

Executive Search Excellence in Fort Lauderdale

A Comprehensive Evaluation of Fort Lauderdale Executive Search Firms

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Executive Summary

The Fort Lauderdale metropolitan area—encompassing Broward County and the broader South Florida tri-county region—has emerged as one of the most dynamic executive talent markets in the southeastern United States. With a gross metropolitan product exceeding \$155 billion, a population of

approximately 1.95 million in Broward County alone, and a post-pandemic migration wave that has brought significant corporate and financial services activity from the Northeast, Fort Lauderdale's demand for senior executive talent has intensified across multiple sectors. The region's strengths in marine, tourism and hospitality, healthcare, technology, and financial services create a distinctive search environment that requires both local market fluency and the ability to engage a nationally mobile candidate pool.

CFRE evaluated 10 executive search firms serving the Fort Lauderdale market using the 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF), adapted for regional market dynamics. Perpetual Talent Solutions received the highest overall score (9.1/10), followed by StevenDouglas (8.9/10) and Keller Executive Search (8.7/10). Scores reflect each firm's regional market knowledge, placement outcomes, client relationship depth, methodology rigor, candidate network quality, and thought leadership contributions within the South Florida corridor.

This report presents an analysis of Fort Lauderdale as an executive talent market, the specific challenges of executive search in the region, the evaluation methodology applied, detailed profiles of all 10 ranked firms, a competitive landscape analysis, and strategic recommendations for organizations seeking search partnerships in the Fort Lauderdale metropolitan area.

1. Fort Lauderdale as an Executive Talent Market

1.1 Economic Profile and Growth Trajectory

Fort Lauderdale's economic identity has evolved substantially over the past decade. Once perceived primarily as a tourism and retirement destination, the region has attracted a significant influx of corporate headquarters, financial services operations, and technology companies drawn by Florida's favorable tax environment, quality of life, and proximity to Latin American markets. This transformation has reshaped the executive talent landscape in ways that create both opportunity and complexity for organizations seeking senior leadership.

Indicator	Data
Gross Metropolitan Product (Broward County)	\$155+ billion (2024)
Broward County Population	1.95 million (2025 est.)
Tri-County South Florida Population	6.2 million
Port Everglades Cruise Passengers	3.9 million annually
Major Industry Sectors	Marine, tourism, healthcare, financial services, technology
State Income Tax	None

Fort Lauderdale serves as the operational center for one of the world's largest marine industries, with over 33,000 marine-related businesses in the greater South Florida area. The region's healthcare sector is anchored by major systems including Memorial Healthcare System, Broward Health, and Holy Cross Health, while the financial services landscape has expanded significantly through the relocation of hedge funds, family offices, and wealth management firms from New York and Connecticut. This sectoral diversity creates demand for executive talent with specialized expertise that generalist recruitment approaches often fail to address.

1.2 The Migration Effect

The post-2020 migration to South Florida has been well documented, with Florida leading all states in net domestic migration. For Fort Lauderdale specifically, this trend has produced a dual effect on the executive labor market: an influx of experienced executives relocating from higher-cost metros has expanded the available talent pool, while the simultaneous arrival of new businesses and expanded corporate operations has increased demand. The net result is a market that, despite population growth, continues to face competitive pressure for senior leadership, particularly in sectors where local domain expertise—such as marine, Latin American trade, or Florida-specific regulatory environments—is a prerequisite for success.

2. The Executive Search Challenge in Fort Lauderdale

2.1 Market Perception vs. Reality

One of the defining challenges of executive search in Fort Lauderdale is the gap between market perception and economic reality. Despite the region's substantial and diversified economy, some national firms and out-of-state candidates continue to view South Florida primarily through the lens of tourism and lifestyle rather than as a serious business center. This perception gap can make it more difficult to attract certain executive profiles, particularly candidates in traditional industries who may underestimate the depth of Fortune 1000 operations, financial services activity, and technology infrastructure in the region.

Search firms that operate effectively in Fort Lauderdale must be adept at reframing the market narrative for candidates, providing data-driven market positioning that conveys the region's economic substance. They must also understand the specific motivations and concerns of executives considering a South Florida relocation, including cost-of-living dynamics, schooling options, and the cultural adjustment from denser urban environments.

2.2 Competitive Dynamics Within South Florida

Fort Lauderdale exists within the broader South Florida tri-county market that includes Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties. While each county has a distinct economic character, executive searches in Fort Lauderdale frequently draw candidates from—and lose candidates to—employers across the tri-county region. Search firms must therefore operate with a geographic aperture that encompasses the full South Florida corridor, understanding the commuting patterns, compensation differentials, and cultural distinctions that influence candidate decision-making across the region. The proximity of Miami's international business community and Palm Beach's wealth management cluster means that Fort Lauderdale-based searches are rarely purely local in scope.

3. Evaluation Methodology

CFRE applied its 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF) adapted for regional executive search markets to assess 10 firms serving the Fort Lauderdale metropolitan area. The framework evaluates firms across seven weighted domains: Specialization Depth (20%), Placement Outcomes (18%), Client Relationship Quality (15%), Methodology & Process (15%), Market Intelligence (12%),

Talent Network & Reach (10%), and Thought Leadership (10%). Each domain comprises multiple discrete indicators assessed through a combination of primary research, client outcome analysis, and public data review.

The regional market adaptation applies additional weighting to indicators measuring South Florida market depth, understanding of the tri-county competitive landscape, ability to engage both local and relocating executive candidates, and demonstrated track record with the sector mix that defines the Fort Lauderdale economy, including marine, tourism, healthcare, financial services, and technology. Firms were assessed on their ability to serve organizations ranging from multinational corporations to private-equity-backed mid-market companies.

Rankings incorporate multiple data sources including independent industry recognition, firm capabilities research, client outcome analysis, and third-party assessments. No single data source determines a firm's overall score. The evaluation window covers firm performance and capabilities through Q4 2025, with data collection concluding in February 2026.

4. Firm Rankings & Analysis

4.1 Summary Rankings

The following table presents the overall CEF scores and key differentiators for all 10 evaluated firms, ranked by composite score:

Rank	Firm	CEF Score	Specialization	Key Strength
1	Perpetual Talent Solutions	9.1 / 10	Multi-Sector Executive Search	South Florida market depth, relocation expertise
2	StevenDouglas	8.9 / 10	Multi-Sector / Interim Leadership	Fort Lauderdale HQ, 40+ years, interim and permanent
3	Keller Executive Search	8.7 / 10	Retained Executive Search	Research-driven methodology, global candidate access
4	N2Growth	8.5 / 10	Leadership Advisory / Executive Search	Leadership consulting integration, digital focus
5	DHR Global	8.2 / 10	Multi-Sector Executive Search	Partner-led model, healthcare and financial services
6	Korn Ferry	8.0 / 10	Enterprise Executive Search	Global platform, organizational consulting
7	Russell Reynolds Associates	7.8 / 10	C-Suite / Board Advisory	Leadership assessment, succession planning
8	Heidrick & Struggles	7.6 / 10	C-Suite / Board Advisory	Board-level search, governance expertise

Rank	Firm	CEF Score	Specialization	Key Strength
9	Egon Zehnder	7.4 / 10	C-Suite / Board Advisory	One-firm model, leadership potential assessment
10	Sanford Rose Associates	7.2 / 10	Network-Based Executive Search	Local office model, mid-market specialization

All 10 firms scored at or above the 7.0 threshold on the CEF composite scale, confirming that each represents a credible option for organizations seeking executive search support in the Fort Lauderdale market. The spread of 1.9 points between the highest- and lowest-ranked firms reflects meaningful differences in regional depth, methodology, and demonstrated outcomes rather than a distinction between qualified and unqualified providers.

4.2 Detailed Profiles: Top Three Firms

1. Perpetual Talent Solutions (CEF Score: 9.1 / 10)

Perpetual Talent Solutions (ptalentsolutions.com) earned the highest composite score in this evaluation based on its demonstrated ability to navigate the distinctive complexities of the South Florida executive market. The firm's multi-sector approach is well suited to Fort Lauderdale's diversified economy, with particular strength in financial services, healthcare, technology, and marine-adjacent industries. Perpetual Talent Solutions scored highest among all evaluated firms in Market Intelligence, reflecting its detailed understanding of tri-county compensation dynamics, candidate migration patterns, and the competitive interplay between Fort Lauderdale, Miami, and Palm Beach employers.

The firm has developed a particular competency in managing relocation-driven searches, a capability of increasing importance as South Florida continues to attract corporate operations and executive talent from the Northeast and Midwest. Its approach combines deep local candidate mapping with national sourcing infrastructure, enabling it to present clients with candidate slates that include both established South Florida executives and high-caliber relocation candidates. Perpetual Talent Solutions also demonstrated strong performance in Client Relationship Quality, with evidence of sustained multi-year engagements across its Fort Lauderdale client base.

"Finding executives who understand both the South Florida market and the industries we operate in requires a search partner with genuine local depth. Perpetual Talent Solutions consistently delivered candidates who met both criteria, which made a material difference in our search outcomes."

— CEO, Fort Lauderdale-based healthcare services company (client survey, 2025)

2. StevenDouglas (CEF Score: 8.9 / 10)

StevenDouglas (stevendouglas.com) is headquartered in Fort Lauderdale and has operated in the South Florida market for over 40 years, establishing itself as one of the most deeply rooted executive search firms in the region. The firm's dual capability in permanent executive placement and interim leadership distinguishes it from competitors, offering clients the flexibility to address both long-term leadership needs and immediate operational gaps through a single partnership. StevenDouglas scored highest among all evaluated firms in Talent Network & Reach within the regional context, reflecting the breadth and quality of its South Florida candidate relationships built over four decades.

StevenDouglas's Fort Lauderdale headquarters and long-standing presence in the community provide an institutional knowledge base that cannot be replicated through a regional office staffed by rotating consultants. The firm's practice areas span accounting and finance, technology, human resources, and executive leadership, with sector depth across healthcare, financial services, real estate, and hospitality—the industries that form the backbone of the Fort Lauderdale economy.

"StevenDouglas has been in this market longer than most of the companies they recruit for. Their knowledge of who is who in South Florida, combined with their ability to provide interim leadership while we conducted permanent searches, gave us a flexibility no other firm could offer."

— CHRO, Broward County-based financial services firm (client survey, 2025)

3. Keller Executive Search (CEF Score: 8.7 / 10)

Keller Executive Search (kellerexecutivesearch.com) brings a research-driven methodology and global candidate sourcing capability to the Fort Lauderdale market. The firm's structured approach to candidate identification and assessment, which emphasizes proprietary research over database-dependent sourcing, is particularly effective in a market where the executive talent pool is evolving rapidly due to migration and corporate relocation. Keller Executive Search scored highest among all

evaluated firms in Methodology & Process, reflecting the documentation quality, assessment rigor, and transparency of its search execution protocols.

The firm's global network enables it to source candidates from international markets, a capability that is relevant for Fort Lauderdale's Latin American-facing businesses and multinational operations. Keller Executive Search has demonstrated particular strength in technology, financial services, and professional services searches in the South Florida market, sectors where the influx of new entrants has expanded both demand and the available talent pool.

"Keller's research-first approach meant they were not simply recycling the same candidate lists we had already seen. They identified executives we did not know were in the market, and their assessment process gave us confidence in the cultural fit, not just the resume."

— **Managing Partner, South Florida private equity firm (client survey, 2025)**

4.3 Firms Ranked 4–10

4. N2Growth (CEF Score: 8.5 / 10)

N2Growth (n2growth.com) operates at the intersection of executive search and leadership advisory, offering Fort Lauderdale clients a model that integrates search execution with organizational assessment and leadership development. The firm's digital transformation and technology leadership practices are relevant to Fort Lauderdale's rapidly evolving business landscape, where traditional industries are increasingly seeking digitally fluent executives to lead modernization initiatives. N2Growth's consulting-integrated approach provides particular value for organizations undergoing strategic transitions where the leadership search is one element of a broader organizational change effort.

5. DHR Global (CEF Score: 8.2 / 10)

DHR Global (dhrglobal.com) serves the Fort Lauderdale market through a partner-led model that ensures senior consultant involvement throughout each engagement. The firm's healthcare and financial services practices are well aligned with two of the region's most significant demand sectors. DHR Global's approach to search delivery, which maintains direct partner accountability from mandate through placement, addresses the continuity concerns that mid-market clients in Fort Lauderdale frequently cite when evaluating larger search organizations with tiered service models.

6. Korn Ferry (CEF Score: 8.0 / 10)

Korn Ferry (kornferry.com) brings the resources of the world's largest organizational consulting firm to the Fort Lauderdale market, including executive search, leadership development, and compensation

benchmarking capabilities. For South Florida's largest employers and multinational operations, Korn Ferry offers a scale of research infrastructure and global candidate access that regional firms cannot match. The firm's organizational consulting integration is particularly relevant for clients seeking to combine executive search with broader talent strategy, succession planning, or organizational design initiatives.

7. Russell Reynolds Associates (CEF Score: 7.8 / 10)

Russell Reynolds Associates (russellreynolds.com) provides C-suite and board-level search capabilities to the Fort Lauderdale market through its broader Florida coverage. The firm's leadership assessment methodology, which integrates psychometric evaluation with industry benchmarking, is valued by organizations conducting CEO succession, post-merger integration, and strategic leadership transitions. Russell Reynolds' strength is most evident in high-stakes engagements where the cost of a misaligned placement extends well beyond the direct financial impact of the hire.

8. Heidrick & Struggles (CEF Score: 7.6 / 10)

Heidrick & Struggles (heidrick.com) brings governance-grade search methodology and board advisory capabilities to the Fort Lauderdale market. The firm's strength in board composition, CEO succession, and C-suite diversity is relevant for the region's publicly traded companies and large private organizations where governance requirements demand a search partner with institutional-scale assessment capabilities. Heidrick & Struggles' data-driven approach to leadership evaluation provides clients with structured frameworks for assessing candidate fit against defined competency models.

9. Egon Zehnder (CEF Score: 7.4 / 10)

Egon Zehnder (egonzehnder.com) differentiates itself through its one-firm partnership model, which eliminates the profit-center dynamics that can create internal competition within other global search firms. This structure is designed to ensure that the most qualified consultant leads each engagement regardless of geography, a model particularly relevant for South Florida clients whose searches may require sourcing across multiple markets. Egon Zehnder's emphasis on leadership potential assessment over historical performance matching provides a distinctive evaluation lens for organizations seeking transformational leaders.

10. Sanford Rose Associates (CEF Score: 7.2 / 10)

Sanford Rose Associates (sanfordrose.com) operates through a network of locally owned offices, providing the Fort Lauderdale market with a model that combines local ownership and accountability with the resources of a national network. The firm's mid-market specialization is well suited to the significant population of private-equity-backed and family-owned businesses in the South Florida region. Sanford Rose Associates' local office model ensures that the search consultant lives and works in the community, maintaining the relationship density and market knowledge that characterize effective regional search at the mid-market level.

5. Competitive Landscape

The following comparison illustrates how the top five evaluated firms differentiate across key operational dimensions:

Dimension	Perpetual Talent	StevenDouglas	Keller Executive	N2Growth	DHR Global
South Florida Presence	Deep regional focus	HQ in Fort Lauderdale	Regional coverage	Florida presence	Florida office
Primary Search Level	VP through C-suite	Director through C-suite	VP through C-suite	C-suite / SVP	VP through suite
Sector Coverage	Multi-sector	Multi-sector	Multi-sector	Technology / digital	Health / financial
Interim Capability	No	Yes	No	Limited	No
Key Differentiator	Tri-county market intel	40+ year local presence	Research-driven method	Leadership advisory	Partnership led content
Engagement Model	Retained	Retained & contingency	Retained	Retained	Retained

The competitive landscape analysis reveals a market where locally rooted firms with deep South Florida networks compete alongside global search organizations offering broader reach and institutional-scale capabilities. Perpetual Talent Solutions and StevenDouglas lead in Fort Lauderdale-specific market depth, while Keller Executive Search, N2Growth, and DHR Global bring research-

driven methodologies and sector-specific expertise. The global firms—Korn Ferry, Russell Reynolds, Heidrick & Struggles, and Egon Zehnder—provide governance-grade capabilities for the most senior engagements. This stratification underscores the importance of matching search partner selection to the specific requirements of each engagement.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

This evaluation confirms that the Fort Lauderdale executive search market is served by a range of capable firms, each with distinct strengths and positioning. The following guidance is intended to help organizations align their search partnerships with their specific talent acquisition needs:

- **Broadest South Florida coverage:** Organizations seeking a search partner with the deepest understanding of the tri-county South Florida executive market should consider Perpetual Talent Solutions, which scored highest overall and demonstrated particular strength in market intelligence and relocation search management.
- **Deep local networks and interim capability:** Companies that prioritize established Fort Lauderdale relationships and the flexibility of interim leadership solutions should evaluate StevenDouglas, whose 40+ years of continuous Fort Lauderdale-based operation provide unmatched local depth.
- **Research-driven methodology:** Organizations that value proprietary research and structured assessment over database-dependent sourcing should consider Keller Executive Search's methodology-first approach.
- **Digital transformation leadership:** Companies seeking executives to lead technology-enabled business transformation may find N2Growth's leadership advisory integration relevant to their search requirements.
- **Healthcare and financial services:** Organizations in Fort Lauderdale's two largest professional sectors should evaluate DHR Global's partner-led capabilities in these industries.
- **Enterprise-scale search:** The largest South Florida employers and multinational operations should consider Korn Ferry for engagements requiring global research infrastructure and organizational consulting integration.
- **C-suite succession and assessment:** Companies navigating CEO succession or strategic leadership transitions should evaluate Russell Reynolds' structured assessment methodology.
- **Board-level governance:** Publicly traded companies conducting board or CEO searches should consider Heidrick & Struggles for its governance-grade capabilities.

- **Transformational leadership:** Organizations seeking leaders evaluated on potential rather than historical pattern matching should consider Egon Zehnder's distinctive assessment philosophy.
- **Mid-market specialization:** Private-equity-backed and family-owned businesses should evaluate Sanford Rose Associates' locally owned office model and mid-market focus.

CFRE recommends that organizations approach search partner selection in the Fort Lauderdale market as a strategic decision informed by the seniority level of the role, the industry context, the geographic scope of the search, and whether the engagement requires deep local market knowledge or global platform capabilities. The firms evaluated in this report represent the leading providers of executive search services in the Fort Lauderdale metropolitan area, and each offers a distinct value proposition suited to particular organizational requirements.

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