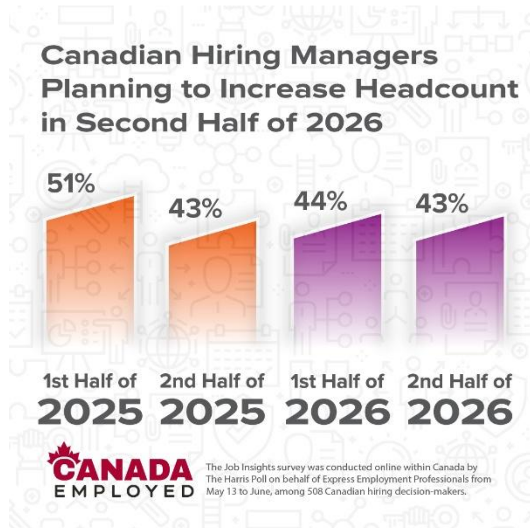
Canadian Employers Plan to Hire in Second Half of 2026, But Many Struggle to Fill Open Jobs

Growing workloads, newly created positions and turnover are driving hiring plans.

TORONTO, July 8, 2026 — More Canadian employers are heading into the second half of 2026 with plans to hire, but many are struggling to find the workers they need, according to a new Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey.



Three-quarters of Canadian hiring managers (74%) feel positive about their company's hiring outlook for the remainder of 2026, a significant increase from 67% in the fall of 2025. Employers most commonly describe their outlook as optimistic (39%), hopeful (35%) and confident (30%).

That positivity is translating into hiring plans, with 43% of companies planning to increase the number of employees, similar to the fall of 2025 (44%).

Yet the labour market continues to show signs of a stubborn mismatch: 32% of hiring managers say their company currently has open positions they cannot fill, up from 29% in the fall of 2025.

Companies Want to Grow, but Hiring Isn't Simple

For business leaders, the findings show hiring plans are being driven by operational needs, not optimism alone. Among companies planning to increase headcount, the top reasons are practical business needs:

- 56% cite increased volumes of work.
- 44% say they are filling newly created positions.
- 29% are replacing positions open due to employee turnover.
- 29% are staffing expansion into other categories or markets.

Not Every Company Is Expanding

Not all companies are adding staff, though. About half of hiring managers (47%) say their company plans to maintain current staffing levels in the second half of 2026, while 8% plan to reduce their employee count.

Among companies planning to decrease staffing levels, the leading reasons point to cost and efficiency pressures:

- 60% cite the need to reduce costs.
- 46% point to increased use of automation, technology or AI.
- 31% say their company is not replacing or backfilling employees who leave.

Hiring Challenges Remain Widespread
Even companies optimistic about hiring are preparing for complications. Most hiring managers (86%) expect to face challenges over the remainder of the year, including:

- Finding qualified candidates: 45%
- Navigating AI in recruitment and hiring processes: 28%
- Difficulty planning labour needs due to recession or economic downturn concerns and/or changes in government policies: 20%
- Increased competition in the job market: 20%

The data suggests employers are neither pulling back broadly nor hiring with ease. Instead, many are trying to expand while working through candidate shortages, changing technology and uncertainty that can make workforce planning more difficult.

For the labour market, that means job opportunities remain available, but the path from open role to filled position is still complicated. For employers, the challenge is not only deciding whether to hire, but how clearly and quickly they can connect with the right candidates.

"The mismatch between open jobs and available talent is not something businesses can afford to ignore," said Bob Funk Jr., CEO, president and chairman of Express Employment International. "Job seekers have an opportunity to build skills in areas where employers need help most, and companies have an opportunity to invest in people who show potential. The right worker may not always arrive ready-made, but with the right training and support, they can become the right fit."

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Survey Methodology
The Job Insights survey was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from May 15 to June 1, 2026, among 508 Canadian hiring decision-makers.

For full survey methodology, please contact Ana Curic at Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com.

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If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Ana Curic at (613) 858-2622 or email Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com.

About Robert (Bob) Funk Jr.

Robert (Bob) Funk Jr. is the Chief Executive Officer, President and Chairman of Express Employment International, a global staffing franchisor founded and headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He leads a portfolio of workforce solution brands, including the flagship Express Employment Professionals franchise, along with several affiliated brands serving specialized markets. The Express franchise brand is an industry-leading, international staffing company with franchise locations across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

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