

## NECAT Student Recruitment Campaign

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Organizations like NECAT have experienced a harder time recruiting for their programs. One explanation for this difficulty stems from COVID-19, as safety measures and fewer in person events means fewer avenues for outreach. Social media, which has been used as a tool to distribute information about resources for years, has risen to fill this gap even more drastically than before. For many smaller organizations, however, social media is still a tool with the potential to be better utilized.

Instagram, due to its huge number of daily users and the known power of photo-sharing, is an effective platform for outreach. NECAT ([@NECATBoston](#)) is already using Instagram to share insights and updates from the program and, more importantly, build an online community. The branded #WeAreNECAT hashtag, as well as the NECAT location tag (linked to the facility at 23 Bradston St. in Boston), allow those outside of the NECAT team to contribute to the NECAT narrative. Students, alumni, and community members can share their experience and, by using one of these tags (or tagging the NECAT account directly), ensure that all NECAT content shared on Instagram can be accessed from one starting place. Well-rounded and easily-accessible content helps paint an accurate picture of the program and establish credibility for potential students and donors. The NECAT Instagram page has a cohesive color scheme and a common theme (best described as pride in what they do) running through all of their posts. There's a variety of content, from student and staff spotlights to event updates and recipe videos, all of which is incredibly engaging. Instagram is NECAT's most established online platform outside of their website, and also the one with the most potential for growth.

An online platform is most effective when all of the available features are utilized. We did some qualitative analysis of how different nonprofits and Massachusetts organizations are making use of the various features on Instagram and how different strategies affect their social media presence — many of the takeaways can be applied to NECAT. The Massachusetts Nonprofit Network makes great use of the branded #ABridgeToBetter hashtag, similar to NECAT's #WeAreNECAT. They combine it, however, with other relevant hashtags that differ from post to post, like [#nonprofits](#) [#professionaldevelopment](#) and [#networking](#). Hashtags are a great way to expand your audience by increasing the reach of your posts. The Instagram Business Team has broken down the [nine types of hashtags](#) to use for your business or organization and listed [tips on how best to use them](#). Christopher's Haven, a nonprofit that provides a home and support system for kids and their families while they battle cancer, understands the importance of consistency — they don't shy away from posting about the same thing more than once. For their recent Giving Tuesday campaign, six separate posts (introducing the idea, providing fundraising updates, thanking the donors) were shared over the course of two days. This is an extreme example, but engagement (likes and comments) only increased as the posts went on. It is likely that this frequent posting aided them in reaching their fundraising goal in such a short period of time. The Greater Boston Food Bank, the East Boston YMCA, and the Women's Foundation of Boston tell great visual stories through a mix of images and text, story highlights sharing more casual content, and clean graphics respectively. Instagram stories are a great way to share text heavy content that would look unattractive

in a feed (saving to a highlight means it's just as accessible as a feed post) or casual content during events, like the East Boston YMCA exhibits [here](#). Using a "cover slide" in a carousel, the way the Women's Foundation of Boston does for all of their [informational graphics](#), allows for big bold headlines that draw people in to swipe and learn more, along with the added bonus of a cleaner looking feed. It is worth noting that too much curation can be a bad thing. The NECAT Instagram page is a genuine representation of the program, with sincere voices and a commitment to sharing honest content. Authenticity is impossible to curate, and for that reason, immensely valuable.

Unsurprisingly, recruitment for NECAT has been more challenging this past year than it has been in the past. After speaking with Jessica Williamson, the Development Manager at NECAT, we learned that NECAT hopes to benefit from a more aggressive recruiting strategy on Instagram. For the reasons discussed above, Instagram is the most practical platform for a NECAT student recruitment campaign. We have put together five separate Instagram posts in support of this recruitment aim, beginning with an alumni spotlight on Sāsha (say sha) Coleman. Sāsha has had immense success since her time at NECAT and we believe that her story is a great example of what is possible. The second post is a timeline of the program itself. It provides practical information and answers the question that readers will likely have right off the bat: "What will my time in the program actually look like?" We found that this sort of basic and easily accessible information was harder to find on the NECAT website and was missing from their Instagram. The third post showcases the experiences of two current students, Sasha and Emily. The motivation of this post is to explain that NECAT is not a one-size-fits-all program, and no two student experiences are the same. We want our audience to be able to place themselves in the shoes of current students, no matter what their individual goals and circumstances look like. The fourth post in the series highlights all of the other resources that NECAT provides. We feel that NECAT does not highlight enough all of their other programs and forms of support they provide to students along the way. Finally, we created a post that shares the steps to register for the next session of training at NECAT, in an effort to translate some of the information on the website to an accessible post for Instagram audiences.

We also decided to take a different approach to designing these posts. The majority of NECAT's posts are photos and we felt that an organization like NECAT could benefit from more infographic-type posts. We thought it would be a new way to change-up their Instagram presence, and create new forms of posts and content that can be accessed. We also felt that a lot of NECAT's posts had all of the information in the caption (rather than in the post itself) and we wanted to switch that up and create posts that actually feature information and keep the captions themselves brief.

All of the campaign posts contain a line encouraging readers to apply by accessing the application link. The most common (and only, if you are under a certain follower count) way to make a link accessible through an Instagram page is by putting the link in the bio of the account. In order to provide the application link without removing the link to donate that is currently in place, Linktree or Sprout Link can be used. Linktree is a free option that provides a landing page for an unlimited number of links. A Sprout Link, created by Sprout Social, requires a monthly fee but makes the links easier to find by linking to clickable images that mirror your posts.

We recommend that NECAT make use of the features made available to professional accounts. NECAT can change their account to a professional account by going to Settings/Account/Switch to Professional Account. This will allow NECAT to access various real-time metrics broken down into overview (accounts reached), interaction (content actions), and audience (location, age, etc.). An account label, such as “Non-Profit Organization”, which is required for professional accounts, will also make a page feel more official. If using hashtags or posting stories as discussed above, a professional account will allow you to view the “impressions” from those hashtags (i.e. how effective they are at reaching new audiences) or stories (i.e. how people interact with the content you share). This kind of data is invaluable for smaller pages that are looking to expand their reach, like [@NECATBoston](#).

NECAT has a successful Instagram account that posts engaging content. We feel that there are certain avenues NECAT can take advantage of to reach more audiences, mostly in the form of a Linktree, changing the account to a business account and by utilizing a wider range of hashtags. We hope that our posts can contribute to NECAT’s outreach efforts, and can diversify NECAT’s content.

Sāsha Coleman is a graduate of  
NECAT who has gone on to  
become a celebrated chef and  
restaurant owner.

After graduating from NECAT in 2017, Coleman joined the team at SRV Boston. In 2019, Coleman helped to open Tanám, a restaurant in Somerville owned and operated by women of color, and centered around culture, storytelling and guest experience.

The Boston Globe named Tanám “Concept of the Year,” and Eater Boston named it “Restaurant of the Year.” In 2020, Coleman received a Rising Star Chef Award.

Today, Coleman works at America's Test Kitchen and is a board member at NECAT.



“NECAT has given me the fundamentals and tools to be successfully in the culinary world. And they have the most supportive and kindest staff, I am truly so grateful to have experienced such an amazing program and community.”

- Sāsha Coleman

To get started,  
head to [ne-cat.org/apply-now](https://ne-cat.org/apply-now)