

Data-Driven Workforce Trends to Elevate Your Hiring Strategy

Fall 2026 *EDITION*

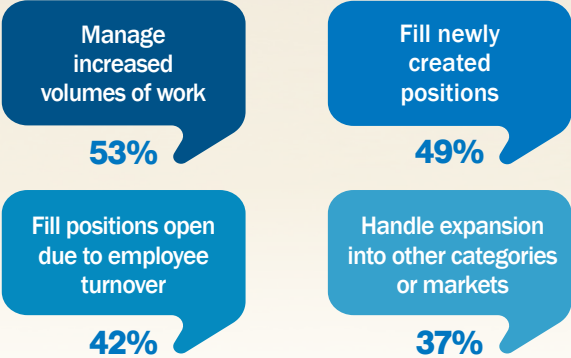


Hiring Optimism Is Strong for the Remainder of 2026

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

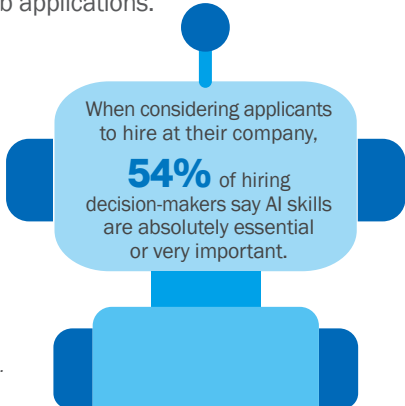
Ninety percent of hiring decision-makers expect to face challenges over the remainder of the year. Navigating AI use is the top challenge hiring decision-makers (49%) anticipate. This includes identifying ways AI can help reach more candidates and/or implementing AI to help assess job candidates, aid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

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

Hiring decision-makers expecting to face AI challenges:



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



“Today’s workforce requires employers to think beyond traditional hiring models,” said Bob Funk Jr., CEO, president, and chairman of Express Employment International. “Organizations are using a combination of technology, contract talent, and seasonal hiring to remain agile while preparing for future growth. These approaches not only help businesses respond to changing demands but also create opportunities for workers to gain experience, build skills, and move into long-term careers.”

— **Bob Funk Jr.**
CEO, President, and Chairman of Express Employment International

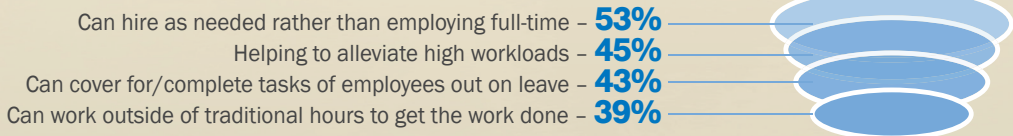
Contract Work Keeps Growing

Contract workers are playing an important part in the workforce. These workers are hired to complete a specific job, project, or task 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 contract workers, and 57% currently do. Hiring decision-makers whose companies have employed contract workers (43%) say their company is more reliant on contract workers now than three years ago.

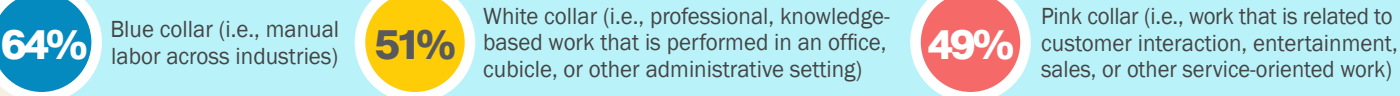
Hiring decision-makers whose companies have employed contract workers (84%) say at times contract workers have actually outperformed full-time employees, with 37% strongly agreeing.

Top Advantages of Hiring Contract Workers



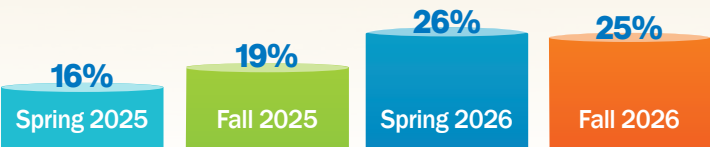
Is Contract Work Here to Stay?

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. This perspective, that contract work is a permanent shift in the workforce, varies by the type of work:



Intent to Hire Temporary or Contract Workers Continues to Increase

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.



Seasonal Today, Full-Time Tomorrow

Seasonal work allows employees to build their skills and network and hiring decision-makers view it as an opportunity to identify future full-time hires (87%). According to hiring decision-makers, seasonal jobs are a pathway into long-term careers (86%) and career accelerators, not just holiday help (90%).

Hiring decision-makers say seasonal jobs provide job seekers with the opportunity to get their “foot in the door” (93%), including 44% who strongly agree. This opportunity is particularly valuable for younger workers (93%).



38% of hiring decision-makers say their company plans to hire more seasonal employees compared to a year ago, particularly those in the service industry (45%).

Why Companies Have Hired Seasonal Workers:



Hiring decision-makers see the value seasonal work offers employees.

- Allows workers to gain foundational skills for their career – **93%**
- Provides valuable skills that are easily transferable to many other industries/careers – **92%**

Transferable Skills Seasonal Employees Commonly Develop

According to Hiring Decision-Makers Who Have Hired Seasonal Employees





The Harris Poll

Harris Insights & Analytics LLC, A Stagwell Company

The survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals among 1,006 U.S. hiring decision-makers (defined as 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). The survey was conducted May 13–June 1, 2026. Data are weighted where necessary by company size to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. For questions analyzed by job type, responses are segmented by blue collar (n=103), white collar (n=515), and pink collar (n=158). Percentages may not add up to 100% due to the acceptance of multiple responses.

For full survey methodology, contact Communications@ExpressPros.com.



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