

## NYC OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOLS' TEXT-TO-SUCCESS RESULTS

- Students who engage in the texting program (texting back at least once) are more likely to enroll in and persist through college than those who do not
- Participating in the texting program, starting in high school and continuing into students' first year of college, resulted in a 50 percent increase in the probability of college enrollment compared to not participating in the texting program (holding all else constant)
- 56% of students responded to any text message

### What are students looking for in your text messages?

Approachability, advisement, reminders and support! Doing this to scale can be tricky, so language becomes extremely important. Keep it simple, factual and to the point. It should be professional AND fun! Combining a key piece of information with an emoji, GIF, other visual, or words of encouragement can help to grab your audience's attention.

### How often should I be texting?

Once or twice per month is ideal. Consider and evaluate the value of each message and its purpose as to not overuse text, which can lead students to discount all texts coming from your program. In addition, you or someone from your program will be sending the texts, so sending too many texts can become unmanageable for your organization, and you will run the risk of watered-down engagement with students.

### What are the categories of information that should be addressed via text?

**INTRODUCTION TEXTS:** When starting a campaign, send a message that makes it clear to students that the texts are not coming from a robot; they are coming from an actual person who is able to help and advise them. Students should be made aware of what they should expect from the text reminders, and that they can opt out at any time.

**COLLEGE TEXTS:** These texts address college supports and go to the core of what it means to be a college student. Topics include registering for classes, visiting professors during office hours, and suggesting that students utilize the tutoring center on campus if necessary.

**FINANCIAL AID TEXTS:** These texts are about completing or re-filing FAFSA and TAP and include video tutorials, as well as reminders for students to check their online accounts and contact the bursar's office as needed.

**HIGH SCHOOL TEXTS:** These texts ask students to share a favorite memory from high school, or if still in high school, to share a college-related task they are working on currently. These affirm real-time experiences that encourage student engagement.

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TEXTS:** These texts simply wish students a happy birthday and, like all texts, should include their first name. This conveys the personal aspect that students crave and bolsters your organization's credibility.

**HOLIDAY TEXTS AND OTHER SOCIOEMOTIONAL MESSAGES:** Texts wishing students happy holidays or a check-in text during midterms, for example. These texts can be combined with other reminders, but are also important to students as stand-alone messages.

All of these categories operate together to support students holistically.

## Tips for success

- Send texts in the early evening or over the weekend. Students generally respond in larger numbers at these times. Consider what time of day your students are most likely to be on their phones to see the text.
- Send texts that feel personal (e.g., birthday messages) to keep the program on a student's radar.
- Students respond frequently to financial aid messages; these messages are often complex so staff should budget extra time to respond.
- Students who respond to the "college tips" texts persist through college at higher rates; these texts normalize and encourage seeking support on campus.
- Send text messages that are relevant for students at the specific point in the school year during which they are sent.
- Consider segmenting your list if it improves your ability to target your message.
- "Yes or no" questions generate more responses than open-ended messages. Include automated follow-up responses based on the student's answers.
- Some programs find that the majority of students who respond will do so within one hour of receiving a text, so texts are most effective if students can interact with staff right away. Time messages so that they are received when you can have staff available and on computers to respond promptly.
- Research suggests that less complicated messages make students more likely to respond.
- Texts are best for getting information out and for motivating a concrete action or for soliciting a response from a student if they need help. If the interaction continues and/or becomes more substantive than the initial prompt, it is better to move that conversation off of text messaging and over to the phone or another medium.

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## Graduate NYC's College Completion Innovation Fund

GNYC's College Completion Innovation Fund, the first collaborative fund focused exclusively on college retention and completion in New York City, invests in innovative solutions for greater rates of degree completion. Grants are made to support community-based organizations and colleges that serve low-income students, first-generation college-goers, and/or students of color in the five boroughs. NYC Outward Bound Schools was one of the CCIF's inaugural grants, which supported the launch of this program and others that work in coordination to test out innovative solutions for supporting their alumni to college graduation.

## NYC Outward Bound Schools

NYC Outward Bound Schools operates a growing network of small, college-preparatory public schools in partnership with the New York City Department of Education. It supports these schools in implementing the EL Education school model, which is rooted in Outward Bound's educational approach, and provides an extensive package of services and supports aimed at promoting high-quality teaching, high levels of student achievement, character development, and college access, readiness and persistence.