

FACT SHEET: Partnering with International Recruitment Agents During COVID

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and the American International Recruitment Council (AIRC) collaborated on a brief survey to learn more about how colleges are partnering with international student recruitment agents during the COVID-19 pandemic. All NACAC and AIRC college members were invited to participate in the survey. A total of 294 valid responses were received.¹

Prevalence of Agent Partnerships

Almost half (49 percent) of survey respondents indicated that they currently partner with agents to recruit undergraduate international students and five percent reported they are actively exploring agent partnerships as a result of the pandemic. Private colleges were more likely than public colleges to have agent partnerships (60 percent vs. 42 percent, respectively).

Percentage of Survey Respondents That Partner with Agents Based on Degree-Seeking Status of Students

	Percent
No, have not partnered with agents immediately prior to or during the pandemic	46
Yes, for degree-seeking students only	26
Yes, for both degree-seeking and non-degree seeking students	22
No, but actively exploring agent partnerships as a result of the pandemic	5
Yes, for non-degree seeking students only	1

N = 294. Note: Respondents who partner with agents for non-degree seeking students only did not respond to any additional survey questions.

Status of Agent Partnerships Before and During COVID-19 Pandemic

Survey respondents that currently partner or had recently partnered with agents were asked a series of questions to learn more about how those partnerships may have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only five percent of respondents reported that they stopped working with agents as a result of the pandemic and two percent started agent partnerships due to the pandemic.²

Agent Partnerships Before and During the Pandemic

	Percent
Partnered with agents prior to the pandemic and continue to work with agents during the pandemic	93
Partnered with agents prior to the pandemic but stopped working with agents as a result of the pandemic	5
Began working with agents as a result of the pandemic	2

N = 142.

¹ At least one admission office staff member at 1,544 institutions received the survey. When multiple responses were received for one institution, duplicates were removed randomly. Responding institutions were 56 percent private, four-year; 36 percent public four-year; 7 percent public, two-year; and one percent private, two-year.

² Institutions that either stopped or started working with agents as a result of the pandemic were asked to indicate reasons for these decisions, but results are not included because fewer than 10 responses were received.

For a substantial portion of colleges, the number of agent partners had changed since the start of the pandemic, with 34 percent increasing the number of agent partners and 9 percent decreasing the number.³

Change in Number of International Student Recruitment Agent Partners Since the Start of the Pandemic

	Percent
No change in number of agent partners	57
Increased number of agent partners	34
Decreased the number of agent partners	9

N = 128.

The vast majority of survey respondents had not changed agent compensation as a result of the pandemic. Six percent increased compensation, and 2 percent decreased compensation.

Change in Compensation for Agent Partners since the Start of the Pandemic

	Percent
No change in agent compensation	92
Increased agent compensation	6
Decreased agent compensation	2

N = 127.

Institutions That Do Not Partner with Agents

Institutions that do not partner with agents and are not actively exploring partnerships were asked to indicate reasons for that decision.⁴ The most common responses were that the institution has staff dedicated to either international travel or armchair recruitment of international students and concerns with unethical practices.

Reasons Cited by Institutions That Do Not Partner with Agents

	Percent
Institution has staff dedicated to international recruitment travel	55
Concern with unethical practice	54
Institution has staff dedicated to armchair recruitment of international students	45
Fear of harming the institution's reputation	31
Institution utilizes alumni in country to assist with recruitment efforts	23
A lack of knowledge about how to choose an agent partner	15
Institution does not recruit international students	9
Institution uses a third-party "in-country representation" provider	2

N= 124. Note: Percentages add to more than 100 percent as respondents could select more than one option.

Survey respondents who cited ethical concerns about agent partnerships were asked to rank order potential reasons for concern. Results of the survey indicated that lack of support for a per-student commission model was the top concern.

Among Survey Respondents Citing Ethical Concerns, Percentage that Ranked Each Option as Top Concern

	Percent Citing as Top Concern
Do not support per-student commission model	47
Concern with potential for agents to provide inaccurate information about my institution	23
Concern with agents steering students to particular institutions based solely, or primarily, on commission incentives	18
Concern that agents will charge both students and institutions	7
Concern that agents will not verify authenticity of student records of achievement, finances and statement of purpose	5

N = 61.

³ Open-ended comments indicated that not all agent-related changes were a result of the pandemic, but were already planned or related to ongoing strategy.

⁴ Institutions that are actively exploring agent partnerships were asked to indicate factors that would inform that decision, but results are not included because only 12 responses were received.