



Green River College

Marketing Strategy & Plans | 2025

GRC College Advancement
Office of College Relations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The GRC Marketing Strategy is a long-term, high-level plan to meet the enrollment, engagement, retention, and re-engagement objectives outlined in Green River College's equity-centered Strategic Plan. It will help GRC understand the needs of prospective and current students, thereby creating a distinct and sustainable competitive advantage.

Marketing at Green River College (GRC) is managed within the College Relations department on the main campus in Auburn, WA and extends its reach and support to GRC remote campuses in Auburn, Enumclaw, and Kent areas.

The Mission of GRC:

Green River College welcomes our diverse local and global communities and is committed to meeting students where they are by providing inclusive, equitable access to innovative and comprehensive educational programs, and individualized support that empowers and prepares students to achieve their personal, educational, and career goals.

History:

Green River College started as a program of adult evening education in 1945 as part of the Auburn School District. The school was approved to become a community college in 1963 and began technical and professional programs in September 1964.

It has a student body of approximately 10,000. The college primarily awards associate degrees but as of 2024, offers 9 bachelor's degrees.

Marketing Operational Contributors:

Marketing at GRC works to further public understanding and recognition of the College and its important mission as our region's leading provider of higher education. Strategically, campus partners play a critical role in GRC's over-all marketing effort.

- **Senior Communications Director**
Oversees the over-all messaging and messaging delivery to campus partners and media outlets
- **Director of Marketing and Digital Content**
Leads the strategic and tactical direction for prospective and retention marketing efforts
- **Director of Creative Services**
Guides the institution on all brand-related efforts and oversees the production of marketing materials.
- **Recruitment and Outreach**
Relies on strategic direction and research from Director of Marketing, as well as own research efforts, to approach the community for the purpose of recruiting new students and engaging community with the GRC brand at the forefront.
- **Campus Marketing Partners**
As areas across campus hire or appoint marketing managers, the position will work closely with the Director of Marketing to develop a "marketing plan" for their area, based

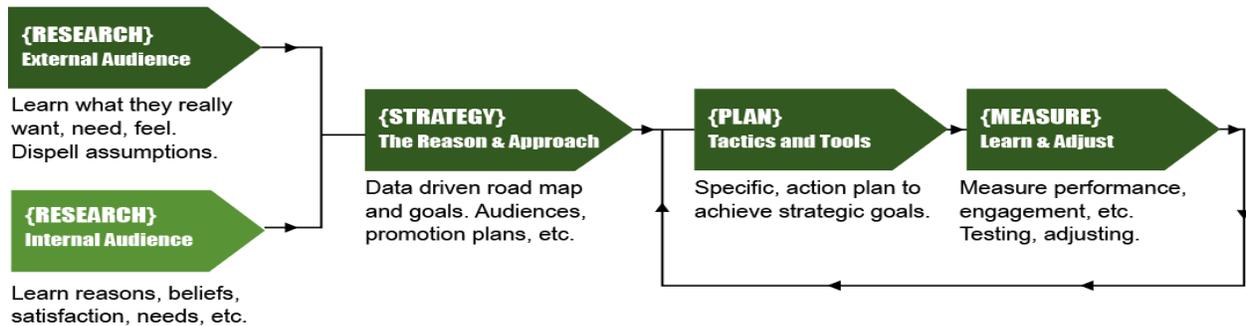
on the overall GRC marketing strategy. They will also work with the Creative Services team to ensure brand unity and consistency. These staff members may have access and permission to edit their respective areas' web pages and/or social media channels. These contributors should have access and training to all applicable GRC guides, standards, and best practices to ensure consistent messaging and brand.

Strategic Summary:

As a public community college, GRC operates within a “business to customer (B2C)” education industry where schools *produce a similar product*, but they are not identical. As a result, the marketing strategy will serve as a central reference for all strategic and functional marketing efforts at GRC to:

- Discover market needs
- Discover our differentiators
- Reach prospective students
- Nurture leads through conversion

Success is critically dependent on data, feedback, and cooperation garnered from various areas of the public and GRC stakeholders.



The marketing strategy is informed by and supports the [2021-2026 Green River College Equity-Centered Strategic Plan](#), namely, the following college goals:

- Goal A: Success for All Students
- Goal D: Integrated and Effective Organizational Structure, Systems, and Processes
- Goal F: Impactful Community Connections

GOALS OVERVIEW

The marketing strategy and plans set forth here will all work towards the following marketing /engagement goals:

- Market the GRC brand with an equitable lens and distribution
- Drive more campus visits and digital traffic

- Increase awareness and enrollments in prioritized groups (largest enrollment drop, people of color, immigrants, etc.)
- Cultivate the student relationship life cycle (prospective > current > alumni) to generate more leads that are tracked and followed up on
 - Boost brand awareness by becoming the most top-of-mind school in our service area
 - Strengthen brand affinity with prospective and current students
 - Retain and engage current and stopped-out student base
 - Build stronger community relationships that result in mutual benefit

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The **GRC Marketing Strategy** is shaped by the GRC business goals and strategy. The marketing strategy outlines the offering we deliver, how we will deliver it and why our marketing efforts will help us achieve GRC's mission and strategic goals. This living document will serve as a guide for:

- All general marketing at GRC
- Individual program marketing plans
- Satellite campus marketing
- Retention and re-engagement efforts
- Community engagement
- Recruitment and outreach

GRC **marketing plans** are roadmaps for tactical marketing efforts that will help the school achieve its marketing goals. These plans are detailed approaches of what GRC will do, where it is done, when it is implemented, and how it will track success. There may be multiple marketing plans based on the need (General brand awareness, targeted digital, program specific, Alumni retention, content focused, account-based, etc.).

Other than general brand awareness, **instructional marketing** is a primary focus for marketing due to the potential for targeted differentiation in our service area. The ideal structure for this approach will include autonomous program-run marketing efforts and budgets by dedicated program marketing positions that work closely with and are guided by College Relations.

- **Research-based:** All stakeholder-facing marketing actions are driven by primary and secondary feedback to ensure resonance and effective use of resources.
- **Comprehensive:** A multi-channel approach is used to engage prospective students, current students, alumni, and stop-outs to maximize impact and ROI (Return on Investment).

- **Both general and specialized:** Standard GRC brand awareness marketing is done along with targeted campaigns aimed at promoting differentiators (i.e., programs, new offerings, special events, etc.) with a call to action.
- **Measured:** Marketing efforts are measured to “fine-tune” GRC’s marketing strategy and mix, ultimately resulting in a direct attribution from marketing effort to conversion (enrollment).
- **Program-centered marketing:** Programs (Departments, disciplines, areas, etc.) are empowered, trained, and supported to manage their own marketing with guidance from their respective industry marketing plans.

OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

College Relations Marketing is engaged (at-minimum) in a multi-faceted approach that includes learning about the market, building brand awareness and community appeal, gaining student feedback, and creating a framework for all marketing efforts at GRC to work together to benefit students.

External Marketing

1. **Market research** is conducted annually to identify:
 - a. The level of brand awareness in the service area
 - b. The level of brand loyalty with the community and current students
 - c. GRC’s market position
 - d. How current offerings align with community need
 - e. Opportunities for differentiation

2. **Brand Awareness**

Continuous general promotion of GRC brand across multiple channels to improve:

- i. Brand trust
- ii. Public recall and familiarity
- iii. Brand equity
- iv. Association

3. **Targeted Campaigns**

Similar to brand awareness campaigns in distribution, targeted campaigns rely more on current research, trends, environmental events, etc. to be a specific messaging beacon to a specific call to action.

4. **Community Engagement**

GRC will engage in community outreach to organizations and businesses for the purpose of building awareness, good will, and partnerships that could potentially result in audience sharing, employee re-training, or prospective student referrals.

5. Digital Marketing

GRC's core, public-facing digital tools are its website and social media channels. Current student-facing tools include campus digital signage, email, social media, and the GRC website's "current students" section. All content on the public website and social media is aimed primarily at prospective students (the public) for the purpose of attracting, engaging, and inviting to be participants in GRC offerings.

All digital channels used at GRC should be continuously evaluated for effectiveness and reach and are kept up to date using the latest best practices for content and use.

Internal Marketing

Part of the marketing department's role is to conduct continuous marketing research among converted students. Feedback and data from students is used to inform retention and brand loyalty efforts.

1. Student Research

In cooperation with Student Life and the Department of Institutional Effectiveness, College Relations Marketing will assist in the gathering of student feedback and data to help inform marketing efforts to current students.

2. Student Activities

In cooperation with Student Life and other departments, College Relations Marketing plays a support role to help understand what students want and how they feel about their student experience.

3. Brand Loyalty

We will aim marketing efforts at current students for the purpose of creating a positive experience, resulting in improved loyalty to the GRC brand, and eventually, greater chance of post-graduation Alumni giving.

4. Campus Promotions

We will assist campus partners with their event promotions to ensure a minimal level of brand unity and messaging cohesiveness.

5. Marketing Operational Plan

The Marketing Operational Plan will act as a framework for amplifying marketing efforts across campus.

ANNUAL SCHEDULE

These "base-level" efforts will serve as the underlying foundation for our brand promotion in the service area. They do not include targeted campaigns, which are intended to engage and convert to a specific end (Example: Running Start campaign with tactics specifically geared to H.S. families in the area.)

GOAL	SUCCESS METRIC	FALL			WINTER				SPRING			SUMMER				
		Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	
General Brand Awareness	1st in aided and unaided recall in service area	[Green bar]														
Higher Retention	Lower stop-out number;	[Green bar]														
Community Engagement	Increased landing page visits; enrollments				[Green bar]								[Green bar]			
INITIATIVE	SUCCESS METRIC															
Fall Enrollment Push	Higher Web Conversions*														[Blue bar]	
Winter Enrollment Push	Higher Web Conversions*			[Cyan bar]												
Spring Enrollment Push	Higher Web Conversions*						[Orange bar]									
Summer Enrollment Push	Higher Web Conversions*										[Yellow bar]					

* = A web conversion is a trackable path from initial impression (Ad, Promotion, etc.) through to "Apply".

AUDIENCES

Geographic

GRC service areas (Auburn, Kent, Enumclaw, Tahoma, Renton) as defined by the [State Board of Community and Technical Colleges](#).

98025, 98035, 98063, 98064, 98071, 98089, 98093, 98352, 98002, 98001, 98092, 98010, 98391, 98042, 98051, 98059, 98058, 98003, 98023, 98022, 98038, 98032, 98031, 98030, 98047, 98057, 98056, 98055, 98390, 98320

Demographic	Psychographic	Approach
K-12 (Elem, Middle School, etc.)	K-12 students excited about high school and college	Brand awareness, prep tools, giveaways, etc.
Ages 16-19 Graduating HS Students	Current HS students looking at local colleges	R&O to work with local HS. Discover concerns, answer questions, build relationships. On-campus event for families.
Ages 17-19 Running Start	Current HS students seeking concurrent college courses	R&O to work with local HS. Focus on classes.
Ages 19+ HS Diploma or GED Seekers	Post HS, working class, looking to complete HS or GED	Targeted campaigns towards certain geographical and demographic areas of higher concentrations of HS dropouts. Work with local HS's to approach these groups.
Ages 18+ Continuing & Community Education	Potential students who are returning to or starting college seeking professional education, job training, and/or personal enrichment.	Work with on-campus partners (CE, WorkForce, etc.) to clarify offerings, marketing plan.
Ages 18+ Career & Technical Education	Potential students seeking an AA or BA(S) through professional/technical education.	Partner with local business. Promote specific programs generally and targeted.
Ages 21+ ABE/Transitional Studies	Potential students seeking basic skills training and personal growth courses to	Partner with GRC ABE, ELL, TRIO, etc. and community resource centers on messaging,

	prepare for entry-level college courses.	offerings, etc. Language campaign and digital resources.
Ages 18+ English Language Learners	Adults seeking to learn the English language	Partner with GRC language centers, ELL, and community resource centers on messaging, offerings, etc. Language campaign and digital resources.
Military Transition	Those transitioning from military careers to public and private workforce careers	Partner with campus Military services, local military orgs, research, targeted offerings campaign.
Returning Students	Students who attended a previous quarter and are enrolled for current quarter	Personalized approach with encouragement and details about their educational journey
Alumni	Previous GRC students who have earned a degree or certificate	Personalized approach with specific details about their GRC journey, encouragement to stay involved, events, give, etc.
Stop-Outs	Previous students who have not transferred or earned a degree or certificate	Re-engage with former students with a survey and targeted plan for success, financial aid info, GRC contacts, etc.
Student Families	Prospective students who are parents or caregivers.	Research, partner with community resource centers, on-campus services, etc.
International	Prospective students from outside the U.S.	Approach according to IP strategy

Student Personas

Student marketing personas are semi-fictional representations of prospective students based on the combination of real data about our existing students and market research. Once created, student personas can be used to develop segmented messaging for our advertisements, email campaigns, social media strategies, and more. Personas will help us get into the headspace of our future student segments so we can inspire them to enroll.

PRODUCT MIX

Product

- Educational classes
- GRC Services (Important part of Student journey)

Price

- Lower cost compared to 4-year schools
- Financial aid journey
- Scholarships available/process?
- Gator Pledge?

Place

- Public promotion of classes on website; print
- Location of school
- Online vs. In-person

Promotion

- PR (Public Relations)
- Packaging (Website user experience, campus impression, welcome packets, etc.)
- Online advertising
- Offline advertising

COMPETITOR ANALYSIS SNAPSHOT

*Green River College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-state tuition: \$4,495 • Student body: 8,435 • Non-white enrollment: 62%

*Highline College

- In-state tuition: \$4,231
- Student body: 6,310
- Minority enrollment: 76%*

*Bellevue College

- In-state tuition: \$12,563
- Student body: 6,310
- Non-white enrollment: 58%

*Tacoma Community College

- In-state tuition: \$4,194
- Student body: 6,095
- Non-white enrollment: 56%

*University of Washington

- In-state tuition: \$11,745
- Student body: 15,484
- Non-white enrollment: 63%

*Washington State University

- In-state tuition: \$12,170
- Student body: 25,470
- Non-white enrollment: 40.8%

* Data sourced from [Community College Review](#)

CONVERSION STRATEGY

The GRC conversion strategy refers to the process and strategy we employ to:

- Turn prospective students into enrolled students
- Improve the likelihood of current students staying enrolled
- Engage stop-outs for feedback and invitation to re-enroll

For example, improving our website content and structure will lead to clearer user conversion. Likewise, increasing our social proof (e.g., showing testimonials of past clients who were satisfied with our school) will nearly always boost conversions.

Note: A method for tracking prospective and current student engagement (i.e., A Customer Relationship Manager or CRM (Customer Relationship Management)) is critical to success in this area.

In this section of our plan, we will document which conversion-boosting strategies we will use.

For Reference:

Branding	Marketing
Is the “why”	Is the “how”
Is long-term	Is short-term
Is macro (General, High Level)	Is micro (Targeted, Detailed)
Defines trajectory	Defines tactics
Builds loyalty	Generates response
Creates value	Extracts value
Is the being	Is the doing

1. Market Research

Continuous market research is conducted and centralized for use in campus decision-making such as offerings, student success, systemic change, process improvement, and engagement approaches.

Primary and secondary qualitative and quantitative data is collected primarily to inform outreach and marketing efforts by College Relations, Recruitment & Outreach, and campus programs.

Types of research that may be done include:

- Focus groups
- Surveys (Online and in-person)
- 1-1 Interviews
- Feedback forms
- Internet research

Data from GRC Institutional Effectiveness is used with market research to inform and support marketing direction.

Where appropriate, GRC marketing efforts will always include an element of gathering feedback.

2. Brand Awareness (BA) and Outreach

Brand awareness is the extent to which community/prospective students can recall or recognize the GRC brand under different conditions. It is the first level of promotion. It is ongoing, general, and consistent.

In 2020, a brand awareness study was done in GRC's service area to determine the recall of the GRC brand with community members. It showed that both Highline and GRC's brand awareness with recipients were the highest among all local schools. Highline was slightly higher in the aided (recognition) version while GRC was slightly higher in the unaided (recall) version.

GRC marketing will consistently produce and distribute general promotion throughout the year with a message used for all quarterly BA efforts, distributed through various methods:

- SEO (Search Engine Optimization)
- TV/Radio
- Advertisements
- Partner promotion
- Social
- Community engagement
- Sponsorships
- Strategic giveaways

3. Targeted Campaigns (TC)

Targeted campaigns are aimed at calling a specific audience into action. TC's have a specific message, using the appropriate language, tone, terms, and content that is most likely to resonate with that targeted audience.

Targeted campaigns will often call the audience to act on a "micro-conversion" first, instead of the ultimate conversion of applying. The purpose is to qualify leads, build a relationship of trust, resolve concerns, and gain research data.

These campaigns will often NOT reflect internal language, assumptions, or visuals but will still support the brand identity of GRC.

Examples of micro conversion calls to action:

- Download a document
- Watch a video
- Call a number
- Fill out a form
- Click through

4. Partnership with Recruitment & Outreach

GRC Recruitment and Outreach aims to empower students by providing the most up-to-date information, program contacts, and clear pathways to successfully register through the enrollment process. It works closely with College Relations and other partners to research GRC's markets, recruit, and educate regarding GRC offerings.

Recruitment is done by working directly and indirectly with our area K-12 schools and organizations by participating in college fairs, career days, college visits and offering general presentations to call to action.

Outreach will often be brand awareness partner building where we provide information to high school students, parents, faculty, and the community to educate and promote the value of a lifelong education, staying top of mind with specific organizations for the purpose of leading their constituents towards conversion (enrollment) at GRC.

Over-arching goals of Recruitment & Outreach are to:

1. Regularly seek feedback and data for the purpose of informing future recruitment, outreach, and marketing
2. Collaborate with College Relations on messaging and materials
3. Engage both general and targeted populations in GRC's service area

Example of an effective CRO / R&O operational partnership:

1. Based on CRO/IE research, identify 4 audiences to target
 - a. CRO and R&O to research and gather feedback
 - b. Build marketing plans for each audience
2. R&O builds (or adds) event calendar to target the 4 specific audiences
3. CRO supports with online and marketing assets
4. Leads are tracked, qualified, nurtured
5. Process or marketing recommendations to appropriate leadership groups

5. Lead Generation

Lead generation is the process of generating public interest for GRC's offerings with the goal of turning that interest into a conversion (enrollment).

Different approaches are required for the different phases of the conversion funnel.

Cold inquiry entry points are tools/methods that new prospective students or families use to contact or engage the school, without any previous contact or referral:

- Google
- Website
 - Unique virtual tour visit
- Programs
- Walk-ins
- Emails

- Cold-call lists

Warm inquiry entry points are tools/methods that new prospective students or families use to engage GRC after having some form of previous referral or contact:

- R&O Events
- Virtual Tour conversion
- Retargeted ads
- Friends and Family
- Local schools

Hot inquiry entry points are tools/methods that new prospective students or families use to engage GRC after having some form of previous referral or contact AND have taken action to pursue next steps at GRC:

- Returning students
- Prospective students further down the conversion funnel (i.e., in process of registering, getting advising, etc.)
- Stopped-out students within last 3-6 months
- Alumni

6. Lead Tracking and Nurturing

It is critical that GRC tracks leads from cold to converted for the purposes of:

- Research and feedback of student perceptions, behaviors, and psychographics at all levels of the conversion funnel
- Nurturing leads towards conversion
- Retention learning from current students
- Re-engagement of stop-outs and alumni
- Marketing engagement learning and adjustment
- Mailing list opportunities

CRM Note: Important to differentiate student vs. parent for whomever is inputting lead. Different or modified marketing approaches may be needed for each.

7. Programmatic Marketing

As GRC works to maintain and improve brand awareness in the service area, it will differentiate itself through targeted departmental/discipline/program marketing. The goal of programmatic marketing is to increase interest and enrollments in specific programs. This is done by researching and approaching targeted audiences in the community and on campus that are most likely to engage with or promote the specific program.

Example: Research and build a partnership with Seatac International Airport to bolster interest in the GRC aeronautics program among its employees.

Marketing Operational Structure

Ideally, each program will have a marketing manager (Campus Marketing Partner or CMP) to manage all external marketing efforts as set forth and guided by the GRC Marketing Strategy and Branding.

The CMP can physically reside with its respective program but is supervised by the College Relations marketing director.

Campus Marketing Partners can include:

Program staff & faculty

Recruitment & Outreach

College Relations

Students

DIGITAL MARKETING

GRC uses digital marketing to promote the GRC brand, attract new students, and improve the online college experience for current students. We follow industry best practices and standards in meeting the known needs of digital users.

All digital marketing should adhere to brand guidelines and standards to maintain brand consistency and impact.

Digital marketing tools are acquired and managed by the College Relations marketing and web team, with input from and consideration of IT restrictions, security requirements, and technical compatibility with other digital tools at GRC.

Although we collaborate with campus and welcome recommendations and suggestions for content improvement and development, the primary driving force for change is found in research, analytics, known user preferences and behaviors, and/or environmental and social needs.

Digital marketing channels include:

- Primary website
- SEO
- Social media channels
- On-campus reader boards
- Email
- Content marketing
- Mobile marketing
- Affiliate marketing
- Pay Per Click ads

JOINT VENTURES & PARTNERS

Joint ventures and partners include those community organizations and individuals that are peripheral to the education sector but pose opportunities for brand awareness and engagement.

What do prospective and current students engage with before, during, and after engaging with GRC?

- Culturally
- Socially
- Politically
- Environmentally
- Personally

REFERRAL STRATEGY

GRC's referral strategy aims to engage prospective students through the reference of currently active students. Key to this strategy is student moral and brand loyalty. Are they willing and excited to share their GRC experience with others? If not, why? Would an incentive help? These questions can be answered through the CRM tracking process.

Initial research:

Are students willing to refer someone? Why or why not?

Can they trust GRC? Is it a social risk?

We can include referrer motivators in referral materials such as:

- My friends will appreciate it
- My friends are impressed that I am associated with GRC
- My friends will perceive me as a provider of insider information
- My generosity (what they will receive) vs. My self-interest (what I will receive)

Referrers must believe that GRC can help, is affordable, and will show up for their referral. They must also feel good about helping GRC, trust that their referral is treated well, and have had a good experience at GRC.

GRC must make it easy to refer others as well...tools, education, follow-up process.

Focus on making incentives enjoyable rather than mechanical. Money or cards alone are not enough.

RESEARCH

Marketing success at GRC will rely heavily on understanding the prospective student market and our current students. Both external and internal research is done to build clear profiles of who is most and least likely to attend GRC.

General Public Perception Study– A general perception study to gain a baseline understanding of the marketplace, providing both quantitative and qualitative data.

Internal Study– A student survey developed to gain qualitative feedback that will inform recruitment and retention strategies.

Multivariate analysis – Analyzing data from both surveys, existing student demographics, preferences, behavioral data, educational intent, and other information will inform focused and purposeful marketing efforts. This will do the following:

- Help minimize financial risk
- Strengthen market position
- Provide objective data to make informed decisions
- Help GRC identify and enable efforts that come from emergency trends
- Help GRC spot emerging trends/technologies
- Help GRC identify SWOT

ANCILLARY OR SUPPORTING WORK STILL NEEDED

- Effective stakeholder reporting channel (GatorNet)
- Effective process and mechanism for tracking leads (CRM)
- Cooperative strategy execution school-wide
- Delineation between internal operational “marketing” (ctcLink, Guided Pathways, program events, etc.), retention marketing (CRM follow-ups), and public marketing (External promotion, ad campaigns, etc.)

Notes to include:

- General content strategy or process