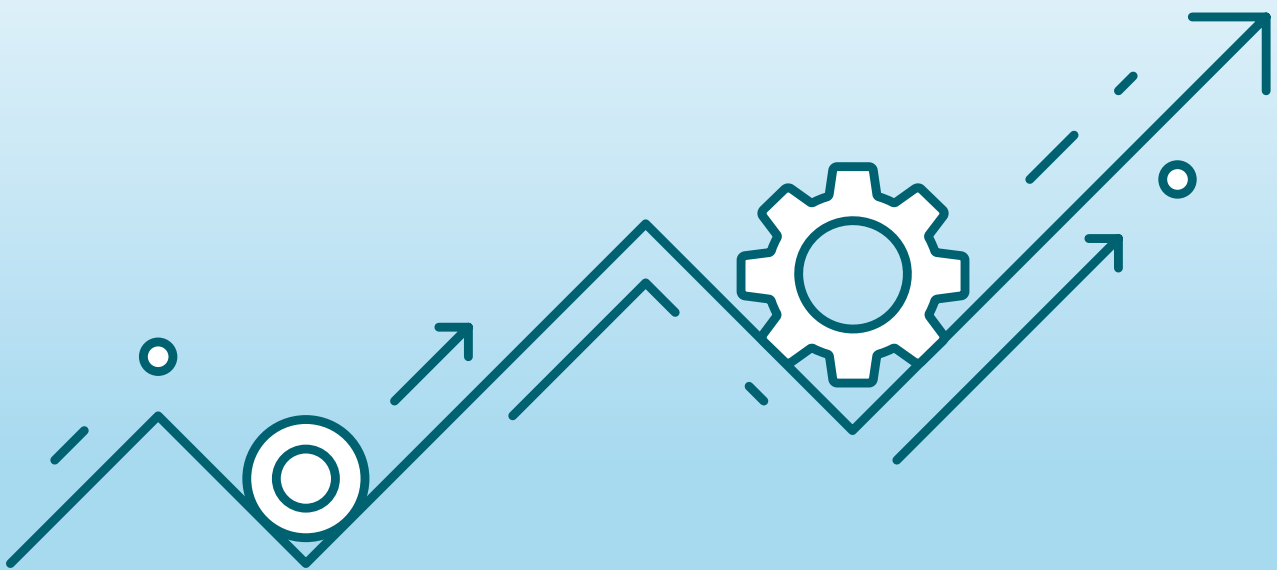


DATA-DRIVEN WORKFORCE TRENDS TO ELEVATE YOUR HIRING STRATEGY

Fall 2026 EDITION

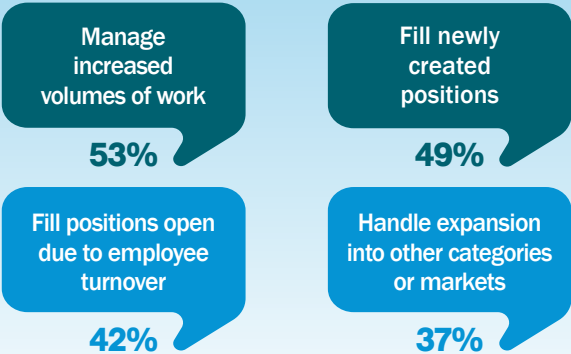


HIRING OPTIMISM IS STRONG FOR THE REMAINDER OF 2026

Hiring decision-makers feel positive (84%) about their company’s hiring outlook for the second half of the year, yet anticipate facing challenges (90%), principally, navigating AI use. Optimism (54%), confidence (52%), and hopefulness (48%) are feelings reported by hiring decision-makers about the hiring outlook.

Sixty percent of companies plan to increase headcount in the second half of the year, down from 66% from the previous six months, with 19% planning to make significant increases in the number of employees. Thirty-two percent plan to stay at about the same number of employees or make no change to headcount.

Reasons Companies Plan to Increase Headcount



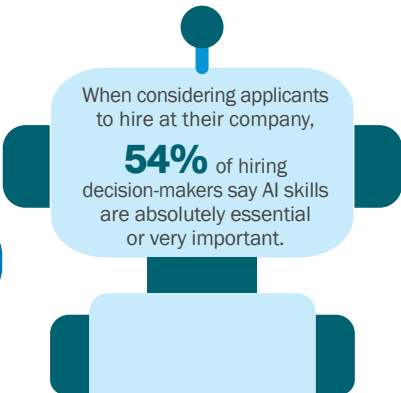
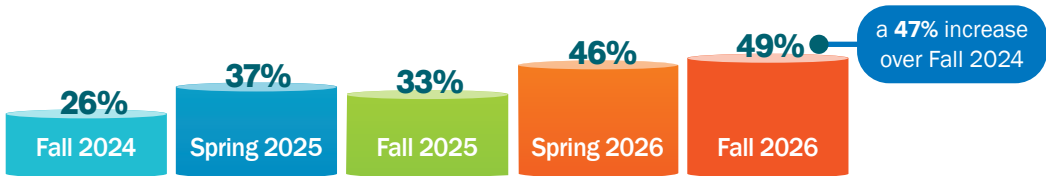
AI CHALLENGES ARE AT THE FOREFRONT

Ninety percent of hiring decision-makers expect to face challenges over the remainder of the year. Navigating AI use is the top challenge hiring decision-makers (49%) anticipate. This includes identifying ways AI can help reach more candidates and/or implementing AI to help assess job candidates, aid in the hiring process, and/or help process job applications.

This is followed by finding qualified candidates (42%) and difficulty planning labor needs* (32%).

**Due to concerns of a recession or economic downturn, and/or changes in government policies.*

Hiring decision-makers expecting to face AI challenges:



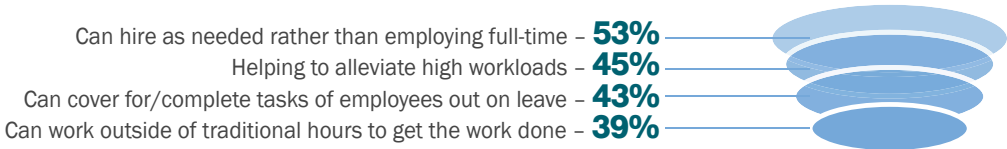
AGILE WORKFORCE GROWING

Contract workers are essential in achieving today’s business goals. Contractors are hired to add expertise to a team or project for a set period of time, as opposed to being a permanent employee at the company. Hiring contract workers signals agility and smart leadership, according to 81% of hiring decision-makers.

Eighty-two percent of hiring decision-makers have employed contractors, and 57% currently do. Hiring decision-makers whose companies have employed contract workers (43%) say their company is more reliant on contractors now than three years ago.

Hiring decision-makers whose companies have employed contract workers (84%) say at times contract workers have actually outperformed core employees, with 37% strongly agreeing.

TOP ADVANTAGES OF HIRING CONTRACT WORKERS

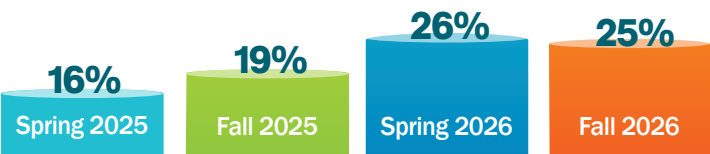


IS CONTRACT WORK HERE TO STAY?

More than half of hiring decision-makers (53%) feel contract work is a permanent shift in the workforce, yet 47% believe it's a temporary response to the economy. When it comes to professional (white collar) contract work, 51% of hiring decision-makers believe it is a permanent shift in the workforce.

Eighty percent of hiring decision-makers say they would be likely to hire contract workers in the future, with 39% saying they are very likely to do so. Intent to hire temporary or contract workers continues to increase.

INTENT TO HIRE TEMPORARY OR CONTRACT WORKERS IN NEXT SIX MONTHS



COMPANIES NAVIGATE RISING COSTS AND POLITICAL PRESSURES

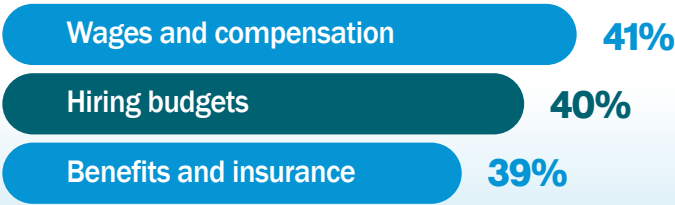
Politics and the current political climate are impacting most companies, according to 66% of hiring decision-makers. More than a third (36%) report a positive impact, while 30% report a negative impact. Rising costs have an impact on 72% of companies' ability to operate and/or grow, with 28% reporting a positive impact and 44% saying it has had a negative impact.

LEVEL OF IMPACT POLITICS AND RISING COSTS HAVE ON COMPANIES



AREAS OF BUSINESS MOST IMPACTED BY RISING COSTS

Hiring decision-makers report being most affected by recent cost increases in:



Nearly a third (32%) note that difficulty planning labor needs due to concerns of a recession or economic downturn and changes in government policies are among the biggest hiring challenges their company will face for the rest of this year.

Thirty-five percent of hiring decision-makers say their company won't be able to survive much longer if wages or costs continue to increase so quickly. However, these sentiments have significantly decreased from 47% when this question was last asked in spring 2022.



The Job Insights survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment International, parent company of Specialized Recruiting Group, May 13–June 1, 2026, among 1,006 U.S. hiring decision-makers (adults ages 18+ in the U.S. who are employed full-time or self-employed, work at companies with more than one employee, and have full/significant involvement in hiring decisions at their company). Data are weighted where necessary by company size to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to the acceptance of multiple responses. For complete survey methodology, please contact Communications@ExpressPros.com.



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