

# Michigan Reconnect 21

## Digital Marketing Case Study

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Prepared By:



# Project Narrative

The [Michigan Center for Adult College Success](#) (The Center), in partnership with [CollegeAPP](#) and [25th Hour Communications](#), successfully responded to an RFP issued in April 2024 by the Office of Higher Education in the [Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential](#) (MiLEAP) to operate a digital marketing campaign promoting the Michigan Reconnect Age Expansion Scholarship targeting adults 21-24 (Reconnect 21). Typically for adults 25 and up, the age for Michigan Reconnect was lowered to 21 for a limited time, allowing eligible 21-24-year-olds an opportunity to apply for free or reduced community college tuition. The Center received notice of their selection in May, and a final grant agreement was executed in early June.

Serving as the lead for the digital marketing campaign, The Center collaborated closely with 25th Hour Communications for creative development and CollegeAPP for ad placements. A key factor in the campaign's success was the strong collaboration between all partners. The Center initiated weekly meetings with the MiLEAP team, 25th Hour Communications, and CollegeAPP to develop, implement, and refine the campaign.

Recognizing the urgency of the initiative, The Center began organizing efforts immediately upon notification of selection, even before the final execution of the grant agreement. During the first team meeting on May 14, The Center led discussions outlining partner

roles, communication strategies, and campaign management. The MiLEAP team emphasized the need for rapid deployment, prompting the team to develop a timeline to identify target audiences, create messaging, and launch the campaign by early July.

Over the following weeks, the team refined target audiences through weekly meetings. CollegeAPP leveraged proprietary data to identify individuals aged 21-24 interested in returning to college, while 25th Hour Communications used Media Prefs data to develop key personas within this demographic. The Center and other partners contributed insights from their data sources, further honing audience targeting.

Simultaneously, messaging was tailored based on geographic eligibility for Reconnect 21, differentiating outreach for those residing within a community college district versus those outside a community college district. Draft messaging and creative were shared iteratively, with partners providing input to ensure collective ownership and buy-in. Due to the tight timeline, the team established a two-business-day turnaround for feedback, resulting in the first batch of creative final approvals by June 25.

Upon approval, CollegeAPP managed ad placements across Meta (Facebook & Instagram), TikTok, and Snapchat. Initial ads launched in early July, with the full suite deployed by July 9. Post-launch, meetings shifted to a biweekly schedule to review performance and adjust strategy as needed.

In addition to creating a strong campaign, this approach led to additional enhancements beyond the original scope of the marketing campaign. During the May 16 meeting, CollegeAPP data indicated strong Hispanic/Latino interest in Reconnect 21.

In response, 25th Hour Communications supported the MiLEAP team in developing a **Spanish-language version of the Reconnect 21 website**, which launched alongside the campaign. Spanish-language ads performed exceptionally well, often surpassing English-language ads.

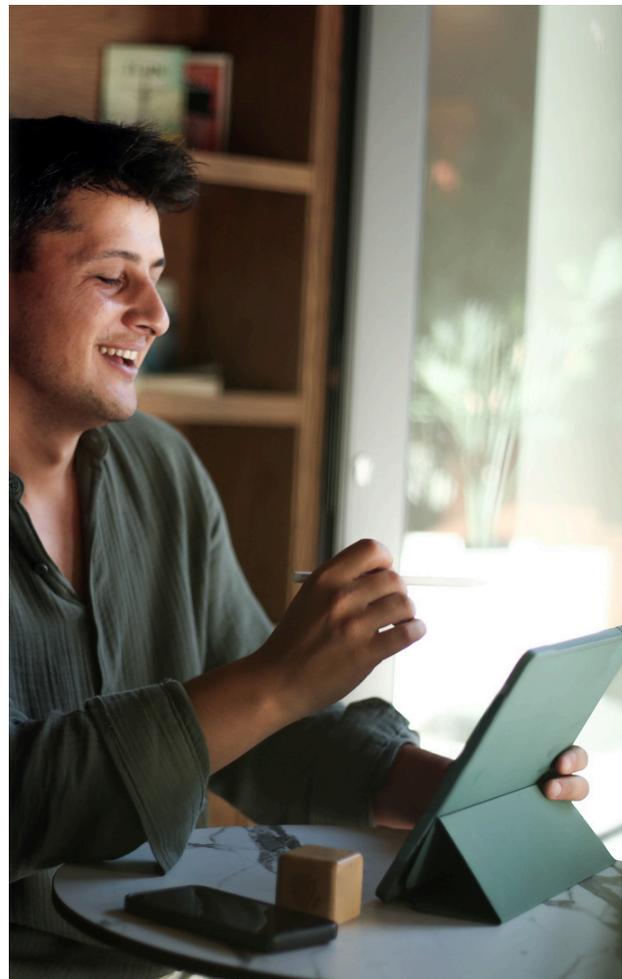
Another enhancement suggested in June was the introduction of an **interest form for prospective applicants**. The MiLEAP team implemented this feature in early August, enabling follow-ups with individuals seeking more information before committing to the program.

In August, the state extended the Reconnect 21 application deadline from November 15, 2024 to December 31, 2024. Immediately following, discussions began on extending the campaign through the end of the year. By late September, performance data indicated plateauing engagement, indicating a need for refreshed creative.

With the possibility of extending the campaign and the need for new creative, the team analyzed campaign insights and agreed to modify messaging. The most significant change was rephrasing out-of-district ads from “significantly reduced tuition” to “get most of your tuition paid” to enhance engagement while maintaining accuracy.

Based on the success of the campaign to date the MiLEAP team agreed to expand outreach to additional marketing channels. Additional digital marketing channels such as streaming video and audio services were explored, requiring new creative assets with enhanced visuals and voiceovers.

Following the same structured development process, 25th Hour Communications led creative discussions starting on September 27, with final approvals secured by November 6. During this phase, biweekly meetings continued, supplemented by email communications to maintain progress on the development of new creative while monitoring current campaign performance.



With the new creative approved, CollegeAPP phased out the original ads and introduced the updated assets. Additionally, new advertising channels, including streaming via Connected TV (CTV), Over-The-Top (OTT) media, as well as display ads focusing on premium website inventory were integrated. For the final campaign push, CollegeAPP also deployed ads to look-alike audiences in Michigan, further expanding reach and driving additional engagement.

The collaborative approach and expertise of all partners contributed to the campaign's outstanding success, significantly exceeding industry benchmarks for digital marketing performance. By leveraging CollegeAPP's

data-driven targeting, the campaign directly identified prospective students and was able to match them against enrollment data. A total of 13,800 individuals from the marketing audience were confirmed to have enrolled in Reconnect—over 41% of all program participants. The true impact is likely even higher, considering the conservative matching methodology and the expanded audience reach in the campaign's later stages.

This case study highlights the power of strategic collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and adaptive marketing approaches in effectively connecting adult learners with educational opportunities.

## Research Findings for Reconnect 21 Marketing Case Study

### Definitions of Marketing Terms

- **Engagement Rate:** We define engagement rate as the percentage of those in our audience pool that have clicked on the advertisement (calculated as clicks / reach \* 100).
- **Cost Per Click:** This is the cost to get one click on an ad.
- **Cost Per Lead:** Relevant only to In-app forms. This is the cost for someone to fill out the In-app lead form.
- **Conversion Rate:** Relevant only to In-app forms. This measures how many people clicked and converted into a lead.
- **Clicks:** Total number of clicks garnered in the campaign, including duplicate clicks.
- **Link clicks:** Unique clicks.
- **Reach:** Total number of people reached throughout the campaign without duplication.
- **Click-through-rate:** The number of clicks that your ad receives divided by the number of times your ad is shown.

## What was the impact of the targeted digital marketing campaign on Reconnect applications and college enrollment?

The July 2024 launch of the targeted digital marketing campaign for Reconnect 21 coincided with a significant surge in program applications and ultimately, substantial enrollment gains across the state's community colleges.

### Applications

Out of 319,186 individuals in the dataset that was utilized for the digital marketing campaign, 22,861 applied to Reconnect 21, yielding an application rate of 7.2%. Application volumes remained modest before the campaign, averaging 1,995 per month between September 2023 and June 2024. Following the campaign's July launch, monthly applications spiked to 3,596 in July and remained elevated through the end of 2024, with 4,623 applications in December alone.

In total, 16,030 applications (70%) were submitted in the six months after the campaign began from the dataset used in the campaign, clearly indicating its effectiveness in driving awareness and action. Removing the individuals who signed up for Reconnect prior to the campaign launch, this resulted in an application yield rate of 5%.

**16,030** applications

**10,175** enrollees

### Institutional Interest

Among applicants, 21,889 individuals identified a specific institution on their application, indicating a strong intent to enroll. (The remaining 972 out of the 22,861 applicants did not list an institution.) Interest was concentrated among a few institutions:

- Oakland Community College: 12% of identified applicants
- Grand Rapids Community College: 9.5%
- Macomb Community College: 9.4%
- Lansing, Washtenaw, and Mott also attracted significant applicant interest.

These patterns align with densely populated areas—particularly Wayne, Oakland, Kent, and Macomb Counties—where the campaign likely had the strongest reach.

### Enrollment Outcomes

From the applicant pool of targeted students, between 10,175 and 13,800 individuals ultimately enrolled in Michigan Reconnect. It is difficult to pinpoint how many individuals saw the marketing before enrolling as the enrollment data is only collected by season – i.e., fall, spring, or summer. This represents a conversion rate between approximately 45% and 60% from applicants to enrolled students—a strong outcome for an adult-focused tuition-free college initiative. Additionally, the total numbers of students enrolled throughout the Reconnect 21 campaign was 18,331, indicating that between 56% and 75% of all enrollees received some kind of targeted digital marketing.

Top enrolling institutions mirrored applicant interest:

- Oakland Community College: 2,009 (10.96%)
- Grand Rapids Community College: 1,817 (9.91%)
- Macomb Community College: 1,596 (8.70%)
- Lansing Community College: 1,502 (8.19%)

Enrollment was also geographically concentrated. The top counties of residence for enrolled students were:

- Wayne County: 4,213 students (22.98%)
- Macomb County: 2,092 students (11.41%)
- Ingham County: 1,896 students (10.34%)
- Kalamazoo, Oakland, Kent, and Genesee Counties also contributed large student counts.

This alignment between marketing reach, applicant interest, and eventual enrollment strongly suggests that the campaign not only captured attention but also successfully guided prospective students through to matriculation.



Table 1. Applications by Month for Reconnect21.

Year	Month	Applications	% Change from Prior Month
2023	September	1	N/A
2023	October	3306	N/A
2023	November	2233	-32.5%
2023	December	1737	-22.2%
2024	January	1613	-7.1%
2024	February	966	-40.1%
2024	March	1322	36.9%
2024	April	2516	90.3%
2024	May	1679	-33.3%
2024	June	1970	17.3%
2024	July	3596	82.5%
2024	August	3592	-0.1%
2024	September	1731	-51.8%
2024	October	1748	1.0%
2024	November	1740	-0.5%
2024	December	4623	165.7%

Figure 1. Applications by Month for Reconnect21.



## How many individuals in the targeted digital marketing campaign expressed interest in Reconnect through actions such as requesting information or starting an application?

The digital marketing campaign generated substantial engagement from potential applicants, as evidenced by multiple forms of expressed interest. Of the individuals targeted in the digital marketing campaign that we were able to match to Reconnect data, we saw the following application rates:

- 36,903 individuals at least started a Reconnect application, indicating a strong initial interest in the program.
- Of those, 22,861 completed and submitted the application, representing a conversion rate of 62% from started to submitted applications—an encouraging sign of the campaign’s effectiveness at moving individuals through the application funnel.

- In addition, 3,033 individuals submitted interest forms requesting more information about the program that were outside of these numbers of incomplete applicants.

Taken together, a total of 39,936 individuals targeted in the digital marketing campaign engaged with Reconnect through either starting an application or requesting more information, representing 12.5% engagement rate from the total list of individuals in the digital marketing campaign. This level of interaction reflects broad reach and effectiveness of the campaign in prompting meaningful steps toward enrollment.

## Where Enrollees Went: Institutional Patterns

Among those who submitted applications, 13,800 ultimately enrolled in a Michigan community college through Reconnect. Enrollment was concentrated among a handful of institutions, reflecting both geographic accessibility and institutional capacity:

Top 5 enrolling institutions:

- Grand Rapids Community College: 1,433 (10.38%)
- Oakland Community College: 1,410 students (10.22%)
- Macomb Community College: 1,212 (8.78%)
- Lansing Community College: 1,193 (8.64%)
- Delta College: 939 (6.80%)

These five colleges alone accounted for over 44% of all Reconnect enrollees.

In contrast, smaller institutions such as Bay Mills Community College, Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College, and Saginaw Ojibwa Tribal College enrolled less than 10 Reconnect students each, reflecting regional differences in population size and program reach.

## Where Enrollees Live: County Patterns

Students enrolled through Reconnect came from across the state, but enrollment was heavily concentrated in Michigan's urban centers:

- Wayne County accounted for the largest share of enrollees: 3,350 students (24.27%)

## Top Enrolling Institutions for Michigan Reconnect



- Followed by Macomb (1,557; 11.30%), Ingham (1,472; 10.67%), Kalamazoo (1,277; 9.25%), Kent (1,139; 8.25%), and Oakland (1,114; 8.07%)
- Collectively, these six counties represented over 70% of all Reconnect enrollments through this marketing campaign.

Enrollment dropped off gradually among smaller counties, with some rural areas contributing only a few students.



## Were those who received the targeted digital marketing campaign more likely to complete their application and enroll in college?

While causality cannot be established without a controlled experimental design, descriptive data suggest a meaningful association between exposure to the targeted digital marketing campaign and increased application completion and enrollment in Michigan Reconnect.

According to the 2024 U.S. Census population estimates, there are approximately 546,000 Michiganders aged 21–24, the key demographic for the Reconnect campaign. If the campaign reached 319,057 individuals, this would represent roughly 58% of that population.

Across the 2024–2025 academic year, a total of 24,660 students enrolled in the Reconnect program. Notably, 10,175 of these enrollments occurred after the campaign launched in July 2024, accounting for approximately 41% of all enrollments during the year. This number could be as high as 13,800, representing almost 56% of all enrollments during the year. While this spike in post-campaign enrollment cannot be attributed solely to the campaign, the timing strongly suggests that the campaign may

have played a role in increasing visibility and motivating action among prospective students.

Similarly, as noted earlier, of those who received the digital marketing, 36,903 individuals started a Reconnect application, and 16,030 submitted their applications, indicating a high level of follow-through among those exposed to the campaign. While we do not have individual-level exposure data to isolate differences between those targeted and not targeted, the magnitude and timing of the post-campaign enrollment increase provide a strong signal that marketing efforts coincided with a rise in student engagement.

In summary, although definitive causal claims cannot be made, the evidence points to a positive association between the digital marketing campaign and increased application and enrollment activity among the target population. Further research using matched comparison groups or longitudinal tracking could help clarify the strength of this relationship.

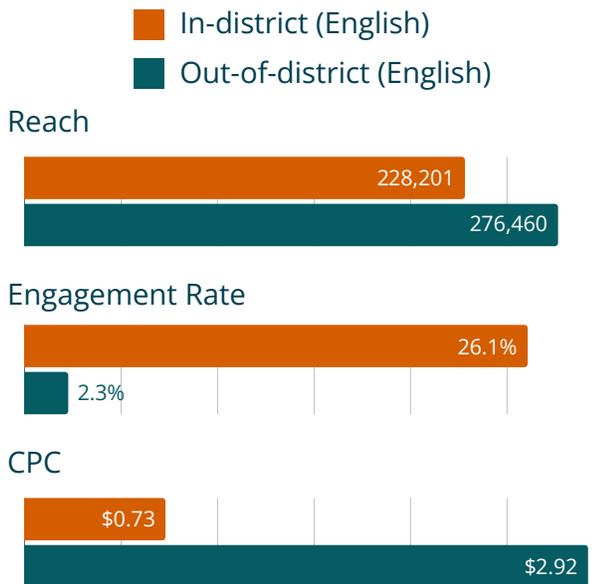
## What, if any, differences were observed between the in-district and out-of-district messaging, and did engagement vary by demographics?

The Michigan Reconnect digital campaign employed differentiated messaging for in-district and out-of-district audiences, alongside tailored outreach to key demographic subgroups. Analysis of platform- and creative-level performance reveals both geographic and demographic disparities in engagement and cost-efficiency.

### In-District vs. Out-of-District Performance

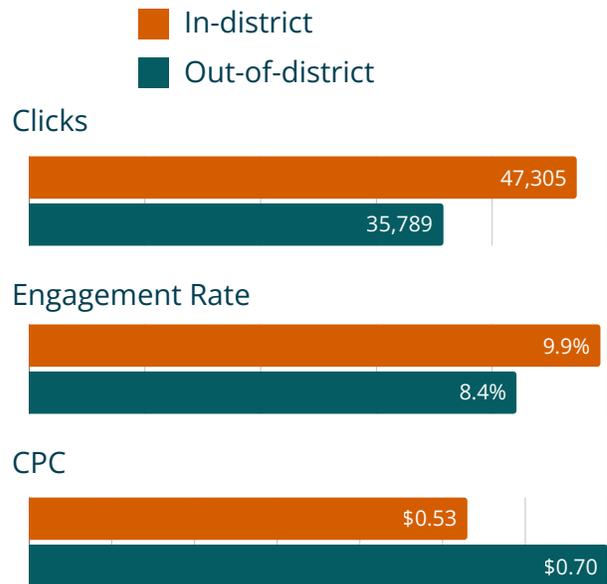
Across nearly all platforms—including Meta, TikTok, Snapchat, and OTT—in-district audiences consistently demonstrated higher engagement rates and lower cost-per-click (CPC):

#### Meta (Facebook/Instagram)

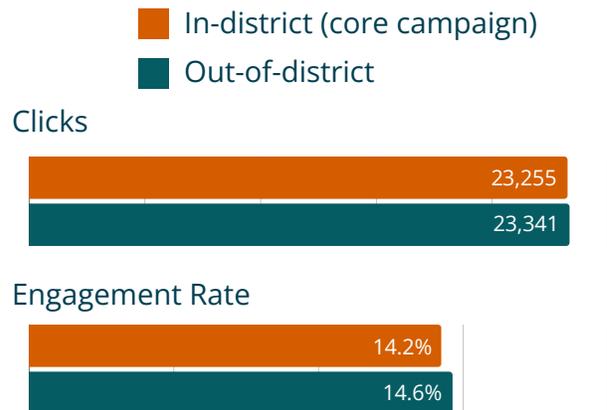


Spanish ads: In-district outperformed again, with 22.6% vs. 13.9% engagement rates for Spanish-speaking audiences.

#### TikTok



#### Snapchat



Note: Snapchat was the only platform where out-of-district slightly outperformed in-district, though the difference was marginal and CPC remained constant at \$0.91.

## OTT Streaming

- In-district viewers: 99.1% video completion rate
- Out-of-district viewers: 98.5%, still high but slightly lower

## Demographic Variability in Engagement

Ad-level data further revealed meaningful differences in how creatives performed across demographic groups. In-district White and Hispanic audiences consistently achieved the strongest performance, both in terms of click-through rate (CTR) and engagement:

- Top-performing in-district creatives:
  - Hispanic male: 4% CTR | 8% engagement | \$0.72 CPC
  - White female: 3.7% CTR | 9.9% engagement | \$0.72 CPC
  - Black female and male creatives also performed competitively in-district, with engagement rates nearing 10% and CPCs under \$0.82

- Spanish-language creatives also showed promise:
  - In-district Hispanic female (Spanish): 2.1% CTR | 16.3% engagement rate—the highest observed
  - Out-of-district Hispanic female (Spanish): Lower CTR (2.2%) and reduced engagement (9.4%), though still outperforming many English out-of-district creatives
- Out-of-district challenges:
  - Performance dipped sharply in out-of-district placements, especially among Black and Hispanic audiences
  - Example: Black female (OOD) had a CTR of just 0.3% and a \$4.00 CPC
  - White female (OOD): 0.4% CTR | \$4.16 CPC, contrasting sharply with their in-district counterpart's performance

Additional data on demographic profiles and Spanish vs. English ads are provided in Tables 2 and 3 on the following pages.



Table 2. Engagement/Performance Rates by Demographic IDs.

Demographic	CTR	Engagement Rate	CPC
Black Female ID	3.4	9.9%	\$0.69
Hispanic Male ID	4	8%	\$0.72
White Female ID	3.7	9.9%	\$0.72
Hispanic Female ID	1.6	7%	\$0.78
White Male ID	3.4	10.1%	\$0.81
Black Male ID	3.3	11.2%	\$0.81
Hispanic Female Spanish OOD	2.2	9.4%	\$0.86
Hispanic Female Spanish ID	2.1	16.3%	\$0.92
Hispanic Female OOD	0.6	1.4%	\$2.37
Hispanic Male OOD	0.5	0.7%	\$2.46
White Male OOD	0.5	1.5%	\$2.77
Black Male OOD	0.4	0.5%	\$3.37
Black Female OOD	0.3	0.4%	\$4.00
White Female OOD	0.4	0.7%	\$4.16

Table 3. Performance/Engagement by Targeted Language.

Spanish Ads vs English Ads						
	Spanish Ads			English Ads		
	Total	In-district	Out-of-district	Total	In-district	Out-of-district
<b>Engagement Rate</b>	27.6%	22.6%	13.9%	13.2%	23.9%	1.9%
<b>CPC</b>	\$0.89	\$0.88	\$0.91	\$0.94	\$0.73	\$2.92
<b>CTR</b>	2%	2.1%	1.8%	1.8%	2.7%	0.4%
<b>Reach</b>	65,000	52,145	44,403	451,759	228,201	276,460
<b>Link Clicks</b>	17,940	11,760	6,180	59,607	54,506	5,108

**How did campaign effectiveness differ by platform, and which platforms were most effective for specific demographics? What additional insights can be drawn from platform engagement and ad performance to be lifted up for potential future study?**

The Reconnect campaign was strategically deployed across Meta (Facebook/Instagram), TikTok, Snapchat, and OTT channels, enabling a detailed view of platform-specific effectiveness and demographic responsiveness. Among these, Meta and TikTok emerged as standout performers, driving strong engagement across key subgroups while offering unique insights into audience behaviors.

**Platform-Level Effectiveness**

- Meta delivered the highest overall engagement, particularly with localized

and demographically tailored creatives. Its audience skew was relatively balanced, reaching 223,792 women and 238,131 men.

- Example: A White female in-district creative achieved a 4% click-through rate (CTR) at a \$0.67 cost-per-click (CPC).
- Example: A Hispanic/Latino male in-district creative achieved a 5.3% CTR at only \$0.60 CPC, demonstrating cost-efficiency in resonant messaging.

- TikTok was the most cost-efficient platform overall, with in-district engagement rates approaching 10%. In addition to standard demographic reporting (gender and age), TikTok's audience deep dive surfaced further insights:
  - Predominantly male audience
  - High usage of Apple devices, including a notable share from iPads
  - Top audience interests on Tik Tok included games, skin care, and food, which may inform future creative direction.
- Snapchat delivered consistent engagement, but CPCs rose during the campaign extension period, reducing cost efficiency relative to other platforms.
- OTT (Over-the-Top media) was highly effective at maintaining viewer attention, with completion rates exceeding 98%. However, its limited interactivity and lack of click-based data reduce its utility for direct engagement analysis.



## Demographic Patterns

- White and Hispanic audiences in-district consistently demonstrated higher engagement and lower CPCs across platforms, reinforcing the value of hyperlocal and demographically relevant messaging.
- Out-of-district creatives, particularly those targeting women and Black audiences, generally underperformed in engagement. This suggests a need for more culturally nuanced and locally resonant content development in future campaign cycles.
- Creatives targeting Black female (BF) and Black male (BM) audiences had lower CTRs across both in- and out-of-district deployments. This underscores a critical opportunity for deeper investment in creative testing and message framing to ensure these audiences are meaningfully engaged.

To further explore the digital marketing campaign's effectiveness, we benchmarked the results against industry standards for higher education marketing. As shown in Table 4 below, the campaign significantly outperformed the average performance of competitors across all key metrics and platforms:

- Engagement rates were exceptionally high across Meta (16.2%), Snapchat (18.4%), and TikTok (14.4%), far exceeding the industry average of 0.8%. This reflects strong message resonance and effective audience targeting.

- Cost-per-click (CPC) was also markedly lower than the higher education industry benchmark of \$2.11, with TikTok achieving the most cost-efficient performance at just \$0.62 CPC, followed closely by Meta and Snapchat.

These results underscore the efficacy of a platform-tailored, digital-first approach in driving both awareness and cost-effective action, particularly when compared to more traditional, broad-reach marketing methods commonly used in the sector.

Table 4. Contrasting Campaign’s Performance with Industry Standards.

Key Metric	Industry Average	Meta (Facebook + Instagram)	Snapchat	TikTok
Engagement Rate	0.8%	16.2%	18.4%	14.4%
Cost Per Click	\$2.11	\$0.93	\$1.03	\$0.62

### What is the cost per sign-up, enrollment and fiscal impact of the campaign?

The campaign spent \$254,117 directly on digital marketing efforts. The total cost of the campaign including ad placements, creative design and campaign management fees totaled \$471,867.

Below is Table 5 with the cost breakdown demonstrating the cost to advertise on an individual basis, the cost per Reconnect sign-up and cost per enrollment. Note that we do not have all the enrollment data yet, so those numbers could improve.

Table 5. Cost Breakdown for Reconnect Marketing vs. Sign-ups and Enrollment

Cost type	Cost in dollars	Cost per individual marketed	Cost per Reconnect Sign-up	Cost per min. enrollment	Cost per max. enrollment
Ad cost	\$254,117.00	\$0.80	\$15.85	\$24.97	\$18.41
Total cost	\$471,867.00	\$1.48	\$29.44	\$46.38	\$34.19

Using the statewide average Total Cost Per Credit/Contact Hour of \$160.54 from FY 2023-24 per the [Senate Fiscal Agency](#) data multiplied by the number of individuals who enrolled in college as a result of this campaign, the digital marketing campaign generated college tuition revenue between \$1,633,494 and \$2,215,452 per credit

## Conclusions

The Reconnect 21 digital marketing campaign serves as a compelling case study in the effective use of data-driven outreach to engage prospective adult learners. Leveraging insights from multiple partners and a diverse set of digital platforms, the campaign reached over 319,000 individuals aged 21–24, resulting in nearly 40,000 expressed interests and more than 22,800 completed applications. These outcomes represent a significant lift from pre-campaign engagement levels, where monthly applications averaged fewer than 2,000. Following the campaign’s launch in July 2024, application volumes more than doubled and remained consistently elevated through the end of the year. The strong application-to-enrollment conversion rate—



hour. Applying the 12-credit hour minimum requirement to maintain the Reconnect, scholarship, the campaign generated between \$19,601,934 and \$26,585,424 in tuition dollars spread across the 30 community and Tribal colleges accepting the Reconnect scholarship.

estimated between 45% and 60%—demonstrates the campaign’s effectiveness in not just raising awareness, but in guiding individuals through key decision points toward actual enrollment.

Enrollment data further reinforces the campaign’s impact. Between 10,175 and 13,800 individuals from the targeted marketing audience ultimately enrolled in Michigan community and Tribal colleges through Reconnect 21, accounting for between 56% to 75% of total enrollees during the campaign period. These students were heavily concentrated in Michigan’s largest counties and most populated regions, suggesting that the campaign effectively reached high-density areas where enrollment potential was greatest.

Performance metrics across platforms and demographics also revealed important insights: in-district messaging significantly outperformed out-of-district efforts in terms of engagement and cost-efficiency, and Spanish-language ads showed exceptional promise—particularly among Hispanic/Latino audiences. These findings highlight opportunities for future campaigns to build on what worked, refine strategies for underperforming segments, and continue using real-time performance data to guide adaptive decision-making.