

# Best Practice Guide

OUTREACH AND PATHWAY  
PROGRAMS



# Outreach and Pathway Programs



## Overview

Outreach and pathway programs are strategic initiatives that connect Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (COMs) with communities and prospective students across educational levels. These programs serve multiple purposes: increasing awareness of osteopathic medicine, supporting community health, building institutional reputation, and creating structured pathways for future applicants.

Based on extensive input gathered during listening sessions with the Council of Osteopathic Medical Admissions Officers (COMAO) and the Marketing and Communications Advisory Council (MAC), this guide outlines best practices, implementation strategies, and measurement frameworks for developing effective outreach and pathway programs.

## Executive Summary

Outreach and pathway programs serve as foundational elements in the recruitment process, building awareness of osteopathic medicine and establishing meaningful connections long before the application phase begins. When executed effectively, these programs function as powerful pipeline tools that introduce osteopathic principles to diverse audiences while creating structured pathways toward application and matriculation.

## The most successful outreach and pathway programs:



**Demonstrate osteopathic principles in action** through hands-on community engagement rather than simply describing them



**Align closely with institutional mission**, reinforcing the COM's values while attracting students who share those commitments



**Engage prospective students early** in their educational journey, often beginning in high school or earlier



**Establish formal partnerships** with undergraduate institutions that create clear pathways to matriculation



**Address genuine community needs** while showcasing osteopathic medicine's unique approach to healthcare

# Guiding Principles for Successful Programs

When developing outreach and pathway programs, consider these foundational principles:

- 1.** **Mission Alignment:** Ensure programs directly connect to your COM's mission and values, reinforcing your institutional identity while attracting mission-aligned applicants.
- 2.** **Demonstration Over Description:** Showcase osteopathic principles through active demonstration. The impact of seeing OMM performed or experiencing it firsthand creates more powerful understanding than explanatory content alone.
- 3.** **Early Engagement:** Build awareness of osteopathic medicine early in students' educational journeys, ideally starting in high school or earlier, to ensure DO programs are considered alongside MD programs when students begin exploring medical careers.
- 4.** **Strategic Institutional Partnerships:** Develop formal articulation agreements with undergraduate institutions that create structured pathways to matriculation while extending your COM's influence in the pre-medical education space.
- 5.** **Community-Centered Approach:** Address genuine community needs through service-oriented programs that simultaneously showcase osteopathic principles and build goodwill with local populations.

# Program Types and Implementation

Implement a comprehensive strategy that includes both pathway programs focused on recruitment pipelines and outreach programs focused on community engagement and awareness-building.

## Pathway Programs

Pathway programs establish structured routes for prospective students to progress toward osteopathic medical education, often with formal agreements that guarantee interviews or seats for qualified applicants.

### K-12 Engagement

- **Summer Programs:** Develop healthcare-focused camps that introduce osteopathic medicine to high school students through interactive experiences
- **Research Opportunities:** Create mentored research experiences for high school students interested in healthcare and science
- **STEM Partnerships:** Collaborate with local schools on healthcare-focused STEM initiatives that incorporate osteopathic principles

### Undergraduate Partnerships

- **Articulation Agreements:** Establish formal partnerships with undergraduate institutions that guarantee interviews or seats for qualified applicants
- **Early Assurance Programs:** Create programs for high-achieving undergraduates that offer conditional acceptance during sophomore or junior year
- **Pre-Med Advising Collaboration:** Develop strong relationships with undergraduate pre-health advisors to ensure accurate representation of osteopathic medicine

## Outreach Programs

Outreach programs connect COMs with their broader communities through service initiatives that address local needs while showcasing osteopathic principles and building awareness.

### Community Health Initiatives

- **Mobile Health Services:** Develop specialized vehicles or pop-up clinics that bring osteopathic care directly to underserved communities
- **OMM Clinics:** Offer free or reduced-cost OMM sessions to community members, providing hands-on demonstrations of osteopathic principles
- **Health Screenings:** Organize community health events focused on prevention and wellness, aligned with osteopathic philosophy

### Student-Led Initiatives

- **Free Clinics:** Support student-run free clinics that serve underserved populations while providing hands-on training
- **Community Projects:** Facilitate student partnerships with local organizations like food banks, shelters, and schools
- **Special Population Outreach:** Develop targeted programs for specific communities (military families, rural populations, etc.) aligned with your institutional mission



#### IMPLEMENTATION TIP:

"We purchased a shuttle bus that we outfitted to be able to do OMM. So we're able to take that out into the community and offer what's called our street medicine program, where we do community outreach, we offer OMM treatments... offering treatment, offering shot clinics and things like that."



# Communications Strategy

Effective promotion and documentation of outreach and pathway programs require a multi-channel approach that maximizes visibility and impact.

## External Communications

**Local Media Partnerships:** Develop relationships with local media outlets to secure coverage of community-focused initiatives

**Collaborative Announcements:** Partner with undergraduate institutions and community organizations to amplify messaging through their established channels

**Visual Storytelling:** Prioritize compelling visual content that showcases hands-on activities and community impact

**Community Partnerships:** Create custom marketing materials for partner organizations to distribute through their networks

## Internal Communications

**Cross-Campus Integration:** Leverage university-wide newsletters and communications to highlight outreach activities

**Student Social Media:** Empower students to document and share their community engagement experiences through authentic content



### IMPLEMENTATION TIP:

"We also have an internal newsletter that goes out not only just to our medical school, but also to the main campus where our undergraduate programs are. So we're able to market some of those opportunities and even offer for the undergraduates to get involved."

# Measuring Success

Implement comprehensive tracking mechanisms to evaluate effectiveness and demonstrate return on investment.

## Key Metrics to Track:

**Community Impact:** Number of community members served, services provided, and specific health outcomes where measurable

**Media Coverage:** Quantity and quality of media placements resulting from outreach initiatives

**Recruitment Influence:** Percentage of applicants and matriculants who participated in pathway programs or learned about the COM through outreach efforts

**Stakeholder Satisfaction:** Feedback from community partners, participants, and institutional leadership

## Tracking Systems:

**CRM Integration:** Ensure your customer relationship management system captures participation in outreach and pathway programs to track progression through the recruitment funnel

**Post-Event Surveys:** Implement consistent feedback mechanisms for all programs to gather actionable insights

**Longitudinal Tracking:** Monitor the academic performance and career outcomes of students who enter through pathway programs to demonstrate effectiveness



# Action Steps for COMs

Transforming these best practices into tangible results requires a structured implementation approach. The following action steps provide a roadmap for COMs to enhance their outreach and pathway strategy.

- 1. Conduct a Comprehensive Program Audit:**  
Map all current outreach and pathway initiatives against strategic recruitment and community engagement goals, identifying gaps in target audience coverage, geographic reach, or program types, and evaluating current measurement practices.
- 2. Develop Strategic Partnership Framework:**  
Identify and prioritize potential undergraduate partner institutions based on applicant data, create a standardized approach for articulation agreements that aligns with your admissions requirements, and build relationships with community organizations that align with your institutional mission.
- 3. Design Multi-Level Pathway Programs:**  
Establish structured programs for different educational stages, from K-12 engagement through post-baccalaureate opportunities, creating clear routes to osteopathic medical education for diverse student populations.
- 4. Create Community Outreach Initiatives:**  
Develop service-oriented programs that address genuine community needs while showcasing osteopathic principles, potentially including mobile health services, student-run clinics, or specialized outreach to underserved populations.
- 5. Integrate Student Ambassador Program:**  
Establish a formal system for students to participate in outreach and recruitment activities, providing training on consistent messaging about osteopathic medicine and creating opportunities for authentic content creation.
- 6. Implement Comprehensive Tracking Systems:**  
Ensure your CRM system captures participation in outreach and pathway programs, develop processes to follow participants longitudinally through the recruitment funnel, and create consistent reporting frameworks to demonstrate ROI.
- 7. Leverage Center of Excellence Resources:**  
Incorporate standardized materials on osteopathic medicine to ensure consistent representation of the profession, utilize shared best practices to accelerate program development, and participate in collaborative efforts to elevate osteopathic medicine awareness nationally.



American Association of Colleges of  
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