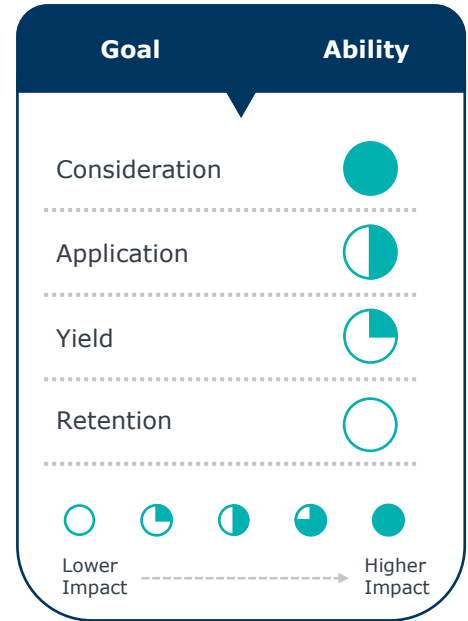


Tuition Price Matching

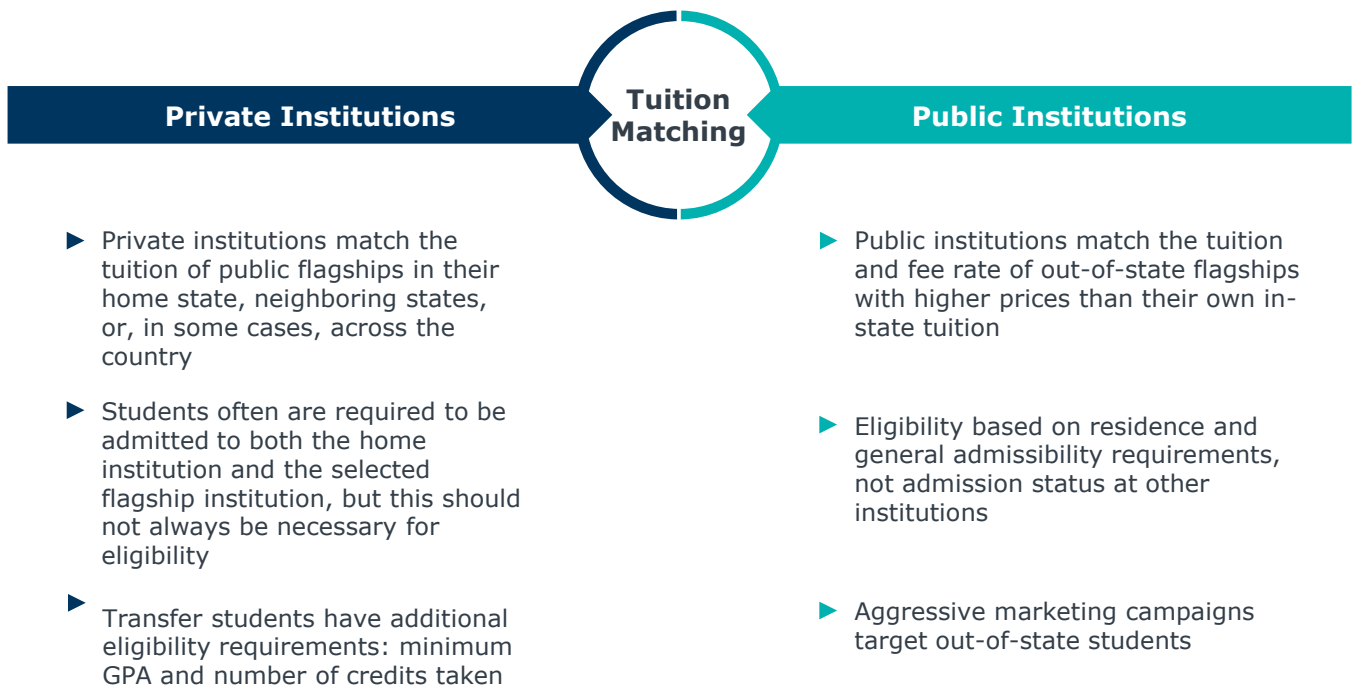
Pegging Prices to Lower-List Institutions to Enter More Consideration Sets

Price matches are branded scholarship programs that guarantee qualified students will be charged the same tuition and fees as designated public institutions, typically flagships. Many students rule out private or out-of-state institutions solely on the assumption they will cost more than their in-state and public options, even when they might prefer or perform better in another setting.

Price match programs signal to students early and clearly in the search process that these institutions are affordable. By pegging prices to lower-list price institutions, these programs defuse sticker shock and reduce the uncertainty and concern about the price of college. As a result, both private and public institutions can make their way into the consideration sets of prospective students that otherwise would have written them off based on price.



Public and Private Variations on Price Match Programs



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Matching List Prices to Increase Application and Yield

How Price Matches Help Institutions Achieve Enrollment Goals



Increase inquiry and application volume

Because out-of-state and private institution list prices tend to be comparatively high, many students never consider them as options, let alone apply. By eliminating cost as a deciding factor, institutions encourage prospective students to focus on fit over cost when considering and applying to college.

Attract more underrepresented students

Underrepresented students tend to be more price-sensitive and are more likely to be dissuaded by high-list prices than other student segments. By reducing sticker shock and improving cost transparency and predictability early in the college search process, price matches allows institutions to attract a more diverse student body.

Recruit students that match high-ability profile

For many small private and out-of-state institutions, applicants also admissible at potential price-match target universities represent some of the highest-ability students in their application pool. By matching prices, can these high-ability students who may prefer smaller or out-of-state institutions but are discouraged from applying due to high sticker prices are more likely to reconsider.

Pre-Implementation Analyses

Determining the Need for and Implications of a Tuition Price Match

1 — Need/Fit

	Yes	No
We are a private institution facing steep competition from our state's and/or neighboring state's public institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We are a public institution looking to attract more out-of-state students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Growing applications and enrollment are top goals at our institution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consideration and application are bigger challenges than yield or retention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inflecting diversity is an enrollment goal at our institution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increasing prestige and brand recognition is an institutional goal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2 — Feasibility

	Yes	No
For students admitted to our target institutions, we are already providing enough aid to cover the difference in COA between our institution and the target institution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As a public institution, our in-state tuition is lower than our target institutions' tuition and fees and even after matching, OOS students would pay a higher rate than in-state students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As a private institution, our applicants who are also admissible at a flagship represent some of the highest-ability students in our application pool and, as such, are already likely to receive substantial merit aid at our institution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We can absorb the impact of pricing changes (e.g., tuition freezes) at target institutions that might diminish the effectiveness of the program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have the staff and resources to handle potential increases in inquiries and applications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have support services in place for underrepresented students and can scale them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Implementation Guidance

Choosing Institutions to Align Price With



Optimize Prestige and Tuition Revenue with Selections



Both public and private institutions should target more selective institutions to signal high quality in the minds of prospective students and families. Higher brand equity will help institutions get into the consideration sets of more students. For public universities in particular, target flagships with a higher in-state tuition and fee rate than the in-state tuition and fee rate at the institution, so that even after matching, OOS students pay a higher rate than in-state students.



Analyze Pricing Trends at Target Institutions

By pegging prices to other universities, institutions become susceptible to pricing changes at target institutions. To mitigate this, examine pricing trends at institutions you are considering to gauge susceptibility to pricing changes that could result in lower than expected NTR. Consider (i) recent tuition freezes or any sign of an impending tuition freeze surfaced in due diligence, (ii) annual rate of tuition increases at the target institution that's lower than the rate of tuition increase at the home institution. University leaders can also change the set of institutions to which they match price.

Determining Student Eligibility



Set Clear, but Limited, Eligibility Criteria to Attract Specific Audiences

In general, EAB recommends limiting the number of criteria to ensure equitable access to the scholarship program. However, institutions can strategically target specific student types with targeted criteria. For example, an institution might set a GPA threshold to match the profile of their high-achieving students on campus. Regardless, eligibility criteria should be clear and as simple as possible.



Link Eligibility to Profile of Students Who Would Receive Equivalent Merit Packages

By allowing all eligible students to pay a discounted price, institutions lose the opportunity to earn higher revenue from full-pay students or students who would have been willing to pay higher prices in the absence of the program. Ensure that most students who qualify for the program would have received equivalent merit award packages in the program's absence.

Implementation Guidance

Marketing a Price Match Guarantee



Emphasize Right Price, Right Fit, and Accessibility Language in Messaging

Affordability should be salient in all price match messaging. By diminishing price as a decision factor, institutions allow students to factor fit into their decisions. To that end, institutions should communicate to students the benefits of attending their university. That may include communities, class sizes, personal mentorship opportunities, and, in some cases location. Finally, marketing should emphasize how the program reduces uncertainty about price and aid and that students can qualify without waiting for their FAFSA.



Conduct Assertive Marketing Campaign

The intensity of marketing can inflect success of a price match program by helping institutions with less brand recognition compete with better-known institutions. Beyond traditional modes of advertising (e.g., TV spots, targeted ads on social media), institutions should equip high school guidance counselors with the information needed to encourage students to apply.



Stagger Implementation for Extended PR Impact

By staggering the inclusion of more schools in a price match program, universities can maximize PR benefits by issuing a press release each time and increasing the frequency of media coverage. Additionally, starting a price match program with one or a select few institutions allows institutions to test and measure the impact of a price match before expanding.



Clearly Communicate Price and Financial Aid

Delivering financial aid touchpoints that immediately break down net price, use clear language, and provide guidance to students at points of uncertainty will increase the likelihood that financial aid is a bridge to further engagement with students in the enrollment process.

See EAB's roadmap for communicating price and financial aid [here](#).

EAB's Recommendations in Action

How Institutions Implement Key Components of Price Match Programs

The below institutions exemplify various aspects of a successful price match implementation and rollout, in accordance with EAB's recommendations:



Optimize Brand and Revenue with School Selections

▶ Examples

- Cal Lutheran matches the most prestigious, recognizable flagships in the state
- RMU targets nearby institutions where admitted students often enroll
- Maine targets institutions with higher in-state tuition and fees

▶▶ Why it Works

- Comparisons to better-known institutions help schools get into more consideration sets
- Recaptures enrollments from admitted students going elsewhere
- Increases ability to win on cost with common competitor institutions

Double Down on Affordability, Fit, and Experience

▶ Examples

- RMU: "You should attend the university that is the right fit for you. The cost of tuition shouldn't get in the way"
- Oglethorpe's dedicated webpage addresses "common misconceptions" about private vs. public education
- UMaine's assertive marketing campaign includes outreach to school counselors

▶▶ Why it Works

- Signals affordability to students early in the search process and reduces uncertainty about aid eligibility
- Mitigates sticker shock, allowing students to focus on fit and experience over price
- Helps institutions with less brand recognition compete with better-known institutions

Enhance Impact with Student Success Initiatives

▶ Examples

- UMaine's "Flagship Internship" connects out-of-state students with work opportunities
- Cal Lutheran's "4 to Finish" Graduation Guarantee removes logistical barriers to timely graduation

▶▶ Why it Works

- Strengthens ties to community, increase likelihood of staying in state after graduation
- Improves persistence and timely graduation before scholarship expires
- Student success initiatives offer complementary talking points in recruiting

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.