



2025 Behavioral Health

Marketing & Recruitment Trends Report

..... Exclusive Insights from **mhca** Members

Why This Report Matters

The behavioral health sector stands at a critical juncture. While the need for quality mental health and substance use services has never been more apparent, providers face a set of formidable and persistent challenges. The most significant among these are a deepening workforce shortage that strains capacity and an ever-evolving digital landscape that has fundamentally changed how individuals seek care and how potential employees search for jobs.

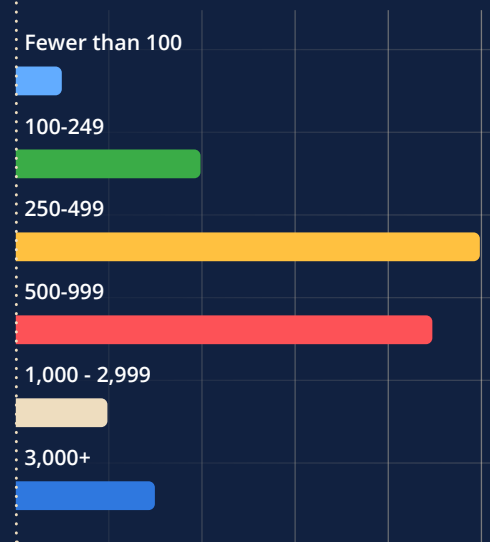
These are not isolated issues. They are interconnected forces actively shaping the future of behavioral health delivery. In this environment, hoping for the best is not an effective strategy. Proactive, intelligent, and data-informed marketing and recruitment are now essential functions for any organization that hopes not only to survive but also to thrive.

Understanding these challenges and eager to help address them, **mhca**, the nation's leading alliance of behavioral and mental healthcare leaders (there are larger associations, there aren't larger CEO focused associations), partnered with the lead behavioral health specialized agency, **A-Train Marketing**. Our goal was to move beyond anecdotal evidence and gain a clear, quantitative understanding of how leaders are navigating these modern challenges.

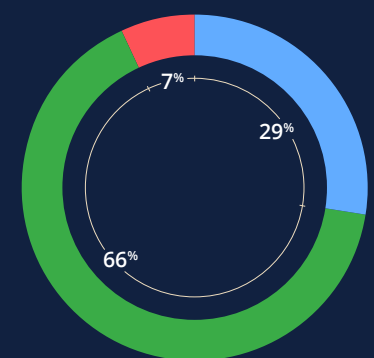
To achieve this, we conducted a confidential, in-depth survey from April to June 2025, gathering insights from individuals on the front lines who are making strategic decisions: chief executive officers, marketing directors, and talent acquisition leaders from member organizations and A-Train clients across the United States. This report is the result of that comprehensive research. It is designed to provide readers with benchmarks, illuminate emerging trends, and offer actionable insights to help build a more resilient and impactful organization.

Participant Overview

Staff Headcount of Participant Organizations

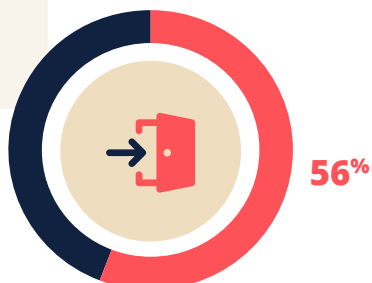


How Does Your Team Execute Marketing/Communications?

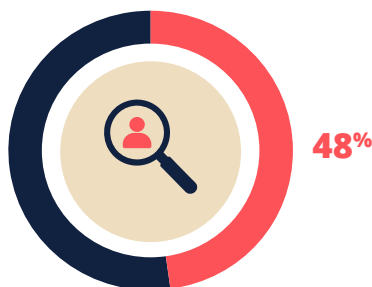


- Fully in-house (29%)
- Partially in-house (66%)
- Fully outsourced (0%)
- We do not have dedicated marketing support (7%)

Workforce Woes Continue



56% of organizations cite “**Recruitment/staffing shortages**” and “**employee retention**” as top challenges.



48% of organizations say their current **recruitment environment is competitive**, and it’s **hard to fill roles**. The largest challenges are a lack of qualified applicants and losing candidates over salaries.

Recruitment Strategies Have Proven to be a Mix of:



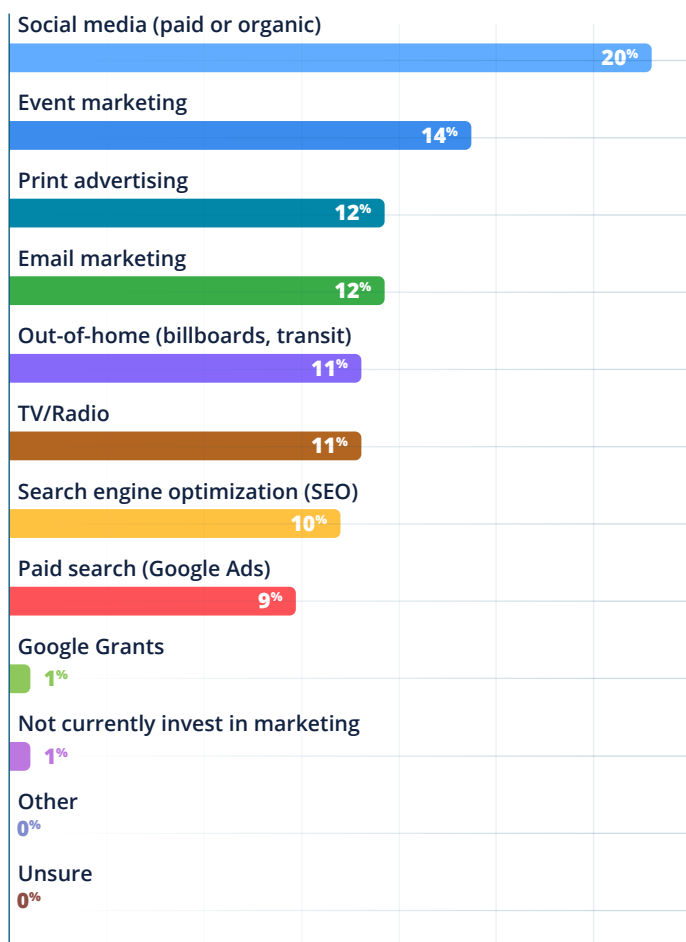
“ We need to learn how to better connect with our audience in a meaningful manner. ”

Key Takeaways:

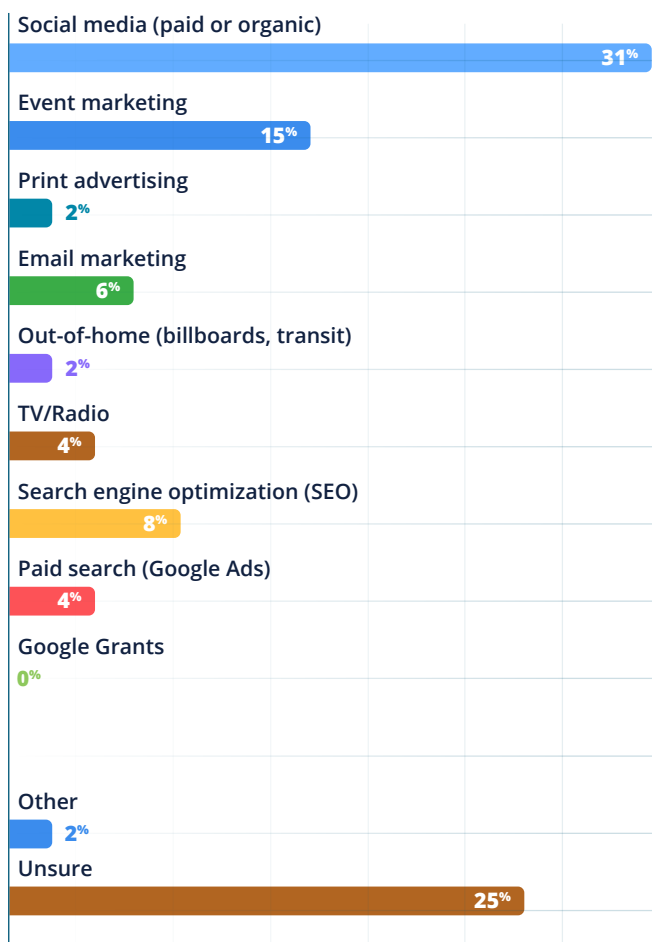
- Despite mission-driven work, behavioral health organizations are **losing talent** battles due to low visibility, unclear branding, and uncompetitive compensation.
- The workforce pipeline is thinning**—especially for Gen Z and Millennial hires—because traditional outreach tactics don’t resonate with younger audiences.
- Heavy reliance on job boards and referrals isn’t enough; organizations must activate a **culture-forward employer brand** across digital channels to stay competitive.

The Marketing Landscape

The Majority of Organizations **Invest** in:



Which Channels Drove the **Strongest ROI** in the Past Year?



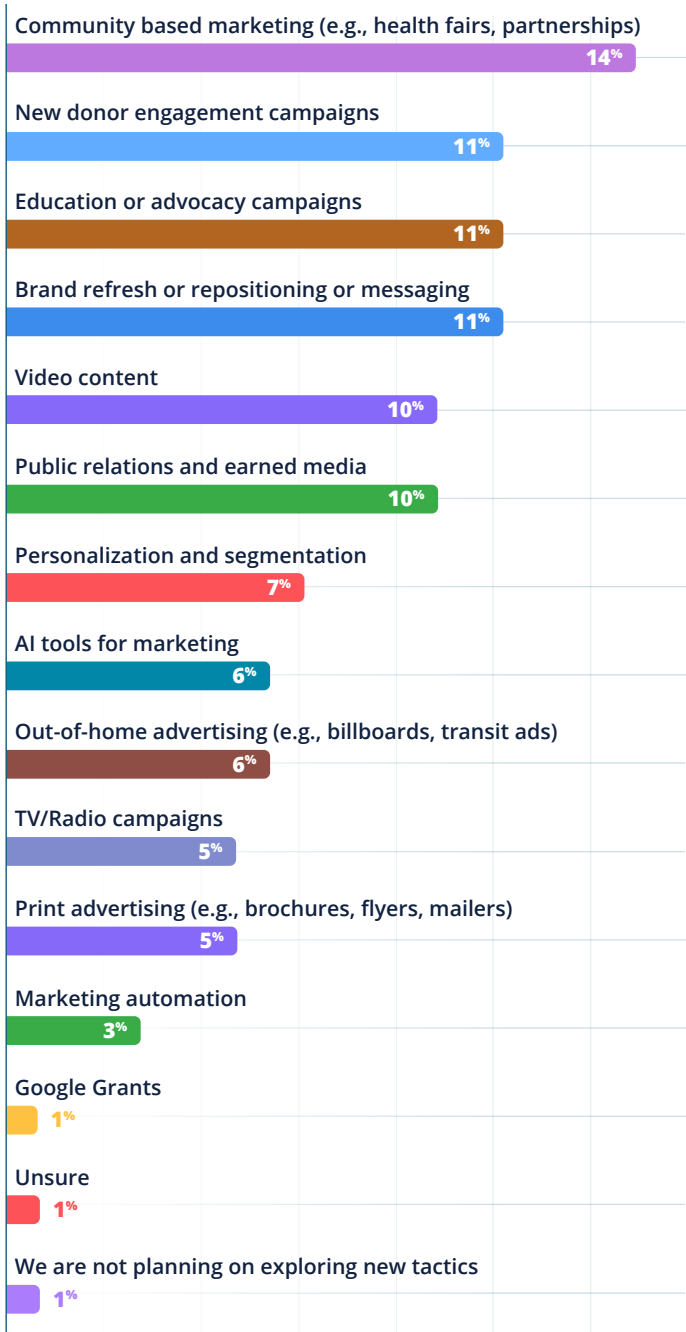
20% of organizations invest in social media marketing (paid and/or organic), and **31%** of organizations said social media drives the strongest ROI.

Many organizations have a strong reputation with existing audiences but are **struggling to engage with younger/different audiences** as the landscape changes.

25% of organizations are curious and want to learn more about AI.

The Marketing Landscape (continued)

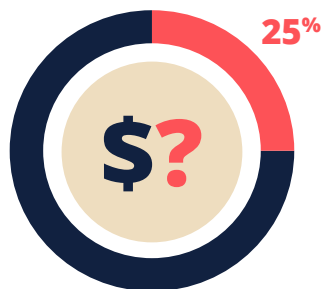
Which **Marketing Tactics** will be invested in this year?



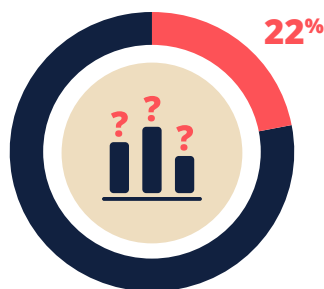
Key Takeaways:

- 25% of respondents have no idea which of their marketing channels are actually driving results (ROI) - indicating a major **lack of tracking**
- Many organizations still rely on traditional channels like print and radio, which may not reach today's **"digital native"** audiences.
- There is significant curiosity about **AI and emerging tactics**, yet a lack of clarity around how to apply them effectively.
- A **marketing refresh** rooted in brand clarity and audience-specific strategy is overdue—especially to reach younger and more diverse communities.

ROI Measurement Challenges



25% of organizations are **unsure which channel** drives the strongest ROI.



22% say their top marketing challenge is **measuring effectiveness/ROI**.

Key Takeaways:

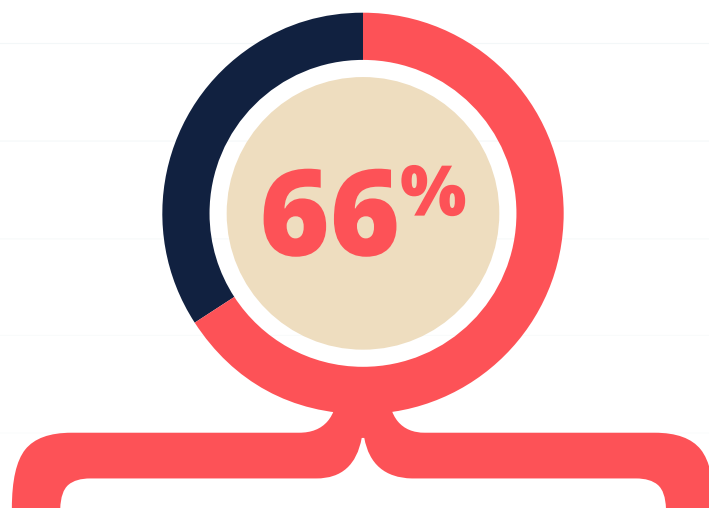
- One in four organizations is **unsure what's working**—a clear symptom of limited tracking and fragmented analytics.
- Measuring marketing effectiveness** remains a top barrier to growth, with 22% identifying ROI clarity as their primary challenge.
- Organizations that lack GA4 setup or a **clear digital funnel** may be leaking valuable engagement data every day.
- This is a call to action: Data hygiene, conversion tracking, and platform optimization are **no longer optional**—they're essential for making smarter investments.



Tracking the full patient journey is a priority.



Boots-on-the-Ground Engagement



Despite limited external funding: **66%** of organizations said **donations/grants** make up **less than 5%** of their current budget.



Yet, **66%** also **plan to invest in donor campaigns** in 2026, signaling a shift in focus toward philanthropic engagement.

The importance of community interactions was a recurring theme across survey responses. Many organizations cited in-person marketing tactics as a priority, including:

Health
fairs

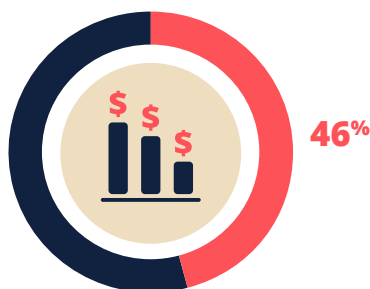
Community
partnerships

Tabling
events

Key Takeaways:

- Medicaid and Medicare uncertainties are forcing behavioral health organizations to invest in **alternative funding** sources like donor campaigns and other avenues.
- Donor development is underleveraged.** Most organizations operate with minimal philanthropic support, but many are ready to change that. Strategic campaigns could unlock sustainability.
- Brand presence at community events matters.** However, it must be paired with strong follow-up—like email nurturing, digital remarketing, and landing pages—to convert visibility into action.

Audience & Funding Challenges



46% of organizations have identified **financial stability, federal cuts, and funding** as top leadership concerns.

Despite reductions in funding, the demand for crisis services among vulnerable populations continues to rise. Survey responses point to a sharp increase in acuity and complexity of client needs.

Top emerging concerns include:



Increased
Houselessness



More Acute
Crisis Needs



More Violent or
Escalated Client
Behavior



Greater Difficulty
Reaching Medicaid
Populations

Key Takeaways:

- Behavioral health marketing must reflect the moment. Organizations are facing both **budget constraints and growing community needs**—making message clarity and urgency non-negotiable.
- Human-first storytelling** is essential. Trauma-informed, culturally aware campaigns help organizations reach the right audiences with empathy and impact.
- Medicaid audiences need new approaches. **Traditional outreach won't cut through the noise.** Localized, stigma-reducing, and trust-based engagement is key.
- The reality: Doing more with less will require **sharper strategy**. Clarity in messaging, smart media targeting, and community-grounded creative will make every dollar count.



From Insights to Action

The survey results provided in this report don't highlight insurmountable obstacles but rather point to significant opportunities. The behavioral health landscape is in flux, yet this motion creates openings for innovation, growth, and deeper community connection. By sharing the knowledge and embracing the strategic imperatives outlined here, organizations can build a stronger, more accessible, and more resilient future for providers and patients. The path forward is clear, and there is reason for tremendous optimism.

We extend our sincerest gratitude to the chief executives, marketing directors, and talent leaders who participated in our 2025 survey. Your willingness to share your time and expertise is what made this report and the valuable benchmarks within it, possible.

The workforce shortages and digital demands highlighted in this study are significant but can be addressed effectively. Success in this new era requires more than effort; it demands the right strategy and partner to bring it to life.

A-Train Marketing is dedicated to the behavioral healthcare sector, providing the specialized expertise needed for recruitment and marketing initiatives that deliver measurable results. With a thoughtful, data-driven approach, your organization can overcome the hurdles it faces and achieve its most ambitious goals.

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