



# **2021 Recruiting Initiatives**

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**For many of us, 2020 will go down as the longest, toughest year in our own personal histories:** one in which we were tested, forced to grow, surprised ourselves, and discovered what we were capable of—for better and for worse—in the midst of uncertainty, doubt, and difficulty. As an industry, talent acquisition saw as much fluctuation, discovery, and growth in 2020 as most of us did in our personal lives.



At Gem, we watched as customers paused reqs, as a few had to fold under the economic pressures brought on by the pandemic, and as others experienced considerable upsurges in headcount. We've had our ears wide-open to customers, colleagues, and talent as we've tracked the shifting landscape and changing trends, gathered candidates' concerns, and observed the critical values that surfaced as the less-important stuff sifted out in the wake of pandemic and of Black Lives Matter. We, *too*, had to shift our hiring entirely to remote and to ask ourselves some serious questions about what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean to us as Gems. As a result, we've contended with the same questions *you* have—around candidate experience, and our culture, and our core values.

For all the talk about how excited we all are to “put 2020 behind us,” we know that nothing radical will happen on January 1 to mark an “end to pandemic” or a brand-new world of inclusion and belonging. There are still *a lot* of questions to be answered and a lot of unknowns to work through. And yet, as recruiters and talent leaders, there's a lot we can learn from reflecting upon 2020, and a lot we can prepare ourselves for in 2021 based on our own observations and the observations of our peers. That's what we've put this ebook together for.

Gem's “2021 Recruiting Reflections, Initiatives, and Predictions” is based on a survey that ran from November 4 through November 30, 2020, which over 500 talent acquisition professionals—from Sourcers and Recruiters, to Directors of Talent, to Talent Ops, to VPs of People, to Founders and CEOs—responded to. Respondents came from small businesses, large enterprises, and everywhere in-between. And they were willing to do more than check boxes.

They were also willing to tell us, *in their own words*, about everything from how democratizing geography is changing their pipelines; to how their approaches to candidate experience changed in 2020; to how they shifted their

diversity goals and initiatives in the wake of the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor; to why data is so important to telling TA's post-COVID stories; to why soft skills became so much more important in our remote-first, DEI-aware world.

We hope this ebook gives you a sense of what 2020 looked like for your peers—broadly, and in retrospect—and what they anticipate 2021 will look like for their respective teams, and for the talent acquisition industry on the whole. What tools are teams adding to their tech stacks to take on 2021 as effectively and efficiently as possible? How did sourcers and recruiters upskill in 2020, and how do they plan on bringing those new skills to bear upon their work in 2021? How, *specifically*, do talent leaders see themselves as strategic business advisors in light of the pandemic and the renewed importance of DEI? What top trends do talent acquisition professionals anticipate for 2021? What top *challenges* do they anticipate? Read on for both a bird's-eye view and detailed observations from your wise and thoughtful peers.

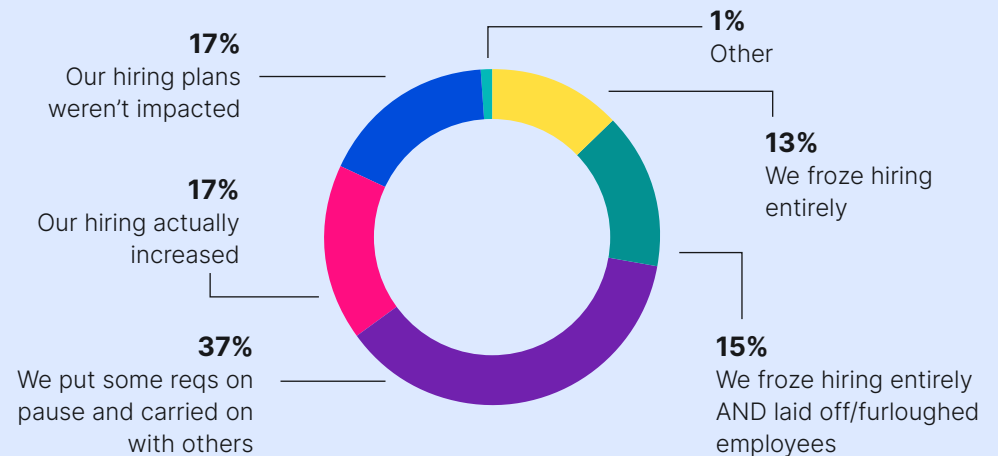
**Read on for insights and predictions from over 500 talent acquisition professionals—from Sourcers and Recruiters, to Directors of Talent, to Talent Ops, to VPs of People, to Founders and CEOs.**

# Reflections on 2020 & The Impact of COVID

Most respondents were on teams that slowed or froze hiring in 2020... but around 90% say they're hiring again

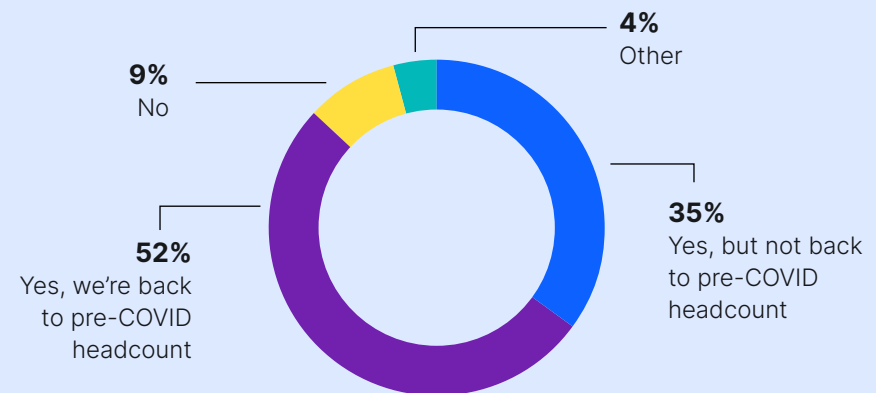
Unsurprisingly, COVID impacted the majority of businesses and therefore the majority of talent acquisition teams: 65% put at least *some* reqs on pause, and 28% of those froze hiring entirely. Only 17% of respondents—about 1/6th of recruiters and talent leaders—said that their hiring plans weren't impacted by the pandemic at all. Yet by November of 2020, the vast majority of respondents said that hiring had ramped up for them again. This is suggestive of a very agile landscape—at least in the tech sector, where the majority of our respondents are.

### Q. What happened to your hiring plans when COVID first hit?



\*The majority of respondents who chose "Other" either weren't working when COVID hit or weren't with their current teams at the onset of the pandemic and so couldn't speak to what had happened prior to their arrival.

### Q. Has hiring ramped up for you again?



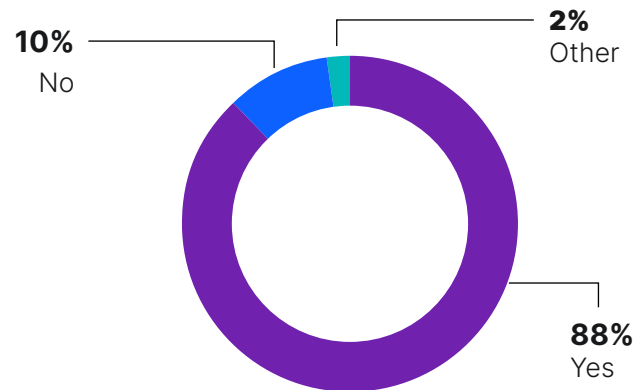
\* Respondents who chose "Other" recorded answers like: "No, but we'll hire again in Q1"; "Yes; and we're hiring more people than ever before"; "Yes—we surpassed pre-COVID headcount"; "Most of our hiring is internal right now".



## Interviewing and hiring processes will stay remote through 2021

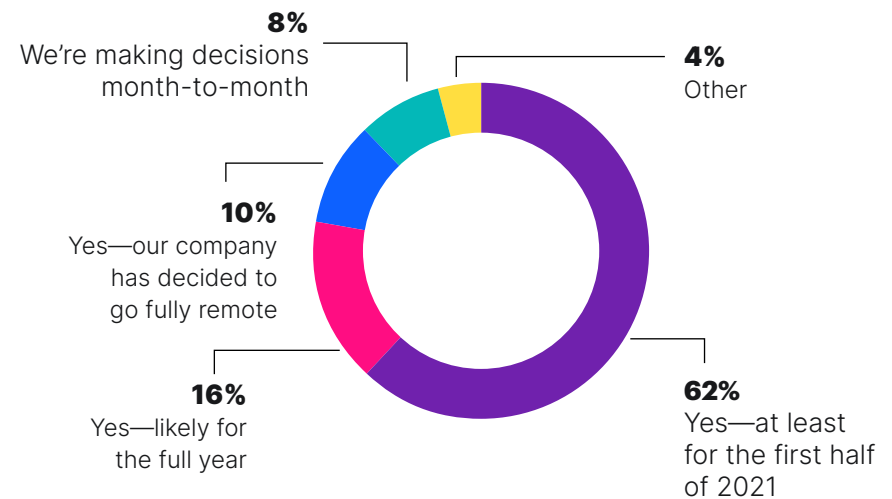
Not a single respondent answered “No” to the question “Do you anticipate that your interviewing and hiring process will stay remote in 2021?” Nearly 90% of recruiters and talent leaders were doing all of their hiring virtually during the span of this survey (November 2020); and over 90% anticipate hiring virtually in—and many of them *through*—2021. Many respondents also told us that their company has *always* been remote, so little has had to change in their process. A full 10% of respondents said that 2020 was the year that their company decided to go fully remote.

**Q. Is your interviewing and hiring process fully remote now?**



\* The majority of respondents who chose “Other” said that they’ve implemented a blend of virtual and onsite—particularly for higher level positions: “It’s remote for most positions, but C-suite level interviews occur onsite”; “First round is virtual, then selected candidates are F2F where appropriate”; “The first half of the interview process is remote, but serious applicants are brought in for a final interview in person”; “We use a mix of remote and onsite (for countries able to return to the office).”

**Q. Do you anticipate that your interviewing and hiring process will stay remote in 2021?**



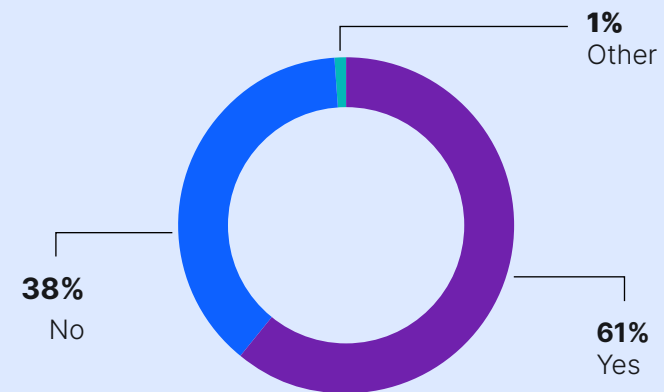
\* The majority of respondents who chose “Other” said that their company has always been fully remote and plans to stay that way. Others said that their org has announced a flexible option, in which employees can be remote, in-office, or a combination of the two, as they choose.

## Geography is being democratized: 72% of talent acquisition teams are now considering talent outside the geographic location of their office spaces

Over 60% of respondents say that their hiring strategy has had to change because of the pandemic. These changes include having to find creative ways to pitch the company, emphasize stability and safety, formalize and standardize the hiring process, seek new competencies and soft skills, and market roles differently. But many respondents reported that their companies are now considering making work fully remote, or considering which areas of the business could benefit from *remaining* remote. (Add to this the 10% of companies that have firmly decided to go fully remote in recent months.)

These decisions about long-term remote work explain why at least 72% of talent acquisition professionals say they're now considering talent outside the geographic location of their office spaces. The benefits of doing so seem to far outweigh the disadvantages. Diversity and more robust pipelines are by far the two biggest benefits cited around opening up geography. Yet there's a general consensus that while searches may be less difficult, competition for talent has increased—one respondent called it a “zero sum game”—since industry rivals are opening up their searches as well. What's more, hiring is now taking longer because there are more candidates in process. Other struggles of democratizing geography include employment brand, market research, salary-mapping, and salary offers—the latter depending on whether respondents' offices are located *within* or *outside* of tech hubs.

Q. Has your hiring strategy had to change during the pandemic?





## 61% of respondents said their hiring strategies changed during the pandemic. Here's how:

"**Remote** interviews. **Remote** onboarding."

"**More virtual pieces** than ever before."

"We're engaging in more **social media** and **virtual career fair platforms**."

"Longer and more intentional interviews. **You have to demonstrate your culture** since you can't have people in an office."

"Trying to reduce the time candidates spend in process; trying to be **more flexible with schedules**; trying to showcase even more what makes our company unique."

"We're emphasizing **company stability** and **plans for growth**."

"**Safety** has become a big part of the recruitment proposition."

"We're seeking **contractors and freelancers** over full-time exempt."

"A large part of our company's culture is around the office. So finding other **creative ways to pitch the company** to prospective candidates."

"We've had to look at our candidate and new-hire experience through a new lens. We need candidates and new hires to **feel appreciated and in-the-loop** despite being remote."

"More **formalized, standardized, and streamlined**. A mix of **asynchronous and synchronous communications** throughout the process."

"We're considering **permanently remote** employees."

"We are considering what orgs may benefit from **remote hiring permanently**."

"We are now open to **looking into other states** for talent that we currently have taxes set up in. This has helped us to expand our **diversity hiring initiatives** and be **more competitive with pay** for top talent."

"More emphasis on **diversity recruiting**."

"Geography's changed, as well as **compensation/benefits** offered."

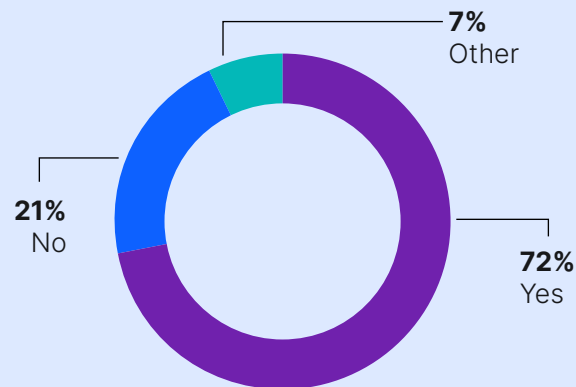
"We used to hire only local candidates and are **now open for the entire U.S.**"

"We're looking for **different soft skills** since candidates can work remotely with us."

"**Seeking different competencies** to ensure new hires are successful working remotely. We have to have a **heavier hand in new hire onboarding** to make sure each new hire starts smoothly."

"We've changed how we're marketing and advertising for open roles. **More spend on LinkedIn ads** and other similar websites."

**Q.** In hiring remotely, are you now considering talent outside the geographic location of your office space?



\* The majority of respondents who chose "Other" said that they expect new hires to relocate when it's safe to return to the office. Others said that the answer to this question is role-dependent, hiring manager-dependent, or dependent upon how difficult the role is to fill.

## 72% of respondents said they're now considering out-of-area talent. Here's what they're seeing:

"It's giving us access to a **larger, more diverse talent pool.**"

"Finding more candidates and having **more robust pipelines.**"

"The ability to reach more candidates in various markets **makes searches less difficult.**"

"**More diversity!**"

"It's allowed us to do what we wanted to do: **recruit in more diverse communities** across the U.S."

"Great impact as we're able to broaden our scope and actively source a **wider pool of diverse candidates** as a result."

"We have a wider applicant pool and can **focus on skills-related qualifications** without concern for physical location. We have also realized a **benefit in having employees across multiple time zones** to better partner with our global colleagues."

"It opens up the pipeline via location, but also makes things **more competitive.**"

**"Competition for that same talent has now increased.**

While it has opened up talent for us that we previously could not have accessed, it's done the same thing for our competitors; so it's been a zero sum game."

"Better pool of candidates, but many more candidates which equals **longer process and wait time.**"

**"Too many geos** - we need to focus more strategically."

"I think **some candidates don't want to be the first person in a new geo,** so I need to alleviate those concerns in my initial messages."

"We're **competing with other cities' cost of living.**"

"The biggest impact is a huge budget **cost savings for relocation this year** as no relocations are in process."

"We're seeing **more applicants** submitting their resumes to our searches."

"Huge **increase in applications.**"

"It's been dramatically **easier to source candidates** but **more difficult to post roles** on platforms like LinkedIn, as they make you pay per post per location."

"We're getting traction in markets where we have pods of people, but still experience the **'I've never heard of your company'** response."

"It's difficult to **map out salaries.**"

"Positive impact: we are able to look at **new geographical areas.** Negative impact: we don't have an **employment brand** in these new areas yet."

"We're **finding talent for less money** than we paid in SF."

"Better impact - we can now **hire talent in markets that historically don't want to relocate to SF** (for example: ATL, NC, TX)."

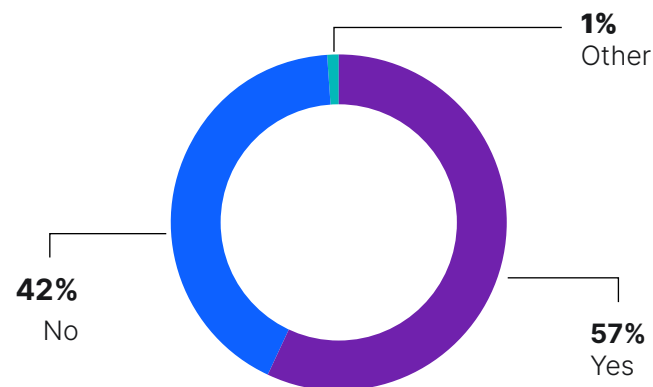
"It's a much **larger applicant pool,** but a bit of an uphill battle to get offers approved due to having to do market research in the specific market we are hiring in."

**"Longer searches** as we enter new markets."

## Approaches to candidate experience have changed—including more touchpoints, more face time, and more thorough communication

Of the nearly 60% of respondents who said yes, their approach to candidate experience has changed, many emphasized prioritizing Zoom calls over emails and phone calls to increase face time. Recruiters also emphasized including more touchpoints and more thorough communication throughout the process. Welcome videos, virtual tours, accommodating candidates' needs around timing (adjusting interview hours or spreading interviews across multiple days), and empathy also topped the list.

**Q.** Has your approach to candidate experience changed during the pandemic?



**57% of respondents said their approach to candidate experience is different now. Here's how:**

"Given the lack of in-person connection, moving all interviews/candidate updates to **Zoom/video calls to see each other in person** instead of phone/email updates."

"We are doing recruiter <> candidate wrap-ups and intros on **Zoom instead of the phone to get more facetime.**"

"**More video calls and touchpoints** needed to build relationships and trust."

"We have had to **adapt our technical assessments, logistics, scheduling, and communication.** In a word... EVERYTHING."

"We include **more virtual video interviews** as well as as require sales candidates to submit a pitch video as part of their application."

"**Virtual communications are much more thorough.** We make our COVID-19 precaution efforts clear to help encourage the feeling of safety and concern."

"Highlighting our focuses on **promoting employee wellness.**"

"**Increased 'touches'** - more check-ins before the interview, setting up a 'greeting' the morning of, also **splitting some interview processes** that would historically happen in one day into anywhere from 2-3 days."

"**More touchpoints** per candidate to try and lessen ambiguity that already exists under current events."

"More focus on **written communication to prepare candidates** for virtual onsite."

"We've taken steps to add **as much information regarding the process**, and what to expect, as possible."

"**Training candidates and interviewers on how to successfully navigate a video interview;** being mindful that interviewing at home is not always a home turf advantage."

"More consideration to **convey a welcoming environment** as they will no longer get to experience it for themselves in person in our office. We also have changed our onboarding process to include welcome videos and virtual tours of some of our locations."

"**Sharing videos with office tours**, trying to keep as much human contact as possible - lots of Zooms!"

"We try to **involve as many different people in the interview process as possible** (within reason) to give the candidate an idea of our working culture."

"Greater emphasis on training interviewers to **respect the candidate's time** and provide information about the hiring process."

## Candidates' soft skills have become even more important in our remote-first, DEI-aware world

Sourcers and recruiters are in general agreement that soft skills became more important in 2020, and that they'll continue to play an essential role in candidate selection in 2021. Communication, flexibility, and adaptability turned out to be critical skills during COVID as businesses had to pivot quickly and the majority of work went online. And as more and more companies began implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, recruiters started looking for potential, predicting impact, and considering culture rather than focusing entirely on experience. Remote work, DEI, and culture were the top three reasons given for why soft skills increased in importance this year.

### SOURCERS/RECRUITERS

On a scale of 1-10, how important does it feel for you to hire for soft skills and potential right now—not just experience?



## We asked respondents why they chose that number:

“**Ability to communicate well** and prove that there’s **self-motivation** will be huge for success while we’re remote.”

“Soft skills, though always important, are especially important when considering the remote environment and dynamics between co-workers/managers, etc. They **weigh more heavily in an environment with less accountability.**”

“**To be able to pivot during hard times** has been shown to be a key skill.”

“**Communication is so much more important** with remote work.”

“**Emotional intelligence is 10x more important** in a remote-first world.”

“The experience we need for a role won’t change but our environment has. We need more than ever to **support the communities we truly serve** as well as build teams that can thrive in this ambiguous time.”

“It’s been a best practice for our company, **especially as we incorporate DEI** more and more to our process, to not just look for experience but also to **provide opportunities for high potentials.**”

“I always believe **growth potential** is what you bring talent on for. I recruit for early-stage startups, so every challenge is new, you need to be adaptable and learn fast.”

“Soft skills are critical to creating **a supportive and adaptable team.**”

“**Culture is king.** In order to be effective in our organization, one has to be a well-rounded individual. Technical, communication, organizational and collaborative skills are all important whether remote or in the office.”

“While we currently find experience is incredibly important as we’re building out our product, **the soft skills to join such a small team is critical. As is the potential to grow,** both personally and professionally, with the company.”

“We are a small startup, so **soft skills + culture add** hires are really big for us right now.”

“**Soft skills are the hard skills** because they’re the traits people bring to an organization that **foster the culture and values.** Technology is what we do, our values are the drivers in how we execute.”

“You’re not just bringing your work experience to a new company; you’re bringing your whole self (ideally, if the company provides the psychological safety that allows you to do so), which includes soft skills, potential for growth, personality, etc. **This shapes a company’s culture and community,** and ultimately the achievements that you’ll make for the company based on your work there.”

“Part of what would make someone successful in this remote period would be their **ability to be flexible and adaptable** and be able to work remotely.”

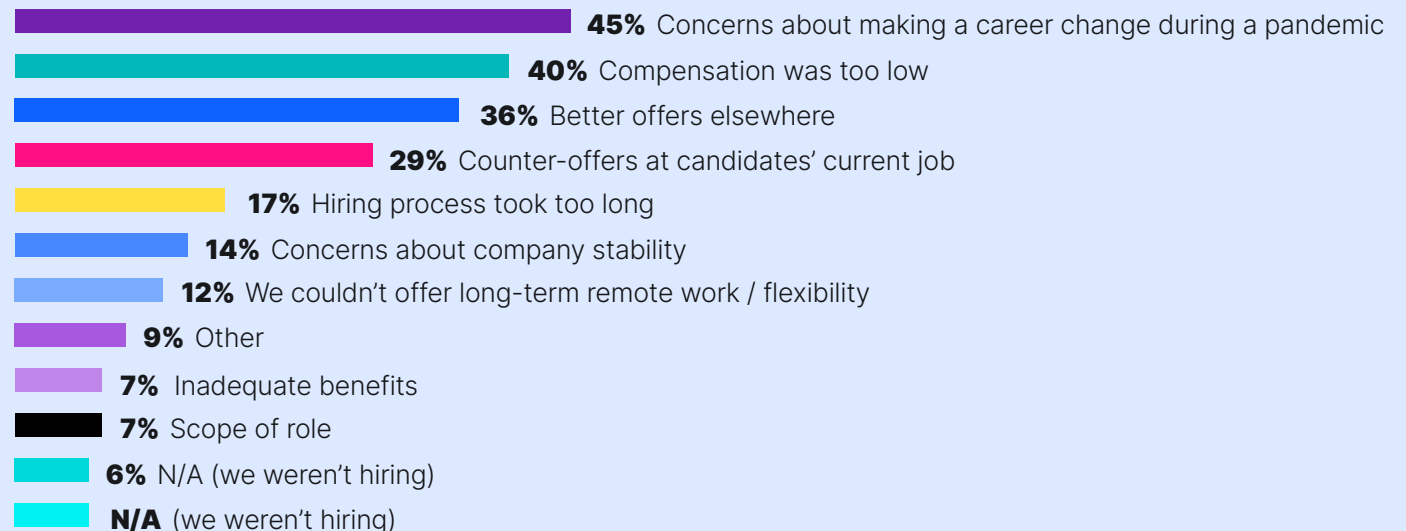


## The most common reason candidates gave for rejecting offers in 2020 was concern about making a career change during a pandemic

This data point solidifies a 2021 prediction we'll discuss below ([see p. 41](#)): that employer branding will play a critical role in recruiting efforts in 2021. It's an understatement to say that COVID has created an environment of uncertainty. Talent is not going to forget the anxiety this pandemic has brought on; and it's likely that company stability will be a fundamental element of career decisions for years to come. Prospective candidates are now asking questions like: How likely is it that the role we've sourced them for will be impacted long-term? How has the pandemic impacted our business performance? Is there any imminent restructuring of teams? They're *even* asking: What do severance packages look like? So however you can demonstrate company stability as part of your employer branding—whether by revealing growth plans, company financials, or long-term revenue prospects—do so. (This is perhaps *especially* true when you can't top compensation offers from your competitors: see top reasons #2-4 for why candidates rejected offers in 2020.)

Q.

What are the most common reasons candidates gave for rejecting offers at your org in 2020?

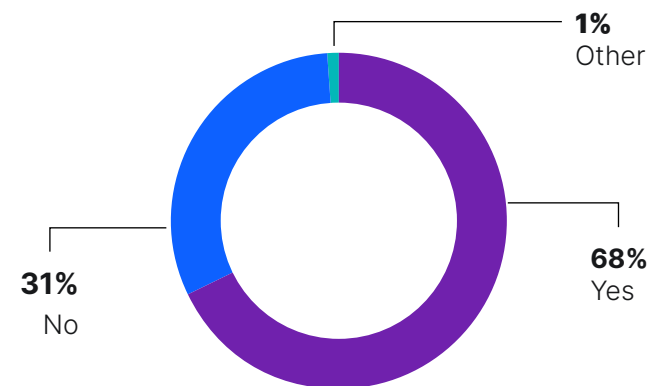


\* Respondents who chose "Other" recorded answers like: "Fear of joining a series A company. Most want Series C or bigger"; "Inadequate information on career development opportunities"; "Concerns about growth opportunities"; "Moving to our city with its extremely expensive cost of living"; and "Relocation after pandemic."

## 2020 was a year of upskilling for sourcers and recruiters—especially when it came to DEI, new sourcing techniques, and leadership development

Nearly 70% of sourcers and recruiters said that they used the extra time they had in 2020—when reqs slowed or were put on pause—for upskilling. Respondents acknowledged a lot of work on soft skills like better communication, flexibility, adaptability, time management, empathy, and resilience. The hard skills recruiters learned ranged from software development to motivational speaking to certifications in CSM and CSPO. But the *most*-mentioned skills that recruiters plan on applying to their work in 2021 include DEI, new sourcing and recruiting techniques, leadership development, and management. What does this mean for business? Organizations can anticipate stronger partners and advisors coming out of talent acquisition in 2021, as well as more diverse talent from a wider range of sources coming through their pipelines.

**Q. Was 2020 a year of upskilling for you?**



\* Respondents who chose "Other" were either unemployed for much of the year or didn't have the time to learn new skills because they were hiring more than ever before.

**68% of sourcers and recruiters learned skills in 2020 that they plan to apply in 2021. Here some examples:**

"I started **contributing to recruiting operations** more."

"**Technical communication** with engineers, **thought leadership** with hiring managers."

"**Diversity and inclusion initiatives**, tracking recruiting processes, being a **stronger consultant** to HM."

"**D&I, talent advising.**"

"**EDI, leadership training**, modern **sourcing techniques.**"

"More **diversity sourcing** skills—especially in looking at tribal colleges and universities which is not a demographic I've previously tried to actively source for."

"**Project management, DEI** practices."

"Excel, **D&I recruiting.**"

"**Leadership in I&D.**"

"**Social recruiting.**"

"Additional **sourcing techniques.**"

"Company-wide recruiting strategy, **top of funnel sourcing.**"

"I took time to level up on **increasing the efficiency of my searches.**"

"Better **sourcing strategy**, better **candidate management.**"

"**Leadership development** skills and **project planning.**"

"**People management.**"

"**Program management.**"

"**Employer branding, social media** strategy, new ways of **sourcing.**"

"Generally more detail around **running campaigns**, more specifically using Gem."

"**Process improvements** for accelerating hiring in a remote setting, **remote collaboration.**"

"**Recruiting analytics.**"

"Way more reliance on **data.**"

"2020 was a big year for my career. **I learned how to work remotely** with other teams. Talent is everywhere! So I had the opportunity to source in cities where we do not have an office."

"**Finding and closing talent in other markets**/parts of the U.S.!"

"Better **interpersonal connection** in a fully remote environment. **Managing communication** better when everyone is working remotely."

"**Building rapport** virtually; **influencing stakeholders** **virtually.**"

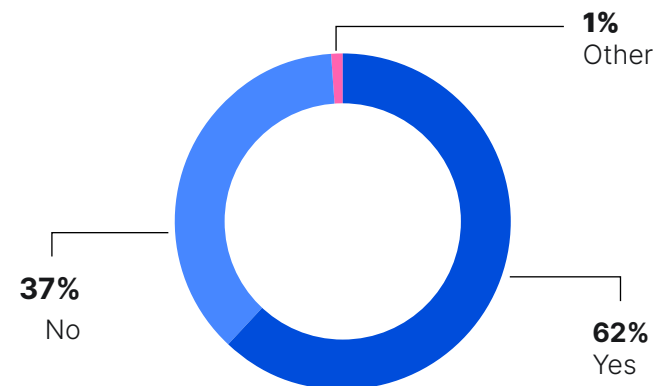
# Recruiting Teams' 2021 Plans & Initiatives

## 60% of teams set new diversity goals and created new diversity initiatives in 2020, and they're planning even more equitable hiring processes in 2021

Teams that had no diversity goals or initiatives at the beginning of 2020 now have them; teams that *had* them say they now have more robust and aggressive ones that will be both backed and tracked by data. Diversity metrics will be reported to teams and/or published to entire orgs to hold teams accountable in 2021. New initiatives include everything from improving referral programs to supporting ERGS to building out DEI teams internally to taking part in bootcamp and university programs. In short, 60% of talent acquisition teams have decided to up the ante for diversity hiring in the wake of 2020.

Sourcers/recruiters and talent leaders mostly align on top practices they'll be including in their hiring processes in 2021 to make them more equitable. Diversifying where they source candidates from, diversifying where they market their open roles, measuring diversity consistently through the pipeline, and diversifying interview panels/hiring teams were 4 of the top-5 practices both demographics cited. Sourcers/recruiters also stressed that they'll be rethinking qualifications in order to attract talent from non-traditional backgrounds, while talent leaders emphasized that they'll be implementing unconscious bias training for hiring team members—differences in focus that make sense, given the nature of these roles.

**Q. Did your diversity recruiting initiatives change at all in 2020?**



\* Respondents who chose "Other" either weren't sure, or have not been on their respective teams for long enough to know.

**62% of respondents said their orgs made changes to their diversity recruiting initiatives in 2020. Here are some of those changes:**

"We **implemented outreach goals.**"

"We worked to **expand our top-of-funnel diversity through better sourcing** and using more diverse job boards. We have been working to **improve our referral programs** to help bring in diverse applicants, as well as **supporting ERGs.**"

"We ground all recruitment, interview, and selection processes in DEI principles. At least a **10% increase in applications from BIPOCs**. At least a **15% increase in applications received from Latinx candidates**. No more than a 5% gap for any group advancing from phone interview to in-person interview and from in-person interview to offer.

"We committed to having at least **2/5 URM candidates** in the final stage interview process."

"We implemented the **Rooney Rule +1** for all roles at all levels."

"We're **hiring more internal staff with DEI experience.**"

"We **shifted our sourcing focus** with newly-opened reqs to ensure only candidates from diverse and/or **underserved groups are prioritized.**"

"We're **building out D&I teams internally.**"

"We've added **DEI training.**"

"We **made diversity recruiting a priority with hiring managers**, as they are the key decision-makers."

"We're doing more **diversity training with hiring managers.**"

"We **aligned our D&I goals directly to company OKRs and team KPIs.**"

"It's always been important to us, but with our recent OKR process put into place, we've made it **more of a formal focus, including reporting.**"

"We've taken part in more **diversity hiring fairs.**"

"**More measurement**, more manual collection and **tracking.**"

"**Tangible % metrics for onsite and hires** within departments (i.e. EPD and GTM)."

"We launched a **DEI working group.**"

"We focused on **interviewer bias, events**, and other initiatives.

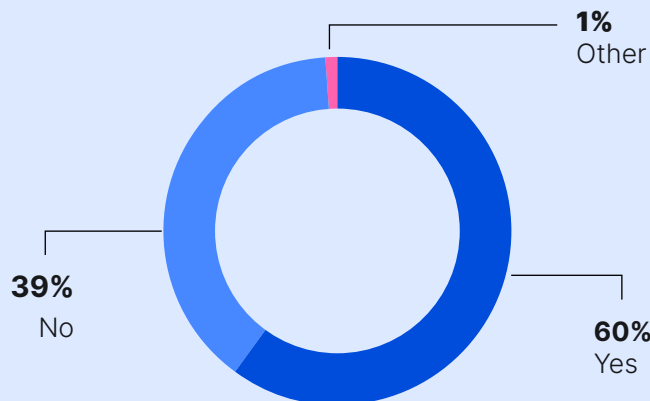
"We **focused on 'underrepresented groups'** and realized we needed to be more intentional around racial/ethnic diversity."

"We're driving diversity through **bootcamp & university programs.**"

"Our leaders volunteered to be part of future diversity efforts to help **create long-term support for new hires** and to foster current programs."

"We better defined our recruiting initiatives and our **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion philosophy.**"

**Q.** Will your diversity hiring goals look different in 2021 than they did in 2020?



\* Respondents who chose "Other" either weren't sure, or have not been on their respective teams for long enough to know.

## 60% of respondents said their diversity hiring goals will look different in 2021. Here's how:

"We'd like to see a significant **increase in the number of people from underrepresented groups (URGs) we hire.**"

"We would like to **fill our pipeline with more diverse candidates** across the board."

"We've **increased diversity sourcing** and **set goals at the very top of the funnel.**"

"We have **more aggressive goals** after this year."

"**More aggressive targets** for 2021."

"They're **higher and tied to KPIs.**"

"We will be more **focused on our talent pipeline.**"

"Our goals now include **tracking, collection, and analysis.**"

"Now we're **more data-driven**, we have more metrics around diversity goals."

"We are **incorporating employee level** next year into our goals, and **measuring progress by team.**"

"**More robust metrics and goals.** We will also be **reporting our current diversity metrics to our teams** so they have a visual representation of their current team diversity."

"Diversity **KPIs will be published quarterly to the entire org**, tracking all phases of the employee lifecycle (hiring, retention, exits, etc)."

"We **had no goals** in place for 2020; now we have them across the board."

"We're focusing on more **diverse hiring at the leadership level.**"



## SOURCERS/RECRUITERS

**Q. Which practices do you plan on including in your hiring process in 2021 to make it more equitable?**



## TALENT LEADERS

**Q.** Which practices do you plan on including in your hiring process in 2021 to make it more equitable?



## TA teams will use automation in 2021 to spend more time building relationships with candidates and to continue improving the candidate experience

Respondents who rated automation lower on the scale-of-importance did so primarily because they equate automation with a lack of personalization and diminished candidate experience: we saw lots of calls for the importance of “personal touch” and the “human element” of recruitment, even as those same respondents recognized automation’s ability to help scale, help organize, and save time. Others called for a balance of automation and humanization, noting that “recruiting is a human-to-human process; automation should only assist that process while recording data in the meantime.” Our favorite responses, of course, recognized Gem as a product that allows for *both*: “automation through entities like Gem is crucial to effective recruiting without losing personalization.” That said, the majority of respondents recognized automation is important precisely because it frees them up to build stronger,

more attentive relationships with prospects and with candidates in process—not to mention attend to other critical tasks like tracking diversity and becoming advisors to their hiring functions.

On a scale of 1-10, how important will automation be for recruiting in 2021?



## We asked respondents why they chose that number:

"Automation saves time so recruiters can **focus more on candidate experience.**"

"Whether you're in a remote setup or in-office, automation doesn't only make work more efficient but you also get to **spend saved time on more impactful tasks** such as interviewing and **building relationships with stakeholders and candidates.**"

"Anything that is repetitive that can be automated will improve the time that we are able to spend **investing in and improving the candidate experience.**"

"Automation saves time and helps us spend **more time doing other things like tracking diversity**, ROI on recruiting platforms, etc."

"Data show that **multiple messages are essential in outreach**; automation is necessary for this."

"**Saves so much time to have automated follow ups!**"

"**With more reachouts due to opening up the candidate pool**, the benefit of automation is huge. It's otherwise so easy for things to fall through the cracks."

"Integration of systems and automating processes speeds up the heavy transactional/ administrative work in recruitment and also **lends to a streamlined candidate experience which is the top goal**. It also creates efficiencies that drive down costs due to increased speed in output and removing barriers."

"In this era automation is everything **for the best candidate experience.**"

"We need to be **using our time as efficiently as possible**, especially now, as we are frequently pivoting."

"Automating the transactional work **frees recruiters up to be consultative recruiting advisors** to their Hiring Functions."

"We are small so automation is critical."

"Automation is especially important for smaller teams with higher workloads."

"As the country reopens and the workforce is rebuilt, **the numbers coming back in will be substantial**—which will mean less time for us. Automation will be especially important then."

"**Speed of application, interview, offer will always be a priority** regardless of environment."

"**More candidates = less time.** Automate ALL the things!"

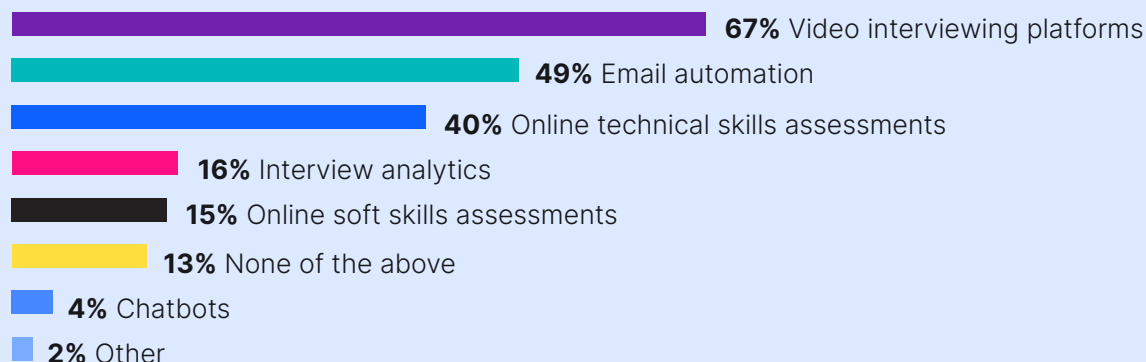
"**Competition is fierce** and we have to **touch on multiple channels and platforms in very little time**... automation helps with this."

"It's just time-saving. And **it increases results!** In the automation process, we can also add a 1:1 customization."

## Video interviewing platforms and email automation will be the two biggest remote-tech-stack adds in 2021

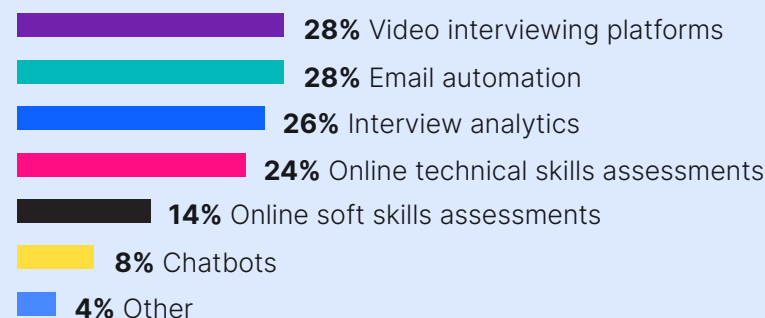
These two technologies were already the most widely-used TA tech pre-COVID: 67% of respondents said they were already using video interviewing platforms and 49% said they were already using email automation prior to the pandemic. But we'll see the use of those technologies expand considerably in 2021: nearly 30% of talent teams who don't already use these two technologies plan to implement them this year. The moral of the story? If you want to keep up with your competition, it'll be well worth looking into both of these solutions if you don't already use them.

### Q. Which technologies or platforms did you use to support remote hiring prior to COVID?



\* Respondents who chose "Other" mentioned Zoom, LinkedIn Recruiter, Gem, Greenhouse, and Calendly.

### Q. In 2021, which remote hiring technologies do you plan on adding to your tech stack?



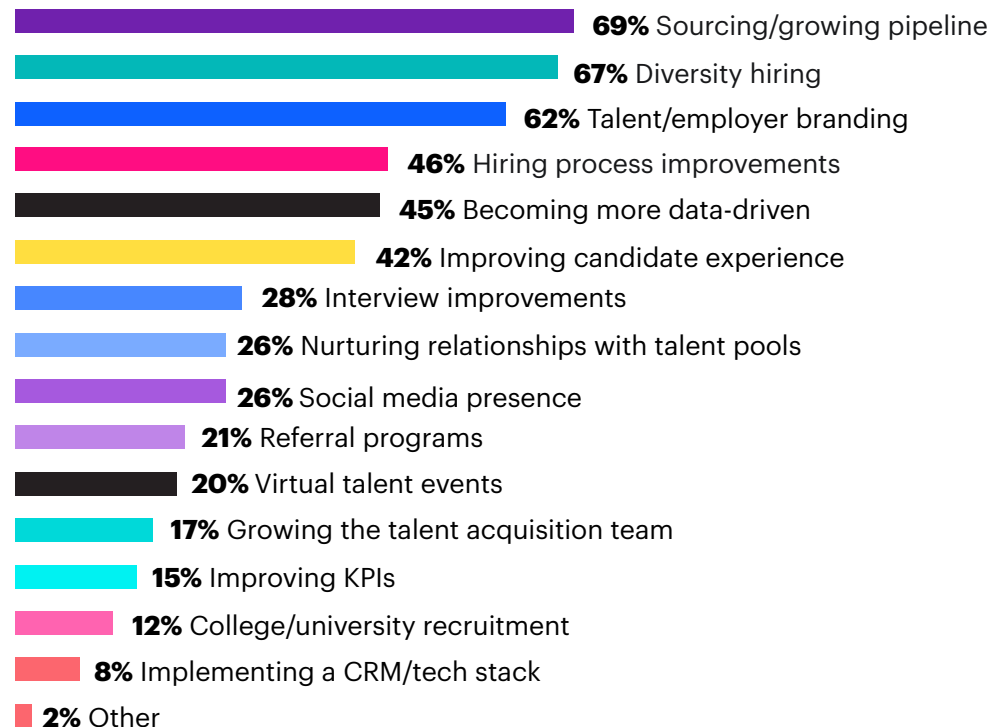
\* Respondents who chose "Other" recorded answers like: "We are still evaluating," "We already use all of the above," "Ways to measure diversity and inclusion efforts," "Platforms geared toward analytics and stronger diverse searches," "Text automation," and "Talent pools and drip campaigns." Others mentioned a specific ATS they plan on implementing.

Talent leaders' highest-priority initiatives for 2021 are pipelining, diversity hiring, and employer branding. Where they plan to invest their TA budgets is reflective of those initiatives.

Nearly 70% of talent acquisition leaders cited sourcing/growing pipeline and diversity hiring as their top two initiatives for 2021. Employer branding came in at #3, with 62% of talent leaders citing it as a top priority. Other top initiatives were hiring process improvements (#4) and becoming more data-driven (#5)—the latter of which is great to hear, since hitting diversity hiring goals and making pipeline and process improvements simply aren't possible without that data.

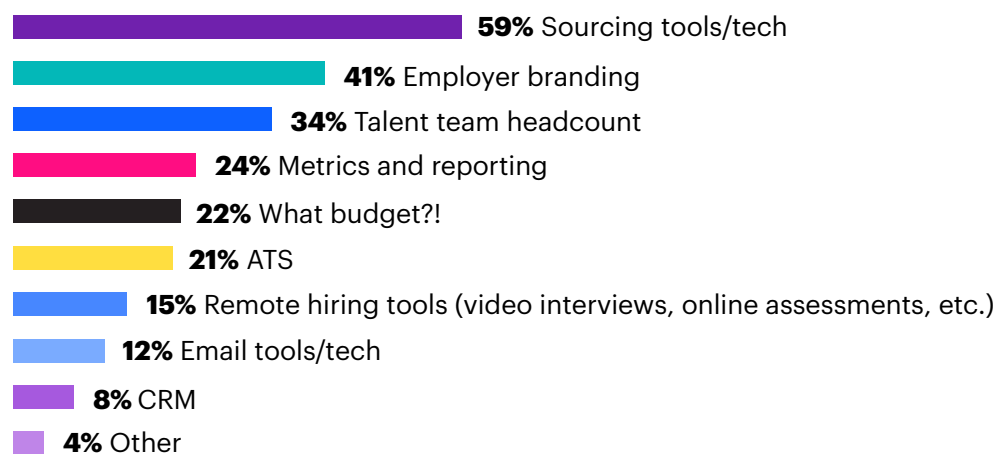
Where leaders intend to invest their TA budgets in 2021 maps nicely onto those high-priority initiatives: sourcing tools and tech came in at #1, which makes sense, given that sourcing/growing pipeline is priority #1. Employer branding came in at #2, which *also* makes sense: diversity hiring is leaders' #2 priority, and there's no hiring for diversity without a strong employer culture and brand. Talent team headcount came in as the #3 investment for 2021; and metrics and reporting tools came in at #4... naturally so, since becoming more data-driven is a top priority.

**Q. What are the highest-priority initiatives for your team in 2021?**



\* Respondents who chose "Other" mentioned everything from interview training, to volume hires, to implementing a new ATS.

**Q. Where will you invest your talent acquisition budget in 2021?**



\* Almost all respondents who chose "Other" mentioned inclusion and diversity initiatives.



## Quality-of-hire and diversity will be the most important KPIs of 2021

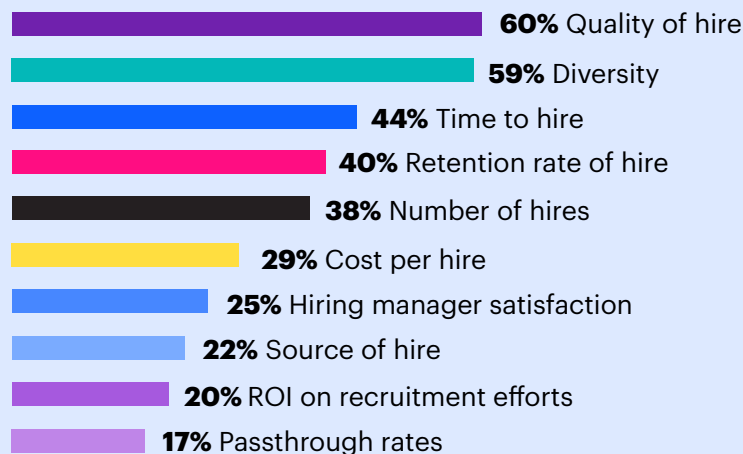
The ever-elusive quality-of-hire—probably the most valuable metric when it comes to demonstrating recruiting’s effectiveness and its value as a strategic business function—is a metric TA will uncover with the help of HR. Quality-of-hire only becomes measurable several months after a new hire steps into their role. HR will use some combination of data on time-to-productivity, total productivity, turnover and retention, cultural fit, employee engagement, and performance reviews/metrics to determine quality-of-hire. Talent acquisition: pay attention to what they uncover. If your team is hiring talent that leaves within the first year, you may be screening for the wrong traits. If you’re hiring talent who is underperforming in certain areas, use that data to adjust your interview questions. And so on.

It’s no surprise that diversity comes in at a very close second for most-important-KPI of 2021. Luckily, this is easier (and faster) to track than quality-of-hire is. With recruitment technologies like Gem, which [tracks diversity \(gender and race/ethnicity\) all the way through your hiring funnel](#), you can uncover unconscious biases, spot bottlenecks, and track your diversity goals. You don’t have to wait on self-reported EEOC data from applicants, which only gets captured later in the funnel and can be skewed due to inconsistent participation. Instead, you can begin your diversity hiring initiatives at the very top of the funnel—through sourcing—before prospects even apply. After all, the earliest stage of the funnel is the only place you can influence the makeup of your pipeline.

Q.

**TALENT LEADERS**

What will be the  
most important KPIs  
for you in 2021?



Data will be a crucial tool in 2021 for helping TA teams tell their post-COVID stories—particularly when it comes to source of hire, diversity hiring, identifying pipeline bottlenecks, and tracking candidate outreach

Of course, many respondents said that data has *always* been important to their process, since you can't improve what you can't measure. But a lot of TA professionals said that data and metrics will be especially important in 2021 to help them identify how well they pivoted on their strategies and to keep iterating on their processes in the wake of those pivots. How are their remote efforts going? What's the market doing? What do post-COVID pipelines look like, and where do they need to be optimized? Talent acquisition leaders said that their top four for uses of data in 2021 will be to uncover best sources of hire, to track diversity hiring, to identify bottlenecks in the pipeline, and to track candidate outreach (think open/click-through/response rates).

#### TALENT LEADERS

On a scale of 1-10, how important will data be for recruiting in 2021?



## We asked respondents why they chose that number:

"Data is extremely important for recruiting! Especially as we head into 2021 with predominantly remote recruiting processes. **Data tells a story of your process**, and since we can't physically 'see' what's happening as our candidates go through process and meet with different folks on the team, it can inform us of any issues and how we can be more efficient and effective in the long run."

"It's already very important for us, and will be even more so to be able to **determine productivity** and push teams to achieve more."

"It's always been important for **planning purposes** but also as a tool **to convince and influence our business partners**."

"Data helps us **make better decisions and forecast needs**."

"Must be data proven to **show execs what's working/what isn't**."

"Improved analytics and metrics will be at the core of how we **determine the success of our programs** and **identify areas for improvement**."

"We need to know that **all of the changes we made in a hurry** are working."

"We'll need to know **how our remote sourcing efforts are going**."

"**Corporate will be tracking data much more closely** in the coming months."

"**To measure the effectiveness of 100% remote processes** and also to pulse the market pre-COVID vs post-COVID."

"MoM and YoY analysis, **comparison of pre-COVID to post-COVID times** will be interesting."

"We'll be relying on data from 2020 to see how and **what we can do differently when it comes to sourcing, time to hire**, etc."

"We've got **bigger pipelines**, which means more opportunities to **evaluate gaps in the process**."

"Presenting with evidence-based data is critical for **decision-making** and getting approval **in new and unknown markets**."

"We'll need to **keep an eye on how our hiring plans will be affected** by people who might not be willing to join a startup at this time, even though we are late-stage. If trying to source in net-new geos is not working and if people are not comfortable being isolated, we'll have to consider whether they'd be willing to relocate to start our satellite offices."

"Data will help show where, in our recruiting process, **we need to refine**. For instance, **passthrough rates** within the pipeline may reveal inconsistencies/misalignment in our recruiting process."

"Because of the **increasing competition** in the market, data matters a lot."



How do you plan to use data in 2021?



# 2021 Recruiting Predictions

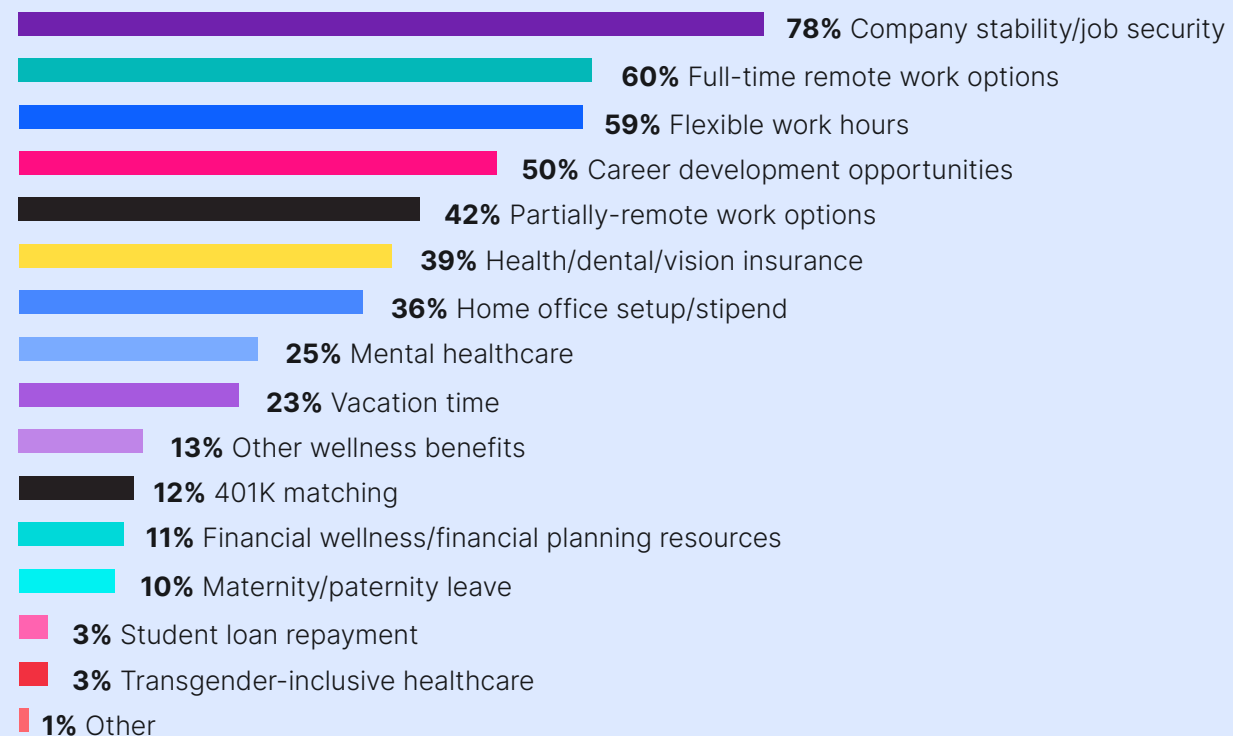
## Job security and remote work are the two things talent will care most about in 2021

We asked sourcers/recruiters and talent leaders this question separately because we wanted to see if they agree about what will matter most to talent in 2021... and they *do*. Respondents across the board believe that company stability/job security will be the most important benefit candidates look for in 2021. Full-time remote work options come in at #2, and flexible work hours at #3. Given that these responses come out of ongoing conversations with talent—recruiters literally have their ears on the ground regarding this question—it'll be well worth figuring out both how to emphasize security and stability in your messaging, and how to open the conversation with C-levels and managers about remote and flexible work options if you don't already offer them.

Q.

**SOURCERS/RECRUITERS**

**What benefits do you foresee talent caring most about in 2021?**

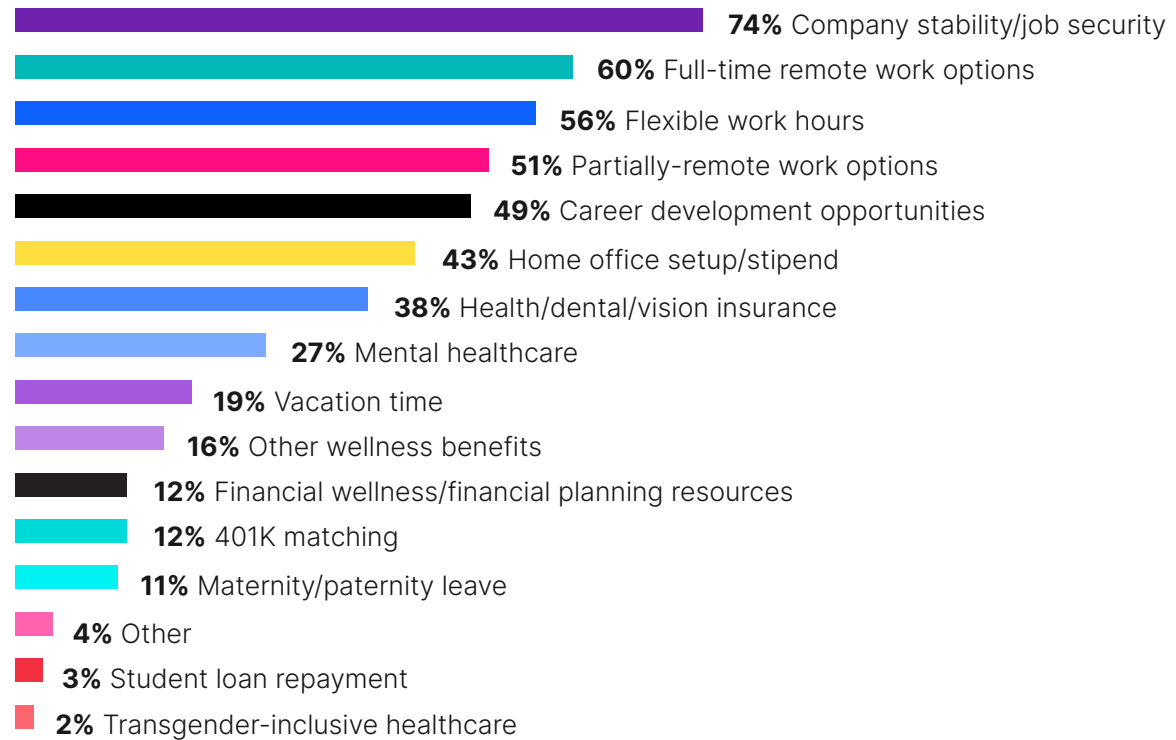


\* Every respondent who chose "Other" mentioned diversity and D&I policies.

**Q.**

**TALENT LEADERS**

What benefits do you foresee talent caring most about in 2021?



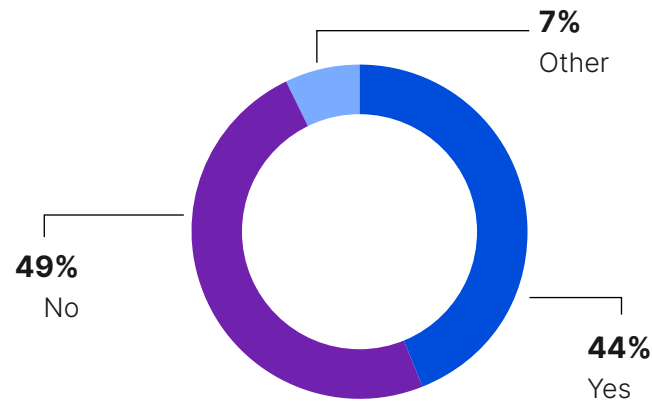
\* Respondents who chose "Other" focused either on DEI/D&I program growth or on daycare benefits/childcare support options when working from home.



## As mediators between the talent market and the business, recruitment will play an important role in companies' transition to remote work

Respondents were split on whether it'll be up to talent acquisition to *lead* the transition to remote. Those who said it will be up to TA stressed that, as the primary touchpoint for talent, recruitment is in the best position to share market insights and table-stakes benefits with leaders—as well as prove that it's possible to attract, onboard, and retain talent remotely. Those who said it's *not* up to TA put the transition in the hands of senior leadership or People Ops instead—but many of them noted that it'll be up to TA to provide data, relay candidate demands, and offer valuable input on the transition.

**Q.** Generally speaking, do you feel that it will be up to your team to lead the transition to remote work?



## 48% of respondents feel that the transition to remote work will be led by recruitment. Here's why:

"We are the market pulse-keepers and need to drive this to stay competitive."

"As recruiters **we are the first touch point** for any new member of our teams. **We set the tone** around our remote work, its policies, and its benefits."

"Recruiting is arguably the most high-touch, human-connected side of the business. If we can do it, anyone can. We're also **in the best position to see what's considered "table stakes"** for candidates going into 2021."

"It is on the Talent Team **to share market insights with leadership**. Our leadership won't know if we don't communicate what candidates want and what other companies are doing."

"We are the closest to the **front lines** of the candidate pool, and hearing what is most important to candidates - which right now is largely the ability to work wherever they want."

"Recruiting ends up being a default microcosm of the org - we get info first-hand of what other companies are doing/what people are looking for. Generally **Recruiting as a part of People Ops sets the tone.**"

"We have to demonstrate that we can successfully attract, assess, onboard, train, and retain talent remotely. If that can't be done successfully, we can't sustain a remote workforce."

## Other thoughts from respondents:

"I would say it is a **joint effort** between leadership and the people/recruiting team."

"Remote work is a very complex issue for us and will involve feedback and analysis from a number of stakeholders, **we will be part of the conversation.**"

"I think it's really viewed as a company-wide effort. The recruiting team, people team, and tech ops are **leading the charge**, but it's also something all our leadership and managers are thinking about."

"It's a **mutual effort with operations.**"

"Yes and No. **Our team is here to support**, but leadership and the managers will also be a big part of it."

"It is a **company-wide effort** to plan out the future of work for 2021 and beyond."

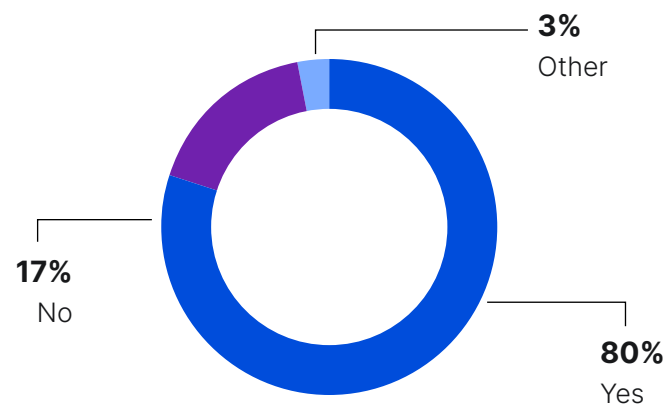
## Recruitment will continue to solidify itself as a strategic business advisor in 2021—particularly as it concerns market intel, DEI, and remote hiring

80% of talent leaders agree that recruitment became a strategic business advisor in 2020 in ways it had never been before. With its ear to the ground, talent acquisition had direct insights into a changing talent market and shifting candidate needs, concerns, and perspectives—insights that both hiring managers and C-levels needed in order to make the best possible business decisions during the pandemic. Beyond access to critical market data and macro trends, respondents mentioned being in a position to help hiring managers think more about DEI—specifically when it came to role qualifications, fighting unconscious bias, and building more equity into hiring processes. A third significant theme concerned encouraging hiring managers to be more open to making hiring decisions remotely, and coaching them on virtual hiring practices.

### TALENT LEADERS

Q.

Generally speaking, do you feel that recruitment has had to become a strategic advisor to the business this year like never before?



\* Nearly all respondents who chose "Other" did so because, in the words of one talent acquisition professional, "a top-notch recruiting function will *always* play a strategic advisory role to the business, regardless of what is happening on the market."

**80% of respondents said that, in 2020, recruiting had to become a strategic business advisor like never before. Here's how/why:**

"We've had to be **constantly aware of the stage we're in in terms of the pandemic** and assess what our candidate base looks like and **how that could impact the growth plans** we have as a company."

"As candidates become more clear on what they want in a workplace, we have to guide the business **to make our company attractive to all candidates post-COVID.**"

"With a lot of **shifts in compensation ranges** for various technical roles accelerating **amidst a pandemic and recession**, how can we remain competitive and continue to grow while not setting ourselves up for a compensation model that is not scalable? This is where talent comes in."

"**Hiring managers are lost in COVID recruitment** and lean on our team for guidance."

"With a hiring freeze, **recruiting for positions that were able to earn an exemption was extremely strategic.** Working with hiring managers, HR, and upper administration was collaborative in ways it had not previously been."

"We need to **help managers think more about DE&I** as well as best ways to carry remote interviews."

"DEI starts with recruitment. We need to level-set expectations more, especially around **diversity recruiting: consulting managers on skills that are desired vs. those could be taught.**"

"**Fighting unconscious bias and creating equity in hiring practices** is more important than ever."

"**Recruitment has helped to bridge the gap** with remote employees and **help foster a culture while we're all working-from-home.**"

"We've had to **encourage hiring managers** to be more strategic and more **open to remote workers.**"

"I think that **recruiters who weren't impacted by the economic downturn** have had to **spend more time proving their strategic value** to organizations and as a result have had to become strategic advisors."

"Some hiring managers were insistent on meeting candidates in person before they made a hiring decision, so we've been able to **coach them on virtual decision-making.**"

"Recruitment at my org is **helping plan out the future of work**, i.e. whether we'll hire remotely and have remote employees for the long-term."

## Employer branding will be critical to talent acquisition in 2021

Of all the elements we asked talent acquisition to rate on a scale of 1-10 in terms of its importance in 2021, employer branding scored highest. It's also worth noting here—as we showed above ([see pp. 28-29](#))—that talent leaders ranked employer branding as their #3 top initiative, and the #2 place they plan to invest their budgets, in 2021. Written responses likely won't be surprising to you: in the wake of COVID and Black Lives Matter, talent wants to know how companies responded to the pandemic, addressed social justice issues, and demonstrated their allyship. Things like stability and community—*especially* in a remote work environment—are top-of-mind for talent; employer branding is the only way to showcase security and culture while cutting through the noise, since a remote work option has become a table-stakes benefit that the majority of companies now offer.

### TALENT LEADERS

On a scale of 1-10, how important will employer branding be to companies (including yours) in 2021?



## We asked respondents why they chose that number:

"People want to know **how we responded to the pandemic and addressed social justice issues**. It's important for candidates to feel **connected to the mission and company values**. Branding can help build that connection."

"Candidates will be looking to see **how companies handled the COVID pandemic**. Were there layoffs? **Did we give back to the community?** **How did we care for our employees?**"

"If an employer can highlight **what they've done during the pandemic to keep their employees safe**, how they've adjusted their hiring process, and what they've done to move towards a future state of work, it will put them ahead of companies that don't adjust their branding."

"**People want stability and security** and communicating these messages over ping pong and in-office perks is the future."

"The candidate base has had a lot of time to review companies and **they have been watching how we all have responded to this crisis**. Our employer brand will help identify us in a crowded sea of people hiring and will likely determine how much success we have attracting those top-tier candidates we all want and need so badly."

"People are looking for **companies that align with their own values** more than ever before. With so much uncertainty and the importance of **diversity, inclusion, allyship, anti-racist systems**, people want to work for companies that have a strong brand around social justice and equality."

"During a time when Black Lives Matter is so prevalent, **companies have to truly showcase their allyship** if that's where they stand."

"People are **more reluctant to leave jobs and have more choice** in their searches."

"You need to showcase why as an employer you are a positive choice for **stability, growth, career development, community support, and giving back**."

"Convincing someone that your organization is the right fit for them **when there are so many concerns, globally**, is crucial."

"Hiring is picking back up, and **candidates have more opportunities**. Also, a lot of people are **burned by the way corporations treated employees during COVID layoffs**."

"With everything remote, potential employees **don't have the office environment to learn about company culture** or get a feel for things. This will all have to be shown through employer branding, virtually."

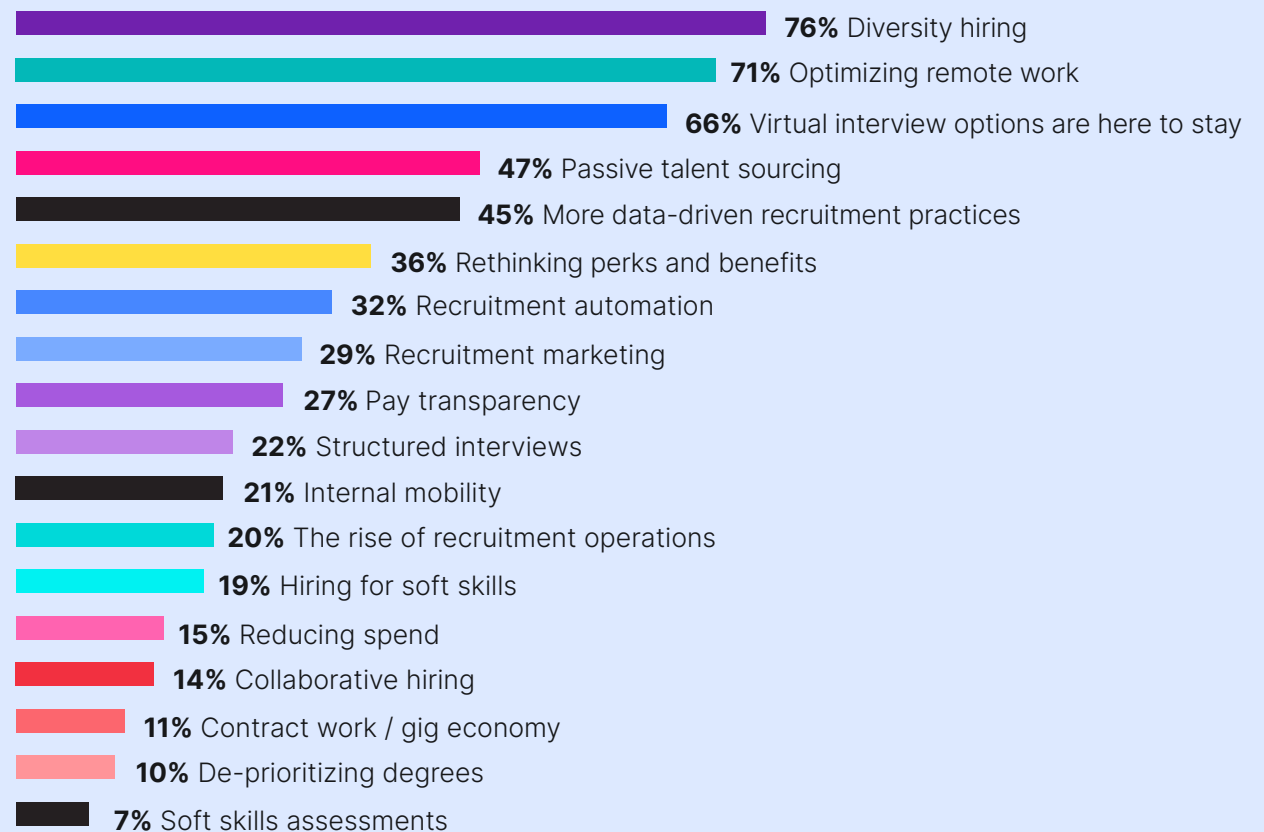
"You need to stand out when all companies are offering remote, **we lose the on-site experience as a sales tool**."

Sourcers/  
recruiters and  
talent leaders  
anticipate the  
same top-5  
recruiting trends  
in 2021. Diversity  
hiring is #1 for  
both groups.

Again, we asked this question separately of talent leaders and independent contributors (ICs) because we wanted to see how their perspectives might differ. But top-5 answers were exactly the same across roles: respondents anticipate that diversity hiring will be the most important trend in the recruiting industry in 2021, followed by optimizing remote work, virtual interview options, passive talent sourcing, and more data-driven recruitment practices. Given this broad agreement, these are trends worth preparing for.

#### SOURCERS/RECRUITERS

Q. What are the most important trends in the recruiting industry that you anticipate for 2021?



## TALENT LEADERS

Q. What are the most important trends in the recruiting industry that you anticipate for 2021?





Sourcers/recruiters and talent leaders anticipate the same top-3 challenges in 2021. Difficulty finding qualified talent is #1 for both groups.

Talent leaders and sourcers/recruiters are *also* on the same page when it comes to the top challenges they anticipate in the coming year: difficulty finding qualified candidates is #1, difficulty meeting diversity goals is #2, and nurturing passive talent over the long-term is #3. The pandemic clearly hasn't eased the ever-present challenge of finding top talent, which is likely why so many sourcers and recruiters said that their "year of upskilling" in 2020 included learning and implementing new sourcing techniques and strategies (see page 17). As for challenges #2 and #3, Gem's got you covered if you need to [track diversity through your pipeline](#) (and therefore meet your diversity hiring goals) and [nurture passive talent well past your initial outreach sequences](#) to build relationships with talent over the long-term.

## SOURCERS/RECRUITERS

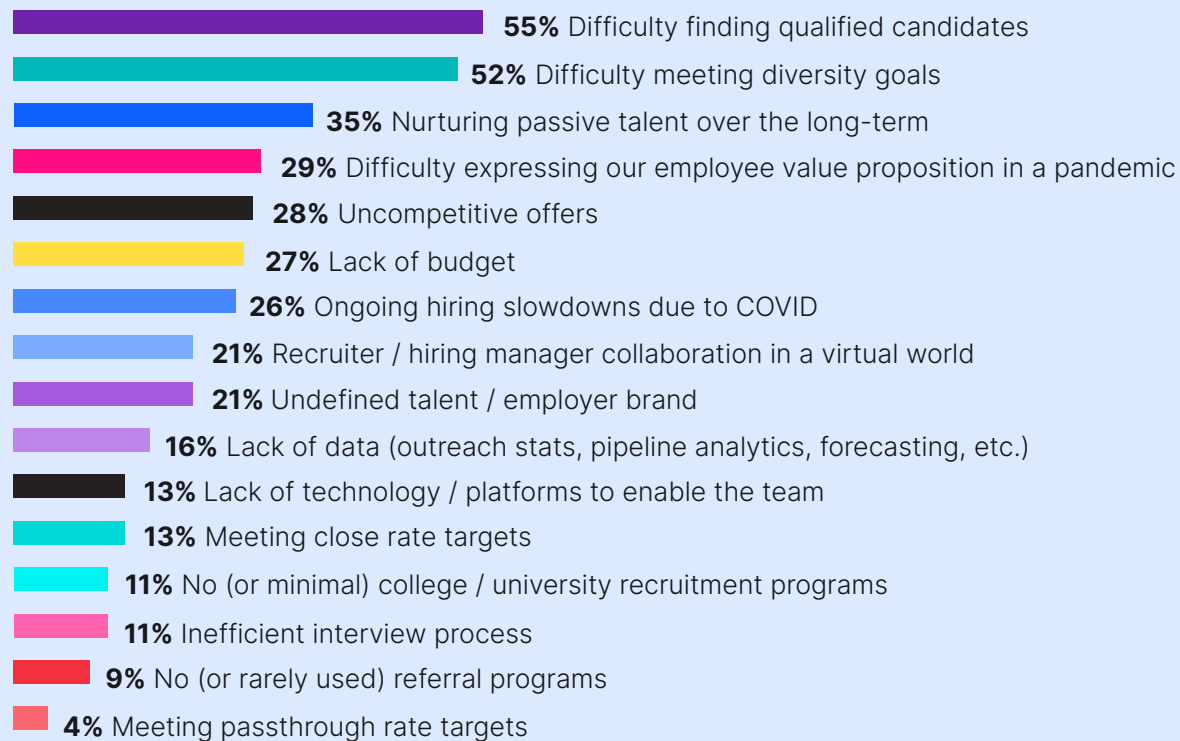
Q. What are the biggest recruiting/hiring challenges you anticipate in 2021?



\* Sourcers/recruiters who chose "Other" recorded answers like: "Candidates are reluctant to leave their current roles out of fear of (future or current work) stability"; "Candidates not wanting to jump to uncertain startups in a difficult economy"; "Sifting through the mountain of unqualified, spray & pray applicants"; "Too many virtual meetings taking up my work time"; and "Identifying competitive salaries globally."

## TALENT LEADERS

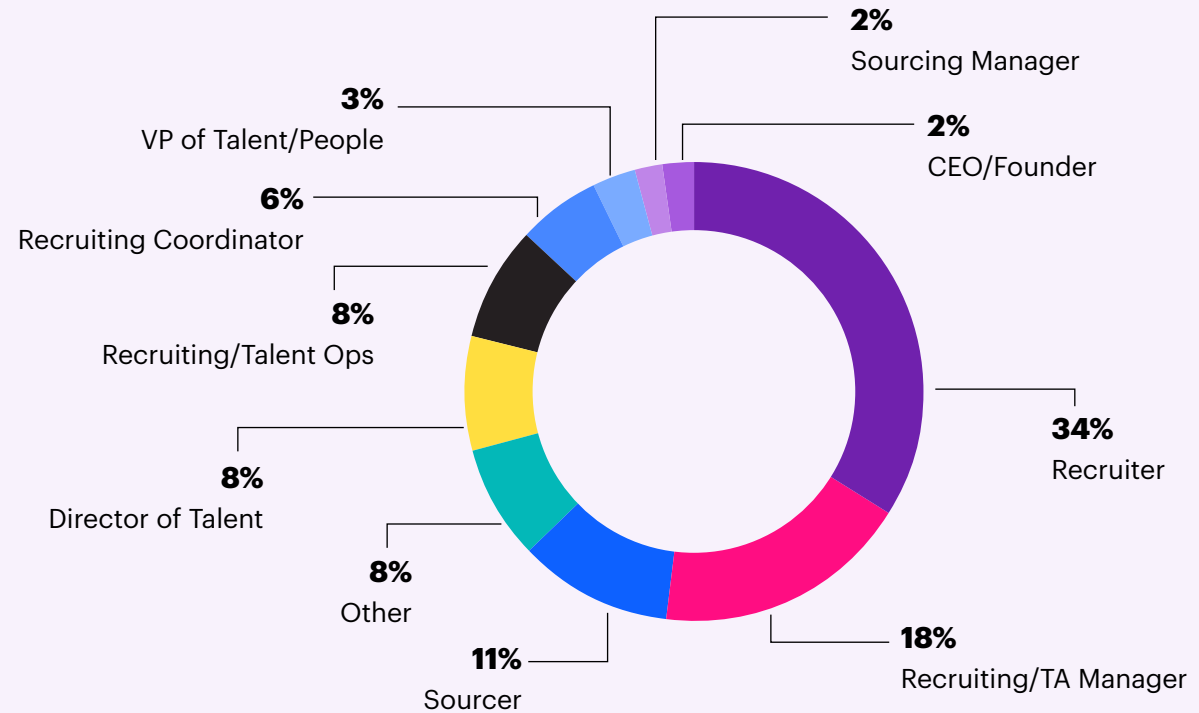
**Q.** What are the biggest recruiting/hiring challenges you anticipate in 2021?



## About Our Respondents

Q.

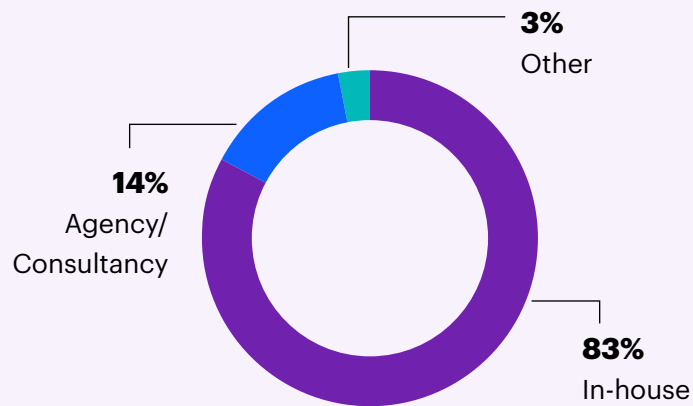
Which job title best matches your role?



\* Respondents who chose "Other" were Chief People Officers, HR Assistants, HR Directors, Talent Brand Specialists, Recruitment Specialists, VCs, Senior Recruiters, Hiring Managers, Chief Inclusion Officers, HR Generalists, Operations Managers, Product Managers, Presidents, and VPs of Operations.

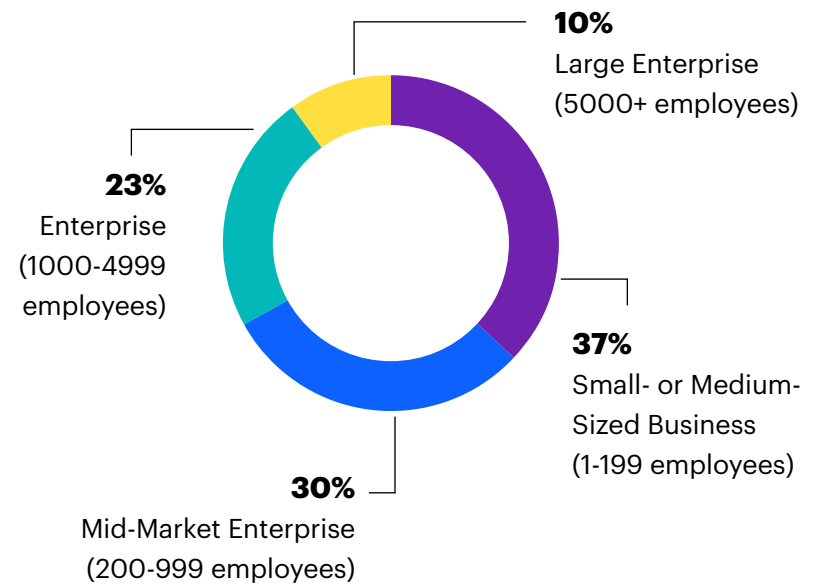
## SOURCERS/RECRUITERS

Q. Do you work in-house or for an agency?



\* Respondents who chose "Other" were self-employed, independent contractors, VCs, and worked for RPOs.

Q. How big is your organization?





**Lauren Shufan, Author**

Lauren is a content strategist with a penchant for 16th-century literature. When she's not trying to tap into talent teams' pain points, she's on her yoga mat or hiking the hills of Marin County. Come at her with your favorite Shakespeare quote.

Gem is an all-in-one recruiting platform that integrates with LinkedIn, email, and your Applicant Tracking System (ATS). We enable data-driven, world-class recruiting teams to find, engage, and nurture top talent. With Gem, recruiting teams can manage candidate pipeline with predictability.

To learn more and see a demo, visit

**gem.com**