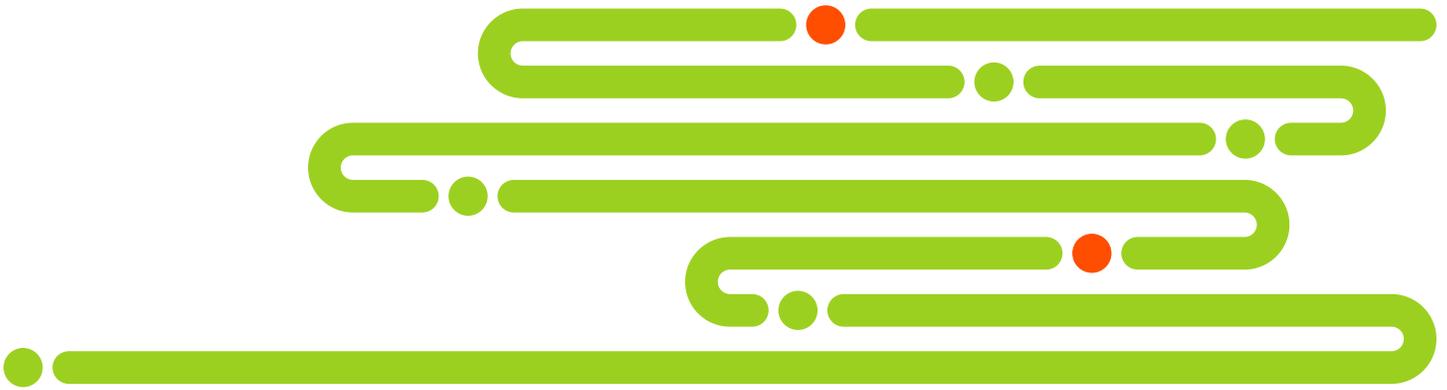


# How to optimize your workforce and transform your culture



For health care systems, the pressure is constant. Managing the ever-changing ecosystem means knowing where, when and how to staff. It's about reconciling labor costs with changing reimbursements and new payment models. Systems want to connect people and processes to help them deliver better outcomes and cost savings.

**Optimizing your workforce involves using smart data to retool your frontlines. Using new insights can yield deeper benefits. You can achieve a lower total cost of care, better patient throughput and higher patient satisfaction scores. A smarter labor utilization program brings together cost savings and quality care to every patient.**

## What are the signs it's time to improve your staffing model?

Budget misalignment and bottom-line losses are frequently the first indications of suboptimal staffing levels and inefficient patient throughput. This can occur when current staffing schedules have inaccurate or no patient data, poor processes or an outdated budget. In addition, being understaffed in key nursing areas could point to the need for better alignment of staff with workload.

## What are some of the challenges in implementing a workforce optimization project?

Implementing a smarter labor utilization program yields varied outcomes. Sometimes hospitals improve their labor utilization only to revert back to inefficient patterns because they lack the will or the skill to change. Occasionally, administrators are handed an improvement plan that lacks the implementation tools and processes required to achieve success.

Hospitals that historically achieved sustainable results use similar strategies. They collect and analyze data, employ tools, implement proven and repeatable processes and have an effective agency labor program.

## What data is needed to perform an assessment?

Detailed volume and payroll data by pay period provides the information needed to match worked hours to volume (unit of service), creating a metric to determine necessary resources for various workloads. Carefully tracking patient volume and acuity by hour illustrates when patients arrive, what their needs are and how the changing clinical landscape affects both the number of staff needed and their skill level. That information helps front-line managers determine future productivity targets, which can translate into a positive bottom-line budget figure.

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## Best practices ensure success

### 1. Require the active support, involvement and cooperation of C-suite executives, front-line managers and staff

### 2. Conduct an assessment to identify the current environment's challenges and opportunities

### 3. Use metrics to guide staffing levels

- Units of service
- Worked hours
- Patient classifications

### 4. Apply productivity metrics

- Worked hour per unit of service (WHPUOS)
- Green-red visual management boards to track performance against goal

### 5. Establish workforce tools

- Detailed process maps that graphically illustrate the transition from the old process to the new process
- Staffing grids that help front-line managers create accurate, predictive models
- Shift-management tools that track current performance and progress toward staffing targets
- Financial budget targets
- Vendor management systems for contract labor

### 6. Conduct daily huddle

- A daily interdepartmental meeting to track progress and collaboratively discuss successes, obstacles and potential opportunities

### 7. Start with phased project implementation

- Collaborate with hospital leaders to identify first areas of focus
- Roll out the project to other teams as a way to build on success

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### Why are metrics necessary to balance demand and patient capacity?

Metrics derived from detailed data analysis provide a common language for both front-line managers and C-suite executives to understand the concept of workforce alignment. Metrics help determine areas of focus, indicate opportunities for improvement, aid budget compliance and promote high-quality patient care. Important data points include department staffing levels, patient volume, care needs, length of stay and premium pay utilization.

Collecting and analyzing past statistics also yields data-based insights that enable managers to develop carefully calibrated, predictive staffing models and accurately match staffing levels to genuine workforce needs. Introducing a shift-management tool that displays the ratios of regularly scheduled staff to patients increases managers' awareness of staffing efficiency and encourages compliance. Implementing streamlined staffing practices, such as a centralized staffing office, assists in the precise, coordinated execution of established staffing plans.

### What tools can help avoid staffing shortages?

Staffing grids can proactively recommend staffing levels based on accurate census figures. They can also help identify gaps in hard-to-staff specialty departments and trigger the use of temporary labor.

When staff shortages do occur, it is critical to have a trusted partner that can help fill gaps in your staffing plan. Optimizing contract labor, while at the same time procuring properly credentialed staff, is essential. Implementing technology that verifies credentials, manages time sheets and streamlines the invoicing process for contract labor has proven beneficial for facilities across the country.

### How can you improve processes and sustain improvements?

Whether interacting with staff on the floor, actively discussing successes and barriers with front-line managers or explaining upcoming events, senior leaders must actively help create a positive attitude about the changing culture.

# Optimize your workforce around streamlined processes

Although new tools and processes play an integral role in optimizing the workforce, empowering your hospital's staff to bring attention to problems and engage in collaborative problem solving is the biggest force for positive change.

## Efficient staffing continuum



### Staffing plan

#### Determine specific resource needs by unit based on demand

- Determine drivers of workload
- Analyze performance data
- Compare to known benchmarks
- Recommend resource needs

### Scheduling

#### Develop optimal schedule plans

- Match core staff to resource needs based on fit criteria
- Schedule to volume
- Develop balanced schedules

### Supplemental staffing

#### Fill incremental needs with supplemental staff as efficiently as possible

- Optimize the sequence: per diem, internal float pool, agency, overtime
- Create a centralized staffing office
- Optimally manage contract labor



### Performance measurement and monitoring

Deploy a shift-management tool, a tracker of weekly and biweekly productivity and a stewardship program

Discussing and analyzing the data with all stakeholders in an open, transparent and positive environment communicates the same information to everyone at the same time, promotes excitement about the project and motivates change. Using the data to paint detailed pictures gets people's attention, provides graphic reinforcement and bolsters understanding and involvement.

Openly talking about scheduling gaps during hospitalwide discussions or huddles helps identify barriers or predict problems. These meetings promote mentoring, coaching and education and sensitize front-line staff to the value of creating and implementing a staffing plan that accurately matches workforce to workload. These daily work sessions—which should also be held at the department level—also help create mutual understanding and foster collaboration.

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### **Is there a universal understanding of what a workforce improvement project is designed to do?**

Organizations often associate workforce improvement initiatives with staffing reductions and layoffs. Although that is sometimes true, getting the active support, involvement and cooperation of the chief financial officer, other C-suite executives and front-line managers inspires a positive culture of accountability and engagement. With simultaneous top-down engagement by a supportive C-suite and bottom-up support by front-line managers and staff, successful change can flourish. One of the keys to success is an open, transparent and nonpunitive environment where front-line staff and managers can applaud successes and openly discuss challenges and workable solutions.



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