As summer approaches, consider getting a head start on fall 2016 by developing or updating a recruitment and enrollment plan. Such a plan does not need to develop new strategic goals, but it will set the agenda for achieving them. Enrollment Managers need to commit to paper what is in their heads about how they expect to enroll the upcoming class.

In our 30+ years of consulting with colleges, universities, and secondary schools, institutions consistently surprise us by failing to document plans for the next enrollment cycle. The plan should correlate trend data with recruitment initiatives. What seems to be working? What’s not? Can you imagine a business without a sales plan?

**Why is a written recruitment and enrollment plan important?**

A written plan:

✔ offers tangible evidence of the disciplined thinking necessary for achieving enrollment goals

✔ conveys an articulated strategy easily shared with others in the community to win support and participation

✔ guides the daily efforts of the Admission office

✔ educates new staff members (in Admission and elsewhere on campus) about the overall “game plan” for recruitment and enrollment

✔ anticipates and addresses the strategies and suggestions that may emerge from trustees, faculty, and other administrators

✔ protects the institution when there is an unexpected departure of leadership

We advise taking one step at a time. Commit to doing something, even if it’s not perfect. Avoid seeing the task of writing the plan as onerous. Make it a team exercise and keep it on the front burner.

**How does one begin? What are the necessary elements for a plan?**

1. **Start with accurate, analyzed data.**
   By documenting trends that convey “where we have been” you will gain an understanding of the external environment and show “where we are” as a basis to set new and realistic goals.

2. **Set clear goals.**
   What are your enrollment goals by headcount, quality, composition (ethnicity, geography, international, and transfer students), and discount rate? What were past goals and have they been achieved?

3. **Articulate your strategy and determine tactics.**
   The strategy serves as a roadmap for reaching your goals, as it guides the selection and mix of tactics to be used. Tactics are the specific, practical actions you will take to reach your goals. These could include how you reply to emails, use your website and social media, organize events on and off campus, and manage search/list buys for direct marketing efforts. Be creative when determining tactics—you may develop a new tactic that works better than anticipated. Tactics need to have metrics and be measured.

4. **Engage your community.**
   Specify the way in which the assistance of faculty, alumni, current students, and parents will be integrated into the recruitment strategy.

(Over, please)
What else?

5. Evaluate metrics.
How will you mark progress, identify issues as they arise, and determine the return on investment from recruitment and marketing activities? Record both qualitative (notes from events) and quantitative (yield by cost) indicators to guide future decisions.

6. Envision the year.
Plot major initiatives and milestones on a calendar. Identify conflicts and particular pressure points that may require additional resources.

7. Involve the staff.
The plan should be an office-wide effort orchestrated by the Dean or Director, but with significant participation from others, leading to a wider distribution of ownership for planning and results.

And finally....

8. Review the plan regularly and make adjustments.
What is working especially well? What needs to be adjusted? Capture this in writing, so that this knowledge accumulates over the years.

Launch some recruitment “experiments.” Identify new geographic areas and outreach approaches to expand recruitment efforts and enhance enrollment. Carefully monitor and analyze these initiatives—and give them time to succeed.

9. Share the plan with campus stakeholders.
Make the plan available to academic, financial aid, marketing and communications, and student affairs leadership as well as colleagues in institutional advancement. Share strategies and seek feedback and support for reaching enrollment goals.

The results you achieve may be different from what you set out to achieve, but the act of planning and revisiting the plan along the way gives your staff a process that guides them and your institution to its best chance for success. Make sure the plan is a living document. Having one that sits on the shelf is almost as bad as not having one at all.

Long term benefit:

Once you have a plan, you can amplify and update it annually. With consistent use and attention, your plan will become increasingly more sophisticated and enrollment objectives more attainable.