



**MINNESOTA STATE**  
Board of Trustees

**AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY**

**NAME:** Outreach and Engagement Committee

**DATE:** May 21, 2024

**TITLE:** Marketing Update

Action

Review and Discussion

*This item is required by policy*

**PRESENTERS**

Noelle Hawton, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer

Barbara Hein, Director of Marketing

Audrey Bergengren, Vice President of Strategic Enrollment and Marketing, Metro State University

Brittany Tweed, Director of Financial Aid, Metro State University

Karen Reilly, Dean of Integrated Communications, Minnesota State Community and Technical College

**PURPOSE**

After an historic investment in higher education during the 2022-2023 legislative session, we will take a look at the marketing efforts to promote several new programs and the impact those programs have had for our system overall and at two Minnesota State institutions specifically.

**Minnesota State BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

This year, Minnesota State had the unique opportunity to share two exciting “affordability” messages with our prospective students and their influencers:

1. Two-year tuition freeze
2. North Star Promise Scholarship

We quickly shifted our messaging focus over the summer to lead with these two new affordability messages. We launched our affordability campaign promoting the North Star Promise Scholarship and the tuition freeze in August 2023 at the Minnesota State Fair, with signage and flyers promoting both of these great opportunities. At the same time, we launched an updated “affordability page” on MinnState.edu that provided more detailed information about the tuition freeze and the affordable tuition rates at our colleges and universities, as well as expanded information about the new North Star Promise Scholarship, including eligibility requirements and how to apply for the scholarship. We found there was a lot of interest from people visiting the State Fair Booth around the North Star Promise. We handed out 1,000 flyers promoting the North Star Promise Scholarship at the Fair which included a QR code that linked to our Affordability page on MinnState.edu. In the six weeks following the Fair, we recorded 588 sessions on our website from that QR code. And while we haven’t distributed the flyer

since last fall, through the end of April, we recorded 919 sessions on our website from the QR code.

### **Fall Semester Campaigns**

On September 1, we launched a paid media campaign across multiple channels including Facebook, Instagram, Twitch, Connected TV (CTV), and streaming audio promoting the North Star Promise and the tuition freeze. At the same time, we worked with several key communicators from colleges and universities across the state to test advertising messaging and graphics for the North Star Promise Scholarship with student focus groups in order to refine our paid advertising campaigns. The input from those focus groups informed our second round of advertising that began in November, following Minnesota State Month in October. For that second round, we changed up headlines and graphics based on the feedback from the focus groups and also added a new version of the campaign aimed at adult learners. We used our media buys to target our traditional markets (18-49 year olds across Minnesota and the cities along the borders of surrounding states) as well as to specifically target more diverse groups of prospective students, including students of color and students who would be PELL eligible. In October, we held our second annual **Minnesota State Month**. Previously, our colleges and universities participated in what the state calls College Knowledge Month and waived application fees for one week in the month. For the past two years all of our colleges and universities have waived their application fees for the entire month of October and have offered special campus visits throughout the month. We have branded that Minnesota State Month to distinguish ourselves from what the other higher education institutions do during October, and to reinforce the depth and breadth of our system and the value of attending one of our schools.

Over the fall months, the Minnesota State marketing and communications team developed a new marketing platform and campaign that packages our affordability messages along with the extraordinary education and wrap around services messages to make it easier for prospective students and their influencers to remember the value they receive from Minnesota State. We are calling this new marketing platform **The Minnesota State Promise**.

### **Spring Semester Campaign**

In spring semester, we launched a paid media campaign announcing the Minnesota State Promise. The Minnesota State Promise is our commitment to the students who attend our colleges and universities to provide affordable education (and in some cases tuition free education via the North Star Promise Scholarship), the most expansive academic programs in the state—including programs in the trades, STEM, and liberal arts, and an array of services and activities that help students achieve their career goals. You will find more information about the Minnesota State Promise on our website at <https://www.minnstate.edu/admissions/MinnesotaStatePromise.html>. Our paid campaign included digital, statewide radio, streaming audio, CTV, and a carousel feature on the home page of MinnState.edu.

In April, we participated in the *Be the Change Career and College Fair in Minneapolis* with a booth. We spoke to 600 students of color and first-generation students from Twin Cities high schools. We talked with the students about the North Star Scholarship Program, the various programs and degrees offered at the 33 colleges and universities of Minnesota State and handed out the Minnesota State Guidebook. We believe this college fair is the first step in building a strong partnership with the Be the Change organization to further our efforts to reach more diverse communities of prospective students and their influencers with our marketing efforts.

### **Goals**

Our paid campaigns and the various events we participate in and/or sponsor like the State Fair, Minnesota State Month, Minnesota State Week in June, Pride in Minneapolis, Saints games in St. Paul,

and the National College Fair, as well as the Be the Change College Fair, have two main goals. The first is awareness. We work to get the Minnesota State name in front of as many prospective students and influencers multiple times so that when they think of higher education options, they think of the 33 colleges and universities of Minnesota State. The second goal is to provoke action by the prospective students and their influencers. Actions include:

- To visit our website and get more information
- Sign up to visit a campus
- Order a Minnesota State Guidebook
- Visit a college or university website from our site
- Apply for admission to one or more college or university

### **Outcomes**

The numbers we track to measure whether we are meeting the goals of our marketing efforts are very positive this year. Here is a breakdown of our metrics from September 1, 2023 – April 30, 2024.

*Awareness:* using paid media campaigns to drive awareness of Minnesota State, we have had:

- 6,092,995 impressions on Facebook and Instagram: an impression is recorded each time our ad is shown to a targeted person
- 16,810,491 impressions on CTV, streaming audio, YouTube, and paid search
- 155,592 impressions on the streaming broadcast of the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) Championship games for football, girls hockey, boys hockey, girls basketball and boys basketball
- 78 television commercials on Channel 45 during tournament coverage of the MSHSL championships games noted above

*Take action:* Drive visitors to key pages on the MinnState.edu website

- Affordability landing page (North Star Promise Scholarship Page): 101,515 views: a view is recorded in Google Analytics each time a person comes to the page
- Minnesota State Promise landing page: 84,099 views
- First user default channels: 49,877 new users came to MinnState.edu directory from one of our paid ads
- Guidebook orders: 21,221 free Guidebooks ordered via the online store
- Click Thru rate for Facebook ads: .50%

*Take Action:* Submit an application

- 2,855 submitted applications during Minnesota State Week 2023 (17.7% increase over 2022)
- 45,036 submitted applications during Minnesota State Month 2023 (13% increase over 2022)
- 225,559 submitted applications from September 2023-April 2024 (19% increase year-over-year)
- Cost per application: \$1.14 (dollars spent on paid media divided by submitted applications)

### **M State BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

M State's implementation plan included a comprehensive campaign to promote an accessible and affordable college education. The marquee promotional piece created by M State is the annual Viewbook. For the 2023-2024 viewbook, M State added information about the North Star Promise Scholarship in the viewbook, which was mailed to over 5,000 juniors and seniors in Minnesota in the fall. Additionally, more than 4,000 viewbooks have been distributed between August 2023 and the end of April through high school visits, on campus tours, requests for information and special events.

There has been a tremendous amount of interest from the public regarding the North Star Promise Scholarship. The landing page created on the M State website has recorded 7,775 views between August

1, 2023 and April 30, 2024.

In addition to promoting the North Star Promise Scholarship, M State has worked to get the message out about the two year tuition freeze at Minnesota State colleges and universities as part of the affordability messaging the college has focused on. M State has leveraged graphics created in-house at M State as well as the toolkit graphics provided by Minnesota State marketing and communications to share this messaging on Facebook and Instagram.

Email has also been used as a one-to-one communication tool sharing information on the North Star Promise Scholarship. Prospective students have been very engaged with email communications on this subject. M State emailed 3,496 Minnesota Seniors on November 1<sup>st</sup> with an open rate of 23 percent.

Additional materials discussing the North Star Promise Scholarship have also been developed by M State this year, including:

- A cost comparison flier that was sent to 5,549 parents of Minnesota students
- A NSP postcard mailed to 4,965 Minnesota students
- A programs and degrees mailer sent to 4,965 Minnesota students
- An email sent to 3,496 Minnesota senior students with an open rate of 24 percent
- Success story flyers sent to 2,618 Minnesota prospects
- Follow up emails sent to 3,496 Minnesota seniors in February with a 23 percent open rate

All totaled, more than 50,000 impressions regarding the North Star Promise Scholarship, Minnesota State Promise, and the tuition freeze have been created by M State through social media, email, and direct mail.

On top of that, M State has shared this messaging at college fairs, high school visits, special events on and off campus, with campus visitors and at FAFSA sessions throughout the year.

The results of this integrated marketing campaign are very positive:

- Applications are up by 12%
- Accepted students are up by 5%
- Full-Time Equivalent is up 29% year over year and headcount is also up 32.4%
- Retention is up 35% year over year with all M State campuses reporting increases

### **Metro State Background Information**

Metro State University's implementation plan included a comprehensive campaign to promote the North Star Promise Scholarship to three segmented populations with varying goals:

#### **1. Metro State University Employees**

Goals included:

- Make employees aware of the North Star Promise Scholarship eligibility requirements
- Encourage all employees to engage in promoting the North Star Promise Scholarship
  - Encourage employees to share the great news with not only their students, but also family, friends, neighbors, and communities
- Provide the tools and training necessary for employees to advise and explain eligibility and the application process for North Star Promise

#### **2. Metro State University Students**

Goals included:

- Help students understand eligibility requirements and that the North Star Promise could cover tuition and fees

- Encourage students to complete the FAFSA (while communicating FAFSA complications) or the MN Dream Act application
  - Communicate deadlines and timelines for students to receive eligibility notice
  - Communicate to those who don't qualify to help them understand other ways to pay for college and scholarship opportunities
3. Prospective students and applicants
- Goals included:
- Reach Minnesota residents in the greater Twin Cities and surrounding area
  - Help them understand what the North Star Promise Scholarship could cover and the eligibility requirements
  - Encourage students to apply to Metro State University and complete the FAFSA (while communicating FAFSA complications) or the MN Dream Act application
  - Communicate deadlines and timelines for students to receive eligibility notice
  - Communicate to those who don't qualify to help them understand other ways to pay for college and scholarship opportunities

### **Examples of Strategies and Tactics**

#### *Target Audience: Employees*

Inform employees and train them as ambassadors of the North Star Promise Scholarship

- Hosted a university-wide town hall to share details and planning, educate the community, and create excitement. 180 employees attended and had dozens of questions.
- Published weekly employee newsletter updates featuring North Star Promise
- Conducted training and information sessions to various groups including Leadership Assembly, Faculty Chair Meetings, Advising Forum, and Admissions Staff
- Provided tools such as talk points, handouts, and "Ask me about FREE TUITION" buttons for employees to wear

#### *Target Audience: Current Students*

Inform current students to encourage retention (paying for college is one of the most common barriers)

- Landing page: <https://www.metrostate.edu/NorthStar>
- Email campaign
- Banners around campus
- Monitor displays
- Integrated into all communications
- Hearing it from faculty and staff in various engagements (result of employee campaign)
- D2L
- Webinars

#### *Target Audience: Prospective Students*

Reach prospective students to increase inquiries, applications, and enrollment

- Landing page: <https://www.metrostate.edu/NorthStar>
- Email campaign
- Campus signage
- Street banners
- Paid digital advertising
- Admissions events and materials
  - Direct mail

- Flyers
- Viewbook
- Displays
- Alumni emails and Buzz magazine
- Organic social media
  - Posts
  - Video
- Earned media campaign – Radio and TV interviews
  - **WIXK Hmong Radio** — Phoua Yang, admissions counselor and community outreach liaison, was interviewed on 2/9. Yang discussed Metro State degree programs, the North Star Promise Scholarship program, and upcoming Open House events.
  - **KBEM Jazz88** — Brittany Tweed, financial aid director, was [interviewed on Jazz88](#) on 2/15.
  - **Native Roots Radio AM950** — Brittany Tweed, financial aid director, was also on [Native Roots Radio and videocast](#) the evening of 2/15.
  - **KMOJ Radio** — Maya Sullivan, dean of students, [appeared on KMOJ](#) during the evening commute on 2/16.
  - **KBEM Jazz88** — Jazz88’s Peter Solomon chatted with Metro State’s Victor Cole, director of Recruitment, Retention, and Induction in the School of Urban Education. Cole shared info about Metro State’s degree programs, student support services, and upcoming Graduate Programs Preview Day event on April 13 in an [interview that aired 4/3](#).
  - **KMOJ Radio** — Metro State’s Graduate Programs Preview Day got solid boosts from several outlets recently, including Victor Cole [appearing on KMOJ](#) on 4/4
  - **WIXK Hmong Radio** — Graduate Admissions Counselor Phoua Yang was interviewed on WIXK Hmong Radio on 4/5.
  - **Native Roots Radio AM950** — Student Success Coordinator for American Indian Students Janice Denny’s 4/9 interview [on Native Roots Radio](#).
  - **KMOJ Radio** — Freddie Bell with the Morning Show interviewed Brittany Tweed live via phone on 4/10 about an upcoming North Star Promise program webinar hosted by Metro State. <https://share.transistor.fm/s/cddc6831>
  - **KARE TV Noon Show** — Alexis Rogers interviewed Brittany Tweed live, in-studio on 4/10 about the North Star Promise Program webinar being hosted by Metro State. <https://www.audacy.com/stations/wccoradio/shows/the-morning-news-with-vineeta-sawkar-ea453/episodes/42b9f07c017d>
  - **WCCO Radio Morning Show with Vineeta Sawkar** — Vineeta interviewed Brittany Tweed about the North Star Promise Program webinar being hosted by Metro State. The live interview took place on 4/15. <https://omny.fm/shows/the-morning-news-with-vineeta-sawkar/metro-state-has-an-event-that-will-answer-all-your>
  - **WCCO TV The 4 Show** — [Jeff Wagner and Erin Hassanzadeh with The 4 Show interviewed Brittany Tweed live in-studio on 4/15 about](#) the North Star Promise Program webinar being hosted by Metro State. <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/video/minnesota-scholarship-program-pays-for-entire-undergrad-degree/?intcid=CNM-00-10abd1h>

### Outcomes as of May 8, 2024

We anticipate these numbers to grow exponentially as the Fall Semester draws nearer.

- FAFSA Submission Narrative:
  - 2,848 - AY23 submissions and 1,862 had Pell eligibility (Dec 2021 to May 2022)
  - 2,765 - AY24 submissions and 1,868 had Pell eligibility (Dec 2022 to May 2023)

- 3,109 - AY25 submissions and 1,995 had Pell eligibility (Dec 2023 to May 2024)
  - Compared to prior year submissions for the same time period (Dec – May), student engagement and application increases were observed. Students who are Pell eligible submitted applications at a higher rate - a 7% increase from AY23 to AY25.
  - MN Dream Act applications for AY25 have increased by 27% from the previous year, alluding to greater awareness of the application for DACAmented and undocumented students. No comparison of Dream Act application data was available for AY23.
  - Data indicates an increase of both Pell Eligible applicants and FAFSA submissions when comparing AY24 & AY25 data. There was a 12% increase in applicants overall. Comparing AY23 to AY25, an increase of 8.4% of submissions was observed. These increased figures may be, in part, related to media, admissions, and marketing strategies implemented at Metro State in Spring 2024.
- 3953 prospects/inquiries for summer 2024 and 9037 prospects/inquiries for fall 2024 (as of 5/9/24)
- 822 registrants and 386 attendees for current Metro State student North Star Promise Scholarship webinars 3/12 and 3/15
- 423 registered and 143 attendees for prospective and new student North Star Promise Scholarship webinar 4/16
- 788 registrants (+31% increase over last spring) and 420 attendees (+29% increase over last spring) for in person and virtual undergraduate open house
- 27% increase of undergraduate applications for Fall 2024