

Why Recruitment Isn't (Only) About Finding Candidates

Across Canada's post-secondary sector, change is the new constant. From shifting student demographics to evolving funding models and growing competition for top talent, institutional leaders are navigating increasingly complex hiring landscapes. Institutions are being asked to do more with less, often within tighter timelines and under greater scrutiny.

At a time when candidate pools may appear abundant, confidence across the sector remains uncertain, making recruitment as critical, and as nuanced, as ever. In a sector where institutional reputation and student outcomes hinge on leadership and faculty strength, recruitment decisions are foundational to long-term success.

Reflections on a Shifting Sector

Our team of experienced consultants understand the challenges facing the sector and the leaders within it, having worked with institutions across Canada to support their talent strategy. Though recent headlines point to layoffs, enrolment pressures, and reduced funding, the reality on the ground is more nuanced. Many institutions are seeing an increase in applicants, particularly as experienced professionals seek new roles following internal restructuring or program closures. But a higher volume of applications doesn't necessarily translate to ease or success in hiring.

Internal HR teams often find themselves overwhelmed. Managing large pools of candidates, aligning internal stakeholders, and ensuring timely, thoughtful communication can strain even well-resourced teams. The risk of process delays, inconsistent feedback, or unclear role expectations increases, which can negatively impact candidate experiences.

Simultaneously, candidates from outside academia may hesitate to pursue roles in the sector, citing perceived instability. Those already in higher education may also feel cautious about making a move. The result is a recruitment landscape that looks busy on the surface but requires a more intentional and informed approach to navigate effectively.

When Good Recruitment Efforts Fall Short

In many cases, hiring responsibilities fall to staff who are managing recruitment alongside other pressing duties. Whether it's coordinating a faculty search or leading an administrative hire, recruitment can become a secondary priority, leading to missed opportunities.

Without a structured and timely process, even highly motivated candidates can lose interest. Delays in interview scheduling, vague communication, or a lack of clarity about role expectations can lead to confusion or frustration. These breakdowns affect not only individual hiring outcomes but also broader perceptions of the institution as an employer.

Additionally, the prevailing public narrative around higher education can dampen candidate enthusiasm. Institutions must be thoughtful in how they communicate their vision, the impact of the role, and why joining now still represents an exciting and meaningful career opportunity.

Why Recruitment Is About More Than Finding Candidates

At first glance, a robust applicant pool might suggest the hard part is over. But effective recruitment involves much more than identifying qualified individuals. It's about aligning institutional needs with the right candidate's motivations, ensuring mutual understanding, and building trust throughout the process.

Once a strong candidate is identified, thoughtful

engagement is key. This means having honest conversations about expectations, clarifying role responsibilities, and maintaining a steady line of communication. Success is measured not just by a signed offer, but by how smoothly the new hire transitions into the role and how well they integrate into the institution's culture and priorities.

As automation and AI take on greater roles in talent acquisition, the importance of human connection becomes more pronounced. Candidates are evaluating your institution throughout the process. Even small missteps in communication or process can have a significant impact on their decision to accept an offer.

"What looks like a full applicant pool often masks a shortage of truly qualified candidates. Recruitment isn't just about volume—it's about long-term alignment of skills and experience, motivation, and candidate values."

— [Mark Gillis](#)
Partner, Meridia and KBRS



Strategies to Strengthen Your Recruitment Approach

The most successful recruitment efforts share certain qualities: they are intentional, inclusive, and responsive. Whether you lead a central HR office or support hiring at the faculty or academic leader level, these practices can be scaled to fit your institution's current capacity and adapted to improve both candidate experience and hiring outcomes.

1. Clarify Expectations Early

Start by developing a clear understanding of the role and the qualities you are seeking in a candidate. Recruitment efforts are more likely to succeed when HR professionals and academic leaders align early on priorities, timelines, and candidate profiles. Go beyond the job description and engage stakeholders to define the role's core responsibilities, success factors, and required competencies. This shared clarity supports better alignment throughout the hiring process and reduces the risk of bias during evaluation.

2. Design a Thoughtful and Transparent Process

First impressions matter. Candidates begin assessing your institution from the moment they encounter your job posting. According to a 2023 Gallup study, 44 percent of respondents said that their interview experience with the people hiring them was the greatest non-compensation influence on their decision to accept an offer. A candidate-focused process, supported by clear communication and consistent timelines, builds credibility and trust. Reconsider old processes that may no longer serve you well.

3. Don't Underestimate the Power of Proactive Outreach

Even in a crowded job market, the best candidates aren't always actively searching. Sharing opportunities directly within professional networks or through personal outreach can attract strong applicants who might not otherwise apply. This proactive step can also help diversify your candidate pool and demonstrate your commitment to inclusive hiring.

4. Build Relationships, Not Just Pipelines

Use initial conversations to build rapport, share context, and genuinely explore a candidate's interest in the role. These interactions aren't just about checking qualifications. They're a chance to communicate your institution's culture, values, and vision, and to better understand the candidate's own motivations and goals.

5. Support Candidates Throughout the Process

Give candidates the tools they need to succeed. Share interview formats in advance, explain who they'll be meeting with, and outline what to expect at each stage. These actions level the playing field and help candidates bring their best selves to the process. Regular updates, even when there's little new information, help maintain engagement and reduce uneasiness in the process.

"In post-secondary searches, weeks can pass between interviews. A brief end-of-week email or quick call helps candidates feel included, know what to expect, and avoid surprises, often the difference between keeping a top candidate engaged or leaving the search."

— [Kyle Steele](#)
Principal, KBRS



6. Communicate Clearly as You Approach Offer

As you near the final stages, keep communication high-touch and personal. Discussing offer terms before sending paperwork can help avoid misunderstandings.

This is especially important for senior academic or administrative roles, where expectations around compensation, relocation, or hybrid work may vary.

“Candidates aren’t just assessing the role—they’re assessing your institution. Every touchpoint, from job posting to offer, tells a story about who you are as an employer.”

— [Katherine Frank, CPHR](#)
Partner, KBRS



7. Plan for Successful Onboarding from the Start

Recruitment doesn’t end with a signed offer. It transitions into onboarding, where first impressions become long-term perceptions. Planning for onboarding during the recruitment phase helps ensure new hires feel supported, aligned, and equipped from day one. A clear handoff between hiring and onboarding teams, along with early discussions around role expectations, institutional culture, and success metrics, can accelerate integration and reduce early attrition. For faculty and leadership roles, where success is often context-specific, a well-structured onboarding plan is critical to long-term engagement and impact.

Continuing the Conversation

The hiring environment in post-secondary institutions is evolving, and recruitment strategies must evolve with it. Whether you’re looking to fine-tune your internal approach or explore additional support, our team of strategic talent advisors has experience working with institutions across Canada. As the country’s largest academic recruitment-focused practice, we welcome the opportunity to support your success.

If you’re interested in learning more or discussing your recruitment needs, we’d be glad to connect.

“We understand that every institution is different. That’s why we don’t bring a one-size-fits-all solution—we co-design recruitment strategies that reflect your culture and values.”

— [Jennifer \(Jennie\) Massey, PhD](#)
Managing Partner, KBRS

