-weeks
  - » Provide Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs for students to get General Educational Development (GED) and take CTE at the same time.

- **Support Services – Should include:**
  - » Advisement and Counseling
  - » Career and Employment Assistance
  - » Financial Assistance
  - » Disability Services
  - » Tutoring
  - » Remediation Assistance – Help students improve their skills so they can meet the requirements for the program.

Recruiting
During a Pandemic

Many of the community college recruitment strategies mentioned in this document, such as on-campus events, visiting high schools, tours of programs and businesses etc. have to be virtual now. It is now even more important to have a personal connection with the students (Ashford, 2020). They need to know you are there to help and are keeping their safety in mind (Ashford, 2020). The following are a few of the ways that community colleges are adjusting to this new normal:

• Provide Online Classes and Hybrid Classes

• Provide Technology and Hot Spots for Students – Some may require students to have their own laptop. Financial aid can assist.

• Provide Online Support Services for Students

• Offer Virtual Orientation Sessions – Including Tours

• Encourage Staff, Counselors, Outreach Coordinators, and Recruiters to Call Potential and Current Students

• Utilize Social and Traditional Media to Reach Potential Students

• Partner with Community Organizations to Assist with Student Needs and Information Regarding Programs

Successful Recruiting Efforts
Collect Data

Specific Targets Need To Be Set

Collecting data on your recruiting efforts will assist you in knowing if the activities that you are doing have the result you want (Flesher, J., & Bragg, D. 2013). You ultimately want more students enrolled. Measuring the enrollment trends, student headcount and credit hours from year to year will give you a good gauge of your efforts. In order to get to the overall numbers, specific targets need to be set for your recruitment activities. If the target is not being met for an activity, then this is the time for additional strategies to be implemented. For example: If you have a target of 10 students from three separate high schools to attend an open house, the responses should be monitored. If you have received at least 10 responses from two of the high schools and none from the third, then it is time to intervene with additional recruitment strategies (Sigler, 2018). If you wait until the end to assess your results, it will be difficult to make up the numbers (Sigler, 2018).

Successful recruitment and communication strategies consist of many activities, incentives, programs and partners all working together. The goal is to assist students to obtain the education and skills necessary to enter into their chosen career field.

Endnotes
and Citations

1. Ashford, Ellie. 2020. "Recruitment requires a human connection." Washington, DC: Community College Daily American Association of Community Colleges. April 14. https://www.ccdaily. com/2020/04/recruitment-requires-a-human-connection.

2. Barrington, Kate. 2019. "Community College Are changing Strategies to Increase Enrollment." Community College Review. June 24. https://www.communitycollegereview.com/blog/community-colleges-are-changing-strategies-to-increase-enrollment.

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4. Sigler, Wayne. 2018. "8 fundamentals of successful student recruitment." Washington, DC: American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). August 3. https://www. aacrao.org/resources/newsletters-blogs/aacrao-connect/article/8-fundamentals-of-successful-student-recruitment.

Recommended Citations

Dora Welker, Successful Recruitment and Communication Strategies for Community Colleges. Edited by: Aime'e Julian, Brittany Boston, and Martha Smith, Normal, IL: Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support, Illinois State University and Whitney Thompson, Springfield, IL: Illinois Community College Board, 2020.
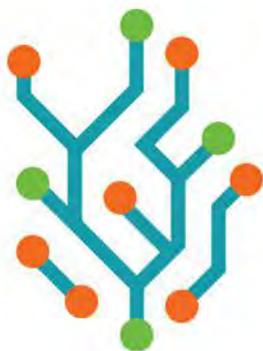
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