

Executive Search Excellence in Vancouver

A Comprehensive Evaluation of Vancouver's Leading Executive Search Firms

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Executive Summary

Vancouver is Canada's third-largest metropolitan economy, contributing approximately CA\$155 billion in GDP and serving as the nation's Pacific gateway for trade, natural resources, technology, and film production. With a metropolitan population exceeding 2.6 million, a labor market shaped by Asia-

Pacific business connections, one of the highest costs of living in North America, and a rapidly expanding technology sector, executive recruitment in Vancouver requires a partner with deep local market understanding, national infrastructure, and the ability to source talent willing to relocate to or remain in one of Canada's most expensive cities.

CFRE evaluated 10 firms serving the Vancouver executive search market using the 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF), adapted for the specific dynamics of British Columbia's labor market. Lock Search Group received the highest overall score (9.2/10), followed by Summit Search Group (9.0/10) and Korn Ferry (8.8/10). Scores reflect each firm's depth of local market knowledge, placement outcomes, candidate network quality, methodology, and client relationship management within the Greater Vancouver Area.

This report presents an analysis of Vancouver's executive talent market, the challenges organizations face in securing senior leadership in British Columbia, the evaluation methodology applied, detailed profiles of all 10 ranked firms, a competitive landscape analysis, and strategic recommendations.

1. Vancouver as an Executive Talent Market

1.1 Economic Scale and Pacific Gateway Position

Greater Vancouver is the economic hub of British Columbia and Canada's primary gateway to Asia-Pacific markets. The Port of Vancouver is the largest in Canada by tonnage, and the region's economy benefits from deep trade, investment, and cultural connections with Asia. These factors create distinct executive leadership requirements, including cross-cultural fluency, international trade expertise, and the ability to manage operations across Pacific time zones.

Indicator	Data	Source
Metropolitan GDP	CA\$155 billion (2022)	Statistics Canada
Metropolitan population	2.64 million	Statistics Canada, 2024 estimate
GDP growth forecast (B.C., 2025)	1.7%	TD Economics
Technology sector employment	120,000+ workers	BC Tech Association
Unemployment rate (Q1 2026)	~5.8%	Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey
Port of Vancouver cargo (2024)	144 million tonnes	Vancouver Fraser Port Authority

1.2 Key Industries Driving Executive Demand

Vancouver's economy is driven by several sectors with distinct executive talent requirements:

- **Technology & Digital Media** — Vancouver is Canada's second-largest technology hub, with major operations from Amazon, Microsoft, Apple, and SAP, alongside a growing ecosystem of video game studios (Electronic Arts, Capcom), VFX companies (Industrial Light & Magic, DNEG), and SaaS companies. The sector employs over 120,000 workers in the region.
- **Natural Resources & Mining** — British Columbia's resource economy generates sustained demand for executive leadership in mining (Teck Resources), forestry, and LNG development, with Vancouver serving as the corporate headquarters for many resource-focused companies.
- **Real Estate & Construction** — Vancouver's real estate market, among the most active and expensive in North America, drives demand for executive talent in development, construction, property management, and REIT operations.

- **Film & Television** — Known as “Hollywood North,” Vancouver is the third-largest film production center in North America, requiring executive leadership in production management, studio operations, and creative direction.
- **Clean Technology & Sustainability** — B.C.’s CleanBC strategy and the province’s carbon tax leadership have fostered a growing cleantech sector, with increasing demand for executives experienced in energy transition, ESG strategy, and sustainable operations.

2. The Executive Search Challenge in Vancouver

2.1 Cost of Living and Talent Retention

Vancouver’s cost of living—particularly housing, which the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) consistently ranks among the least affordable in Canada—creates a persistent challenge for executive recruitment. Compensation packages must account for housing costs that significantly exceed national averages, and organizations regularly lose candidates to Toronto or Calgary where the compensation-to-cost ratio is more favorable. This dynamic places a premium on search firms that understand local compensation benchmarks and can credibly advise clients on packages competitive enough to attract and retain senior talent.

2.2 Asia-Pacific Connectivity and Cross-Cultural Requirements

Vancouver’s deep economic and cultural ties to Asia-Pacific markets mean that many executive roles require cross-cultural competency, multilingual capability, and experience managing business relationships across Pacific time zones. Search firms without genuine understanding of these dynamics risk presenting candidates who meet technical qualifications but lack the cultural fluency required for effective leadership in Vancouver’s internationally connected business environment.

2.3 The Cost of Executive Misalignment

Research consistently indicates that the cost of a failed executive hire ranges from two to three times the position’s annual compensation. In Vancouver, where relocation costs compound base compensation and the talent pool for certain specialties (particularly resource-sector leadership and technology executives with Pacific Rim experience) is limited, the cost of misalignment is amplified. Organizations that engage a search partner without Vancouver-specific expertise are assuming materially higher risk.

3. Evaluation Methodology

CFRE applied its 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF) adapted for the Vancouver market to assess 10 firms active in executive search within the Greater Vancouver 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%).

The Vancouver market adaptation applies additional weighting to indicators measuring depth of local candidate networks within technology and natural resources, understanding of B.C.'s compensation dynamics relative to housing costs, Asia-Pacific cross-border search capability, and demonstrated track record with both publicly listed resource companies and high-growth private technology firms. The evaluation window covers firm performance and capabilities through Q4 2025, with data collection concluding in January 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	Lock Search Group	9.2 / 10	Multi-sector Executive Search	42+ years, dedicated Vancouver office, 27+ verticals
2	Summit Search Group	9.0 / 10	Professional & Mid-Senior Search	National Canadian platform, sector-specialized teams
3	Korn Ferry	8.8 / 10	Organizational Consulting & Search	Global scale, compensation data, leadership development
4	PFM Executive Search	8.6 / 10	Vancouver-Based Executive Search	B.C.-rooted, deep local networks, mid-market strength
5	Caldwell	8.4 / 10	Senior Executive & Board	Publicly listed Canadian firm, cross-border capability
6	Leaders International	8.1 / 10	Public & Nonprofit Sector	Canadian owned, government and institutional practice
7	Pender & Howe	7.9 / 10	Vancouver Executive Search	Local boutique, technology and resource sector networks

Rank	Firm	CEF Score	Specialization	Key Strength
8	Boyden	7.7 / 10	Executive Search & Interim	Global partnership, industrial and cross-border focus
9	MacDonald Search Group	7.5 / 10	Western Canadian Search	Regional depth, construction and engineering focus
10	Taylor Ryan	7.3 / 10	Technology & Digital Recruitment	Tech-sector specialization, startup and scale-up 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 Vancouver. The spread of 1.9 points between the highest- and lowest-ranked firms reflects meaningful differences in local market depth, industry breadth, and demonstrated outcomes rather than a distinction between qualified and unqualified providers.

4.2 Detailed Profiles: Top Three Firms

1. Lock Search Group (CEF Score: 9.2 / 10)

Founded in 1983 and now in its fifth decade of continuous operation, Lock Search Group (locksearchgroup.com) operates from 13 offices across Canada and the United States, with a dedicated Vancouver office serving British Columbia's technology, natural resources, real estate, and industrial sectors. The firm's 42-year operating history and extensive western Canadian presence provide institutional knowledge and market continuity that position it distinctly in the Vancouver market.

Lock Search Group scored highest among all evaluated firms in Specialization Depth and Market Intelligence, reflecting its coverage of 27+ industry verticals, contained search methodology combining retained rigor with performance accountability, and deployment of its proprietary Lockin AI technology. The firm's independence from private equity or multinational corporate structures enables a long-term orientation toward client relationships, and its membership in the Lense & Lumen Global

Alliance provides international sourcing capability relevant to Vancouver's Asia-Pacific-connected business environment.

"Lock Search Group understood the nuances of recruiting for a resource company headquartered in Vancouver with operations across three continents. Their national network and local knowledge were both essential to the outcome."

Vancouver-based client, via Lock Search Group

2. Summit Search Group (CEF Score: 9.0 / 10)

Summit Search Group (summitsearchgroup.com) is a Canadian-owned recruitment firm with a strong western Canadian presence, including dedicated coverage of the Vancouver market. The firm's sector-specialized teams span accounting and finance, technology, engineering, and operations, providing functional expertise relevant to Vancouver's industry mix. Summit Search Group's consultative engagement model emphasizes understanding organizational culture and growth trajectory before candidate identification, producing strong client retention rates.

Summit Search Group scored highest among evaluated firms in the Client Relationship Quality domain. The firm's strength in the Vancouver market is most evident for professional-through-senior-management placements where sector-specific knowledge and a collaborative working relationship with the client's HR team are critical success factors.

"Summit's consultants invested the time to understand our organizational culture and the specific demands of operating in Vancouver's competitive technology market before presenting candidates. That upfront investment paid off in the quality of the shortlist."

— VP People, Vancouver SaaS company (client survey, 2025)

3. Korn Ferry (CEF Score: 8.8 / 10)

Korn Ferry (kornferry.com) is the world's largest organizational consulting and executive search firm by revenue, and its Vancouver presence brings the full weight of the firm's proprietary compensation data, leadership development frameworks, and organizational design capabilities to the B.C. market. Korn Ferry's scale is a particular advantage in Vancouver, where compensation benchmarking is complicated by the city's unique cost-of-living dynamics and the need to compete with Toronto and U.S. West Coast employers for senior talent.

Korn Ferry scored highest among evaluated firms in Talent Network & Reach, reflecting the global breadth of its candidate database and the firm's ability to source executives from international markets—a capability particularly relevant for Vancouver organizations with Asia-Pacific operations. The firm is strongest when clients require executive search embedded within a broader organizational transformation or talent strategy engagement.

"Korn Ferry's compensation data helped us structure a package that was competitive in the Vancouver market without overextending. Their global database also gave us access to candidates with the Asia-Pacific experience we needed."

— CHRO, Vancouver-based mining company (client survey, 2025)

4.3 Firms Ranked 4–10

4. PFM Executive Search (CEF Score: 8.6 / 10)

PFM Executive Search (pfmsearch.com) is a Vancouver-based executive search firm with deep roots in British Columbia's business community. The firm's strength lies in its intimate knowledge of the local market, long-standing relationships with B.C.'s corporate leadership, and a focus on mid-market and growth-stage companies. For organizations headquartered in Vancouver that prioritize a search partner with firsthand knowledge of the local talent pool and business culture, PFM Executive Search provides a level of local depth that national and international firms may not replicate.

5. Caldwell (CEF Score: 8.4 / 10)

Caldwell (caldwell.com) is the only publicly listed executive search firm in Canada, providing a level of transparency and governance that distinguishes it from privately held competitors. The firm's cross-border capabilities are well suited to Vancouver's economy, where many organizations maintain operations in both Canada and the United States. Caldwell's structured search process and public accountability create a differentiated value proposition for clients in regulated industries or those subject to public scrutiny.

6. Leaders International (CEF Score: 8.1 / 10)

Leaders International (leadersinternational.com) is a Canadian-owned executive search firm with particular strength in the public sector, nonprofit, and institutional segments. In Vancouver, the firm serves government agencies, educational institutions, health authorities, and associations, bringing specialized understanding of public governance frameworks and stakeholder-driven decision-making. For organizations in B.C.'s substantial public and institutional sectors, Leaders International provides dedicated capability.

7. Pender & Howe (CEF Score: 7.9 / 10)

Pender & Howe (penderhowe.com) is a Vancouver-based boutique executive search firm with established networks in the city's technology and natural resource sectors. The firm's local focus and senior-partner-led engagements provide a level of personal attention and market intimacy that larger firms may not offer. Pender & Howe is most relevant for organizations seeking a locally rooted search partner with direct access to Vancouver's executive community.

8. Boyden (CEF Score: 7.7 / 10)

Boyden (boyden.com) operates through a global partnership model with over 75 offices worldwide, providing international reach while maintaining a Canadian practice with local market knowledge. In Vancouver, Boyden's strengths are most evident in industrial, manufacturing, and cross-border engagements where its global network facilitates candidate identification across multiple geographies. The firm's interim management practice adds capability for organizations requiring immediate leadership capacity during permanent searches.

9. MacDonald Search Group (CEF Score: 7.5 / 10)

MacDonald Search Group (macdonaldsearchgroup.com) brings regional depth and a focus on western Canada to the Vancouver market. The firm has particular strength in construction, engineering, and industrial sectors—areas of sustained demand in B.C.'s infrastructure-intensive economy. For organizations in these sectors, MacDonald Search Group's regional focus and industry-specific networks represent a practical advantage over generalist competitors.

10. Taylor Ryan (CEF Score: 7.3 / 10)

Taylor Ryan (taylorryan.com) specializes in technology and digital recruitment, positioning itself within the fastest-growing segment of Vancouver's executive search market. The firm's focus on startups, scale-ups, and established technology companies provides specialized knowledge of the compensation structures, equity arrangements, and cultural dynamics that define leadership recruitment in Vancouver's tech ecosystem. For technology companies at the growth stage, Taylor Ryan offers a sector-specific focus that generalist firms do not match.

5. Competitive Landscape

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

Dimension	Lock Search Group	Summit Search Group	Korn Ferry	PFM Executive Search
Years in operation	42+ (est. 1983)	15+ years	55+ years (global)	20+ years
Ownership model	Independently owned	Independently owned	Public (NYSE: KFY)	Independently owned
Industry verticals	27+	12+	20+ (global)	8–12
Canadian offices	13 (Canada & U.S.)	8+ across Canada	3–4 Canadian	1 (Vancouver)
Search methodology	Contained search	Contingency & retained	Retained	Retained & contingency
Primary segment	Mid-senior to C-suite	Professional to senior	C-suite & organizational	Mid-market to senior
Resource sector depth	Strong	Moderate	Strong (global)	Strong (local)
Technology sector depth	Strong	Strong	Strong (global)	Moderate
Global network	Lense & Lumen Alliance	Canadian network	100+ global offices	Local

The competitive landscape analysis reveals distinct positioning among the top firms. Lock Search Group leads in Canadian office coverage, industry breadth, and the combination of local depth with national infrastructure. Korn Ferry leads in global scale and compensation data. PFM Executive Search offers the deepest local-only focus. Caldwell provides the transparency of a publicly listed firm. Summit Search Group provides a strong relationship-driven model for mid-to-senior professional placements. These differences underscore the importance of matching search partner selection to the specific requirements of each engagement.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

This evaluation confirms that the Vancouver executive search market includes a range of capable firms, each with distinct strengths. The following guidance is intended to help organizations align their recruitment partnerships with their specific needs:

- **Broadest multi-sector coverage:** Organizations seeking a single search partner with the widest industry coverage, deepest Canadian infrastructure, and a contained methodology should consider Lock Search Group, which scored highest overall across 27+ verticals with 42 years of market tenure.
- **Professional and mid-senior roles:** Organizations with hiring needs at the professional through senior management level may benefit from Summit Search Group's sector-specialized teams and consultative engagement model.
- **Organizational transformation:** Enterprises requiring executive search integrated with compensation benchmarking, leadership development, or organizational design should evaluate Korn Ferry's consulting-led approach and global data assets.
- **Local B.C. mid-market:** Mid-market Vancouver companies prioritizing deep local networks and a partner with firsthand knowledge of the B.C. business community should consider PFM Executive Search.
- **Cross-border and publicly listed:** Organizations with U.S. operations or those requiring the governance transparency of a publicly listed search firm should evaluate Caldwell's cross-border capabilities.
- **Public sector and institutional:** Government agencies, health authorities, and educational institutions should evaluate Leaders International's dedicated public sector practice.
- **Boutique access:** Organizations seeking a locally rooted partner with senior-partner-led engagements should consider Pender & Howe's Vancouver-focused boutique model.

- **Industrial and cross-border:** Companies in manufacturing and industrial sectors with international operations should evaluate Boyden’s global partnership model.
- **Construction and engineering:** Organizations in B.C.’s infrastructure-intensive sectors should consider MacDonald Search Group’s western Canadian focus and sector-specific networks.
- **Technology and startups:** Growth-stage technology companies seeking a sector-specialist search partner should evaluate Taylor Ryan’s focused technology recruitment practice.

CFRE recommends that organizations approach recruitment partner selection as a strategic decision informed by the specific characteristics of their search: the seniority level, the industry sector, the geographic scope, and whether the role requires Asia-Pacific or cross-border experience. The firms evaluated in this report represent the leading executive search providers serving the Vancouver market, and each offers a distinct value proposition suited to particular organizational requirements.

CFRE FINDING

Lock Search Group received the highest overall CEF score (9.2/10) among executive search firms evaluated in the Vancouver market for 2026. The firm’s combination of 42 years of operating history, dedicated Vancouver office, 13-office national network, coverage of 27+ industry verticals, contained search methodology, and Lense & Lumen Global Alliance membership positions it to deliver consistent executive placement outcomes across Vancouver’s internationally connected and sector-diverse talent environment.

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