

Culture and Workforce Strategies to Grow Market Share

A critical access hospital, clinic, or other rural health care organization's **workforce and internal culture** play a central role in growing market share by shaping how patients experience and perceive care. This technical assistance brief examines staff interactions and workplace culture through the lens of patient choice. It also considers outmigration as a potential sign of gaps in trust or organizational alignment. Addressing these factors can strengthen patient loyalty and increase local service utilization.

How Workforce Shapes Strategies

Rural health care employees influence how patients understand and experience the organization. Every interaction can reinforce or weaken the promises made through marketing. Staff who communicate clearly, provide respectful service, and understand the organization's values help build trust and strengthen its reputation. In this way, workforce culture becomes part of the organization's marketing because patient experiences often shape future care decisions, word-of-mouth recommendations, and community perception.

Recognizing Signs of Potential Outmigration

Gaps in trust or organizational alignment can signal a greater risk of patient outmigration. Patients may seek care elsewhere when staff provide inconsistent information, service experiences do not match the organization's promises, or community concerns go unaddressed. A negative employee experience can also affect customer service, as staff frustration, poor communication, or low morale may carry into patient interactions. Monitoring employee and patient feedback, complaints, referral patterns, and patient volume can help leaders identify these gaps and respond before they weaken confidence in local care.



Staff as Brand Ambassadors

A brand ambassador is an employee who represents the organization through their words, actions, and interactions with patients and the community. While some employees may be formally designated as brand ambassadors, every employee plays a role in building and maintaining the hospital's reputation. Staff should understand key messages, know the services available, and feel prepared to answer questions or connect patients with the appropriate resources. For example, when a hospital adds a new specialist, employees should understand

the services offered, the benefits they provide to the community, and how patients can access them. Clear internal communication and training help staff share accurate information, promote local services, and strengthen trust.

Empowering Extraordinary: Ambassadors Make Excellent Spokespersons

An internal recognition campaign can highlight staff contributions while reinforcing a shared commitment to excellent service. Peer nominations, staff spotlights, and visible recognition can strengthen morale, support retention, and celebrate



Key Definitions

Workforce

All leaders, providers, business, front-end staff, support staff, and volunteers are considered a part of the organization's workforce.

Workforce Culture

Shared attitudes, behaviors, and expectations that shape how employees work and interact.

Market Share

The portion of local patients who choose an organization for care.

the people behind patient care. Recognized employees may also serve as strong ambassadors in recruitment, marketing, and community outreach by sharing authentic examples of the organization's culture and the difference staff make in the patient experience.



Developing an Insider's Guide

An insider's guide is a practical internal resource that gives staff easy access to the information they need to represent the organization consistently. It may take the form of a printed workbook, digital handbook, or shared online resource that can be updated as services, leadership, and key messages change. It should be included in onboarding and ongoing staff development

to reinforce how each employee shapes patient experience and represents the organization. The guide may include key messages, service updates, common questions, referral information, and guidance for responding to community concerns. It can also reference the organization's story and elevator pitch, which provide staff with a clear and concise way to explain who the organization is, what it offers, and why its care matters. Used consistently, the guide strengthens alignment across teams and creates a structured way for staff to share ideas that improve service and patient experience.

Growing Market Share

Market share grows when more community members choose the organization for care, complete recommended services, and return when future needs arise. Workforce and culture influence each of these decisions. When employees feel informed, supported, and connected to the organization's purpose, they are better prepared to build trust and deliver an experience that matches the organization's promises. Strong patient experiences can improve retention, generate positive word of mouth, reduce outmigration, and increase utilization of local services.

Market Share in Action

Local Services

A staff member helps a patient identify a service available locally rather than traveling elsewhere.

Effective Tools

A positive scheduling experience prevents a patient from abandoning an appointment.

Health Literacy

Clear preparation instructions increase the likelihood that a scheduled procedure is completed.

Cycle-Focused

Strong follow-up encourages patients to return for additional care.

Sharing Experiences

A positive experience leads a patient to recommend the organization to family and friends.

Addressing outmigration requires a focused approach that recognizes the workforce as a central driver of patient experience and community perception. Staff communication, engagement, and alignment influence how care is delivered and how it is viewed by those making care decisions. Strengthening these areas supports trust, reinforces confidence in local services, and helps retain patients within the community. For additional support, contact TASC at

TASC@ruralcenter.org.

Outmigration Technical Assistance Brief Series

The Technical Assistance and Services Center, in partnership with Impact! Communications, Inc., has produced a series of four technical assistance briefs that present concepts and solutions for rural health organizations to address outmigration. These briefs are informational as individual documents and as a collective. Scan the QR code to visit the National Rural Health Resource Center's outmigration resources.



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Impact! Communications, Inc. 1144 E. State Street, Suite A #287 Geneva, IL 60134

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