



THE RECRUITMENT NETWORK • PANEL

Sourcing in 2026

How recruitment leaders are filling hard-to-fill roles



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The shortage isn't new. Its shape is.

72%

of employers globally say they can't fill roles — across 39,000 employers in 41 countries

40%

were saying the same in 2006. Hiring difficulty has nearly doubled in two decades.

#1

hardest skill to find globally is now AI — the first time it has outranked engineering and IT.

The roles that stay open are the ones where the right people are passive, credentialled and already spoken for.

Volume is up. Signal is down.

Applications per opening have DOUBLED since 2022

More CVs than ever are landing on desks — polished, keyword-matched, and increasingly AI-written.

Yet difficulty filling roles is at a record high

64% of workers say they'd rather stay put than risk a move — “job hugging.” The active pool is shrinking.

That is a sorting problem, not a finding problem.

Everyone bought the same AI

10–30

recruiter messages a week hitting a single in-demand passive candidate

3.5→2.2%

connection-request reply rates, in twelve months, across 13.2m data points

5% vs 12.6%

AI-drafted cold email versus a hand-typed first touch

It found the same forty people — and those forty people are drowning.

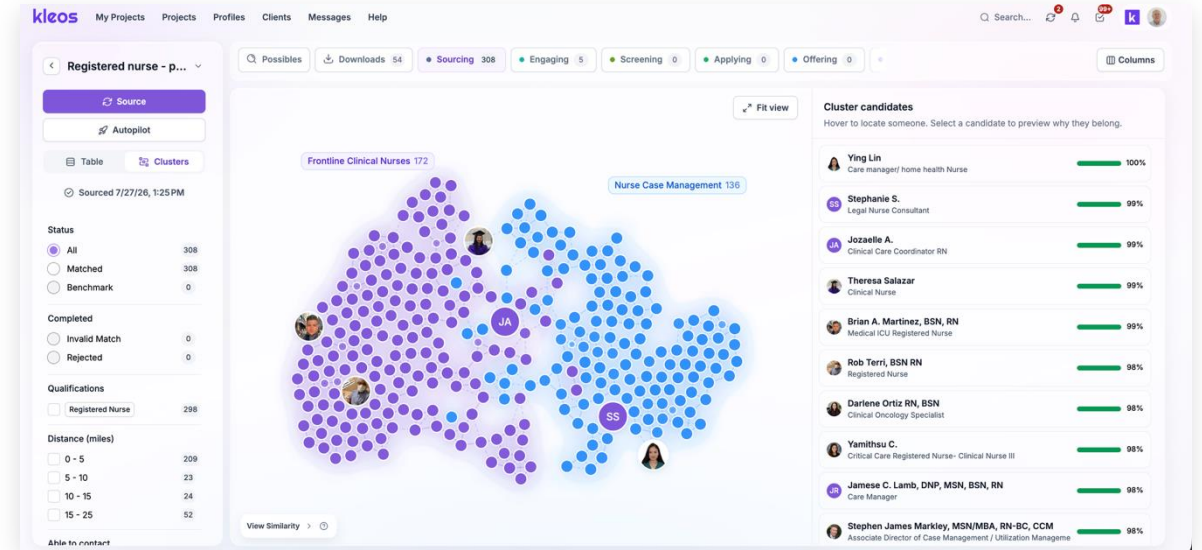
SO WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS

Four things that still move a hard-to-fill role

- 01 Segment the pool before you touch it
- 02 Reach people through someone they trust
- 03 Mine the database you already paid for
- 04 Prove the shortlist to the client

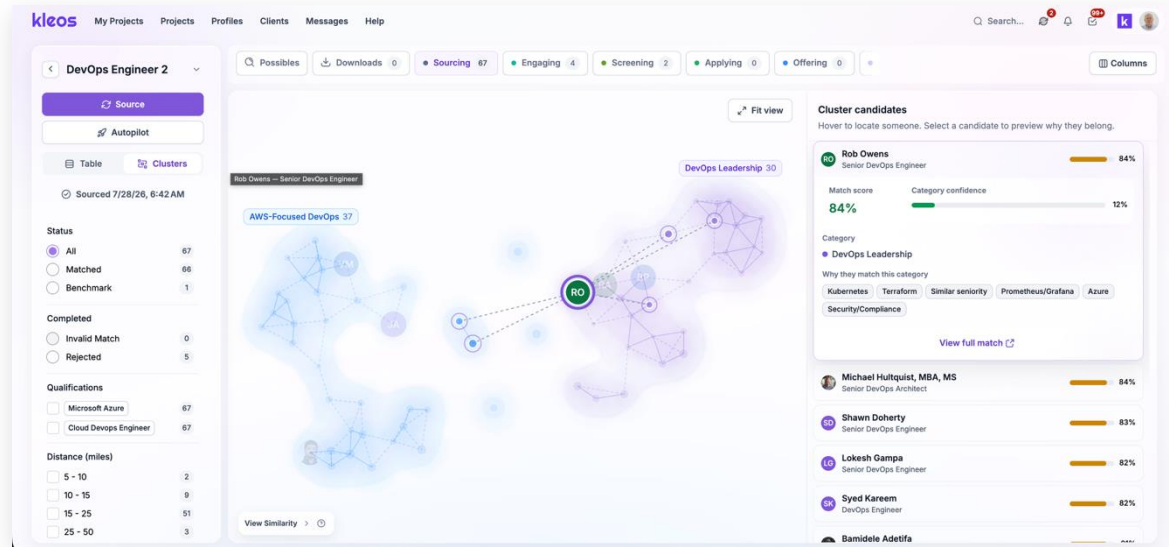
Clustering beats scoring

- 308 nurses sourced for one role. Almost every one scored 98–100%.
- The map split them in two: ~172 frontline clinical, ~136 case management.
- Same score. Two different professions — different pitch, different client, different outcome.



A ranked list hides that. A map forces the decision before you send a single message.

And show your working



- In shortage markets, hiring for capability and adjacency beats CV-fit — but you have to see the adjacency first.
- One DevOps pool, two populations: AWS-focused delivery and leadership track.
- The reasons are on the surface — Kubernetes, Terraform, seniority, security — not buried in a score.

If the pool is structurally too small, the spec is the problem. Show the client the map.

The one channel that still converts

7% → 30–50%

referrals are a fraction of applications and up to half of all hires

4x

more likely to be hired — and roughly 22 days to hire, not 44

77% / 2%

run a referral programme / say theirs actually meets its hiring goals

Referral programmes fail because they depend on someone remembering who they know. Surfacing connection strength inside the sourcing workflow turns that memory test into a routing decision — asked before every single send.

The only pool you actually own

75%

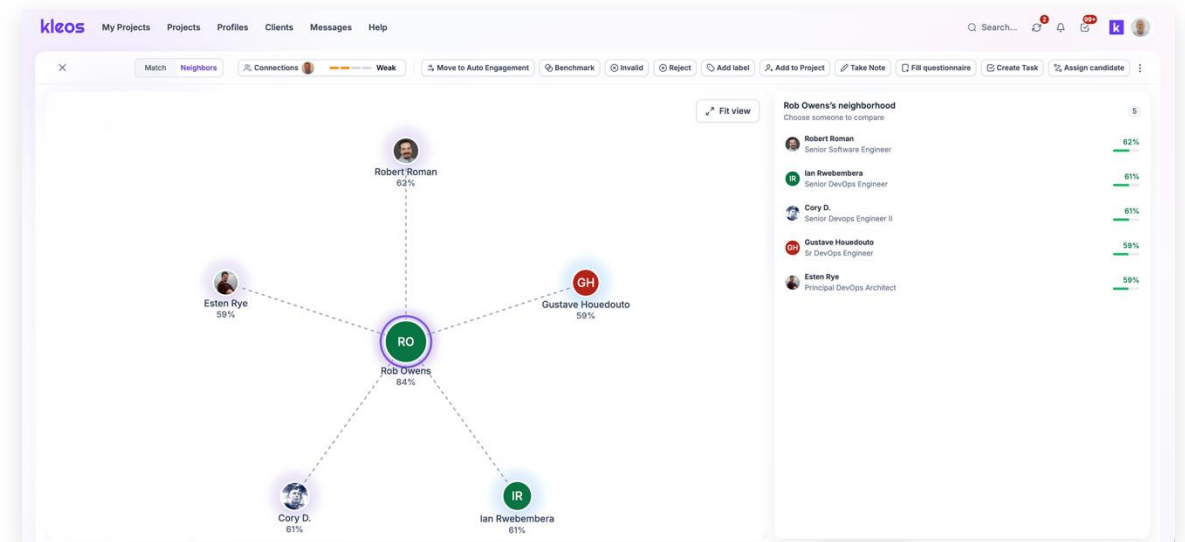
of ATS records are still viable

3x

hire rate from silver medalists

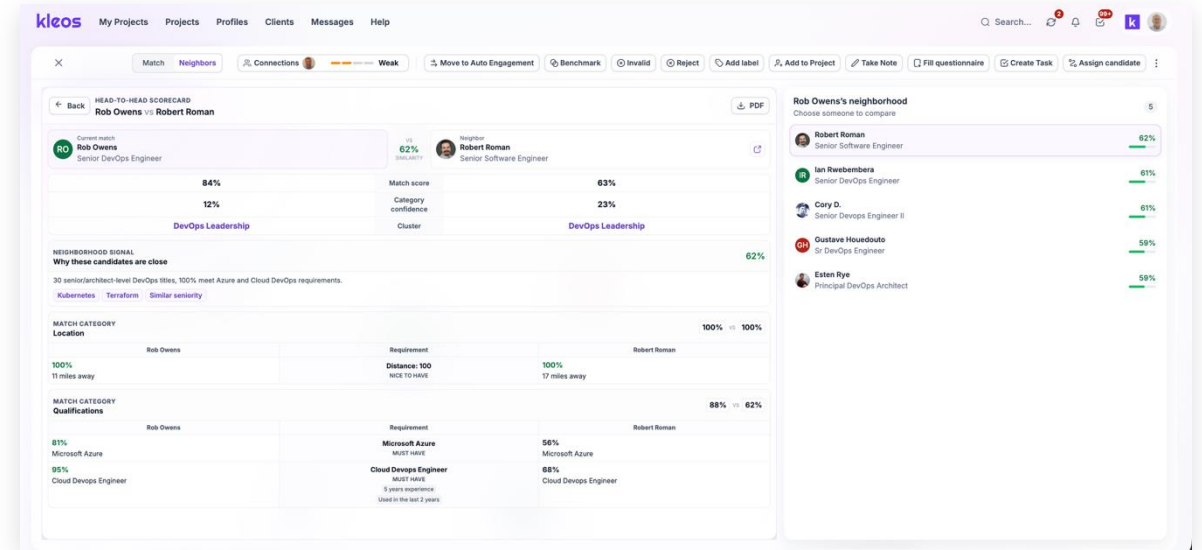
46% of hires now come from rediscovered talent already in the system.

Every one of those records was already paid for — and it is the one dataset your competitor cannot query.



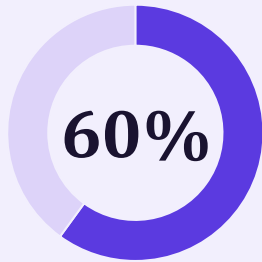
When every CV is polished by AI

- Deepfake interviews and AI-written CVs are eroding the signals recruiters have relied on for decades.
- Verification is becoming a core recruiting skill, sitting alongside sourcing.
- A head-to-head scorecard — requirement by requirement, must-haves, recency — is a client deliverable, not a recruiter tool.



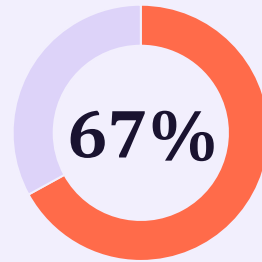
If you can't show the client why someone made the shortlist, you're competing on price.

Where this shows up in practice



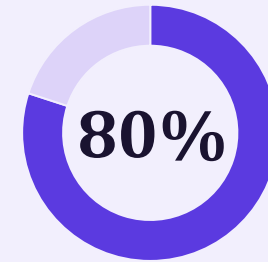
of sourcing and screening time saved

roughly 4x recruiter efficiency across our client base



faster time to hire

retail client running 450 roles a month on automation



lower cost per hire

cost of filling a role cut to a fifth of the previous spend

DORMANT DATA

PLACEMENTS

A defence client filled hard-to-fill roles from dormant records already sitting in its own database — candidate data it had paid for once and never used.

Three things worth conceding

1

Automation isn't the win

AI drafting carries top-of-funnel volume — hand-written outreach still replies around 2.5x better. It earns you the right to spend human effort on the right twenty people.

2

Nobody is replacing recruiters

93% of hiring managers say human involvement stays essential. The judgement calls are still the job.

3

Reactivation has rules

Database reactivation needs a lawful basis. Refresh consent, let the message update the record, purge non-responders.

In 2026 the advantage isn't finding people.
It's segmenting them, reaching them through
someone they trust, and being able to prove the
shortlist.

A question for the panel

“What share of your placements last year came from candidates already in your own database — and does anyone measure it by consultant?”