



Where TA Leaders Are Investing for 2026

Introduction

Recruiting is entering 2026 in a moment of pressure and possibility. Hiring needs remained steady for many organizations in 2025, and in many cases, they even increased. The teams responsible for meeting those needs, though, stayed the same size.

Responsibilities that once fell across larger groups now sit with smaller teams, expected to maintain output with fewer hours to spare.

To understand how leaders are managing this reality, we gathered input from TA leaders across industries and company sizes. The themes point in the same direction: the requisition load per recruiter is climbing, sourcing feels heavier, scheduling and screening consume a broad section of the week, budgets are level rather than expanding, and AI maturity is starting to drive differences in how quickly teams move.

This report breaks down what those shifts mean inside real workflows and how TA teams can build a steadier, more efficient operating rhythm for 2026, even without headcount increases.

Executive Summary

- **Hiring demand is steady while teams stay lean**

Hiring volume is nearly evenly split (35.3% lower, 34.6% same, 30% higher), yet nearly 40% of TA teams are smaller and only 12.3% have grown.

- **Requisition load per recruiter is increasing**

With 48.1% of teams unchanged in size, recruiters are carrying more concurrent reqs and absorbing coordination and sourcing work once handled by support roles.

- **Sourcing, screening, and scheduling are the biggest drags**

Sourcing is the top pressure point (41.6%), while the most manual tasks are scheduling (52%) and screening (49%), slowing candidate flow.

- **AI maturity drives real efficiency gains**

AI-native teams (39.2%) concentrate automation in sourcing and early screening, while AI-limited teams (11.8%) see smaller gains focused on reporting and admin work.

- **Flat budgets are accelerating consolidation**

With 53% expecting flat budgets and 30.2% anticipating cuts, teams are consolidating sourcing, scheduling, and CRM to enable end-to-end workflows without adding headcount.

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Hiring demand held steady
while teams stayed lean.

Recruiters are carrying similar or higher expectations with fewer people supporting the workload.

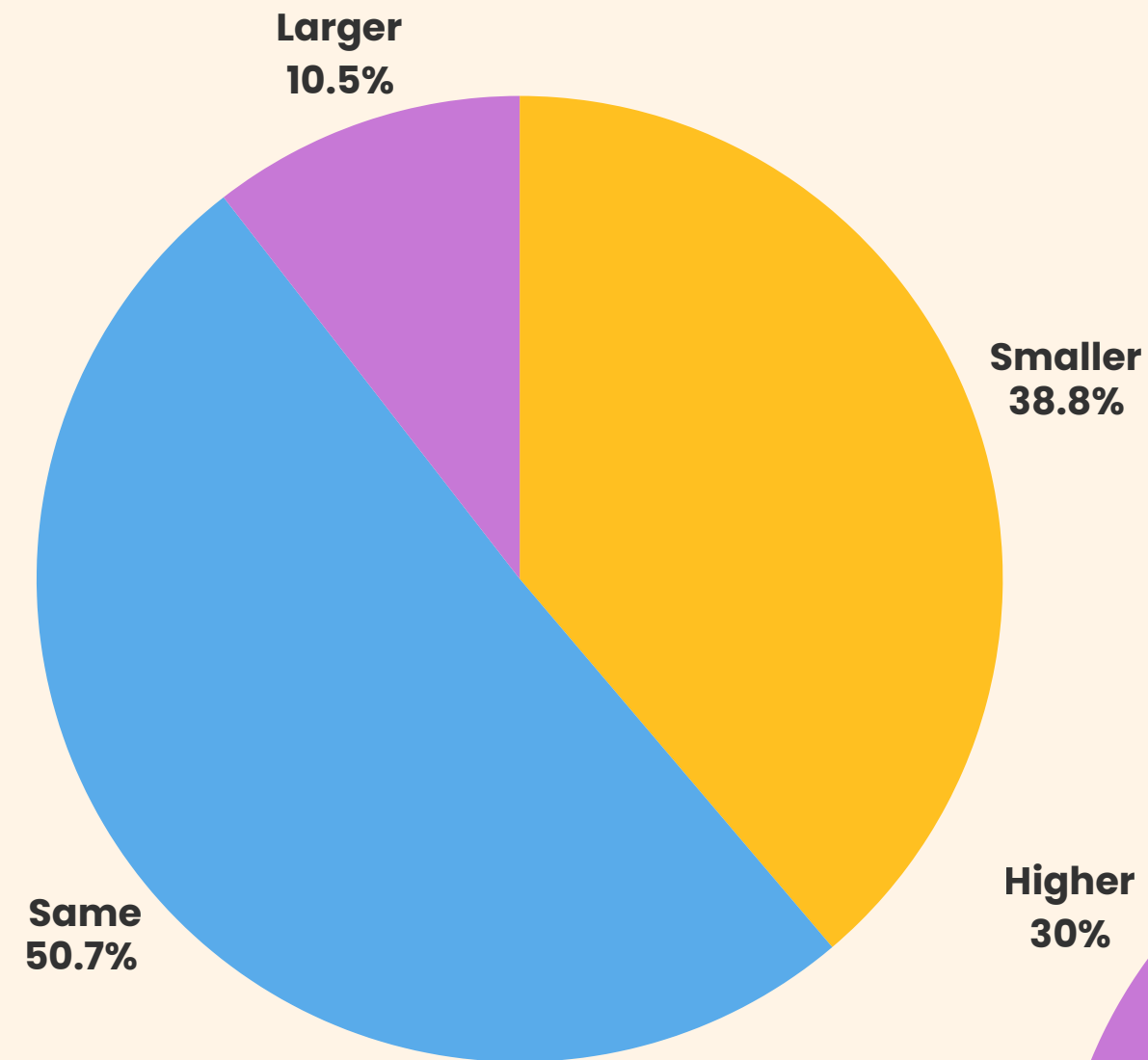
Hiring volume is distributed across three nearly equal buckets: **35.3 percent** say the volume is lower than last year, **34.6 percent** say it is the same, and **30 percent** say it is higher. Headcount tells a tighter story. Nearly **40 percent** of TA teams are smaller than they were last year, **48.1 percent** remain unchanged, and only **12.3 percent** have grown.

This gap is evident in both small and large organizations. Under-1,000-employee companies often carry steady or rising volume with reduced TA staff. Large organizations in Tech, Manufacturing and Healthcare show similar patterns, especially among high-volume roles.

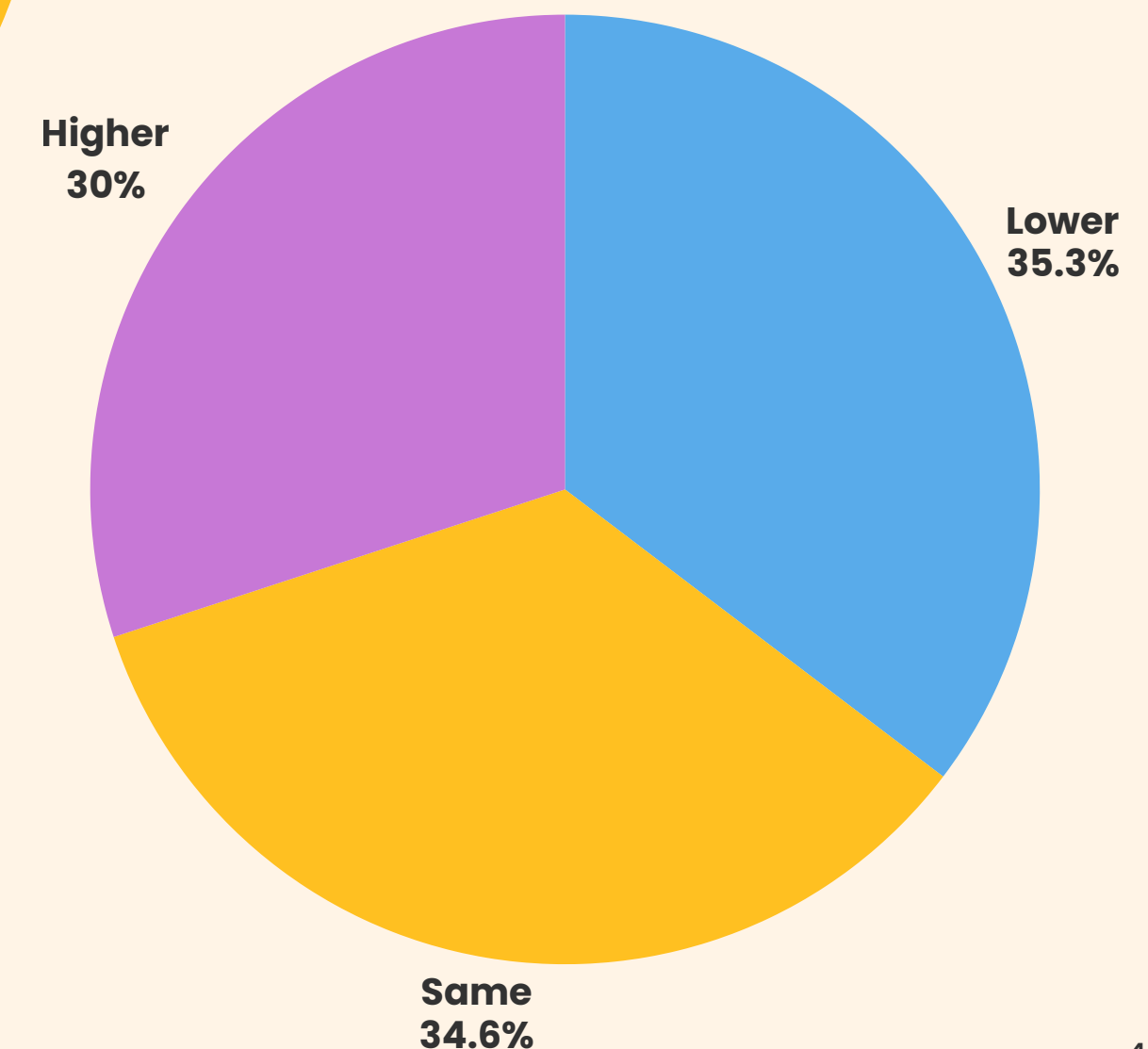
Recruiters now handle more requisitions simultaneously and have less coordinator or sourcer support to absorb administrative tasks. Leaders spend more time triaging openings and rebalancing workloads.

What felt temporary in recent years now appears to be the operating model for the foreseeable future.

TA team size vs. last year



Hiring volume vs. last year



Why it matters

When hiring demand remains steady, but teams shrink or freeze, recruiters spend less time per candidate, eliminate steps they once relied on, and face increased pressure to meet timelines without the support structure they had previously.

Old SLAs often feel out of sync with new realities unless expectations are shifted.

What to do now

Align expectations with hiring managers using what your workload data actually shows.

Focus on performance measures that track how quickly recruiters identify strong candidates and how efficiently those candidates progress through the process.

Treat process clarity as a capacity boost. Tighter handoffs and less rework create hours you don't have to hire for.

2

Sourcing feels the pressure.
Scheduling and screening
eat the day.

Strain shows up at the top of the funnel. The grind shows up in the middle.

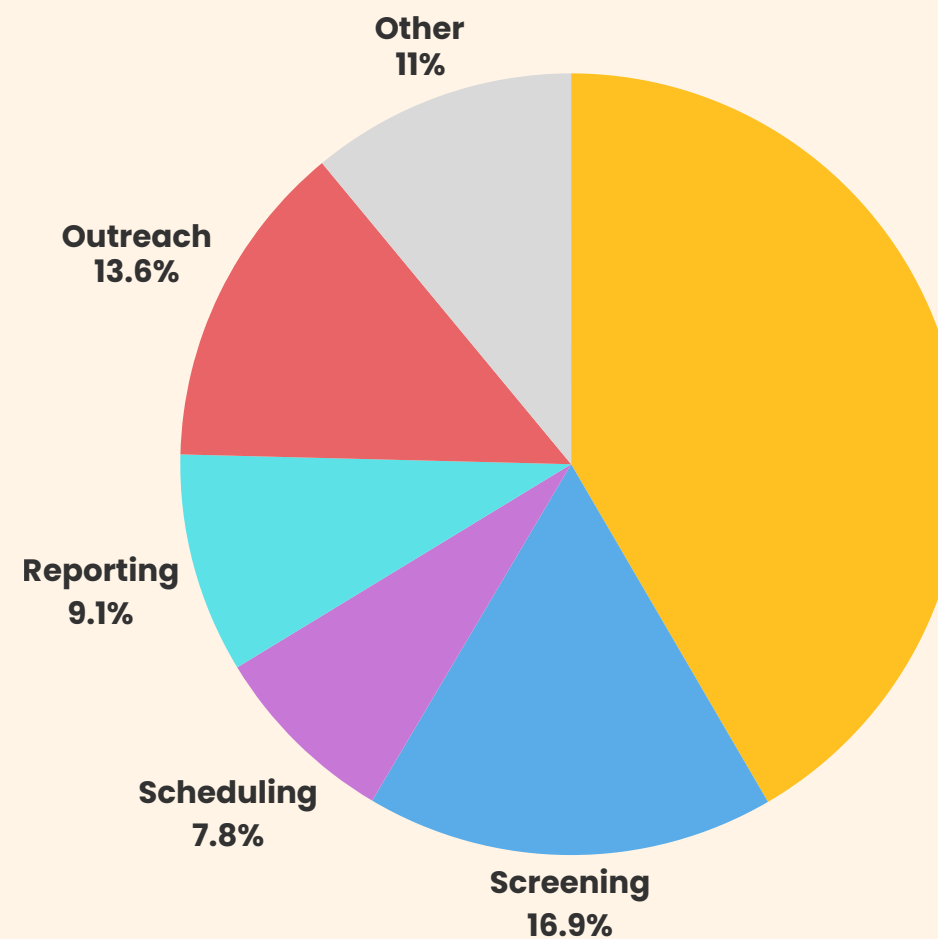
When leaders are asked to name a single strained workflow, sourcing rises to the top, with **41.6 percent** identifying it as their biggest pressure point. No other stage comes close, underscoring how much weight sits at the very start of the funnel.

That pressure shows up regardless of hiring conditions. Even as volume fluctuates, sourcing remains the most consistently strained area, particularly for smaller teams operating with tighter capacity.

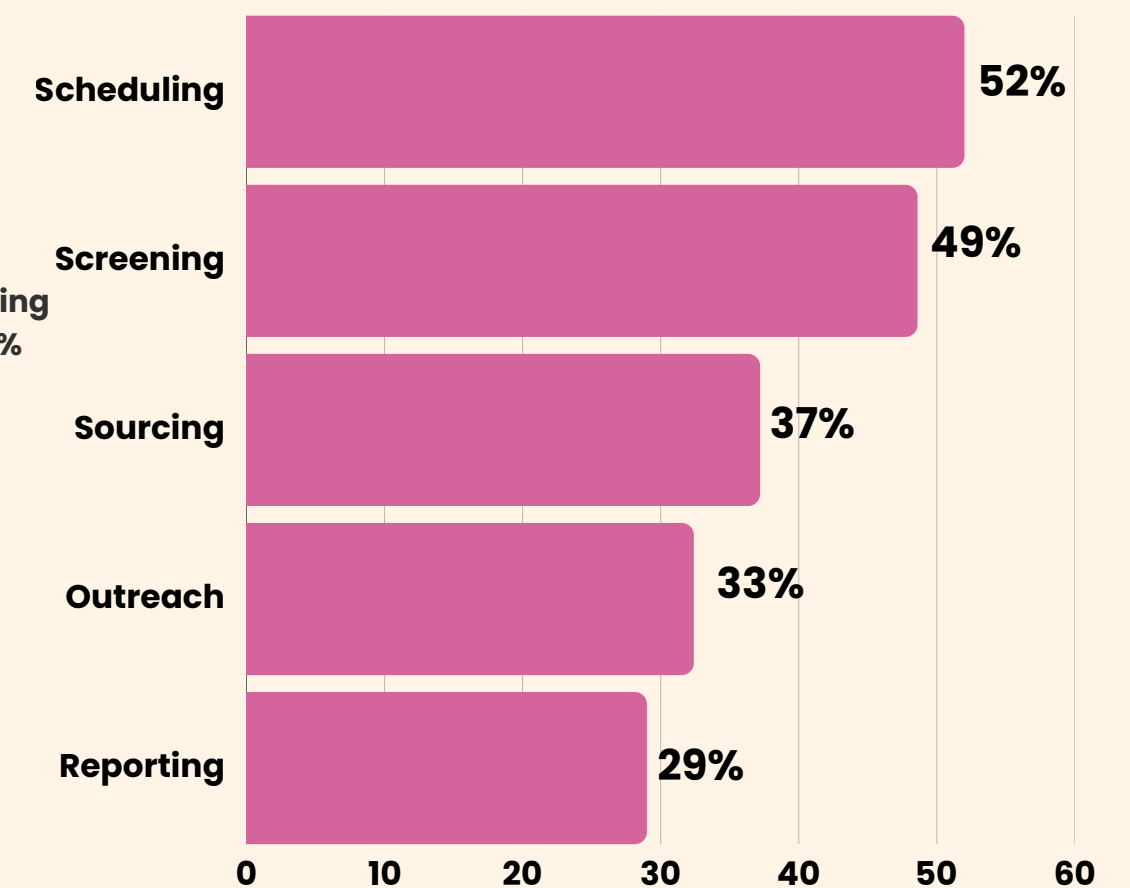
But when leaders are asked which parts of the recruiting process feel most manual or repetitive, the picture shifts. Scheduling (**52 percent**) and screening (**49 percent**) dominate, followed by sourcing (**37 percent**), outreach (**33 percent**), and reporting (**29 percent**).

Together, these results point to a familiar pattern: urgency at the top of the funnel, paired with fatigue once candidates move into motion. Recruiters feel pressure to find talent quickly, then lose time and energy navigating repetitive steps that slow progress.

Most strained workflow



Most manual or repetitive



Why it matters

Pressure at the top of the funnel affects the strength of the candidates coming through. Manual work in the middle of the funnel affects speed.

When both tighten at once, recruiters spend more time reacting and less time persuading or calibrating — the parts of the job that move hiring forward.

What to do now

Strengthen sourcing with matching, AI-assisted search and market-specific outreach.

Automate scheduling to stabilize the middle of the funnel.

Standardize early screening so recruiters can focus on high-value conversations.

Give recruiters protected time blocks for outreach and communication.

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Automation appetite is rising,
and AI-mature teams are
pulling ahead.

Teams using AI as part of their strategy are building more momentum at the top of the funnel.

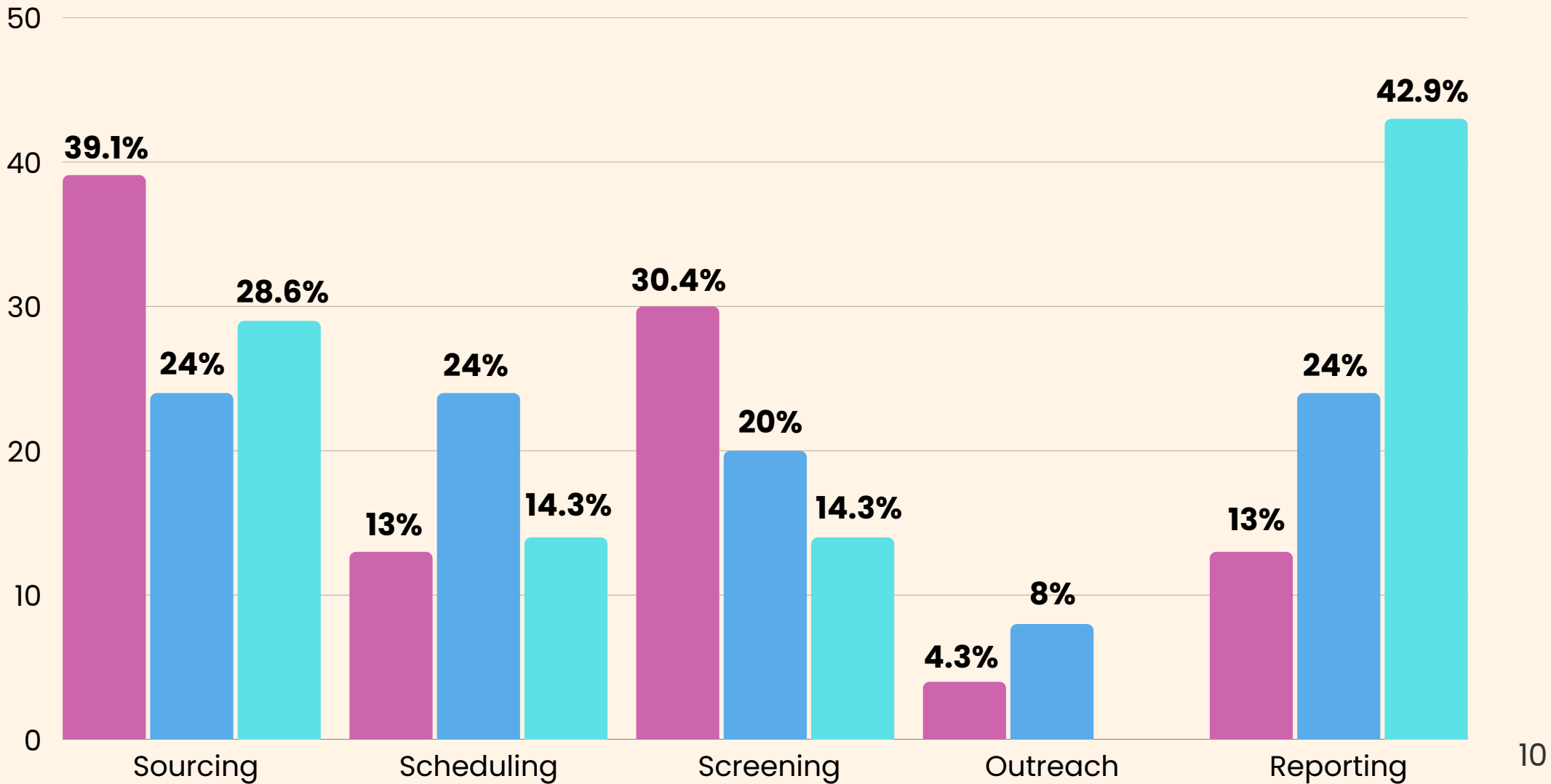
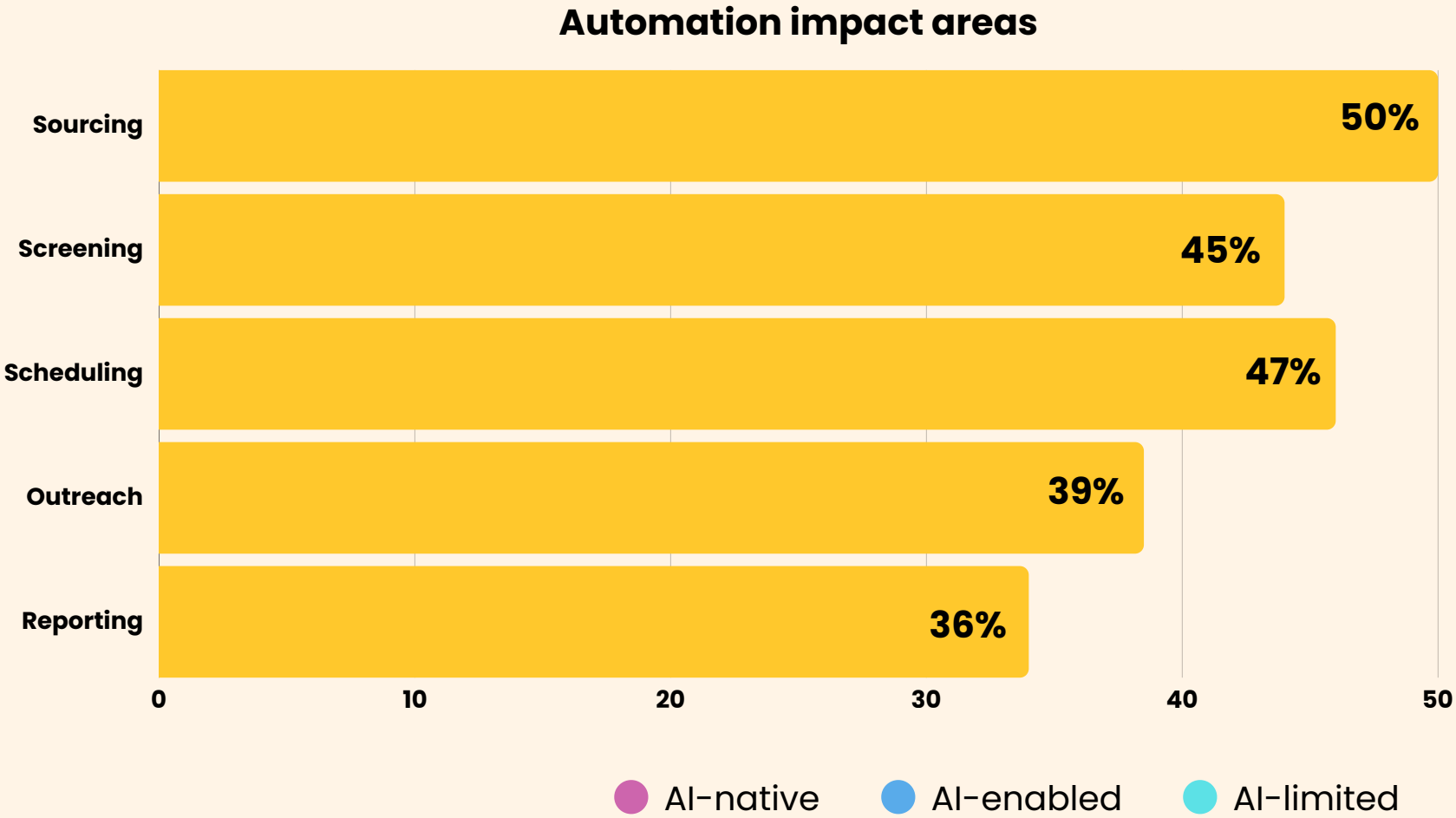
Across all respondents, leaders see the biggest automation lift in sourcing, followed by scheduling and screening, with outreach and reporting trailing behind.

But once the data is sliced by AI maturity, the contrast is sharp.

Teams that consider AI core to their strategy (AI-native) focus most heavily on front-of-funnel automation, with sourcing and screening accounting for the majority of their attention as they work to speed up candidate identification and early evaluation.

Teams that consider AI somewhat central (AI-enabled) take a more balanced approach, spreading automation across sourcing, scheduling, screening, and reporting to reclaim recruiter time.

Teams avoiding AI (AI-limited) skew toward reporting, using automation to manage day-to-day workload rather than drive broader changes in recruiting strategy.



Why it matters

Automation choices directly shape how much capacity a team can gain without adding headcount.

AI-native teams are shifting automation toward the front of the funnel, allowing systems to take on more of the work involved in finding and evaluating candidates.

Teams that focus automation further downstream may see incremental efficiency gains, but risk falling behind as volume and complexity continue to compound.

What to do now

Use AI to support sourcing, matching, and early screening where possible to increase speed at the top of the funnel.

If adoption is earlier-stage, start with scheduling and initial reviews to reclaim recruiter time and reduce bottlenecks.

Map automation intentionally across the funnel so each stage builds on the last, rather than operating in isolation.

Track hours returned to recruiters and measure how quickly teams can now reach a strong first batch of candidates.

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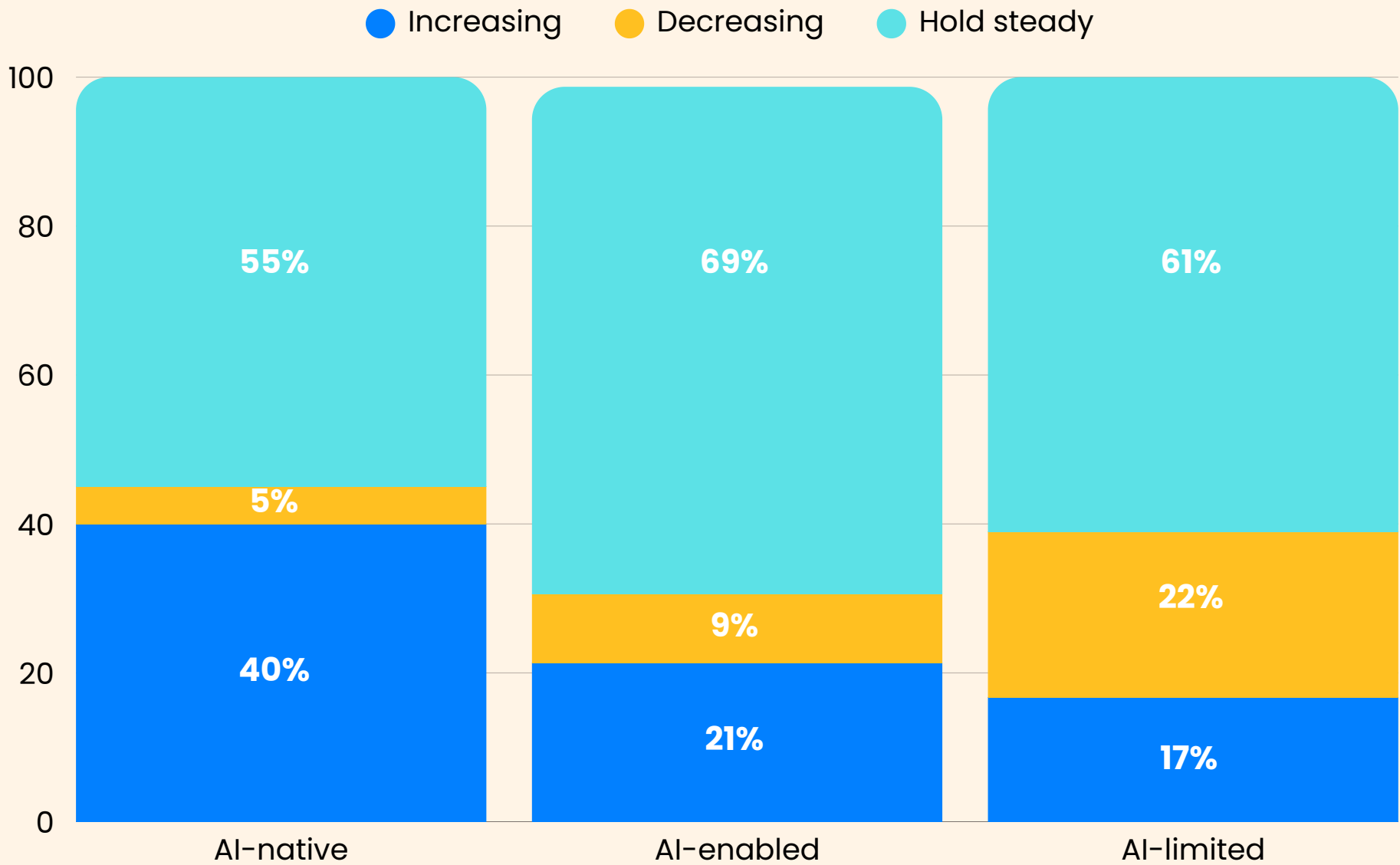
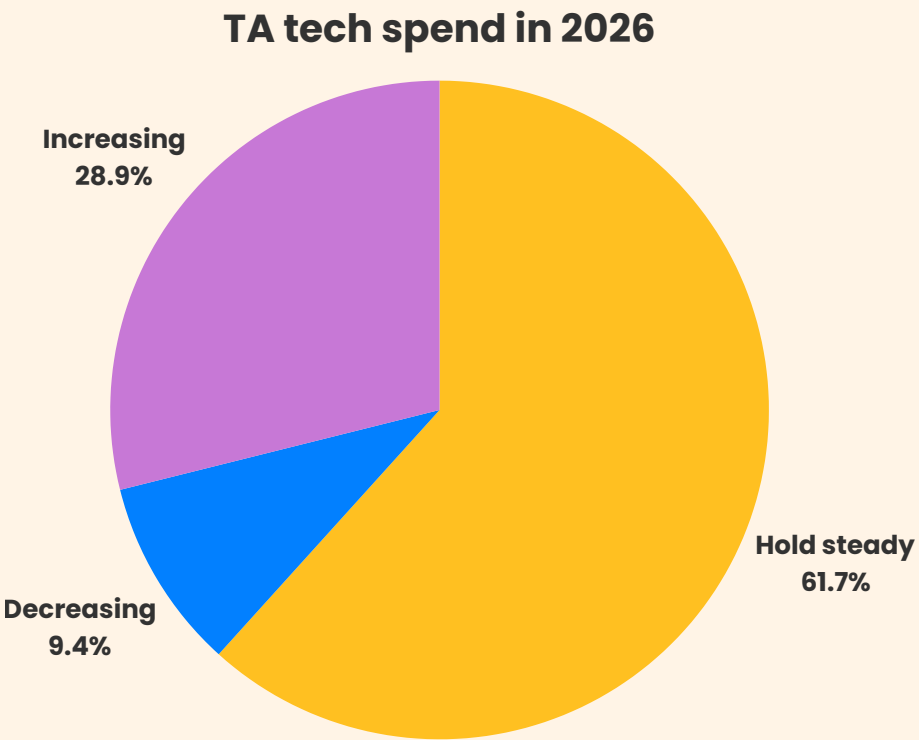
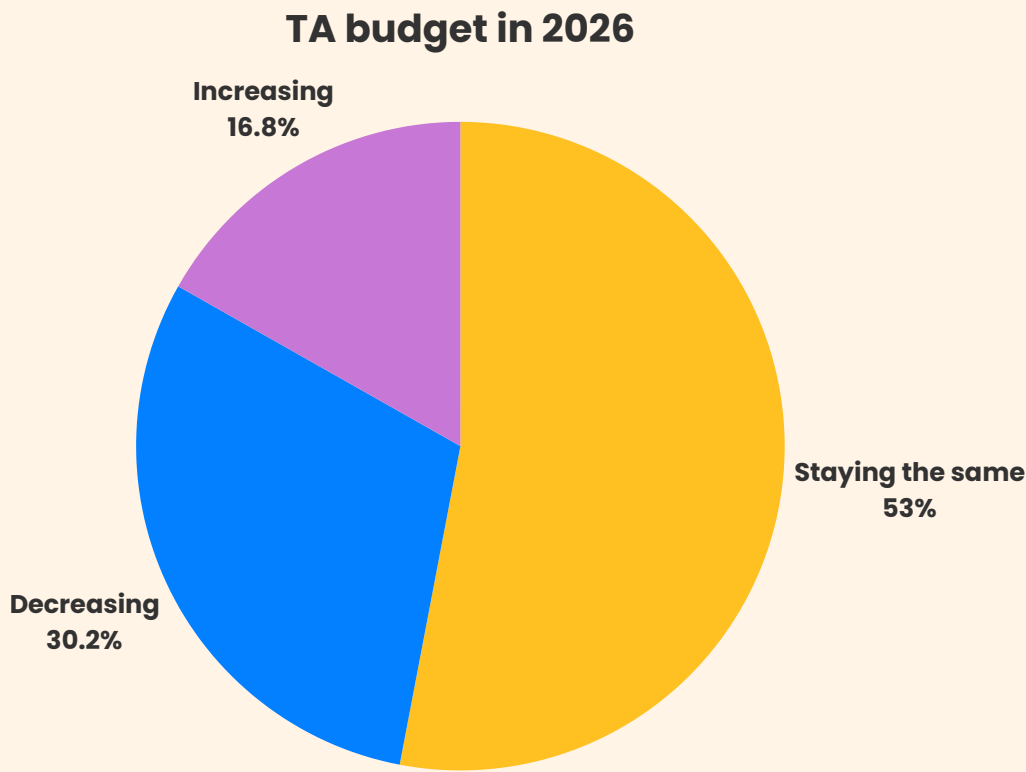
Budgets are flat while
expectations rise.

Most teams are being asked to level up workflows without leveling up investment.

For 2026, **53 percent** of leaders expect their TA budget to remain the same. Another **30.2 percent** expect a decrease, and only **16.8 percent** foresee an increase. TA leaders are entering the year with similar or reduced resources, despite steady requisition loads.

Technology budgets show more momentum. While **61.7 percent** expect their spend to hold steady, nearly **30 percent** plan to increase investment. The gap widens by AI maturity: among AI-native teams, **40 percent** are increasing tech spend, compared to **21 percent** for somewhat-central teams. Teams that are not using AI are the most likely to cut, with **23.5%** expecting tech spend to decrease.

This split matters because it determines how quickly teams can convert budget strategy into capacity. AI-forward teams are funding systems that absorb operational load. Others are stuck stretching flat budgets across workflows that keep draining hours.



Why it matters

Stable budgets do not have to limit progress.

The teams that move ahead are the ones that reassign spend to capabilities that lighten the administrative load and create smoother candidate movement.

Budget strategy becomes a performance strategy.

What to do now

Consolidate overlapping tools to reduce cost and workflow friction.

Reinvest savings into platforms that strengthen sourcing and funnel momentum.

Build the business case around hours saved, not just feature gained.

Create a multi-year modernization plan tied to measurable funnel outcomes.

5

Consolidation is revealing
replacement cycles, not just
stack cleanup.

Investment in one part of the funnel is driving simplification elsewhere.

When investment and consolidation data are viewed together, a clearer pattern emerges: teams are not optimizing stages in isolation. They are replacing disconnected steps to keep work moving end to end.

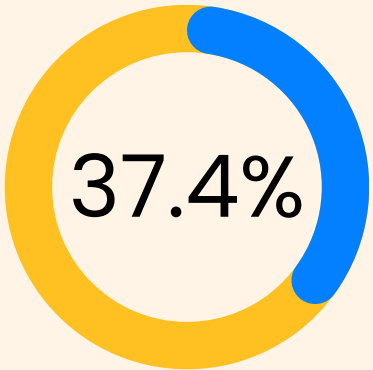
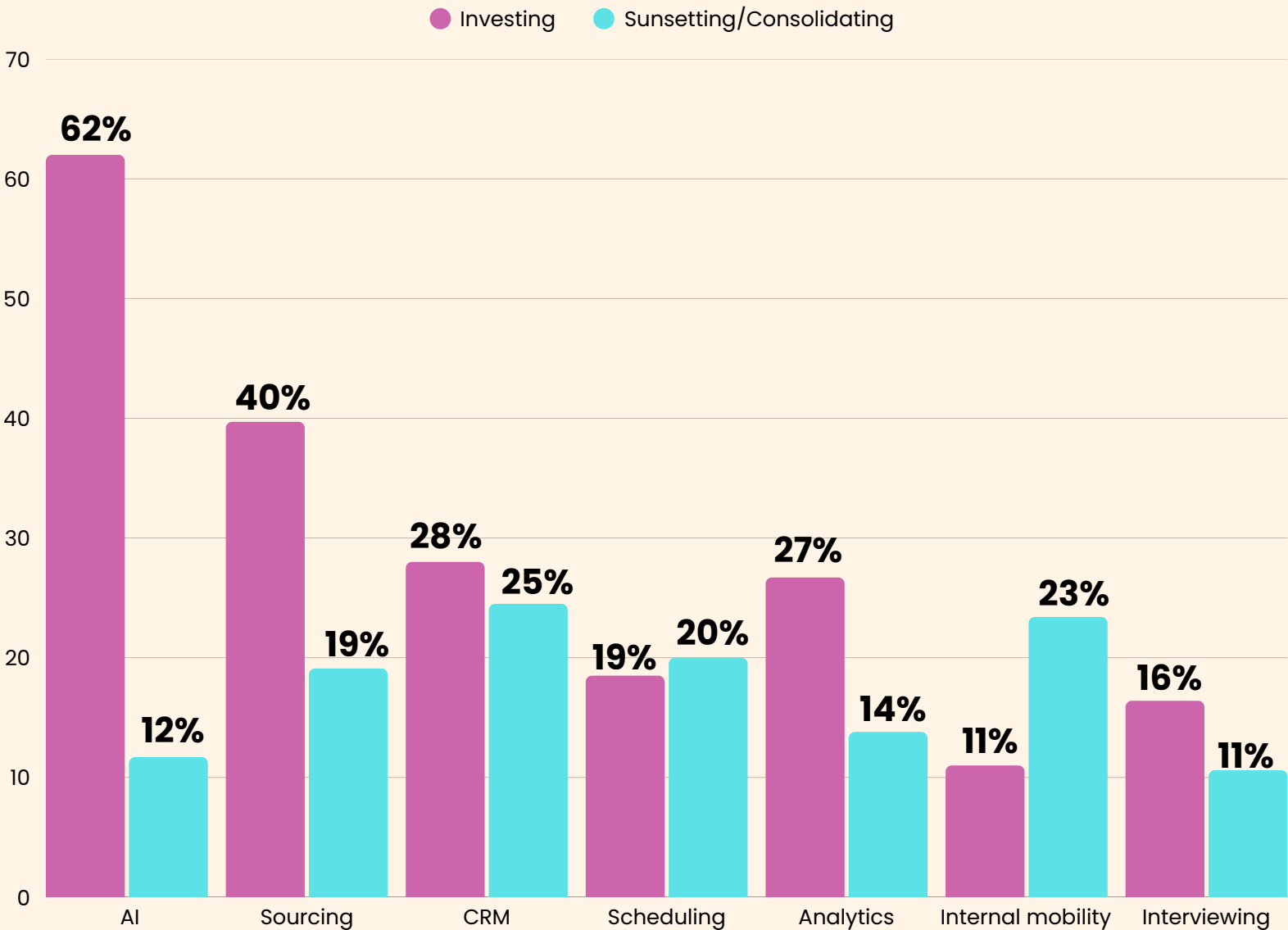
Scheduling and sourcing show the strongest two-way relationship. Teams investing in scheduling are frequently consolidating sourcing tools, and teams investing in sourcing are just as likely to consolidate scheduling.

The signal is clear: leaders want candidates to move from discovery to conversation without switching systems.

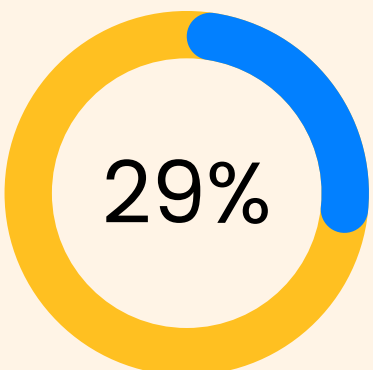
AI investment acts as a forcing function. Teams that invest in AI are more likely to consolidate downstream systems like scheduling and CRM, simplifying the environment so AI can operate across the workflow rather than sitting on the edges.

CRM investment follows a similar path. As teams modernize CRM, fragmented sourcing extensions and legacy business development tools are consolidated, pulling sourcing, outreach, and follow-up into fewer platforms that preserve context.

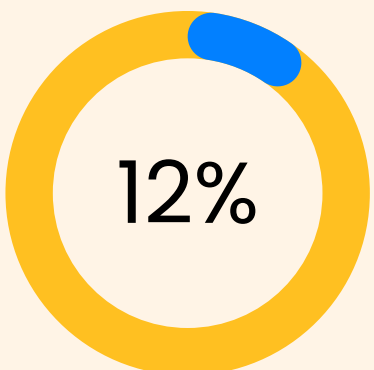
Together, these patterns point to a broader shift. Consolidation is not about having fewer tools. It's about replacing disconnected steps with connected workflows that allow momentum to carry forward.



of teams investing in sourcing and scheduling are consolidating the other.



of teams investing in AI are consolidating scheduling and/or CRM.



of teams investing in CRM are also consolidating sourcing tools.

Why it matters

Replacement cycles signal how teams expect work to be done in the future.

By consolidating around platforms that combine multiple stages of the funnel, teams reduce handoffs, preserve context, and increase the return on automation and AI.

This is how capacity is created without adding headcount.

What to do now

Map your current ecosystem to identify duplicate functions and manual handoffs.

Shift toward platforms that support sourcing, engagement and scheduling in unified flows.

Make CRM the central system of record and activation.

Establish standards for evaluating new capabilities based on the actual workflow improvements they deliver.

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AI strategy now defines
how TA teams operate.

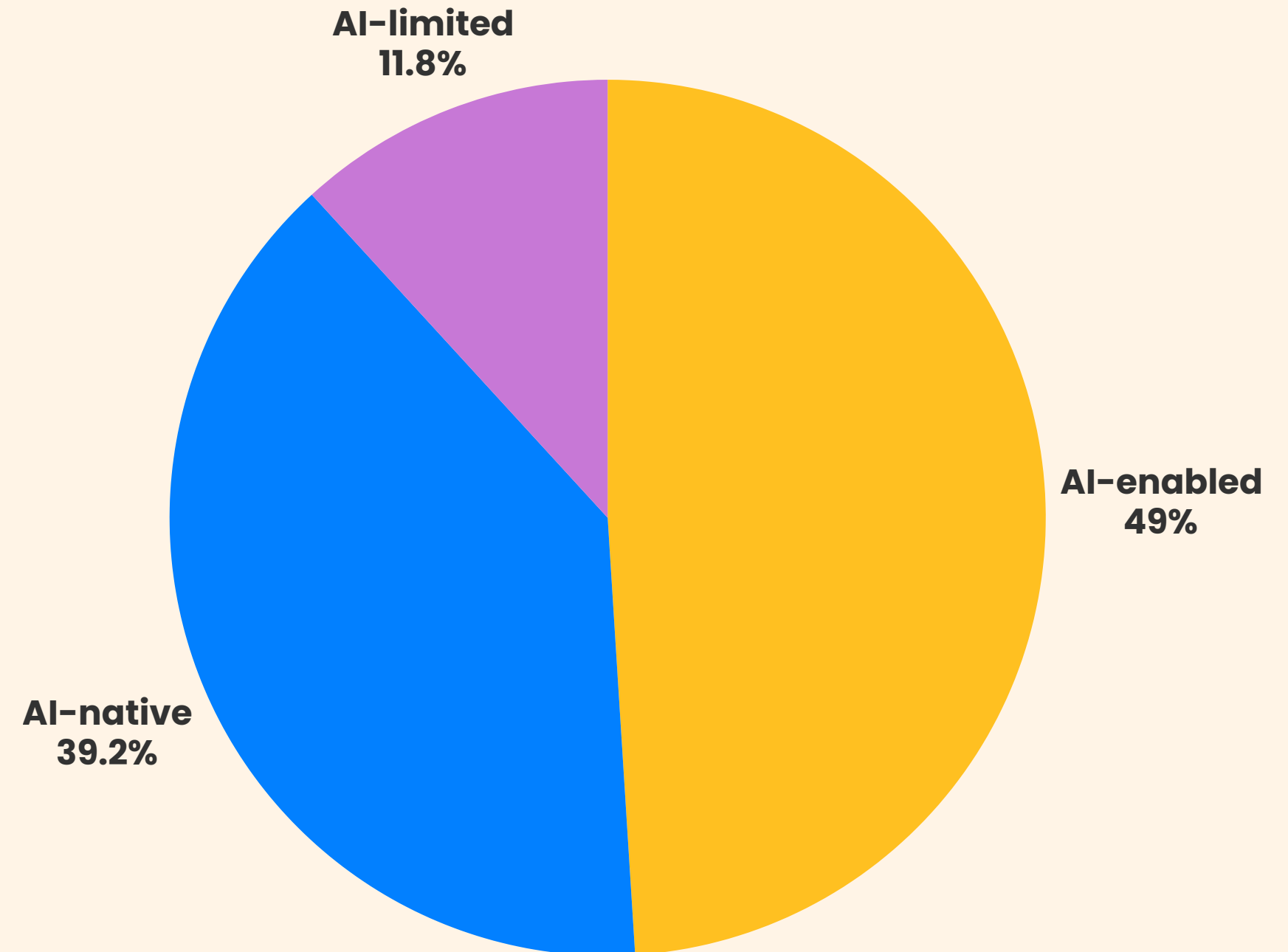
The gap between AI-native and AI-enabled is turning into a performance divide.

Nearly half of leaders say AI is central to their strategy, making them AI-enabled teams, and **39.2 percent** say it is core, making them AI-native teams. Only **11.8 percent** describe themselves as operating without meaningful AI support. These are the AI-limited teams.

These levels of maturity directly influence recruiter bandwidth. AI-native teams increase tech investment at higher rates and adopt sourcing automation, AI-assisted review and self-moving workflows that help candidates progress even during low-capacity periods. Teams earlier in the adoption curve often start with administrative lift, which improves the week but does not transform funnel strength.

The result is a widening difference in speed, consistency and quality of hire. The teams entering 2026 with momentum are those that allow AI to carry more operational steps so recruiters can focus on persuasion and decision support.

AI adoption



Why it matters

AI has moved from an experiment to an operational differentiator.

The groups that embrace it across sourcing, review, engagement and scheduling operate with more stability, more predictability and more room for recruiter influence.

The work humans handle becomes more strategic, while automation maintains continuity.

What to do now

Choose one workflow for AI to manage fully and expand from there.

Train recruiters on how to interpret and refine AI outputs. Make CRM the central system of record and activation.

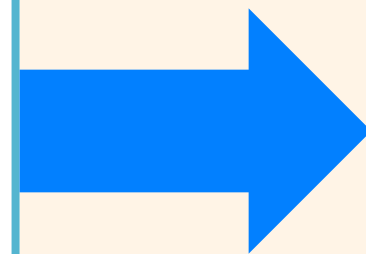
Develop a shared playbook for situations where AI leads and when human judgment takes over.

Track progress through funnel speed, the caliber of candidates entering each stage and the time returned to recruiters.

90-day plan: Building momentum heading into 2026

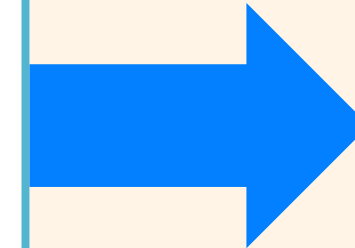
Days 1 to 30: Diagnose capacity and pressure

- Measure requisitions per recruiter, time spent on sourcing, screening and scheduling, and how long it takes to surface a solid shortlist.
- Use this report's strain and manual labor benchmarks to determine your primary bottleneck.
- Audit every system that touches sourcing, outreach, engagement or scheduling to identify overlap or friction.
- Rank your top five roles by volume or business impact and map how candidates move through each stage.



Days 31 to 60: Automate work, stabilize the funnel

- Deploy AI-assisted scheduling to remove back-and-forth cycles for high-volume roles.
- Implement standardized early review for applications and inbound interest.
- Pilot AI-supported sourcing or matching for one of your priority roles and evaluate the strength of the candidates it produces.
- Reassign recruiter time toward hiring manager alignment, outreach messaging and closing conversations.



Days 61 to 90: Modernize for 2026

- Consolidate redundant systems and shift spend into platforms that support multi-stage workflows.
- Establish new KPIs such as speed to a qualified group of candidates, how effectively those candidates progress and hires per recruiter.
- Build an AI operations guide that defines how AI participates in sourcing, screening and scheduling.
- Train the entire TA team on workflows that utilize AI behind the scenes while enhancing recruiter influence.

Final takeaway

Hiring needs stayed steady. TA teams stayed lean. Sourcing feels heavier, and the middle of the funnel drains more hours than teams can spare. Budgets aren't rising fast enough to match the workload, but AI-mature teams are finding ways to build capacity anyway.

This is the shift heading into 2026: recruiting teams are rebuilding around efficiency, clarity and better use of the hours they have.

The teams that rise next year will be the ones that reshape their workflows early, automate the right moments and give recruiters the space to do the work only they can do — guiding the market, earning trust and helping people move into roles that change their lives.

Thank you!

Curious to see our agentic intelligent platform in action? [Book a demo.](#)