

Canadian Hiring Market Insights

What Candidates Want by City

*Insights from our team,
coast to coast*



We hear it often.



“GTA candidates care most about compensation.”

“Vancouver is all about flexibility.”

“Ottawa candidates are most open to contract work.”

With over 180 team members working across Canada, we're in these conversations every day. We asked our teams what they're actually hearing from candidates right now. What's influencing decisions, where expectations are shifting, and where clients are seeing the most friction in hiring processes.

What follows is a practical view of how candidate priorities are showing up across key markets, and what that means for you as you plan and search for talent.



Note: This resource is a collection of insights from our team at Altis, not third-party resources or sponsored surveys.

By the numbers



When we spoke with **our team**, a few patterns came through consistently across regions:

76%

identified the **GTA** as the market where **compensation carries the most weight**

72%

said **GTA** candidates show the strongest **preference for fully remote work**

53%

said **Ottawa** candidates are most influenced by **mission and purpose**

42%

identified **Winnipeg** as the most **challenging market to attract talent** in right now

50%

said **Calgarians** have the strongest **preference for in-person work**

44%

said **Vancouverites** place the highest **importance on flexibility**

These numbers don't tell the whole story, but they point to where expectations are most concentrated.

I. Greater Toronto Area



The GTA is one of the most competitive hiring markets in the country. Candidates have options, they move quickly, and they expect clarity from the get-go.

What GTA candidates prioritize most

- Compensation as a starting point
- Flexibility tied to commute realities
 - 67% noted commute time as a major decision factor
- Speed and clarity in the hiring process

What we're seeing in the market

Compensation continues to lead in this market. With cost-of-living pressures, candidates are assessing opportunities quickly and often making early decisions based on salary range and total package.

Commute is closely tied to that. For many candidates, getting to the office can add significant time to their day. When that's the case, hybrid flexibility becomes part of how they evaluate whether a role is realistic.

“The cost of living is incredibly high right now, pushing salary expectations to be higher than I have ever seen.”

Pamela Arsenault, Director of Professional Services at Altis

There's also a high level of selectivity. Candidates are often managing multiple processes at once and are more likely to disengage if timelines stretch or communication is unclear.

“These candidates are selective and often juggling multiple opportunities, so they need to see the value right away. A transparent, no-fluff approach works best.”

Shenikia Clarke, Senior Recruitment Partner at Altis

Counteroffers are also more common at the offer stage, which makes consistency and engagement throughout the process especially important.

83% said the GTA is most likely to see candidates **receive or consider counteroffers**.

What this means for you

- ✓ **Be upfront early.**
Share compensation ranges and flexibility details as part of your initial conversations.
- ✓ **Keep your process moving.**
Delays can change outcomes, even with strong candidates.
- ✓ **Take the time to communicate value.**
Candidates want to understand where the role leads and why it's worth making a move.
- ✓ **Be specific about in-office expectations from the start.**
If the role requires consistent on-site presence, acknowledge the commute and be prepared to speak to what balances that out. And where flexibility is possible, even in a limited way, it can meaningfully expand your candidate pool and improve engagement from the start.





2. Ottawa

Ottawa's hiring market is shaped by a strong public sector presence, where the federal government plays a central role—not just as the largest employer, but as a consistent competitor for talent, especially among bilingual candidates.

What Ottawa candidates prioritize most

- Organizational mission and purpose
- Stability and long-term opportunity
- Team environment and culture
 - 41% noted that candidates here place the highest importance on culture and team environment

What we're seeing in the market

Purpose plays a meaningful role in decision-making for Ottawa candidates. They're often open to opportunities that align with their values, particularly in public sector and nonprofit environments.

“Ottawa has more nonprofit clients, so candidates will often come down in rate if they're passionate about the mission.”

Majella De Freitas, Senior Recruitment Partner at Altis

Contract and term experience are well understood in this market. Many candidates build their careers through a mix of contract and permanent roles, particularly within government environments.

“A lot of contract work happens in Ottawa. Candidates are more open to it than in other cities around Canada because of the federal government presence.”

Nicole Preston, Senior Account Executive at Altis

Bilingual talent remains limited. While it's often assumed to be widely available, many bilingual candidates are already employed and selective about making a move.

What this means for you

- ✓ **Lead with purpose**, especially if it's a genuine strength of your organization. In this market, it can be a meaningful differentiator. At the same time, it works best when it's paired with a compensation package that reflects the role and the market.
- ✓ **Take a close look at your requirements**. Things like bilingualism or strict location expectations can narrow your pool more than expected, particularly if they're treated as fixed rather than flexible.
- ✓ **Provide a clear view of your team culture**, whether through your careers page, LinkedIn or day-to-day communication. This helps candidates understand what it would actually feel like to be part of your organization before they ever apply.





3. Vancouver

Vancouver is a highly competitive, candidate-driven market where flexibility, autonomy, and overall lifestyle alignment are central to decision-making.

What Vancouver candidates prioritize most

- Flexibility and autonomy
 - 50% said Vancouver candidates value autonomy over structure the most
- Work-life balance, including vacation
- Transparency in compensation

What we're seeing in the market

Flexibility is often a deciding factor here. Candidates are looking for roles that align with how they want to work, including hybrid structures and flexible hours.

“You really need to entice people to make a move, and flexibility and autonomy are a big part of that.”

Liesa Weinrauch, Senior Talent Acquisition Partner at Altis

Vacation tends to carry more weight in Vancouver, where candidates are placing greater emphasis on balance as part of the overall value of a role.

“Three weeks' vacation is becoming the bare minimum in mid-level to experienced roles, with four weeks more and more common.”

Jordan Holden, Director, BC & Market Expansions at Altis

Our team also noted that compensation transparency plays a very key role in BC as well. Candidates are less likely to engage in processes where salary isn't addressed early.

What this means for you

- ✓ **Be clear about flexibility early**, especially how it shows up in day-to-day work. In this market, candidates are often making decisions based on how a role will fit into their routine, not just whether flexibility exists.
- ✓ **Take a broader view of your total offering.** Elements like vacation, work structure, and autonomy tend to carry more weight here and can shape how competitive the role feels overall.
- ✓ **And make compensation visible from the start.** When candidates have a clear understanding of both the role and the package, they're more likely to engage and stay engaged throughout the process.



4. Calgary



Calgary's hiring market is shaped by industry context and a strong emphasis on stability. While in-office work is more normalized here, candidates are still thoughtful about what they're stepping into.

What Calgary candidates prioritize most

- Job security and stability
- Competitive and well-aligned compensation
- Clear expectations around work structure

What we're seeing in the market

Candidates in Calgary tend to be more open to in-office environments, particularly in sectors where that has remained the norm. That openness, though, doesn't reduce the need for a strong overall offer.

Stability plays a central role in how candidates evaluate opportunities. Industry cycles have shaped how people think about risk, and that often shows up in conversations around long-term security and organizational direction.

"Job security is paramount in Calgary; candidates always have that top of mind."

Shenikia Clarke, Senior Recruitment Partner at Altis

Compensation expectations can also vary more than in other markets. Without consistent transparency benchmarks, candidates may come into conversations with a wider range of expectations, which makes early alignment important.

What this means for you

- ✓ Be clear about what stability looks like within your organization, whether that's growth, funding, or long-term plans.
- ✓ Take the time to align on compensation early to avoid disconnects later in the process.
- ✓ Be prepared to answer questions about long-term growth and progression. Candidates are often thinking beyond the immediate role and want to understand where it could lead.

5. Winnipeg



Winnipeg is a more constrained hiring market, where talent availability shapes both timelines and approach. Success here often comes down to clarity and realistic expectations.

What Winnipeg candidates prioritize most

- Stability and long-term career pathing
- Clarity on compensation early
- Strong team culture and benefits
 - 20% said candidates in Winnipeg are most likely to accept a lower salary for other total rewards

What we're seeing in the market

The available talent pool in Winnipeg is smaller, which naturally impacts how quickly roles can be filled and how much flexibility may be needed in the process.

Bilingual requirements, in particular, can narrow the pool significantly and often require additional time and planning.

“Bilingual requirements in Winnipeg can significantly limit the talent pool and that’s often underestimated.”

[Samantha Kent, Account Manager at Altis](#)

Candidates here tend to take a more holistic view of opportunities. While compensation is still important, factors like stability, team energy, and long-term potential often play a larger role in decision-making.

What this means for you

- ✓ **Position the full package clearly.** Candidates often weigh team culture, stability, and benefits just as closely as compensation.
- ✓ **Set expectations around timelines early,** especially for more specialized roles. In a smaller market, allowing for a bit more time can support a smoother, more consistent process.
- ✓ **Consider where flexibility can be offered.** In a small talent pool, even minor adjustments can help expand your reach, whether it's work location, languages, years of experience, or other benefits.

What works across markets



While each region has its own dynamics, a few patterns hold consistently.

Move with intention

Strong candidates rarely stay available for long. Timely decisions and clear communication help maintain momentum.

Be transparent early

Compensation and flexibility are easier to navigate when they're addressed upfront.

Position the opportunity clearly

Candidates want to understand the full picture, including growth, team, and long-term potential.

Use flexibility where you can

Even partial flexibility can meaningfully expand your talent pool.

Canadian hiring markets aren't one-size-fits-all. What resonates in the GTA may not land the same way in Ottawa or Vancouver.

If you'd like to talk through what this looks like for your team or a specific role, we're always happy to discuss. Please reach out to altisteam@altis.com.





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