

NICHE 

Direct 
Admissions®



Using direct admissions to unlock new opportunities

*A look at verified outcome data from Niche Direct Admissions®
partners driving deposits, revenue and diversity*





Direct admissions:

An essential catalyst for change in higher education

Among the many challenges rocking the higher education industry, students and families are faced with an increasingly complex and stressful admissions process.

Direct admissions is gaining momentum as the solution to bring efficiency to that process. By removing traditional barriers with proactive acceptance—and in some cases with scholarship—direct admissions is helping more students get into college.

Once limited to state-run programs, colleges and universities now have several options to choose from. Many institutions have adopted direct admissions programs to simplify processes for students, improve enrollment outcomes and engage in targeted student outreach in the wake of decreasing student name availability and increasing legal restrictions.

** This report explores the rise of direct admissions, and how Niche's innovative program is transforming the college admissions process.*



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WHAT'S DRIVING
direct admissions?



WHAT'S DRIVING DIRECT ADMISSIONS?

Unprecedented change in higher education

An industry, disrupted

Changing privacy laws make it harder to connect with prospective students while decreasing budgets mean there are fewer resources for institutions to differentiate themselves. The recent SCOTUS ruling adds another layer of uncertainty, and FAFSA delays continue to leave students in financial limbo, hindering their ability to commit.

As if that weren't enough, admissions offices are often facing staffing shortages due to turnover. All of this while public perception of the value of a college degree is on the decline. Institutions are committed to bringing the right students to their communities, but these challenges make it much more difficult to achieve that goal.

Tackling diversity challenges

Institutions are under increasing pressure to attract and retain a diverse student body while also managing enrollment targets and budgetary constraints.

But with the traditional admissions process, that becomes increasingly hard to accomplish. Encountering barriers to entry led more than half of students to abandon an application last year. **This number jumps another 9% for first-generation and traditionally underrepresented students who have less support.**

The traditional admissions process—dependent on lengthy applications, hefty fees and long waiting periods—is keeping students (especially first-gen and underrepresented students) out at a time when many institutions can't afford that drop-off.

Cost perceptions and skepticism of higher ed

College tuition has skyrocketed in the past few decades—in fact, **the average price of an undergraduate degree increased 169%** between 1980-2020. Students worry about paying for college, when the reality (unknown to them) is many of those students wouldn't pay full sticker price after financial aid.

On top of that, today's students and parents are often skeptical about the value of a four-year college degree with many trades offering competitive salaries without substantial debt.

Higher education institutions are now tasked with defending their affordability to an audience becoming less and less convinced that they want what they're selling.



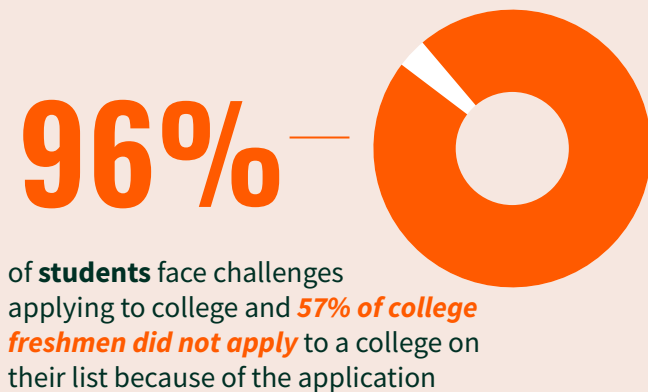
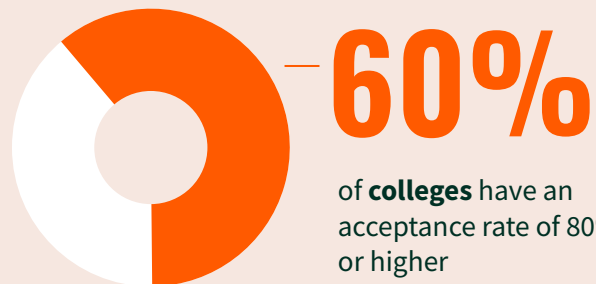
WHAT'S DRIVING DIRECT ADMISSIONS?

Inefficient admissions processes

The college admissions process is filled with hurdles for students. So it isn't a surprise that today's students are less inclined to follow the industry's traditional application process.

As colleges face unprecedented challenges impacting their ability to recruit and enroll the right students, a streamlined model offers the promise of not only increasing interest at the top-of-the-funnel, but also driving meaningful enrollment.

Source: Niche research & analysis. Niche Class of 2024 Fall Survey





WHAT'S DRIVING DIRECT ADMISSIONS?

Students expect a simpler path to enrollment

The current generation of college-bound students has grown up in an on-demand world. They expect frictionless digital experiences tailored to their interests—from ordering food delivery and getting rides across town to scanning "For You" feeds on TikTok. This generation craves a similarly seamless and hyper-customized pathway to college.

However, the college admissions process has been slow to evolve with its target audience.

Students wade through a sea of undifferentiated marketing messages, lengthy applications and ambiguous evaluation criteria. The process is stressful, time-consuming and misaligned with how Gen Z prefers to engage with institutions and make major life decisions. Students who had written off college as a possibility were suddenly optimistic about their education journey after seeing colleges come to them with proactive acceptance through Niche.

Source: 2024 Niche Spring Junior Survey



ONLY 15%

of rising seniors said colleges were sending information that was very relevant to their interests and what they cared about most



BUT...87%

of the rising seniors who received information relevant to their specific interests said it influenced them to more strongly consider the college



WHAT'S DRIVING DIRECT ADMISSIONS?

Students explicitly say that *direct admissions offers* move the needle

A whopping **80% of the class of 2024** reported they'd be **more interested in a college that offers acceptance without an application**. That trend continues for rising seniors in the class of 2025.

Institutions removing financial and logistical barriers are quickly moving to the top of students' lists—a claim verified by a massive **255% increase in year-over-year inquiries** for Niche partners offering direct admissions.

Sources: 2023 Niche Spring Junior Survey, 2024 Niche Spring Junior Survey



DATA FROM RISING SENIORS

80%



said they were “more interested in colleges that offer direct admissions programs”

90%



said they would find it appealing if a college offered direct admissions because of the quick response



96%

said the idea of receiving an upfront scholarship with a direct admissions offer would be “a positive experience” and “appealing” to them



WHAT'S DRIVING DIRECT ADMISSIONS?

Students actively seek *affordability and transparency*

36% of the class of 2025 said that their biggest fear in the college search process was being able to afford the college they wanted to attend.

That didn't just mean tuition—it applied to various stages of the process. When asked to predict challenges they might face in applying to college:

- 61% of respondents said “applying for financial aid”
- 54% said “paying application fees”

Students aren't waiting for their financial aid packages to make decisions—**83% of the class of 2023 didn't consider a college at all because of the total cost.** If they didn't think they could afford it, they wrote it off altogether.

Institutions offering direct admissions with real-time acceptance and scholarships have an opportunity to circumvent sticker shock by providing students a more realistic picture of affordability right away.

Source: 2024 Niche Spring Junior Survey

* *My senior year, I was really scared that I wasn't going to be able to afford to go to college. But when I saw the email Niche given me, it opened my eyes. And if I don't take this opportunity, I'm going to be losing a lifetime.”*

Jessica Quintero, Niche Direct Admissions® '23

* *“To have Niche step in was **a breath of fresh air and it made things seem a lot more optimistic from my side.** I'm looking forward to seeing how this can serve a greater impact in the future.”*

Steven King, Niche Direct Admissions® '23



VERIFIED OUTCOMES

*Driving steady deposits and revenue
with Niche Direct Admissions[®]*



VERIFIED OUTCOMES

Niche Direct Admissions® *leads the way* for impact

Since its inception, Niche Direct Admissions® has delivered impressive results for both students and higher education institutions. By the fall of 2023, **91 institutions across the country** were live with Niche Direct Admissions®, **more than any other direct admissions program**. For students, that has translated to over 900,000 high school seniors receiving real-time college offers through a platform they know and trust.

With our innovative platform and our audience, Niche Direct Admissions® has driven success for institutions looking to shape their class with more diverse enrollments.

Through the following pages, you'll explore verified outcomes across:

- The class of 2024 overall
- Deposits
- Diversity
- Revenue

*Across 44 partners with verified Niche outcome data as of 5/6/2024

54

Average verified deposits
per partner attributed to Niche
Direct Admissions® for the
2023-2024 cycle*

2,357

Total verified deposits
attributed to
Niche Direct Admissions®
for the 2023-2024 cycle*



VERIFIED OUTCOMES

The class of 2024

In its third cycle, Niche Direct Admissions® had a significant impact on the class of 2024. With over **900,000 students receiving offers**, Niche Direct Admissions® has become a standard—and expected—part of the admissions experience.

By meeting students where they are (with the experience they expect), students can go from site registration to viewing an acceptance offer to submitting their information directly to the college within a matter of minutes and in just a few clicks.

Students from the **class of 2024 received an average of five offers** through Niche Direct Admissions®, and were offered an average of \$18,500 per year in scholarships across the 91 partners.

Source: Niche research and analysis



CLASS OF 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

900K+

class of 2024 students on Niche have received a direct admissions offer

\$18,500

average annual scholarship awarded to class of 2024 students through Niche Direct Admissions®

255% increase

in year-over-over inquiries among Niche Direct Admissions® partners



VERIFIED OUTCOMES: DEPOSITS

Meaningful deposit volume

Niche Direct Admissions® has proved to be a valuable tool for higher education institutions looking to grow their enrollment and even to hit specific, strategic enrollment goals. Institutions in the 2023-2024 cycle reported that they **enrolled net new students** directly attributable to Niche Direct Admissions®.

* Niche Direct Admissions® is on pace to source an *average of 9% of partner institutions' deposits* as of early May, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in attracting and enrolling students.

How is the 9% calculated?

Niche partners share **verified enrollment outcomes** that provide unique insights on students' progression through the funnel.

As of May 2024, 32 partners have shared verified data outcomes across all sources and are pacing to source an average of 9% of 2024 deposits to Niche Direct Admissions®.

*Across 32 partners who have shared verified data outcomes across all sources



VERIFIED OUTCOMES: DEPOSITS

Large public (Southwest)

	FY23 cycle	Current FY24 cycle
Onboarding forms	106	964
Full admits	92	887
Deposits	21	188

Onboarding form: A form created by the institution to verify a Niche Direct Admissions® student's information and collect any additional information needed.

Full admit: A student who has completed an institution's onboarding form and has been fully admitted by the institution.

Data has been blinded to protect partner confidentiality. Current FY24 Cycle Data last updated 5/17/24.

CHARACTERISTICS

This large public institution in the Southwest participated in Niche Direct Admissions® in the 2022-2023 cycle and 2023-2024 cycle.

Additional characteristics:

- Flagship university
- Freshman class: ~3,400
- Scholarships: \$3k-13k

Institutions use up to 11 data-points to set specific criteria for acceptance and merit-based scholarship eligibility.



VERIFIED OUTCOMES: DEPOSITS

Medium private (South)

	FY23 cycle	Current FY24 cycle
Onboarding forms	1232	2183
Full admits	689	1350
Deposits	76	170

37%
OF FRESHMAN
CLASS*

CHARACTERISTICS

This medium-sized, private institution in the South participated in Niche Direct Admissions® in the 2022-2023 cycle and 2023-2024 cycle.

Additional characteristics:

- Faith-based
- Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)
- Freshman class: ~400
- Scholarships: \$12-24K

Institutions use up to 11 data-points to set specific criteria for acceptance and merit-based scholarship eligibility.

Onboarding form: A form created by the institution to verify a Niche Direct Admissions® student's information and collect any additional information needed.

Full admit: A student who has completed an institution's onboarding form and has been fully admitted by the institution.

*Based on 2022 IPEDs-reported freshman class size number

Data has been blinded to protect partner confidentiality. Current FY24 Cycle Data last updated 5/17/24.



VERIFIED OUTCOMES: DEPOSITS

Medium public (Northwest)

	FY23 cycle	Current FY24 cycle
Onboarding forms	130	1042
Full admits	118	993
Deposits	3	44

Onboarding form: A form created by the institution to verify a Niche Direct Admissions® student's information and collect any additional information needed.

Full admit: A student who has completed an institution's onboarding form and has been fully admitted by the institution.

Data has been blinded to protect partner confidentiality. Current FY24 Cycle Data last updated 5/17/24.

CHARACTERISTICS

This medium-sized, public institution in the Northwest participated in Niche Direct Admissions® in the 2022-2023 cycle and 2023-2024 cycle.

Additional characteristics:

- Rural location
- Technology program-focused
- Freshman class: ~3,300
- Scholarships: \$3k-13k

Institutions use up to 11 data-points to set specific criteria for acceptance and merit-based scholarship eligibility.



VERIFIED OUTCOMES: DEPOSITS

Small private (Northeast)

	FY23 cycle	Current FY24 cycle
Onboarding forms	162	1642
Full admits	61	923
Deposits	7	83

Onboarding form: A form created by the institution to verify a Niche Direct Admissions® student's information and collect any additional information needed.

Full admit: A student who has completed an institution's onboarding form and has been fully admitted by the institution.

Data has been blinded to protect partner confidentiality. Current FY24 Cycle Data last updated 5/17/24.

CHARACTERISTICS

This smaller-sized, private institution in the Northeast participated in Niche Direct Admissions® in the 2022-2023 cycle and 2023-2024 cycle.

Additional characteristics:

- Rural
- Freshman class: ~600
- Scholarships: \$30-40K

Institutions use up to 11 data-points to set specific criteria for acceptance and merit-based scholarship eligibility.



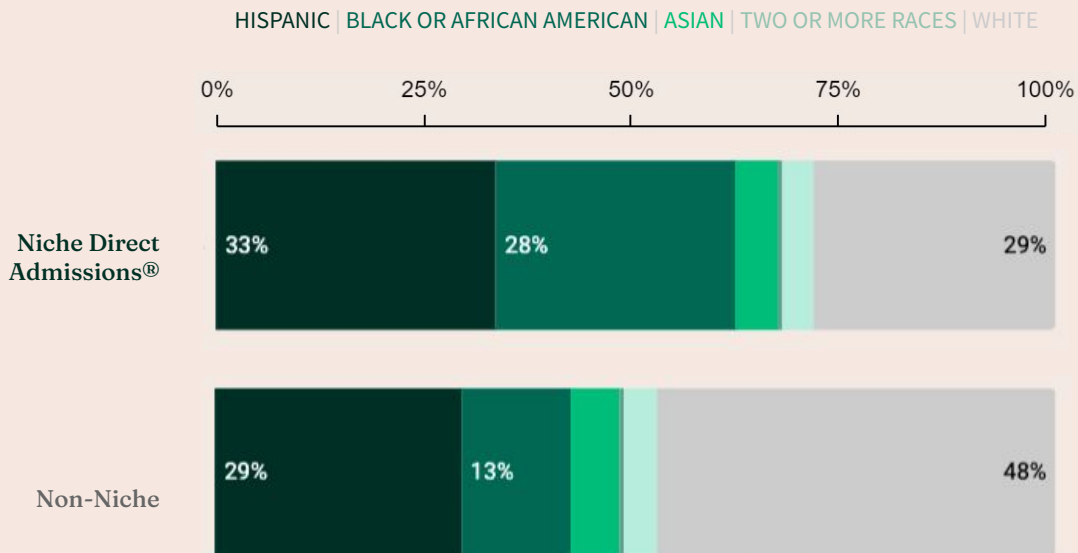
VERIFIED OUTCOMES: DIVERSITY

A more diverse funnel

Fall 2024 admits by IPEDS

Race/ethnicity

Niche Direct Admissions® continues to resonate with students from historically underrepresented communities with **nearly two-thirds of admits identifying as Hispanic or Black or African American.**



*104k students from 29 MVP institutions who provided full funnel data with IPEDS-compatible values

*Students with "Unknown Race or Ethnicity" or "U.S. Nonresident" status excluded from analysis

*Students from other IPEDS categories represent less than 1%

*Data current as of 5/21/2024



VERIFIED OUTCOMES: REVENUE

New revenue sources

Can direct admissions really get those students who deposited to campus?
According to partners using Niche Direct Admissions® — **yes.**

“The **quality of Niche Direct Admission admits are strong**, just as strong as is the quality of our students coming from the common application or our own slate application.”

– Chris Ferguson, Vice President for Enrollment Strategy at University of the Pacific

“And in comparison to other direct admissions programs — Niche Direct Admissions® quickly becomes the front-runner. We do have two partners for direct admissions, but **Niche is by far outperforming in every metric that we have.**”

– Christie Smith, AVP for Undergraduate Enrollment at Nazareth University

SOURCES OF REVENUE EXPANSION

Market expansion:

Partners are able to recruit in out-of-state and tertiary markets to reach new students that other direct admission programs cannot target.

Audience expansion:

With reduced barriers to entry and an extended timeline for admission, Niche Direct Admissions® helps partners expand their funnel to reach:

- Traditionally “late” and under-supported students
- Underrepresented and first-gen students
- Students skeptical of the value of a degree



“**Niche was like the bridge between me and the college. It wasn’t even on my list at first and then I got an offer of admission through Niche. It was the connecting factor for me to the school.**”

– Zakaria, Niche Direct Admissions® ‘22

“

With what’s happening right now with the FAFSA issues, 50 deposits is about **\$2M in net tuition revenue** we wouldn’t typically see. It’s about **11% of our total deposit pool right now**, which actually contributes to us being ahead in deposits year over year.”

”

Chris Ferguson
Vice President for Enrollment Strategy
University of the Pacific

“

We ended up generating applications from 1,000+ Niche direct admits. In [the] first year alone, we netted **well over \$600,000 in net-new revenue** after our initial investment.

”

James Steen
Vice President of Enrollment Management & Marketing
Houston Christian University



THE DIFFERENCE

What sets Niche Direct Admissions[®] apart



THE DIFFERENCE

Our audience

Trusted by over 70 million people annually, Niche is modernizing how colleges connect with students to build their future classes. With **more than 50% of all college-bound seniors creating a Niche profile each year** and an audience that's more diverse than the average U.S. population, our mission is to help students easily find their best-fit institution.

Through Niche Direct Admissions® and our relentless focus on meeting students where they are—via TikTok, Meta and other platforms—Niche has a very active and engaged college-seeking audience.

24x

Niche inquiries are 24x more likely to enroll than traditional sources*

*Verified by National Student Clearinghouse

1 in 2

college-bound high school seniors register on Niche



THE DIFFERENCE

Our data

Student profiles contain **up to 38 data points**, including academics, interests, state of residence, extracurriculars and more. This gives institutions a more complete view of prospective students beyond the typical test score or GPA.

Niche Direct Admissions® offers up to **11 fields for customization**, including GPA, intended major, state/zip code/high school and more.

This level of customization allows institutions to target specific students and shape their incoming class to meet their enrollment goals. Advanced filtering options help enrollment teams focus their recruitment and scholarship efforts.

77%

of Niche users **willingly complete** their profile—which has as much information as a college application

53%

of traffic to college search and profile pages is organic, meaning **students choose to visit and engage on Niche** and resulting in authentic data signals for colleges



THE DIFFERENCE

Our history

Niche's program is built on a deep understanding of the challenges facing today's students and higher education institutions. As a student-centric platform with a long history in college search, Niche is uniquely positioned to help students and colleges connect more efficiently.

FEB - MAY 2022: *Pilot*

Niche launches a late stage direct admissions pilot with two partners. One partner was hoping for 3-4 enrollments, and ended with **18 net new enrollments** for their institution.

2022 - 2023 *Enrollment cycle: Beta*

Niche Direct Admissions® beta launches with **25 institutions in 17 states**. Tens of thousands of students experience the power of Niche Direct Admissions®.

2023- 2024 *Enrollment cycle: Platform launch*

In August 2023, Niche Direct Admissions® officially launched, offering scholarships and admissions to **all** registered high school seniors **in real time** on the platform they trust.

2024 AND BEYOND

With 150 partner institutions anticipated by the end of 2024, Niche Direct Admissions® serves as the **personalized, intelligent admissions solution** for both students and institutions.

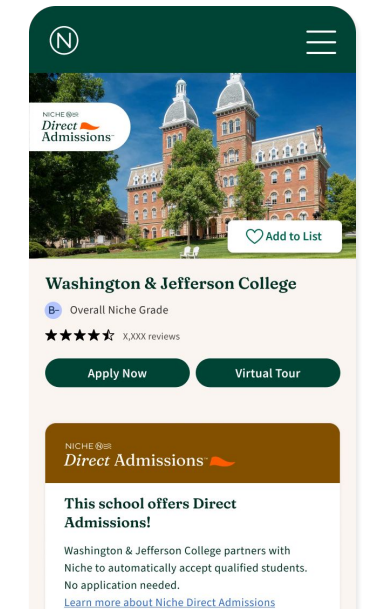


THE DIFFERENCE

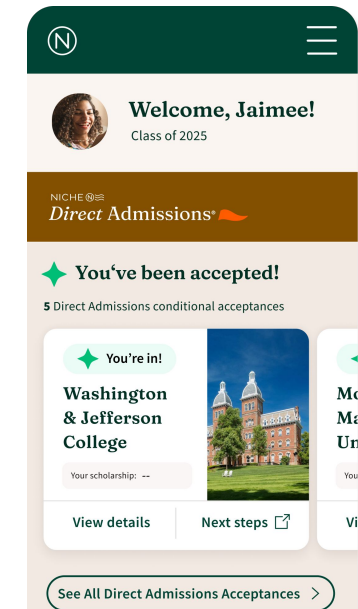
Our student-centric experience

"It comes down to 'what is the most user-friendly and effective way to get in front of students?,' and that's what I love about Niche Direct Admissions®."

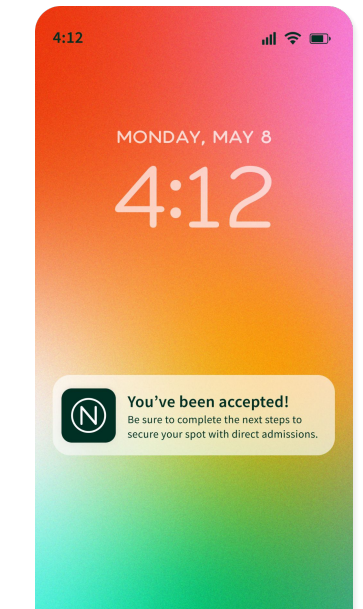
James Steen
Houston Christian University.



Easily find and research schools offering Niche Direct Admissions®



Personal dashboard of acceptances and scholarships with the ability to easily compare schools and offers



Personalized outreach to guide students through next steps from acceptance to deposit



THE DIFFERENCE

Our process

- 1** Partner institutions work with a dedicated enrollment strategy team over the course of 4-6 weeks to set up integrations and define goals and success metrics.
- 2** Partners set specific criteria for acceptance and merit-based scholarship eligibility.
- 3** Students who meet partners' criteria are offered real-time acceptance and their personalized scholarship offer.
- 4** Students complete partners' onboarding forms and submit transcripts and documentation for enrollment.

“

The onboarding experience at Niche was, by far,

the best onboarding experience

we have had with any vendor. It was clear, it was concise, and they provided us what we needed to not just launch, but successfully launch, within 30 days.”

”

Christie Smith
Associate Vice President for Undergraduate
Enrollment at Nazareth University



THE DIFFERENCE

Our process: customizing offers

Partners set specific criteria for Direct Admissions acceptance and merit-based scholarship eligibility.

STUDENT PROFILE

State

Zip code

States of interest

Metro

Religious affiliation

High school

Gender

STUDENT INTEREST

Major CIP code

Cross-interest schools

SCORES

High school GPA (out of 4.0)

ACT/SAT composite



THE DIFFERENCE

	<i>Niche Direct Admissions®:</i>	<i>Other direct admissions programs:</i>
STUDENT BENEFITS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ No application required✓ User-friendly experience tailored to students' interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Requires applications✗ Not guaranteed
SHARED BENEFITS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Real-time acceptance and scholarship offers✓ Acceptance based on 11 data points✓ Intentionality of the student	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Students wait for results✗ Accept based GPA only✗ Not guaranteed
COLLEGE BENEFITS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ An efficient and collaborative onboarding process✓ Ability to recruit out-of-state and in new markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Not guaranteed✗ Only in-state students are eligible



WHAT'S NEXT?

*Looking to the fall cycle and beyond,
direct admissions will play a role*

Looking ahead

The college admissions process is at a crossroads. Students and families are demanding a simpler, more transparent path to enrollment, while institutions are seeking new ways to meet their enrollment targets. Direct admissions offers a comprehensive solution to these challenges.

As the higher education landscape continues to evolve, it is clear that direct admissions will play an increasingly important and prominent role. In 2024, more than half of high school students live in states with direct admissions programs and private direct admissions programs are expanding opportunities. Niche Direct Admissions® is at the forefront of this movement, providing an innovative and effective solution for students and institutions alike.

With impressive results and growing partnerships, Niche Direct Admissions® is poised to revolutionize the path to higher education for millions of students.

Considerations for institutions exploring direct admissions programs

Alignment with your strategy

Are you considering changes to your enrollment strategy to better align with student expectations? Will reducing friction for prospective students positively impact your enrollment goals?

Positioning you for enrollment growth

How can you grow the top of your funnel without bloating the top of your funnel? 89% of institutions who offered Niche Direct Admissions® doubled their inquiries, and that's something to think about.

Defining your criteria

What student profiles are the best fit for your institution? Which data points would you use to define your direct admissions criteria, and what guardrails do you need to maintain academic standards?

Resource allocation

How will you ensure adequate staffing and resources to maximize the benefits of Niche Direct Admissions®? What processes or technology may need to adapt to accommodate a new admissions paradigm?

Evaluating outcomes

What KPIs will you use to measure success? How will you track progress and iterate your strategy over time? Remember that Niche Direct Admissions® represents a long-term shift, not a one-time campaign.

[Learn more about Niche Direct Admissions®](#)



About this report



About Niche

Niche is a trusted partner for over 3,000 schools and colleges, helping them streamline operations, build brand awareness and achieve their enrollment targets.

Each year, more than 70 million people rely on Niche as the nation's number one resource for students and families to discover the schools and colleges that are best for them. Our data-driven enrollment marketing solutions, customizable profiles and unique market insights empower schools and colleges to build strong brand awareness and engage the right audiences at the right time.

With our Niche Direct Admissions® program, higher education institutions can proactively admit students based on their Niche Profile alone, offering a modern admissions experience for today's students that yields higher enrollments. Learn more about ways to partner with Niche.

[Learn more about Niche Direct Admissions®](#)



Data sources

Survey data

- [2024 Niche Spring Junior Survey](#)
- [Niche Class of 2024 Fall Survey](#)
- [2023 Niche Spring Junior Survey](#)

Niche research and analysis

Niche research and analysis is based on verified data provided to Niche by its partners.