

By Julie Sinclair and Patty Croom

How to Create a Successful International Recruitment Plan

CREATING AN INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT PLAN is both science and art: It needs to be grounded in good data, both external and institutional, and it requires creativity to incorporate that data into institutional priorities and goals. Each institution has its own needs, capacities, and objectives, but there are key ingredients that will help any plan maximize its chances for success.

Conduct a SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis involves taking stock of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that may be factors in carrying out a plan. Strengths and weaknesses focus on the internal or institutional points that currently support and hinder international recruitment. Opportunities highlight possible points on which to build, and threats emphasize organizational and external concerns that may impact the success of a plan.

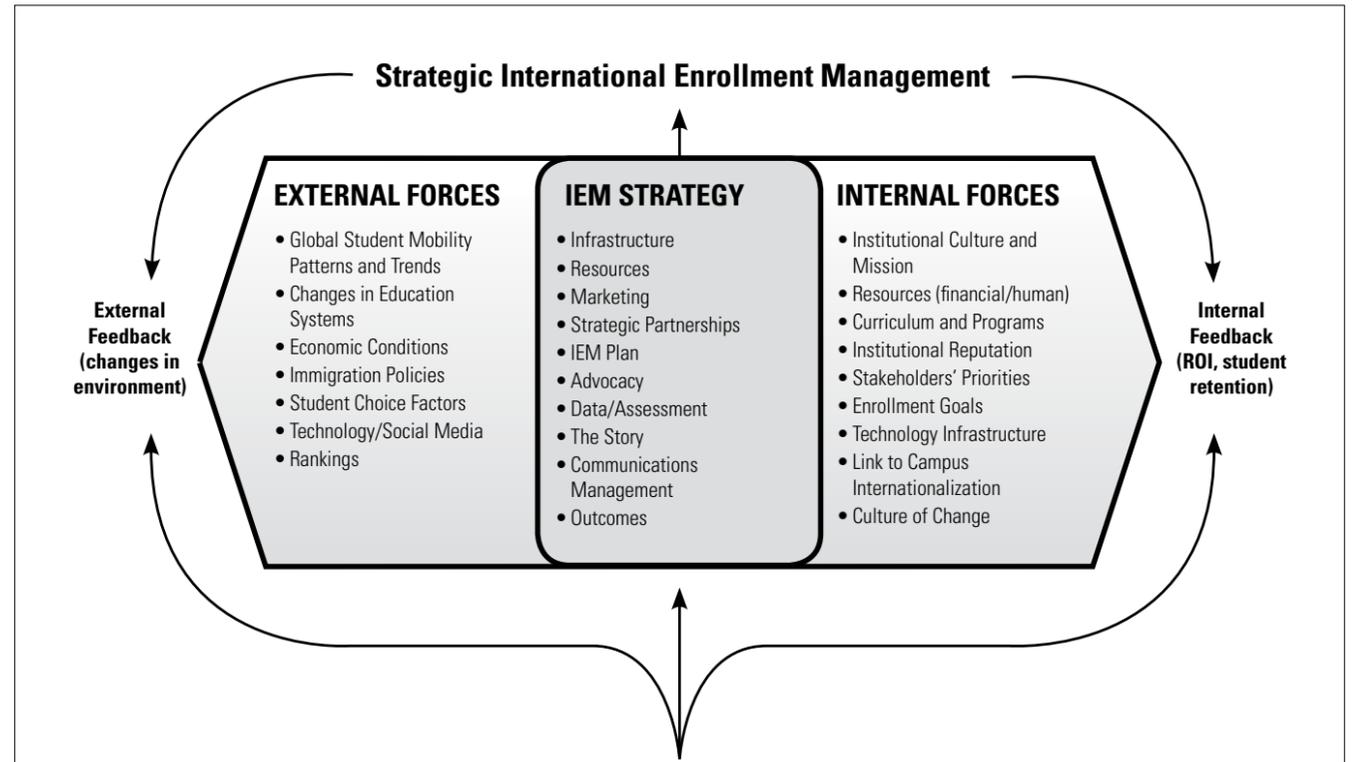
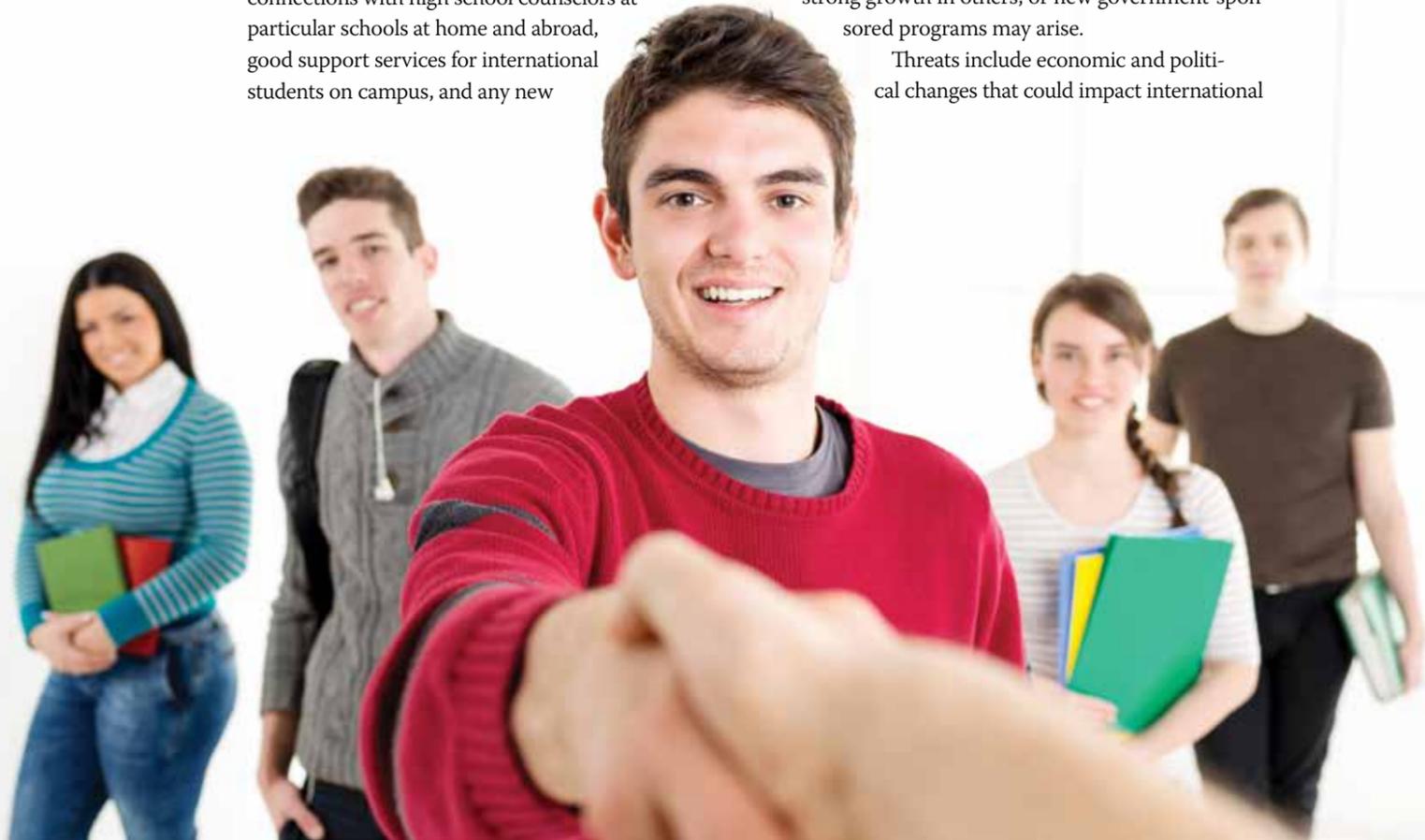
Strengths include items such as academic programs that are well-ranked or have a strong draw for international students. Good alumni relationships in a particular country or region, existing partnerships abroad, connections with high school counselors at particular schools at home and abroad, good support services for international students on campus, and any new

budget, staff, or technological resources are all types of factors that are strengths.

Weaknesses include such things as a relatively high tuition cost, dependence on a particular country for enrollment, lack of scholarships for international students, poor communication with other departments or units, lack of brand recognition, limited housing options, and geographical challenges.

Opportunities draw on internal and external data that point toward potentially positive directions for the plan: Student mobility data may show that there are emerging markets in particular countries or regions and strong growth in others, or new government-sponsored programs may arise.

Threats include economic and political changes that could impact international



Checklist: Six Planning Imperatives

Incorporating all of the internal and external aspects into an international recruitment plan can be complex and overwhelming. One useful way to start building the outline of a plan is to consider a series of questions that help provide the building blocks for a plan. Evelyn Levinson's 2009 resource, "Building an IEM Strategic Plan: Questions to Ask Before You Begin," highlights important who, why, where, what, when, and how questions to aid not only in creating actual sections of a plan but also in connecting them to the context of the institution or organization in which the plan sits. Below are six key steps that will help in building a recruitment plan.

- 1. Know the institutional history of recruitment planning, if any.** What kind of recruitment has been done in the past and by whom? Did explicit plans drive this effort? Is there a record of that on which to build?
- 2. Be clear about the scope.** Is the plan covering degree-seeking undergraduate, graduate, intensive English programs, short-term programs, sponsored student recruitment, or some combination of these?
- 3. Understand important institutional/organizational connections.** Will the recruitment plan need to align with other campus or organizational international efforts, such as faculty work and research abroad, existing international partnerships, or a broader internationalization plan?
- 4. Know the available resources.** It's important to know the current budget and human resources available to support an international recruitment plan. Are these resources likely to be there two or three years in the future?
- 5. Review external data.** Data on student mobility and trends, as well as demographic and economic forecasts, are essential inputs to any international recruitment plan. A number of easily available sources provide data on student mobility, including the Institute of International Education (IIE)'s Open Doors report, and the Council of Graduate Schools' annual application, admission, and enrollment surveys, which highlight changes in international graduate student enrollment in the United States.
- 6. Understand institutional data.** Part of preparing to write a good plan involves gathering as much institutional international student enrollment data as possible. Any history of applications, admission, and enrollment rates by country, level of study, and major, as well as retention data, provides insights into the SWOT analysis.

students' ability to afford and access education abroad. Elimination of sponsored scholarship programs and sudden changes in applications for other, unexpected reasons may occur. Declining applications from a country, threat of pandemic, budget or personnel cuts, changes in rankings, and lack of a clear international strategy are all examples of threats to a recruitment plan.

Components of the International Recruitment Plan

There are a variety of ways to structure the plan depending upon the needs and style of an organization, but the following ingredients should be strongly considered for inclusion:

BACKGROUND: Provide a brief history of institutional international recruitment to date, along with highlights of key strategies and changes over the last five years or so that have played an important role in recruitment. A brief overview of critical risk factors is also helpful.

GOALS: Articulate the institution's high-level international student enrollment goals that drive this planning effort. The goals might cover only one year, but more often will look forward at least three years.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES: Clearly connect the recruitment plan to larger

internationalization goals and strategies, outreach in specific world regions, support for international graduate students and research partnerships, or study abroad activity.

STAKEHOLDERS/CAMPUS PARTNERS: Involve key academic and support units as early as practical in the planning process; this usually leads to a better plan and stakeholder buy-in. Key units to involve in decisionmaking, regardless of where international recruitment is located on the organizational chart, include domestic admissions (both undergraduate and graduate) and international student and scholar services.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION: Be realistic about what may be accomplished within current resource limits; this will serve as a basis for more detailed decisionmaking in the annual planning and budgeting process. Considerations include include travel, staffing levels, digital and social media expenses, marketing materials, agency contracts, and professional development.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROCESS CHANGE: Although international recruitment typically focuses on efforts outside the institution, changes internal to the organization can also have a significant impact on recruitment. While the plan should not specify details of a potential customer relationship management (CRM) implementation or other such changes, it is important to consider process improvement opportunities that could have an impact on international enrollment.

FOCUS ON MARKETS: Assess and classify the institution's key markets. Using the SWOT analysis as well as a realistic assessment of the resources, planners should identify those countries or world regions that are most strategic, and to which they will devote the most effort in the coming several years. A classification scheme might include high focus, medium focus, sustaining, exploratory, and passive.

RECRUITING METHODS: In today's interconnected world, recruitment planning should include multiple forms of recruitment appropriate to the specific market. These could include recruitment and yield visits, engaging current students and alumni, and also advertising and collecting names through electronic media. Beyond market classification, the selection of appropriate recruitment channels for a given market should reflect key characteristics of the market.

TIMELINE: It may not be possible to easily measure recruitment efforts year to year, and it may be more worthwhile to think longer term, perhaps preparing the outline of a plan over a three-year period.

There are additional considerations that are also important in creating an international recruitment plan, including risk management and measuring and assessing the success of the plan. However, the most important may be flexibility. Unexpected world events or a sudden budget cut could impact an institution's ability to move forward with plans. It is also possible that an unexpected opportunity will arise that aligns well with institutional goals, such as a new sponsored program in a strategic region. In either case, alternate recruitment strategies or initiatives may be necessary; if there is one certainty in international higher education, it is that change is a constant. ■

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This article is an adaptation of a chapter of NAFSA's Guide to International Student Recruitment, Third Edition, edited by Jessica Black Sandberg of Temple University.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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