



2026 Marketing Plan

December 18, 2025

Agenda

- **2025 Year In Review**
 - Marketing Performance Goals
 - What Worked Well in 2025
- **Planning for 2026**
 - Headwinds
 - Tailwinds
 - What's New for 2026
 - High-Level Marketing Plan
 - Budget Allocations

Marketing Performance Goals – 10/31/2025

99%

Total Accounts Growth Goal: 6% (479,506), 99% YTD (479,286)

74%

Contributions Growth Goal: 4% (\$1.413 billion), 83% YTD (\$1.169 billion)

0.39%

% of Total Accounts Closed Due to Rollovers Goal: <2%, 0.39% Year Ending 9/30/25

What worked well in 2025

- **Data-Driven Marketing Initiatives**
 - Multi-channel acquisition strategy (video ads on streaming services, direct mail, email, display, search, long-form digital content)
 - Prospects scored on their propensity to open an account. More resources invested in households most likely to act.
 - Efficient growth of new accounts and contributions are our core KPIs.
- **Workplace Savings**
 - Network of employers and Third-Party Administrators (TPAs) continue to grow and provide a platform for our messaging to families with children.
- **Cross-Marketing to CalKIDS Registrants**
 - Promotion featuring LifeCents financial literacy platform had a meaningful impact on our New Accounts.
- **Gifting**
 - Gifting is responsible for 8% of contributions YTD. Not so long ago this was insignificant.

Headwinds

- **Environmental**
 - Political and financial uncertainty affects consumer confidence and delays decision-making. Federal policy shifts regarding education funding, tax policy, and financial regulation create hesitation among families considering long-term savings commitments.
- **Competition**
 - Big brand banks and incentivized brokers selling out-of-state 529 plans present significant competition.
- **Demographics**
 - While the target market for our plan is sizable, it's shrinking. Birth rates and student populations are declining.



Tailwinds

- **Dreams Persist**
 - Parents still aspire to send their kids to college or career training.
- **Legislation**
 - HR1's expanded uses of 529 \$ are regularly highlighted in the popular press.
- **Education as a Buffer**
 - For some families, the uncertainty of the times causes them double down on saving. During COVID, those with greater education attainment had more consistent employment.



What's New for 2026

- **Evolve our Media Strategy**
 - Enhance audience targeting capabilities by adopting advanced technology platforms and data modeling techniques.
 - AI's impact is being felt. Ads are increasingly developed on-the-fly by the advertiser's platform using components we supply. Based on response data, the component combinations with greatest engagement are shown to prospects most often.
 - AI Overviews impeded traffic to our website. We will optimize website content to increase the chances that our information will be featured in the Overviews.
 - Consumers rely on "FinTok" and other platforms for financial literacy content. In 2026, we will create content for Reddit and possibly other social platforms.
- **Adjust Quarterly Ad Spend to Optimize Results**
 - Transfer some resources from Q1 to later quarters. The last two years we front-loaded spending to separate ourselves from the election (2024) and take advantage of "early days" in the new federal administration (2025). In 2026 we will spend more when our incentive offers are in market.

What's New for 2026

- **Leverage HR1 Expansion of 529 Uses**
 - Long-form content and our owned channels are great formats to tell the story of expanded use cases.
- **Expand Thought Leadership**
 - Using PR, social media, white papers, and speaking opportunities, bring ScholarShare 529 and CalKIDS into broader conversations around the value of college, college access, and how families can leverage financial resources. Audiences to include California families/prospects, 529 Industry, College Access community.
- **Secure Consumer and Employer Testimonials**
 - Increase efforts to leverage testimonials in our marketing initiatives.
- **Brand Evolution**
 - Refresh brand strategy based on changing consumer attitudes on higher education.
 - Execute market research to uncover consumer insights that will modernize our brand strategy and communications in 2027.

2026 ScholarShare 529 Marketing Plan

	Goal	Strategy	Tactics
1	Gain New Accounts/AUM	Strategically use technology and marketing resources to grow the plan. Marketing Performance Targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6% growth in Total Accounts • 4% growth in Contributions • <2% of Total Accounts closed due to rollovers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance our audience targeting capabilities by adopting more advanced technology platforms and data modeling techniques. • Evolve our media strategy to reflect changes related to AI and new media formats. • Shift ad spend to time periods that allow greater impact and efficiency. • Secure testimonials for marketing.
2	Expand Thought Leadership	Demonstrate California’s strength as an industry leader in college savings and college access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using PR, social media, white papers, and speaking opportunities, bring ScholarShare 529 and CalKIDS into broader conversations around the value of college, college access, how families can leverage financial resources. Audiences to include California families/prospects, 529 Industry, College Access community.
3	Brand Evolution	Refresh brand strategy based on changing consumer attitudes on higher education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execute market research to uncover consumer insights that will modernize our brand strategy and communications in 2027.
4	Cross-sell CalKIDS Claimants on ScholarShare 529	Engage CalKIDS claimants with content to spur ScholarShare 529 account openings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage 2025 LifeCents campaign learnings and financial literacy insights to inform 2026 engagement campaigns targeting CalKIDS claimant families.
5	Grow plan via Employers/RIAs	Continue to build relationships with employers (public and private) and registered investment advisors to attract new account owners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support TFI education consultants and SIB field team in gaining new partnerships. • Activate employees of partner organizations.
6	Support Tenured Account Owners	Enhance College Countdown program to serve the needs of mature account owners on the cusp of using their 529 savings. (1/3 of accounts have beneficiaries age 16+.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to leverage Patricia Roberts as site host and program promoter. • Enrich content throughout the year.

Proposed 2026 ScholarShare 529 Marketing Budget

	GOAL	TACTICS	BUDGET	SUBTOTAL	%
1	Gain New Accounts/AUM	Acquisition Advertising to Prospects, Inquirers, Account Owners	\$ 6,325,000	\$ 8,315,000	83%
		Advertising on Streaming Media	\$ 1,400,000		
		Acquisition Video Creative for Streaming Platforms	\$ 30,000		
		Incentives (529 Day 2025 (\$100,000) + Holiday 2025 (\$100,000) + BTS/CSM 2025 (\$50,000)) & Giveaways (\$50,000)	\$ 300,000		
		Social Media (SS529)	\$ 70,000		
		Fulfillment, Printing, Postage	\$ 100,000		
		Public Relations	\$ 90,000		
2	Thought Leadership	Content development and distribution	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	1%
3	Brand Evolution	Market research to uncover consumer insights	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000	1%
4	Cross-sell to CalKIDS	Content Marketing	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	1%
5	Employers	Gain new WPS Employers & Engage Employees	\$ 75,000	\$ 75,000	1%
6	College Countdown	Promote and enhance website/program	\$ 200,000	\$ 200,000	2%
7	Support Resources	Website Hosting/Analytics & Marketing Agency/Contractors	\$ 1,160,000	\$ 1,160,000	12%
	TOTAL		\$ 10,000,000	\$ 10,000,000	100%