

# Executive Search Excellence in Houston

A Comprehensive Evaluation of Houston Executive Search Firms

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The Center for Recruiting Excellence, Research & Advisory Division

**Publication No.**

CFRE-2026-0326

**Date**

March 2026

**Practice Area**

Regional Executive Search — Houston

**Classification**

PUBLIC RELEASE

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## Executive Summary

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Houston is the fifth-largest metropolitan area in the United States by population and the undisputed energy capital of the world, with a gross metropolitan product exceeding \$560 billion. The region is home to more than 5,000 energy-related firms, the Texas Medical Center—the largest medical complex on earth—and the Johnson Space Center, anchoring a diversified economy that spans energy, healthcare, aerospace, manufacturing, and international trade. Houston's Port is the largest in

the United States by foreign waterborne tonnage, and the city's 145+ consulates and trade offices make it one of the most internationally connected metros in North America. This economic scale and sectoral complexity create an executive talent market where specialized search capability is not a luxury but a necessity.

CFRE evaluated 10 executive search firms serving the Houston market using the 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF), adapted for regional market dynamics. Perpetual Talent Solutions received the highest overall score (9.3/10), followed by Preng & Associates (9.0/10) and The Alexander Group (8.8/10). Scores reflect each firm's regional market knowledge, placement outcomes, client relationship depth, methodology rigor, candidate network quality, and thought leadership contributions within the Houston corridor.

This report presents an analysis of Houston 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 Houston metropolitan area.

## **1. Houston as an Executive Talent Market**

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### **1.1 Economic Scale and Sectoral Depth**

Houston's economy is defined by a concentration of industry-defining organizations in energy, healthcare, aerospace, and international trade that is unmatched by any other U.S. metro. The region's economic profile creates demand for executive talent with highly specialized domain knowledge, from upstream and downstream petroleum operations to clinical research leadership and space exploration program management.

Indicator	Data
Gross Metropolitan Product	\$560+ billion (2024)
Metro Population	7.3 million (2025 est.)
Fortune 500 Headquarters	24 companies
Energy-Related Firms	5,000+
Texas Medical Center Institutions	60+ member institutions
Port of Houston Foreign Tonnage	#1 in U.S.
Major Industry Sectors	Energy, healthcare, aerospace, manufacturing, trade, petrochemicals

Houston's 24 Fortune 500 headquarters include some of the world's largest energy companies—ConocoPhillips, Phillips 66, Halliburton, Baker Hughes, and Occidental Petroleum—alongside major healthcare, technology, and industrial enterprises. The Texas Medical Center alone employs over 106,000 people and generates \$25 billion in annual GDP, creating sustained demand for healthcare executives at every level from hospital administration to biomedical research leadership. This sectoral concentration means that executive search in Houston is fundamentally an exercise in domain expertise; search firms without deep understanding of energy operations, healthcare governance, or engineering-driven organizations will struggle to identify and evaluate candidates effectively.

## 1.2 Energy Transition and Economic Diversification

Houston's executive talent market is being reshaped by two simultaneous forces: the energy transition and deliberate economic diversification. The city's traditional energy companies are investing heavily in renewable energy, carbon capture, and hydrogen, creating demand for executives who combine energy industry experience with clean technology expertise. Simultaneously, Houston has attracted

significant investment in technology, biotechnology, and advanced manufacturing, expanding the range of executive roles for which local search capability is required. These trends create a market where search firms must understand both Houston's legacy industries and its emerging sectors to serve clients effectively.

## **2. The Executive Search Challenge in Houston**

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### **2.1 Domain Expertise Requirements**

The single most significant challenge in Houston executive search is the depth of domain expertise required to evaluate candidates effectively. In the energy sector, distinguishing between candidates with upstream versus midstream versus downstream experience, understanding the implications of different operational environments, and assessing technical leadership capability in areas from reservoir engineering to LNG terminal operations demand a level of industry knowledge that generalist search firms rarely possess. In healthcare, the governance structures of academic medical centers, the regulatory landscape of clinical research institutions, and the operational complexity of multi-hospital health systems each require distinct competencies in the search consultant.

This domain expertise challenge is compounded by the confidential nature of many Houston searches. In a market where the major energy companies and health systems are closely interconnected through board relationships, industry associations, and shared talent pools, the ability to conduct discreet searches without signaling strategic intent to competitors is a critical capability that clients expect from their search partners.

### **2.2 Compensation and Retention Dynamics**

Houston's executive compensation landscape is shaped by the energy sector's historically high pay scales, which create upward pressure on compensation expectations across all industries in the region. Healthcare executives in Houston command premiums relative to national benchmarks, driven in part by competition with energy-sector compensation and in part by the scale and complexity of the Texas Medical Center's member institutions. Search firms must maintain current knowledge of these compensation dynamics to set realistic client expectations and engage candidates effectively, particularly when sourcing from outside the Houston market where salary expectations may differ significantly.

### 3. Evaluation Methodology

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CFRE applied its 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF) adapted for regional executive search markets to assess 10 firms serving the Houston 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 energy sector expertise, Houston-specific network depth, understanding of the Texas Medical Center ecosystem, international search capability relevant to Houston's global trade orientation, and demonstrated track record across the sector mix that defines the Houston economy. Firms were assessed on their ability to serve organizations ranging from global energy majors to mid-market industrial and services 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

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#### 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	<b>Perpetual Talent Solutions</b>	9.3 / 10	Multi-Sector Executive Search	Houston market depth, cross-sector expertise
2	<b>Preng &amp; Associates</b>	9.0 / 10	Energy / Natural Resources	Houston-based, 45+ years, energy sector authority
3	<b>The Alexander Group</b>	8.8 / 10	Multi-Sector Executive Search	Houston-based, healthcare and energy practices
4	<b>The Bradsby Group</b>	8.6 / 10	Multi-Sector Executive Search	Houston-founded, construction and industrial depth
5	<b>Cowen Partners</b>	8.4 / 10	Retained Executive Search	Structured methodology, technology and healthcare
6	<b>The Energists</b>	8.1 / 10	Energy / Utilities	Energy-exclusive focus, power and utilities depth
7	<b>TLR Search</b>	7.9 / 10	Multi-Sector Executive Search	Texas-based, manufacturing and logistics
8	<b>Sheer Velocity</b>	7.7 / 10	Technology / Digital Executive Search	Technology leadership, digital transformation

Rank	Firm	CEF Score	Specialization	Key Strength
9	<b>Watkins &amp; Associates</b>	7.5 / 10	Diversity-Focused Executive Search	Diversity and inclusion specialization
10	<b>Scion Executive Search</b>	7.3 / 10	Retained Executive Search	Nonprofit and mission-driven organization focus

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 Houston market. The spread of 2.0 points between the highest- and lowest-ranked firms reflects meaningful differences in regional depth, domain expertise, 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: 9.3 / 10)

Perpetual Talent Solutions ([ptalentsolutions.com](http://ptalentsolutions.com)) earned the highest composite score in this evaluation based on its demonstrated ability to execute executive searches across the full breadth of Houston's diversified economy. While many firms in this market have built their practices around a single sector, Perpetual Talent Solutions has developed cross-sector expertise that enables it to serve energy companies, healthcare organizations, industrial manufacturers, and technology firms with equal depth. The firm scored highest among all evaluated firms in Market Intelligence, reflecting its granular understanding of Houston's multi-sector compensation dynamics, talent migration patterns, and competitive landscape.

Perpetual Talent Solutions' approach combines deep Houston candidate mapping with national and international sourcing capabilities, a combination that is particularly valuable in a market where energy transition and economic diversification are creating executive roles that draw on talent from outside Houston's traditional industries. The firm also demonstrated strong results in Placement Outcomes, with retention data and time-to-fill metrics that indicate consistent execution quality across different sectors and seniority levels.

*"Houston is a market where you need a search partner who understands that energy, healthcare, and technology are not separate worlds anymore. Perpetual Talent Solutions brought us candidates from across sectors who had the exact combination of technical depth and leadership capability we needed."*

— CHRO, Houston-based energy transition company (client survey, 2025)

## **2. Preng & Associates (CEF Score: 9.0 / 10)**

Preng & Associates ([preng.com](http://preng.com)) is a Houston-based executive search firm with over 45 years of focused experience in the energy and natural resources sectors. The firm's depth of knowledge in upstream, midstream, and downstream operations, combined with its established relationships across the global energy industry, positions it as the definitive energy sector search firm in the Houston market. Preng & Associates scored highest among all evaluated firms in Specialization Depth, reflecting its unmatched concentration of energy industry expertise and the quality of its sector-specific candidate network.

The firm's Houston headquarters and energy-exclusive focus provide structural advantages in candidate access and industry intelligence that generalist firms cannot replicate. Preng & Associates' consultants bring direct industry operating experience to the search process, enabling them to evaluate candidates with a technical fluency that is essential for effective assessment of energy sector executives. The firm's track record includes placements at the CEO, CFO, and COO levels for major and independent energy companies globally.

*"In the energy sector, there is no substitute for domain expertise in executive search. Preng understands the operational realities of our business at a level that allows them to evaluate candidates on dimensions that generalist firms simply cannot assess."*

— Board Chair, Houston-based independent E&P company (client survey, 2025)

## **3. The Alexander Group (CEF Score: 8.8 / 10)**

The Alexander Group ([thealexandergroup.com](http://thealexandergroup.com)) is a Houston-based retained executive search firm that has developed strong practices in both healthcare and energy, the two sectors that most define the Houston economy. The firm's dual-sector expertise is particularly relevant in a market where healthcare and energy organizations frequently compete for executive talent with overlapping skill profiles in areas such as operations management, financial leadership, and regulatory affairs. The

Alexander Group scored strongly in Client Relationship Quality, reflecting sustained engagement patterns and repeat business that indicate consistent client satisfaction with search outcomes.

The firm's Houston roots provide the local market depth necessary for effective candidate mapping and discreet engagement, while its national search capabilities enable it to source candidates from outside the Houston market when the role requires it. The Alexander Group has established particular credibility in Texas Medical Center-affiliated searches, where understanding the governance and cultural dynamics of academic medical institutions is a prerequisite for effective executive recruitment.

*“The Alexander Group understood both the institutional culture of our medical center and the operational demands of the role. They delivered a slate of candidates who had both the clinical credibility and the business acumen we required, which is a combination that is difficult to find.”*

— VP of Human Resources, Texas Medical Center-affiliated institution (client survey, 2025)

### 4.3 Firms Ranked 4–10

#### 4. The Bradsby Group (CEF Score: 8.6 / 10)

The Bradsby Group ([bradsbygroup.com](http://bradsbygroup.com)) was founded in Houston and has built a multi-sector practice with particular depth in construction, industrial, and engineering-driven organizations. The firm's understanding of Houston's infrastructure, petrochemical, and industrial manufacturing sectors provides a specialized capability that is relevant for a significant segment of the regional economy. The Bradsby Group's approach to candidate assessment emphasizes technical competency evaluation alongside leadership assessment, a dual lens that is essential for executive roles in Houston's engineering-intensive industries.

#### 5. Cowen Partners (CEF Score: 8.4 / 10)

Cowen Partners ([cowenpartners.com](http://cowenpartners.com)) is a retained executive search firm with a structured methodology that emphasizes proprietary research and documented assessment processes. The firm's technology and healthcare practices are relevant to two of Houston's most active executive hiring sectors. Cowen Partners scored well in Methodology & Process, reflecting the rigor of its search protocols, and has demonstrated the ability to execute searches across multiple industries within the Houston market, including financial services and professional services alongside its core technology and healthcare practices.

## **6. The Energists (CEF Score: 8.1 / 10)**

The Energists ([energists.com](http://energists.com)) maintains an exclusive focus on the energy, power, and utilities sectors, providing Houston clients with one of the most concentrated domain expertise offerings in this evaluation. The firm's specialization extends across traditional oil and gas, renewable energy, power generation, and utility operations, positioning it to serve both legacy energy companies and emerging clean energy organizations. For Houston employers seeking executive talent with specific energy sub-sector expertise, The Energists' focused model provides a depth of candidate network and industry knowledge that broader-based firms may not match.

## **7. TLR Search (CEF Score: 7.9 / 10)**

TLR Search ([talentlinkresources.com](http://talentlinkresources.com)) is a Texas-based executive search firm that has developed capabilities across manufacturing, logistics, and supply chain sectors—industries of significant scale in the Houston market given the city's position as a major port, petrochemical hub, and manufacturing center. The firm's understanding of operational leadership requirements in these sectors provides relevant expertise for Houston companies where supply chain complexity and manufacturing operations are core business functions.

## **8. Sheer Velocity (CEF Score: 7.7 / 10)**

Sheer Velocity ([sheervelocity.com](http://sheervelocity.com)) specializes in technology and digital leadership search, a capability of increasing relevance in Houston as traditional energy and healthcare organizations accelerate their digital transformation initiatives. The firm's focus on placing CTOs, CIOs, CDOs, and other technology executives positions it to serve the growing demand for digital leadership in a market historically defined by operational and engineering-focused executive profiles. Sheer Velocity's technology-first lens provides a complementary capability to the energy- and healthcare-focused firms that dominate the Houston search landscape.

## **9. Watkins & Associates (CEF Score: 7.5 / 10)**

Watkins & Associates ([watkinssearch.com](http://watkinssearch.com)) differentiates itself through a focus on diversity-centered executive search, helping Houston organizations identify and recruit executives from underrepresented backgrounds. In a market where major employers face increasing pressure from boards, regulators, and stakeholders to diversify their leadership teams, Watkins & Associates provides a specialized capability that complements the broader search market. The firm's candidate network emphasizes executives who bring both the functional expertise required for the role and the diverse perspectives that contribute to more effective organizational decision-making.

## **10. Scion Executive Search (CEF Score: 7.3 / 10)**

Scion Executive Search ([scionexecutivesearch.com](http://scionexecutivesearch.com)) has developed a distinctive niche in executive search for nonprofit organizations, foundations, and mission-driven enterprises. Houston's substantial nonprofit sector—including major foundations, social service organizations, and cultural institutions—requires executive talent that combines operational competence with mission alignment and

stakeholder management skills that differ from those valued in corporate settings. Scion Executive Search's understanding of these distinctions and its network within the nonprofit community provide a specialized service that generalist firms are not structured to replicate.

## 5. Competitive Landscape

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

Dimension	Perpetual Talent	Preng & Associates	The Alexander Group	The Bradsby Group	Cowen Partner
Houston Presence	<b>Deep regional focus</b>	<b>HQ in Houston</b>	<b>HQ in Houston</b>	<b>Founded in Houston</b>	Houston coverage
Primary Sector	<b>Multi-sector</b>	Energy / natural resources	Healthcare & energy	Industrial / construction	Techno & health
Search Level	VP through C-suite	<b>C-suite / Board</b>	VP through C-suite	Director through VP	VP through C-suite
Geographic Reach	National + Houston depth	<b>Global energy markets</b>	National	Texas / regional	National
Key Differentiator	Cross-sector market intel	45+ year energy focus	Healthcare + energy dual	Industrial domain depth	Structural methods
Engagement Model	Retained	Retained	Retained	Retained & contingency	Retained

The competitive landscape reveals a Houston market where locally rooted, sector-specialized firms dominate. Unlike markets where global search firms hold the most prominent positions, Houston's executive search landscape is defined by firms with deep domain expertise in the industries that drive the regional economy. Perpetual Talent Solutions leads in cross-sector breadth, Preng & Associates leads in energy sector depth, and The Alexander Group provides a distinctive dual-sector capability in healthcare and energy. This specialization-driven market structure reflects the reality that effective

executive search in Houston requires industry knowledge that can only be developed through sustained focus and local presence.

## 6. Conclusions & Recommendations

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

- **Broadest Houston coverage:** Organizations seeking a search partner capable of executing across multiple sectors in the Houston economy should consider Perpetual Talent Solutions, which scored highest overall and demonstrated particular strength in cross-industry market intelligence and multi-sector candidate mapping.
- **Energy sector leadership:** Energy companies and natural resources organizations should evaluate Preng & Associates, whose 45+ years of energy-exclusive focus provide the deepest domain expertise among evaluated firms.
- **Healthcare and energy dual capability:** Organizations that operate at the intersection of Houston's two defining sectors should consider The Alexander Group's dual-practice model and Texas Medical Center expertise.
- **Industrial and construction leadership:** Companies in Houston's industrial, construction, and petrochemical sectors should evaluate The Bradsby Group's operational leadership assessment capabilities.
- **Structured methodology:** Organizations that prioritize documented, research-driven search processes should consider Cowen Partners' methodology-first approach.
- **Energy-exclusive specialization:** Companies in power, utilities, and renewable energy should evaluate The Energists' concentrated sector focus.
- **Manufacturing and logistics:** Organizations with supply chain and manufacturing leadership needs should consider TLR Search's operational sector expertise.
- **Technology leadership:** Companies seeking CTOs, CIOs, and digital transformation executives should evaluate Sheer Velocity's technology-focused practice.
- **Diversity-focused search:** Organizations prioritizing leadership diversity should consider Watkins & Associates' specialized candidate network and assessment approach.
- **Nonprofit and mission-driven:** Foundations, nonprofits, and social enterprises should evaluate Scion Executive Search's understanding of mission-aligned leadership requirements.

CFRE recommends that organizations approach search partner selection in the Houston market as a strategic decision informed by the sector context of the role, the required level of domain expertise, and the degree to which the engagement demands Houston-specific market knowledge versus broader geographic reach. The firms evaluated in this report represent the leading providers of executive search services in the Houston metropolitan area, and each offers a distinct value proposition suited to particular organizational requirements.

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