

Recruiter's guide to choosing a staffing agency.

For recruitment professionals who are new to hiring locum tenens providers, choosing and working with staffing agencies poses a steep learning curve. There are reputable agencies that will help you meet (and even exceed) your staffing goals. At the same time, you also need to be wary of less-than-stellar agencies that lack the ability or willingness to provide quality service.

This guide draws from the wisdom of seasoned recruitment professionals to share some of the best advice for choosing the right agency for your needs.

The unique role of a new recruiter.

Whether you are a seasoned recruitment professional or new to the role when you begin to recruit locum tenens providers, you will often inherit contracts with agencies that your predecessors have used in the past. This can be a blessing and a curse. The obvious benefit is that you will already have contracts in place

and established connections with agencies to help you carry out your staffing strategies.

The potential negative is that the contracts could be unfavorable, and the agencies could be substandard. Therefore, it is crucial to vet each agency to ensure its quality and reliability. A good place to start this process is to connect with colleagues to get their insights and perspectives.

Here are some good resources for agency recommendations:

- Referrals from colleagues
- Feedback from your staff
- Industry associations like AAPPR

Your next step is to evaluate the number of agencies you will be working with. If there are too many, cull them down to a more manageable number. This number will vary from recruitment professional to recruitment professional, but a rule of thumb for someone new to working with locum tenens is to start with two or three agencies per search. It is important to keep detailed records of any locum candidates presented to you and what agency presents them. The more agencies you are working with, the more overwhelming this can become.

Important considerations when evaluating agencies.

The process of choosing the right agency requires you to look at multiple factors. As long as you do your due diligence, you should be able to weed out the pretenders and find the top contenders for your needs. Here are some of the crucial factors.

The experience of the agency and their ability to deliver on their promises.

It is important to know how long the agency has been in business and the



size of its provider database. In order to have the versatility to meet your needs, they likely must offer multiple specialties and staff throughout the country — in both rural and urban settings.

You also must ascertain what kind of back-office infrastructure they offer. The key support to look for includes:

- Credentialing assistance
- Licensing assistance
- Travel assistance
- Housing assistance

TIP: If the representative takes more than 24-48 hours to get back with you on their numbers and how many placements they have had, they are probably inexperienced and unable to get that contact information.

Keep in mind that because your current rep is too new or not knowledgeable enough, it does not mean that the agency is not a good fit. You are looking for a qualified partner who will listen to you and be trusted to get the job done. A reputable agency

There is always a learning curve for recruitment professionals to understand what constitutes reasonable rates and margins. Recruitment professionals are often put in a crisis situation with many people calling and asking for updates on a locum search. The recruiter may be tempted to deliver quickly without fully understanding a fair price. Perhaps your predecessor did not understand fair pricing either, making it more important than ever to ask the right questions.

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The experience of the agency's representative and strength of partnership.

Relationships are key here. You will need a partner at the agency who understands your needs, your organization's needs, and the specifics of the position you are seeking to fill. Most importantly, they must be able to deliver on them. When a representative makes promises, they must be able to back them up.

For example, placing a neurologist is difficult because it is a rare and high-demand specialty. In this case, you would want to ask follow-up questions about how many neurologists have been placed in the last 12 months and where they have been placed. Rural placement versus urban placement is also an important factor. A more experienced agency and representative will not promise things they cannot deliver, damaging the relationship.

will listen to your concerns and will not hesitate to help connect you with a representative who is a better fit. You should feel comfortable expressing your concerns and even requesting a more experienced representative.

The cost of the agency.

This is an important factor, especially for non-profit health systems. But it should not be the first consideration. Suppose you can find a reputable company that delivers quality candidates. In that case, it might be worth having a conversation with the operations team at your organization regarding the budget for the locum to assess whether the organization can manage a slightly higher cost. When you have the choice between two good agencies supplying providers, you should, of course, go with the less expensive option.

Here are some proven methods for determining fair rates:

- Go to the agencies that you have a trusted relationship with and ask them to give you a range of rates
- Ask for agencies to provide you with an annual rate sheet, so you can judge whether they are in the right range
- Check-in with colleagues about their experiences
- Use the locumstory [“Trends by Specialty” tool](#)
- Use CHG Healthcare's [Locums Revenue Estimator](#)

When you know the fair range for rates, you will be better positioned to negotiate with the agency. You will also be able to provide your organization with a reasonable estimate for the cost of a locum. As you negotiate with an agency on the rates for a provider, be honest. Tell the agency what you can pay and



ask them if they can still help you fill the need. A reputable agency will help you and most likely deliver because they want you to keep coming back.

Be aware that sometimes it is the provider who will ask for much more than a fair market rate. In these cases, it has nothing to do with the agency, and they may not be able to lower the rate despite their best efforts. Then you have to decide whether or not the provider is worth it.

The quality provided.

This is an essential factor, as quality control is often lacking in the industry. There is no rating system that allows a health system or hospital to know what they are getting. And there is no database or clearinghouse that will enable recruiters to measure the quality of a candidate.

Possible issues include:

- Providers not showing up
- Providers asking for more money on the day they start
- Providers not completing their charts, so a hospital is unable to get paid

- Providers acting or dressing unprofessionally
- Providers not submitting accurate timecards

Sometimes providers are terminated for cause, and an assignment is therefore canceled. Three weeks later, you might learn that this provider is working someplace else for the same agency. It is an unfortunate situation that can occur with less reputable agencies.

Here are six strategies to help you verify a candidate's quality:

1. Calling past assignments to ask for feedback on their performance
2. Watch for red flags, such as a candidate that has worked with a large number of agencies (most stick with the same two or three)
3. Carefully interview them ahead of time
4. Ensure that the agency rep is a good partner who will not send anyone that does not meet standards
5. Ask for past evaluations on the provider from the agency
6. Get quality written into the contract

(i.e., You will not pay if the provider is behind on their charts)

Because there is no established system for tracking candidate quality, you will need to keep notes on all locums providers you bring on. Your record keeping will ensure that bad providers do not return to your facility.

Putting it all together.

Like any important task in life, you will move faster and get better results if you use a team approach when choosing which agencies to work with. Seek recommendations from colleagues and other contacts within associations such as AAPPR.

As you evaluate various agencies using the factors outlined in this guide, you will begin to recognize the qualities you are seeking. Potential red flags will also become more apparent. Draw from the experience of others in the decision-making process while also trusting your gut. As long as you have done your research, you should possess all the information you need to make an informed decision.

