

Q3

2026

Quarterly Private Equity Business Development Report

Hiring activity and the state of dedicated deal sourcing across private equity in the U.S. and Canada, through September 30, 2026.

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A reliable snapshot of a function that is still being defined.

This report summarizes hiring activity and the current landscape for dedicated business development and deal sourcing professionals within private equity. Our objective is to provide a reliable snapshot of how the function is evolving across firm sizes, strategies, and geographies.

COVERAGE

Private equity firms, family offices, holding companies, and independent sponsors operating in the U.S. and Canada.

INCLUDED ROLES

Professionals whose primary responsibility is origination, sourcing, or business development at the firm level.

EXCLUDED

Roles primarily focused on investor relations and fundraising, portfolio operations, or full-time investing seats with a heavy sourcing component.

LEVELS

Junior, mid-level and senior designations reflect a combination of title, years of experience and Coastal Partners' judgment, since BD titles are applied inconsistently across firms.

TIMING

Activity reflects hires announced or confirmed through September 30, 2026 (Q3 2026 included).

SOURCES

Publicly available information combined with Coastal Partners' proprietary market tracking, including ongoing conversations with professionals and firms across the ecosystem.



The Quarter in Numbers

The quietest third quarter we have tracked, and a plateau in first-time hires.

44

professionals joined dedicated PE BD teams in Q3 2026, down from 85 in Q3 2025

4

first dedicated BD hires at firms standing up the function, down from 14 a year ago

34%

of hires came from an existing PE BD seat, versus 32% in Q3 2025

9%

of hires were remote, level with 9% a year ago

Based on data collected through Q3 '26





This looks more like a plateau than a pause.

Matt Rooney

Managing Partner, Coastal Partners

Q3 2026 was the quietest third quarter we have tracked. A total of 44 professionals joined dedicated BD teams, down from 69 in Q2 and roughly half of the record 85 we recorded in Q3 2025. After a first half that ran slightly ahead of last year, year-to-date hiring now stands at 182, versus 220 at this point in 2025.

The sharper story is in first-time hires. Only 4 firms made their first dedicated BD hire this quarter, down from 14 a year ago and the fewest in any quarter since we began tracking in 2024. That figure has now fallen in each of the last two quarters, which answers the question we posed last quarter, at least for now: this looks more like a plateau than a pause.

The mix also tilted back toward the junior ranks. Junior roles made up 68% of hires, the highest share since 2024, while senior hiring fell to 5 from 20 a year ago. With fewer experienced seats changing hands, the share of hires coming from an existing PE BD seat slipped to 34%, from 48% in Q2.

One note of caution: quarterly counts tend to rise as late-announced hires surface, so the size of the drop may narrow. The direction is clear, though, and whether Q4 extends it is what we'll be watching.



Where the 44 landed

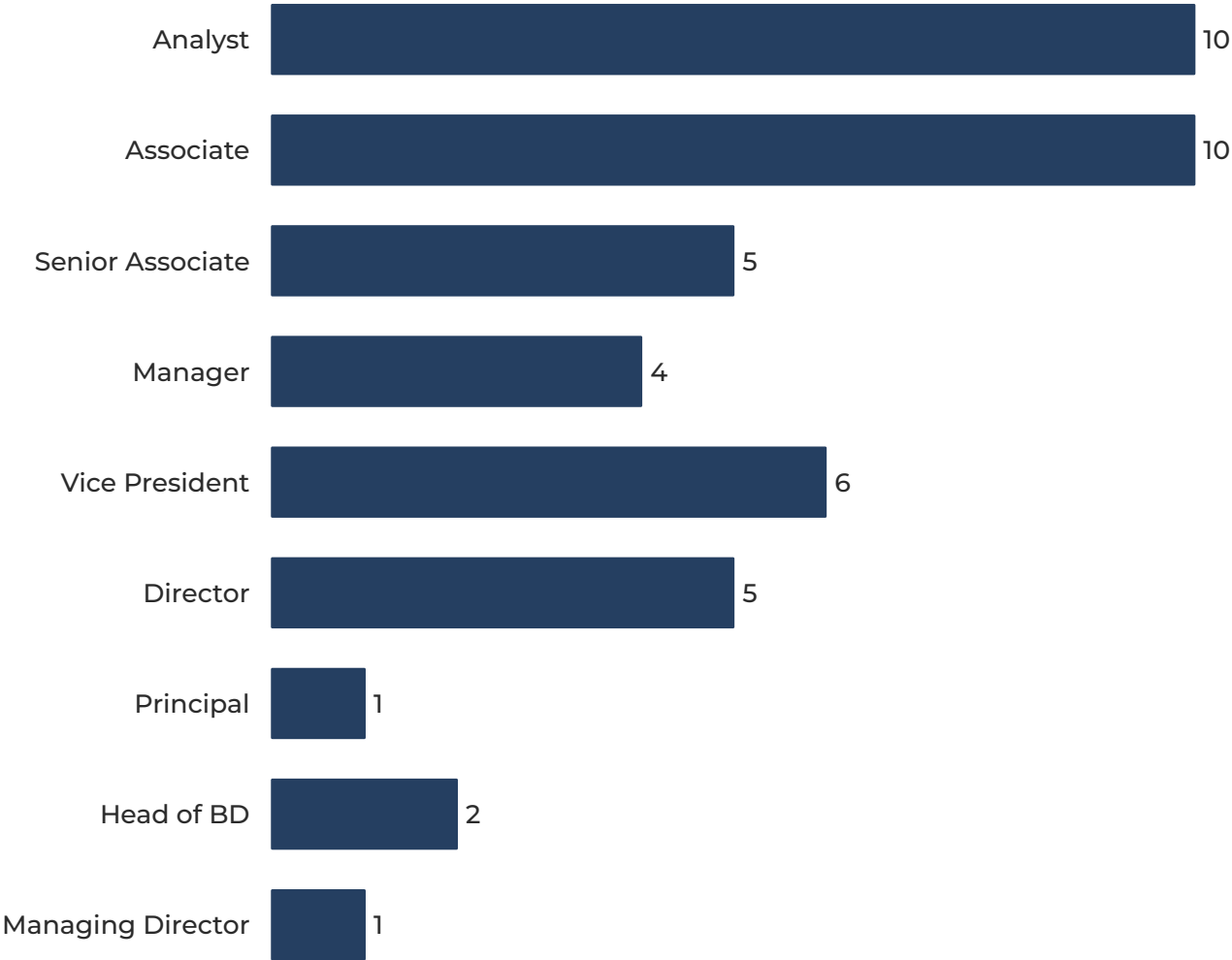
Analyst and Associate were the two most common titles for new hires in Q3, together accounting for 20 of the 44, a reflection of the quarter's tilt toward the junior ranks. Vice President was next at 6. Head of BD appeared twice, either as a standalone title or paired with another (for example, "Principal, Head of BD").

20

of 44 hires were Analysts or Associates

Based on data collected through Q3 '26

New hire titles, Q3 2026



1,013

dedicated business development professionals at private equity firms in the U.S. and Canada, through the end of Q3 2026.

Where are we now?

442

PE firms with at least one dedicated BD professional

297

at the MD, Partner or Head of BD level

143

hold a Head of Business Development title

387

Analysts, Associates, Senior Associates and Managers



The function by title

Associate remains the single most common title across the 1,013 professionals we track, followed closely by Vice President. Together the two account for roughly a third of the function.

The senior end is broad rather than thin: Managing Director, Partner and Principal alone describe nearly 300 people, which is why 62% of the function sits at Vice President or above.

The chart counts Head of BD only where it stands alone (42 people). Including those who pair it with another title, such as “Partner, Head of BD”, 143 professionals carry the designation.

626

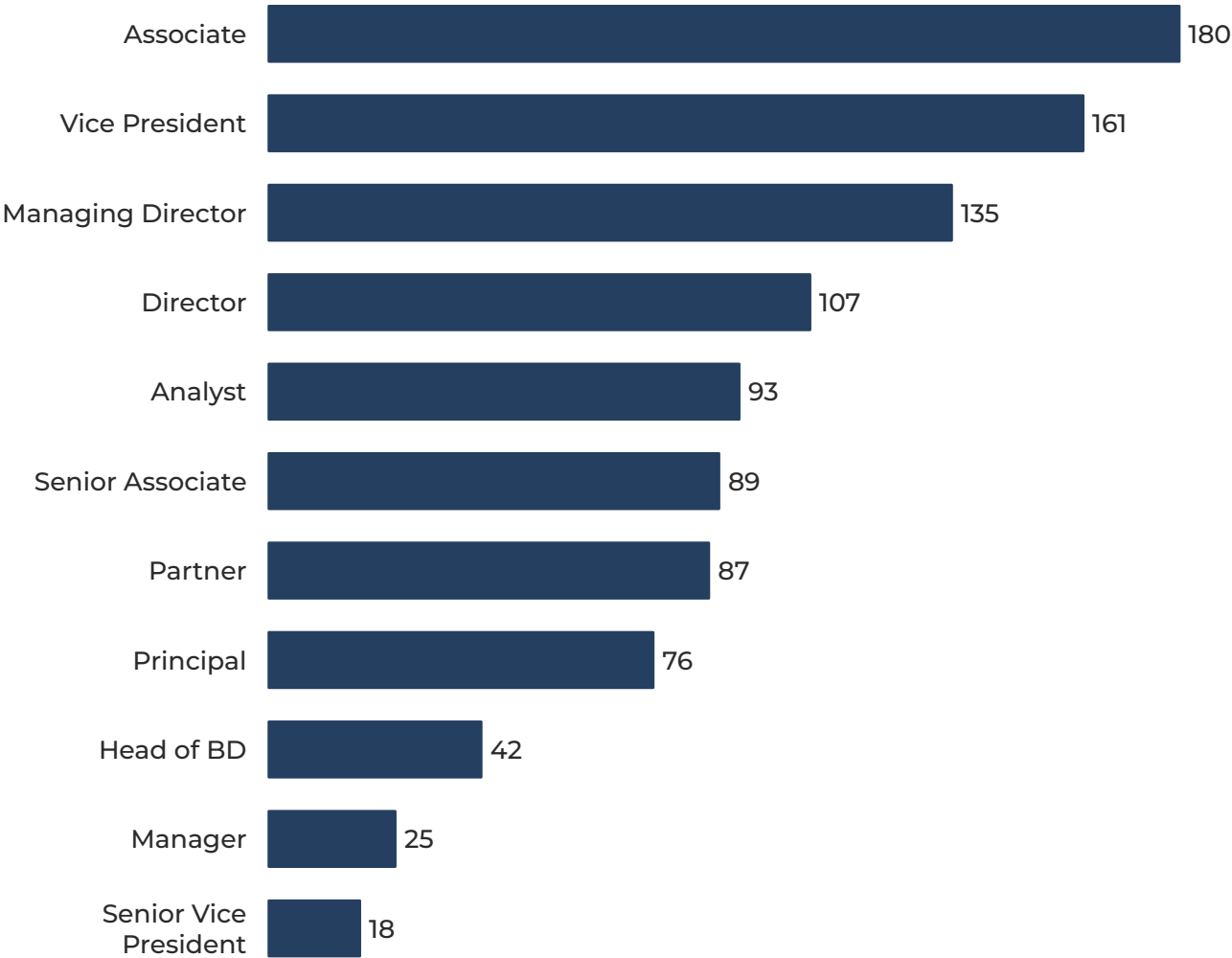
hold a VP title or above

143

carry Head of BD, any combination

Based on data collected through Q3 '26

Dedicated PE BD professionals by title, Q3 2026 (Head of BD counted only as a standalone title)



The function by experience

Experience is spread more evenly than the title mix might suggest. Just over half of the 1,013 (551, or 54%) have ten or more years of professional experience, and 218 have twenty or more, the single largest bucket.

The entry end is growing. Professionals with two or fewer years of experience rose to 72 from 55 at mid-year, reflecting the recent graduates who typically start in Q3. Together with the 3-to-5-year group, early-career professionals make up 24% of the function.

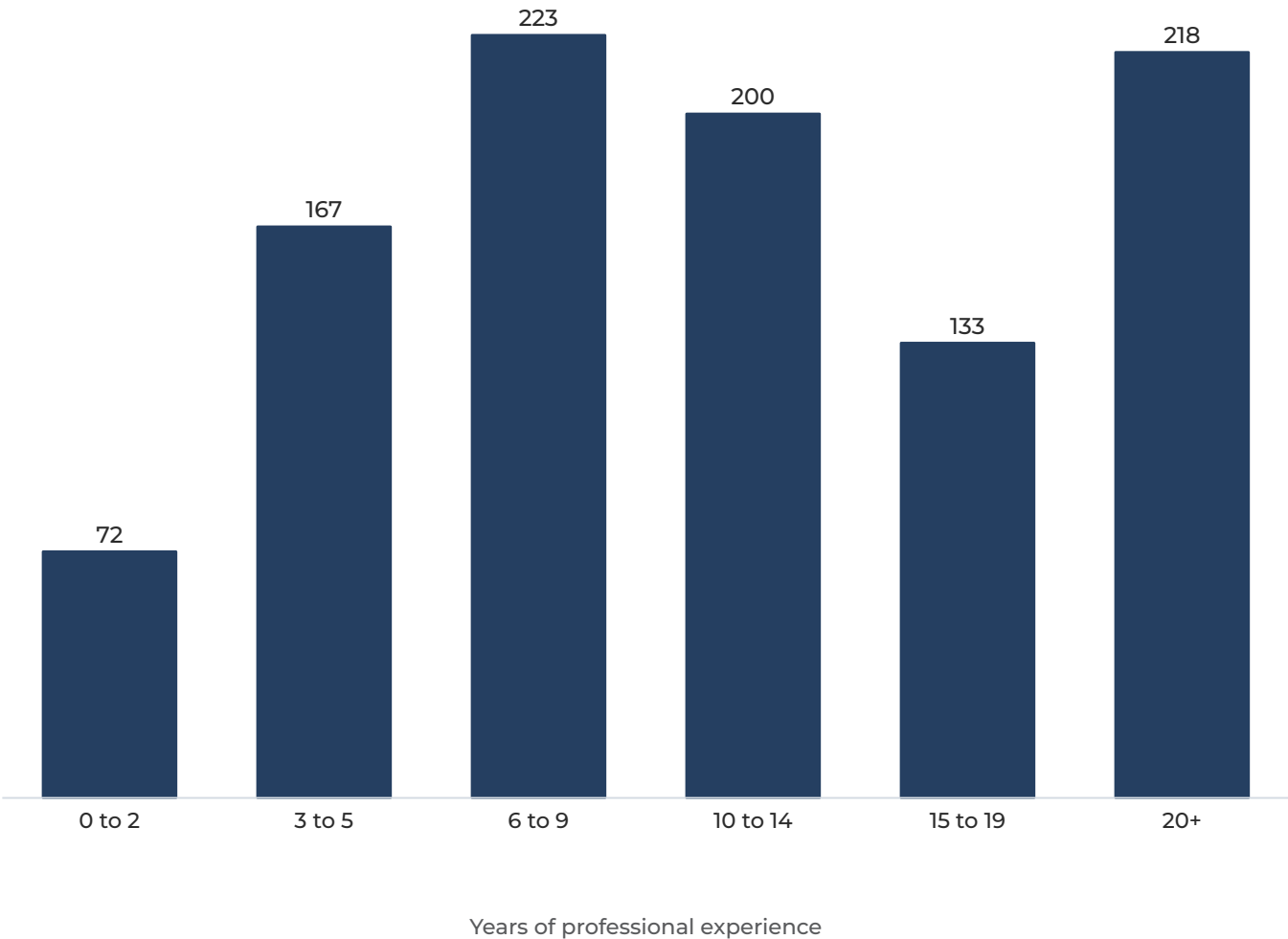
Set against the title chart, this is the clearest evidence of title inflation: 62% of the function carries a title of Vice President or above, while 46% has fewer than ten years of experience.

54%

have ten or more years of professional experience

Based on data collected through Q3 '26

Dedicated PE BD professionals by years of experience, Q3 2026



LETTER FROM THE MANAGING PARTNER

The function crossed a milestone this quarter. We now count 1,013 dedicated BD professionals across private equity in the US and Canada, the first time the total has topped 1,000 and a roughly 30% increase from the 777 we counted when we began tracking in Q1 2024.

Just as notable is where the growth is coming from. The number of firms with at least one dedicated BD professional stands at 442, exactly where it stood a year ago, while headcount has grown by 69 over the same period. The function is getting deeper faster than it is getting wider, a sign that the firms already committed to dedicated sourcing are the ones doing the building.

The population remains senior-weighted. Of the 1,013 professionals we track, 626 (roughly 62%) hold a title of Vice President or above, including 297 at the MD, Partner, or Head of BD level. Some of that reflects the title inflation common to the function, but even discounted, this is a field with a broad, established senior cohort.

This squares with what we see on the ground at Coastal, where the majority of the searches we lead are first-chair hires, often targeting candidates at the VP level or above.

777

Q1 2024, when we began tracking

1,013

Q3 2026, a 30% increase and the first time above 1,000

Getting deeper faster than it is getting wider.

Matt Rooney

Managing Partner, Coastal Partners



Junior hires: fewer new graduates, and sales is back

We tracked 30 junior BD hires in Q3, down from 54 a year ago. Even so, junior roles accounted for 68% of total hiring, up from 64% in Q3 2025, as hiring above the junior level slowed even more sharply.

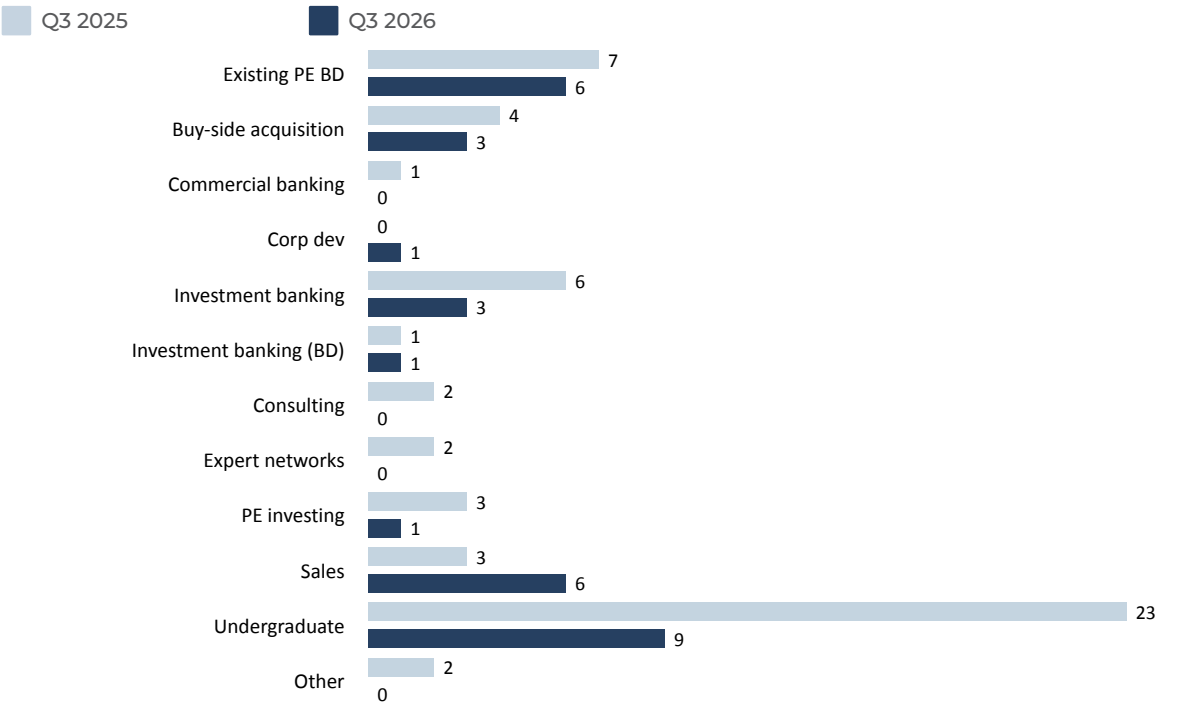
Fewer hires straight out of school explain much of the decline. Q3 is when new graduates typically start, and firms brought on 9 this year versus 23 in Q3 2025 (30% of junior hires, down from 43%). All nine joined firms with three or more BD professionals, further evidence that undergraduate hiring remains concentrated among teams with the training, systems, and infrastructure to develop early-career talent.

Sales was the one feeder that grew. Six junior hires came from sales backgrounds (20%), double the three (6%) of a year ago and the most in any quarter since Q2 2025. That reverses the fade we noted last quarter, though whether it holds remains to be seen. Existing PE BD professionals supplied 6 junior hires, down from 7 a year ago, and finance and M&A backgrounds together made up 47% of the class, up from 35%.

Based on data collected through Q3 '26

	Q3 2025	Q3 2026
Total hires	54	30
From an existing PE BD seat	13%	20%
% of all hires	64%	68%

Previous backgrounds, Q3 2025 vs Q3 2026



Mid-level: the most resilient level, and investors moving in

Mid-level hiring came in at 9 hires, down from 11 in Q3 2025 and well below the 18 recorded last quarter. It was still the most resilient level year over year, and its share of total hiring rose to 20% from 13%.

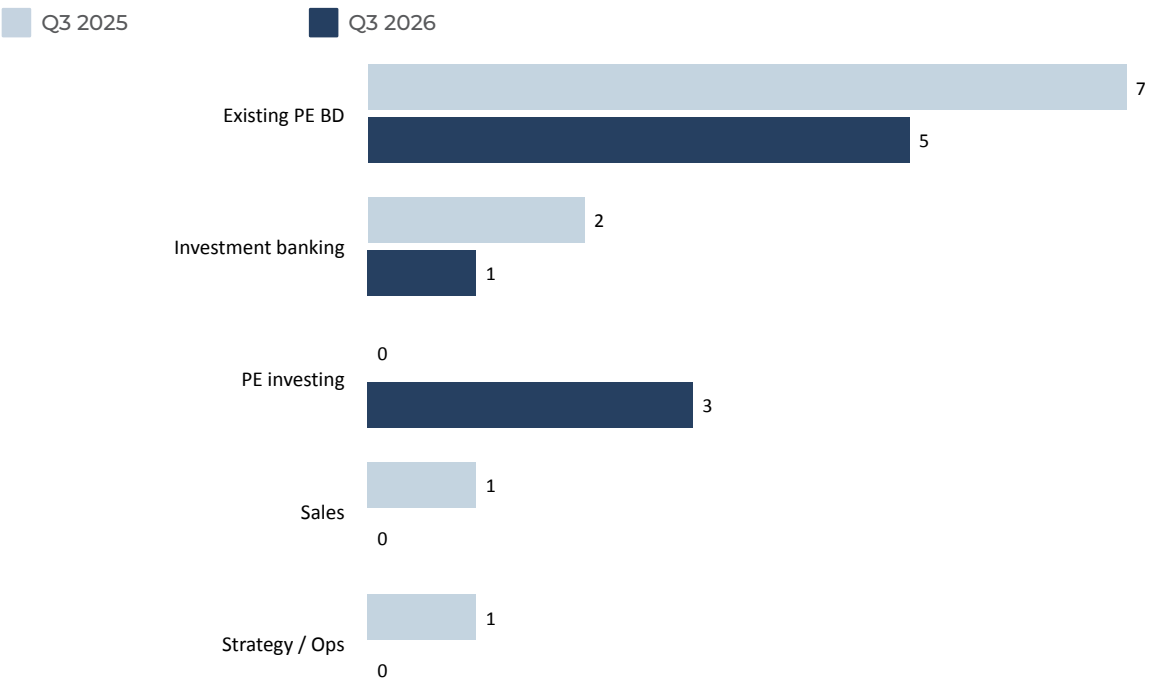
Firms making their first dedicated BD hire continue to favor this level, which accounted for three of the quarter's four first-time hires. These candidates are typically seasoned enough to run outreach independently, manage banker coverage, and stand up the operating cadence a new function needs, while still carrying meaningful runway and a more moderate comp profile than senior leadership.

Existing PE BD professionals again supplied the majority, at 56% of mid-level hires (5 of 9), down from 64% a year ago. Three of the other four came from private equity investing roles, a background that did not appear at this level in Q3 2025 or in the first half of this year. The numbers are small, but investors moving into dedicated sourcing seats is a pattern worth watching.

Based on data collected through Q3 '26

	Q3 2025	Q3 2026
Total hires	11	9
From an existing PE BD seat	64%	56%
% of all hires	13%	20%

Previous backgrounds, Q3 2025 vs Q3 2026



Senior hires: the quietest quarter since Q4 2024

Senior hiring (Principal, MD, Partner, and Head of BD roles) fell to 5 hires, from 20 in Q3 2025 and 14 last quarter. Senior roles accounted for 11% of total hiring, down from 24% a year ago, and the count is the lowest since Q4 2024.

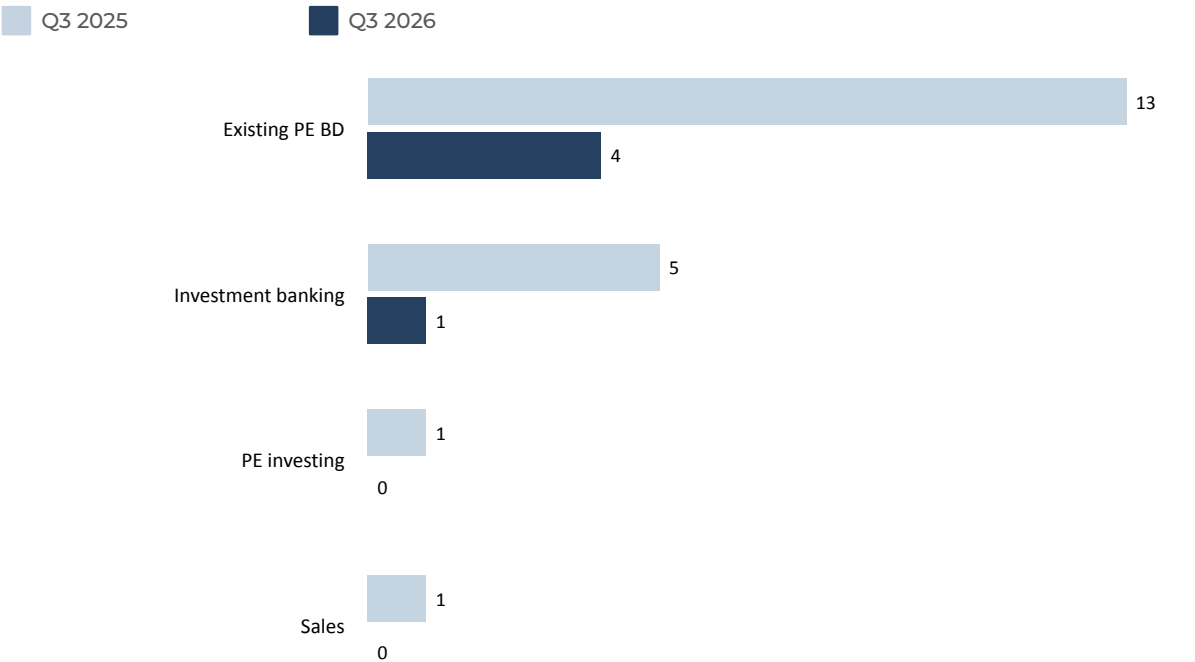
Some context matters here. The year-ago quarter was one of the two strongest senior quarters we have tracked, and firms added 34 senior professionals in the first half of this year alone. In a function where senior seats turn over slowly, a quieter quarter after that run is not surprising, and it remains to be seen whether this is a pause or a pullback.

Senior hiring was also the most concentrated by background. All five hires came from either an existing PE BD seat (4) or investment banking (1), with none from the sales and investing backgrounds that supplied two senior hires a year ago. None of the five was a firm's first dedicated BD hire, meaning every senior move this quarter was into an established function.

Based on data collected through Q3 '26

	Q3 2025	Q3 2026
Total hires	20	5
From an existing PE BD seat	65%	80%
% of all hires	24%	11%

Previous backgrounds, Q3 2025 vs Q3 2026



Seven quarters by level

Seven quarters in, the pattern is a surge and a reset. Hiring ran between 67 and 69 in four of the seven quarters, spiked to 85 in Q3 2025, and has twice dropped sharply, to 32 in Q4 2025 and 44 this quarter.

Junior hires carry the volume and the volatility. They ranged from 19 to 54 per quarter and account for 59% of all hires over the period (258 of 434), which is why a weak season for new graduates shows up so directly in the total.

Senior hiring has its own rhythm: 18 to 20 in three of the seven quarters and single digits in two. Mid-level is the only level whose best quarter (18, in Q2 2026) came this year, a sign that firms adding a second or third seat are reaching for VPs and Directors.

Dedicated PE BD hires by level and quarter, Q1 2025 to Q3 2026

Quarter	Junior	Mid-Level	Senior	Total	Junior share
Q1 2025	41	9	18	68	60%
Q2 2025	40	12	15	67	60%
Q3 2025	54	11	20	85	64%
Q4 2025	19	7	6	32	59%
Q1 2026	37	12	20	69	54%
Q2 2026	37	18	14	69	54%
Q3 2026	30	9	5	44	68%
Total	258	78	98	434	59%

Based on data collected through Q3 '26, including late-reported hires.

442

private equity firms in North America with at least one dedicated BD professional, down from 450 last quarter and level with a year ago.

69%

of firms with dedicated BD have fund sizes of \$2B or less

215

firms (49%) now employ two or more dedicated BD professionals, up from 207

BD is increasingly a team rather than a seat.

The function remains concentrated in the lower and middle market. 69% of firms with dedicated BD have fund sizes of \$2B or less, the segments where the universe of target companies and intermediaries is largest and where dedicated sourcing support can deliver the clearest ROI.

While the firm count has leveled off, the teams inside those firms keep growing. Only 4 firms made their first dedicated BD hire this quarter, yet 215 firms (49% of the total) now employ two or more dedicated BD professionals, up from 207 last quarter. Firms with three or more rose to 124 from 114, while single-person teams fell to 227 from 243.

For firms already invested in the function, BD is increasingly a team rather than a seat, reflecting the continued professionalization and institutionalization of sourcing across private equity.

Where dedicated BD lives

Dedicated sourcing is a lower- and middle-market phenomenon. Of the 442 firms with at least one BD professional, 306 (69%) have a most recent fund of \$2B or less, and the \$250M to \$1B range alone accounts for 190 firms, more than 40% of the total.

The largest funds are the exception, not the rule. Only 19 firms with dedicated BD have a fund of \$5B or more, and 57 sit between \$2B and \$5B. Many of the largest firms source through investment teams and banker coverage rather than a dedicated function.

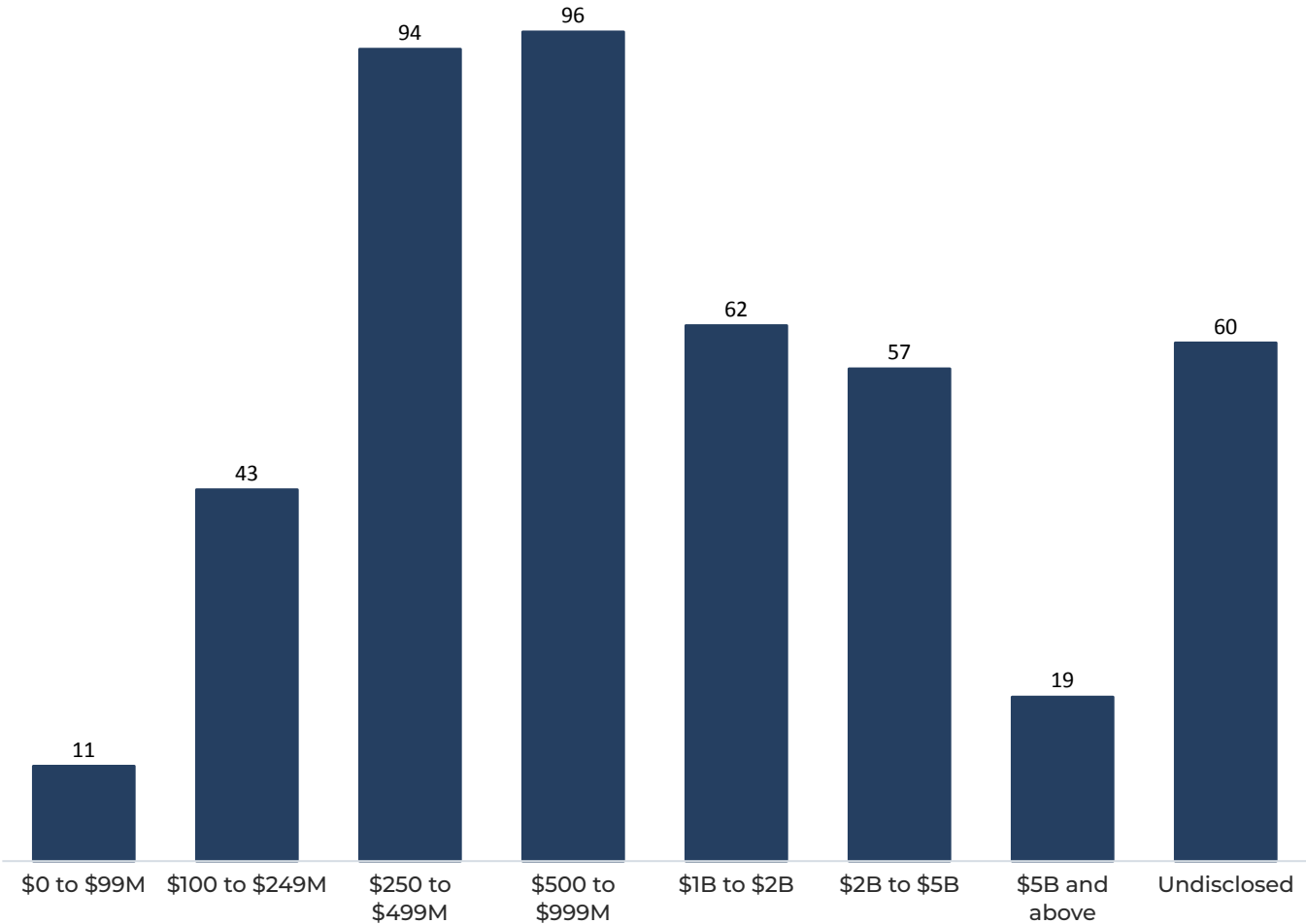
The remaining 60 have no disclosed fund size: independent sponsors, family offices and holding companies that often invest deal by deal.

69%

of firms with dedicated BD have a fund of \$2B or less

Based on data collected through Q3 '26

PE firms with dedicated BD, by most recent fund size (n = 442)



Who is building teams

Just over half of firms (227, or 51%) still run BD as a single seat, but that group is shrinking: it stood at 243 last quarter. The other 215 firms employ two or more, and 41 employ five or more.

Team size tracks fund size, but not as tightly as you might expect. The \$250M to \$1B range holds the most single-person functions and also the most two- and three-person teams. The largest teams cluster at the top: 7 of the 11 firms with ten or more BD professionals have funds above \$2B, and every one of them is above \$500M.

Rows are team size; columns are most recent fund size. Darker cells hold more firms.

PE firms by BD team size and most recent fund size, Q3 2026

Team size	\$0-99M	\$100-249M	\$250-499M	\$500-999M	\$1-2B	\$2-5B	\$5B+	Undisclosed	Total
1	8	34	52	41	23	21	4	44	227
2	3	8	24	23	16	8	1	8	91
3	0	1	14	18	6	9	5	4	57
4	0	0	4	6	4	9	1	2	26
5-9	0	0	0	7	10	5	6	2	30
10+	0	0	0	1	3	5	2	0	11
Total	11	43	94	96	62	57	19	60	442

Based on data collected through Q3 '26

On titles

“Director” spans professionals with as few as five, or as many as twenty, years of experience.

BD titles continue to vary widely across firms. "Director" remains one of the most inconsistently applied designations, spanning professionals with as few as five years or as many as twenty years of experience.

This title inflation often reflects a strategic choice: credibility in front of investment banks, founders, and intermediaries can directly influence access to deals. As a result, some firms elevate public-facing titles to enhance market presence while maintaining internal hierarchy behind the scenes.

Head of BD exists both as a sole title and in combination with another, for example "Principal, Head of BD". Across the 1,013 professionals we track, 143 carry the Head of BD designation and 626 sit at Vice President or above.

626

VP and above

297

MD, Partner or Head of BD

143

Head of BD title



We focus exclusively on private equity business development and deal sourcing.

20

private equity firms we have helped scope and hire dedicated BD / sourcing professionals over the past 24 months.

01 Role clarity, fast

We help you define the right profile, seniority, and success metrics before you start.

02 Access to the market

We stay closely connected to the PE BD ecosystem, so we know who's active, who's credible, and why.

03 Process that converts

Structured outreach, calibrated messaging, tight cadence, and thoughtful evaluation through offer.

If you're considering a hire in 2026, reach out for a short conversation on profile, title, and team design (even if you're early).



Thank you.

CoastalPartners.co

Official website of Coastal Partners

Deal Sourcing Podcast

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Newsletter dedicated to private equity deal sourcing

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Business Development focus since 2023
