



# Recruiting Nurses is Harder Now than at Onset of Pandemic



*HRO Today* Flash Reports are a series of ongoing research initiatives that address today's topics of interest in the HR community. These are focused briefs that can be used to support business decisions and further discussion among industry practitioners and thought leaders.

This report examines the changing difficulty of hiring nurses over the last 12 months, steps taken to manage the requisition volume of nurses, and the effectiveness of various sources of nursing candidates.

This study was sponsored by **Personify**.

## Methodology

Between March 9 and April 5, 2022, a series of emails were sent to subscribers of *HRO Today* magazine and *HRO Today* newsletters inviting them to take part in an online study. Study respondents were senior HR practitioners in the healthcare field who were familiar with nurse recruitment practices in their organizations. Respondents were screened to ensure they employed nurses full time. The total number of usable surveys was 50 and respondents were from North America.

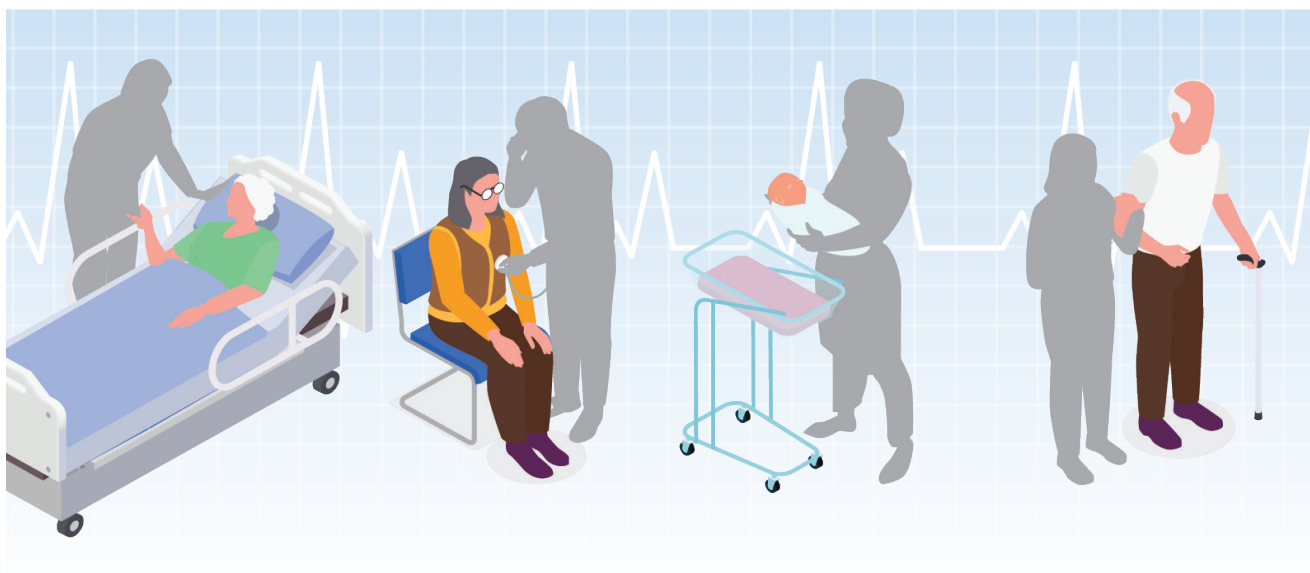
## Introduction

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic began, it was no secret that the healthcare industry faced enormous nursing shortages—a challenge healthcare organizations and staffing companies have been struggling to solve since. The coronavirus crisis put a new focus on the acute need to recruit nurses.

Some of the factors that have affected the supply and demand of nursing candidates have included:<sup>1</sup>

- aging baby boomers in need of more medical services.
- a significant percentage of nurses nearing retirement age; and
- bottlenecks in nursing education constraining the talent pipeline.

Given these factors, to what extent have recruiters experienced changes in the difficulty of hiring nurses throughout the pandemic? And how effective are the steps being taken to handle the requisition volume of nurses?



## Conclusions



**Recruiting nurses now is harder than at the start of the pandemic.** Recruiters concur that it has become more difficult to hire nurses over the

last 12 months than in prior years. Overall, 87% indicated greater difficulty, with two-thirds of that group indicating that their difficulty increased greatly.



**Hiring metrics reflect difficulty in nurse recruiting.**

Time-to-fill has increased far more than any other recruitment measure over the last 12 months, while the average number of registered nurse (RN) requisitions a recruiter can fill and the number of filled positions both declined. Asking current RN staff to cover more shifts is the most common solution, though the practice is a short-term fix.



**Sourcing nursing candidates has become a challenge.**

The only recruitment source with a better than mediocre rating was employee referrals, which can reduce time to hire, often improve quality of hire, and reduce cost-per-hire. In contrast, job postings on traditional job boards, such as Indeed, CareerBuilder, and Monster, and social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook were less successful.



**Use of outsourcing for RN recruiting will increase.** Nearly three times as many healthcare organizations feel they are more likely to outsource RN recruiting

over the next 12 months than feel they are less likely (32% versus 12%, respectively).



**Increased recruitment marketing spend is the strategy undertaken most often to handle requisition volume.** According to nearly

three-quarters (71%) of respondents, recruiters have been forced to increase their investment to attract top candidates.



**The most likely service that could be outsourced to an RPO provider is social media planning.** Social media is a channel seen by many as a

comparably inexpensive way to reach a larger recruiting pool, but the expertise and hours needed to maximize its potential are often lacking among internal recruiting teams. Over half (55%) of respondents indicate that they plan to outsource their social media marketing to an RPO provider.



**Applicant quality is ranked as the most important key performance indicator (KPI).**

The time-to-source/time-to-fill metric was ranked as second most important. Rounding out the top three is candidate experience satisfaction.

## DETAILED FINDINGS:

## Number of Nurses Employed Full Time

*How many RNs do you currently employ full time?*

Study participants were asked to select the range that included the number of RNs they employ full time. Results were polarized, with nearly one-quarter (23%) indicating 100 or fewer, while 23% indicated 2,001 or more. The average number of RNs employed was 970.

There are almost 3.2 million RNs and 950,000 licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and licensed vocational nurses (LVNs) in the United States. Over 325,000 nurse practitioners (NPs) are licensed in the United States and comprise 30% of hospital employment.<sup>2</sup>

Number of Full-Time RNs Employed	TOTAL
1–100	23%
101–250	6%
251–500	6%
501–1,000	20%
1,001–2,000	14%
2,001+	23%

## How Difficulty in Hiring Nurses Has Changed

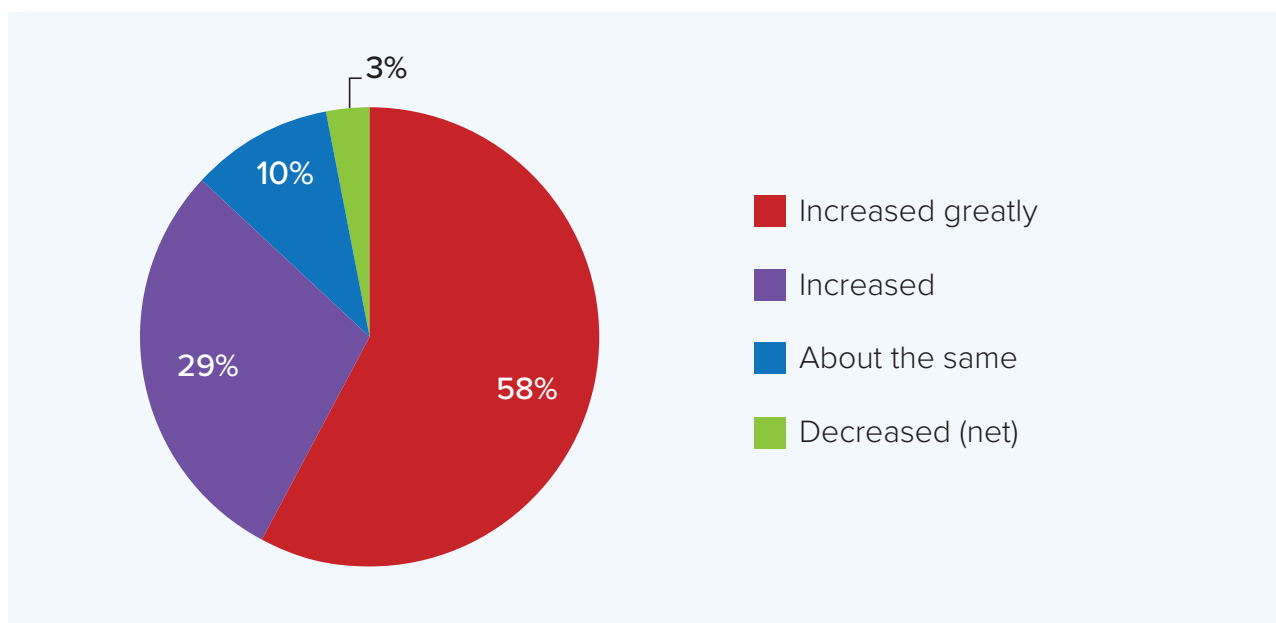
*How has your difficulty in hiring nurses changed over the last 12 months?*

Respondents were asked to rate the extent of their difficulty hiring nurses in the last 12 months on a scale of one to five, with one meaning that the difficulty decreased greatly and five meaning that it increased greatly. Overall, 87% indicated

an increase, with most (58%) indicating that their difficulty increased greatly.

With the number of nursing jobs expected to increase at a rate of 7% (faster than all other occupations), competition for nurses is likely to increase. Nurse recruiters will not find relief from the competition for talent in the foreseeable future.<sup>3</sup>

### How Difficulty in Hiring Nurses Has Changed



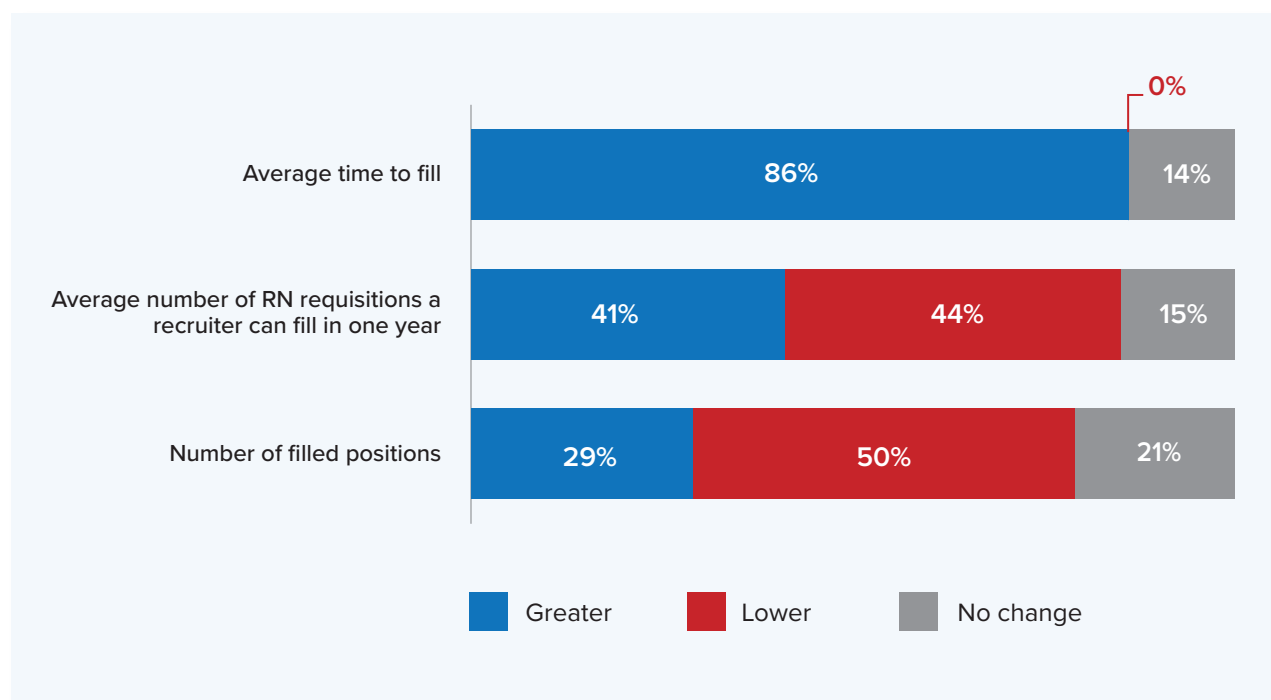
## Changes in Recruiting Metrics

*Please indicate how each of the following metrics has changed over the past 12 months.*

Study participants were shown three recruiting metrics and asked to indicate the direction of change over the prior 12 months. The metric that increased for the greatest percentage (86%) of respondents is average time-to-fill.

In comparison to the increase in average time-to-fill, the average number of RN requisitions a recruiter can fill in one year declined for 44% of organizations, while the number of filled positions declined for 50%. If it takes longer to fill a role, than the number of requisitions a recruiter can fill will drop alongside the number of filled positions.

### Changes in Recruiting Metrics



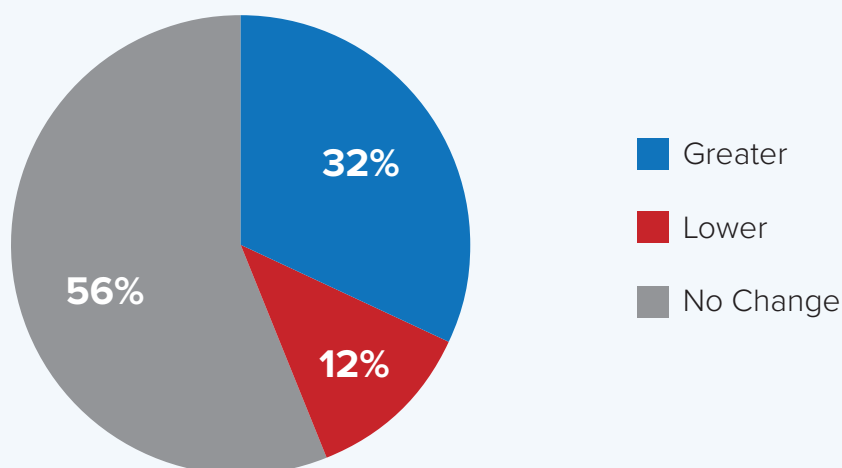
## Likelihood to Outsource RN Recruiting

*Please indicate how each of the following metrics has changed over the past 12 months.*

Nearly three times as many healthcare organizations feel they have become more likely to outsource RN recruiting over the last 12 months than less likely, at 32% versus 12%, respectively.

More healthcare organizations will look externally for recruiting support to meet the demand for nurses, taking advantage of the added capacity, recruiting expertise, and flexibility an external recruiting agency can offer.

### Likelihood to Outsource RN Recruiting



## Actions Taken to Handle Extreme Requisition Volume Demands

*What steps do you take to handle requisition volume when it exceeds the maximum capacity of your internal recruiting teams?*

Respondents were asked to identify the actions they've take to handle requisition volume when it exceeds the capacity of their internal recruiting teams.

The strategy undertaken the most is increasing recruitment marketing spend, as indicated by 71% of respondents. Recruiters have been forced to use a larger funnel to get the candidates they need and increasing spend is part of that effort.

The time-to-fill open requisitions has also increased because of the added demand, consistent with earlier findings. In the short-term, asking current RN staff to cover more shifts is a common solution

to meet patient needs. But staff burnout can occur quickly, negatively impacting patient care.

Another action taken by at least 50% of organizations is to hire travel nurses. Again, this is often seen as a temporary solution, as they can be expensive and not as familiar with hospital protocols as permanent nursing staff.

Travel nurses usually earn somewhat higher salaries than staff nurses. While nurses earn an average of \$78,559 per year, travel nurses earn an average of \$108,342 per year. They also receive tax-free benefits for lodging and travel when they are living away from their home state. Healthcare facilities or staffing agencies may offer other incentives to travel nurses as well, especially during times of high demand.<sup>4</sup>

### Actions Taken to Handle Extreme Requisition Volume Demands





## Likelihood of Outsourcing Services to an RPO Provider

*How likely are you to outsource each of the following services to a third-party recruitment process outsourcing provider?*

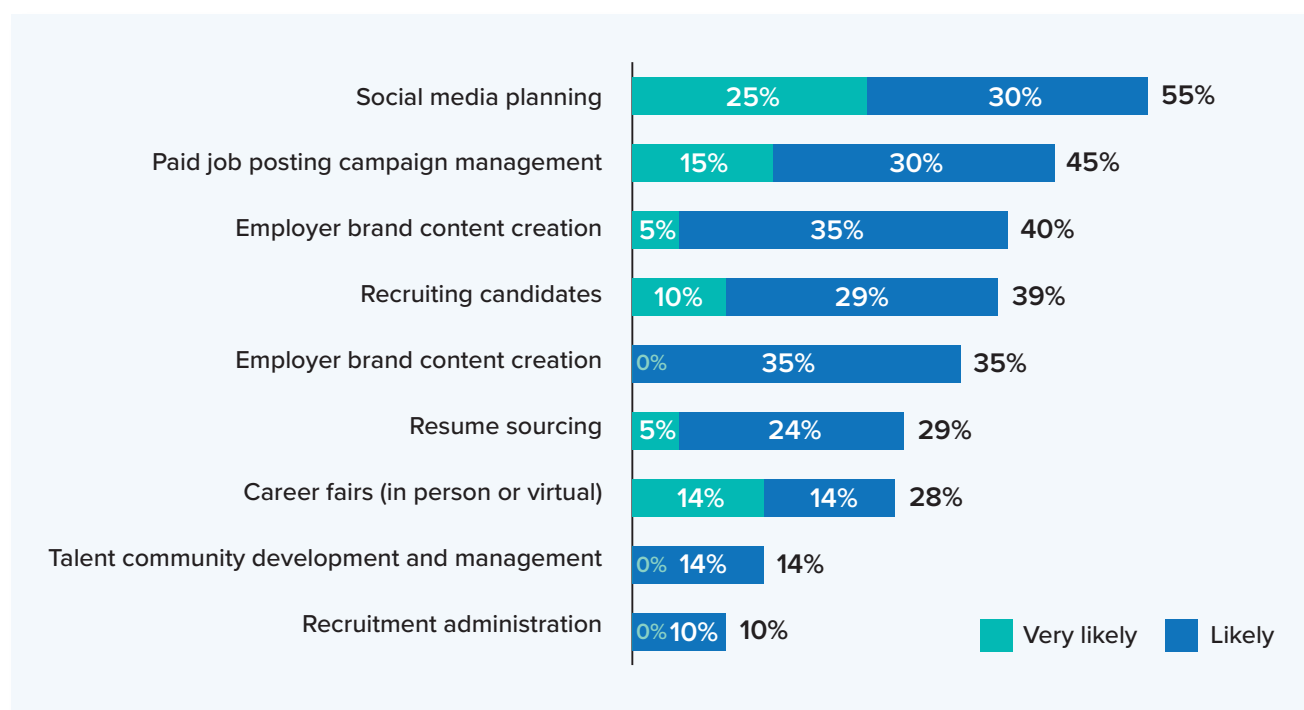
Study participants were presented with a list of nine different services that could be outsourced to an RPO provider. The most likely service outsourced was social media planning, as indicated by 55% of respondents. Social media is a channel seen by many as a relatively inexpensive way to reach a larger recruiting pool, but the expertise and hours needed to maximize its potential are often lacking among internal recruiting teams.

Paid job posting campaign management is another area of recruiting where many organizations are looking to RPO providers for guidance, as

45% expressed it would be very likely or likely they would outsource the service. Job posting campaign management includes the day-to-day strategy, reporting, analysis, and optimization of campaigns.

Employer brand content creation was a service likely to be outsourced by 40% of respondents. An employer brand influences the recruitment of new employees, the retention and engagement of current employees, and the overall perception of the organization in the market. How companies have positioned themselves in the job marketplace because of the policies enacted during the pandemic could dictate their success in attracting key talent in coming years.<sup>5</sup>

### Likelihood to Outsource Services to an RPO Provider



## Recruitment KPIs in Order of Importance

*Please rank the following recruitment KPIs below in importance, with one being the most important and eight being the least important.*

Respondents were asked to rank eight key performance indicators in order of importance to them in their recruiting practices. Applicant quality was ranked as the most important KPI. Registered nurses need to pass the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) and complete an accredited nursing school program.<sup>6</sup> Beyond education, there are the qualities that make a good nursing candidate, such as caring, communication skills, empathy, attention to detail, stamina, and many more.<sup>7</sup>

The time-to-source/time-to-fill metric was ranked as second most important. Prior survey results have

shown that this area has been under considerable duress since the onset of the pandemic.

The third most highly ranked KPI was candidate experience satisfaction. Given the extremely tight labor market, particularly for RNs, it is essential that the experience of bringing them into the organization is smooth, quick, and as easy as possible. A poor candidate experience can cause employers to lose quality candidates during the interview process, as well as portray the employer in a poor light at the onset of the relationship, which can impact retention.

Social media engagement was ranked as the least important KPI, though previously it was reported as the most likely to be outsourced. Nurse recruiters do not know how to optimize this area.

Recruitment KPIs in Order of Importance	RANK
Applicant quality	1
Time-to-source /Time-to-fill	2
Candidate experience satisfaction	3
Hiring manager satisfaction	4
Applicant-to-offer acceptance rate	5
Cost-per-hire	6
Direct source fill percentage	7
Social media engagement	8

## Effectiveness of Candidate Sources

### *How effective do you find each of the following sources of candidates?*

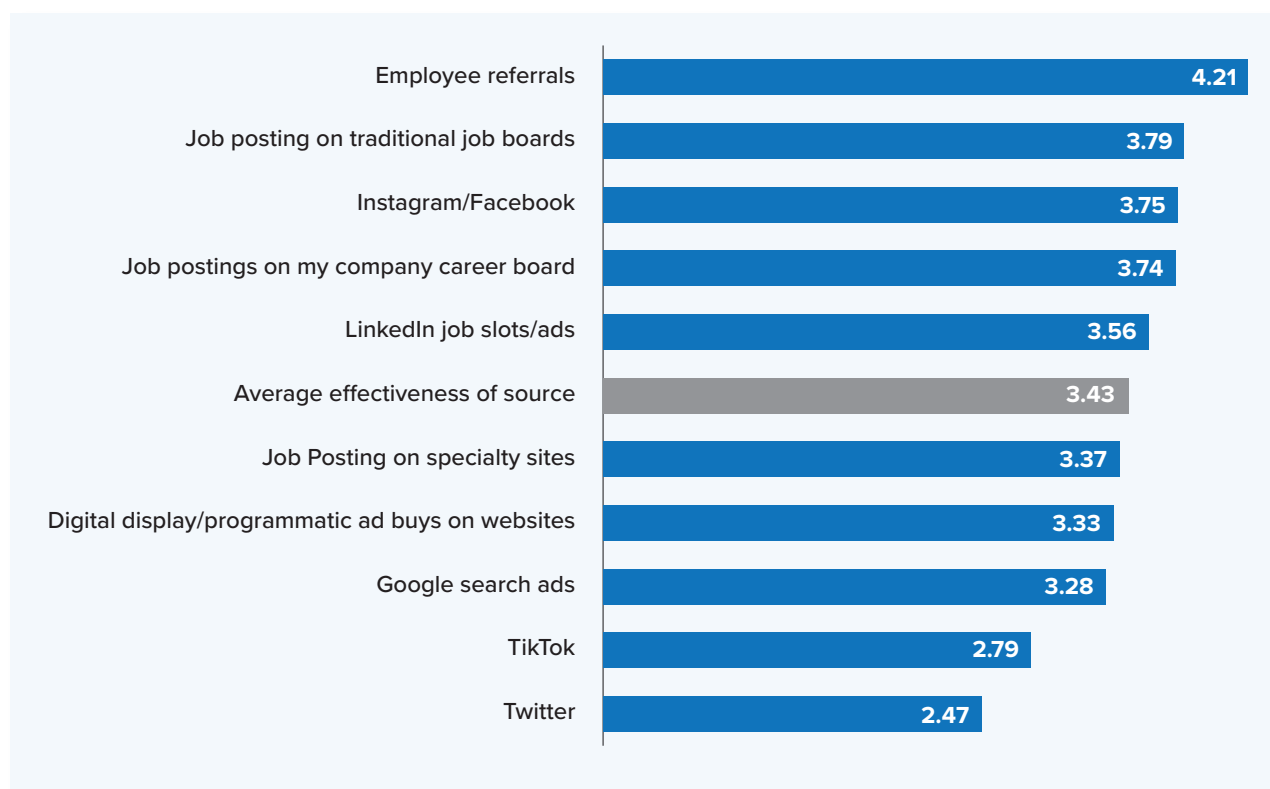
Study participants were asked to rate how effective 11 different sources of nursing candidates were on a scale of one to five, with one being very ineffective and five being very effective. Overall average effectiveness of the sources examined was a mediocre 3.4.

The only source with a rating of higher than 4.0 was employee referrals. Referrals reduce time to hire, often improve quality of hire, reduce cost-per-hire, and boost retention rates.<sup>8</sup>

The next three highest sources are rated very similarly – job postings on traditional job boards, such as Indeed, CareerBuilder, and Monster; Instagram/Facebook; and job postings in career boards were rated between 3.7 to 3.8, all quite unexceptional.

Interestingly, job posting on specialty sites, which includes state nursing boards, Nurse.com, nurserecruiter.com, and others was below average in terms of effectiveness.

### Average Effectiveness of Candidate Sources



## Resources Leveraged to Deliver RN Hiring Needs

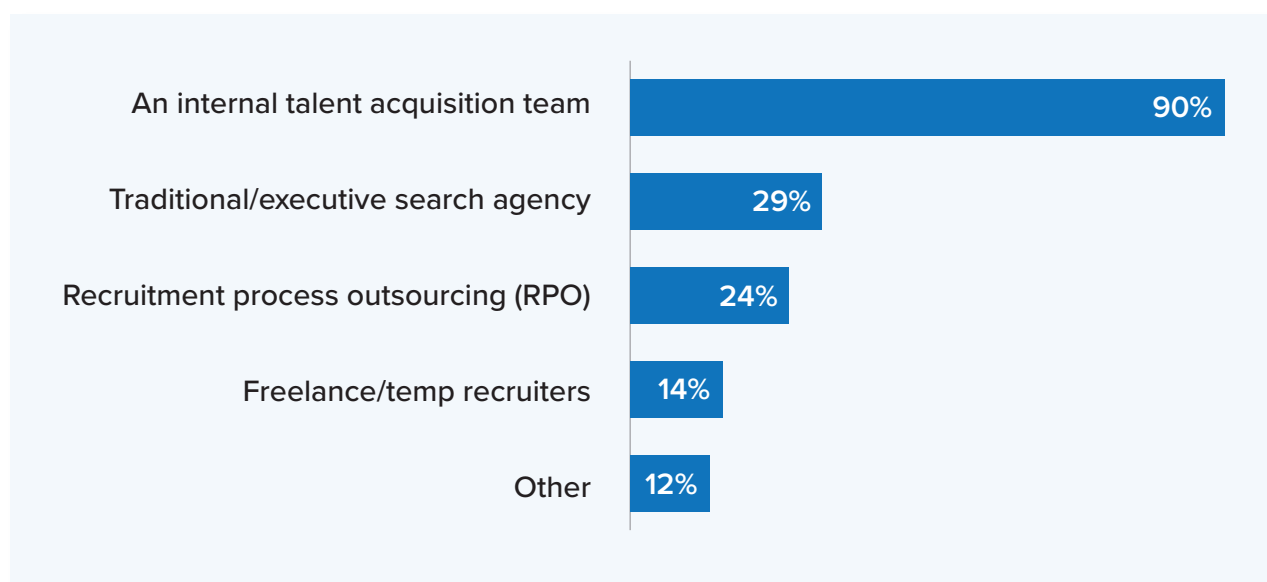
*Lastly, which of the following resources do you currently leverage to deliver on your RN hiring needs?*

Respondents were shown a list of resources and asked to identify those they use to deliver on RN hiring needs. Virtually every (90%) respondent uses an internal talent acquisition (TA) team. Given that the average number of RNs employed in our study

sample approached 1,000, the necessity for an internal TA team is obvious.

Given the demands for RN even prior to the pandemic, it is somewhat surprising that more external sources for recruiting are not being used. Traditional/executive search teams are used by only 29% of organizations, with just under one-quarter (24%) using an RPO service provider. ■

### Resources Leveraged to Deliver RN Hiring Needs





## Notes

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