



GUIDE

Getting Started With the Gig Economy as a Flexible Employer

Overview

Healthcare leaders have struggled with staffing challenges and burnout for years, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a shift in the labor market caused by a change in worker preferences and expectations is challenging many leaders to explore alternative staffing models as a workforce solution.

Traditional staffing models are often too rigid to meet today's unpredictable demands. When patient volumes spike, such as during flu season, hospitals can quickly become short-staffed, with limited options to fill shifts. Internal float pools may be maxed out, and even the best staffing partners may require lead time to fill shifts.

Increasingly, organizations are turning to gig platforms (technology designed to support gig work in healthcare) to bring in credentialed professionals for short-term assignments, offering a faster, more flexible way to maintain care quality and support core staff. Gig work is no longer a novel trend — and the agility it offers helps meet a growing appetite for flexible work among healthcare workers while making it easier to quickly staff.



Gig Economy: A labor market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs.

In the U.S., there are currently 70 million gig workers finding contract jobs through gig platforms such as Upwork, Uber, DoorDash, Task Rabbit and more. To be clear, the nature of the work done in the typical gig economy is different from the work done in healthcare, which has a unique set of barriers to gig employment. With the varying complexities of healthcare staffing and the different policies within every healthcare organization, there is not one model for supporting a flexible workforce that will fit all.

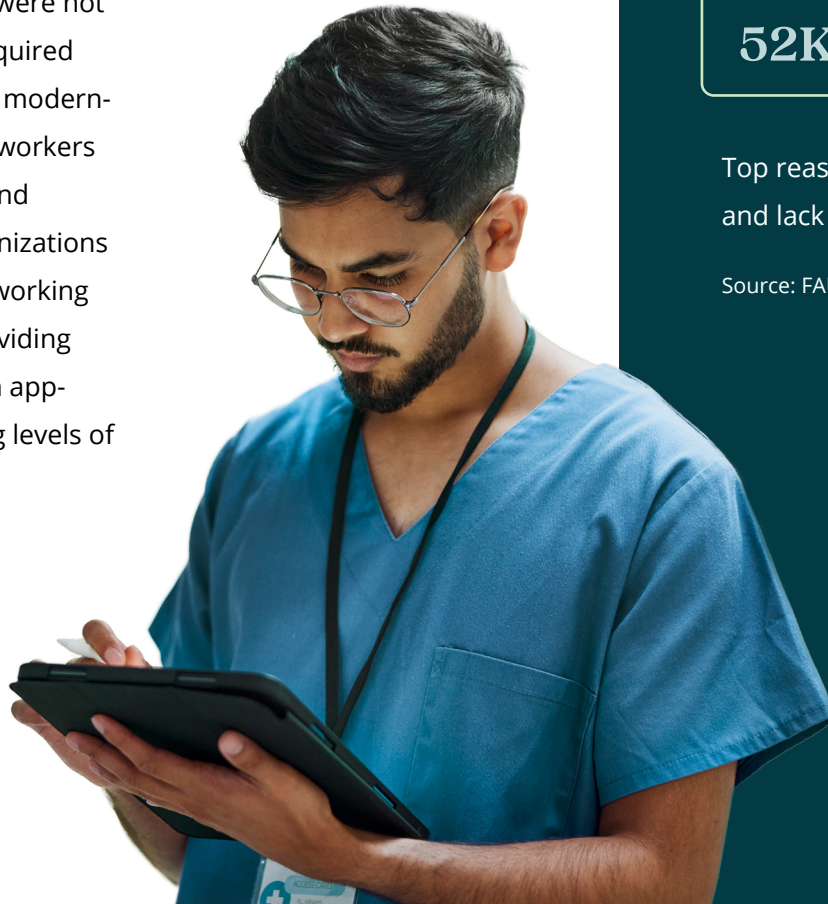
But with the rise in technology available to healthcare systems, it's never been easier to launch a hybrid workforce model that blends full-time, part-time and gig workers.

This guide offers a framework for how health systems can get started with the gig economy by reimagining their internal resource pool and engaging the local gig workforce.

Building the Case for a Flexible Workforce

To address staff vacancies and increasing patient loads, many health systems have become heavily reliant on premium contract labor. Designed as a stop-gap solution, the use of contract labor as a long-term strategy is unsustainable for health systems. In order to effectively compete for talent and retain staff today, healthcare employers are seeking alternative workforce solutions.

One emerging workforce solution is to engage gig workers who wish to earn extra income by providing on-demand services. The healthcare industry was one of the earliest adopters of the gig economy with per diem and registry nurses in float pools. While traditional float pool models were not tech-enabled and typically required higher FTE commitment than modern-day gig employment, today's workers have different expectations and preferences. Healthcare organizations must lean into a new way of working and engaging workers by providing flexibility and control through app-based technology and varying levels of employment commitment.



State of the Healthcare Workforce

65% of nurses report high stress and burnout in 2025.

1 in 3 nurses are considering leaving the profession entirely.

193K jobs will be opened per year through 2032, but this falls far short of offsetting losses from retirements and turnover.

52K The average cost of RN turnover

Top reasons for leaving are insufficient staffing, inadequate pay and lack of leadership support.

Source: FAU, McKinsey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, AACN



Getting started with the gig economy allows health systems to build a sustainable workforce model that meets their clinical, operational and financial goals.

Clinical Outcomes:

Develop an additional layer of resources for excellent patient care.

Building a flexible pool of internal resources and local gig workers allows a health system to adjust resources to census demand and unexpected call offs. Leveraging a flexible resource pool in turn allows the systems to minimize mandatory overtime and reduce burnout. Healthcare worker burnout contributes to decreased patient satisfaction, poor patient outcomes, decreased nurse performance and increased medication errors.

Operational Outcomes:

Improved recruitment and retention with alternate employment opportunities.

Becoming a flexible employer appeals to the lifestyle expectations of workers who desire more control over their schedules. Retain the vast clinical experience of workers on the verge of retirement, attract workers from neighboring health systems looking to earn extra income or recruit wanderlusts transitioning from travel nursing. A flexible workforce can help organizations increase their labor pools by accommodating a wide variety of lifestyle choices.

Financial Outcomes:

Reduce premium labor costs with strategic resource management.

On-demand clinical labor platforms can prioritize your internal resource pool to fill open shift needs before engaging local gig workers or agency resources. Technology can systematically consider instances where core staff overtime and incentives cost the health system more than using an external resource. Having a flexible pool based on internal and external resources ensures good financial stewardship by balancing overall cost with resource type.

Framework to Building a Flexible Workforce

In the past, operationalizing flexible programs was challenging due to a lack of sufficient technology to support them, which limited programs' scope and size. Instead, hospitals relied on traditional models that made it difficult for organizations to fully reap the benefits of flexibility.

But now, you can use technology to quickly engage with gig workers and make scheduling and filling open shifts more manageable and more efficient.

It takes a combination of technology, strategies and best practices to overcome healthcare's workforce challenges. Whether you are building your resource pool from scratch or revamping your current pool with gig workers, the following guidance will help provide a framework.

Framework to Building a Flexible Workforce



Dig into the Data

Every organization and market operates differently, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to staffing. The right solution considers the unique needs of an organization.

Start by analyzing your hospital census, staffing plans, budgets and payroll data by unit. You may find that using gig workers can sometimes be more cost-effective than full-time employees. This is especially true when factoring in overtime, benefits and incentive pay — which can make gig labor a financially viable option for covering fluctuations in patient volume or hard-to-fill shifts.

Using this data, you can figure out how many flexible staff you need based on core staffing levels. It also helps predict future staffing needs by unit, so you can create a plan that matches demand.

Things to Consider:

- Are there certain times of the year when the census is considerably higher?
- How much variation does the unit experience daily or weekly?
- Are staff working to their fully budgeted hours?
- Do you have multiple scheduling/staffing policies for each facility or unit? Is there overlap or redundancies?
- What are you currently spending on OT and incentives?
- What percentage of your workforce is comprised of external supplemental labor?
- What is your total spend on internal employees (including pay, OT, shift differentials, incentives, operational costs) versus external resources (agency per diem)?



Fill and Refill the Funnel

Recruitment in this competitive labor market is no easy task — even for gig positions that may appeal to what today's workers are looking for. Developing an appropriate employment structure, sourcing strategy and support team is essential to attracting and retaining gig workers. Many app-based solutions make promises to connect health systems with local talent, but they do not always have an adequate talent pool or provide recruitment support.

Healthcare systems must also scrutinize the fine print with app-based staffing solutions that provide 1099 workers introducing co-employment, misclassification, insurance and compliance risks to the health system. Health systems must not overlook having the appropriate infrastructure for ongoing recruitment needs and support of gig workers while employed at your health system. Having a supportive environment and providing community and professional development are important to retaining gig workers. As easily as gig workers enter your talent pool, they can easily exit for a myriad of reasons, including conversion to a full-time employee either in your health system or elsewhere or lifestyle changes that no longer support taking extra shifts.

Things to Consider:

- How are you thinking about the employment classification for this flexible workforce?
- How many hours and shifts are mandated?
- How will you rationalize these pay scales against existing pay scales to ensure you don't alienate core staff?
- Is there an active candidate pool already identified? Can you create programs to convert your per diem agency workers or boomerang back former employees who left to pursue travel positions?
- Once "hired," how will onboarding work (i.e. managing credentials, skills and competency training)?

Choosing the Right Tech

Frontline clinicians now want sleek, friendly ways to engage with their employers and manage their schedules. Open shift management mobile apps fulfill that desire. For example, Shifts, which integrates with your organization's traditional technology system, allows for an automated, bi-directional feed of offered and claimed open shifts.

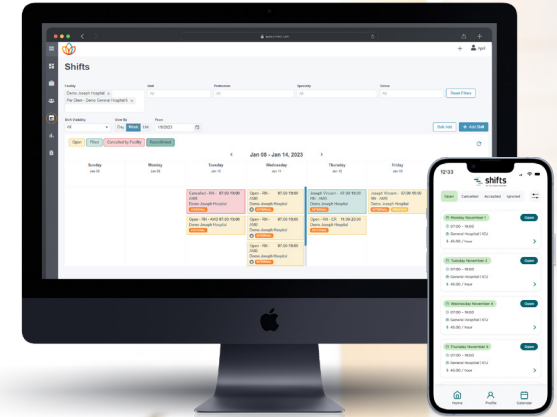
Frontline staff use the Shifts app to quickly view and claim shifts they are qualified to work. Staff also see the shift's location, instructions for the shift (such as what color scrubs to wear and where to park) and pay. This type of technology eliminates the need for the central command center staff to manually call staff to fill shifts.

Remember that open shift management technology doesn't replace the existing scheduling system. The scheduling system should always be the record of truth, but with a mobile open shift management app, staff no longer have to search for shifts in the schedule, and the days of emails, phone calls and group chats are gone. These apps also allow leaders to gain the full value of flexible programs.

The ideal open shift management app should:

- Integrate with existing technology.
- Replace short message service (SMS) text messaging for recruitment and staffing.
- Automate open shift offerings by group rather than individual recruitment for each need, starting with the least expensive labor first.
- Allow for partial shift pickups to meet last-minute needs.
- Enable notifications to be driven by employee-controlled preferences for control over which shifts they want to be notified of or see within their view to minimize over messaging.
- Provide enhanced reporting capabilities.

An added perk of the Shifts application is that it also integrates with the LotusOne VMS, ensuring consistent access to data across all departments and role types.





Operations Management

Once the structure, sourcing strategy and support team are established, developing the processes for operations management can ensure a smooth, efficient program. When people think of managing a smooth and efficient program, technology is usually the enabler of flexible workforce operations to standardize and automate scheduling, deployment and communications. App-based platforms do an excellent job of engaging clinicians to pick up a shift from their smartphone just as easily as they scroll through social media or order their next meal. But will you want to push all open shifts directly to gig workers, or will your staffing managers want more control to select from the best-matched candidates available or tier the release of open shifts to different resource groups?

Project stakeholders must outline the processes, understand where it makes the most sense to automate and integrate and decide on the level of automation and integration that is absolutely needed.

Things to Consider:

- Are you looking to pre-book gig workers into open shifts when a new schedule comes out, or do you anticipate just-in-time deployment to capture last minute needs?
- How often do you anticipate needing the schedule to refresh inside the portal?
- What is your tiering structure for releasing shifts? How long will you wait before releasing open shift needs to the next labor tier?
- Do you have enough resources to manage the tool and be completely self-service or will you need additional support from the vendor?

Scale and Optimize

To get started with the gig workforce, create a pilot program to test your processes and iterate as needed. As the project stakeholders have pressure-tested the technology and processes and initial goals have been met, you can begin to scale accordingly, incorporating more locations and even more specialties and professions. Perhaps you are part of a multi-regional health system, where you can begin to expand to other locations or even begin to incorporate clinics as well. Flexible resource pools are not just for your clinical positions but can also be beneficial for non-clinical resource management. As you scale the program, re-evaluating processes is important to continue making enhancements whether to service or efficiency. While utilization, fulfillment and financial metrics are important to review, review of intangibles through quantitative and qualitative feedback will also be critical. The ongoing success of a flexible workforce program will always come back to people — are your workers satisfied? Are your managers satisfied? Are your patients satisfied?

Things to Consider:

- Once a nursing resource pool is established, what other types of disciplines are you looking to manage in the resource pools?
- What data is important for reporting?
- How will you incorporate feedback surveys about your gig workers from patients and managers? Will you undertake experience surveys from your gig workers?



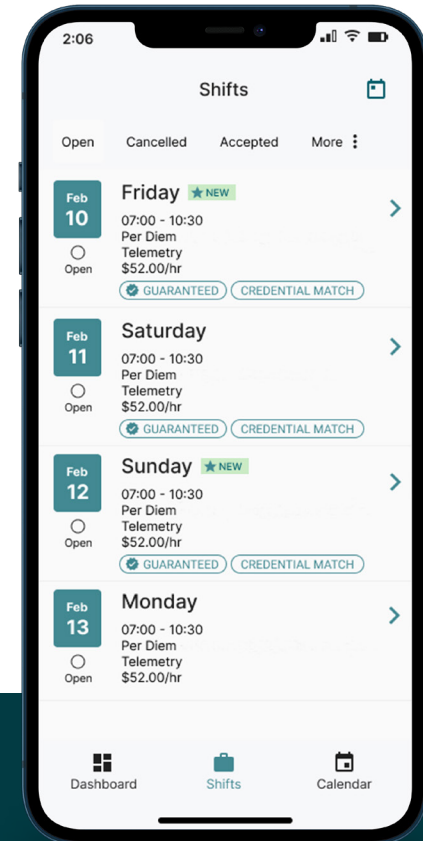
Conclusion

As healthcare systems aim to expand their talent pools and lower premium labor costs, becoming a flexible employer is key. But it's not always easy.

Float pools are common but can be hard to maintain, and healthcare faces unique challenges in adopting gig-style staffing. That's where Shifts comes in.

Developing a solid team, foundation and technology with the right partner is critical. Shifts combines smart technology with workforce expertise to help you build flexible staffing programs tailored to your clinical, financial, and operational needs.

Whether you need to fill a shift today or transform your entire workforce strategy, Shifts helps you achieve better outcomes and become a more agile employer.



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