

Search Firms

Working with Third-Party Recruiters

Employers engage external recruiting firms at times to assist them in identifying and hiring candidates. One of the most challenging questions for new or younger entrants to the workplace is how to get noticed by the recruiters working with employers in industries of interest. This Career Development Guide outlines some basic facts about the recruiting industry and offers suggestions for maximizing your chances of working successfully with recruiters.

Basic Facts

Recruiters are usually engaged only for positions requiring highly experienced professionals in specialized fields. Because most recruiters depend on fees paid by employers, only higher-level positions typically command the salaries that justify using recruiters. External recruiting firms usually target “passive” candidates who are currently working, successful in their professional roles, and not actively seeking new employment opportunities. Recruiters who ask for payments from candidates (as opposed to employers) are a subset of the search industry—generally called “resume referral firms” (see below)—and we strongly advise against paying fees to such firms.

Recruiters

- **Contingent or Professional Placement Recruiters/Headhunters/Search Consultants** are independent consultants engaged by client companies to locate qualified candidates for positions. No fee is charged to jobseekers—the client company is responsible for the search fee. These consultants may also be called “third-party recruiters” if they work as part of an agency or organization that recruits candidates for temporary, part-time, or full-time employment opportunities for other employers. These agencies earn a fee only if the hired candidate is one they identified for the employer.
- **Retained Recruiters** may have an exclusive contract with an employer for senior-level positions. These recruiters receive fees from the employer from the start of the search and continue to search until the employer fills the position.
- **Corporate Recruiters** are employees of the organization that is hiring and usually work under the Human Resources department. They sometimes work with third-party recruiters to locate qualified candidates for specialized roles.

Recruiting Organizations

- **Employment Agencies** list positions and receive payment when a candidate is hired. The fee is paid by the employer with the opening or by the candidate. Look for a “fee paid” designation in job notices and/or ask who pays the fee.
- **Search Firms** have contracts with employers to find and screen qualified candidates. The employer pays the fee and the search firm identifies the employer once a potential applicant has been identified.
- **Contract Recruiters** are hired by employers to represent the organization in the recruiting and employment of individuals.
- **Resume Referral Firms** collect resumes/information and forward to prospective employers. The fee is paid by the employer or the job seeker. Applicants give written permission to have their resumes sent to employers, with particular instructions regarding to whom and for what purpose the applicant’s information can be forwarded. We advise you to be careful of this “service” as employers generally do not like “fax-blasted resumes” and you can forward your resume directly to employers yourself, for no fee, if you can identify the opportunity.

The Harris Career Development Office does not give third-party recruiters access to resumes in [HarrisLink](#). However, we may post bona fide openings that require applicants to apply through a recruiting organization if we are advised of the name of the actual employer.

Although we strongly advise against signing any agreements with third-party recruiters where you are expected to pay fees, here are some **questions to ask** before signing an agreement to work with a third-party recruiter:

- **How many currently active job openings do you handle for professionals in my field?**

Some recruiters may not have the number or kind of openings they advertise but wish to add your resume to their applicant pool to attract employer clients. Employment postings through third-party recruiters may not always be valid positions but used as a means to build a pipeline of readily available candidates for future job openings.

- **How will my resume be used?**

Insist that the recruiter states clearly that unless you give explicit permission, your personal information will not be shared with anyone outside their organization, and that it will be sent only to the specific employer/specific opportunity for which you are applying. They are not permitted to “sell” your resume to anyone or use it for marketing and/or promotional purposes.

- **Does the recruiter adhere to Equal Employment Opportunity standards?**

You must be assured that all qualified candidates are referred to the client for consideration without regard to gender, race, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or disability.

- **Who pays what fees and when?**

Determine who pays any fees before you agree to work with the recruiting organization.

- **Can you see and approve your resume after they revise it (if they do)?**

Ask to see and review your resume before they forward it to an employer, to confirm that the information is valid and correct.

- **How do they work with employers?**

Learn the actual process in terms of how they find and fill opportunities.

- **How can you continue your job search independently?**

Third-party recruiters may require candidates to sign a commitment stating they will no longer actively apply to positions or post their resumes to public job boards (e.g., [Monster](#), [CareerBuilder](#)) to prevent employers from readily accessing a candidate’s information. We advise you to carefully consider before signing any such commitment.

These comments are presented to help you avoid costly mistakes when working with third party recruiters.

A few more **hints** for you to consider:

- If the name of the employer has been revealed to you by the recruiter, do not apply directly for the position—it is both unethical and risky.
- You may be able to work with multiple recruiters, but be sure to advise each of them regarding your other activities, as well as the names of specific employers where you have active applications.

Most importantly, **stay focused**. No one will be as committed to your job search as you. You must take charge of your search, using a wide variety of resources: meet with a CDO counselor; check [HarrisLink](#) and other job search engines providing daily job alerts (such as [Indeed.com](#)); use online employment sites such as [careersinnonprofits.com](#), [npo.net](#), [idealist.org](#), [devex.com](#); and stay involved with professional organizations, the University Alumni and Friends database, and your other alumni associations. Continue building your network throughout your career: stay in touch and grow the number of colleagues, classmates, former employers, alumni, family, and friends who are on your team!