

WHAT CANDIDATES WANT: *2023 Job Seeker Report*

FLEXIBILITY

RESPECT

FAIR
PAY

CLARITY

BENEFITS

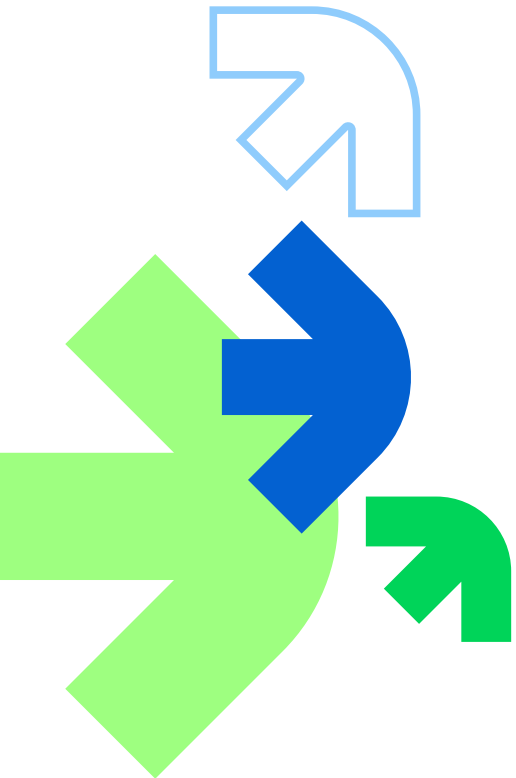
HONESTY

COMMUNICATION



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In the wake of talent shortages and record turnover, it's become employers' million-dollar question: *What do candidates want?*

Undoubtedly, job seekers' needs, preferences, and habits have evolved in the post-pandemic world of work, leaving hiring professionals scratching their heads on how to best attract top-notch applicants.

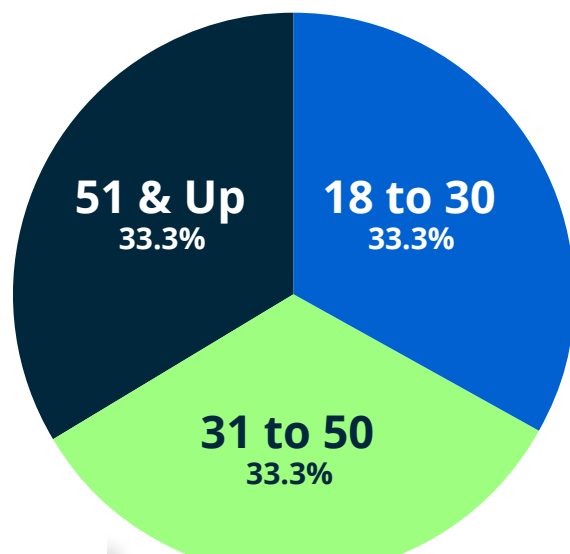
iHire set out to find answers, surveying 600 job seekers in the United States. This report details their candid and fascinating feedback – including direct quotes from the panel – to help today's employers recruit the right talent.

Survey Respondent Snapshot



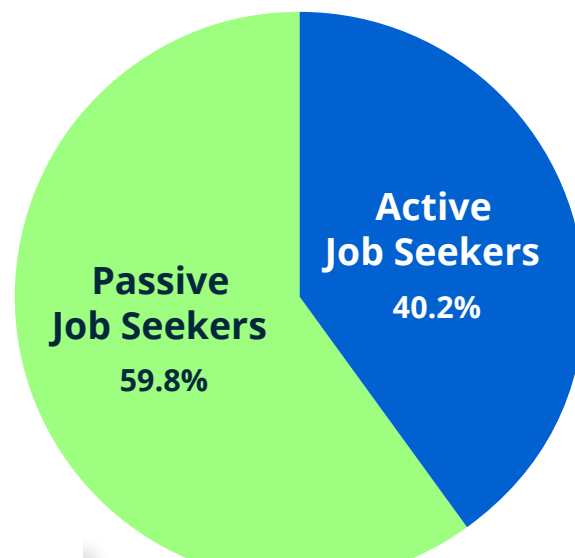
To generate a well-rounded response sample, iHire surveyed a Qualtrics panel consisting of working professionals ages 18 and older in all industries across the U.S. Quotas were set to ensure an equal number of responses were received from candidates in three age groups (18 to 30, 31 to 50, and 51 and up) to reflect the multi-generational workforce (Figure 1).

Respondents represented two types of job seekers – those seeking a job actively and those seeking a job passively/open to new opportunities (Figure 2) – and held various employment statuses (Figure 3).



Age Groups

Figure 1

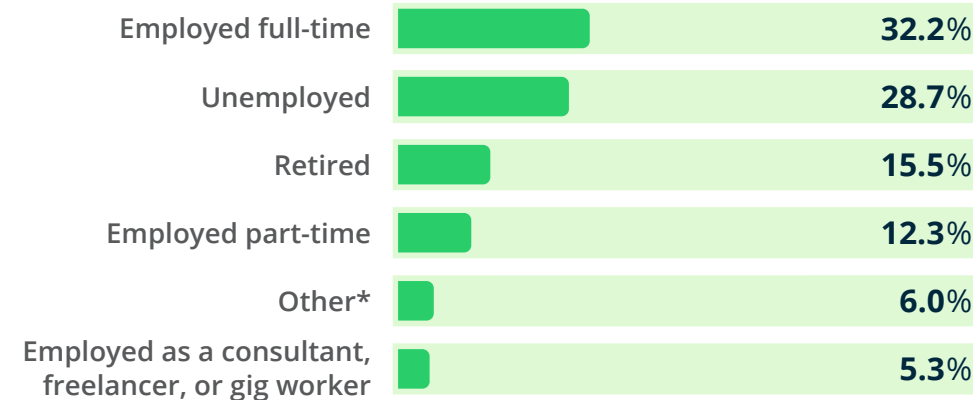


Types of Job Seekers

Figure 2

Employment Statuses

Figure 3



*Other responses included homemaker, stay-at-home-mom, and student.

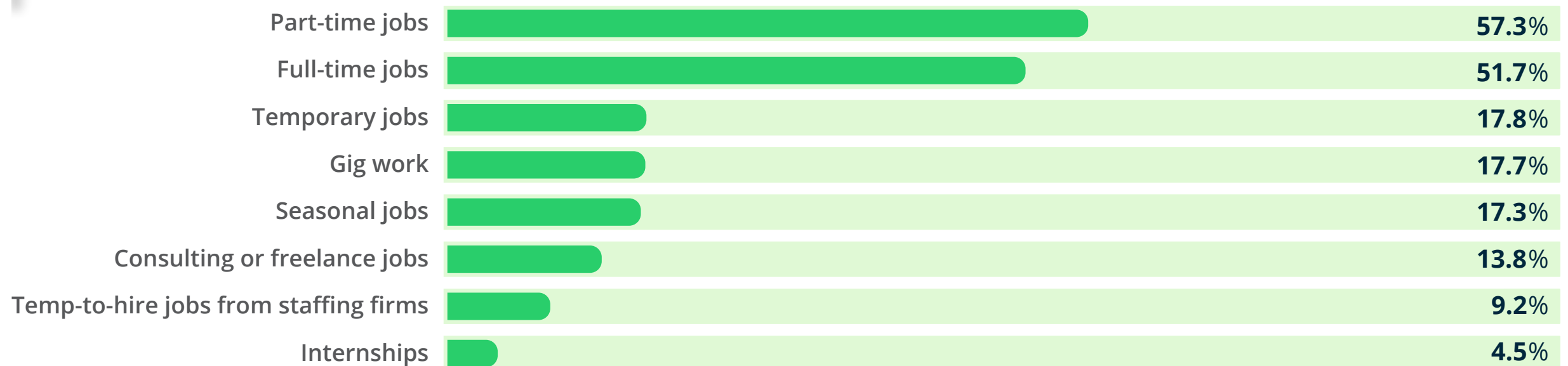
Employment Types

In addition, iHire asked candidates to identify which type(s) of employment they were seeking. We found that traditional full-time jobs weren't the only type of employment on job seekers' wish lists.

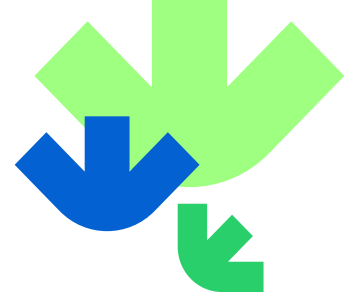
While over half (51.7%) of respondents desired full-time jobs, an even larger percentage (57.3%) sought part-time work (Figure 4). Of note, 71.2% of those seeking part-time jobs fell in the 18 to 30 and 51 and up age groups, likely comprising students and retirees re-entering the workforce.

What type(s) of employment are you seeking? (Check all that apply.)

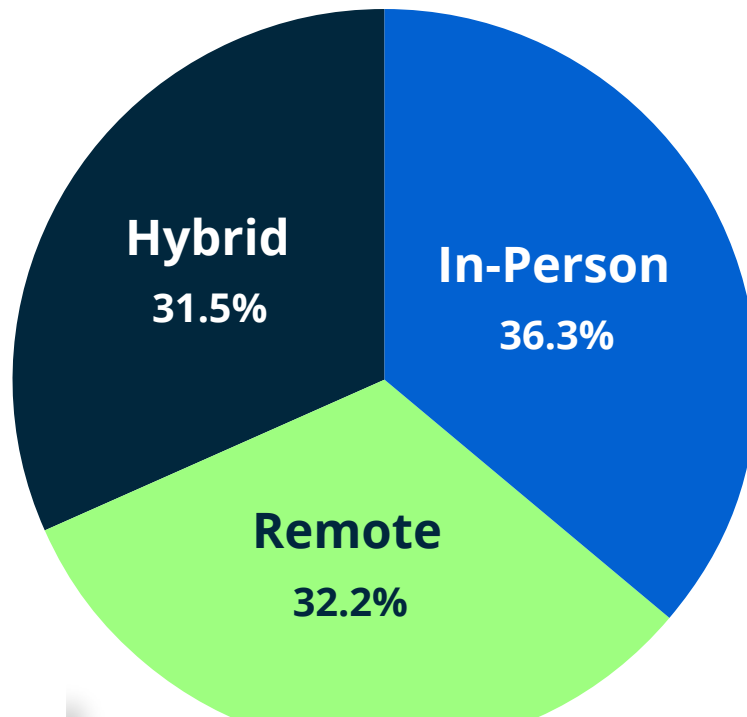
Figure 4



Work Environments



As the debate over in-person, remote, and hybrid (mix of in-person and remote) work continues, no clear winner emerged in our survey. But looking at the combined responses for in-person (36.3%) and hybrid work (31.5%), a majority of candidates (67.8%) preferred some form of on-site or in-office arrangement (Figure 5).



What is your preferred work environment?

Figure 5

Candidates' desired environments varied based on their age, as each generation surveyed favored a different type of work – in-person work was most popular among candidates ages 18 to 30, remote work was most popular among candidates ages 51 and up, and hybrid work was most popular among candidates ages 31 to 50. Here's a look at the breakdown:

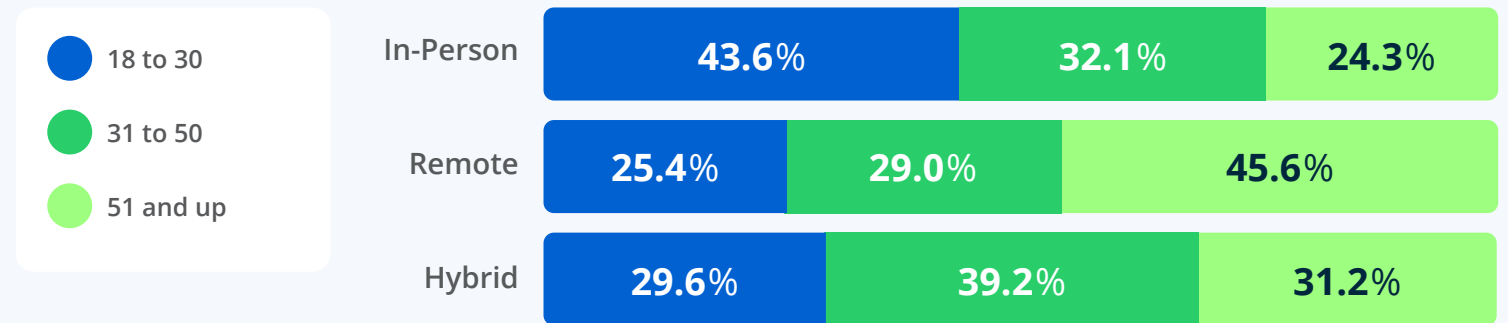


Figure 6

Remote work is a viable kind of work and deserves to be an option.



The Job Search

As we analyze our survey results, we'll walk through the various stages of the candidate journey in the recruitment funnel, starting with attracting talent to your job openings. When asked how they preferred to find out about new job opportunities, respondents selected a range of avenues, including search engines (52.7%), company websites (46.7%), and job boards (46.3%). With networking/word-of-mouth (38.2%) and cold calls/emails from recruiters bringing up the rear (21.5%), job seekers largely depend on employers' online presence to find their next role (Figure 7).

That said, employers must ensure their job postings contain the right keywords to be found online by the right talent. We asked candidates to identify the keywords they use to search for work on a job board. 50.5% said they search by skills they would use in a new position, 49.7% search by the location of the job, and 46.8% search by work environment (for example, "remote jobs") (Figure 8).

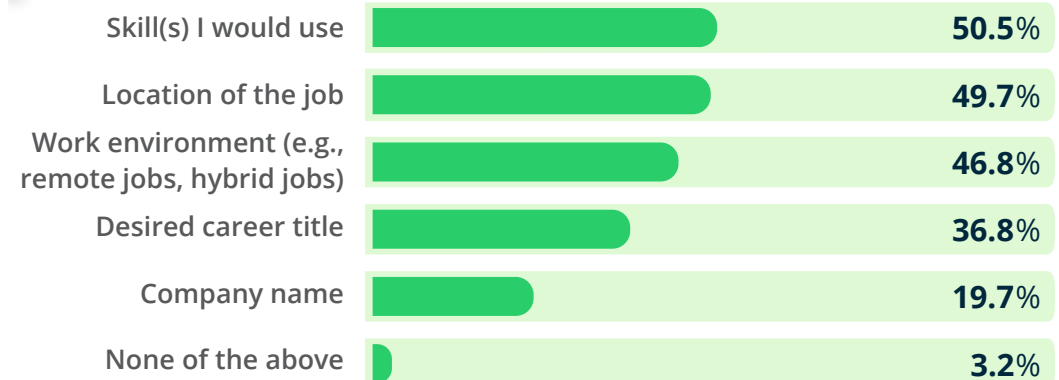
How do you prefer to find out about new job opportunities? (Check all that apply.)

Figure 7



When looking for work on a job board, which keywords do you use to search for jobs? (Check all that apply.)

Figure 8



What do candidates believe is most important in their job search? Salary (64.0%) and location of the job (56.8%) ranked atop the list of responses, followed by benefits (42.8%) and remote work options (42.7%) (Figure 9).

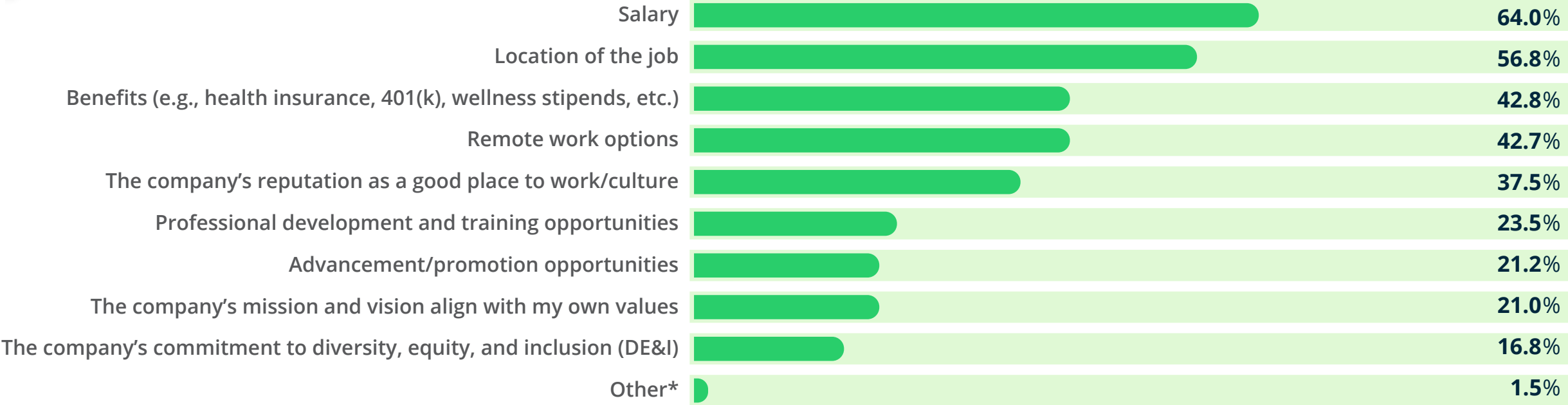
Yet even with employers' increased focus on their missions, values, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) efforts, just 21.0% of candidates said it was important for the company's mission and vision to align with their own, and 16.8% felt strongly about a company's commitment to DE&I.

“
Salary should be clear and fair.
 ”

“
The work culture is very important – to go into work every day and feel confident in my role.
 ”

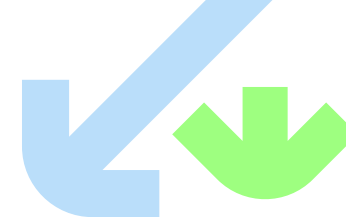
Which of the following are most important in your job search? (Check all that apply.)

Figure 9



*Other responses included flexible hours and a better work/life balance.

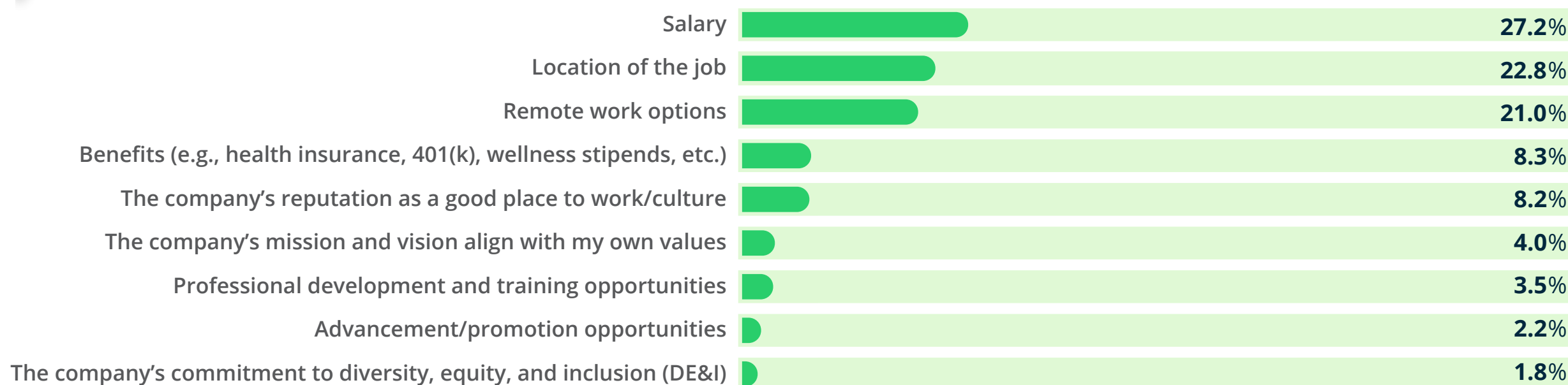




Next, we asked respondents to choose the *single most* important element in their job search from their previous selections (Figure 10). Salary, once again, took the top spot (27.2%), demonstrating candidates' need to feel they are compensated fairly for their work, as well as their concerns about the rising cost of living.

Which one of these is most important in your job search?

Figure 10



Fair pay and benefits are key.

Stop lowballing candidates with starting pay... cost of living is high everywhere.

Now that we know what job seekers deem most important in their search, let's look at their turnoffs. When asked to choose which factors would prevent them from applying for a job when using a job board, 54.7% of candidates cited the location of the position, indicating that they did not wish to relocate or commute (Figure 11).

Meanwhile, 44.7% would not apply for a job if the salary/pay was not specified, strengthening the argument that employers could lose out on top talent by omitting compensation details from postings. Candidates were also deterred by unclear job descriptions (38.8%) and poorly formatted ads (33.5%), suggesting that companies need to optimize their job ads to attract the right applicants.

Make it easy to submit a resume.

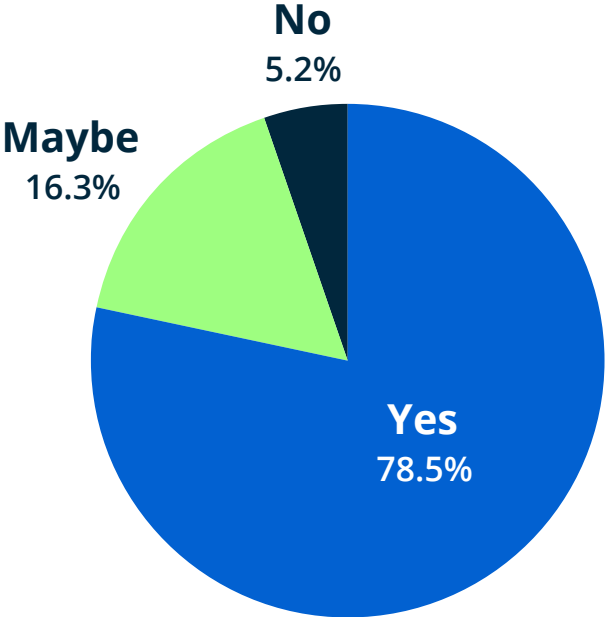
Be very specific about the job requirements and salary.

When using a job board, which of the following, if any, would prevent you from applying for a job? (Check all that apply.)

Figure 11



Whether or not salary is listed can make or break one's ability to hire. Along with the 44.7% who said a lack of salary info would deter them from applying (Figure 11), 78.5% of respondents said they would be more likely to apply for a job if it listed a salary range (Figure 12).



Are you more likely to apply for a job if it lists the salary range for the position?
Figure 12

“
Be upfront about salary.
”

“
I just want clear job listings with salary, duties, and hours.
”



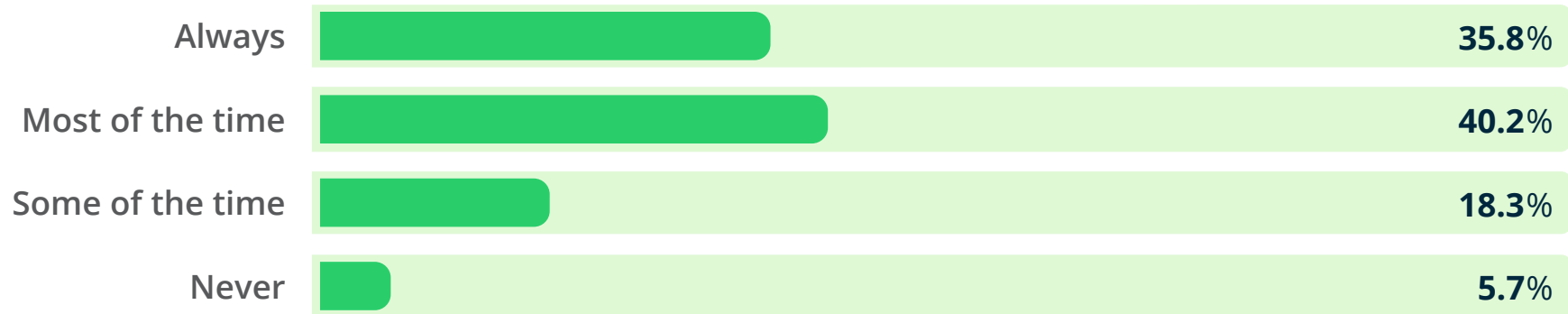
Employer Branding

Employer branding matters to job seekers, and few candidates will hit “submit” on their applications without first doing their research to find out whether a company is considered a good (or bad) place to work.

According to our survey, 76.0% of candidates research the hiring company “always” or “most of the time” before applying (Figure 13).

How often do you research the hiring company before applying for their job?

Figure 13



A positive work environment.

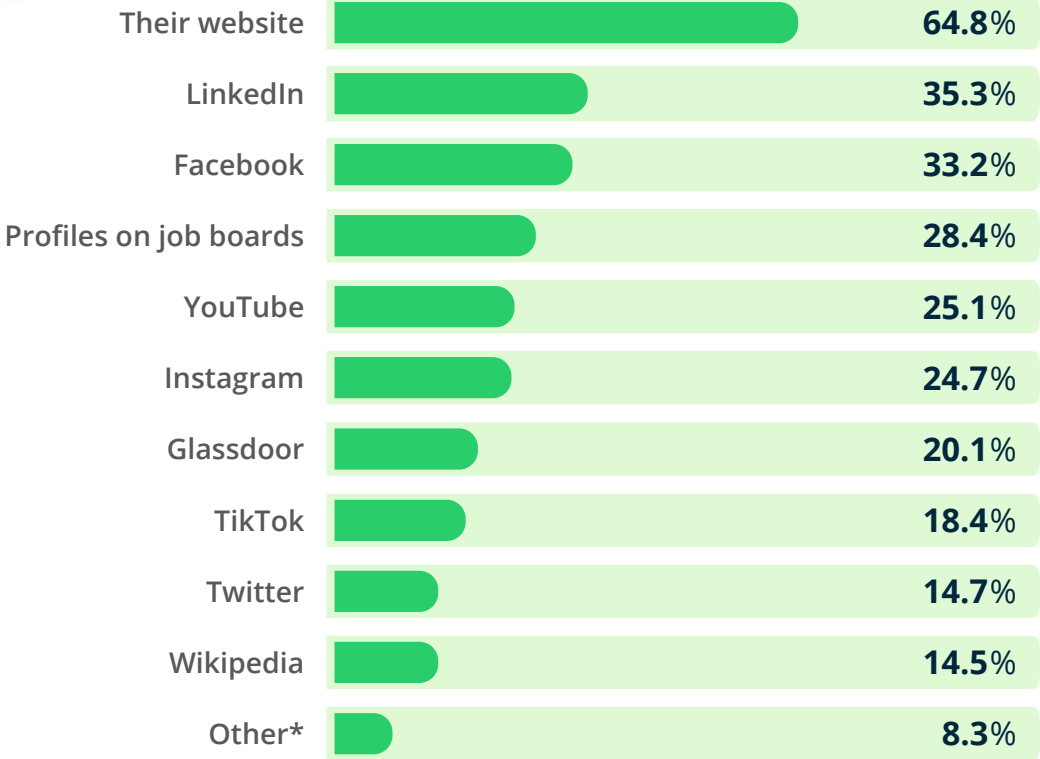
[I want] a culture that is conducive to effective teamwork.



Of those who researched companies at least some of the time, 64.8% visited a company's website (Figure 14), and 64.7% said employee reviews/testimonials were critical in their research (Figure 15).

What resources do you use to research the company? (Check all that apply.)

Figure 14



*Other responses included Google/search engines and word of mouth.

When researching a company as a potential employer, what types of information are important to you? (Check all that apply.)

Figure 15



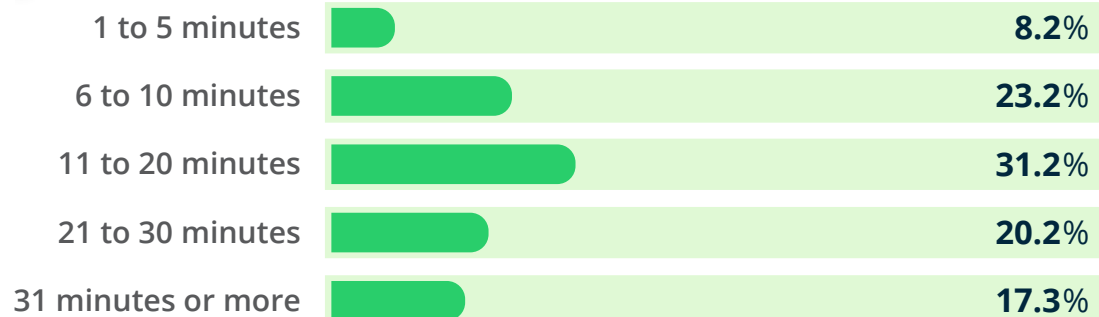
We look at what your old employees said about working there. Care for your team.

The Application Process

What do candidates want when it comes to the application process? While fast and easy applications are ideal – 62.6% want to spend less than 20 minutes completing an online application (Figure 16) – job seekers are still putting in effort to ensure they capture hiring managers' attention. For example, nearly three out of four (74.5%) job seekers follow up on their applications “always” or “most of the time” (Figure 17).

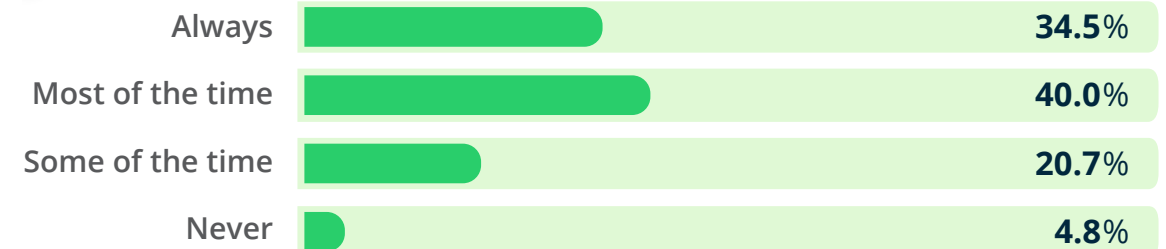
How much time are you willing to spend to complete an online application?

Figure 16



How often do you follow up on your job applications?

Figure 17



Simplify the process and the amount of time it takes [to apply].

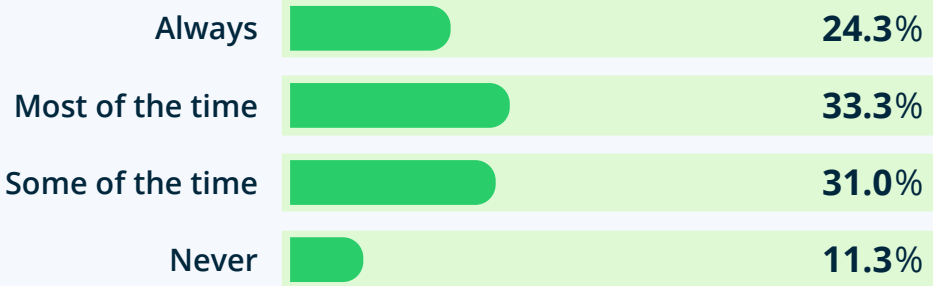
I want an easy application process that does not require tedious input of all the details on my required resume.

My time is valuable.

Furthermore, over half (57.6%) of job seekers customize their resume “always” or “most of the time” for a specific job (Figure 18). Plus, a quarter of respondents (25.0%) “always” include a cover letter even if the job posting said it is optional (Figure 19).

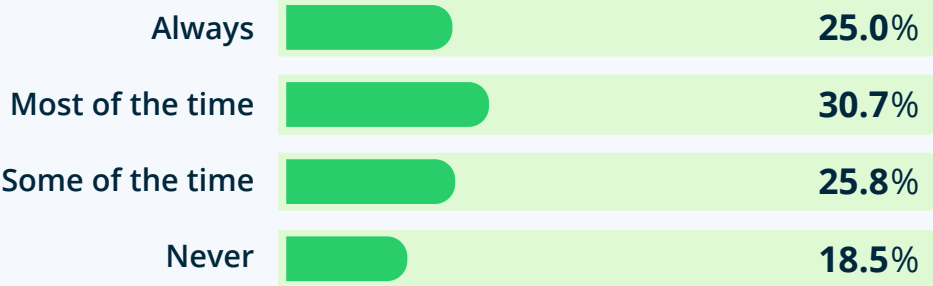
How often do you customize your resume for the job you’re applying for?

Figure 18



How often do you include a cover letter with your application, even if the job posting indicates that it is optional?

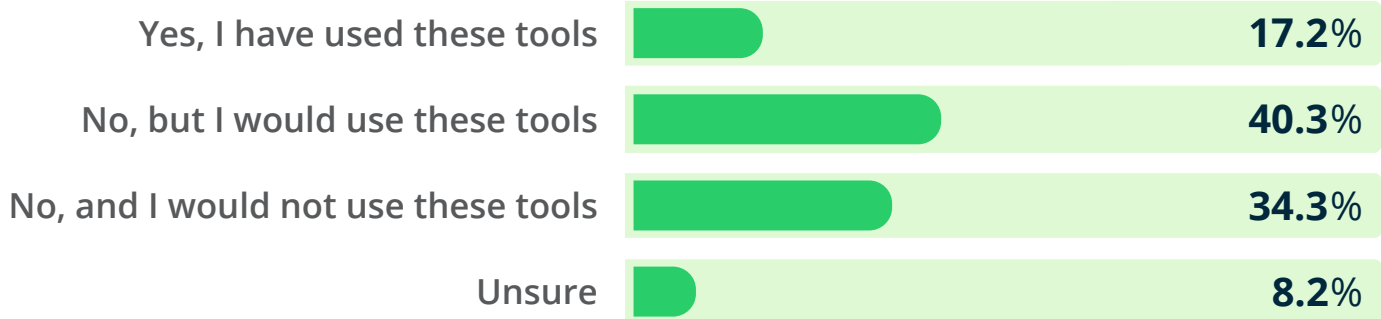
Figure 19



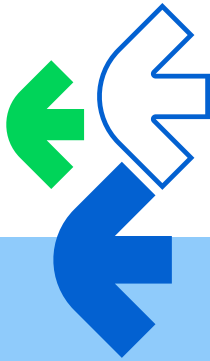
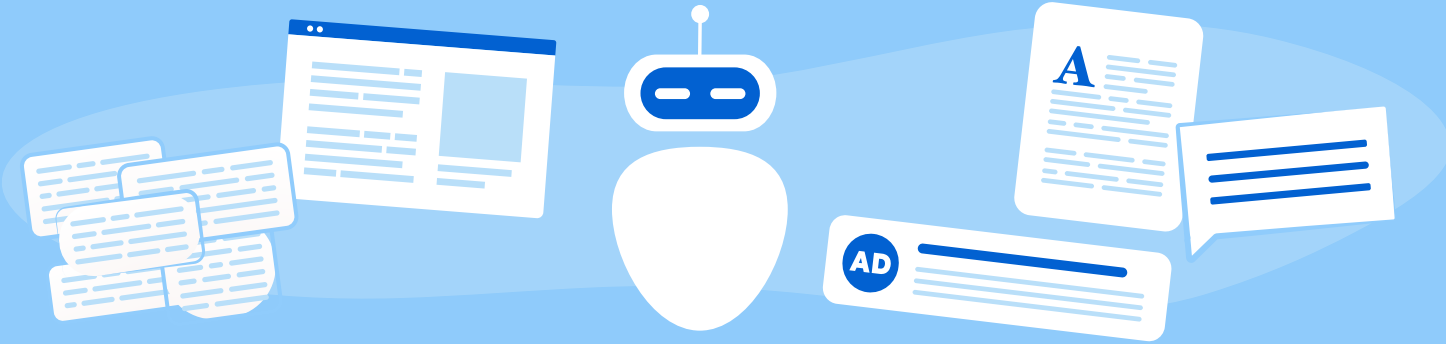
Are job seekers using artificial intelligence (AI) to help with some of their heavy lifting? When asked if they'd used an AI-based tool like ChatGPT to create their resume or cover letter, 57.5% of candidates said they have used or would use these technologies, and 34.3% said they would not use them (Figure 20). Nearly half (45.6%) of those who had used AI-based tools came from the 18 to 30 age group.

Have you used an artificial intelligence-based tool (e.g., ChatGPT) to create your resume or cover letter?

Figure 20

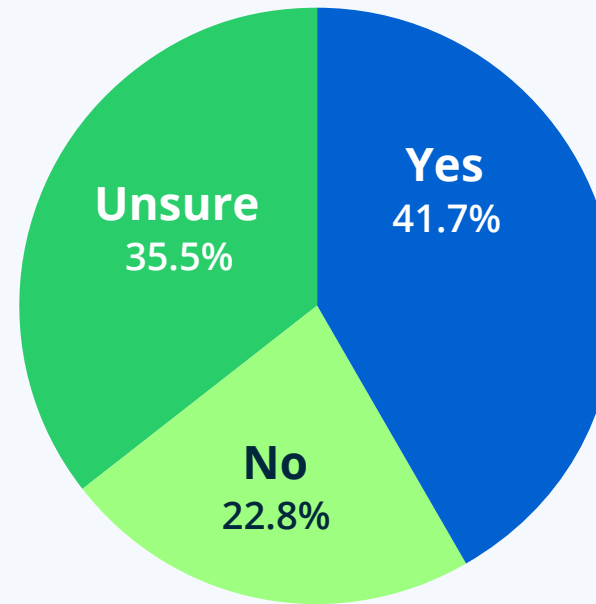


I want employers to know that applicants are actual people and not robots. It's already hard for job seekers to apply for employment, let alone find a job that is suitable and can meet your qualifications.



To round out our questions about the application process, we asked candidates if they would be more likely to apply for a job if they knew the hiring company used recruiting tools to anonymize resumes and applications.

Such technologies hide information that can imply various aspects of a candidate's diversity, such as age or gender. 41.7% of respondents said they would be more inclined to apply for a role if they knew the company used these tools (Figure 21).



Would you be more likely to apply for a job if you knew the company used “blind” or “anonymous” recruitment tools to reduce bias and increase diversity hiring?

Figure 21

“
Despite my age, it is my experience that makes the difference.
”

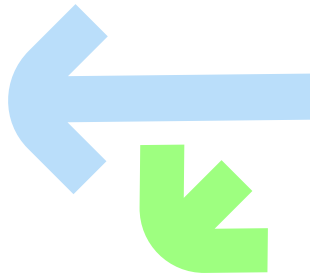
“
Diversity and fairness.
”

“
Workplace equity.
”

Communication With Employers

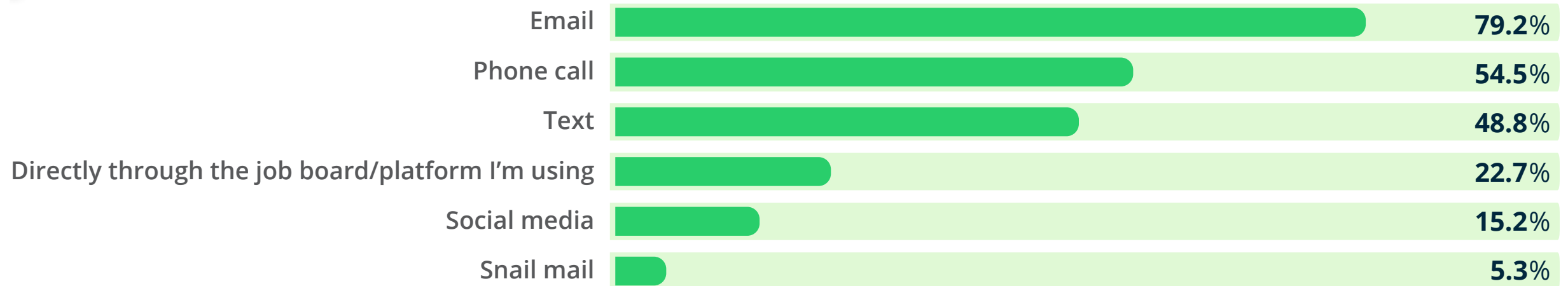
Fast, frequent, and transparent communication with employers was one of candidates' greatest "wants" – and they are open to hearing from companies through a variety of channels.

While email was the most popular method of communication (79.2%), nearly half of job seekers want to receive phone calls (54.5%) and text messages (48.8%) (Figure 22).



How do you prefer employers/recruiters contact you? (Check all that apply.)

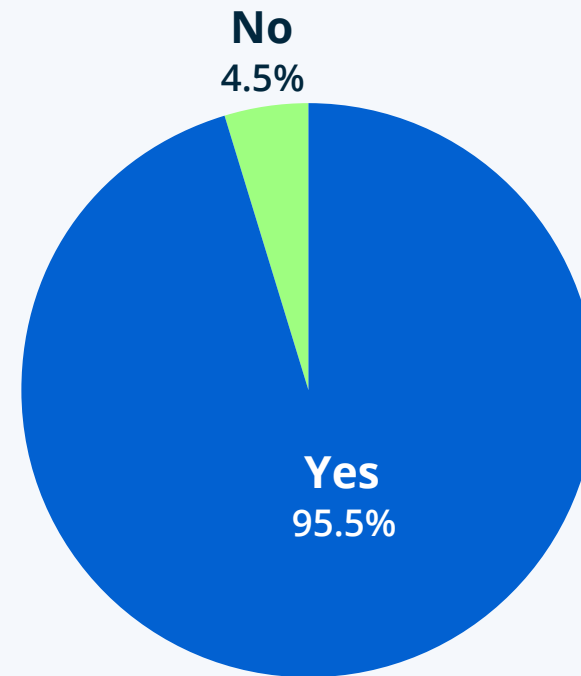
Figure 22



“
Transparency is paramount.
”

“
I want to be treated fairly and with respect.
”

Candidates were also adamant that employers communicate with them through the various stages of the recruitment process. In fact, the vast majority of candidates (95.5%) want employers to acknowledge they received the application (Figure 23), and 66.1% want to hear back in less than 24 hours (Figure 24).

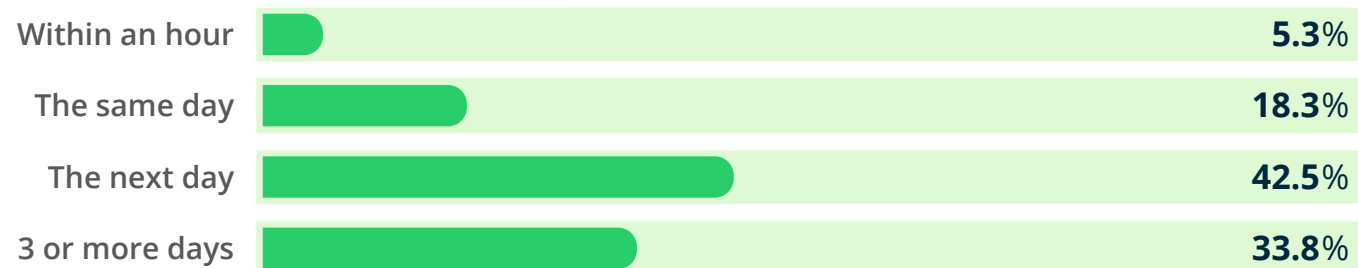


After applying for a job online, do you want employers to acknowledge that they've received your application?

Figure 23

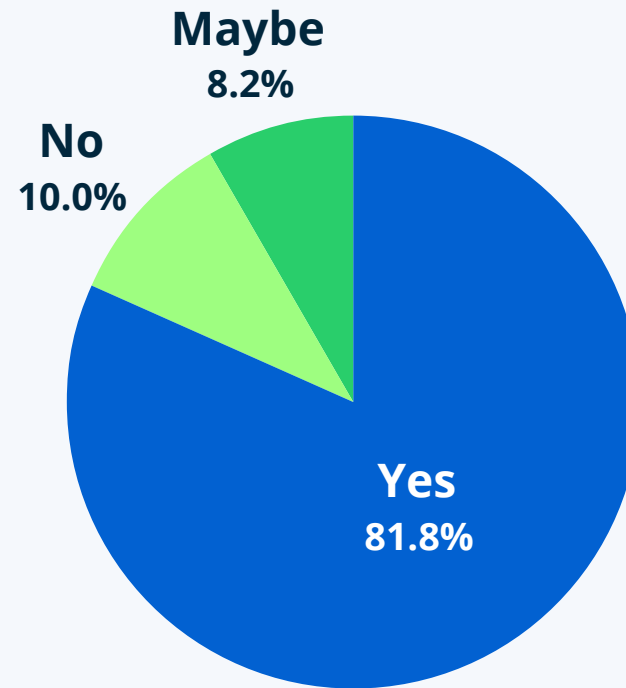
What is an acceptable amount of time for an employer to respond to your application, follow-up message, or other correspondence during the recruitment process?

Figure 24



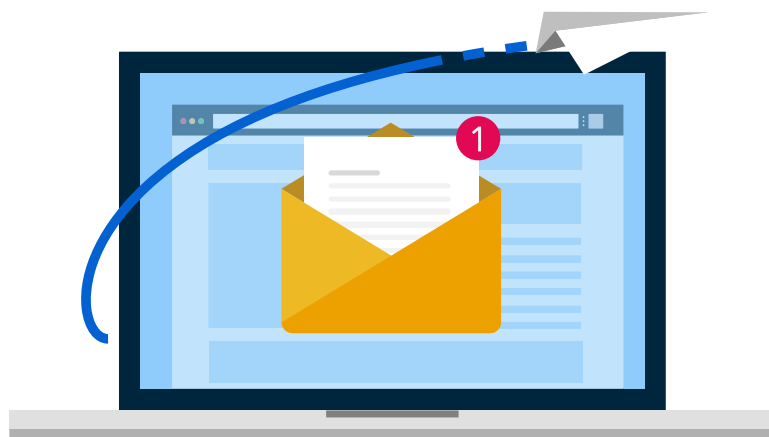
I would like to feel more 'in the loop' during the hiring process. If I am not a viable candidate, I would like to know up front, so I am not wasting any more time pursuing something that isn't a viable option.

Interestingly, 81.8% of candidates want the employer to contact them to let them know if and when they are no longer in the running for a job or not a good fit (Figure 25).



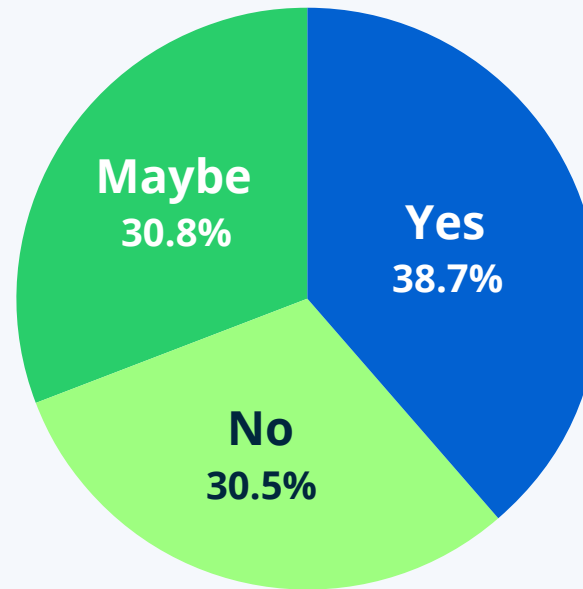
If you are disqualified from the job/no longer in the running for the role, would you prefer the employer/recruiter inform you of their decision?

Figure 25



“
*I would like a response that tells me why I wasn't selected for a job.
I would like to know what I need to improve upon.*
”

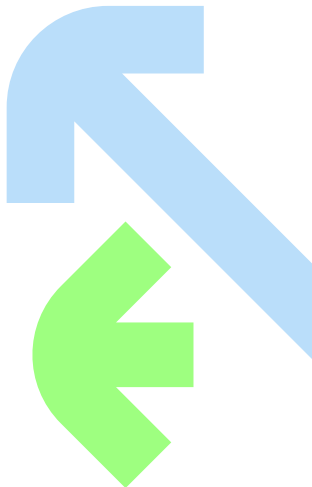
Employers' inability to communicate clearly and quickly with candidates can negatively impact their employer and consumer brand – 38.7% of candidates said they'd be less likely to interact with a company's brand (e.g., buy their products, follow them on social media, apply for a future role) if the employer ghosts them (Figure 26).



If you apply for a job and don't hear back from the employer, are you less likely to interact with their brand in the future?

Figure 26

“
Always keep in contact and let me know what is going on so I can move on if necessary.
”

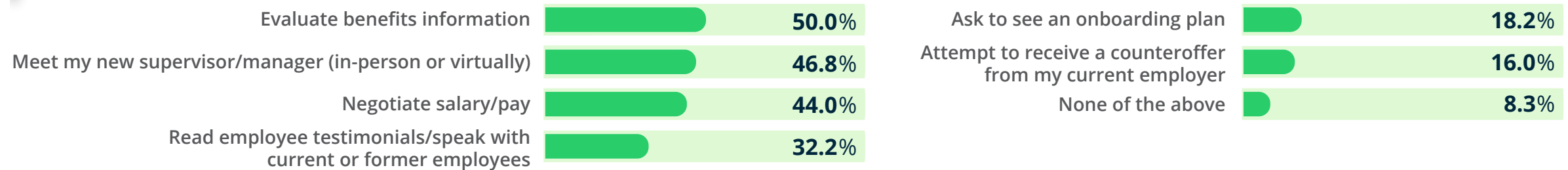


Job Offers

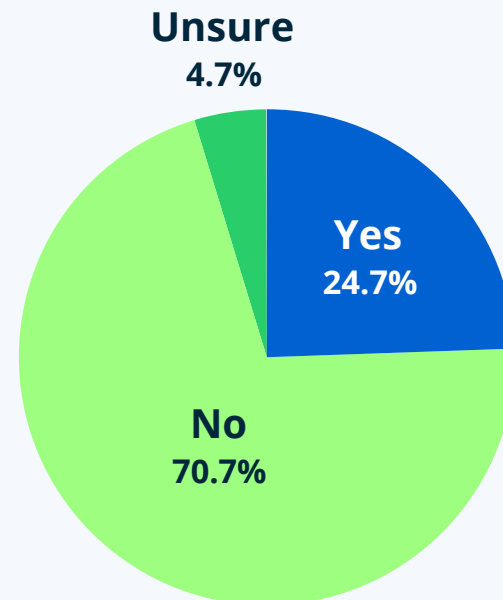
Finally, we asked candidates about their behaviors and preferences during the job offer stage. Half of all job seekers (50.0%) said they always evaluate benefits information before accepting a job and 46.8% meet their new supervisor or manager (Figure 27). But despite the strong emphasis candidates place on salary, just 44.0% negotiate pay, and 16.0% attempt to receive a counteroffer from their current employer.

Before accepting a job offer, I always: *(Check all that apply.)*

Figure 27



We also found that approximately one in four job seekers (24.7%) have declined an offer after accepting it verbally (Figure 28). While this hints that candidates want the freedom to change their minds, it also suggests that employers should have a backup plan – or a pipelined candidate – if their initial offer falls through.



Have you ever declined a job offer after accepting it verbally?

Figure 28

Top Findings: 10 Things Candidates Want in Their Job Search

Although each and every job seeker has unique preferences, several common themes emerged from these survey results. Here are 10 things candidates want in their job searches, according to our research.

01

Candidates want employers to communicate openly and honestly throughout the entire recruitment process. 95.5% of respondents want employers to acknowledge they've received their application after applying for a job online, and 81.8% want employers to close the loop and inform them if they are disqualified from the job or no longer in the running for the role.

When asked what they believed to be an acceptable amount of time for an employer to respond to their correspondence, 66.1% of candidates said they wanted to hear back in less than 24 hours. And a lack of response has consequences: 38.7% of job seekers said they would be less likely to interact with a brand in the future if they apply for a job and don't hear back.

As for the method of communication with employers, candidates preferred email (79.2%), but approximately half of job seekers were also interested in receiving phone calls (54.5%) and text messages (48.8%).

02

Candidates want to know salary ranges – and a lack of pay transparency can be a dealbreaker. 78.5% of candidates said they would be more likely to apply for a job if the salary was listed in the ad, while 44.7% said they would be deterred from applying if the salary was not specified.

Further, 64.0% said salary was one of the most important factors in their job search (the top answer), yet just 44.0% of job seekers negotiate pay before accepting a job.

03

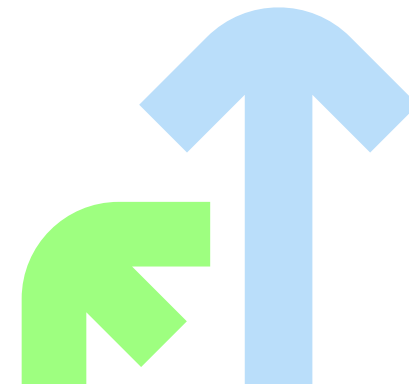
Candidates want some form of in-person work, but remote work options are still essential. 67.8% of respondents preferred either an in-person work environment (36.3%) or a hybrid arrangement/mix of in-person and remote work (31.5%). However, remote work was still a “must-have” for many job seekers: 42.7% of candidates said remote work options were among the most important aspects of their job search, and 27.2% said they would not apply for a job if remote work was not an option.

04

Candidates want employers to embrace fair, unbiased hiring practices. Although only 16.8% of respondents said a company’s commitment to DE&I was among the most important aspects of their job search and 14.1% said they want to learn more about a company’s DE&I initiatives when researching potential employers, 41.7% said they would be more likely to apply for a job if they knew the company used “blind” or “anonymous” recruitment tools to reduce bias and increase diversity hiring.

05

Candidates want employment options beyond traditional full-time roles, particularly part-time jobs. Part-time jobs were the most popular type of employment sought – 57.3% of respondents were interested in part-time work, compared to 51.7% interested in full-time opportunities. A portion of candidates were also looking for temporary jobs (17.8%), gig work (17.7%), and seasonal jobs (17.3%).



06

Candidates want employers to value their time, especially if they are putting in the work to get the job. While 62.6% of candidates want to spend less than 20 minutes on an online application, they are still putting in the legwork to get in front of employers: 57.6% customize their resume for the position they're applying for "always" or "most of the time," and 55.7% include a cover letter "always" or "most of the time" even if it's not required. What's more is that 34.3% would not use AI-based tools (like ChatGPT) to write their resume or cover letter for them.

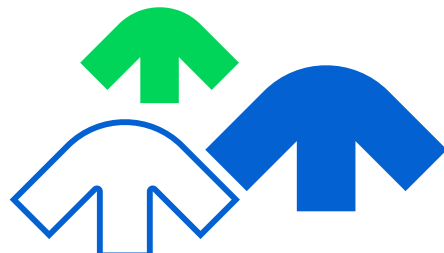
Additionally, three-fourths (74.5%) of candidates follow up on their applications "always" or "most of the time," demonstrating to employers their genuine interest in a job.

07

Candidates want to work for a company with a positive employer brand – and they want proof. 37.5% of candidates said a company's reputation as a good place to work was one of the most important factors in their job search, while 76.0% research the hiring company before applying for a job "always" or "most of the time." Of those who do their research, 64.7% said they want to read employee reviews/testimonials and 64.8% check out the employer's website.

08

Candidates want to use job boards to advance their employment search. Job boards play a major role in connecting candidates with the right employers – 46.3% of survey respondents prefer to find out about job openings by searching job boards, and 44.3% like to receive job alerts emails from these recruiting platforms. In addition, 28.4% of candidates who research employers prior to applying view their company profiles on job boards as part of their due diligence.



09

Candidates want jobs in the right location. The location of the job ranked second (behind salary) among candidates' most important aspects in their job search (56.8%), and 54.7% of respondents said that if the location of the job is too far away and/or they would need to relocate or commute, they would not apply. Plus, more candidates search for work on job boards by the location of the job (49.7%) than by their desired career title (36.8%).

10

Candidates want informative and clear job ads. Along with a strong desire to see salary in job ads, 38.8% of respondents said they would not apply for a job if the job description or duties are too vague or unclear, and 33.5% wouldn't apply if the ad is poorly formatted and hard to read (e.g., it uses all CAPS, there is no spacing).



Conclusion



To close our survey, we asked candidates an open-ended question, allowing them to anonymously share their thoughts: *If employers could better understand one thing about your wants and needs as a job seeker, what would that be?*

While some of their responses are included throughout this report, several topics appeared time and time again, including honesty, transparency, clarity, communication, equity, fair/good pay and benefits, flexibility, easy applications, respect, and understanding. In sum, job seekers want to be treated well and their time to be valued.

Based on this research, employers must take a candidate-centric approach to recruitment. By putting themselves in the mind of a job seeker and looking at their hiring processes – how they communicate, what information they include in their job ads, how they determine and promote salary, and what their employer brand looks like – they can more efficiently find, engage, and retain the right talent.



Survey Methodology

iHire surveyed 600 job seekers in the U.S. who were seeking work actively and passively across all industries. The survey was fielded to a Qualtrics market research panel of working professionals ages 18 years and older. The survey was conducted in March 2023.

About iHire

iHire is a leading career-oriented platform that powers a family of 57 industry-focused talent networks, including WorkInSports, iHireVeterinary, iHireDental, iHireConstruction, and iHireChefs. For more than 20 years, iHire has combined advanced job matching technology with our expertise in the talent acquisition space to connect job seekers with employers in their desired sector. With an industry-specific, candidate-centric, and data-driven approach to recruitment, iHire helps candidates find meaningful work and employers find unique, high-quality talent – faster, easier, and more effectively than a general job board. Visit www.iHire.com for more information.

