

BRIEF 05 OF 07 · BEFORE YOU RENEW

Enrollment Services

Outreach and coaching alone don't carry students to completion. In the trials that worked, the active ingredients were money and sustained advising.

43.1M

people who left postsecondary education without a credential

4.7%

of re-enrolled stopouts earned a credential in their first year back

27,027

former students tracked; outreach-only gains faded before completion

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If you read one thing here, ask any third party enrollment provider three questions before anything else: what financial relief is included, how is the file targeted, and how is advising sustained after the student returns.

The challenge as members describe it

With the traditional pipeline contracting, institutions are turning to adult learners who left without a credential. The population is large and the movement within it is favorable: 43.1 million people had left postsecondary education without a credential as of the start of the 2023 to 2024 academic year, of whom 37.6 million were working age adults under 65, and more than one million re-enrolled during that year, an increase of 7.0 percent (Cohen et al., 2025). Members ask how to reach them at scale without building capability they cannot sustain.

Status quo belief and the more accurate insight

THE BELIEF

Outreach and coaching bring students back.

THE EVIDENCE

Coaching is the delivery mechanism rather than the treatment, and that the active ingredients in the trials that worked were money and sustained advising, applied to students close to completion.

Three randomized controlled trials, reported across four publications, bear on this question. Outreach alone produced re-enrollment gains of 1.5 percentage points that did not survive to credential completion when followed up three years later across 27,027 former students (Ortagus et al., 2024). Coaching alone, delivered to approximately 8,000 former state aid recipients in an independently funded trial with a pre-specified analysis plan, produced no detectable effect on enrollment, with effects larger than two percentage points ruled out; the coaching was genuinely delivered, since treatment students were 48.6 percentage points more likely to communicate with a coach (Turner and Gurantz, 2024).

Project REACT, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, combined tuition waivers of up to fifteen credit hours with case managed proactive advising across five semesters and multi channel outreach, targeted at students within fifteen credits of a degree, and raised re-enrollment from 11.2 percent to 20.7 percent (Rubin et al., 2026).

Dynamics E&I is observing

Members are increasingly attentive to the compliance architecture of these arrangements, and correctly so. The incentive compensation prohibition at 34 C.F.R. 668.14(b)(22) contains no bundled services exception. The allowance permitting tuition based payment to an unaffiliated third party rests entirely on Example 2-B within a 2011 Dear Colleague Letter (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

That guidance remains in effect and was not rescinded; the letter rescinded in November 2024 was a different one addressing third party servicer scope, and the two are frequently confused. Because the allowance is sub-regulatory, it may be withdrawn without notice and comment rulemaking, and it should not be described as a safe harbor.

One further observation from the national data deserves emphasis. Of stopout students who did re-enroll, 4.7 percent earned a credential within their first year back (Cohen et al., 2025). Re-enrollment is the outcome a vendor agreement will naturally be written around. Completion is the outcome that produces sustained net tuition revenue and serves the student.

Sourcing implications

- Require independently evaluated evidence rather than vendor reported outcomes, and ask specifically whether any outcome claim rests on a design evaluated by a party other than the provider.

- Tie a meaningful portion of compensation to persistence and completion rather than to initial re-enrollment alone, and define the census point, the treatment of stop and return behavior, and the attribution window precisely.
- Verify the four conditions of the bundled services allowance continuously rather than once. Affiliation can change across a five year engagement, and invoicing practice as executed is what matters rather than invoicing as contemplated.
- Negotiate a change in law provision permitting restructuring or termination without penalty if the bundled services guidance is modified or withdrawn.
- Where the institution lacks the outreach infrastructure, data capability, or advising capacity to run such a program internally, a pre-competed agreement supplies it on established terms. E&I's enrollment management and student outreach agreement offers that route, and a member's E&I sourcing consultant can identify the vehicle that fits the institution.

Want help acting on this?

Your E&I sourcing consultant can point you to the contract that fits. The Executive Overview, full report, and 90-day checklists: [\[LANDING PAGE LINK\]](#)

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Sources

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