

# U.S. Technology Hiring & Contract Staffing Report 2026

*The Bifurcated Market*

January – August 2026



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# Executive summary

There isn't one tech market in 2026. There are two, and they're moving in opposite directions.

## Market one

# 2.8%

Tech unemployment, July

Tech unemployment hit 2.9% in June. It dropped again in July, to 2.8%, the lowest reading of the year. It ticked back up to roughly 3% in August.

National unemployment ticked down to 4.1% over the same period and held there in August. Active tech postings passed 600,000 through June and sat just under 600,000 in August, 42% of them newly advertised.

Worldwide IT spending is on track to pass \$6 trillion this year, up from \$5.5 trillion in 2025.

## Market two

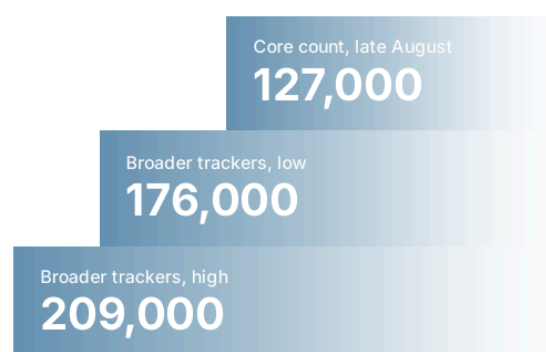
# 127,000

Tech job cuts, through late August

127,000 tech job cuts through late August, already more than all of 2025. Other trackers, using broader definitions, put the running total between 176,000 and 209,000 by early September. Over half of those layoff events named AI or automation as the reason.

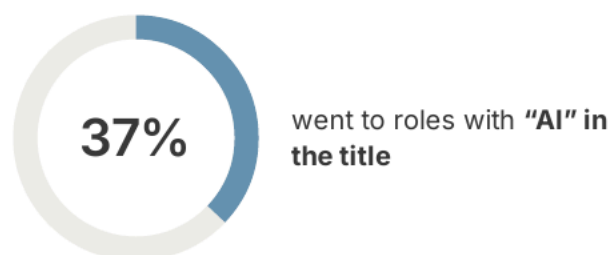
### 2026 tech job cuts, by tracker definition

Running totals, late August to early September



Once you look at who's in each group, the two numbers stop contradicting each other. Demand has shifted up the seniority curve and into specific skills.

Software developer postings tell the story clearly that 71% of the recent increase went to senior roles, and 37% went to roles with "AI" in the title.



## The rebound is real and it's just not for everyone.

July gave us the first real crack in the "resilient tech hiring" story. Tech occupation employment has grown every month since spring. Then it fell by 26,000 in July, even as unemployment kept dropping.

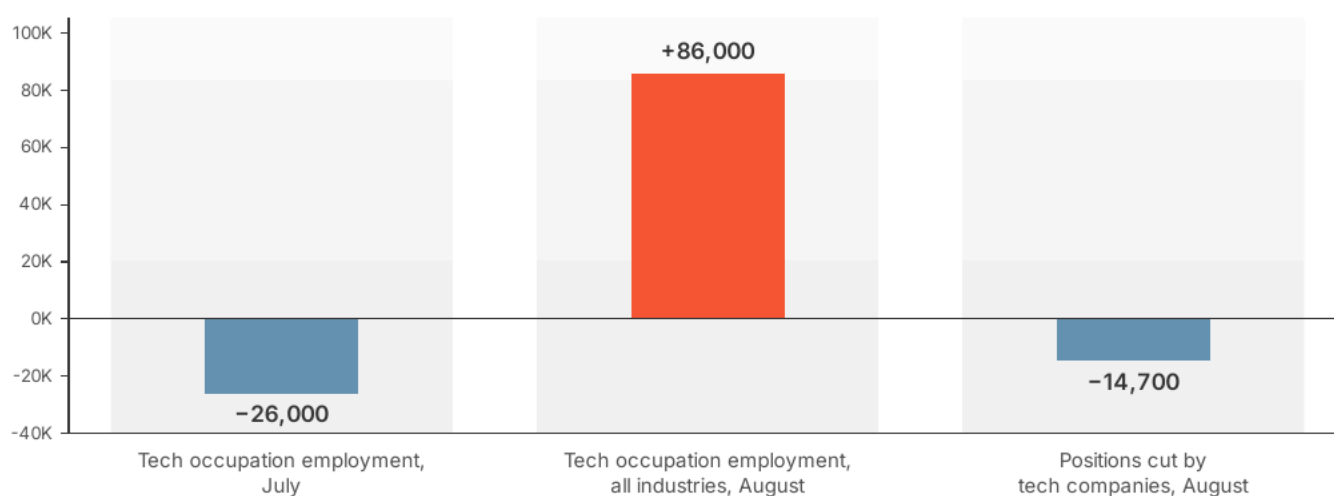
It is a mixed month: fewer people employed in tech roles, but the ones still looking found work faster. Postings are leveling off too, after six straight months of growth.

August put most of that back. Tech occupation employment across all industries rose by 86,000, and BLS revised national July payrolls from a 23,000 loss to a 21,000 gain, which makes July look less like a break in the trend than it did a month ago.

The crack that stayed open is inside the tech sector itself: tech companies cut about 14,700 positions in August while tech roles in every other industry kept filling. Postings held near 600,000 rather than resuming growth.

### The July dip and the August split

Change in positions, thousands



# Major findings

01

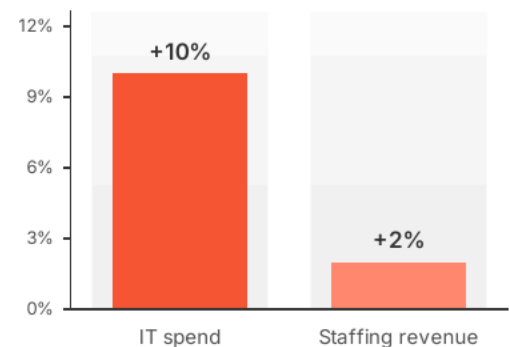
## Spending is booming while hiring stays flat.

IT spend is up roughly 10%, to \$6 trillion. The gap tells a clear story that companies are investing more in technology, but not proportionally more in people.

Global staffing revenue is up about 2%. That extra \$500 billion is going into data centers and AI infrastructure. It's capital spending, not payroll. 42% of technology leaders told Deloitte they've seen little or no return on their AI investment so far.

### Growth, 2026

IT spend vs. staffing revenue



02

## Layoffs are getting absorbed almost as fast as they happen.

Tech unemployment sits at about 3% across roughly 5.9 to 6.9 million tech workers, after three months of declines ended in August. The unemployed pool is about the same size as the year to date layoff total. Most displaced workers are landing somewhere else.

**3%**

Tech  
unemployment

**5.9–6.9M**

U.S. tech workers

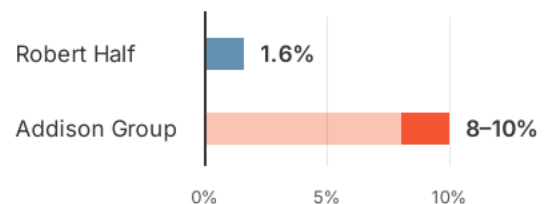
03

## Salary forecasts diverge sharply.

Robert Half projects tech pay up 1.6% for 2026. Addison Group projects 8 to 10%. Both can be right. They're measuring different populations. The gap between them is a rough measure of the specialization premium.

### 2026 tech pay forecasts

Projected increase



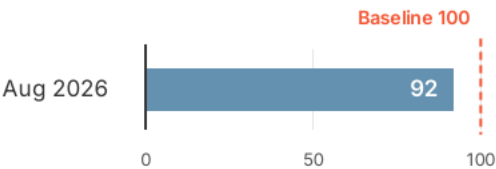
04

Contract staffing is growing, off a low base.

The ASA Staffing Index rose to a four-week average of 92 in August, up 3.3% from the July report and 4.4% year over year. Growth had slowed for five straight weeks through July and then rebounded, according to ASA's own chief economist. The index is still roughly 8% below its 2006 baseline.

ASA Staffing Index, August

Four-week average vs. 2006 baseline



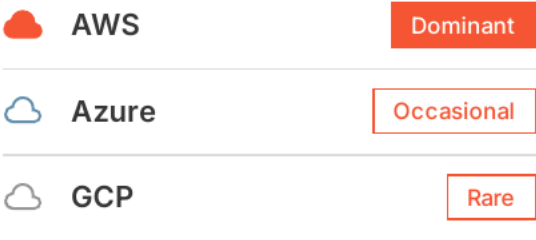
+4.4%  
Year over year

+3.3%  
From the July report

05

AWS dominance in our data is close to absolute.

Azure shows up occasionally. GCP is rare. Size any GCP pipeline to that reality, not to the vendor-neutral advice in most 2026 skills reports.



06

Robotics and data centers are the two standout growth pockets.

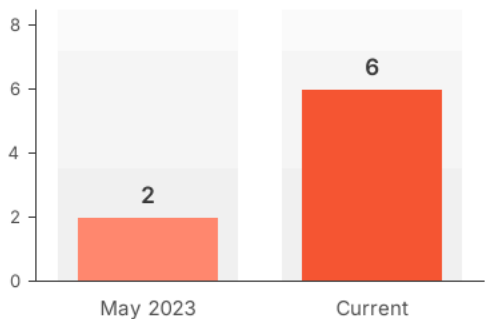
Over 65,000 open U.S. robotics jobs, with an average fill time of 114 days. Data center postings have tripled as a share of U.S. postings in two years.

  
**65,000+**  
Open U.S. robotics jobs

  
**114 days**  
Average fill time

Data centre postings

Per 1,000 U.S. postings



# What we recommend

Clear actions for the two groups on either side of a split market.



## For clients

- Budget for senior rates, not mid level ones. The mid-level discount is disappearing in the skills that matter.
- Start sourcing scarce skills earlier.
- Treat AI capability as something you add to an existing role, not a separate role you hire for.



## For candidates

- Pair a core engineering skill with a cloud platform and an AI tool.
- Single skill profiles are the ones getting squeezed.
- July's dip in tech employment, even alongside falling unemployment, suggested that squeeze was starting to show up in headcount, not just in posting mix. August's 86,000 gain argues the other way, but it came almost entirely from outside the tech sector.

Section 1

# State of the U.S. tech job market

## 1.1 Market overview

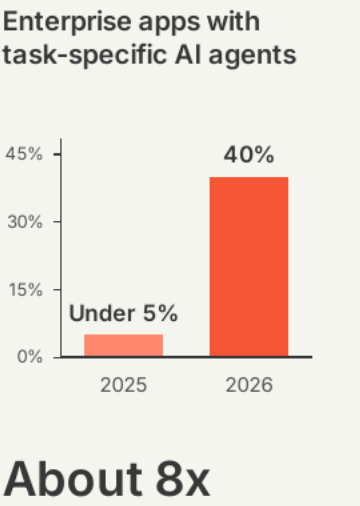
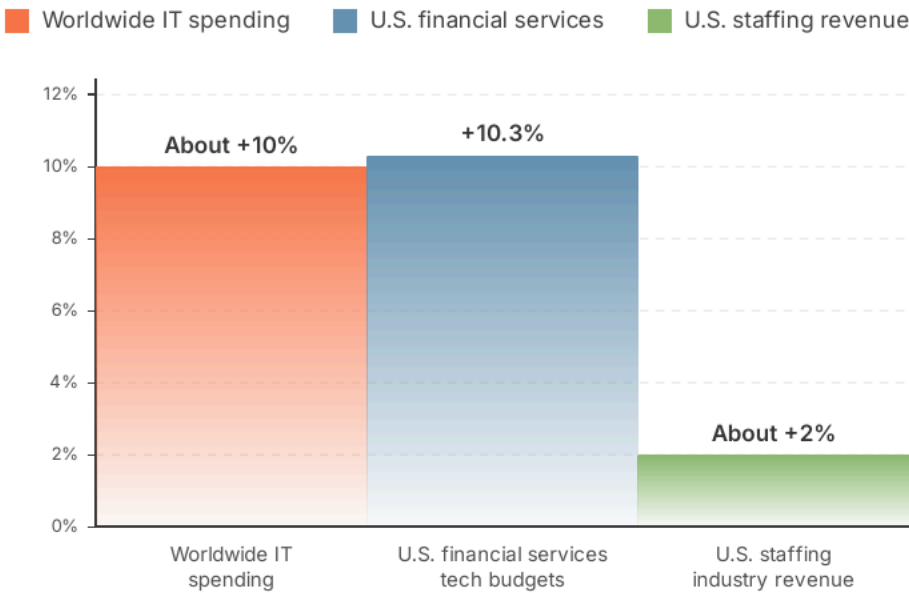
Worldwide IT spending is projected to exceed \$6 trillion in 2026, up from about \$5.5 trillion in 2025. That’s nearly \$500 billion in new spending, and most of it is going into AI infrastructure, cloud, and cybersecurity, not headcount.

U.S. financial services alone is projected to spend \$495 billion on tech in 2026, up 10.3% from 2025. One American vertical now accounts for close to 8% of global IT spend.

The software market is heading toward \$780 billion by 2030. By the end of 2026, 40% of enterprise applications are expected to include task specific AI agents, up from under 5% in 2025.

### Projected 2026 growth by spend area

Change vs. 2025



| Spend area                           | 2025     | 2026 (projected) | Change     |
|--------------------------------------|----------|------------------|------------|
| Worldwide IT spending                | \$5.5T   | Over \$6T        | About +10% |
| U.S. financial services tech budgets | —        | \$495B           | +10.3%     |
| Enterprise apps with AI agents       | Under 5% | 40%              | About 8x   |
| U.S. staffing industry revenue       | —        | \$183B           | About +2%  |

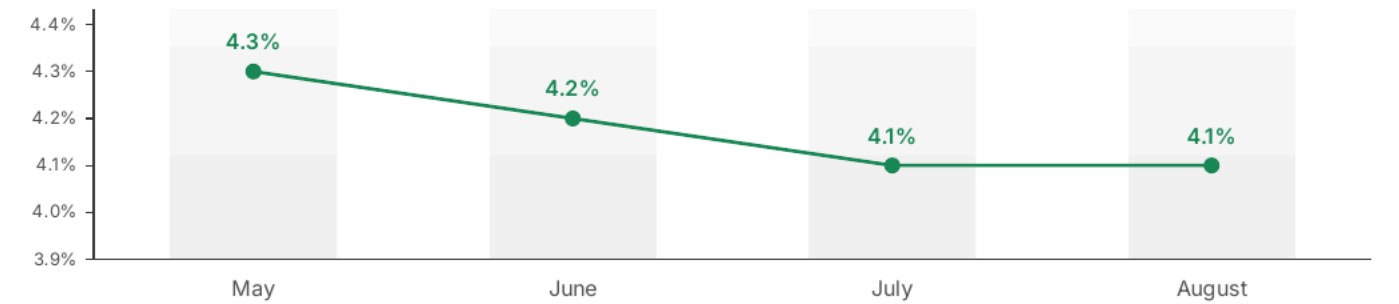
Sources: Official Census ICT spending data, Gartner forecast Worldwide It Spending report, U.S. financial services technology budgets by Forrester.

The gap between the last two rows is the story of this report. IT spending is growing five times faster than staffing revenue. The money is going into infrastructure, not people.

## Economic environment

The labor market stayed broadly stable through mid 2026. National unemployment eased from 4.3% in May to 4.2% in June and 4.1% in July, then held at 4.1% in August.

National unemployment rate, 2026



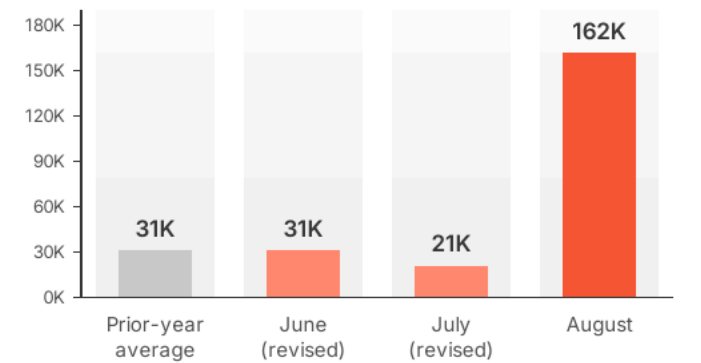
Payroll employment barely moved each month. July payrolls initially came in at a 23,000 decline, per BLS, but were later revised to a 21,000 gain, alongside a June revision from 20,000 to 31,000.

August broke the pattern with 162,000 jobs added, the strongest month since March and well above the 31,000 average of the prior year.

Most of it came from food services and local government education rather than anything structural.

Monthly payroll gains

Thousands of jobs; June and July as revised



Average hourly earnings rose 0.3% in June, to \$37.64. In July, real earnings were flat. August earnings rose another 0.3%, to \$37.75, but the annual pace slipped to 3.1%, the slowest of 2026.

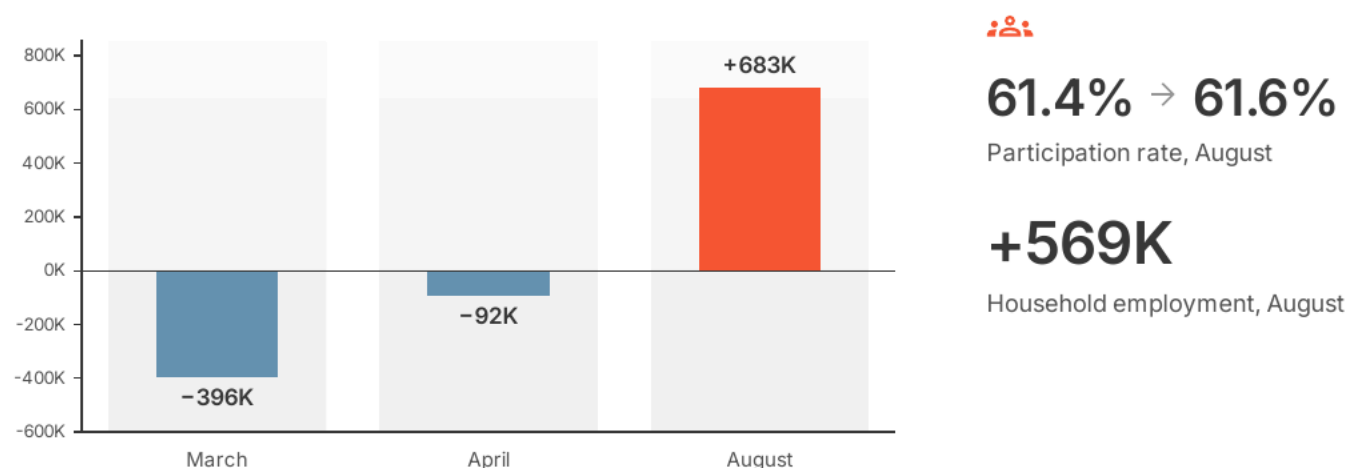
Labor supply kept tightening underneath those calm headline numbers for most of the year. The labor force shrank by 396,000 in March and 92,000 in April, the slowest labor force growth in over fifteen years.

A shrinking labor force keeps unemployment low without any real improvement in hiring. Worth remembering, the next time a low unemployment print gets called strength.

August ran the other way. The labor force grew by 683,000, participation rose from 61.4% to 61.6%, household employment was up 569,000, and unemployment still held at 4.1%.

#### Change in the labor force

Thousands of people



Absorbing that many new entrants without moving the rate is a better signal than any single month of payroll growth this year.

Openings tell a flatter story. July JOLTS, released September 1, put job openings at 7.3 million, little changed, with hires and total separations both at 5.1 million and the openings rate at 4.4%. June openings were revised down by 177,000. Hiring in professional and business services, which is where most tech contract work sits, fell by 188,000.

**7.3M**

Job openings, July

**5.1M**

Hires

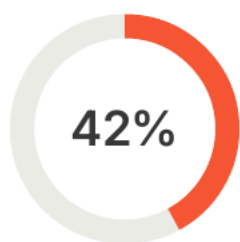
**5.1M**

Total separations

**4.4%**

Openings rate

## Hiring sentiment



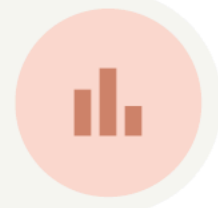
42% of leaders reported low or no ROI on AI investment. That's producing cautious, replacement-led hiring rather than a pullback: more contract talent, more emphasis on skills over titles, and, according to the American Staffing Association, growing vendor consolidation and in-house recruiting.

## Key takeaways

### 1.1 Market overview

01

Global IT spending is up about 10%, to over \$6 trillion. The money is going into infrastructure, not headcount.

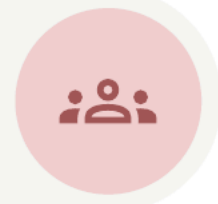


42% of tech leaders report low or no AI ROI, producing cautious rather than absent hiring.

02

03

The labor force shrank for most of the year, then added 683,000 in August without moving the unemployment rate.



Niche skill demand keeps outpacing supply while generalist demand softens.

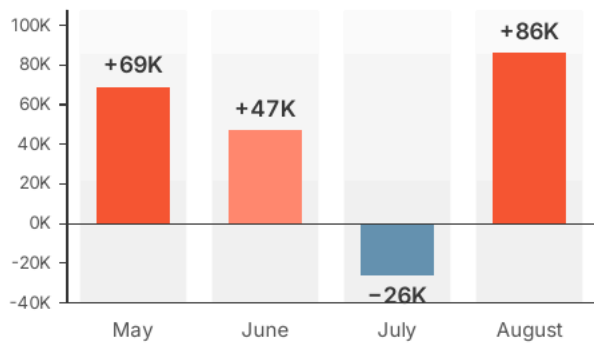
04

## 1.2 National hiring trends

| Month 2026 | Tech jobs added | Active tech postings                             |
|------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| May        | +69,000         | 587,000                                          |
| June       | +47,000         | Over 600,000                                     |
| July       | -26,000         | Postings leveling off after six months of growth |
| August     | +86,000         | Nearly 600,000, 42% newly advertised             |

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

Tech jobs added per month, 2026



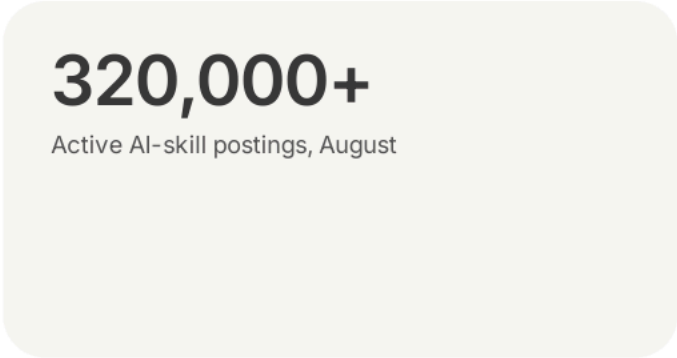
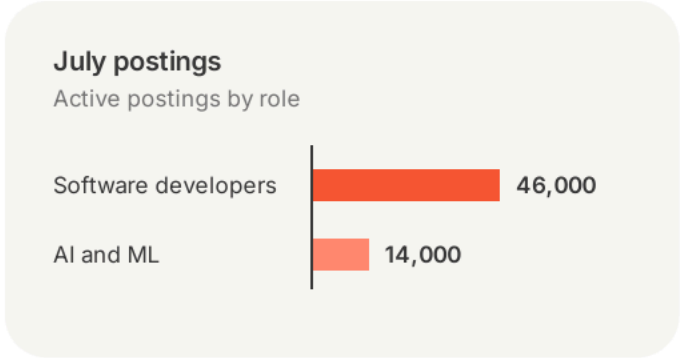
June still showed growth. July flipped negative.

Tech occupation employment fell by 26,000 workers even as the unemployment rate for tech occupations kept falling, from 2.9% to 2.8%.

CompTIA's Seth Robinson described it as: "strong demand for foundational roles across support, infrastructure, and data, even as headline employment dipped."

AI and ML postings held nearly 14,000 for the month of July. Software developer postings totaled roughly 46,000. Demand for specific skills hasn't disappeared. Total headcount growth just stalled.

August recovered the headcount and split the market in two along a cleaner line. Tech occupation employment rose 86,000 across all industry sectors while tech companies themselves cut about 14,700 positions, technical and non-technical. Banks, manufacturers, and hospital systems are hiring the engineers that software firms are letting go.



AI-skill postings passed 320,000 active openings in August, up 4.5% from July, and roughly triple the level of two years ago.

Active tech postings had grown for six straight months through June. Put that next to the July employment dip, and it's the clearest sign yet that resilient tech hiring is losing steam at the margin, even while the specialist end stays hot. August didn't resume the growth. Postings held just under 600,000.

Job posting trends through mid 2026 concentrated in five core occupations:

|                                   |                                  |                          |                                        |                                  |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 01                                | 02                               | 03                       | 04                                     | 05                               |
| Software developers and engineers | Systems engineers and architects | Tech support specialists | Cybersecurity engineers and architects | Network engineers and architects |

Tech support keeps its spot on this list despite being one of the roles most exposed to AI automation. That suggests AI hasn't displaced frontline support hiring at the pace many expected.

August's growth categories were tech support, infrastructure, project management, and cybersecurity. Project management is the one that isn't on the five-occupation list, and it's the sort of role that shows up when companies are running delivery programmes rather than building teams.

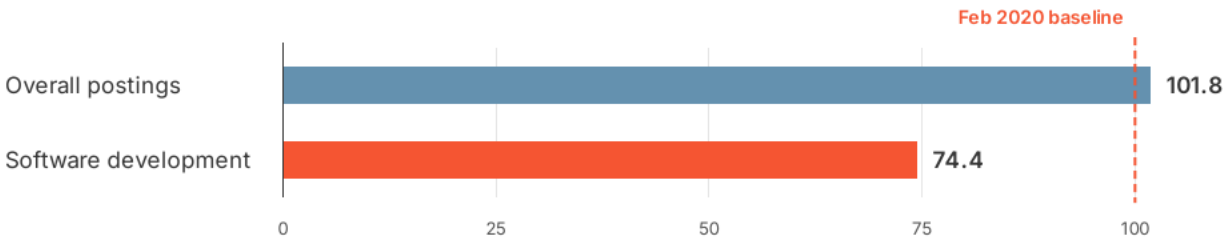
Professional, scientific and technical services, manufacturing, and administrative support generated the highest volumes of new tech postings for the month, with month-over-month gains also in retail, wholesale trade, and educational services.

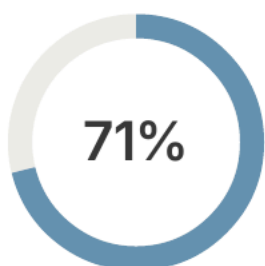
Software development postings rebounded from May 2025 to May 2026. 71% of the increase went to senior roles. 37% named AI in the title. Even with the rebound, postings remain 27.5% below pre-pandemic levels.

Indeed's software development posting index sat at 74.4 in August, about a quarter below its February 2020 baseline, so the gap is narrowing slowly. Overall postings on Indeed were at 101.8, roughly level with pre-pandemic and down 2.4% year over year.

Indeed Job Postings Index, August 2026

February 2020 = 100





The ten largest tech employers account for 71% of all data-center-related postings. This growth pocket is hyperscaler driven.

Oracle recorded 2026's largest layoff event, cutting somewhere between 21,000 and 30,000 positions, all while staying part of the broader investment cycle. Large enterprises are increasingly both the biggest hirers and the biggest workforce reducers, reallocating talent toward strategic priorities.

On Challenger's count, technology has announced 155,126 cuts through August, 29% of all announced U.S. job cuts this year and 52% above the same period in 2025. August's 6,103 was the sector's lightest month of 2026.

**155,126**

Tech cuts through August  
(Challenger)

**29%**

Of all announced U.S. job  
cuts

**+52%**

Vs. the same period in 2025

**6,103**

August, the lightest month  
of 2026

### How hiring patterns have changed:

**01 Seniority is up.** 71% of the posting increase went to senior roles.

**03 Entry level is thinning.** Layoffs concentrate in entry level, support, and AI-substitutable work.

**05 The split is now sector versus occupation.** Tech companies are cutting while every other industry hires tech people.

**02 AI is entering job titles, not just descriptions.** 37% named AI directly.

**04 Hiring cycles are lengthening.** Postings rose through June while monthly job additions fell, then turned negative in July and recovered in August without postings following.

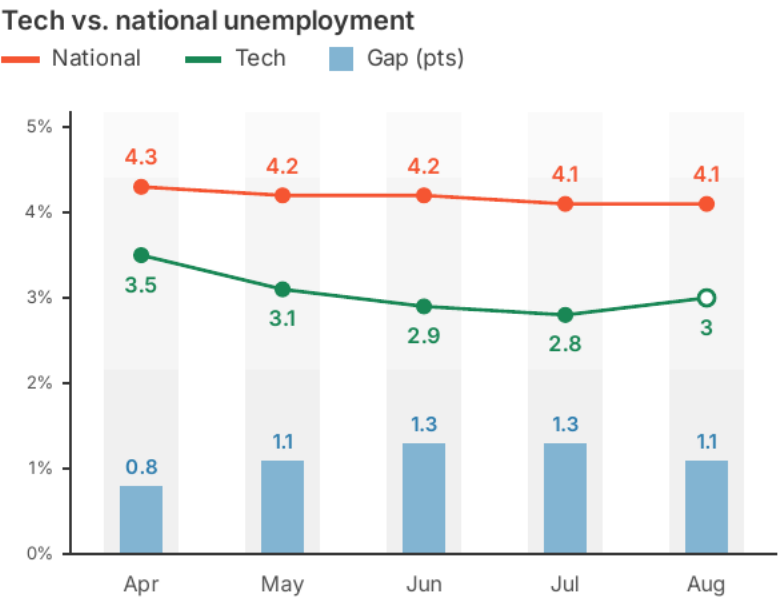
**06 Contract demand is holding,** and growing faster than permanent hiring.

### 1.3 Employment status

About 5.9 to 6.9 million people work in tech occupations across the U.S. The estimate varies by source and month.

| Month 2026 | Tech unemp. | National unemp. | Gap           |
|------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|
| April      | 3.5%        | 4.3%            | 0.8 pts       |
| May        | 3.1%        | 4.2%            | 1.1 pts       |
| June       | 2.9%        | 4.2%            | 1.3 pts       |
| July       | 2.8%        | 4.1%            | 1.3 pts       |
| August     | About 3%    | 4.1%            | About 1.1 pts |

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), CompTIA Tech Jobs Report



August tech rate is approximate (hollow marker).

Tech unemployment fell for a third straight month in July, hitting its lowest point of 2026, even as tech employment fell.

The gap against the national rate held steady at 1.3 points. Falling unemployment alongside falling headcount is a sign of fast re-absorption, not real strength.

That streak ended in August. The rate looks like it drifted back to about 3%, narrowing the gap against the national rate to a little over a point, in the same month tech occupation employment gained 86,000.

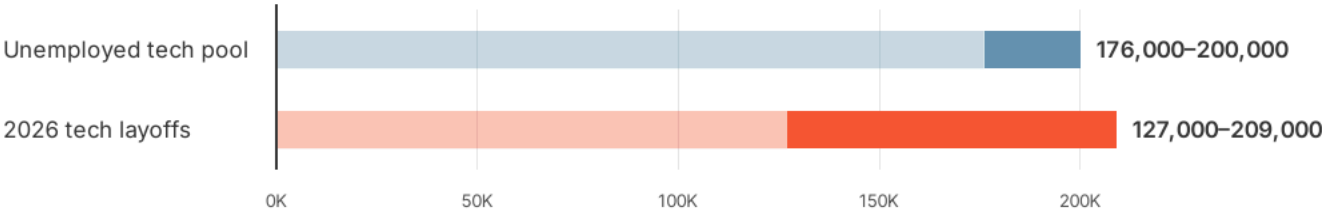
Rising unemployment alongside rising employment usually means more people entering or re-entering the search, which is consistent with the 683,000 who joined the national labor force that month.

Roughly 176,000 tech professionals were unemployed at July’s rate. At about 3% the pool is closer to 200,000, though that number is derived from a rate we had to read off a chart, so treat it as directional.

Against 2026 layoffs of 127,000 to 209,000, depending on the tracker, most displaced tech workers appear to have found new work or left tech occupations entirely.

Unemployed tech pool vs. 2026 layoffs

Low and high estimates; unemployed pool at July and August rates



A laid off tech worker is finding new work faster than the average U.S. worker

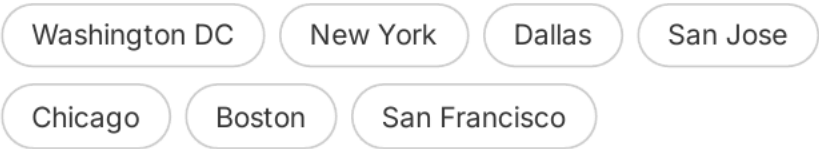
1.4 Role demand

| Rank | Role cluster                               | Source signal                                                                          |
|------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Software developers and engineers          | Strongest demand                                                                       |
| 2    | Systems engineers and architects           | Strong demand                                                                          |
| 3    | Tech support specialists                   | Strong demand                                                                          |
| 4    | Cybersecurity engineers and architects     | Strong demand; BLS projects 32% growth for information security analysts, 2022 to 2032 |
| 5    | Network engineers and architects           | Strong demand                                                                          |
| 6    | AI titled roles across categories          | 37% of the software posting increase                                                   |
| 7    | Data centre technical and facilities roles | 6 per 1,000 U.S. postings, up from 2 per 1,000 in May 2023                             |

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Indeed Hiring Lab

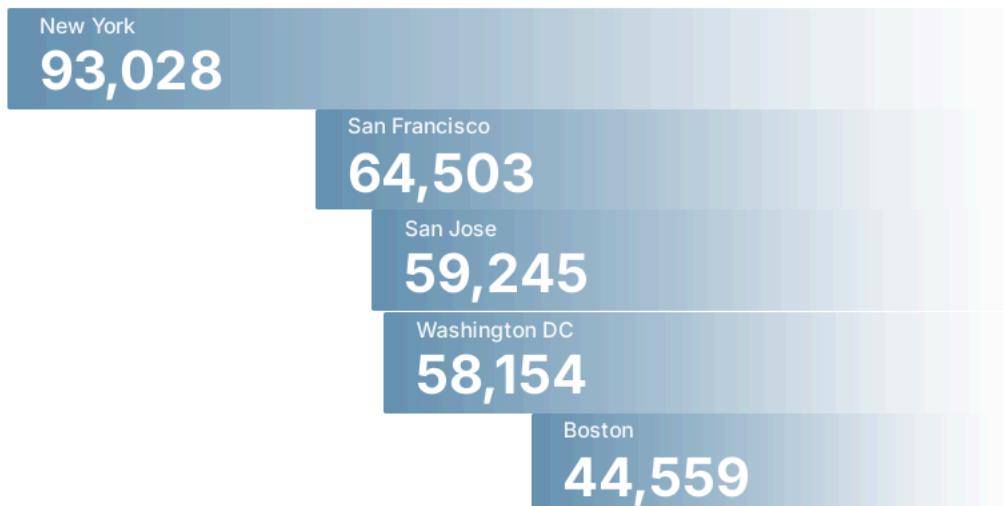
Top metros by posting volume

January 2025 to January 2026

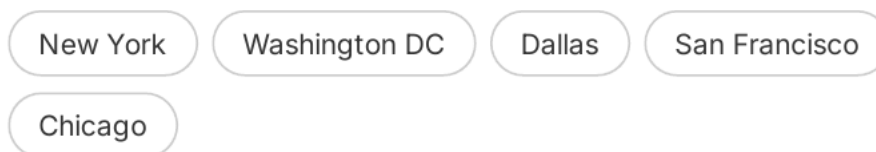


### Top metros for AI skill postings

Number of postings



### Top metros for postings that didn't require a four-year degree



## 1.5 Role trend highlights

|                                  |                 |                        |               |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|---------------|
| AI and ML engineering            | ● Rapid growth  | Data centre operations | ● Fast growth |
| Robotics and automation          | ● Fast growth   | Cloud engineering      | ● Strong      |
| Software engineering, senior     | ● Rebounding    | Data engineering       | ● Growing     |
| Cybersecurity                    | ● Steady growth | DevOps and platform    | ● Consistent  |
| Systems and network architecture | ● Stable        | Tech support           | ● Mixed       |
| Software engineering, junior     | ● Weak          | Manual QA              | ● Declining   |

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

## 1.6 Consultadd insights

This is requisition level data. It shows hiring composition, not overall volume.

Our internal book leans toward software engineering, cloud, AI, data engineering, DevOps, and enterprise platforms. Seniority skews mid to senior, with few clearly junior roles.

Engagement is mostly contract-based and priced hourly. Work is heavily remote-friendly.

---

### Most requested roles

Python developers

Java developers

Data engineers

Full stack developers

Business analysts

Almost always in combination rather than as standalone skills:

Python AWS Developer

Java Spring

Cloud Data Engineer

Salesforce Business Analyst

---

### Most requested skills

Python

Java

AWS

Data engineering

Full stack

APIs

Cloud

DevOps

AI and ML

SQL

Elasticsearch and ELK

Business analysis

AWS shows up far more often than Azure.

---

### Our top geographies

New York

Dallas

Seattle

Boston

Atlanta

Plano

Baltimore

Jersey City

Austin

Baltimore is also one of the four fastest-growing metros nationally for new postings.

San Francisco doesn't appear on this list despite being a top-three volume market nationally. Our SF clients hire remotely, so those roles land in the remote bucket instead.

---

## Comparison with the external market:

| Market trend                     | External data                                                                           | Consultadd data                         | Aligned                     |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| AI/ML hiring                     | Rising fast, 37% of software posting growth; 320,000 active AI-skill postings in August | Rising, small volume, highest pay band  | ● Yes                       |
| Senior-weighted demand           | 71% of posting growth                                                                   | Mid-to-senior dominant                  | ● Yes                       |
| Data engineering                 | Top 2026 priority                                                                       | Our strongest volume signal             | ● Yes                       |
| Contract over permanent          | +4.4% YoY in August                                                                     | Contract-based, hourly, dominant        | ● Yes                       |
| Remote work                      | Growing                                                                                 | Dominant                                | ● Yes                       |
| Cloud hiring                     | Growing, supply short                                                                   | Growing, AWS-dominant                   | ● Yes, with a platform skew |
| Cybersecurity                    | Top five demand, 32% growth; named an August growth category                            | Present, but not leading                | ○ Partial                   |
| Traditional software engineering | 10% of in demand roles, per Addison                                                     | Python and Java still top two by volume | ○ Partial                   |

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

For cybersecurity, market demand is strong, but Consultadd's data shows lower relative volume. This indicates it is a growing sector with strong chances of demand boom in the future.

For traditional software engineering, Consultadd sees strong demand for Python and Java because these skills remain widely used across enterprise applications, modernization projects, and backend development, even as newer technologies are driving a larger share of overall market growth.

## Section 1

## Section 1 summary

---

- 01 Tech unemployment hit 2.8% in July, its lowest point of the year, then drifted back to about 3% in August as tech employment rose 86,000, reversing July's 26,000 drop.
  - 02 The clearest divide is now the sector against occupation. Tech companies cut roughly 14,700 jobs in August while tech roles across every other industry grew.
  - 03 Demand has moved up the seniority curve. 71% of the software posting rebound is senior roles, 37% names AI, and postings overall remain about a quarter below pre-pandemic levels.
  - 04 Spending growth isn't hiring growth. IT spend is up about 10%, staffing revenue is up about 2%.
  - 05 Our internal book matches the market on seniority, contract mix, cloud, data, and AI.
-

## Section 2

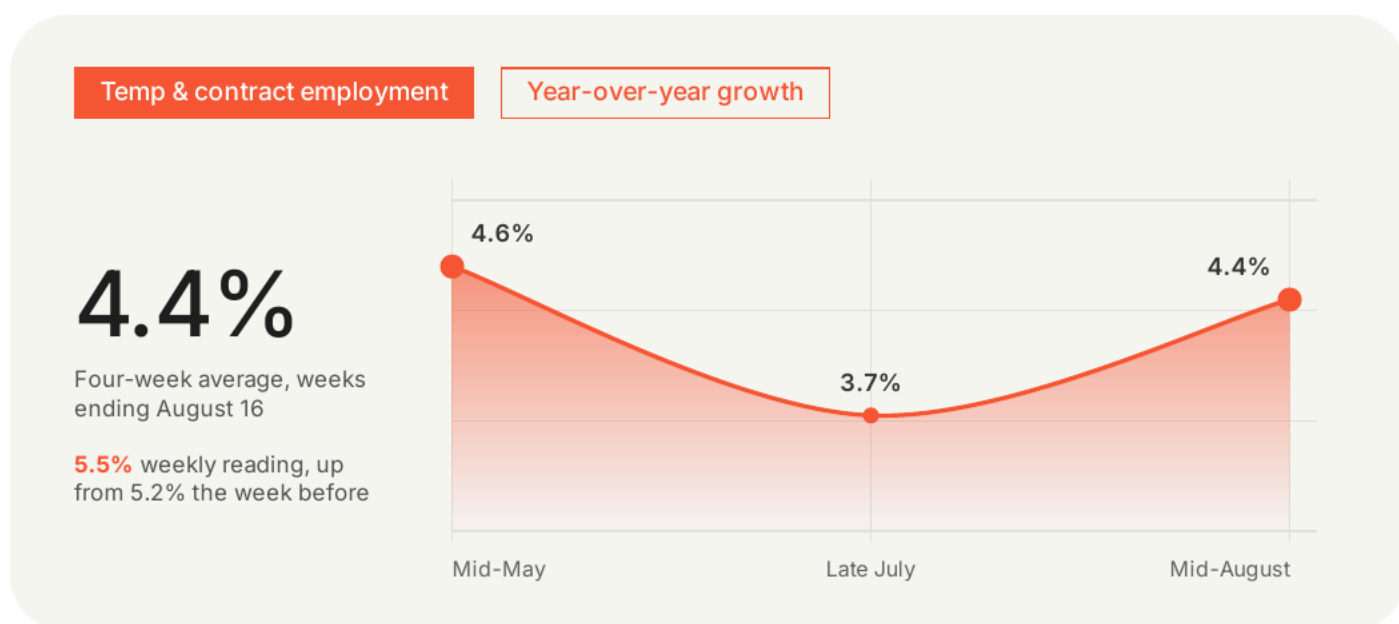
# Contract hiring and workforce flexibility

## 2.1 The rise of contract hiring

Contract staffing showed renewed momentum through mid-2026, then started cooling. Temp. and contract employment was up 4.6% year over year in mid-May.

By late July, the ASA Staffing Index had risen to a rounded value of 90, up 0.6% from June. But the year-over-year growth rate had slipped to 3.7%, down from 4.6% the week before.

ASA's chief economist, Noah Yosif, pointed to rising cost pressures and economic uncertainty, noting that the index's over the year's has eroded for five straight weeks.



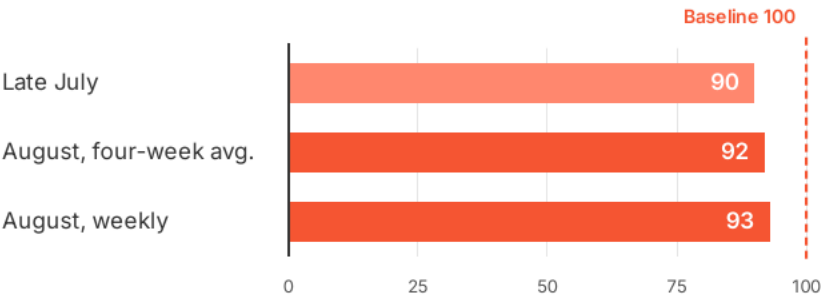
August reversed it. The four-week moving average rose to a rounded 92, with temp and contract employment for the four weeks ending August 16 running 4.4% above the same period in 2025, and up 3.3% from the July report.

The weekly reading held at 93 and was 5.5% higher year over year, up from 5.2% the week before. New starts rose 5.0% week over week, and 49% of staffing firms reported gains in new assignments, against a 2026 average of 41%.

The index remains below its June 2006 baseline of 100, at roughly 8% under. Growth is real. The base is still low.

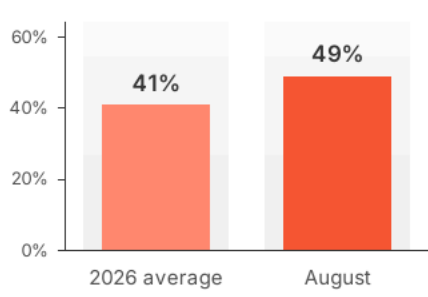
ASA Staffing Index readings

June 2006 = 100

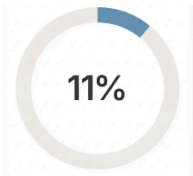


Staffing firms reporting gains

In new assignments



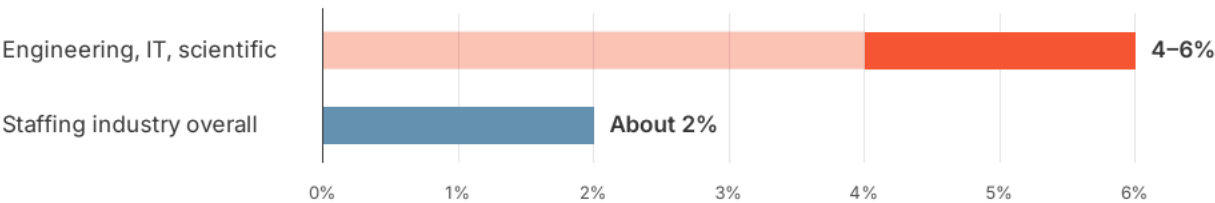
| Metric (Data Source)                                           | Value                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| U.S. staffing industry revenue, 2026 forecast                  | \$183 billion                                                                                     |
| Forecast growth                                                | About 2%                                                                                          |
| ASA Staffing Index, August 2026                                | 92 four-week average, 93 weekly (up 3.3% from the July report; +4.4% YoY four-week, +5.5% weekly) |
| Projected growth, tech, engineering, and professional staffing | 4% to 6%                                                                                          |



Engineering, IT, and scientific staffing is only 11% of staffing employment, but it's projected to grow at 4 to 6%, two to three times the industry's overall pace. Given higher bill rates, it likely represents a disproportionately larger share of industry revenue.

Projected growth

Engineering, IT, and scientific staffing vs. the overall staffing industry



Employers are choosing contractors because AI implementation, cloud migration, and digital transformation usually get delivered as projects, not permanent functions.

Contract hiring is a practical way to access scarce expertise in AI, cloud, cybersecurity, data engineering, and ServiceNow, without the lead time of permanent recruiting.

# Key insights

## 2.1 The rise of contract hiring

01

Contract and temp employment growth slowed through July, from 4.6% year over year in May to 3.7% by late July, then picked back up to 4.4% on the four-week average in August.



The ASA index at roughly 92 is still about 8% below its 2006 baseline.

02

03

Engineering, IT, and scientific staffing is projected to grow 4 to 6%, two to three times the industry rate.

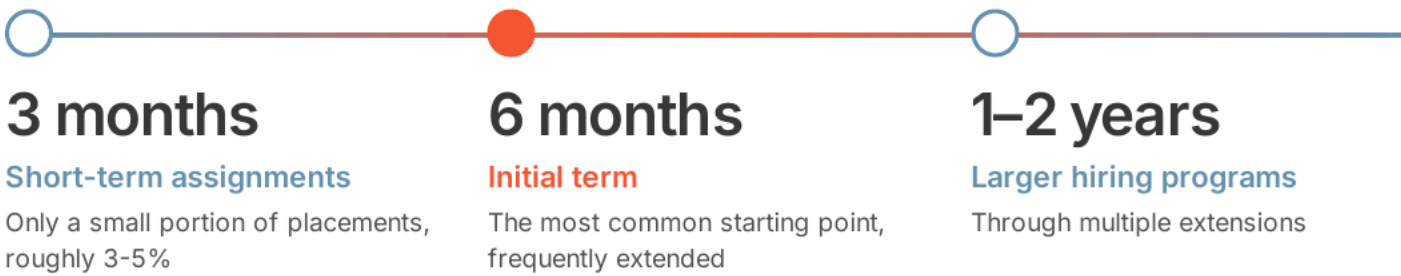


Vendor consolidation and in-house recruiting build-out are compressing margins industry-wide.

04

## 2.3 Contract duration analysis

According to our internal data, most contracts begin with an initial six-month term and are frequently extended based on client demand and consultant performance. Short-term assignments lasting around three months represent only a small portion of placements, estimated at roughly 3-5%.



In larger hiring programs, consultants may remain on projects for one to two years through multiple extensions. At the same time, contracts can end earlier if project priorities change or performance expectations are not met. Overall, six-month contracts continue to be the most common starting point.

Our data suggests that roles requiring specialized cloud, AI, enterprise platform, or DevOps expertise tend to sit inside larger transformation projects and run longer.

Requisitions that demand multiple certifications generally reflect more complex client environments and higher hiring standards.

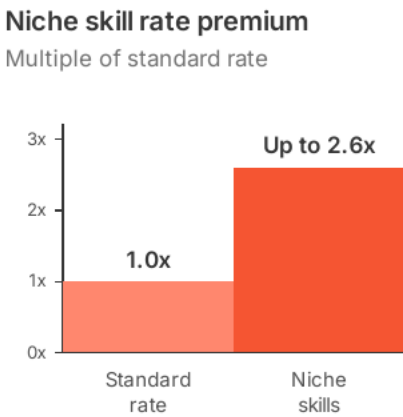
This lines up with the broader industry view is that certified professionals get hired for complex, long duration work, not short term gaps.

## 2.4 Contract market intelligence

Most requested contract roles: Python developers, Java developers, data engineers, full stack developers, business analysts, almost all as skill combinations.

Highest rate skills: AI and ML, cloud architecture, security, Elasticsearch and ELK. Top rates go to architects, lead engineers, AI, security, and cloud specialists.

| Market observation             | External market       | Consultadd data                     |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Contract hiring volume         | Increasing            | Increasing                          |
| AI contract demand             | High and growing      | High value, low volume              |
| Cloud hiring                   | Growing, supply short | Growing, AWS heavy                  |
| Rate premiums for niche skills | Significant           | Confirmed, up to 2.6x standard rate |



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Indeed Hiring report



Business implications for clients: budget the specialist rate, not the average. Use contract structures for AI work specifically. With 42% of leaders reporting low or no AI ROI, project-based engagement is the rational structure until returns are clearer. Plan for extensions too. Building renewal terms into the initial contract is cheaper than negotiating them under pressure.

## Section 2

# Section 2 summary

- 01 Contract and temp employment growth cooled through July, from 4.6% over the year in May to 3.7% by late July, then rebounded in August to 4.4% on the four-week average and 5.5% on the weekly reading. The ASA index at 92 is still about 8% below its 2006 baseline.
- 02 Engineering, IT, and scientific staffing is 11% of employment, growing 4 to 6%, two to three times the industry's roughly 2% overall pace.
- 03 Contract demand is strongest where skills are scarce like AI, cloud, cybersecurity, ServiceNow.
- 04 Fastest growing posting markets are secondary metros, Providence, San Antonio, Baltimore, Indianapolis. Houston and Chicago are also called out as strong.



*What we are seeing is that contract hiring is becoming more focused rather than simply growing across the board. Companies are still willing to invest where the right skills are hard to find, especially in AI and Cloud. For us, this means focusing more on specialized talent and staying close to where the demand is moving.*



**Ankit Pathak**

CEO- Consultadd

## Section 3

# Tech Talent Market Trends & Hotspots

## 3.1 Geographic talent hotspots

### ★ Anchor market

As mentioned in Section 1, New York remains our most significant market, matching its status as the highest volume tech hiring location nationally.

### 📍 Moderate cost metros

Moderate cost metros, Dallas and Plano, Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, show a notable concentration of placements. They offer strong demand at lower cost than New York or San Francisco.

### ↗️ Expansion opportunities

Washington DC and San Francisco are among the largest tech hiring markets nationally, but placement growth has been slower for us there, likely due to premium salaries and market saturation. Both represent expansion opportunities if we pursue them strategically.

### 📈 Fastest-growing markets

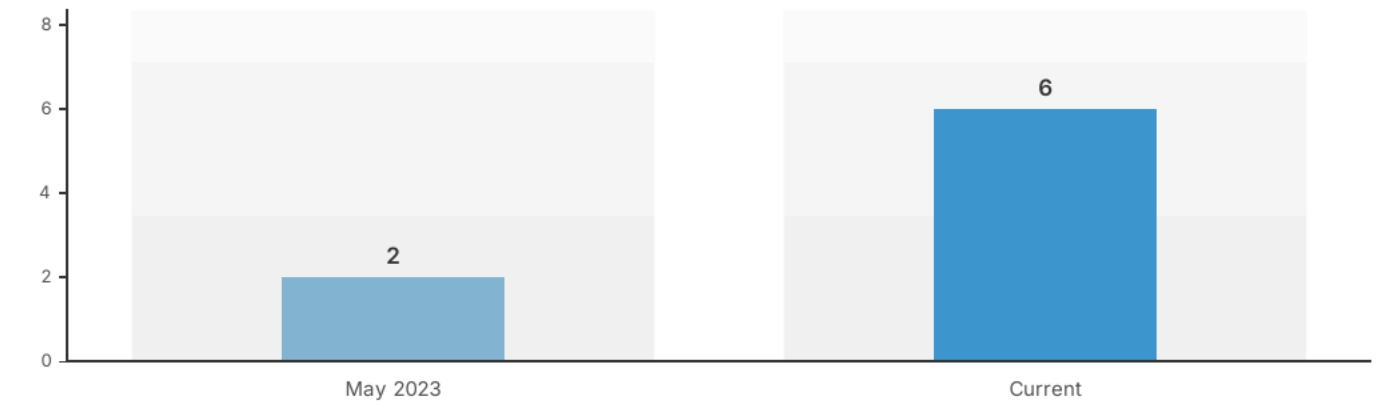
External data flags Providence, San Antonio, and Indianapolis as some of the fastest-growing tech employment markets. Lower labor costs plus growing demand make them attractive targets before competition intensifies. Houston and Chicago also show strong hiring activity per external sources.

### 3.2 Emerging role trends

| Role area                          | Growth signal                                             |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| AI titled roles                    | 37% of the entire software posting increase               |
| AI-skill postings across all roles | Over 320,000 active openings in August, up 4.5% from July |
| Generative AI roles                | Postings up 170% from Jan 2024 to Jan 2025                |
| Data centre roles                  | 2 to 6 per 1,000 U.S. postings in two years               |
| Information security analysts      | 32% projected growth, 2022 to 2032                        |
| Robotics and automation            | 65,000+ open U.S. roles as of May 2026                    |
| Data engineering                   | Named a top hiring manager priority for 2026              |
| MLOps and agentic AI tooling       | Named a genuinely new 2026 skill category                 |
| Senior software engineering        | 71% of the posting increase                               |
| Junior software engineering        | Contracting; layoffs concentrated in entry level          |

Source: Indeed Hiring Lab, CompTIA Tech Jobs Report, 2026 Workforce Planning Guide Addison Group, U.S Bureau of Labor and Statistics

**Data centre roles**  
Per 1,000 U.S. postings, May 2023 vs. now

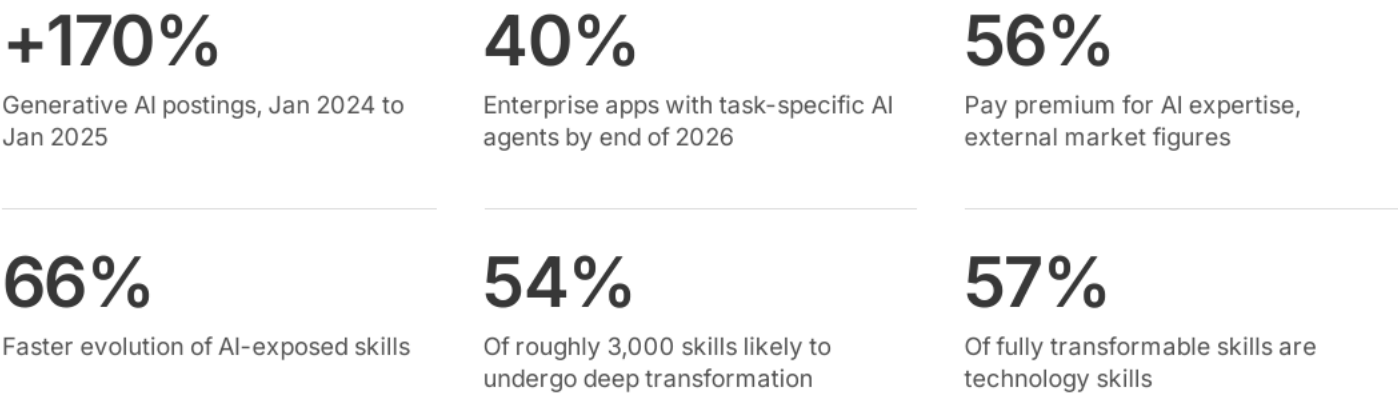


### 3.3 AI's impact on the tech talent market

Generative AI postings rose 170% from January 2024 to January 2025. By the end of 2026, 40% of enterprise applications are projected to include task-specific AI agents, up from under 5% in 2025.

Professionals with AI expertise earn 56% more on average than peers without it, per external market figures (compare our own 28% figure from the executive summary).

AI exposed skills are evolving 66% faster than less exposed skills. As mentioned in Section 1.2, 37% of the increase in software development postings named AI in the title.



Only a small share of tech roles are AI roles. A much larger share are ordinary roles with AI requirements added on. Of roughly 3,000 skills analyzed, 54% are likely to undergo deep transformation from generative AI, and 57% of the fully transformable skills are technology skills specifically.

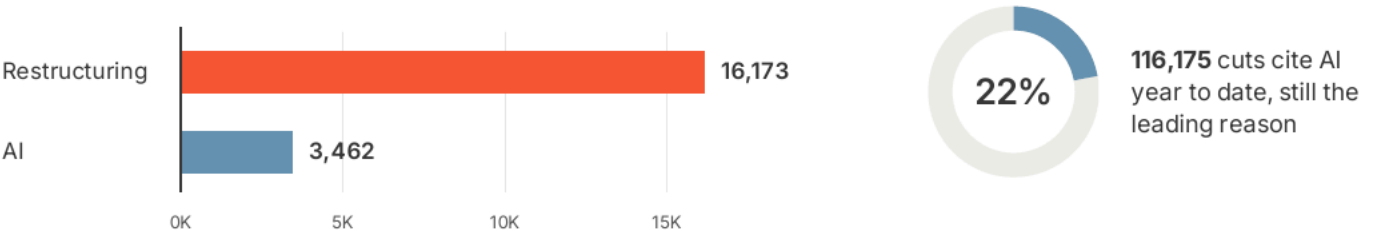
August’s posting data points the same way: over 320,000 active listings asked for AI-related capability, while dedicated AI specialist hiring stayed concentrated in a narrow set of employers.

AI’s role in layoff attribution moved in August. Challenger recorded 3,462 cuts attributed to AI, its lowest monthly total since December 2025, and the end of a five-month run as the leading stated reason.

Restructuring took over at 16,173 for the month. AI still leads for the year, cited in 116,175 announcements, about 22% of all cuts.

Stated reason for cuts, August 2026

Challenger count



| Traditional skill |   | AI era companion                               |
|-------------------|---|------------------------------------------------|
| Python            | → | ML frameworks, AI engineering, LLM tooling     |
| Data engineering  | → | Pipelines feeding model training and retrieval |
| DevOps            | → | Automation and MLOps                           |
| QA                | → | AI assisted test generation                    |
| Full stack        | → | AI features in the application layer           |

### Hiring implications for the next 12 to 24 months

Expect to pay a premium for AI-adjacent capability rather than finding it bundled free into standard rates. Junior pipelines need deliberate investment.

The market isn't producing mid-level engineers if nobody hires juniors. Treat the 42% low ROI figure as a reason to structure AI work as projects rather than permanent teams.

### 3.4 Talent intelligence summary

Our top four role families by volume have all become combination roles.

#### Growing or strong metros

Providence

San Antonio

Indianapolis

Houston

Chicago

Washington DC

Washington DC is also a top three volume market.

#### Talent market matrix

Roles by demand and salary level

##### High demand

##### Low demand

High salary

#### ! Critical shortages

AI/ML engineers

Cloud architects

Security SMEs

Data centre specialists

Senior robotics

#### 📌 Niche specialists

Elasticsearch/ELK

Guidewire

Workday

Lawson

Kronos

Infor

Moderate to low salary

#### 📦 High volume

Data engineers

Full stack

DevOps

Python/Java combos

Business analysts

#### 📉 Mature or declining

Manual QA

Legacy middleware

On-prem admin

Generalist junior development

Source: U.S Bureau of Labor and Statistics

Top left is where clients lose searches if they budget on averages. Top right is where a single departure creates a real problem, since the replacement pool is tiny even though demand looks low. Bottom left is where our volume and margin live. Bottom right is where clients should automate rather than hire.

Section 4

# Skills intelligence and future demand

## 4.1 External skill demand trends

 Rising

| Skill area                        | Evidence                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cloud platforms (AWS, Azure, GCP) | Named foundational and in short supply across every 2026 source reviewed                                                                          |
| AI/ML engineering, MLOps          | GenAI postings up 170%, Jan 2024 to Jan 2025; over 320,000 active AI skill postings in August 2026                                                |
| Agentic AI tooling and MCP        | Genuinely new 2026 category, no dedicated skill tests yet                                                                                         |
| Cybersecurity and Zero Trust      | Ranked #1 skill to learn in 2026; BLS projects 32% growth for information security analysts 2022 to 2032; named an August posting growth category |
| Data engineering                  | Named a top 2026 priority                                                                                                                         |

Source: IABAC - Data Engineer Hiring in 2026, Indeed Hiring Lab - AI at Work: Rise of the GenAI Consultant, BairesDev - Dev Barometer 2025/2026

 Declining

| Skill area                             | Evidence                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Manual testing                         | Heavy exposure to AI test tooling                                            |
| Legacy ETL tooling                     | Displaced by modern cloud data platforms                                     |
| On-premise infrastructure admin        | Displaced by cloud migration                                                 |
| Traditional BI reporting               | Absorbed into data platform and self service tooling                         |
| Generalist single-language development | Addison puts traditional software engineering at only 10% of in demand roles |

Source: Addison Group: 2026 Workforce Planning Guide

Cloud demand persisting into 2026 is worth noticing, because cloud has been "in demand" for a decade already. It hasn't saturated, since the requirement keeps changing shape.

In 2016 it meant migration and for 2026 it means cost optimization, security posture, and infrastructure that can carry AI workloads. Same certifications, different jobs.

The decline list shares a common thread. Every item is either well-specified enough for tooling to absorb, or attached to shrinking infrastructure.

Nothing on the list is declining because the underlying business need disappeared.

## 4.2 Consultadd skill demand analysis

Most requested skills, ranked

|                           |                           |                          |                      |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 01 Python                 | 02 Java                   | 03 AWS                   | 04 Data engineering  |
| 05 Full stack development | 06 APIs                   | 07 Cloud engineering     | 08 DevOps            |
| 09 AI and ML              | 10 SQL and data platforms | 11 Elasticsearch and ELK | 12 Business analysis |

Three places our data disagrees with the public picture:



**AWS dominance is far steeper in our book than in any external source.** Public reports treat AWS, Azure, and GCP as a set. Our clients don't. Sizing a GCP pipeline off vendor-neutral advice would be a mistake.



**Elasticsearch and ELK barely register in external 2026 skills reporting,** yet carry premium rates in our book alongside AI and cloud architecture. It's a small, defensible niche.



**Cybersecurity is a top-five external demand category and isn't a leading one for us.** This is the clearest gap between what the market wants and what we're actually asked to fill.

## 4.3 Emerging skill clusters

| Cluster                  | Skills                                                                     | Our position                |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| AI engineering           | Python, ML frameworks, LLM tooling, vector databases, agentic tooling, MCP | ● Low volume, highest rates |
| Cloud engineering        | AWS, Azure, Terraform, Kubernetes, Docker                                  | ● Strong, AWS-weighted      |
| Data engineering         | SQL, warehousing, big data, pipelines, modelling                           | ● Our deepest cluster       |
| DevOps and platform      | CI/CD, automation, cloud operations                                        | ● Strong, high rates        |
| Cybersecurity            | IAM, Zero Trust, cloud/application security                                | ● Present, under-weighted   |
| Modern full stack        | React, Angular, Node, plus backend, plus cloud                             | ● High volume               |
| Search and observability | Elasticsearch, ELK                                                         | ● Small, premium-priced     |
| Enterprise platforms     | Oracle, Workday, Salesforce, Guidewire, Dynamics, Infor, Lawson, Kronos    | ● Distinctive to us         |

Source: Consultadd's internal data

Enterprise platforms are our most commercially interesting cluster. Almost no 2026 skills report mentions them, yet they imply real client depth.

### What the platforms point to

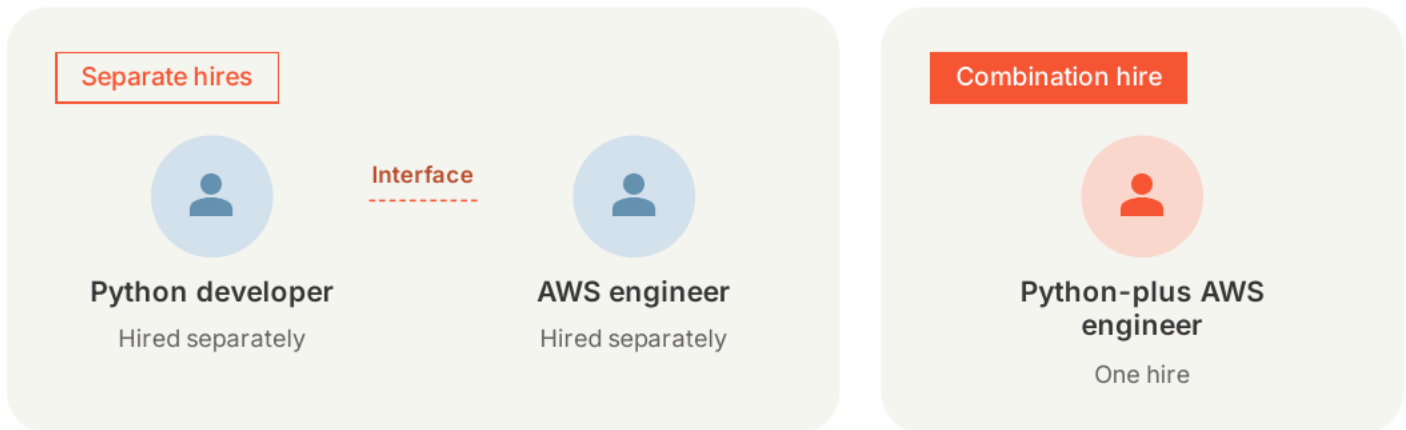
|                       |                                            |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Guidewire             | → Property and casualty insurance          |
| Workday Kronos Lawson | → HR and workforce management              |
| Oracle Infor          | → ERP-heavy manufacturing and distribution |

This is a moat, and also a concentration risk, since these platforms sit in the legacy-adjacent estate that tends to get consolidated.

Clients hire clusters rather than skills because integration is where projects fail. A Python developer and a separately hired AWS engineer have to negotiate an interface.

#### Why clients hire clusters

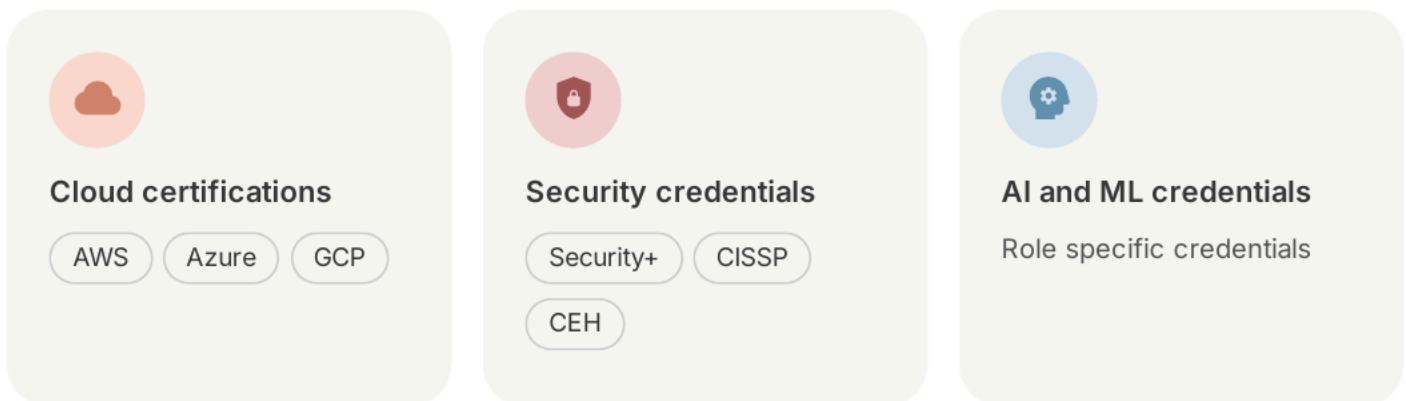
Coordination sits between two hires, or inside one



A Python-plus AWS engineer handles it inside one person's head. The combination premium is smaller than the coordination cost it avoids, which is why combination roles keep spreading even in a cost-conscious market.

## 4.4 Certification and placement outcomes

Named as having the clearest hiring ROI in 2026



Also appear on in-demand lists

Databricks

SnowPro

Kubernetes CKA

Employers increasingly treat certifications as supporting evidence rather than proof of competence. Practical experience and project work remain the primary hiring factors.

**Certifications work more as a differentiator than a guarantee.**

## 4.5 Skill combination analysis

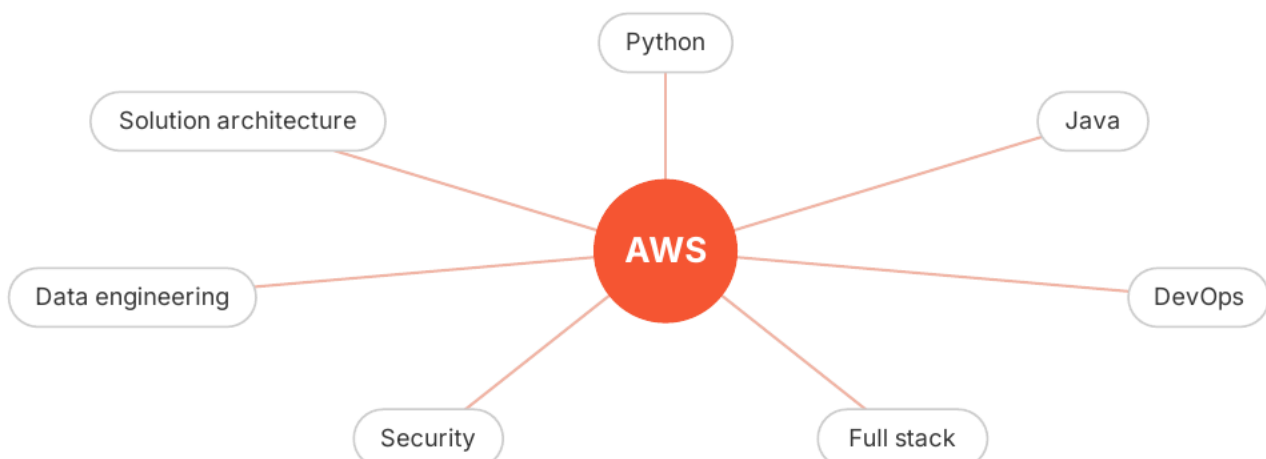
| Primary skill     | Companion skills seen in our requisitions                             |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Python            | AWS APIs AI ML Data engineering Full stack                            |
| Java              | Spring Microservices AWS Angular Kafka Scala Full stack               |
| AWS               | Python Java DevOps Security Solution architecture<br>Data engineering |
| Data engineering  | Python Cloud Big data Warehousing Modelling                           |
| DevOps            | AWS Cloud Batch operations                                            |
| Full stack        | React Angular Node Python Java AWS                                    |
| Security          | AWS Application layer                                                 |
| Business analysis | Oracle Guidewire Salesforce Reporting Business systems                |

Source: Consultadd's internal data

Python is now viewed as a versatile cross-platform language rather than a standalone skill. Java stays tied to enterprise application development. AWS functions as a cross-functional platform skill that touches nearly every other cluster.

### AWS as the connecting skill

Skills paired with AWS in either direction, from the table above



## 4.6 Skills outlook

Gaining momentum

- AI engineering and MLOps, including agentic tooling.
- Cloud security specifically, as distinct from cloud engineering generally.
- Data platform engineering.
- Platform engineering as its own discipline, separate from DevOps.

Mature and durable

- Python
- Java
- SQL
- Linux
- AWS fundamentals

These aren't growth stories. They're the floor. Their persistence in our rankings, always paired with something newer, shows the market is layering skills, not replacing them.

Declining

- Manual testing
- Legacy middleware
- On-premise administration
- Traditional standalone BI reporting
- Generalist single-language development

## Business implications

- 01 Prefer multi-skilled candidates over deep single-technology specialists, except in genuinely rare niches like Elasticsearch and Guidewire.
- 02 Upskill your existing bench into AI-adjacent tooling rather than hiring separate AI specialists.
- 03 Invest in cloud and security certifications, the two areas with the clearest reported hiring ROI in 2026.
- 04 Build pipelines around clusters, not individual technologies.
- 05 Watch the agentic AI and MCP category closely.

“ One thing we are seeing clearly is that having one technical skill is no longer enough. Companies are looking for people who can combine their core expertise with AI, cloud and automation, and we need to continuously help our talent evolve with that demand. ”

**Ankit Pathak**

CEO- Consultadd

Section 5

# Growth pockets

## 5.1 The data centre build out

| Metric                                      | Figure                                               |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Data centre postings, May 2023              | 2 per 1,000 U.S. postings                            |
| Data centre postings, mid 2026              | 6 per 1,000 U.S. postings                            |
| Change                                      | Tripled as a share of all U.S. postings in two years |
| Share held by the 10 largest tech employers | 71%                                                  |

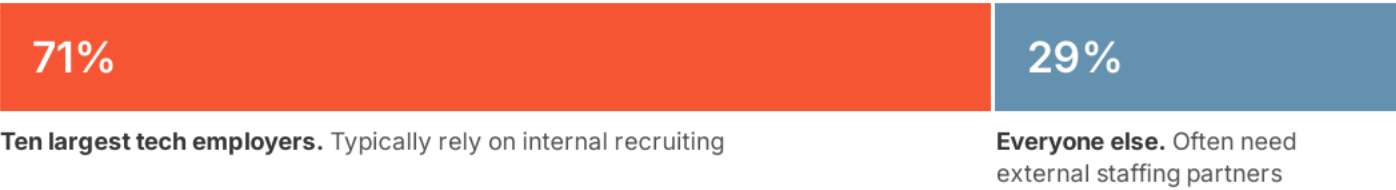
Source: Indeed Hiring Lab report, U.S Bureau of Labor and statistic

This growth reflects accelerating cloud adoption, AI workloads, and the estimated \$500 billion increase in global IT spending.

The market is highly concentrated. The ten largest tech employers hold 71% of postings and typically rely on internal recruiting, which makes them hard for staffing firms to penetrate.

Who holds data centre postings

Share of data-center-related postings



The remaining 29% is a real opportunity:

- Colocation providers
- Regional data center operators
- Engineering and construction firms
- Network infrastructure contractors
- Enterprises building private AI infrastructure

These groups often need external staffing partners.

The workforce needs to span well beyond software.



**Electrical engineers**  
Power distribution



**Mechanical and cooling engineers**  
Thermal management



**Network engineers**  
Connectivity



**Physical security**



**Site operations and maintenance**



**One caution from the August data.** BLS recorded job losses in computing infrastructure providers, data processing, and web hosting of about 8,000 for the month. The build-out is capital spending first, and the operator payrolls attached to it are not growing in a straight line.

5.2 Robotics and automation

| Metric                                   | Figure                   |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Global robotics market, 2026 expectation | \$88.3 billion           |
| Industrial robot installations           | Above 540,000 units      |
| Global robotics workforce                | About 9.3 million people |
| New jobs added in the last year          | About 2,800              |
| Open U.S. robotics jobs, May 2026        | Over 65,000              |

Source: Statistics MRC - Robotics Market, StartUs Insights - Global Robotics Report 2026

Growth is driven by AI, industrial automation, advanced manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, and autonomous systems.



Despite strong demand, over 65,000 open U.S. positions, specialized robotics roles take an average of 114 days to fill. That reflects a limited supply of talent in:

Robotics software

Embedded systems

Automation controls

Machine vision

AI integration

Robotics reproduces the pattern seen across this report: strong demand at the specialist end, flat order volumes overall, and investment concentrated in the most speculative segment.

## Section 6

# Candidate and vendor playbooks

## 6.1 Candidate playbook

 What to build, in priority order:

- 1 A cloud platform certification, AWS first**  
Since cloud credentials have the clearest hiring ROI in 2026 and AWS dominates our own book.
- 2 One AI capability attached to your existing skill, not a career change**  
Since professionals with AI expertise earn a meaningful premium and 37% of the increase in software postings named AI in the title. Over 320,000 active postings asked for AI capability in August, and most of them were not AI specialist roles.
- 3 A security credential if it's within reach: Security+, CISSP, or CEH.**  
Cybersecurity is a top-five demand category with 32% projected growth through 2032, and was ranked the #1 skill to learn in 2026 by Pluralsight practitioners.
- 4 A data platform skill**  
Since data engineering is a top hiring-manager priority for 2026.

 What to stop leaning on:

### Single-skill positioning

Since plain Python or plain Java requests have effectively disappeared.

### Junior generalist positioning

Since 71% of the posting increase went to senior roles.

Job searches are taking longer across the board as hiring cycles lengthen and employers get more selective. Senior and specialized professionals move fastest. Entry-level candidates face the longest timelines, as employers keep prioritizing experienced hires after recent layoffs.

Most laid-off tech professionals are being reabsorbed relatively quickly, especially those with in-demand skills.

July's dip in tech employment looked like an early signal that even senior re-absorption was slowing. August's 86,000 gain argues against that reading, though the rate drifting up to about 3% in the same month suggests more people are now looking, not that fewer are finding work

## 6.2 Vendor and client playbook

### 📍 Where to source:

Follow growth, not volume.

#### Still lead on posting volume

New York

Washington DC

San Francisco

Both coasts have softened.

#### Growing fastest

Providence

San Antonio

Baltimore

Indianapolis

#### Strong 2026 activity

Houston

Chicago

Ample open roles.

Remote sourcing remains the default for technical contract roles. The practical constraint is skill availability, not geography.

**Widen the client list beyond tech companies.**

August is the cleanest evidence yet: the sector cut about 14,700 while tech occupations across all industries added 86,000.

Professional and technical services, manufacturing, and administrative support led new tech postings, with gains also in retail, wholesale trade, and educational services.

 **What rates are defensible:****Senior DevOps**

Senior DevOps professionals command premium compensation amid a continued shortage of engineers who can manage cloud infrastructure and production operations.

**Cloud and security**

Highly specialized cloud and security expertise commands the highest contract rates.

**AI and ML**

AI and ML specialists continue to command strong compensation, particularly with production-level GenAI or ML experience.

**Niche expertise**

Exceptional niche expertise commands significant premiums.

 **Which sectors are growing:****Financial services**

Tech budgets projected at \$495 billion in 2026, up 10.3%, concentrated in cloud migration, cybersecurity, AI adoption, digital banking, and regtech.

**Data centres and AI infrastructure**

Postings tripled as a share of the market in two years, driving demand for infrastructure engineers, network specialists, and electrical and facilities professionals.

**Healthcare, SaaS, manufacturing, supply chain, and energy**

Consistently identified as leading 2026 tech employers, driven by digital transformation and automation.

**Cybersecurity**

A universal hiring priority across every industry, with 32% projected employment growth over the decade.

**Robotics and automation**

High-growth, specialist-constrained, strongest in manufacturing, logistics, warehousing, automotive, and industrial automation.

**Enterprise platforms**

An established strength in our own portfolio, with consistent Guidewire, Oracle, and Infor demand pointing to strong activity in insurance, ERP, and manufacturing.

# Overall takeaways

## 6.3 · Section 6: Candidate and vendor playbooks

01

There are two tech markets in 2026. Senior and specialized is hot. Junior and generalist is not.



The second split is sector against occupation. Tech companies cut about 14,700 jobs in August while tech occupation employment across the economy grew 86,000.

02

03

Tech unemployment fell to 2.8% in July and drifted back to roughly 3% in August. Re-absorption, not underlying strength, explains the coexistence of low unemployment and continued layoffs.



IT spending is up about 10%, to over \$6 trillion. Staffing revenue is up about 2%. The money went into data centers, not payroll.

04

05

42% of technology leaders report low or no AI ROI, which is why hiring stays cautious and contract-shaped rather than absent.





Contract staffing growth slowed from 4.6% year over year in May to 3.7% by late July, then rebounded to 4.4% in August, from a base still well below its 2006 level.

06

07

AI-skill demand keeps rising even as AI slipped from first to fourth among stated reasons for August layoffs. Over 320,000 active postings asked for it.



Every high-volume role in our book has become a combination role. Clients hire clusters.

08

“

*"The biggest takeaway for me is that both talent and companies need to keep adapting. The market will continue to change, but there will always be opportunities for people who keep learning and businesses that stay close to where the demand is moving."*

”

**Ankit Pathak**

CEO- Consultadd

Section 7

# Methodology

## External sources

### Government and official statistics

|                                                      |                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BLS Employment Situation, June, July and August 2026 | National unemployment, average hourly earnings, payroll change and revisions, labor force participation |
| BLS JOLTS, July 2026                                 | Openings, hires, separations                                                                            |
| BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook                    | IT wage benchmarks, information security analyst growth projection                                      |
| NSF NCSES, Science and Engineering Indicators 2026   | Foreign born STEM workforce shares                                                                      |
| USCIS and American Immigration Council               | FY2026 H-1B registration and selection figures                                                          |
| DHS                                                  | February 2026 rule on FY2027 H-1B selection weighting                                                   |
| U.S Bureau of Labor and Statistics                   | Publications, press releases                                                                            |

### Industry and private research

|                                                             |                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CompTIA Tech Jobs Report (monthly, via BLS and Lightcast)   | Tech unemployment, jobs added, postings, April to August 2026                                              |
| CompTIA State of the Tech Workforce 2026                    |                                                                                                            |
| CompTIA Corporate AI Adoption, August 2026                  | AI skill demand context                                                                                    |
| Indeed Hiring Lab                                           | Posting composition, data centre share, generative AI posting growth, US Labor Market Snapshot August 2026 |
| Indeed 2026 US Jobs and Hiring Trends and AI at Work Report | Skill transformation exposure                                                                              |
| Deloitte 2026 Hardware and Consumer Tech Outlook            | Worldwide IT spending                                                                                      |
| Deloitte 2026 Global Technology Leadership Study            | AI ROI figure                                                                                              |
| Deloitte 2026 Software Industry Outlook                     | Application software market size, AI agent adoption                                                        |

|                                                                  |                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Forrester US Tech Forecast 2026                                  | Financial services tech budgets                                            |
| American Staffing Association                                    | Staffing Index, occupational mix, revenue forecast, August 2026 commentary |
| Challenger, Gray & Christmas Job Cuts Report, August 2026        | Announced cuts by sector and stated reason                                 |
| Robert Half 2026 Salary Guide                                    | Salary projection                                                          |
| Addison Group 2026 Workforce Planning Guide                      |                                                                            |
| Pluralsight Tech Skills Report 2026                              | Cybersecurity ranking, MCP and agentic AI category                         |
| Layoffs.fyi, TrueUp, SkillSyncer                                 | 2026 layoff counts and AI attribution                                      |
| A3, Association for Advancing Automation                         | Robot order data                                                           |
| StartUs Insights, Elevation Proving Grounds, Careers in Robotics | Robotics market size, fill times                                           |

## Consultadd data

The primary internal source is requisition level hiring demand data from Consultadd’s clients:

- Job title and category
- Required skills and stack
- Location and work arrangement
- Compensation (hourly and salary)
- Employment type
- Requisition frequency across technologies and geographies



Since it comes directly from active client requisitions, it offers a real-time view of employer priorities that can surface trends ahead of public labor statistics.

Throughout this report, internal data is read alongside other external research to validate market trends against actual hiring activity.