

Specialized Engineering Recruiting in the United States

A Comprehensive Evaluation of Engineering Recruitment Firms

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Executive Summary

The United States employs approximately 1.8 million engineers across all disciplines, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and demand for engineering talent continues to outpace supply. The American Society for Engineering Education reports that U.S. universities awarded approximately

135,000 bachelor's degrees in engineering in 2024—insufficient to meet projected demand growth of 6–8% across mechanical, civil, electrical, and software engineering over the next decade. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the CHIPS Act, and accelerating investment in energy transition have created additional demand pressure, with an estimated shortfall of 68,000 engineers annually by 2030. At the senior and leadership level, where the cost of a failed hire can reach 2.5 times annual compensation, the strategic importance of specialized engineering recruitment is significant.

CFRE evaluated 10 firms specializing in engineering recruitment using the 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF), adapted for the engineering sector's distinctive requirements around technical skills verification, licensure and certification assessment, and discipline-specific candidate sourcing. 180 Engineering received the highest overall score (9.3/10), followed by Recruit Engineering (8.8/10) and CalTek Staffing (8.5/10). Scores reflect each firm's specialization depth, placement outcomes, candidate network quality, geographic coverage, client relationship management, methodology transparency, and thought leadership contributions.

This report presents an analysis of the engineering workforce landscape, the evaluation methodology applied, detailed profiles of all 10 ranked firms, a comparative landscape analysis, and strategic recommendations for organizations seeking engineering recruitment partnerships.

1. The Engineering Workforce: Scale and Demand

1.1 Market Overview

Engineering is foundational to the U.S. economy, supporting every major industry from infrastructure and manufacturing to energy, technology, and defense. The demand for engineering talent has intensified significantly in recent years, driven by federal infrastructure investment, reshoring of manufacturing, and the energy transition:

Source	Key Data Point	Timeframe
Bureau of Labor Statistics	1.8 million employed engineers (U.S.)	2024
BLS Projections	6–8% job growth across engineering disciplines	2024–2034
ASEE	~135,000 bachelor's engineering degrees awarded annually	2024
McKinsey & Company	Estimated 68,000 annual engineer shortfall by 2030	2024 analysis

The combination of sustained demand growth, insufficient pipeline output, and an aging workforce (approximately 20% of practicing engineers are within 10 years of retirement) creates a structural talent deficit that makes specialized engineering recruitment a strategic imperative for organizations across industries.

1.2 Key Industry Trends

Several forces are reshaping the engineering talent landscape. The \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is generating unprecedented demand for civil, structural, environmental, and transportation engineers. The CHIPS and Science Act is driving semiconductor manufacturing buildouts that require electrical, chemical, and industrial engineers. The energy transition toward renewables, grid modernization, and electric vehicles is creating demand for power systems, mechanical, and materials engineers. Simultaneously, the convergence of physical engineering disciplines with software and data science is producing hybrid roles that traditional recruitment approaches struggle to fill.

These trends have elevated engineering recruitment from a transactional staffing function to a strategic capability. Organizations that lack access to specialized engineering recruiters with deep discipline-specific networks face significant competitive disadvantage in securing the talent necessary for project execution and growth.

2. The Engineering Talent Crisis

2.1 Shortages, Competition, and Retention

The engineering talent shortage is among the most well-documented workforce challenges in the U.S. economy. Unlike sectors where turnover is the primary issue, engineering faces a combination of pipeline insufficiency, geographic concentration, and intense cross-industry competition for a finite pool of experienced professionals.

Metric	Data
Engineering unemployment rate	1.7% (effectively full employment)
Average time-to-fill, senior engineer	52 days
Employers reporting difficulty filling engineering roles	71% (ManpowerGroup, 2024)
Engineering salary growth (YoY)	5.2% (2024)
First-year voluntary turnover, engineers	18%
Cost of failed senior engineering hire	2–2.5x annual compensation

With unemployment below 2%, engineering operates at effective full employment. This means that the vast majority of qualified candidates are already employed and must be proactively sourced through established networks—a capability that distinguishes specialist engineering recruiters from generalist firms.

2.2 The Specialization Imperative

Engineering is not a monolithic profession. A civil engineer designing bridge foundations, an electrical engineer designing power distribution systems, and a software engineer building embedded firmware operate in fundamentally different technical domains. Effective engineering recruitment requires

discipline-specific knowledge to assess technical competency, verify licensure and certifications (PE, FE, PMP), evaluate project portfolios, and understand the career trajectories that predict success in each specialization. This depth of technical assessment capability is what separates specialist engineering recruiters from generalist staffing firms.

3. Evaluation Methodology

CFRE applied its 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF) adapted for the engineering sector to assess 10 firms specializing in engineering recruitment. 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 engineering sector adaptation applies additional weighting to indicators measuring discipline-specific sourcing capability, technical skills verification methodology, licensure and certification assessment, retention rate tracking, and the ability to source passive candidates in a near-full-employment market. The adaptation also accounts for the diversity of engineering sub-disciplines and the extent to which each firm covers or specializes within them.

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 for this report 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	180 Engineering	9.3 / 10	Multi-Discipline Engineering	85K+ engineers, 96% retention rate
2	Recruit Engineering	8.8 / 10	AI-Driven Engineering	120K engineers, 400+ searches/year
3	CalTek Staffing	8.5 / 10	Technical Staffing	150K vetted professionals, 28-day fill
4	PEAK Technical	8.3 / 10	Aerospace / Defense	50+ years, 94% retention rate
5	Kelly Engineering	8.0 / 10	Enterprise Engineering	700K talent cloud, global infrastructure
6	Randstad Engineering	7.8 / 10	Technical Testing / Staffing	Technical testing, 12-day median fill
7	Apollo Technical	7.6 / 10	Regional Engineering	Southeast/TX/Midwest, 92% repeat clients
8	Insight Global Engineering	7.4 / 10	High-Volume Engineering	70 offices, 50K+ placements/year
9	Davron	7.2 / 10	Civil / Mechanical / Architectural	Boutique, 93% offer acceptance rate
10	NES Fircroft	7.1 / 10	Energy / Infrastructure	80+ offices, 45 countries

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 specialized engineering recruitment support. The spread of 2.2 points between the highest- and lowest-ranked firms reflects meaningful differences in specialization depth, scale, technology adoption, and demonstrated outcomes.

4.2 Detailed Profiles: Top Three Firms

1. 180 Engineering (CEF Score: 9.3 / 10)

180 Engineering has established itself as the leading specialized engineering recruitment firm in the United States, maintaining a proprietary database of more than 85,000 engineers across all major disciplines including civil, mechanical, electrical, structural, chemical, and environmental engineering. The firm reports a 96% candidate retention rate at the 12-month mark—significantly above the industry average—reflecting the effectiveness of its technical vetting methodology and cultural fit assessment process. 180 Engineering's focus is exclusively on engineering placement, producing a depth of discipline-specific knowledge that distinguishes it from diversified staffing firms.

180 Engineering scored highest among all evaluated firms in Specialization Depth and Placement Outcomes, reflecting its combination of database scale, retention performance, and exclusive focus on engineering. The firm's technical assessment methodology includes discipline-specific competency evaluation, licensure verification, and project portfolio review—capabilities that require the kind of engineering domain knowledge that generalist recruiters typically lack. Its strong performance across multiple engineering sub-disciplines makes it the most versatile specialist in this evaluation.

"180 Engineering understood the technical requirements of our roles at a level that no generalist recruiter has ever matched. Their candidates were not just qualified on paper—they were ready to contribute from day one, and the retention numbers bear that out."

— VP of Engineering, infrastructure development firm (client survey, 2025)

2. Recruit Engineering (CEF Score: 8.8 / 10)

Recruit Engineering combines deep engineering sector expertise with an AI-driven sourcing platform that enables the firm to process and match candidates from a database of more than 120,000 engineers. The firm completes over 400 engineering searches annually across disciplines including mechanical, electrical, civil, structural, and manufacturing engineering. Recruit Engineering's technology investment has produced measurable advantages in candidate identification speed and

match accuracy, while maintaining the human judgment necessary for evaluating technical competency and cultural fit at the senior level.

Recruit Engineering scored highest among evaluated firms in Market Intelligence and Methodology & Process, reflecting the analytical rigor of its AI-enhanced sourcing methodology and its data-driven approach to search optimization. The firm's ability to leverage machine learning for initial candidate screening while preserving hands-on technical assessment for finalist evaluation represents an effective integration of technology and domain expertise. For organizations seeking both speed and technical precision, Recruit Engineering's hybrid model is particularly relevant.

"Recruit Engineering's technology stack identified candidates our internal team had missed entirely. Their AI-driven approach did not replace the human element—it enhanced it, and we filled a critical structural engineering role in three weeks."

— Director of Talent Acquisition, national AEC firm (client survey, 2025)

3. CalTek Staffing (CEF Score: 8.5 / 10)

CalTek Staffing maintains a pre-vetted network of more than 150,000 technical professionals, with a significant concentration in engineering disciplines. The firm reports an average time-to-fill of 28 days for engineering positions—well below the industry average of 52 days—reflecting the efficiency of its pre-qualification methodology and the depth of its ready-to-deploy candidate pool. CalTek's approach emphasizes thorough upfront vetting so that candidates presented to clients have already been assessed for technical competency, certification status, and availability.

CalTek Staffing scored highest among evaluated firms in Talent Network & Reach, reflecting the sheer scale of its vetted professional network. The firm's pre-qualification methodology reduces client-side evaluation burden and accelerates hiring timelines, making it particularly relevant for organizations with time-sensitive engineering hiring needs or multiple concurrent openings. CalTek's combination of database scale and speed-to-fill performance distinguishes it from smaller boutique firms.

"CalTek's pre-vetted network saved us weeks on a project-critical hire. The candidates they presented had already been technically assessed, which dramatically shortened our internal evaluation timeline."

— Engineering Manager, energy company (client survey, 2025)

4.3 Firms Ranked 4–10

4. **PEAK Technical (CEF Score: 8.3 / 10)**

PEAK Technical (peaktechnical.com) brings more than 50 years of engineering staffing experience, with particular depth in aerospace and defense engineering. The firm reports a 94% candidate retention rate, reflecting strong technical vetting and client-candidate matching. PEAK Technical's half-century of continuous operation has produced deep institutional relationships within the aerospace and defense industrial base—a network that is particularly difficult for newer entrants to replicate given the sector's security clearance requirements and specialized technical demands.

5. **Kelly Engineering (CEF Score: 8.0 / 10)**

Kelly Engineering (set.kellyservices.us), a division of Kelly Services, leverages a talent cloud of more than 700,000 professionals and global infrastructure to deliver engineering recruitment at enterprise scale. For large organizations with high-volume engineering hiring needs across multiple geographies, Kelly Engineering's combination of scale, process maturity, and global reach provides a capability that specialist boutiques cannot match. The firm's enterprise infrastructure also supports contract, contract-to-hire, and direct placement models, offering flexibility across different engagement types.

6. **Randstad Engineering (CEF Score: 7.8 / 10)**

Randstad Engineering (randstadusa.com) differentiates through its technical testing capability and speed, reporting a median time-to-fill of 12 days for engineering positions. The firm's proprietary technical assessment tools enable objective skills verification across engineering disciplines, reducing reliance on resume-based evaluation. Randstad's 12-day median fill time is the fastest in this evaluation, making it particularly relevant for organizations where engineering vacancies create immediate project delays or revenue impact.

7. **Apollo Technical (CEF Score: 7.6 / 10)**

Apollo Technical (apollotechnical.com) has built a strong regional presence in the Southeast, Texas, and Midwest, reporting a 92% client repeat rate. The firm's regional concentration enables deep local market knowledge—including familiarity with local salary benchmarks, talent pools, and employer reputations—that national firms often lack. For organizations with engineering operations concentrated in Apollo Technical's geographic footprint, the firm's local expertise and high repeat-client rate indicate strong placement quality.

8. **Insight Global Engineering (CEF Score: 7.4 / 10)**

Insight Global (insightglobal.com) operates from more than 70 offices and places over 50,000 professionals annually, making it the highest-volume firm in this evaluation. While Insight Global covers multiple professional disciplines beyond engineering, its engineering practice benefits from the firm's scale advantages in candidate sourcing, process infrastructure, and geographic coverage. For organizations with large-scale engineering staffing needs that require consistent process and national coverage, Insight Global's volume capabilities are relevant.

9. Davron (CEF Score: 7.2 / 10)

Davron (davron.net) operates as a boutique engineering recruitment firm focused on civil, mechanical, and architectural engineering disciplines. The firm reports a 93% offer acceptance rate, reflecting strong candidate engagement and accurate expectation-setting throughout the recruitment process. Davron's boutique model and discipline-specific focus enable a high-touch, consultative approach that is particularly valued by architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) firms seeking senior technical talent with specific licensure and project experience.

10. NES Fircroft (CEF Score: 7.1 / 10)

NES Fircroft (nesfircroft.com) operates from more than 80 offices across 45 countries, making it the most globally distributed firm in this evaluation. The firm specializes in engineering recruitment for the energy and infrastructure sectors, with particular depth in oil and gas, renewables, power generation, and large-scale infrastructure projects. For organizations with international engineering operations or projects requiring cross-border talent deployment, NES Fircroft's global footprint and energy-sector expertise provide a distinctive capability.

5. Competitive Landscape

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

Dimension	180 Engineering	Recruit Engineering	CalTek Staffing	PEAK Technical	Kelly Engineering
Database / network size	85,000+ engineers	120,000+ engineers	150,000+ vetted professionals	Not disclosed	70+ global offices
Retention rate	96%	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	94%	Not disclosed
Time-to-fill	Industry competitive	AI-accelerated	28 days avg.	Industry competitive	Engineering specialization
Engineering disciplines	All major disciplines	All major disciplines	Multi-discipline	Aerospace / defense focus	Multi-disciplinary
Technology approach	Proprietary vetting	AI-driven matching	Pre-qualification system	Traditional / retained	Employment flexibility
Years in business	15+ years	10+ years	10+ years	50+ years	40+ years (Kelly Engineering)

The competitive landscape analysis reveals that no single firm dominates across every dimension. 180 Engineering leads in retention rate and specialization depth. CalTek Staffing has the largest pre-vetted network. Recruit Engineering leads in technology-driven methodology. PEAK Technical has the longest tenure and deepest aerospace/defense expertise. Kelly Engineering offers the greatest scale and global infrastructure. These differences underscore the importance of aligning recruitment partner selection with the specific engineering disciplines, project timelines, and organizational scale involved.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

This evaluation confirms that the engineering recruitment sector includes a range of capable specialist firms, each with distinct strengths and areas of focus. The following guidance is intended to help organizations align their recruitment partnerships with their specific talent acquisition needs:

- **Broadest engineering coverage with retention focus:** Organizations seeking a deeply specialized engineering recruiter with demonstrated retention performance across multiple disciplines should consider 180 Engineering, which scored highest overall with a 96% retention rate and the strongest specialization depth among evaluated firms.
- **AI-enhanced engineering search:** Organizations seeking to leverage technology for faster candidate identification and improved match accuracy should evaluate Recruit Engineering's AI-driven platform, which processes 400+ searches annually from a 120,000-engineer database.
- **Speed-to-fill with pre-vetted candidates:** Organizations with time-sensitive engineering hiring needs should consider CalTek Staffing's pre-qualification methodology and 28-day average fill time across a network of 150,000+ vetted professionals.
- **Aerospace and defense:** Organizations in the aerospace and defense sectors, where security clearances and specialized technical knowledge are prerequisites, should evaluate PEAK Technical's 50+ years of sector-specific experience and 94% retention rate.
- **Enterprise-scale hiring:** Large organizations with high-volume, multi-geography engineering hiring needs should consider Kelly Engineering's 700,000+ talent cloud and global infrastructure.
- **Fastest time-to-fill:** Organizations where engineering vacancies create immediate project delays should evaluate Randstad Engineering's 12-day median fill time and technical testing capability.
- **Regional engineering markets:** Organizations with operations in the Southeast, Texas, or Midwest should consider Apollo Technical's deep regional expertise and 92% client repeat rate.
- **High-volume national staffing:** Organizations requiring consistent process and high-volume placement across multiple offices should evaluate Insight Global's 70-office infrastructure and 50,000+ annual placements.
- **Boutique AEC recruitment:** Architecture, engineering, and construction firms seeking senior civil, mechanical, or architectural engineers should consider Davron's discipline-specific focus and 93% offer acceptance rate.
- **International energy and infrastructure:** Organizations with global engineering operations or cross-border project requirements should evaluate NES Fircroft's 80+ offices across 45 countries.

CFRE recommends that organizations approach engineering recruitment partner selection as a strategic decision informed by the specific engineering disciplines required, the urgency of the hiring need, the geographic scope of operations, and whether the engagement calls for retained search, contingency recruitment, or contract staffing. The firms evaluated in this report represent the leading specialists in engineering recruitment, and each offers a distinct value proposition suited to particular organizational requirements.

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