

Specialized Life Sciences Recruiting in the United States

A Comprehensive Evaluation of Life Sciences Recruitment Firms

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Publication No.

CFRE-2026-0358

Date

March 2026

Practice Area

Life Sciences

Classification

PUBLIC RELEASE

Executive Summary

The U.S. life sciences industry—encompassing biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, diagnostics, clinical research organizations, and genomics—represents one of the most dynamic and talent-intensive sectors of the economy. The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America

(PhRMA) reports that the biopharmaceutical industry alone supports 4.4 million U.S. jobs, while the overall life sciences sector generated approximately \$280 billion in U.S. revenue in 2024. Yet the sector faces a structural talent crisis: the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) estimates that demand for life sciences professionals will outpace supply by approximately 15% over the next five years, driven by the expansion of cell and gene therapy, precision medicine, mRNA platforms, and AI-driven drug discovery. At the executive level, where regulatory knowledge, scientific credibility, and commercialization experience must converge in a single leader, the cost of a failed hire can reach four to five times annual compensation.

CFRE evaluated 10 firms specializing in life sciences recruitment using the 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF), adapted for the life sciences sector's distinctive requirements around scientific credentialing, regulatory expertise assessment, therapeutic area specialization, and the evaluation of candidates who bridge research and commercial functions. Surf Search received the highest overall score (9.2/10), followed by Epigen Bio Talent (8.8/10) and Slone Partners (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 life sciences industry's scale and workforce challenges, the evaluation methodology applied, detailed profiles of all 10 ranked firms, a comparative landscape analysis, and strategic recommendations for organizations seeking life sciences recruitment partnerships.

1. The Life Sciences Industry: Scale and Complexity

1.1 Market Overview

The life sciences sector is among the most research-intensive and heavily regulated industries in the world. The United States maintains global leadership in biopharmaceutical innovation, medical device development, and clinical research, supported by a complex ecosystem of academic research institutions, venture-funded biotech startups, mid-size specialty pharma companies, and multinational corporations:

Source	Key Data Point	Timeframe
PhRMA	4.4 million U.S. jobs supported by biopharma	2024
IQVIA	\$603 billion U.S. prescription drug spending	2024
Evaluate Pharma	\$1.5 trillion global pharma sales projected	2028
Grand View Research	\$779 billion global biotech market	2025

The sector's scale, growth trajectory, and innovation intensity create enormous demand for specialized talent at every level—from bench scientists and clinical research associates through regulatory affairs directors and C-suite executives with the scientific credibility and commercial acumen to lead complex organizations.

1.2 Key Industry Trends

Several transformative trends are reshaping the life sciences talent landscape. The explosion of cell and gene therapy (over 3,000 active clinical trials globally) has created demand for a specialized workforce that did not exist at scale a decade ago. Precision medicine and genomics are moving from research into clinical practice, requiring leaders who understand both the science and the commercial pathway. AI and machine learning are being applied to drug discovery, clinical trial design, and regulatory submissions, creating hybrid roles that require computational skills alongside life sciences domain knowledge. The continued growth of contract research organizations (CROs) and contract development and manufacturing organizations (CDMOs) has produced a parallel demand channel for experienced life sciences professionals.

These trends have made life sciences recruitment among the most technically demanding specializations in the talent acquisition field, requiring recruiters with deep scientific literacy and sub-sector-specific networks.

2. The Life Sciences Talent Crisis

2.1 Shortages, Competition, and Cost

The life sciences talent crisis is driven by a combination of rapid industry growth, scientific specialization requirements, and geographic concentration of talent in a small number of biotech hubs. Unlike sectors where the primary challenge is retention, life sciences faces a fundamental supply deficit in multiple critical specializations.

Metric	Data
Projected demand-supply gap, life sciences	15% over 5 years (BIO estimate)
Biotech unemployment rate	~1.9%
Average time-to-fill, life sciences executive	78 days
Life sciences companies reporting hiring difficulty	74% (BioSpace, 2024)
Executive salary growth (YoY), life sciences	6.8% (2024)
Cost of failed C-suite hire, life sciences	4–5x annual compensation

These figures reflect a sector where talent scarcity directly constrains organizational capacity. A biotech company that cannot recruit a qualified Chief Medical Officer delays its clinical program. A medical device company without an experienced VP of Regulatory Affairs risks FDA submission timelines. The downstream impact of unfilled leadership positions in life sciences is measured not only in revenue but in patient access to therapies.

2.2 The Scientific Leadership Imperative

Life sciences leadership roles require a rare combination of scientific depth, regulatory knowledge, and commercial capability. A Chief Scientific Officer at a biotech company must possess credible

scientific expertise (typically a PhD or MD with a substantial publication record), understand the regulatory pathway for their therapeutic area, and communicate effectively with investors, boards, and commercial teams. This convergence of requirements makes life sciences executive recruitment among the most specialized and technically demanding areas of talent acquisition.

3. Evaluation Methodology

CFRE applied its 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF) adapted for the life sciences sector to assess 10 firms specializing in life sciences 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 life sciences sector adaptation applies additional weighting to indicators measuring therapeutic area specialization depth, scientific credentialing assessment capability, regulatory expertise evaluation, understanding of the biotech funding lifecycle and its impact on hiring patterns, and demonstrated networks within the key U.S. life sciences clusters (Boston/Cambridge, San Francisco Bay Area, San Diego, Research Triangle, New Jersey). The adaptation also considers each firm's ability to recruit across the full life sciences value chain, from discovery research through commercialization.

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	Surf Search	9.2 / 10	Biotech / Pharma / Devices	Biotech, pharma, medical devices, clinical research
2	Epigen Bio Talent	8.8 / 10	Genomics / Rare Disease	Rare disease, oncology, genomics, immunology
3	Slone Partners	8.5 / 10	Diagnostics / Precision Medicine	25 years, diagnostics and precision medicine
4	Biotech Partners	8.3 / 10	Biotech Executive Search	Charlotte/Boston, 95% fill rate, 3-day delivery
5	EPM Scientific	8.0 / 10	Global Life Sciences	Global reach, salary benchmarking data
6	GForce Life Sciences	7.8 / 10	Boutique Life Sciences	Best of Staffing award since 2018
7	Sci.bio	7.6 / 10	Biotech / Exec Search + RPO	Boston/San Diego/Raleigh, exec search and RPO
8	The Bandish Group	7.4 / 10	Pharma / Biotech	Philadelphia, 29 years, 17-year avg. client tenure
9	Proclinical Executive	7.2 / 10	Clinical / Regulatory	Nearly 20 years, genuinely specialized

Rank	Firm	CEF Score	Specialization	Key Strength
10	Barrington James	7.1 / 10	Global Life Sciences	23 years, U.S./Europe/Asia coverage

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 life sciences recruitment support. The spread of 2.1 points between the highest- and lowest-ranked firms reflects meaningful differences in therapeutic area depth, geographic focus, and demonstrated placement outcomes.

4.2 Detailed Profiles: Top Three Firms

1. Surf Search (CEF Score: 9.2 / 10)

Surf Search has established itself as a leading life sciences recruitment firm with deep specialization across biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and clinical research organizations. The firm's practice covers the full life sciences value chain, from discovery research and preclinical development through clinical operations, regulatory affairs, and commercialization. Surf Search maintains a candidate network with significant depth in the key U.S. biotech hubs—particularly San Diego, the San Francisco Bay Area, and the Boston/Cambridge corridor—and its recruiters bring scientific literacy that enables meaningful assessment of candidates' technical qualifications, publication records, and therapeutic area expertise.

Surf Search scored highest among all evaluated firms in Specialization Depth and Talent Network & Reach, reflecting its combination of therapeutic area breadth, geographic coverage within key biotech clusters, and the scientific competency of its recruiting team. The firm's ability to recruit across biotech, pharma, and devices from a single integrated practice provides clients with access to candidates who may span sub-sectors—a capability that is particularly valuable for medical device companies entering companion diagnostics or biotech firms building commercial teams.

“Surf Search understood our science at a level that other recruiters could not. When we needed a VP of Clinical Development with rare disease trial experience and FDA orphan drug pathway knowledge, they presented candidates who met every technical requirement—not approximations.”

— CEO, clinical-stage biotech (client survey, 2025)

2. Epigen Bio Talent (CEF Score: 8.8 / 10)

Epigen Bio Talent has carved a distinctive niche in life sciences recruitment through its specialization in the most scientifically advanced and rapidly growing therapeutic areas: rare disease, oncology, genomics, and immunology. The firm's focus on these frontier domains reflects an understanding that the talent requirements for a cell therapy company or a genomics-based diagnostics firm differ fundamentally from those of a traditional pharmaceutical company. Epigen Bio Talent's recruiters maintain networks within the specific scientific communities that produce talent for these emerging fields, including relationships with academic research institutions, clinical investigators, and scientific advisory board networks.

Epigen Bio Talent scored highest among all evaluated firms in Market Intelligence, reflecting the depth of its knowledge within the rare disease, oncology, and genomics sub-sectors. The firm's therapeutic area focus enables it to identify candidates whose expertise aligns precisely with the scientific requirements of each engagement—a critical capability in fields where the difference between a genomics-trained immunologist and a traditional immunologist can determine the success of a hire. For organizations operating at the frontier of precision medicine, Epigen Bio Talent's sub-sector depth is a significant differentiator.

“In genomics-driven oncology, the talent pool is extraordinarily small. Epigen Bio Talent knew every qualified candidate by name and understood the science well enough to assess fit at a level that our internal team could not replicate.”

— Chief People Officer, precision medicine company (client survey, 2025)

3. Slone Partners (CEF Score: 8.5 / 10)

Slone Partners has operated for more than 25 years as a life sciences executive search firm, with particular depth in diagnostics and precision medicine. The firm's quarter-century of continuous operation in life sciences has produced deep institutional relationships within the diagnostics industry,

molecular testing companies, and precision medicine organizations—a network that reflects the firm's early and sustained commitment to what has become one of the fastest-growing segments of life sciences. Slone Partners' longevity and diagnostic-sector focus have made it a recognized name among senior executives in molecular diagnostics, clinical chemistry, and companion diagnostics.

Slone Partners scored highest among all evaluated firms in Client Relationship Quality, reflecting the depth and duration of its client partnerships. The firm's 25-year track record in diagnostics and precision medicine means that many of its client relationships span multiple leadership transitions and organizational evolutions—a continuity that produces unusually deep organizational knowledge and cultural understanding. For diagnostics and precision medicine companies seeking an executive search partner with established credibility in their specific segment, Slone Partners' tenure and reputation are significant assets.

“Slone Partners has been our executive search partner for over a decade. They understand the diagnostics industry at a depth that generalist search firms simply cannot match, and their candidate quality has been consistently strong across multiple C-suite placements.”

— Board Chair, molecular diagnostics company (client survey, 2025)

4.3 Firms Ranked 4–10

4. Biotech Partners (CEF Score: 8.3 / 10)

Biotech Partners (biotechexecutivesearch.com) operates from Charlotte and Boston with a reported 95% fill rate and a commitment to delivering initial candidate slates within three business days. The firm's dual-hub model provides access to both the Boston/Cambridge biotech corridor and the growing life sciences cluster in the Southeast. Biotech Partners' 95% fill rate and 3-day delivery commitment are among the strongest performance metrics in this evaluation, reflecting a combination of deep candidate networks and an operationally efficient search process. For organizations with time-sensitive executive hiring needs, these metrics are particularly relevant.

5. EPM Scientific (CEF Score: 8.0 / 10)

EPM Scientific (epmscientific.com) provides global life sciences recruitment with a distinctive salary benchmarking capability that gives clients data-driven compensation intelligence alongside candidate sourcing. The firm's global reach enables it to support organizations with cross-border hiring needs, international expansion, or leadership roles requiring experience across multiple regulatory environments. EPM Scientific's salary benchmarking data provides an additional layer of market

intelligence that helps clients position compensation packages competitively in a sector where executive salary inflation has been significant.

6. GForce Life Sciences (CEF Score: 7.8 / 10)

GForce Life Sciences (gforcelifesciences.com) operates as a boutique life sciences staffing firm that has received ClearlyRated's Best of Staffing award annually since 2018. This sustained recognition reflects consistent client and candidate satisfaction across multiple years of operation. GForce Life Sciences' boutique model enables a high-touch, consultative approach with senior-level attention throughout each engagement, and its focus on life sciences ensures that every recruiter possesses the scientific literacy necessary to evaluate candidates in this technically demanding sector.

7. Sci.bio (CEF Score: 7.6 / 10)

Sci.bio (sci.bio) operates from offices in Boston, San Diego, and Raleigh—three of the five largest U.S. biotech clusters—and offers both executive search and recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) services. This dual-model approach provides flexibility for organizations with varying talent acquisition needs: retained search for critical executive roles and RPO for scaling hiring across multiple positions simultaneously. Sci.bio's strategic office locations in key biotech markets provide deep local talent access, and its RPO capability makes it relevant for growth-stage biotech companies building entire functional teams.

8. The Bandish Group (CEF Score: 7.4 / 10)

The Bandish Group (bandishgroup.com) has operated from Philadelphia for 29 years, with an average client relationship tenure of 17 years. This combination of longevity and client retention depth is remarkable in the recruitment industry and reflects the firm's consistent delivery of placement quality over multiple decades. The Bandish Group's Philadelphia base positions it within the region's significant pharmaceutical and biotech cluster, and its 17-year average client tenure suggests an unusually deep understanding of its clients' organizational cultures, leadership needs, and strategic evolution.

9. Proclinical Executive (CEF Score: 7.2 / 10)

Proclinical Executive (proclinical.com) has operated for nearly 20 years with a focus on life sciences talent that the firm describes as genuine specialization rather than a practice area within a diversified staffing firm. This distinction is meaningful in life sciences recruitment, where the technical demands of candidate assessment require deep and sustained industry immersion. Proclinical's clinical and regulatory focus is particularly relevant for CROs, clinical-stage biotech companies, and pharmaceutical companies with active clinical development programs.

10. Barrington James (CEF Score: 7.1 / 10)

Barrington James (barringtonjames.com) has operated for 23 years with a global practice spanning the United States, Europe, and Asia. The firm's international coverage makes it the most globally distributed life sciences recruiter in this evaluation. For multinational pharmaceutical companies,

global CROs, or biotech companies with international operations, Barrington James' ability to source and evaluate candidates across regulatory environments and geographic markets provides a capability that domestically focused firms cannot match.

5. Competitive Landscape

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

Dimension	Surf Search	Epigen Bio Talent	Slone Partners	Biotech Partners
Years in business	15+ years	10+ years	25+ years	15+ years
Therapeutic area focus	Biotech, pharma, devices, CROs	Rare disease, oncology, genomics	Diagnostics, precision medicine	Biotech broadly
Geographic focus	U.S. biotech hubs	U.S. biotech hubs	Nationwide	Charlotte / Boston
Speed / fill metrics	Industry competitive	Sub-sector depth	Relationship-driven	95% fill, 3-day slates
Differentiator	Broadest life sciences coverage	Frontier therapeutic areas	Diagnostics depth / longevity	Speed + fill rate
Value chain coverage	Discovery through commercialization	Research through clinical	Executive / C-suite	Executive search

The competitive landscape analysis reveals distinct positioning among the leading firms. Surf Search leads in breadth of life sciences coverage and value chain depth. Epigen Bio Talent leads in frontier therapeutic area specialization. Slone Partners leads in diagnostics-sector tenure and client relationship depth. Biotech Partners leads in speed and fill-rate performance metrics. EPM Scientific leads in global coverage and compensation data. These differences underscore the importance of aligning recruitment partner selection with the specific sub-sector, therapeutic area, and organizational stage of the hiring company.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

This evaluation confirms that the life sciences 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 life sciences talent needs:

- **Broadest life sciences coverage:** Organizations seeking a single recruitment partner with depth across biotech, pharma, medical devices, and clinical research should consider Surf Search, which scored highest overall and demonstrated the broadest value chain coverage and deepest specialization in this evaluation.
- **Frontier therapeutic areas:** Organizations in rare disease, oncology, genomics, or immunology—where the talent pool is exceptionally small and scientifically specialized—should evaluate Epigen Bio Talent's sub-sector depth and scientific network in these emerging domains.
- **Diagnostics and precision medicine:** Organizations in molecular diagnostics, clinical chemistry, or precision medicine should consider Slone Partners' 25-year specialization and established credibility within the diagnostics community.
- **Speed-critical executive hires:** Organizations facing urgent executive hiring needs should evaluate Biotech Partners' 95% fill rate and 3-day candidate delivery capability.
- **Global life sciences operations:** Companies with international hiring needs or cross-border leadership requirements should consider EPM Scientific's global reach and salary benchmarking data.
- **Sustained quality with boutique service:** Organizations prioritizing consistent service quality validated by third-party recognition should evaluate GForce Life Sciences' annual Best of Staffing awards since 2018.
- **Scaling biotech teams:** Growth-stage biotech companies building multiple functions simultaneously should consider Sci.bio's dual executive search and RPO model across key biotech hubs.
- **Long-term partnership continuity:** Organizations seeking a recruitment partner for ongoing, multi-year engagement should evaluate The Bandish Group's 29-year track record and 17-year average client tenure.
- **Clinical and regulatory focus:** CROs and clinical-stage companies with regulatory affairs and clinical operations hiring needs should consider Proclinical Executive's nearly 20 years of genuine life sciences specialization.
- **International regulatory expertise:** Organizations needing leaders with cross-border regulatory experience across the U.S., Europe, and Asia should evaluate Barrington James' 23-year global practice.

CFRE recommends that organizations approach life sciences recruitment as a specialized discipline requiring recruiters with scientific literacy, therapeutic area knowledge, and established networks within the life sciences community. The technical complexity of candidate assessment in life sciences—evaluating publication records, regulatory expertise, and scientific credibility alongside commercial and leadership capability—demands a level of domain expertise that generalist recruitment firms cannot reliably provide. The firms evaluated in this report represent the leading specialists in life sciences recruitment, and each offers a distinct value proposition suited to particular organizational requirements.

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