

# Closing The Talent Gap: On-Demand Talent Acquisition 101



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# Tight Labor Market Drives Demand for Independent Talent

Finding qualified candidates is more challenging than ever before.

A recent study from [OpenView Venture Partners](#) has found that companies are seeing a 2x increase in the time it takes to hire new employees. Not to mention that job openings have been [staying put at 60%](#), causing massive issues with talent acquisition costs.

So, what's behind these hiring hurdles? First, the [labor market is tightening](#) at historic levels. There were 11.5 million job openings in the US in February 2022, compared to 7.6 million in February 2021, with [44% of all workers](#) currently looking for a new job.

But that's not all.

Outdated and rigid legacy talent acquisition models also keep companies from finding the talent they need in today's employee-centric market. Tried and true methods like leaning on a staffing agency or recruiting firm simply don't cut it anymore.





Not only do they lock you in with an expensive contract that can add even more cost pressures should you break it, but they're also inflexible. More importantly, they don't guarantee results. That's because traditional approaches like hiring a staffing agency or recruiting firm typically rely on filling positions, not business outcomes. And that's not all.

The economic environment is evolving so rapidly that you might find yourself reprioritizing your company's needs at a moment's notice. This is where talent acquisition strategies fall short. They're unable to keep up with shifting business and client needs, making it hard for organization to capture future value or to fully take advantage of an emerging opportunity.

So what are savvy business leaders doing instead? They're increasingly turning to the on-demand talent acquisition model to address capacity and capability gaps on their teams. On Graphite, we saw this shift with an increase in spend on independent talent by 90% YoY in Q1 2022.

But where do you start finding talent? And what can you do throughout the talent lifecycle to ensure you've identified the right expert for your team and that you can retain them long after the project is completed? Walk away today knowing what to do with this guide.

## 6 Creative Ways to Find Top-Tier Talent

We are living in a new talent acquisition landscape. And finding top-tier independent talent means you must rethink your process and use creative talent sourcing strategies to fill your job openings strategically. Here are six creative ways to get you started.



### Look into Online Communities and Social Networks

Online networks are popular hangouts; job seekers use these areas to find work. Your organization can connect with passionate and qualified professionals on LinkedIn, Facebook, Slack groups, and Twitter threads.

For example, [Fishbowl](#) is an app dedicated to specific communities. There's one community in Fishbowl called [All Things MBB](#). Current and ex-MBB professionals join this community to connect and share industry news and best practices while also discussing new job opportunities and salaries.

Communities also form around specific locations. If you have a job opening in a big city or state, you can likely find a Facebook group by searching for that location with the keywords jobs or help wanted. Groups like [San Francisco Jobs](#) are all over Facebook to help people find work in their area.

Lastly, you might look at special interest groups — particularly if you're working on attracting more diverse candidates to your company. Facebook groups like [Women In Marketing](#) support women, but they can also be a great place to look for emerging talent.



### Focus on Niche Job Boards

Many companies are experimenting with [niche job boards](#) to combat issues with large job boards. Niche job boards revolve around a specific topic or job type. For example, you might want to work with a company like [efinancialcareers](#) for due diligence and financial reporting roles or [Energy Jobline](#) to list energy-sector-specific opportunities.

These sites have spent years cultivating an audience of visitors who identify with their site's mission and the types of jobs they post. Getting your new opening listed on a niche job site will narrow down your search by getting in front of talented people in a specific area.



### Explore Rapidly Growing Remote Workforce Platforms

Employees want to work remotely, so they're turning to new sites to make that happen. Graphite is a platform that matches organizations to vetted independent experts. We can help you find subject matter experts who have done the work in roles like corporate strategy, market research, finance, technology, and more.

Many organizations are turning to on-demand talent platforms like [Graphite](#) to quickly address immediate needs, address skills gaps, gain greater access to top-tier talent, and accelerate speed to market. The best part? Our matching process speeds up time-to-hire — enabling you to start working with a vetted expert within 13.5 days.



### Rework Roles for the Project-Based Economy

Companies often need employees or contractors who can boost company profits, create a product, or move the company along quickly. The point? Your next role might be a project-based one.

The project economy has become a large part of the business world, and the value of projects will grow from \$12 trillion in 2017 to **\$20 trillion in 2027**. As a result, projects will have a place in business success, and companies need to adopt them early.

You can hire an independent expert or an employee to handle a specific project, like launching a new product, facilitating a digital transformation initiative, or developing your go-to-market strategy.



### Consider Candidates You Might Have Overlooked

Remember that candidate you may have looked over in the past? That person can be the one you need now. Companies often look for employees with specific domain expertise, but that's not always possible in today's tight labor market. Sometimes you need to focus on candidates who are a great culture fit and then focus on training to create a skill fit.

One of the most obvious ways to utilize this strategy is by recruiting an impacted group of people, like teachers. Teachers have been at the forefront of the Great Reshuffle because the pandemic **has burnt teachers out**, and lack of pay/upward mobility has made the idea of leaving easier for teachers.

The moral of the story is this: Your organization can easily teach the specific skills that are unique to your industry, like the specific software you utilize. Most employees will have to learn those skills, even if they've worked for a competitor.



## Host Your Own Talent Search Event

One of the best ways to find talent and get involved in the community is to hold an event. Events allow you to meet potential talent and put a face to some of the resumes you've been looking at.

With the internet, it's easier than ever to hold an event on Zoom. You can add breakout rooms with various professionals in your company's HR department or a team that needs more employees. While Zoom isn't always ideal for getting to know employees, virtual events are a must if you are hiring for remote roles.

You can try holding an event at your office if you plan to onboard for hybrid or in-person roles. For example, in 2020, [Honeywell](#) needed to add more sales professionals to their pipeline, so they hosted a happy hour at their headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia.





## 5 Tips for Selecting the Best Talent for the Role

Organizations that onboard the wrong fit will fail to derive maximum return on investment (ROI). The candidate might be so unsuitable for the role that the company needs to restart the hiring process again. This is a time-consuming, expensive distraction that organizations should avoid. Here's how you can ensure you're selecting the right person for the role.

### Ask the Right Questions

This might seem like a no-brainer, but it's crucial in helping narrow down the list of candidates you might be considering. Start by asking 2-4 general questions based on the scope of work for the project, then dig a little deeper.

For example, if you're looking to onboard a business strategy consultant, you may want to ask them if they specialize in a particular area of business strategy, how well they know your industry and market, what relevant experience they bring, and if they know about your company or competitors.

Likewise, if you are onboarding for a finance role, you might want to ask the talent what they can bring to the role that no other applicant could provide or to pitch your company as if you were in a sales meeting.

#### PRO TIP

It's unreasonable to ask for detailed or highly specific answers to the questions you're seeking help with. Top talent will see through this tactic and segue back to asking about your readiness to engage, wondering whether you're shopping this work looking for free advice.



### Request Work Examples

Ask candidates to review their portfolio or links showing their past work. If you're not using a crowdsourced review platform, ask for references. Once you've established their credentials and experience and found a few candidates who seem qualified, you can then move to the next step of the onboarding process.

### Consider an Assignment

Sometimes the work samples are not enough, or you might be interested in two candidates that would be an excellent fit for the project. One way to navigate this is by providing an assignment or assessment for the independent professional to complete.

The key here is to have the candidate work on something similar to what you're looking for that will provide you insights into how they think, work, and process information. Just make sure that you don't make the candidate feel like they're doing free work. One way to work around this is to pay for the work done.

### Look for Self-Starters

If you decide to move forward with an assignment, keep an eye out for self-starters. Too much hand-holding, and the value of your independent talent goes way down. A good indicator of a self-starter is someone who can accomplish the assignment with minimal support and teaching.

### Identify Team Fit

Understand how your company's culture and goals may impact the working relationship with anyone you onboard. Try to find a compatible fit who can easily communicate and collaborate with other team members. This can be done by asking the right questions and having additional team members interview the independent expert.



# How to Onboard Your Independent Talent

There's a strong business case for having a well-thought-out onboarding process in place. According to [Glassdoor](#), "Organizations with a strong onboarding process improve new hire retention by 82% and productivity by over 70%." What's more, employees who deem their onboarding processes to be highly effective are **18x** more committed to the organization.

While these benefits usually relate to full-time hires, they also extend to the independent workforce as well. Effective onboarding processes ensure independent experts can reach peak productivity as soon as possible, that they don't encounter any stumbling blocks, and that they can be of maximum value. In turn, this increases project satisfaction and retention.

The following checklist explains how organizations can successfully onboard independent talent with minimal hassle.





### Protect Yourself With a Solid Contract

Some independent experts use their own contract forms, but most often, the employer provides the contract. Be sure to review your employment agreements, adding or customizing sections as needed, and include a detailed scoping section outlining the work and deliverables. Whenever you communicate something important pertaining to a project deliverable, either do it in writing or confirm later with an email or preservable chat message.



### Don't Forget the Nondisclosure Agreement (NDA)

Ask your independent expert to sign an NDA before revealing too much about your business plan, initial market research, or other sensitive information. NDAs ensure they'll keep anything you tell them confidential and out of potential competitors' hands. Some employers hand out NDAs to all candidates before they've even made a selection.



### Sort Out Any Tax Requirements

Ensure you've completed all relevant tax paperwork and accounting administration before the independent expert begins working for your organization. For example, make sure they've submitted a correct 1099 or W8-BEN before passing it over to your accounting department.



### Set Up Milestones for Payment

Even if it is an hourly contract, you should still set reasonable deadlines for project deliverables. Have a contingency plan in case the independent expert doesn't deliver on time or within the promised scope of work.



### Get Yourselves in Sync

Ask about the systems the candidate uses to stay organized and run them through your own systems to ensure they're familiar with any platforms they'll be required to use while working for you.



### Set Expectations Before You Start

Whether this is a project-based role or just a set number of hours, make sure you agree on specific deliverables, deadlines, and timelines from the beginning. Review work products regularly, and schedule regular check-ins to discuss progress.



## Develop an Onboarding Guide

After communicating all of the above to your on-demand talent, go a step further by documenting it in an onboarding guide. At Graphite, we've created an onboarding guide to help facilitate the process, which you can get [here](#).

Collecting all of this information in one easy-to-find place makes it easy for your on-demand talent to get access to key resources that will enable them to hit the ground running on day one. This guide can include the following resources depending on the role:

- Website
- Style Guide
- Buyer persona(s) and business pains
- Help documentation
- Internal and external subject matter experts (SMEs)
- Demo/Relevant training materials
- Cybersecurity training
- DE&I policies and training
- Subconscious bias training
- List of competitors
- Industry information



# How to Manage Your On-Demand Talent

Once you've onboarded your independent talent, it's time to focus on building a relationship with them. Not only does this increase the likelihood of the project succeeding, but it also boosts retention rates. This will make it easier to work with the same expert again on future initiatives. Here's how.



## Set Clear Goals and Expectations

Create a positive and effective experience that helps you get the right results from your agile talent. Set clear goals, expectations, and milestones, define an overall schedule and structure for your project or ongoing engagement, and integrate them with the rest of your organization.

An independent professional may become a key team member, lead an important business initiative, or provide high-level strategic advice or insights for your top executives. Accordingly, you need to clarify they clearly understand the work involved, what's expected, and make sure your hire has the relationships, access, and support to ensure success.



## Think of Your Independent Talent as Partners

Many top independent subject matter experts have their choice of opportunities. They've built up a track record of success, insights, and experiences. More importantly, they know their value.

On-demand experts are also frequently called upon to provide strategic guidance and subject matter expertise to drive, manage, and execute high-value and mission-critical business projects. Thus, it's best to view them as business partners rather than a contract worker or outside resource.



Establish relationships where your on-demand talent can share in the stakes and success of your business and know that their expertise and contributions are trusted. Treat your engagements like a win-win partnership where both sides should benefit, and you'll get the most out of your agile talent.



### **Address and Minimize Employee Concerns**

In established organizations with traditional structures and direct employees, bringing in an on-demand resource can cause some employees to worry. This is why it's important to be open and transparent, communicate with your team, and clarify why you're hiring an outside expert and how it's intended to supplement or augment your team. A failure to do this means you may risk alienating your team.

Instead, introduce your agile talent to your employees, let everyone get to know each other, and reinforce the value and expertise you see in your existing team. Let your employees know why you're bringing in an additional resource, and emphasize the potential of agile talent to be part of your team and help everyone succeed in their roles and efforts.

Your employees may welcome additional help or an opportunity to leverage an outside expert's expertise, as long as they know it's designed to help them tackle specific challenges or grow as professionals.



### ↑ Develop the Talent You Onboard

Just like managing direct employees, executives and managers should coach and invest in developing their external experts. While many independent experts and consultants are self-starters who are used to taking the initiative and working independently, leveraging them as long-term assets on your team requires good management.

For example, many of our Graphite clients have hired independent consultants to help them create more efficient business processes, put proper financial management and reporting systems in place, implement better cost reduction strategies, and develop better sales and marketing plans.

All of these efforts involve knowledge and processes that can be shared with your employees. You can do this by having your internal team work together with your agile talent and learn from formal or informal training that your outside expert provides.

The end result is a win for everyone, with your expert able to provide lasting value from the engagement and your employees and organization able to get long-term benefits from what may be short-term projects.



The right talent, in the right place, at the right time, is the equation for success in today's world,"

————— HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

## Move Forward With Confidence

As business leaders rethink how to get their hands on highly skilled professionals in light of the pandemic and the [Great Resignation](#), many are turning to the on-demand talent model to address capability and capacity gaps on their teams.

This approach enables companies to create a flexible workforce, where businesses readily tap into external expertise to overcome internal talent shortages, scaling resources when necessary.

Organizations usually turn to dedicated platforms, such as Graphite, for their on-demand needs. These platforms provide companies with access to a large range of top-tier talent.

The talent in these networks tend to be highly specialized, with expertise in highly sought-after industries and functional skills, as well as experience working with Big four accounting and MBB firms. Organizations can filter by independent experts' specialties, experience, preferred sectors, and more.

In other words, they can find exactly who they need for any particular job.

If your company needs to get a project over the line but lacks the capabilities to do so, it's time you considered the on-demand talent model. Get in touch today to learn more about Graphite's on-demand talent platform.

[GET IN TOUCH](#)

**About Graphite.** Graphite is shaping the future of work by enabling seamless access to the world's best independent talent. It's home to 8,300+ leading independent experts that can enhance various areas of your organization. They're masters in their field, possessing deep functional and/or domain experience. Interested in learning how you can build a pool of high-caliber independent professionals that can help you execute and win more projects? [Learn more at www.graphite.com](http://www.graphite.com).