



# AAPPR

ASSOCIATION FOR ADVANCING  
PHYSICIAN AND PROVIDER RECRUITMENT

*AAPPR WHITE PAPER*

# UNLOCKING SUCCESS

## The Role of Metrics in Physician Recruitment

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## Unlocking Success: The Role of Metrics in Physician Recruitment

Metrics play a pivotal role in the world of physician recruitment, providing invaluable insights to assess performance, facilitate data-driven decisions, and set benchmarks for improvement. To illuminate how data can drive success for organizations, the Association for Advancing Physician and Provider Recruiting (AAPPR), the nation's leading professional organization for physician and provider recruiters, recently looked deeper into the significance of metrics in the context of physician recruitment, emphasizing the importance of both industry data and internal data in shaping a compelling narrative. This exploration highlighted essential industry metrics that recruitment teams can employ to drive success, leveraging days to fill provider openings with data on the number of providers currently in practice and in training programs, hardest-to-fill specialties, and provider turnover. Additionally, it explores critical internal data points, such as the number of searches per recruiter, tracking the candidate waterfall, and sourcing return on investment. This paper offers guidance on harnessing these metrics to build a data-driven equation for successful physician recruitment.

Commonly used terms. We gather individual pieces of data; when we interpret that data, it becomes information. Applying our data or information as a means of measurement is a metric. Finally, establishing standards based on metrics is a benchmark.

### Metrics Magic: Because Who Says Numbers Can't Spark Joy?

In-house recruitment teams often feel misunderstood, with organizational leadership overlooking their efforts or not fully appreciating their work. If you're searching for the magic ingredient to make your work relatable, look no further than metrics!

Using numbers to explain your work sounds like an odd solution. But think of it this way: numbers are a universal language. They are consistent and provide a standardized and precise means of communication that transcends linguistic and cultural barriers. Within an organization, they can:

- Offer a quantifiable means to evaluate performance, aiding individuals, teams, and organizations in gauging their progress toward goals.
- Access to performance data encourages proactive identification of areas for improvement and fosters accountability, as specific metrics clarify responsibility for goal attainment.
- Tracking metrics over time reveals trends, aiding in the anticipation of challenges and opportunities.



- Analyzing relevant metrics facilitates data-driven decision-making, informing resource allocation and strategy adjustments.
- Metrics tied to goals enable teams to align efforts, track progress, and make necessary adjustments.
- Comparative analysis against historical data, industry benchmarks, or competitors' performance highlights strengths and areas needing improvement.
- Metrics also establish a common language for objective organizational communication, fostering transparency, trust, and efficient resource allocation.



## The Good, the Bad, and the Nonexistent

Let's be honest: getting started with data is overwhelming, especially if you're not a numbers person. You need to learn not only what data sources are most helpful but also what that data means.

Some organizations will say they don't have enough data to track metrics or benchmark their work or that their data isn't good because it is so limited. Here's the secret: even limited data can be helpful. Even a small amount of data can provide valuable insights and trends. Analyzing limited data may help you identify trends, correlations, or anomalies that can inform decision-making. However, you must know how to leverage it and carefully consider the context and objectives of your reporting.

Spreadsheets and PDFs can't do the work for you. To make data meaningful, you must first decide what story you are hoping to tell with the data or learn from the data.

### **Do you want to demonstrate how many qualified candidates you are screening for an open provider position?**

- Look at the number of candidates who have applied or been sourced against the number of candidates available nationally.

### **Are you hoping to explain to leadership why investing in a retention program is imperative?**

- Look at the number of providers who have turned over within your organization against the national data.

### **Is your recruitment team stretched thin and in need of another recruitment professional?**

- Look at the size of your team against the national averages
- Look at the number of searches per recruiter within your organization against the national averages
- Look at the cost of hiring another team member against the cost of leaving a provider position open

## Unlocking The Data: Discover Your Story!

There are two types of data for provider recruitment professionals to be mindful of. The first is industry data that reflects the national or regional market. This data establishes benchmarks across the industry to provide insight into trends, provider supply versus demand, shifts or changes in practice models, and the effectiveness of sourcing methods. The primary industry data source reported by in-house provider recruitment professionals is AAPPR's Benchmarking Report.



However, data sources on physician supply are equally important, such as the AAMC Physician Specialty Data Report[i].

It is also crucial that teams utilize internal data and identify metrics that drive and measure the performance of the recruitment team. Often, recruitment departments are viewed as non-revenue generating, and as healthcare organizations look closely at budgets, teams should constantly reinforce the value they bring to an organization. This can be done through basic tracking and data collection methods. Utilizing metrics to do this puts the work into a common language that leaders and stakeholders will understand in relation to the big picture.

In an ideal world, teams would be able to track countless data points to create metrics that drive results and performance. In reality, however, teams and resources are stretched thin, and, in many cases, they will need to prioritize the data they are tracking and select the most critical metrics. To make an informed decision about what metrics to prioritize, the first question to ask is what story you are trying to tell.

Focusing on what story you are trying to tell with the data and why that story matters will help teams determine which data points to prioritize.

## Decoding the Data Dilemma

There are numerous data points recruitment teams can look at nationally that will help them create metrics that make a difference in their efforts and tell a compelling story to leadership and stakeholders. For the purposes of this report, we will focus on three standard metrics that help organizations strategize by telling a compelling story.

**Days to Fill Provider Openings:** Time is critical when organizations are searching for providers to mitigate the downstream effects of the vacancy, including access to care, lost revenue, and the additional strain placed on other providers in the practice. Being aware of the national trends and days-to-fill metrics can help recruitment teams strategize their search efforts and manage the expectations of organizational leadership. Additionally, days to fill data can help leadership develop a staffing plan and determine whether hiring a locum tenens provider would be necessary.

According to the latest AAPPR Benchmarking Report (published October 2023), the median was 130 days to fill the typical physician search and 72 days for an Advanced Practice Provider (APP) search. Breaking that down further, it took slightly longer to fill typical specialty care physician positions versus primary care openings, while surgical provider searches took the longest to fill.

Looking solely at days to fill only tells part of the story. Defining and tracking the hiring stages for each position within your organization is also essential. For example, a large academic medical center hiring a surgeon specializing in oncology may take much longer to hire a provider than a community-based primary care practice seeking a family medicine physician.

In the case of the academic medical center, they may be able to quickly source a qualified candidate who shares the same vision and values as the organization. However, the interview process may be lengthy and include meetings with stakeholders in several departments – surgery, oncology, and administration, to name a few. Additionally, because this position requires teaching, the candidate may be asked to present at Grand Rounds. In the case of a community-based practice hiring a family medicine physician, it may take them longer to source a candidate who would be an ideal fit for the practice. However, once the candidate has been identified, they could move them through the interview process quicker since the interviews would most likely be contained to the practice and one or two key administrators.

As this example illustrates, in order for data to be valuable, it is vital to continually revisit the story you want the data to tell and to ask whether you have all the metrics needed to tell an accurate story. In the case of days to fill, while median national averages are helpful, they only tell a piece of the story. To have a meaningful conversation around this metric, tracking and incorporating other data points internally is essential. In the next section, we will detail important internal data points for organizations, including the candidate waterfall, where we will explore these data points in more detail.

**Hardest to Fill Specialties:** Alongside days to fill, it is important for recruitment teams also to be aware of which specialties are the most difficult to fill. Hard-to-fill positions may require additional sourcing resources and efforts. They may also see fewer candidates applying for positions, making it essential that organizations maximize their efforts for qualified candidate interviews. The 2023 AAPPR Benchmarking Report found that Urology searches took the longest median time to fill at 344 days, while Anesthesia openings filled the fastest at a median of 39 days.

The data tells a compelling story when we look at these two specialties, Urology and Anesthesia, in terms of the number of active physicians reported to the AAMC in 2021. Of the 48 specialties reported, Urology was 20th, with 10,081 physicians actively practicing. In the same report, Anesthesiology 6th with 42,264 active physicians[ii].



It has been noted that organizational leadership is increasingly interested in metrics that predict the future. To the extent that recruitment professionals can, it is important to be mindful of how physician residency and fellowship programs are growing or contracting since this will impact the future supply of physicians. The American Medical Association hosts FREIDA<sup>[iii]</sup>, an online tool that allows you to search for a residency or fellowship accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), which details the number of applicants applying to programs, the number accepted, and the number of unfilled slots.

**Provider Turnover:** The cost of replacing a physician can be in tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars. Furthermore, we are in an incredibly competitive job market, so organizations must prioritize retaining providers. According to the 2023 AAPPR Benchmarking survey, provider turnover has increased over the past several years, reaching 11% for APPs and 8% for physicians. Using this metric, teams can analyze the turnover in their organizations to see how they measure up to national benchmarks. In cases where there is higher turnover than the national average, organizations may want to strategize a more robust retention strategy or explore whether the providers they are hiring are indeed the right fit for the organization and community.



In 2022, AAPPR published a white paper entitled *Increased Provider Turnover and Inadequate Retention Programs Spotlight Industry Volatility and Challenges Ahead for Health Care Organizations*, where we reported on the urgent need for organizations to address the physician and APP turnover challenge with fresh retention strategies and more significant commitment and intention. Among the common drivers, the paper cited inadequate support staff, providers not feeling that they have a voice in decisions, and burnout.

Many factors related to physician turnover and retention are beyond the control of recruitment professionals, but one is easily within their reach – tracking and measuring the reason for turnover. Only by objectively understanding the rate of turnover and its causes can recruitment professionals and their senior executive teams work together to create retention strategies that will shift the tide in their favor, and that starts with collecting and analyzing the data.

Similarly, teams can use numerous internal data points to ensure they are positioned to be efficient, effective, and successful. Among the most important include the number of searches per recruiter, the metrics that make up the candidate waterfall, and the return on investment for the tools being utilized by the recruitment teams.

**Number of Searches per Recruiter:** Sourcing, interviewing, hiring, and onboarding new providers require a high level of personal attention on each candidate in a recruitment professional's pipeline. Therefore, recruitment professionals must have sufficient time to give each candidate adequate attention at every step of the process. Unsurprisingly, in a market where provider retirements and turnover are outpacing hiring, the median number of searches per recruiter has increased over the last three years (2020 – 2022) from 29.6 to 40, according to the 2023 AAPPR Benchmarking Report.

However, because of the nature of the work recruitment professionals do, even a slight increase in the number of searches reflects a significant increase in a recruiter's workload. This can lead to a lack of attention to detail on individual searches and, ultimately, to recruiter burnout and turnover. It is crucial for organizations to be mindful of the number of searches recruiters are carrying and to address team staffing needs accordingly.

**The Candidate Waterfall:** The candidate waterfall is a systematic and sequential approach to managing candidates as they move through various stages of the recruitment process, from sourcing to hiring. The steps in the waterfall include sourcing, initial phone screens, hiring manager screens, interviews, and finally offers.



Accurately tracking metrics within the candidate waterfall helps teams identify more specific information and identify potential resolvable bottlenecks within an organization's internal process. Among the metrics that teams should be tracking are:

- Number of new applicants
- Source of new applicants
- Time between application and initial phone screen
- Number of initial phone screens
- Time between initial phone screen and hiring manager phone screen
- Number of hiring manager screens
- Time between hiring manager phone screens and interviews
- Number of candidate interviews
- Time between candidate interview and offers
- Number of offers
- Reason(s) for candidate declination
- Time from offer to signed contract (hire)

In addition, tracking the time between when a candidate signs their contract and when they can start clinically is critical for organizations to ensure that there are no unnecessary bottlenecks in the credentialing and onboarding phases of recruitment.

**Sourcing Return on Investment:** Sourcing provider candidates can be a costly endeavor. Sourcing platforms can be expensive, and the cost of placing ads on websites can quickly add up. To maximize budgets and ensure that sourcing efforts yield results, it is important to track where candidates are going to seek openings. The 2023 AAPPR Benchmarking Report data showed that the primary method for filling searches was the organization's website, followed by referrals and internet job boards. While the order has changed, these sourcing methods have consistently been the top three since 2019. The good news for recruitment teams is the cost of maintaining a robust and easy-to-use organizational website is relatively minimal. While referral programs can have a heftier price tag, data shows that providers hired through referrals typically stay longer and are a better fit for organizations, making the investment worthwhile.



## Building the Equation

While tracking days to fill, hardest-to-fill specialties, turnover, recruiter search load, metrics within the candidate waterfall, and sourcing ROI are important; teams can use countless other metrics to tell their data story.

Regardless of which metrics your team chooses to use, keep in mind the following tips to help manage your data:

- Determine the story you want your data to tell and select the metrics accordingly.
- Make it an organizational priority or at least ensure you have commitment from everyone on the recruitment team to stay current with data inputs.
- Maintain consistency in your terminology to be sure it aligns with industry or market benchmarking.
- Make sure all stakeholders agree that this is the data you need to collect and/or that they want to see.
- Consider what data will allow you to benchmark locally, regionally, and nationally.
- Consider the ability to compare data sets and how to do that most effectively.

Remember, data plus clear goals will lead to alignment – your ultimate equation for success.

## AAPPR'S RESEARCH AGENDA

As a core component of AAPPR's mission to impact health care access through education, research, and the elevation of the physician and provider recruitment industry, the association makes significant financial and time commitments to ensuring that this industry has the most relevant benchmarks and insights needed. AAPPR's research agenda is designed to identify those most critical areas of research needs impacting the physician and provider recruitment profession over a five-year period. In alignment with the organization's newest strategic goals to contribute its knowledge to the broader healthcare landscape, to engage members with networking, growth, and adaptable solutions, to build a community of members who can bring hiring and retention diversity knowledge to their organizations, and attract a diverse industry representation, AAPPR will identify those high priority topics and emerging issues of importance that assist leaders in solving the range of provider recruitment problems and challenges they face.

## RESEARCH PRIORITY AREAS

### I. Factors impacting the length of days to fill physician and provider positions, as well as days to start

This priority area will go beyond the basic benchmark of number of days to fill (defined as the difference between the date a search was initiated and the date a contract was signed), a common industry metric, and examine the 10 factors that play a role in completing that search and when a physician or provider starts their first day.

### II. Making the business case for in-house recruitment, onboarding and retention teams

This priority area includes an examination of factors impacting a healthcare organization's return on investment (ROI) for its internal recruitment team dedicated to the unique needs of physicians and provider recruitment, onboarding and where appropriate, retention. This area will examine the various reporting structures, alternatives to or expansion of internal teams, and the financial impacts of growth vs replacement positions and lengths of search and start times.



## Conclusion

In the realm of physician recruitment, metrics are the linchpin that connects data to performance, enabling healthcare organizations to make informed decisions, set benchmarks, and optimize their resource allocation strategies. AAPPR believes that data driven decision making requires an organization's commitment throughout its leadership and staff. By harnessing the power of metrics, both industry data and internal data, recruitment teams can build compelling narratives that facilitate success and drive excellence in the ever-evolving field of physician recruitment. Whether you are tracking days to fill, hardest-to-fill specialties, turnover, recruiter search load, recruitment staffing, sourcing ROI, or many other metrics, the key lies in knowing what story you want your data to tell and selecting the right metrics to convey that narrative. This data-driven equation will guide your team toward achieving its goals, promoting accountability, and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the physician recruitment process.

## Sources

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- iii. Table 1.2. Number of Active Physicians in the Largest Specialties by Major Professional Activity, 2021 and Figure 1.2. Number of Active Physicians in the Largest Specialties by Major Professional Activity, 2021
- iv. "Tools to Help You." FREIDA, [freida.ama-assn.org/](https://freida.ama-assn.org/). Accessed 25 Oct. 2023.



## About AAPPR

The Association for Advancing Physician and Provider Recruitment (AAPPR) is a nationally recognized leader in health care provider recruitment, onboarding, and retention. For more than 30 years, AAPPR has empowered physician and advanced practice provider recruitment leaders to transform care delivery in their communities by providing best-in-class practices, up-to-date industry knowledge, and evolving innovative approaches for hiring, onboarding, and retaining exceptional clinical talent.



To learn more or to become an organizational member of AAPPR, please visit [aappr.org/join-now](https://aappr.org/join-now).

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