

The Rural Playbook

The Rural Playbook is your go-to resource for engaging rural healthcare leaders effectively. Whether you're starting your partnership or refining your ongoing strategy, this playbook equips you with actionable tools, strategic insights, and a clear framework to maximize your success.

GUIDING MEANINGFUL
ENGAGEMENT WITH
RURAL HEALTHCARE
EXECUTIVES

The Rural Playbook

CONTENTS

TRUSTED PRINCIPLES	2
The TRUSTED Principles in Action.....	2
Interacting with Rural Healthcare Leaders: Tips for Success	3
NRHASC Quick Messaging Checklist	4
Step 1: Create Your Message	4
Step 2: Respect Their Expertise and Their Time.....	4
Step 3: Understand the Audience	5
Step 4: Share Results.....	5
Step 5: Build Trust	5
Step 6: Educate with Actionable Takeaways.....	6
Step 7: Demonstrate Value with Visuals	6
Quick Messaging Checklist	6
Examples of Good Messaging vs. Bad Messaging	7
NRHASC Case Study Step-by-Step Guide	7
What a Case Study Should Look Like	8
Step 1: Title	8
Step 2: Introduction (2–3 Sentences)	8
Step 3: The Challenge	8
Step 4: The Solution	8
Step 5: The Results	9
Step 6: Peer Voices and Quotes.....	9
Step 7: Add Statistical data driven Visuals.....	9
Step 8: Key Takeaways	10
Step 9: Call to Action	10
Final Checklist: Did You Include Everything?	10
Applying TRUSTED Principles at Conferences	10
How to Apply TRUSTED at Conferences	10
Target: Identify Who to Engage.....	10
Respect: Ask for Their Time	11
Understand: Show You’re Informed	11
Share Results: Align Collateral with Value	11
Trust: Build Credibility Through Authenticity	11

Educate: Provide Actionable Insights	12
Demonstrate: Keep It Neat and Show Tangible Value	12
Key Conference Takeaways	12
Understanding Rural Healthcare: Facility Types & Key Challenges	13
Common Facility Types in Rural Healthcare	13
Common Challenges in Rural Healthcare	13

TRUSTED PRINCIPLES

The **TRUSTED principles** provide a framework for crafting clear, results-driven messaging while building meaningful, lasting relationships with rural healthcare executives. By applying these principles, you position yourself as a valuable and trusted partner in rural healthcare.

THE TRUSTED PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

T – Target Your Messaging

- Focus on how your solution solves rural-specific challenges.
- Replace generic content with messaging tailored to the needs of rural healthcare.

R – Respect Their Time and Knowledge

- Be concise and direct. Skip fluff and avoid repeating what they already know.
- Lead with the most important points and focus on actionable insights.

U – Understand Their World

- Show awareness of rural healthcare—CAHs, FQHCs, RHCs, and PPS hospitals.
- Highlight specific solutions that solve rural challenges.

S – Share Results

- Provide measurable outcomes and success stories to demonstrate value.
- Let satisfied customers speak for you with testimonials or peer comparisons.

T – Trust Takes Time

- Build relationships with consistency, follow-through, and authenticity.
- Avoid vague or promotional clickbait content.

E – Educate

- Show why, how, and where your solution works for rural facilities.

- Share insights or case studies that demonstrate real-world impact.

D – Demonstrate Value

- Use data and statistics to show how you outperform competitors.
- Provide clear, measurable outcomes that align with their goals.

Example: *“Our solution improved financial sustainability by reducing operational costs by 25%.”*

INTERACTING WITH RURAL HEALTHCARE LEADERS: TIPS FOR SUCCESS

While the **TRUSTED principles** guide your messaging, successful interactions with rural healthcare executives also require cultural awareness, respect, and the ability to build authentic relationships. Here are additional tips to consider:

Lead with Relationships, Not Transactions: Focus on trust-building, not hard selling. Start conversations by asking about their challenges and priorities.

Tip: Start by asking:

- *What we found working with all the rural facilities we have before yours is that performing XYZ while executing ABC is 50% more efficient for a CAH than doing it the other way around. Do you see how this may work similarly in your facility?*
- *“If we were to implement this solution here the way we have with your peers, what would success look like for you in the next year in this department?”*

Show Up Consistently

- Be present and reliable. Trust takes time, and consistency matters.
- Follow through promptly with information or resources after meetings.

Respect the Rural Healthcare Reality: Avoid urban comparisons and acknowledge resource limitations. Create custom solutions to fit rural needs.

Example: *“Here’s how this solution was custom built to be successful in a CAH with 25 beds.”*

Listen First, Then Speak: Understand their challenges by listening carefully and asking thoughtful questions.

Examples:

- *“After what you have heard and seen about how this solution works in peer facilities, how do you think this solution could work for your team?”*
- *“What adjustments would make this more effective for your facility?”*

Be Authentic and Direct: Avoid jargon and overpromising—stick to plain, results-driven messaging.

Example: *“Our solution reduced patient travel times by 40%, which directly improved care delivery.”*

Appreciate the Community Focus: Highlight solutions that impact patients and the broader community.

Be Flexible and Collaborative

- Demonstrate peer success and a willingness to adapt solutions to accommodate rural limitations like funding cycles or staffing shortages.
- **Emphasize collaboration:** *How can we adapt this successful rural solution to fit your facility's needs?*

NRHASC QUICK MESSAGING CHECKLIST

Purpose: This checklist helps you create clear, concise, and results-driven messaging that aligns with NRHASC's **TRUSTED principles**. Use it for emails, social posts, blogs, presentations, case studies, and other outreach to rural healthcare leaders.

By following this checklist, you will:

- ✓ Communicate effectively with busy rural healthcare executives.
- ✓ Provide action items to implement immediately.
- ✓ Ensure your messaging builds trust, not sales fatigue.

STEP 1: CREATE YOUR MESSAGE

Focus on Rural-Specific Solutions

- ✓ Does your message address a rural healthcare challenge?

Examples: Staffing shortages, financial sustainability, access to care, patient outmigration.

- ✓ Have you made the message audience-specific? Speak directly to critical access hospitals (CAHs), rural health clinics (RHCs), or FQHCs—avoid generic statements.

Examples:

- ✓ *"XYZ Hospital in Montana solved their nurse retention issues by implementing these seven steps."*
- ✗ *"Hospitals face staffing challenges." "CAHs struggle with nurse retention due to limited resources and rural isolation."*

STEP 2: RESPECT THEIR EXPERTISE AND THEIR TIME

Keep It Clear and Concise

- ✓ **Is your message easy to scan?** Use short paragraphs, bullet points, and clear headings.
- ✓ **Does it avoid filler content or jargon?** Remove phrases like "cutting-edge solutions" or "innovative offerings"—focus on specifics.
- ✓ **Have you shared the most important point first?** Lead with the result, outcome, or value.
- ✓ **Avoid condescending language and urban mentions.** Language that diminishes rural expertise or compares negatively to urban success.

Examples:

- ✓ *"This 5-step program reduced nurse turnover by 25% in just 6 months, saving hospitals \$150,000 annually."*
- ✗ *"Let me start by telling you about our company history and why we care about hospitals."*

STEP 3: UNDERSTAND THE AUDIENCE

Demonstrate Awareness of Rural Realities

- ✓ **Does your message reflect your expertise in solving rural health challenges?** Highlight how your solution solved a common rural hospital challenge.
- ✓ **Have you used examples or success stories they can relate to?** Include rural-specific case studies, quotes, or peer comparisons.

Examples:

✓ *“This solution was created for ABC Hospital, a 25-bed CAH in rural Nebraska, where staffing resources were stretched thin but should translate to similar success at your facility.”*

✗ *“This program works for hospitals of all sizes.”*

STEP 4: SHARE RESULTS

Prove Value with Measurable Outcomes

- ✓ **Does your message include clear, measurable results?** Use metrics, percentages, or specific improvements.
- ✓ **Have you visualized success where possible?** In presentations or blogs, add charts, graphs, or comparisons to support your message.

Examples:

✓ *“Our telehealth program reduced patient travel times by 40%, reducing outmigration by 26 % and overall increasing care access for this rural community.”*

✗ *“Our solution improves patient care.”*

STEP 5: BUILD TRUST

Avoid Salesy Language and Overpromises

- ✓ **Is your message authentic and professional?** Avoid exaggeration, vague claims, or promotional language.
- ✓ **Have you included peer voices or testimonials?** Quotes or stories from rural healthcare leaders add credibility.

Examples:

✓ *“‘This program stabilized our workforce and improved patient care over the past 1 ½ years,’ said Jane Doe, CEO of ABC Hospital.”*

✗ *“Our state of the art, best in class, industry leading, awesome and handsome program guarantees groundbreaking improvements in your hospital operations!”*

STEP 6: EDUCATE WITH ACTIONABLE TAKEAWAYS

Provide Real Value

- ✓ **Does your message offer clear takeaways?** Include actionable steps, tips, or tools the audience can implement.
- ✓ **Is the takeaway tailored to rural healthcare needs?** Focus on practical, realistic strategies.

Examples:

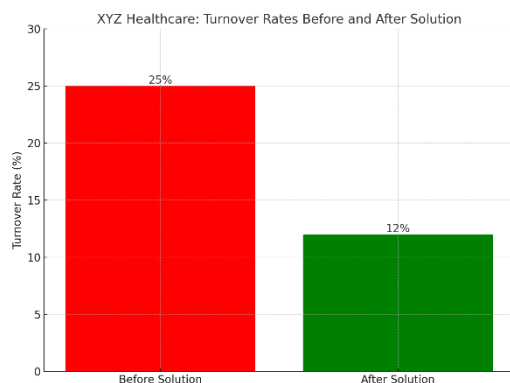
- ✓ *“Three ways to reduce nurse turnover: flexible scheduling, retention bonuses, and team wellness programs.”*
- ✗ *“Contact us to learn more about our services.”*

STEP 7: DEMONSTRATE VALUE WITH VISUALS

Support Key Points with Data and Visuals

- ✓ **Do you have visuals to back up your results?** Include charts, before-and-after data, or infographics that are clear, relevant, and aligned with your key points.
- ✓ **Is the message visually easy to follow?** For emails, blogs, and presentations, use bullet points, **bold** key takeaways, and clean formatting.

Examples:



- A graph comparing “Before” and “After” nurse turnover rates.
- A chart showing recruitment cost savings.

QUICK MESSAGING CHECKLIST

Before finalizing your message, confirm it meets all TRUSTED criteria:

- ✓ **T – Target:** Does your message directly address rural-specific challenges and highlight how your solution solves them?
- ✓ **R – Respect:** Is it concise, clear, and free of unnecessary details or fluff?
- ✓ **U – Understand:** Does it show you truly understand rural healthcare realities and priorities?
- ✓ **S – Share Results:** Have you included real-world success stories and measurable outcomes to back up your claims?
- ✓ **T – Trust:** Is your tone authentic, professional, and focused on building long-term relationships rather than making a hard

sell?

- ✓ **E – Educate:** Does your message provide valuable insights, actionable steps, and examples they can use?
- ✓ **D – Demonstrate:** Have you included specific examples or data to prove your value and align with rural healthcare goals?

When to Use This Checklist

Use this checklist to review all types of content:

- ✓ **Emails:** Ensure messages are concise and focused.
- ✓ **Blogs:** Verify content is results-driven and rural-specific.
- ✓ **Case Studies:** Highlight outcomes, peer voices, and actionable lessons.
- ✓ **Presentations:** Ensure visuals, results, and takeaways align with TRUSTED.
- ✓ **Social Media Posts:** Short, targeted messages with measurable value.

Final Notes

By following this checklist, you ensure your messaging:

- ✓ Respects the audience’s time with clarity and focus.
- ✓ Demonstrates measurable value with real-world examples.
- ✓ Builds trust and credibility through rural-specific, result-driven content.

Remember: With **TRUSTED** messaging, you’ll create meaningful connections with rural healthcare leaders by focusing on value, not pitches.

Pro Tip: Use our [Trusted Messaging Exercise](#) to create clear messaging that resonates with rural healthcare executives. You can also download a [Trusted Messaging Example](#).

EXAMPLES OF GOOD MESSAGING VS. BAD MESSAGING

Bad Messaging	Good Messaging
<i>“We provide cutting-edge workforce tools.”</i>	<i>“Flexible staffing reduced turnover by 25% in more than 13 CAHs.”</i>
<i>“Our program improves patient care.”</i>	<i>“Our telehealth solution reduced patient travel by 40%creating.....andat ABC hospital in XYZ State”</i>
<i>“Contact us to explore new possibilities.”</i>	<i>“Three practical ways to improve staff retention: 1. Flexible schedules, 2. Bonuses, 3. Wellness programs just like ABC hospital, a 25 bed CAH in MO”</i>

NRHASC CASE STUDY STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

A **case study** is a structured success story that explains how a real-world problem was solved with a specific solution. It uses measurable results, clear steps, and rural-specific examples to build trust and provide actionable insights for healthcare executives.

WHAT A CASE STUDY SHOULD LOOK LIKE

- **Length:** 500–1,500 words.
- **Format:** Clear sections with bold headings, bullet points, and visuals (optional).
- **Tone:** Professional, educational, and results-focused—**not promotional or riddled with logos.**

Why Case Studies Matter: A well-structured case study allows you to:

- ✓ **Demonstrate Impact:** Real-world results prove your solution’s effectiveness and builds your position as an expert.
- ✓ **Build Trust:** Demonstrate your success with similar facilities to show rural health executives that achieving the same results with them is possible.
- ✓ **Provide Value:** Share actionable lessons that equip healthcare executives to address challenges and implement effective solutions.

STEP 1: TITLE

Write a concise, results-focused title that highlights the outcome.

Examples:

- ✓ *“Reducing Nurse Turnover by 25% at ABC Hospital with Flexible Scheduling”*
- ✓ *“40% Reduction in Patient Travel Times Through Telehealth in CAHs”*

STEP 2: INTRODUCTION (2–3 SENTENCES)

Summarize the **problem**, the **solution**, and the **results**. This short snapshot hooks the audience.

Example: *“ABC Hospital, a 25-bed CAH, in Montana faced a 35% annual nurse turnover rate, increasing recruitment costs and disrupting care. By implementing a flexible scheduling model, turnover decreased by 25% in 6 months, saving \$150,000 annually in trailing 24mos.”*

STEP 3: THE CHALLENGE

Describe the **specific problem** or challenge your solution solved for specific rural healthcare facilities.

What to Include:

- Focus on a **rural-specific challenge** at specific rural hospitals(e.g., staff shortages, financial instability, or access gaps).
- Detail the problem’s impact on the organization or community (typically 5-7 bullets).

Example: *“ABC Hospital, a critical access hospital in Montana, experienced a nurse turnover rate of 35%. Which contributed to burnout, increased costs, and inconsistent patient care, reduced HCAPS scores creating additional strain on staff and budgets.”*

STEP 4: THE SOLUTION

Explain the solution or strategy that was implemented and why it worked.

What to Include:

- Describe the specific **steps** taken to solve the problem.
- Highlight why this solution was effective for a rural setting (e.g., affordability, scalability, minimal resources).

Example: “We introduced a flexible scheduling model with tiered retention bonuses and targeted staff wellness initiatives. These changes were cost-effective and practical for ABC Hospital’s limited budget creating a \$29K positive impact in FY2023.”

STEP 5: THE RESULTS

Share the **measurable outcomes** that demonstrated success.

What to Include:

- Use clear data, before-and-after comparisons, and visuals.
- Highlight improvements in operations, cost savings, or patient care.

Example:

“Within 6 months of implementing the solution:

- ✓ 25% reduction in nurse turnover.
- ✓ Stabilized patient care and improved HCAPS scores by 29%
- ✓ \$150,000 annual savings in recruitment costs.
- ✓ 30% improvement in staff satisfaction scores.”

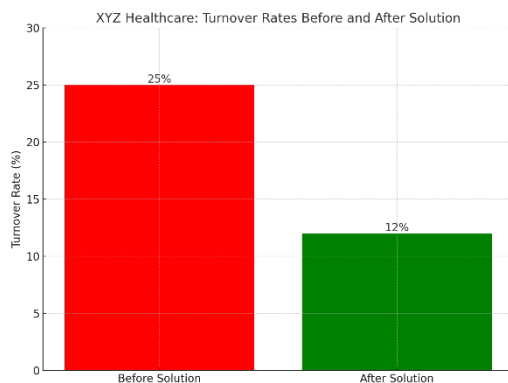
STEP 6: PEER VOICES AND QUOTES

Include a quote regarding the impact the solution had on the facility from the rural healthcare executive, to add credibility.

Example: “‘This flexible model has stabilized our workforce and improved staff morale,’ said Jane Doe, CEO of ABC Hospital. ‘Our team is now stronger, and patient care has improved.’”

STEP 7: ADD STATISTICAL DATA DRIVEN VISUALS

Use charts, graphs, or images to make your results more engaging and easier to understand.



Examples:

- A bar graph comparing turnover rates before and after the solution.

- A chart illustrating cost savings or other metrics.

STEP 8: KEY TAKEAWAYS

Summarize **2–3 action items** other rural healthcare leaders can apply today to create change.

Examples:

- *“Flexible scheduling programs can reduce nurse turnover and save on recruitment costs for CAHs.”*
- *“Retention bonuses don’t need to be large to make a big impact on staff satisfaction and stability.”*

STEP 9: CALL TO ACTION

Include a next step or resource for readers who want to learn more.

Example: *“We have done this for several rural facilities and I would be happy to chat more with you regarding how to create a similar impact in yours, just email me at: JaneDoe@Flexiblestaffing.com .”*

FINAL CHECKLIST: DID YOU INCLUDE EVERYTHING?

Confirm your case study includes:

- ✓ **Title:** Clear and results-focused.
- ✓ **Introduction:** 2–3 sentence snapshot of the problem, solution, and results.
- ✓ **The Challenge:** Rural-specific issue and solution clearly described.
- ✓ **The Solution:** Steps taken and why they worked for a rural setting.
- ✓ **The Results:** Measurable, data-driven outcomes with bullet points and visuals.
- ✓ **Peer Voices:** A quote or testimonial from a healthcare leader.
- ✓ **Visuals:** Charts, graphs, or images.
- ✓ **Key Takeaways:** 2–3 actionable lessons other leaders can use.
- ✓ **Call to Action:** A link or next step for readers.

APPLYING TRUSTED PRINCIPLES AT CONFERENCES

Conferences are a high-impact opportunity to connect with rural healthcare leaders and showcase your solutions. With limited space and a networking-focused setup—one high-top table, room for a standard pull-up banner, and no electricity—it’s essential to align your actions with what attendees want and the **TRUSTED** principles. By doing so, you ensure meaningful connections and long-term credibility.

HOW TO APPLY TRUSTED AT CONFERENCES

TARGET: IDENTIFY WHO TO ENGAGE

- **What It Means:** Identify key attendees—those who align with your solution’s focus—and plan your interactions.
- **How to Do It:**

- Review the attendee list to pinpoint executives you want to meet.
- Strategically plan your time to approach them when they're available.
- **Example:** *"Could we spend a few minutes discussing how we've addressed financial sustainability at similar facilities? Is 1:30 a bad time to meet after a bite to eat to share more about what we are doing for other hospitals like yours?"*

RESPECT: ASK FOR THEIR TIME

- **What It Means:** Respect their time by engaging purposefully and keeping your conversations concise.
- **How to Do It:**
 - Open with direct questions about their challenges to create meaningful dialogue.
 - Share 1–2 key takeaways and follow up with details later.
- **Example:** *"What's the biggest workforce challenge your facility is facing right now? Is that consistent in the trailing 36mos? Is that trending to continue to be the largest WF challenge next Quarter? "*

UNDERSTAND: SHOW YOU'RE INFORMED

- **What It Means:** Demonstrate awareness of rural healthcare realities and challenges.
- **How to Do It:**
 - Listen, eavesdrop on/to hallway and coffee break conversations. Not all hospitals' challenges are going to be the same at the same time, arm yourself with the knowledge of what challenge consistencies and diversities are occurring.
 - Attend sessions to better understand rural-specific issues and incorporate those insights into your conversations.
 - Acknowledge their unique priorities and resource limitations.
- **Example:** *"I attended the session on patient outmigration—are you seeing similar trends at your facility?"*

SHARE RESULTS: ALIGN COLLATERAL WITH VALUE

- **What It Means:** Use your limited space to share results-focused collateral that highlights measurable outcomes.
- **How to Do It:**
 - Bring a one-pager or small handout summarizing metrics and success stories.
 - Use your pull-up banner to emphasize key outcomes.
- **Example:** A handout reading, *"Our program reduced turnover by 25% average among 31 rural hospitals, saving \$150,000 annually on average in the trailing 24mos."*

TRUST: BUILD CREDIBILITY THROUGH AUTHENTICITY

- **What It Means:** Build trust by being approachable, honest, and focused on solutions.
- **How to Do It:**

- Avoid hard sales pitches. Instead, listen actively and share examples that resonate.
- Be transparent about what your solution can and cannot do.
- **Example:** *“Here’s a case study showing how we helped a 25-bed CAH reduce costs by 20%—would you like a copy?”*

EDUCATE: PROVIDE ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

- **What It Means:** Use your time to offer something attendees can apply immediately.
- **How to Do It:**
 - Share a small resource, like a toolkit or checklist, relevant to their needs.
 - Position yourself as a knowledgeable resource willing to help beyond the conference.
- **Example:** *“This toolkit includes three quick ways to improve staff retention—I can send you a digital version after the event.”*

DEMONSTRATE: KEEP IT NEAT AND SHOW TANGIBLE VALUE

- **What It Means:** Use visuals and your exhibit space to reinforce your professionalism and rural-specific messaging.
- **How to Do It:**
 - Keep your high-top table uncluttered with neatly displayed materials.
 - Ensure your pull-up banner highlights clear, rural-focused outcomes (e.g., “Improving care access for rural patients by reducing travel times by 40% in 24 months”).
 - Use clear, concise handouts that align with rural healthcare goals.
- **Example:** A pull-up banner reading, *“Solving rural healthcare challenges with proven results: 25% cost reduction, 40% improved retention on average among 26 rural facilities in trailing 24mos”*

KEY CONFERENCE TAKEAWAYS

- **Be Proactive:** Don’t wait at the table—engage purpose.
- **Keep It Neat:** A clean, organized high-top table and a professional pull-up banner create a strong impression.
- **Align with Rural Needs:** Use messaging and materials tailored to rural-specific priorities.
- **Follow Up:** Collect contact information and send personalized follow-ups to continue the conversation.

For more information on our conferences, visit the [Partner Resource Center](#).

UNDERSTANDING RURAL HEALTHCARE: FACILITY TYPES & KEY CHALLENGES

Rural healthcare operates within a unique landscape, with diverse facility types and distinct challenges that impact care delivery. Recognizing these differences is essential for effectively engaging with rural healthcare leaders and tailoring solutions to their needs.

COMMON FACILITY TYPES IN RURAL HEALTHCARE

- **Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs):** Small hospitals with 25 or fewer beds, often the sole care providers in their regions.
- **Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs):** Facilities serving underserved populations with unique funding requirements.
- **Rural Health Clinics (RHCs):** Clinics addressing outpatient care gaps with lean resources.
- **Prospective Payment System (PPS) Hospitals:** Larger rural hospitals acting as regional hubs for expanded care.

COMMON CHALLENGES IN RURAL HEALTHCARE

- **Workforce Shortages:** Recruiting and retaining skilled staff remains difficult.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Lower volumes and reliance on government funding create pressures.
- **Access to Care:** Long distances limit timely care and specialty services.
- **Technological Gaps:** Limited broadband and outdated IT slow innovation.
- **Patient Outmigration:** Patients leaving rural facilities for urban care impacts local trust.
- **Community Health Disparities:** Higher rates of chronic disease and barriers to preventive care.

[Visit the Partner Resource Center for more information!](#)