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2026 Recruiter Success Kit

Insights, tools, and strategies for smarter hiring in 2026

New for 2026!

Navigating the rise in candidate fraud

AI, but make it responsible

Bonus: Hit play on your soundtrack for success

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Executive Summary

For candidates, recruiters are often the first real connection to an organization.

For recruiters, that moment is just one piece of a much bigger—and increasingly complex—job.

Today's recruiters are balancing expanding talent pools, evolving role requirements, compliance considerations, organizational change, and constant shifts in the labor market. All while maintaining speed, fairness, and a candidate experience that builds trust.

And with more data, more technology, and more stakeholders involved, TA leaders are stepping into a bigger role: strategic partners driving real business impact.

Which leads to the one question that comes up consistently across teams of all sizes, industries, and geographies: *What can we be doing better?*

Because while 2026 may be an employer's market, recruiters and TA pros know the pendulum always swings back—making now a critical window to refine processes, strengthen hiring foundations, and build your brand before conditions shift.

Enter the Recruiter Success Kit—built to deliver answers.

The kit provides practical, step-by-step guidance to help teams reinforce what's working, improve what isn't, and scale recruiting programs as hiring needs evolve.

Inside, you'll find actionable strategies your team can apply across the hiring journey—from defining candidate personas and identifying best-fit talent, to designing onboarding that supports long-term retention. Real strategies to solve the real challenges recruiters face every day.

Most importantly, the guidance meets recruiters where they are. It balances steps teams can take today with longer-term investments that help future-proof recruiting as demands continue to change.

Soundtracks for Success

Every great recruiter knows success isn't about one magic tool—it's about having the *right mix*. And sometimes, the right mix isn't just another framework or checklist...it's the right soundtrack.

That's why the 2026 Recruiter Success Kit comes with three curated playlists, designed to pair perfectly with every part of your day. Whether you're caffeine-loading to kick off the morning, powering through your inbox mid-day, or winding down after a jam-packed interview block, there's a playlist to match your tempo. Because recruiting isn't one-note—and your toolkit shouldn't be either.

So, grab your headphones, hit play, and let the rhythm carry you through the day. Think of these tunes as your background vocals, setting the tone while you focus on the main act: building a smarter, more successful recruiting strategy.

Choose your vibe—and let's get into it:

Rise & Recruit

A mix made for inbox domination, calendar coordination, and hiring hustle. Start your day with tracks that'll have you filling reqs and feeling unstoppable.

Press Play

ATS (Afternoon Tunes Sesh)

Mid-day slump? Never heard of her. You've got candidates flowing and offers going—these bops are here to keep your recruiting rhythm strong all the way to 5 pm.

Press Play

Interview Interlude

You've sourced, screened, and scheduled like a pro. It's time to let these tunes take you from hiring hero to couch potato.

Press Play

How to Develop a Data-Driven Recruiting Strategy

When recruiting strategies fall short, it's rarely a question of effort.

Instead, challenges often arise when success—and the metrics tied to it—aren't clearly defined. What's working. What isn't. And what should be improved.

The strongest talent acquisition teams take a different approach. They decide what matters, measure it consistently, and let data (not guesswork) guide what happens next.

According to the 2025 Employ Recruiter Nation Report, **82%** of organizations use analytics to inform their talent acquisition strategy—and among teams planning to increase budget, more than a third (**38%**) plan to invest in reporting and analytics technology.

Still, data alone doesn't drive results. Action does.

That's where the real work begins: aligning stakeholders around shared goals, gathering meaningful feedback, and using recruiting metrics not just to report performance, but to uncover opportunities to improve it.

Looking Backward vs. Moving Forward

One of the most common challenges in a data-driven recruiting strategy is the gap between forward-looking signals and retrospective measurement.

When reporting focuses primarily on historical metrics, teams have less visibility into what's ahead—making it harder to monitor pipeline health, upcoming roles, and in-flight performance.

From Reporting to Decision-Making

High-performing TA teams don't treat data as a historical record, they use it as a real-time signal. They review metrics while roles are still open, surface early warning signs, and adjust quickly—before small slowdowns turn into major bottlenecks.

But data can only drive decisions when teams agree on what success looks like. When metrics are tied to clearly defined goals, actions become obvious: where to intervene, what to prioritize, and how to stay aligned with hiring managers and business leaders.

Leading TA teams don't rely on spreadsheets or static dashboards to power this shift—they invest in technology that makes decision-driven data usable in real time.

That includes platforms—like Lever—that support historical, req-level, and job-level reporting, so teams can see how similar roles have performed before, forecast timelines, and adjust strategy while reqs are still open.

Working SMART-er: Defining Your Goals and Success Metrics

The SMART framework—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound—is a proven way to set goals that actually drive progress.

Applied to talent acquisition, SMART goals help teams move from broad objectives to clear priorities and measurable outcomes. The result: goals your team can act on now, not revisit later.

Factors shaping goal-setting and strategy through 2026 include:

- **70%** of organizations anticipate hiring more
- **67%** plan to increase their spend
- **67%** plan to invest more in AI-powered recruiting tools
- **91%** are focusing on skills-based hiring
- **47%** cite not enough qualified talent as a top challenge

*Data pulled from Employ 2025 Recruiter Nation Report

Use this chart to define, refine, and ramp your SMART goals.

Goal	Metrics	Goal Date(s)	Results
Goal #1: Get time to hire under 4 weeks	time to hire	End of Year	—
Goal #2: Add two full-time employees in the x role	Two employees successfully complete a 90-day onboarding	End of Q3	—

Where to Look for the Data

Your organization already holds a wealth of insight—you just need to know where to look.

Some of the most valuable signals come from:

- Employee engagement surveys to identify satisfaction trends and early turnover signals.
- Historical hiring and turnover data to predict future hiring needs.
- Industry labor data, such as U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports, to understand market conditions.
- Candidate engagement and conversion data throughout the hiring funnel.
- Industry benchmark reports to check your progress against other companies your size or in your industry.
- Your ATS and recruiting technology, including req-level and job-level historical data that shows how similar roles have performed by location, level, and source.
- New-hire check-ins at 30, 60, and 90 days to assess onboarding effectiveness.
- Hiring manager feedback loops to surface bottlenecks and friction points.

Bonus: AI-powered tools can help surface patterns across these data sets faster, making it easier to identify quick wins and long-term improvements with the greatest impact.

Metrics Worth Measuring

The truth is, not all metrics carry the same weight. And when teams try to track everything, the insights that matter most get lost in the noise.

The right recruiting metrics help teams move from activity to impact. By measuring performance across the hiring lifecycle, talent acquisition teams can clearly see what's working, where friction exists, and where to focus next.

Start with these foundational benchmarks:

- **Cost per Hire:** Total cost to recruit and onboard through the first 90 days
- **Time to Hire:** Time from application to accepted offer
- **Time to Fill:** Time from job posting to onboarding
- **Source of Hire:** Where candidates originate
- **Candidate Conversion Rate:** Applicants compared to job views
- **Offer Acceptance Rate:** Percentage of offers accepted
- **Candidate Experience:** Feedback on fairness, communication, and interviews
- **Quality of Hire:** Performance and role fit over time

Once your priorities are clear, focus on three to five metrics you can measure consistently. These should be easy to capture—ideally automated—and directly tied to your goals.

Employ customers reduced time to fill from **67.7 days** to **63.5 days** year over year—driving faster, more efficient hiring.

Use this table to outline the metrics you plan to track and the targets you aim to achieve. This will help you stay focused on the metrics that matter, without being bogged down by endless priorities.

Goal	Metrics/KPI	Baseline	Target	Review Cadence
Focus sourcing on quality	Qualified Engagement Rate	32%	45%	Monthly

Move Your Measurement Out of Excel

Today, teams are increasingly using AI where it matters most: to make sense of recruiting data. In fact, 27% of TA teams now use AI to help synthesize recruiting benchmarks, up from 18% in 2024.

AI-assisted analytics help teams:

- Automate reporting and reduce manual work.
- Surface trends in candidate quality and funnel drop-off faster.
- Highlight metrics most closely tied to outcomes and ROI.
- Connect ATS, CRM, and sourcing data for a unified view.
- Improve forecasting and capacity planning.
- Enable faster, in-workflow decisions.

Used responsibly, AI-powered dashboards help teams align faster, communicate more clearly, and make confident decisions based on data, not guesswork.

From Benchmarks to Momentum

Benchmarks aren't the goal. Progress is.

Industry benchmarks—like those in Employ's 2026 Hiring Benchmarks Report—give teams critical context, showing where they stand, what to prioritize, and how to set realistic, business-aligned targets. Because improving your hiring process starts with a clear picture of where you are today.

But context alone doesn't drive results.

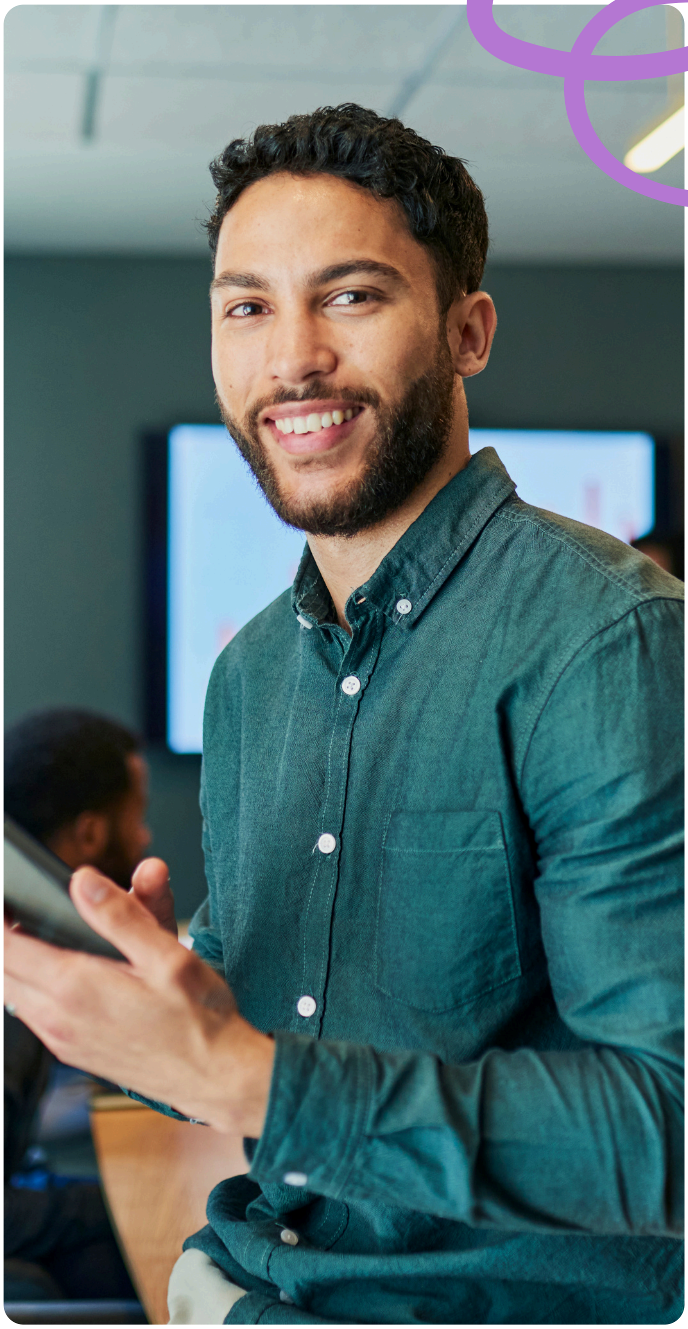
TA teams don't need more dashboards. They need a clear point of view.

Metrics only create impact when they're translated into an action plan—and into a story the business understands.

That means moving beyond reporting what happened to explaining it and creating an action plan for what comes next:

- What it means for the business.
- Why it matters right now.
- What you're doing next to improve outcomes.

When TA can connect hiring metrics to revenue growth, productivity, risk reduction, and cost efficiency, benchmarks become more than comparison points—they become momentum drivers.



The goal isn't just better data. It's better decisions, clearer narratives, and a seat at the table.

Get Clear on Your Ideal Candidate

Hiring is accelerating. Complexity is rising. And TA teams are being asked to do more—with less margin for error.

Even as teams move faster, the path to the right hire isn't getting any easier. Nearly half of recruiters (47%) say hiring will remain "very" or "somewhat" challenging in 2026.

And the pressure points are familiar: intense competition from other employers (50%), a shrinking pool of quality candidates (46%), and rapidly rising candidate expectations (42%, up from just 24% in 2024).

The answer isn't simply more applicants—it's better alignment.

That's where candidate personas come in. Think of your candidate personas as ultimate representation of your ideal candidate—including detailed information on the skills, experiences, behaviors, and motivations that you would expect to see in your new hires.

Built with real data and clear intent, personas help teams focus on candidates most likely to succeed, move faster with confidence, and create hiring experiences that actually connect, within the context of your organization.

Build Personas Based on Real Candidate Feedback

Candidates today are evaluating roles on more than job titles and compensation. They're looking for alignment with their values, work environment and work style preferences, and long-term career goals.

That shift means candidate personas can't be static documents—if they ever could be. They're living tools for navigating an increasingly complex talent landscape. While input from recruiters and hiring managers still matters, effective personas today must account for more—work-model preferences, expectations around flexibility, and how candidates engage with hiring technology itself.

One of the most effective strategies to keep personas current is a simple one: listening directly to candidates.

Post-interview surveys not only help maintain engagement; they capture real, experience-driven insights teams can actually act on.

Below are a few data points you can include in candidate surveys to build—and continually refine—personas that reflect who your candidates are today, not who they were a year ago.

- **Application Sources:** How and where the candidate found out about the job.
  - Ex: LinkedIn, Indeed, Company website
- **Role Type and Seniority:** The type of role the candidate is targeting and their level of experience
  - Ex: individual contributor, people manager, or executive.
- **Work Model Preferences:** What environment the candidate prefers to work in.
  - Ex: Remote, hybrid, or in-office work.
- **Technology Comfort Level:** How experienced the candidate is with the specific technology that the role would require.
  - Ex: Microsoft Suite, Salesforce, Jira.
- **AI Expertise:** How familiar the candidate is with AI tools and how to responsibly use them within their role.
  - Ex: ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Gemini.
- **Career Motivation:** What drives candidates' job searches.
  - Ex: Flexibility, advancement opportunities, company culture.

Bring Your Personas to Life

Once you've gathered the right insights, partner with your hiring team to bring those findings to life through clearly defined candidate personas. Start with at least two personas aligned to the core roles across your organization, then expand as needed—larger teams or more varied hiring needs may benefit from five or six.

The goal isn't perfection, it's coverage. Make sure every department is represented, even if they're not actively hiring today. That way, when demand shifts, your team isn't left starting from scratch.

Use the template on the next page to document each persona and create a shared reference point that keeps recruiters, hiring managers, and leadership aligned on who you're hiring for—and why.

Category	What to Capture (with Examples)	Notes / Prompts (with Examples)
Persona name & summary	Short persona label and description *Example: Mid-market AE— motivated by winning deals and strong earning potential.*	Combine role and motivator *Example: quota-driven closer seeking growth*
Role type & seniority	Functional focus and level of responsibility *Example: Mid-Market Account Executive (IC)*	Scope of influence, decision-making authority *Example: individual contributor with full-cycle ownership*
Common past roles	Typical previous positions or paths *Example: SDR, BDR, Account Executive*	Look beyond exact titles *Example: entry-to-mid sales progression*
Education & credentials	Degrees, certifications, or equivalent experience *Example: Bachelor's degree or equivalent experience*	Required vs. Preferred *Example: degree preferred, not required*
Hard skills	Tools, technologies, certifications *Example: Salesforce, LinkedIn Sales Navigator*	Separate must-haves from differentiators *Example: Salesforce required; LinkedIn Sales Navigator nice-to-have*
Soft skills	Leadership, communication, collaboration *Example: persuasive communicator, resilient, coachable*	Include behaviors tied to success *Example: handles objections calmly*
Technology comfort (including AI)	Level of fluency with role-related tech and AI *Example: uses AI to draft emails and summarize calls*	Passive user vs. power user *Example: daily AI user*
Values & motivators	What matters most to this candidate *Example: uncapped commission, product-market fit*	What makes them stay? *Example: winning culture, recognition*
Work-model preference	Remote, hybrid, in-office *Example: hybrid or remote*	Degree of flexibility expected *Example: 2 days onsite max*
Career stage & growth goals	Near-term and long-term aspirations *Example: grow into Senior AE*	Specialist vs. leadership track *Example: IC advancement path*
Decision drivers	Factors that influence offer acceptance *Example: comp plan, growth opportunity*	Top three drivers and deal-breakers *Example: comp, territory, manager*
Compensation expectations	Target range or structure *Example: $80k base / $160k OTE*	Base vs. variable, flexibility *Example: open to higher variable*
Competitive threats	Other employers or roles competing for this talent *Example: B2B SaaS hiring Mid-Market AEs*	Industry, role type, market demand *Example: companies expanding sales teams in the same region*
Preferred communication channel	How the candidate prefers to engage *Example: LinkedIn or email first*	Email, text, async tools, live conversations *Example: text for quick updates, video call for interviews*
Job search behavior	How and when they look for roles *Example: Passive but open to outreach*	Active vs. passive, channels used *Example: not actively applying*
Biggest work frustrations	Pain points in current or past roles *Example: Unrealistic quotas, poor enablement*	Process, tools, management, growth *Example: constant fire drills, outdated systems, no career path*
Employer Value Proposition (EVP) expectations	What they want from an employer *Example: Strong enablement, fair territories*	Culture, growth, flexibility, purpose *Example: collaborative team, learning budget*
Hiring experience preferences	Ideal interview pace and format *Example: Fast process, conversational interviews*	Tolerance for assessments or AI-assisted steps *Example: ok with mock pitch*
Risks & tradeoffs	Areas requiring alignment or compromise *Example: Needs ramp time on complex product*	Skills gaps, training needs *Example: extended onboarding*

Category	What to Capture	Notes / Prompts
Persona name & summary		
Role type & seniority		
Common past roles		
Education & credentials		
Hard skills		
Soft skills		
Technology comfort (including AI)		
Values & motivators		
Work-model preference		
Career stage & growth goals		
Decision drivers		
Compensation expectations		
Competitive threats		
Preferred communication channel		
Job search behavior		
Biggest work frustrations		
Employer Value Proposition (EVP) expectations		
Hiring experience preferences		
Risks & tradeoffs		

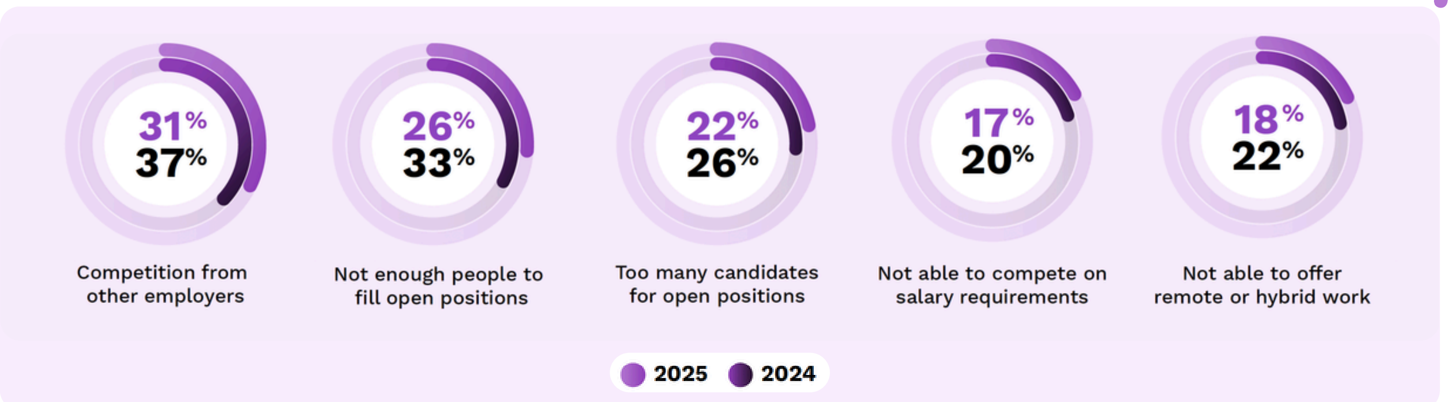
Building Stronger Talent Networks with Targeted Audience Planning

The latest Employ Recruiter Nation Report highlights a talent market defined by imbalance. While **26%** of organizations struggle with not having enough candidates, **22%** are overwhelmed by too many applicants.

This tension—scarcity on one end and overload on the other—underscores the real challenge facing today's talent acquisition teams: not attracting more candidates, but finding the right ones.

And that's exactly why targeted audience planning and well-defined candidate personas are more critical than ever.

Biggest Recruiting Challenges Facing Companies



Why Move to Targeted Candidate Audiences?

Talent acquisition is equal parts connection, precision, and speed. Teams need to build meaningful relationships with candidates, while efficiently moving qualified talent toward the right opportunities.

To do that, leading recruiting teams are shifting to a data-driven audience engagement—often supported by tools with embedded nurturing features. By organizing candidates into targeted audiences, recruiters can personalize outreach, maintain relationships over time, and support applicants across the entire journey—from first interaction through hire and beyond.

Below are some of the most common targeted audience types recruiting teams use today to stay aligned, intentional, and ready to hire.

- **Key Talent Audience:** Broad, high-value pools of candidates with the skills and experience aligned to a specific role type or function. These audiences are intentionally wide, spanning everything from seasonal and hourly workers to specialized professionals and executive talent. The goal is reach and readiness, keeping pipelines healthy so teams can respond quickly as hiring needs emerge.
- **Strategic Audience:** More targeted groups built around shared attributes such as background, experience, or community affiliation. These audiences are often used to support focused outreach initiatives, including efforts to broaden representation and improve equity across the hiring funnel. When grounded in data and intent, strategic audiences help teams engage talent thoughtfully—not generically.
- **Relationship Audience:** These are your candidates with a prior connection to your organization, including silver-medalist candidates, past applicants, and former employees. Recruiters should nurture any relationship audience through a consistent engagement cadence—sharing relevant roles, company updates, and feedback opportunities—to keep high-intent talent warm and ready to re-engage.

Audience vs. Segment

- **Audience:** Audiences are your primary candidate groups. They include candidates who can receive job openings, industry updates, surveys, and ongoing communications as part of a consistent engagement cadence. Audiences should closely align to the candidate personas you've built, reflecting how different candidates want to engage throughout the hiring journey.
- **Segment:** Segments are smaller, more specific subsets within your audiences. These niche groups are often defined by skills, experience level, certifications, professional affiliations, or education. Because they're highly targeted, segments are ideal for personalized outreach—like invitations to apply—and are especially valuable when sourcing for hard-to-fill roles.

Time Saving Tip

- **Advanced option:** Use a Candidate Relationship Management (CRM) solution with AI embedded directly into the ATS workflow to automate audience creation, segmentation, nurturing, and early-stage screening. Look for platforms that pair AI-powered screening companions with built-in nurture and engagement features, so candidates are continuously evaluated, organized, and re-engaged...without the manual lift.
- **Lower-cost option:** If your ATS doesn't offer a native CRM—or it's out of budget—there are lower-cost communication tools focused specifically on candidate outreach and engagement. These solutions allow you to build simple lists, send targeted campaigns, and maintain lightweight nurture cadences, helping you stay connected with talent without a full CRM investment.

Build Your Candidate Audiences

Once candidate audiences and segments are identified, it's time to start building, mapping, and targeting.

Bring the right stakeholders into the process—recruiters, hiring managers, and department leaders—to ensure each audience reflects real hiring needs, priorities, and success criteria. This collaboration helps create a shared understanding of who you're targeting and with what messaging.

Use the table below to map your targeted audience groups to their corresponding candidate personas, creating a clear, actionable foundation for more focused, effective recruitment marketing.

Targeted Audience Group	Recruiting Goal(s)	Candidate Persona(s)	Segment(s)
Remote workers in healthcare industry	• Fill the 2 open remote billing positions • Expand male representation by 10% in remote roles	Persona A	• Remote roles • Healthcare providers • Facility staff

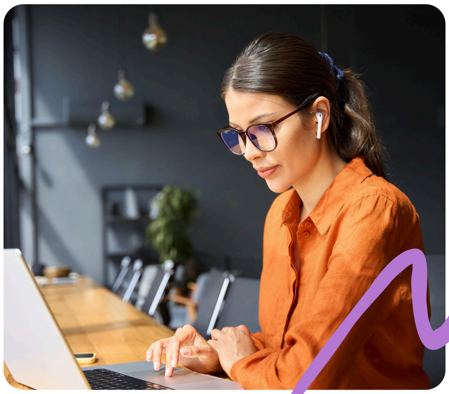
Hit Send: Create Engaging Content that Drives Candidates

Once your candidate audiences and segments are in place, the focus shifts to activation—aka the outreach.

You'll want to focus on developing and delivering recruitment marketing content that's relevant, timely, and easy to engage with—which should be much easier now that you've defined your personas and your segments and know what to send to who.

Pro-tip: Leading recruiting teams meet candidates where they already are—prioritizing mobile-first touchpoints like text messaging and chatbots—while still leveraging proven channels such as career sites, job boards, and email.

Measure, Refine, Optimize



Every recruiting campaign tells a story—if you know where to look.

Track and analyze candidate engagement metrics the same way a marketing team measures campaign performance to see what's really driving interest, what's falling flat, and where you can optimize your targeting and outreach.

Below are some of the candidate engagement metrics recruiting teams use to guide more effective recruitment marketing.

Top-of-funnel engagement metrics

Answers the question: Are the right candidates discovering and clicking into your jobs?

- **Open rate:** Percentage of recipient who open a recruiting email.
- **Link click-through rate (CTR):** How often candidates click job links from emails, job boards, ads, or social posts.
- **Applicant conversion rate:** Percentage of visitors who start and complete an application.
- **Average applications per job:** The average number of applicants that apply to each open role.
- **Source of hire:** Where candidates are coming from (job boards, referrals, career site, social, etc.).

Mid-funnel engagement metrics

Answers the question: Are candidates engaging and progressing once they've entered the hiring process?

- **Candidate response rate:** Percentage of candidates who respond to outreach, emails, and interview requests.
- **Qualified engagement rate:** The percentage of candidates who advance from application to screening stage.
- **Screen-to-interview rate:** The percentage of screened candidates who advance to interview.

Re-engagement metrics

Answers the question: Are you successfully engaging (and re-engaging) existing talent for new roles?

- **Re-engagement rate:** Percentage of silver-medalist, past applicants, or CRM candidates who re-enter the funnel.

These insights should directly inform future campaigns, helping teams refine outreach, strengthen talent networks, and ultimately, improve quality of hire.

Turn AI Hype into Hiring Advantage

The conversation around AI is shifting.

What used to be “Should we consider investing in AI?”

Has now become “How are we investing responsibly?”

As AI adoption accelerates across the hiring lifecycle—from early screening to interview support and onboarding—talent acquisition teams are moving from experimentation to execution. With that shift comes a new set of expectations: clarity on where AI adds value within the context of your candidate and employee lifecycle, confidence in how decisions are supported, and transparency for candidates and stakeholders alike.

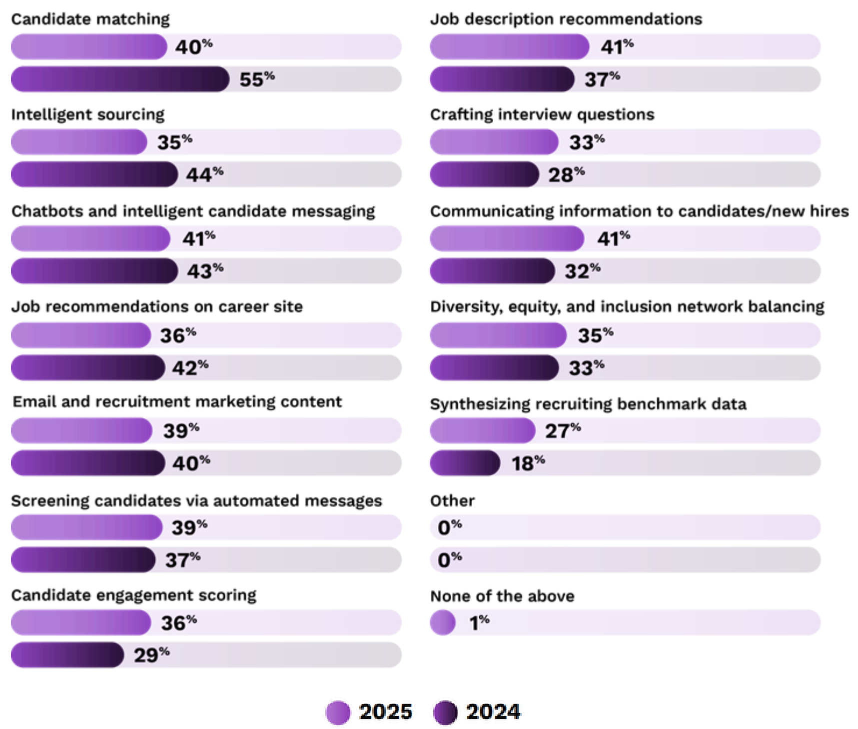
How Leading Teams are Leveraging AI

In today’s hiring processes, AI tools are showing up in real and impactful ways—enabling teams to streamline processes, augment workloads, and refocus their energy on the hiring steps that actually require a human-first approach.

Candidate matching dropped significantly this year, while writing-heavy tasks took the lead.

*Taken from the 2025 Recruiter Nation report.

What ways are you leveraging artificial intelligence in your hiring process?



And the benefits are hard to ignore: from faster time to hire and improved candidate quality to increased recruiter productivity, teams are making the most of this new technology to create a better hiring process on both sides of the table.

Importantly, AI is not replacing humans and human judgement, but rather providing more time for TA pros to spend in those moments that require personalized connection.

Finding the Best-Fit AI Tools for Your Team

It's important to remember that not every AI tool is right for your team. And onboarding a smorgasbord of AI tools that no one ever uses? That can create just as much friction as keeping your entire process manual.

Before jumping on the AI bandwagon, assess where your needs lie and where AI could provide the most impactful benefits for your team:

1. **Start with what you're trying to solve**
   Identify where time, quality, or clarity breaks down in your hiring process today. Focus on specific pain points (e.g., slow screening, inconsistent reporting, interview scheduling delays), not abstract goals like "use more AI."

2. **Define the outcome you want to improve**
   Be explicit about what success looks like. Tie each potential AI use case to a measurable outcome—such as reduced time to fill, improved candidate engagement, or clearer reporting.

3. **Assess data readiness and workflow fit**
   AI is only as effective as the data and workflows it supports. Confirm you have consistent inputs, clear processes, and the ability to integrate AI into how teams already work.

4. **Evaluate integration and operational fit**
   Prioritize AI that integrates seamlessly into existing workflows instead of creating new layers of complexity.

5. **Pilot, measure, and scale intentionally**
   Start small. Test AI in a defined area, measure impact against your goals, and expand only when value is clear and trust is established.

Addressing Risk and Ethical Considerations

If AI can deliver real value across the hiring process, why hasn't every team adopted it? For many, the hesitation isn't about potential—it's about trust.

Nearly 40% of non-adopters say they're waiting for the technology to mature, while others point to concerns around privacy, bias, and candidate experience.

Why aren't you using AI to augment your recruiting technology?

Respondents cited waiting to see how AI develops before making investments as the top reason for delaying adoption.

Those concerns are valid—and they're exactly why evaluating AI requires more than a feature checklist. Responsible adoption starts with understanding how AI is designed, governed, and applied in real hiring workflows.

When evaluating your AI tools consider how the vendor approaches:

- **Bias monitoring:** Does the vendor provide real-time, continuous bias checks across all data, or is it just point-in-time checks?
- **Transparency and explainability:** Do you have clear visibility into how AI generates recommendations, including what data it uses and how those outputs are evaluated?
- **Audit-readiness:** Does the solution include built-in auditability for regulators, legal teams, and leadership?
- **Safeguards and controls:** What kinds of guardrails are in place to ensure responsible, fair, and explainable AI use?
- **Transparent usage:** Are candidates notified that AI tools are used throughout the process? How are they notified? How are they enabled to opt out?

AI Governance: Guardrails for Innovation

AI adoption in recruiting is accelerating—and so is the need for guardrails. According to Employ's 2025 Recruiter Nation Report, "Governance is gaining traction as a response. Nearly half (**49%**) of organizations already have formal AI governance policies in place, and another **38%** are piloting them."

Think of AI governance policies as your guardrails for responsible use—defining when, where, and how AI can support hiring while protecting fairness, transparency, and trust.

Strong governance frameworks typically outline:

- Which hiring workflows can leverage AI (and which require human-only decisions).
- How data is sourced, stored, and protected.
- What transparency looks like for candidates and hiring teams.
- How models are evaluated for bias, accuracy, and performance over time.

The goal isn't to slow down innovation, it's to make sure innovation doesn't come at the expense of trust and responsibility.

How to Protect Your Business from Rising Candidate Fraud

Candidate fraud is everywhere in hiring: AI-polished resumes, proxy interviews, identity spoofing. As misrepresentation becomes easier to execute and harder to detect, TA teams face wasted recruiter hours, compliance risks, and reputational damage.

In this worksheet, we'll show you where fraud shows up, best practices for catching it, and actions you can take to start preventing it right now.

1 in 4
applicants will be fake by 2028

78%
of job seekers admit to misrepresentation during the hiring process

17%
of hiring managers encountered deepfake technology during interviews

Statistical Sources: Gartner, Checkster, and HireRight

Understanding Where Fraud Shows Up

Fraud tactics are becoming more sophisticated and harder to spot, appearing at every stage from application through onboarding.

	Source/Apply	Screen	Interview	Select/Onboard
Fraud Types	Bots, spam applicants, low-intent AI mass applies	Credential fraud, false resumes	Proxy candidates, deepfake-assisted answers, voice spoofing	Reference fraud, stolen identities, continued impersonation once hired
Business Impact	Wastes recruiter hours reviewing fake profiles	Fills your pipeline with bad candidates while good ones move on to other roles	Interviews (and potentially hires) the wrong person	Security breaches, compliance violations, reputation damage

Rethinking How and When You Verify Candidates

Most organizations get verification wrong. They verify too early (creating candidate drop-off) or too late (after fraud has already wasted their time). Here's what doesn't work and what does:

WHAT DOESN'T WORK	THE BETTER APPROACH
✗ **Too early:** ID at application creates candidate drop-off	✓ **Light checks early** to filter obvious fraud
✗ **Too late:** Verifying only at background check lets fraud slip through	✓ **Consistency monitoring** mid-funnel to catch impersonation
✗ **Same for everyone:** Using identical verification for all roles	✓ **Robust verification** only when it matters most

Preventing Fraud Across the Funnel: Best Practices & Next Steps

Early in the hiring process, fraud tends to be noisy and inconvenient—wasting recruiter time and attention. Later in the funnel, it becomes far more dangerous, as bad actors gain access to more people, systems, and information.

At Employ, we believe fraud prevention should scale with risk—what we call the Swiss cheese method. A single slice of Swiss cheese has holes. But when you stack enough slices together, those holes disappear. The same principle applies to fraud prevention: by layering the right safeguards at each stage of the hiring process, you close the gaps that fraudulent candidates rely on to slip through.

Here’s what that looks like in practice:

Early stage: filter fast, reduce noise

- Use knockout questions to eliminate obvious mismatches early.
- Watch for fraud patterns: blank resumes, placeholder documents, one-word answers, or consistently selecting the first radio-button option.
- Set clear guidelines around AI assistance—prioritizing authenticity over polished responses.

Mid-stage: validate skills and consistency

- Use performance-based tasks that require candidates to demonstrate real skills.
- Ask candidates to explain their work in real time, not just describe outcomes.
- Cross-check details across resumes, applications, and interview responses.
- Train hiring managers to spot red flags: vague answers, inconsistent details, or an inability to elaborate on past work.

Late stage: verify before access

- Use reference checks to verify credentials and past performance.
- Set transparency expectations about your verification process.
- Document and standardize verification steps to ensure consistency and fairness.

Candidate fraud will hit your hiring process, but it doesn’t have to waste your recruiters’ time or damage your company’s reputation. Build verification into every stage to surface fraud early without losing great candidates.

Turn Employee Referrals into Your Best Hiring Source

Thanks to AI, it's never been easier for candidates to apply for jobs—and recruiters are feeling it. Application volume is up, with 66% of teams reporting more applicants than last year. But more doesn't always mean better. Nearly half of recruiters say their biggest challenge is still finding qualified candidates.

So, the question becomes: how do you attract better talent without sorting through hundreds of applications?

One of the most effective answers is already on your team. Your employees know what it takes to succeed at your company—and who they'd want to work alongside. Yet referrals remain surprisingly underused. According to Employ's latest Hiring Benchmarks data, just 7.5% of hires came from employee referrals in 2025.

When done right, employee referrals can help teams reach higher-quality candidates faster, while cutting down time spent on spam or fraudulent applications that often come with high-volume hiring. But they're not without tradeoffs. Referral programs can also reinforce bias by favoring candidates with similar backgrounds, experiences, or networks, making intentional design essential.

Build a Competitive Incentive Program

If you want employees to participate in your referral program, the incentives have to matter to them. Start by finding out what motivates your team—cash bonuses, recognition, growth opportunities, or something else entirely. A quick company-wide survey can help you gauge interest and shape incentives employees will actually care about.

To drive long-term impact, design your referral program with retention in mind. Layer in milestone-based rewards—like bonuses when a referral stays six months, a year, or longer—to reinforce long-term fit and ensure you're not just hiring faster, but better.

Leverage this chart to brainstorm incentive ideas for a referral program.

Goal Action	Incentive/Reward	Compound Over Time	Who Benefits
Ex: Employee network referral for open positions	• Employees get entered into monthly prize drawing for every referral application. • Employees get $100 for successful referral hire made	• Employee gets $500 for referral hire successfully completing 6 months of employment	• Employees • Hiring managers • Stakeholders

Chart Costs and Set Clear Goals

Once you've defined your incentives, map out what the program will cost and what success looks like. Outline expected spend, referral targets, and the outcomes you want to drive—like faster hires, better quality candidates, or improved retention.

Partner with managers to help promote the program and drive early adoption. Launching with a limited-time or first-referral incentive can spark interest, build awareness, and get employees participating right away.

Leverage this chart to align your referral program spend with expected return.

Incentive	Estimated Cost(s)	Hiring Goal(s)
Ex: Employee network referral for open position	Monthly: $ Annual: $	Hire at least 3 referrals during the year

Deploy Your Tech Stack

Enable your team with a streamlined portal

1. Implement a user-friendly ATS that can monitor referral sources.
2. Integrate the referral program with existing HR and payroll platforms for seamless reward distribution.
3. Create simple, mobile-friendly submission processes that take less than five minutes to complete.
4. Set up automated notifications to keep employees updated on their referral's status.
5. Use dashboards and reporting to monitor participation, performance, and ROI.
6. Establish secure documentation systems for referral records and reward distribution.

Launch For Success

Set the stage for early adoption

1. Conduct engaging company-wide training sessions that clearly outline program benefits.
2. Create compelling promotional materials that highlight success stories and reward potential.
3. Establish regular communication channels to maintain program visibility.
4. Monitor early adoption rates and gather feedback for quick adjustments.
5. Host kick-off events to generate excitement and answer questions.
6. Implement a recognition system to celebrate successful referrals.
7. Create a dedicated support channel for the program.

Distribution Channel Checklist

Leverage multiple channels to maximize program visibility and participation

Digital Platforms:

- Company intranet
- Employee communication apps
- Social or advocacy platforms
- Internal newsletters

Personal Engagement

- Team meetings
- Department updates
- One-on-one discussions
- Success story sharing

Remember: The strongest referral programs align with your company culture and use modern tools to make participation easy and inclusive. Regular check-ins and small optimizations help keep the program effective as hiring needs and market conditions change.

Employee Retention Starts with Quality Onboarding

You sourced great candidates, kept communication strong, ran structured interviews, aligned with the hiring team, and landed on your top choice. Once the offer is accepted and the paperwork is signed, hiring's complete—right? Wrong.

This is where onboarding begins. And while it's often treated as an administrative step, onboarding plays a much bigger role. It shapes how quickly new hires ramp, how connected they feel, and whether they see a future at your company.

Too often, onboarding becomes a box to check instead of a strategic opportunity. We'll help you rethink onboarding and build an experience that sets employees up for long-term success, not just day-one readiness.

Review Your Existing Program

Before jumping to conclusions about where onboarding is working (or falling short), it's important to take a step back and review the full process.

82% of TA teams already track recruiting metrics, and those data points can reveal more about onboarding than you might expect. Metrics like new-hire retention, first-year turnover, and early satisfaction scores can help you understand how well onboarding sets employees up for success—and how that experience impacts engagement and retention over time.

Beyond the numbers, common onboarding breakdowns often show up in a few key places:

- Manual verification steps that eat up hours per candidate
- I-9 documentation errors that create compliance risk
- Admin bottlenecks that delay productivity from day one
- Disconnected first-week experiences that trigger early regret
- Rigid workflows that break down as organizations scale

These issues don't just slow the process down—they create friction, increase risk, and jeopardize your hard-won hires. Use this list as a starting point to identify where your onboarding experience is breaking down.

Ask for Feedback

Data tells part of the story, but feedback fills in the gaps. One of the most effective ways to evaluate onboarding is to go straight to the source.

Start by gathering feedback from new hires shortly after onboarding to capture their first impressions. Then follow up at 30, 60, or 90 days to understand how well the experience actually prepared them for the role. Hiring managers are another critical input—ask whether new hires felt ready to contribute, and where gaps may still exist.

You can even get ahead of issues earlier in the process by asking candidates about their onboarding expectations during recruiting. This is often a missed step—but when used intentionally, it gives you an early signal into what new hires need and value, helping you design an experience that feels intentional, supportive, and relevant from day one.

Use the charts below as a starting point for building onboarding questionnaires for both new hires and hiring managers.

New Hire Questionnaire

Audience	Focus Area	Sample Questions
New hire	Overall experience	How would you rate your overall onboarding experience so far?
	Clarity & expectations	Did onboarding clearly explain what success looks like in your role?
	Readiness	After onboarding, how prepared did you feel to start your job?
	Tools & access	Did you have access to the tools, systems, and information you needed on Day 1?
	Process & timing	Were onboarding tasks and paperwork easy to complete and clearly explained?
	Connection & support	Did you know who to go to with questions during your first few weeks?
	Engagement	What part of onboarding was most helpful? What felt unnecessary or confusing?

Hiring Manager Questionnaire

Audience	Focus Area	Sample Questions
Hiring manager	Role readiness	How prepared was the new hire to perform their role after onboarding?
	Ramp time	How quickly did the new hire begin contributing meaningfully to the team?
	Skills & knowledge	Did onboarding adequately cover the skills, tools, and context needed for success?
	Gaps identified	Were there any gaps onboarding didn't address that you had to cover later?
	Process alignment	Did onboarding align well with your team's expectations and workflows?
	Support & ownership	Did you feel clear on your role in supporting the new hire during onboarding?
	Improvement	What would you change to better prepare future hires?

Embrace the Power of Technology

At its core, onboarding is about people. Your team's time is better spent building relationships and setting new hires up for success—not chasing paperwork or managing manual checks. And yet, for many teams, onboarding still gets bogged down by administrative work that adds friction instead of value.

When the right processes are paired with the right technology, that dynamic changes. AI and automation can take care of the busy work, freeing your team to focus on what actually matters: connection, support, and engagement.

For example, Employ's ATS solution, Lever, helps streamline onboarding with built-in automation that removes common bottlenecks:

- **Integrated E-Verify** takes manual verification off your plate while keeping you fully USCIS-compliant. No extra logins, no delays—just instant verification, built right in.
- **AI-powered form generation** automatically adapts to regulatory changes. And if you need something custom, our AI Form Builder will create it in minutes. Just describe what you want and watch it appear—no more waiting on legal reviews or wrestling with outdated templates.
- **Native tax document support** streamlines payroll onboarding and eliminates dependency on outside vendors, saving days in coordination and setup.

The result? Onboarding workflows that adapt to your business—not the other way around.

When evaluating onboarding technology, look for AI and automations that help your team spend less time on paperwork and more time engaging new hires from day one.

Apply Onboarding Best Practices

You know what metrics to track, which questions to ask, and how technology can help. Now it's time to put it all together.

Below is a list of onboarding best practices informed by years of working with organizations of all sizes. Use it to assess how your current process stacks up—and to identify simple, actionable improvements you can start making today.

Onboarding Best Practice	Is This Part of Our Onboarding Process?
Remote-first orientation and training modules that can be completed on any smart device.	
Assign role ambassadors for new hires to help them integrate into the company culture; use engaged employees and incentivize them to participate.	
Survey new hires after they complete the onboarding program for feedback and ideas.	
Continuously monitor employee retention and turnover rates and report regularly.	
Start new hires on orientation, onboarding, and paperwork before their first day of work.	
Include information about the company's dedication to DE&I and share employee resources and stories.	
Give new hires a virtual tour of the systems and let them know where they can reach out for questions.	

How to Win the Best Talent in Today's Market

Recruiting is one of the most important functions in any organization—but it isn't always treated that way.

Think about it: this is the team responsible for hiring the people who build your business. Get it wrong, and the impact shows up in wasted spend, stalled productivity, and higher turnover. Get it right, and recruiting becomes a competitive advantage, a growth lever, and a real driver of business performance.

But with talent shortages, limited resources, and competing priorities, finding the right people isn't simple. Add in rapid advances in AI, and it gets even harder. Today, it's easier than ever for candidates to apply for jobs, leading to an avalanche of applications—and more fake or fraudulent candidates slipping into the funnel. As a result, screening is tougher, risk and compliance concerns are rising, and recruiters are spending more time sorting through noise instead of engaging qualified talent.

That's why the teams that win top talent invest intentionally—in the right tools, processes, and tactics. Below are ten smart ways to invest in your recruiting efforts today, so your team can focus on quality, efficiency, and long-term impact.

What Top Teams are Doing Differently:

1. **Invest in recruitment software that proves ROI.** Choose tools that clearly connect spend to outcomes like quality of hire, time to fill, and retention.
2. **Use AI to handle busy work, not human work.** Invest in AI that takes on tasks like resume reviews, interview scheduling, and feedback follow-ups, while keeping human judgment in the driver's seat. Look for tools that prioritize explainability, fairness, and trust.
3. **Design a tech stack that works together.** Reduce overlap and manual handoffs by investing in systems that integrate across the hiring lifecycle, from job board posting through onboarding.
4. **Build a smarter recruiting budget.** Allocate spend across different strategies like employer branding, recruitment marketing, and candidate relationship management based on your goals and priorities.
5. **Protect your funnel from candidate fraud.** Layer safeguards throughout the hiring process that scale as risk increases, helping protect your business without adding friction for legitimate candidates.
6. **Shift toward skills-based hiring.** Focus on what candidates can do—not just credentials—to expand access to talent and improve long-term fit.
7. **Measure what matters—and review it often.** Set clear goals, assign ownership, and track key recruiting and onboarding metrics consistently so you can adjust quickly, not quarterly.
8. **Build feedback loops into hiring.** Regular input from candidates, recruiters, hiring managers, and new hires helps surface issues early and improve the hiring experience for everyone involved.
9. **Treat onboarding as a retention investment.** A personalized, streamlined onboarding experience helps new hires ramp faster and feel confident from day one.
10. **Celebrate progress, not just outcomes.** Recognizing wins keeps teams motivated and reinforces what's working.

Remember: Success in modern recruiting requires a balanced approach combining technology investment, process optimization, and people-first strategies. Stay agile, measure consistently, and adjust as needed to maximize your recruiting investments.

How to Prove the ROI of Your TA Tech Stack

Recruiting today comes with no shortage of pressure. Application volume is up. Candidate expectations are higher. Resources are tighter. And teams are navigating new risks—from increased scrutiny around bias and fairness to candidate fraud.

To keep pace, TA teams are leaning into technology more than ever. According to the latest Recruiter Nation data, 65% now use AI to support their recruiting efforts—and they're seeing real returns.

That momentum isn't slowing down. Thirty-nine percent of TA leaders say upgrading or adopting new recruiting software is a top priority this year (up from 25% in 2024), with AI-powered tools leading the way, followed by CRM and ATS investments.

But here's the kicker: getting (and keeping) budget for these investments requires more than adoption. It requires proving impact and clearly showing recruiting ROI.

Map Your Recruiting Tech Spend

Recruiting today rarely runs on a single tool—it runs on a tech stack. Many teams rely on different platforms for background checks, recruitment marketing, scheduling, video interviews, and more.

Before adding another shovel to your shed this year, use this chart to list every tool in your stack and what it costs. Seeing everything in one place makes it easier to spot overlap, identify opportunities to consolidate, and compare new investments against what you're already paying for.

Tool			
Cost Type	**Up-Front Costs**	**Recurring Costs**	**Total Cost of Ownership**
Ex: New ATS	Initial setup fee: $x One-time deposit: $x	Monthly support fee: $x Annual membership fee: $x	Sum of costs

Set your Measures of Success

Once you understand what your tech stack costs, the next step is understanding what it delivers. That means looking beyond spend to the impact on the business—and on the people involved.

Use this chart to evaluate business benefits like efficiency and cost savings, alongside employee and candidate outcomes such as hiring manager satisfaction or candidate net promoter score.

The key: focus on the benefits you can actually measure and track.

Tool	Business Benefit	Employee Benefit	Candidate Benefit
Ex: New ATS	• Faster time to revenue • Lower cost per hire • Improved hiring quality	• Higher confidence in decisions • Faster team build and reduction in burnout • More equitable, structured hiring	• Clearer hiring timelines • Fairer evaluation process • Better communication at every stage

This framework is also useful when evaluating new technology. Define what success looks like for the business, employees, and candidates before you invest. If the data isn't readily available, identify who you need to partner with internally to access it—because without clear metrics, it's hard to prove impact or justify spend.

Review and Optimize Your Tech Stack

Your recruiting tech stack shouldn't be "set it and forget it." The teams that see the strongest ROI regularly review how their tools are performing—and adjust as needs change.

Use this chart to assess which platforms are delivering real value, where inefficiencies exist, and which tools are worth expanding, consolidating, or replacing. Regular check-ins make it easier to optimize spend, improve outcomes, and ensure your tech stack evolves with your hiring goals.

Deep-Dive Questions	Answers	Future Scale
What's not working? Where are you still seeing delays, bottlenecks, and misalignment? What tools are supporting you in those stages?		
Which stage(s) of the funnel does it support? Who uses it most and how often?		
What measurable outcomes does this tool influence? Are these metrics improving, flat, or declining?		
Does this tool have duplicate functionality elsewhere in our stack?		
Is this tool meeting current needs and future ones?		