Maximizing Community College Marketing Budgets

Smart Strategies for FY '26

April 2025

A Few Starting Details

+ 45-minute sessions, including time for questions and conversation at the end

+ Session recordings shared with attendees via email at later this week

+ Use the Zoom Chat and Q+A panels to engage with attendees and submit questions

+ Need help? Use Whova's "Ask Organizers Anything" section in the Community Board or email us at **conferences@carnegiehighered.com**

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+ Senior Director, Community College Solutions

+ Former campus enrollment + marketing leader

+ Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, with research focused on prior learning to recruit adult learners, particularly the Some College, No Credential population

Agenda

1   **Key Industry Insights**

2   **Hyper-Targeted Strategies**

3   **Local SEO**
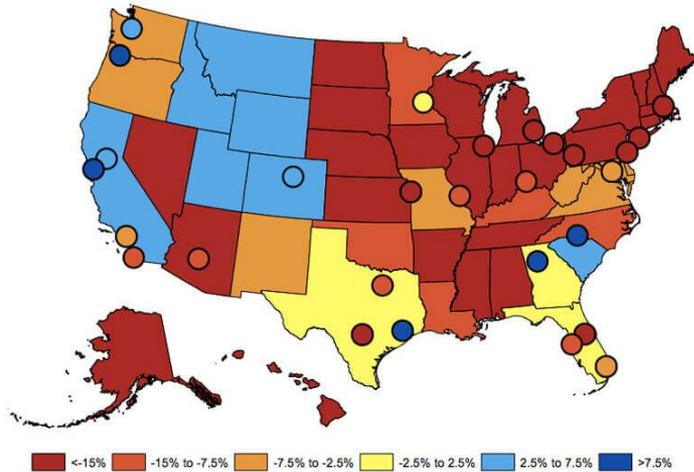
4   **Measuring & Optimizing Campaigns**

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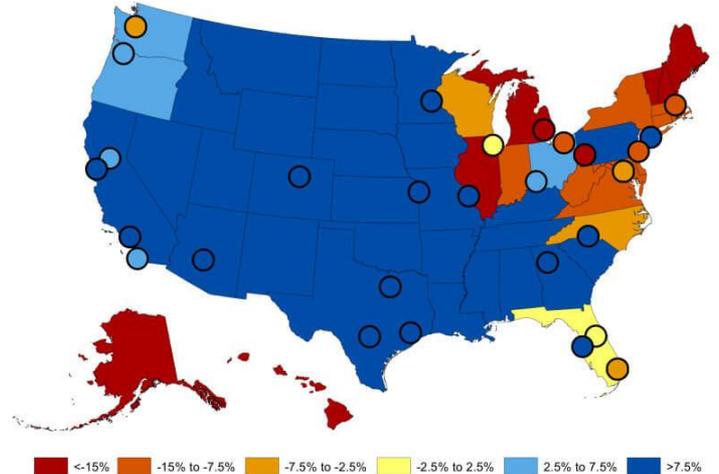# Key Industry Insights

Turning Insights into Opportunities:

+ Overview of Current Landscape
+ Maximizing Impact with Smart Strategies

Enrollment Projections Through 2029

Regional four-year college enrollment between 2012 and 2029

Elite four-year college enrollment between 2012 and 2029

Legend (Regional): <-15% | -15% to -7.5% | -7.5% to -2.5% | -2.5% to 2.5% | 2.5% to 7.5% | >7.5%

Legend (Elite): <-15% | -15% to -7.5% | -7.5% to -2.5% | -2.5% to 2.5% | 2.5% to 7.5% | >7.5%

*It takes **2x to 2.6x more media spend** for dull, unengaging ads to achieve the same impact as compelling, engaging ads.*

Attracting a new student costs 5 to 25x more than retaining an existing one.

Hyper-Targeted Strategies

Shift from Broad-Based to Audience-Centric Targeting

+ **Defining Hyper-Targeting:** What it is and why it matters.
+ Key **audiences** to focus on (prospects, inquiries, current & former students).
+ Digital **ad platforms** to focus on.

What is Hyper-Targeted Marketing?

Precision targeting using data, geofencing, and audience segmentation to connect with prospective students effectively.

Why It Matters for Community Colleges:

+ Maximizes limited budgets

+ Reduces wasted ad spend

+ Improves engagement by focusing your message to students who have a higher likelihood to convert

Bridging the Education-to-Career Gap

Career pathways play a critical role in helping students gain credentials and secure meaningful careers.

+ Step-by-step paths from education to employment demonstrate a clear return on investment
+ Demonstrate ways students can earn to learn

High-Impact Advertising Strategies to Reach & Engage Community College Students

BRANDING

REACH AND ENGAGE

LEAD NURTURE

REGISTER

+ **Geofencing & Location-Based Ads**: Target local hotspots like libraries, coffee shops, high schools, and community hubs

+ **Program-Specific Campaigns**: Target by career interests and workforce demands

+ **Lookalike Audiences**: Find students with similar traits as current enrollees

+ **Retargeting Ads**: Engage past website visitors and incomplete applications

+ **Hyper-Local Out of Home:** Leverage zip codes and consumer data to deliver localized ads

Mobile-First Outreach for Maximum Engagement

60%+ of students access education info via mobile.

Power of Programmatic Advertising:

+ Place ads across websites, social media, streaming platforms, and mobile apps.

+ Ensures visibility where students spend their time online.

+ Delivers tailored messages based on user interests and behaviors.

KPIs by Device Type

Phone	Impressions	Clicks	CTR
	155,343	354	0.23%
	Total Conversions	Conversion Rate	
	83	23.45%	

Tablet	Impressions	Clicks	CTR
	31,681	126	0.40%
	Total Conversions	Conversion Rate	
	4	3.17%	

Computer	Impressions	Clicks	CTR
	6,553	4	0.06%
	Total Conversions	Conversion Rate	
	27	675.00%	

Example infographic showcasing KPIs by device type, emphasizing the power of programmatic advertising in reaching prospects across multiple devices.

3

Local SEO for Visibility & Engagement

Winning with Local SEO - Own Your Community's Search

+ **Why local search matters** for community colleges.
+ Key **SEO strategies** such as, Google Business Profile, and keywords.

Why Local SEO Matters for Community Colleges

**46% of all Google searches have local intent.**

Importance of Local SEO:

+ **Visibility in Local Searches:** Helps prospective students find your college when searching for education options nearby.

+ **Mobile Optimization:** Many students search for colleges on mobile devices using location-based queries.

+ **Driving Enrollment:** Prospective students are more likely to explore and apply when they can easily find relevant information.
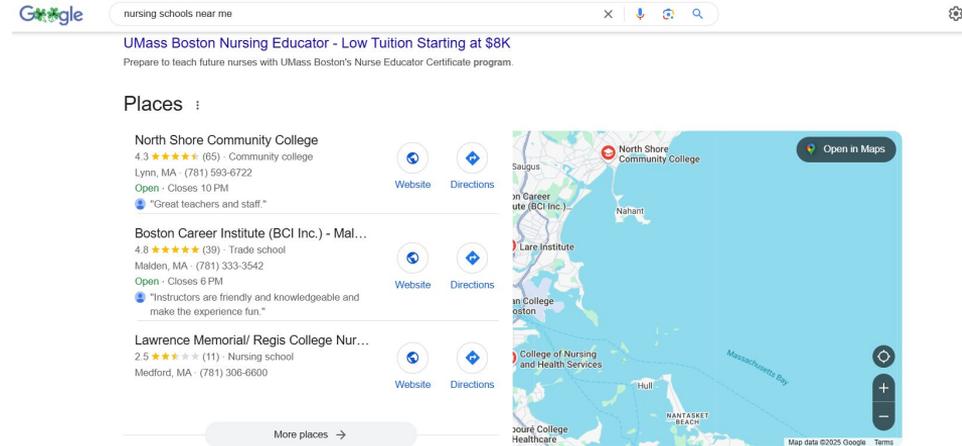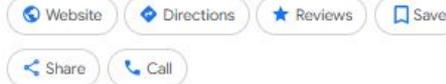
Easy Wins for Local Search Visibility

+ **Use location-based keywords** ("[College Name] near me").
+ **Encourage student & faculty reviews** on Google.
+ **Ensure NAP (Name, Address, Phone) consistency** across listings.
+ **Create location-based content** (blogs, FAQs, community events).
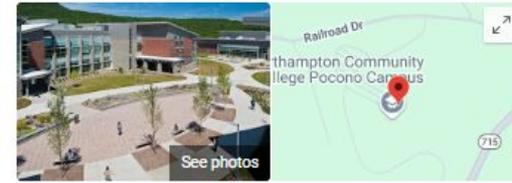
Posts and Events

Post about your campus news and promote your upcoming events to increase student engagement and get key messaging in front of your audience.

Post ideas: Open houses, campus tours, admission deadlines, and information sessions.

4

Measuring & Optimizing Campaigns

What We'll Cover in This Section:

+ **Google Analytics & tracking tools** to measure campaign success.
+ **How to adjust strategies** based on data insights.

Leveraging GA4 to Analyze Student Behavior and Engagement

What metrics show a user is engaged?

+ Percentage of users that scroll 90% down the page

+ Engagement rate and user engagement time on the page compared to other similar pages or other campaigns

+ Track user behavior from acquisition to completing key events. Where are users dropping off in the expected journey across the website?

+ What information are users searching for on the website that may not be found in the navigation?

Hidden Insights in Search Queries

search term ▾ ✕	↓ Event count	Sessions	Total users	Events per session	Event count per active user
	6,792 100% of total	4,297 100% of total	2,919 100% of total	1.58 Avg 0%	2.33 Avg 0%
catalog	93	86	51	1.08	1.82
calendar	90	85	76	1.06	1.18
academic calendar	89	81	64	1.10	1.39
course catalog	67	64	20	1.05	3.35
nursing	63	50	42	1.26	1.50
registrar	54	51	38	1.06	1.42
athletics	45	43	42	1.05	1.07
schedule of classes	43	40	27	1.08	1.59
campus map	42	30	30	1.40	1.40
open house	40	38	36	1.05	1.11

GA4 Search Report

Standard Reports: Traffic Acquisition

What insights can we uncover with a Traffic Acquisition Report?

+ Where do users completing RFI submissions come from?

+ Which campaigns are driving the most application submissions?

+ What channels drive the highest engagement rate?

Dimension	What does it mean?
Session Source	Specific website or other online location that referred a user to your site - google.com, facebook.com
Session Medium	Categorizes the type of traffic your property receives - referral, social, cpc, organic
Session Campaign	Marketing initiatives with specific objectives.
Session Default Channel Group	Traffic segmented into broad channels - Organic Search, Paid Search, Direct, Referral, Display, etc

|	Session source / medium ▾	Event name ▾ ✕	↓ Sessions
	Total		722 0.38% of total
1	google / organic	request_info_link_click	379
2	google / organic	request_info_ug	78
3	google / cpc	request_info_link_click	71
4	(direct) / (none)	request_info_link_click	64
5	google / organic	request_info_grad	55
6	bing / organic	request_info_link_click	48

Standard Reports: Traffic Acquisition Report

Session source / medium	↓ Sessions	Engaged sessions	Engagement rate	Average engagement time per session	Events per session	Event count All events
Total	1,763,000 vs. 1,787,006 ↓ -1.34%	999,993 vs. 1,055,955 ↓ -5.3%	56.72% vs. 59.09% ↓ -4.01%	1m 04s vs. 1m 07s ↓ -4.39%	14.93 vs. 16.68 ↓ -10.52%	26,313,649 vs. 29,806,820 ↓ -11.72%
google / organic						
Oct 1 - Dec 31, 2024	804,936	522,963	64.97%	1m 16s	16.96	13,654,785
Oct 1 - Dec 31, 2023	828,084	541,928	65.44%	1m 16s	18.42	15,253,472
% change	-2.8%	-3.5%	-0.72%	0.99%	-7.91%	-10.48%
(direct) / (none)						
Oct 1 - Dec 31, 2024	433,850	241,972	55.77%	47s	11.86	5,145,370
Oct 1 - Dec 31, 2023	474,880	262,666	55.31%	50s	13.44	6,381,312
% change	-8.64%	-7.88%	0.83%	-5.09%	-11.74%	-19.37%
carnegie-slate / email						
Oct 1 - Dec 31, 2024	773	610	78.91%	55s	10.04	7,759
Oct 1 - Dec 31, 2023	0	0	0%	0s	0.00	0
% change	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Standard Reports: Landing Page

What insights can we uncover with a Landing Page Report?

+ Understand which pages are effectively bringing users into your site.

+ Track event completions (ex. Clicks, downloads, video plays) per landing page to see user interactions.

+ Identify pages with high traffic but low engagement.

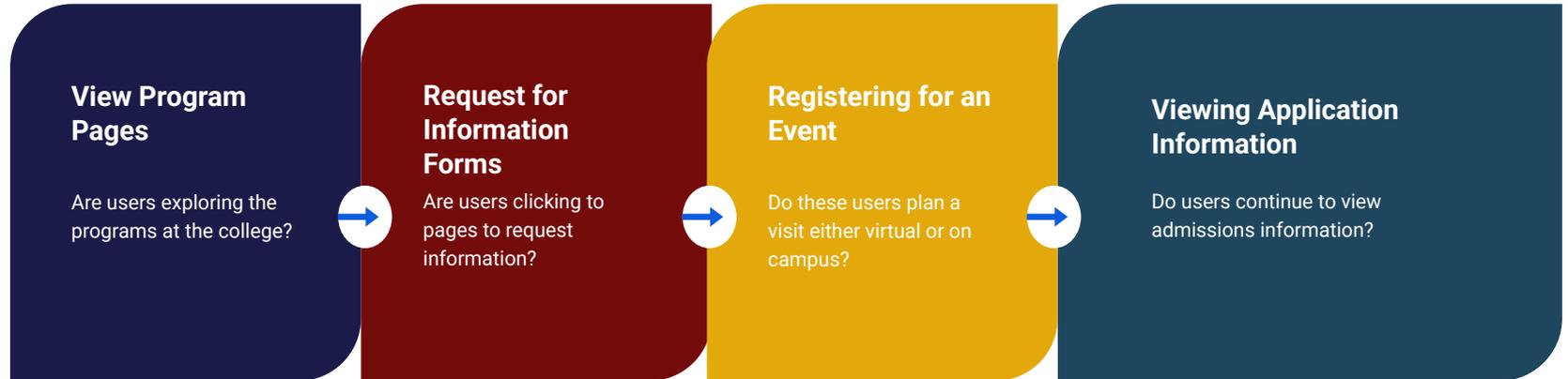+ Review metrics across the user's entire session
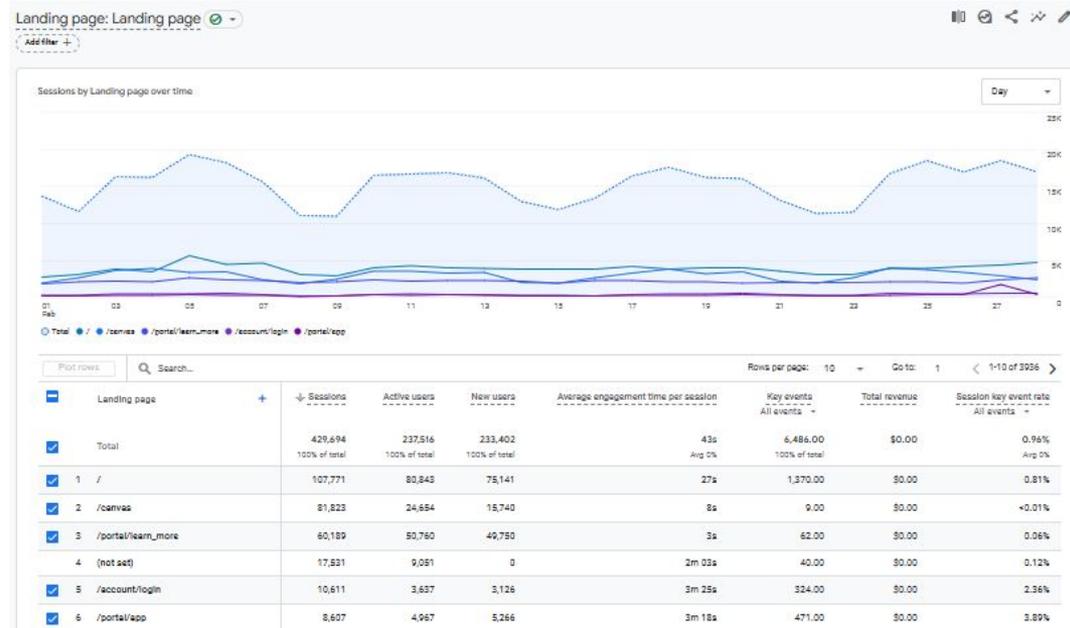
How do you find out where users are dropping off in the journey?

Exploration Reports: Funnel Exploration

Funnel Exploration reports are useful for following a user journey across the site to discover where users are dropping off in the funnel.

+ Are users completing the steps in the funnel as you expect?

View Program Pages

Are users exploring the programs at the college?

→

Request for Information Forms

Are users clicking to pages to request information?

→

Registering for an Event

Do these users plan a visit either virtual or on campus?

→

Viewing Application Information

Do users continue to view admissions information?

Exploration Reports: Funnel Report

Viewing the steps users take through the funnel can show the time it takes for users to move between steps and the Abandonment rate between steps.
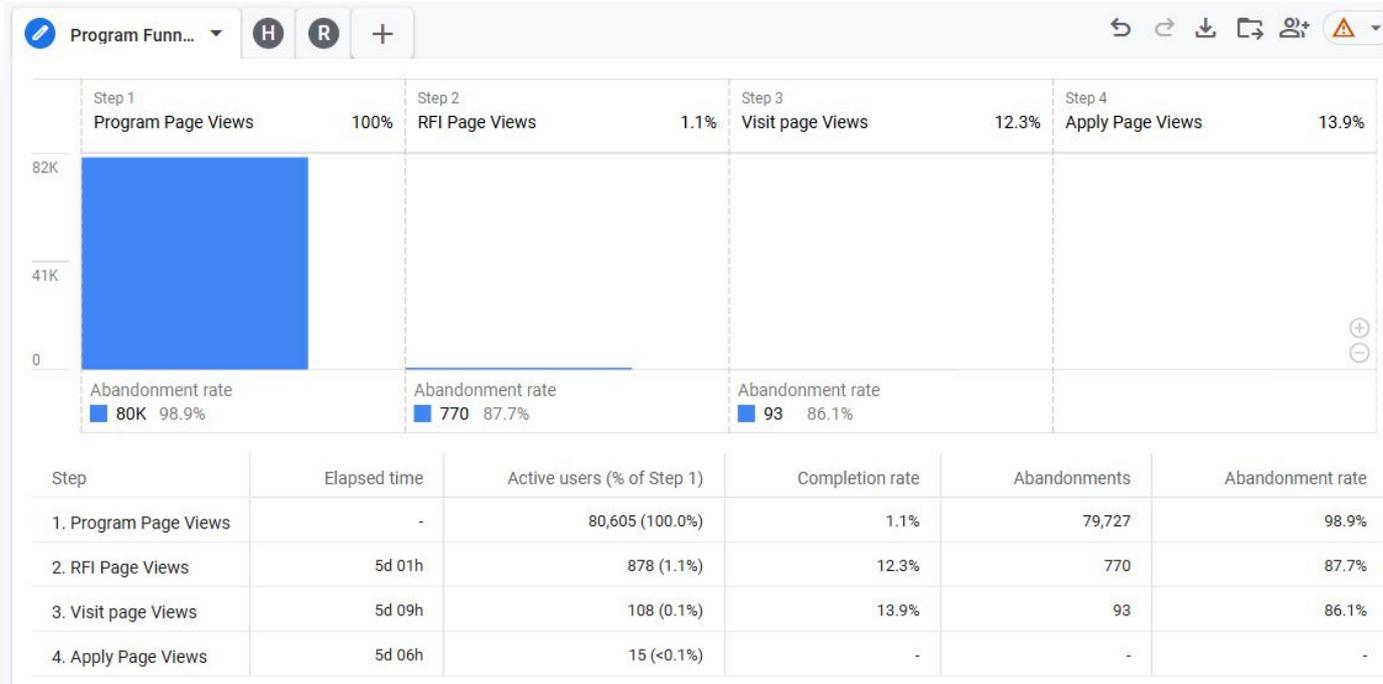
Key Takeaways

+ **Hyper-Targeting Saves Money.** Focus on engaged audiences.

+ **Local SEO Boosts Visibility.** Ensure students find you online.

+ **Analytics Drive Smarter Marketing.** Use data insights to refine efforts.

+ **Even Small Budgets Can Have Big Impact.** Prioritize cost-effective strategies.

Resources

Dive Deeper

CLARUS Blog

Carnegie Blog

Download

Enrollment Match Fact Sheet

Explore

Partner with CLARUS

Scan the QR code for a 20% discount on a 12-month Conversion Rate Optimization package

Thank You!

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