The 4 ways to find talent

All four methods of talent acquisition, their costs, risks, and trade-offs.

Every hire runs through 3 stages



Assess
Decide what you're hiring for

Search and engage
This guide

Qualify
Pick the right person

This guide is about the middle stage.*

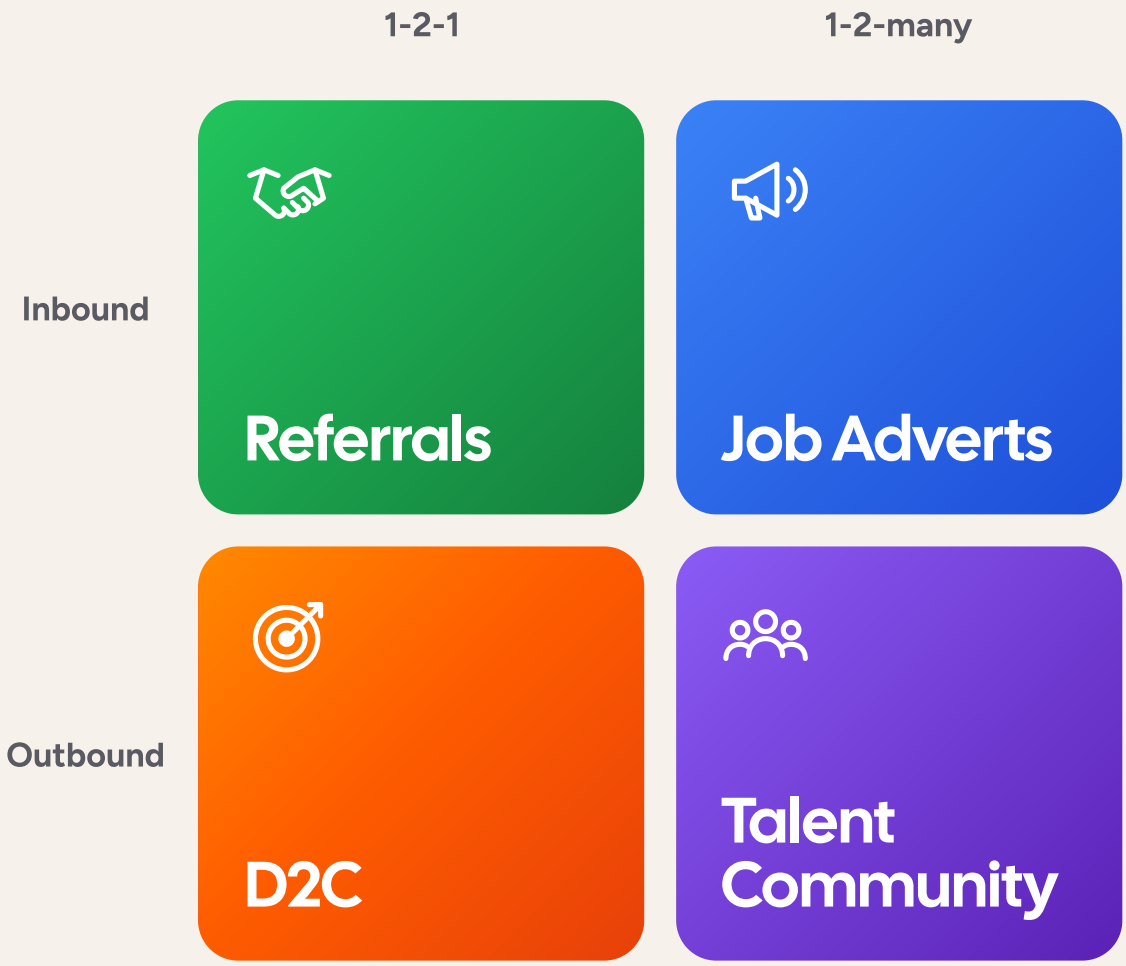
Its goal is to search for, attract and engage talent, so you can bring them from not interested to the qualification process.

*Guides for the other two stages are being built.

Every method can work. The question is which is most likely to, in your situation.

There are only 4 ways to find talent

Candidates come to you, or you go to them. One at a time, or many at once.



Each one costs something.
None of them is free.

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There is no free lunch

Every method has trade-offs.

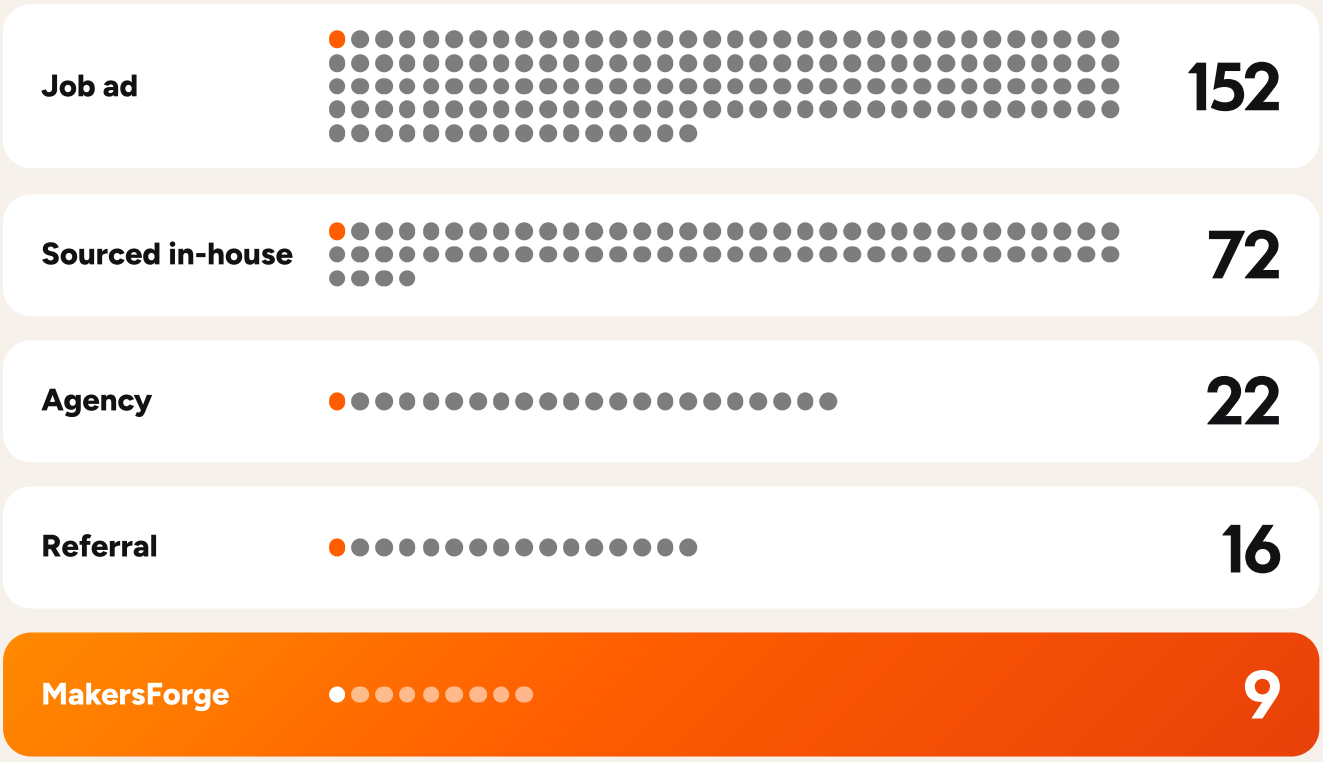


- Reducing risk **costs money.**
- Saving money means **taking on risk.**
- Saving money and reducing risk at the same time **relies on luck.**
- Compounding returns **take set-up time.**

The right method is the trade-off you can best afford.

How many candidates for one hire?

The real odds behind each risk score.



Lever, Little Grey Book of Recruiting Benchmarks: 4M+ candidates, ~1,000 employers, Aug 2015 to Jul 2016.
MakersForge: 232 candidates sent across seven clients, 26 hired.

Risk is how many people you see to make one hire.

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The 4 at a glance

Referrals

Risk	1
Money	1
Obligation	3
Set up	3
Time to result	2
Management	1

Worth knowing: You have to get lucky.

Job Adverts

Risk	5
Money	2
Obligation	5
Set up	2
Time to result	1
Management	3

Worth knowing: Expensive infrastructure to scale without damaging your employer brand.

D2C

Risk	1
Money	5
Obligation	2
Set up	2
Time to result	2
Management	2

Worth knowing: Founders of small teams can do it themselves, if they're willing. It doesn't scale past them.

Talent Community

Risk	2
Money	3
Obligation	4
Set up	4
Time to result	2
Management	3

Worth knowing: Most worth it for larger businesses with high, ongoing hiring volume.

Scored 1 to 5. Higher means more. For time to result, lower is faster.

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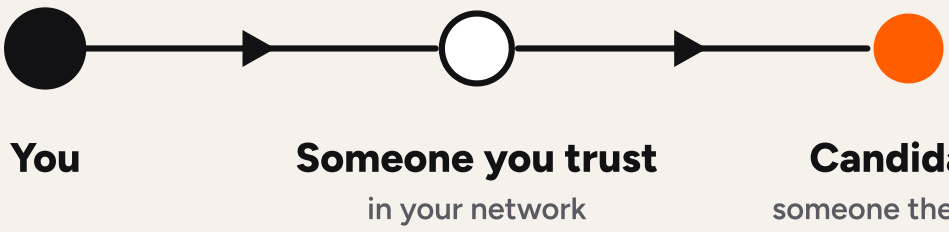
Method 1: Referrals

Borrow trust from someone you know.



Someone you trust introduces someone they trust. The candidate arrives with some of that trust already built.

Inexpensive, quick and effective, when your network knows the right people.

Method 1: Referrals

Low risk. Low cost.

The catch is supply.



1 Risk

Someone has already vouched for them. It can creep up to a 2 or 3 depending on who's referring: **a referral is only as good as the judgement behind it.**

1 Money

Usually free, or a referral bonus at most. **Even a generous bonus is a fraction** of any other method.

1 in 16 referred candidates get hired. **Someone vouching for them cuts the risk.**

Source: Lever, Little Grey Book of Recruiting Benchmarks: 4M+ candidates, ~1,000 employers, Aug 2015 to Jul 2016.

You can't choose who your network knows.

Method 1: Referrals

What it asks of you

A little goodwill.

3 Obligation

If you trust the referrer, you'll take the call even when the profile isn't right. **Out of respect, you see it through.** It's not a big time cost.

3 Set up

It happens by luck unless you **build a scheme:** what you pay, when, and who can refer.

2 Time to result

Fast when someone has a name in mind. **Slow when nobody does.**

1 Management

A referral arrives with context, so **screening is quick.**

Method 1: Referrals

When to use it

Use it for

- ✓ Roles your team's network already overlaps with
- ✓ Early hires, where trust matters most
- ✓ Roles where culture fit is hard to test

Skip it for

- ✗ A discipline nobody in your team knows well, like your first UA hire
- ✗ When you need a wider range of backgrounds

Great when it lands. Don't build a hiring plan on luck.

Method 1: Referrals

Setting it up

Steps, tools and what it costs.

Steps

1. Ask the people you know. Games is a small industry, and everyone knows everyone.
2. Tell the team which roles are open, every time one opens.
3. Make referring one step: a form, a Slack channel, or your ATS's referral feature.
4. Thank every referrer, hired or not.

Tools

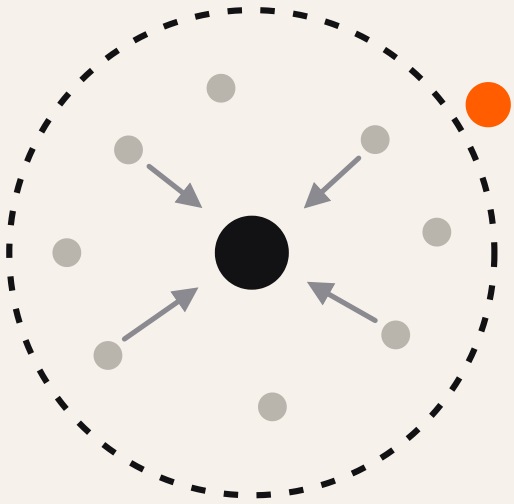
- The referral feature in your ATS (Teamtailor, Workable, Greenhouse and others have one)
- A simple form or a Slack channel

What it costs

Often nothing: just ask. If you pay for very specific referrals, €1,500–€3,000 is typical. There's a sweet spot: the more you put on it, the more you attract people referring just for the cash. If you'd pay much more than that, use D2C.

Method 2: Job Adverts

Broadcast it, and hope the right person sees it.



Radius
how well known your company is

Pull
how good the job ad is

One ad, sent out to everyone it can reach. Candidates find it, decide if they like it, and decide whether to apply.

You can't control the reach. You can only improve the odds.

Method 2: Job Adverts

Two levers. Still a gamble.

The only two things you control.

Radius

How well known your company is. The bigger the name, **the further the ad reaches.**

Pull

The quality of the job ad. The better the ad, **the stronger the pull** on the people it reaches.

Why it's still a gamble

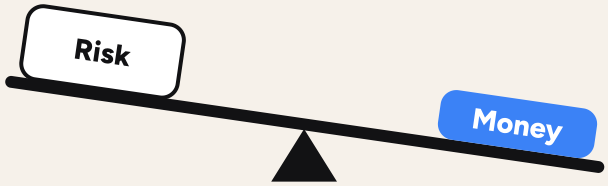
- ✕ You can't control when people see it.
- ✕ You never learn why someone didn't apply, so **you can't sell against it.**
- ✕ Some people are interested but won't fill out a long application. **You'll never know which ones.**

Improve the odds all you like. It's still a gamble.

Method 2: Job Adverts

Low cost. High risk.

Cheap to post. Expensive to get wrong.



5 Risk

The highest of the four. You only reach people within your radius, and **every applicant you don't reply to** is a small hit to your employer brand.

2 Money

Cheap to post, sometimes free. **The real cost shows up in time,** not money.

1 in 152 applicants get hired. **That's why the risk is a 5.**

Source: Lever, Little Grey Book of Recruiting Benchmarks: 4M+ candidates, ~1,000 employers, Aug 2015 to Jul 2016.

The upfront cost is low. The back-end cost isn't.

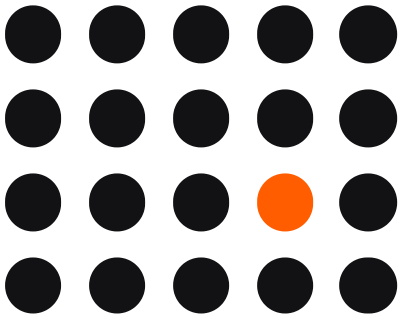
Method 2: Job Adverts

The real risk: volume

Finding the best person in 20 is easy. In 900, it's luck.

1 role

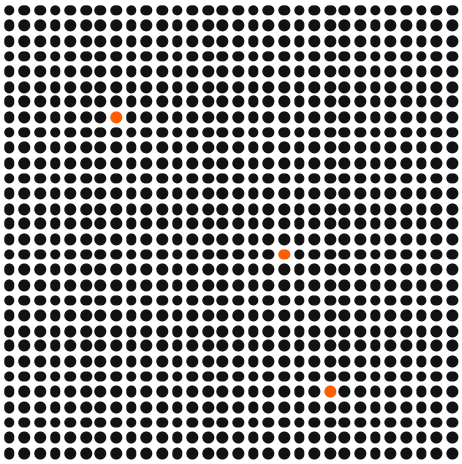
20 applicants



You can read every one. **The best one stands out.**

3 roles, 1 recruiter

900 applicants



At 5 minutes a CV, that's **75 hours of reading** before the first interview. Nearly two working weeks.

Pick the method your team has the capacity to run.

Method 2: Job Adverts

What it asks of you

Your inbox, mostly.

5 Obligation*

Every applicant expects a reply. 100+ applications means **hours of reading and first calls.**

2 Set up

Write it, post it, done. **That's why it's everyone's default.**

1 Time to result

The fastest way to get applicants. **Applicants aren't hires** though.

3 Management

Someone has to **own the inbox** until the role is filled.

*You could choose to lower the obligation by not replying to everyone, or by not setting up automations and systems. The trade-off is a hit to your employer brand.

Method 2: Job Adverts

When to use it

Use it for

- ✓ Roles where many people could do the job well
- ✓ Junior and entry-level roles
- ✓ Volume hiring for the same role
- ✓ When you can't afford the other options

Skip it for

- ✗ Senior or specialist roles with a small talent pool
- ✗ Confidential replacements
- ✗ When you don't have the infrastructure to handle 100+ applicants

This can be scalable, if you're prepared for the obligation and the infrastructure to scale it.

Method 2: Job Adverts

Setting it up

Steps, tools and what it costs.

Steps

1. Write it as an advert, not a job description.
2. Post on a general board and a games-specific one.
3. Set up replies before you post: an acknowledgement and a closing date.
4. Keep the application short. Every extra step loses people.

Tools

- Hitmarker: free to post until 31 Dec 2026; promotion from €119 for 14 days
- Games Jobs Direct: from about £250 + VAT a post, live for 60 days
- LinkedIn Jobs: free or promoted
- A mobile-games job board from MakersForge is being built

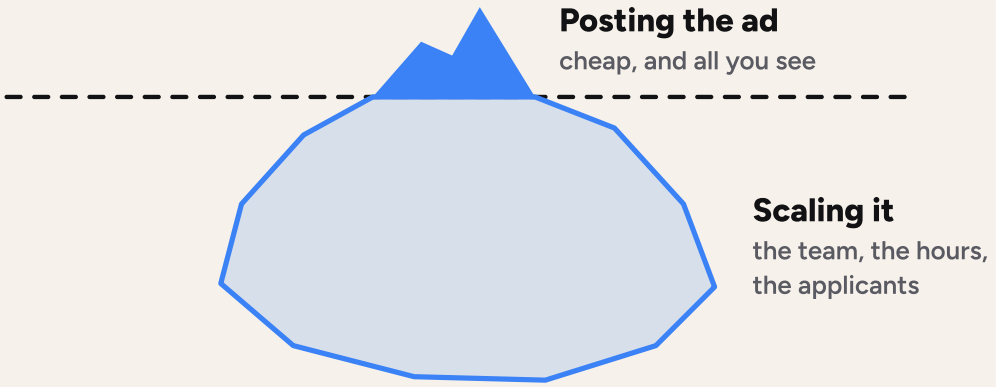
What it costs

Low to post. The real cost is the time to read, reply and screen.

38 candidates in our survey complained, unprompted, about long forms and re-typing their CV into portals.
Source: MakersForge State of Recruitment in Games survey, 2025: 306 candidates.

Method 2: Job Adverts

The common trap: scaling job ads



Scaling job ads is the most common route to mass hiring. If they worked for you in the early days, it makes sense to scale them.

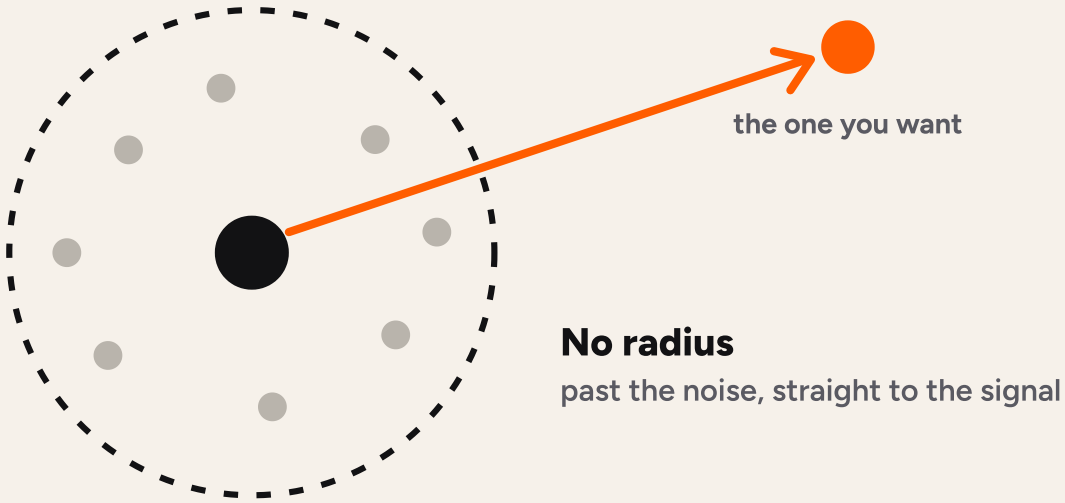
But the back-end cost is huge: a 3, 4, 5 person talent team working all hours to get through **hundreds, if not thousands, of applicants a week.**

The alternative: train that team to do D2C. For the same cost or less, you vastly reduce the obligation. Going direct to candidate is **the 20% of the work that does 80% of the result.**

Job ads are cheap to post. They're expensive to scale.

Method 3: D2C

Go straight to the person you want.



Direct to candidate. Find the specific people who fit the role, wherever they are, and talk to each of them 1-2-1.

Your own talent team can do it, or a specialist partner can. If you're a small company, the business owner or C-suite are perfectly capable of doing it themselves.

Method 3: D2C

Low risk. High cost.

You're paying to take the gamble out of it.



1 **Risk***

Job ads miss great people because you can't get them engaged enough to apply. Going direct, you only approach the people who'd make a big difference, and **you can actually engage them.**

5 **Money****

The most expensive of the four. You're paying for someone to find and engage the specific people you want, **not to post and wait.**

*This COULD be a 2 depending on how you do D2C: an internal Talent Acquisition specialist doing direct search instead of managing scaled job advert infrastructure, or a D2C recruitment specialist in your industry.
**If you're a small business owner and take this on yourself, it drastically reduces the money. Just know that when you get to the point where you can't afford the time to commit to it, it will start costing.

Engage the talent you'd kill to have, and the risk of missing them is minimal.

What it asks of you

Not much. That's the point.

2 Obligation

The searching and first conversations happen **outside your calendar.** You meet people who already want to talk.

2 Set up

A clear brief. In-house, your TA team needs the tools and **the time to search.**

2 Time to result

Slower than an ad for raw applicants. But the first people you see are **worth meeting.**

2 Management

A weekly check-in and feedback on candidates. **Most of the work is done for you.**

Method 3: D2C

When to use it

Use it for

- ✓ Senior and leadership roles
- ✓ Specialist roles with a small talent pool, like a LiveOps lead
- ✓ Urgent hires
- ✓ Confidential searches
- ✓ Roles you've already tried to fill with an ad

Skip it for

- ✗ High-volume roles many people could do
- ✗ When the budget can't carry the fee and the role isn't urgent

The more specific the role, the less you can leave it to chance.

Method 3: D2C

Setting it up

Do it in-house, or use a partner.

In-house

1. Train whoever's searching to understand the business: the game genres, the experience levels, what great looks like.
2. Run a proper search, based on the criteria from your assessment.
3. When you find someone you want, message them 1-2-1 straight away, about them, not the job ad. Don't build a list to go back through.
4. Move the interested ones into your interviews.

With a partner

1. Brief them on the role, the team and what great looks like.
2. Agree the fee model up front.
3. Receive high-quality candidates.
4. Interview the best.

Tools and costs

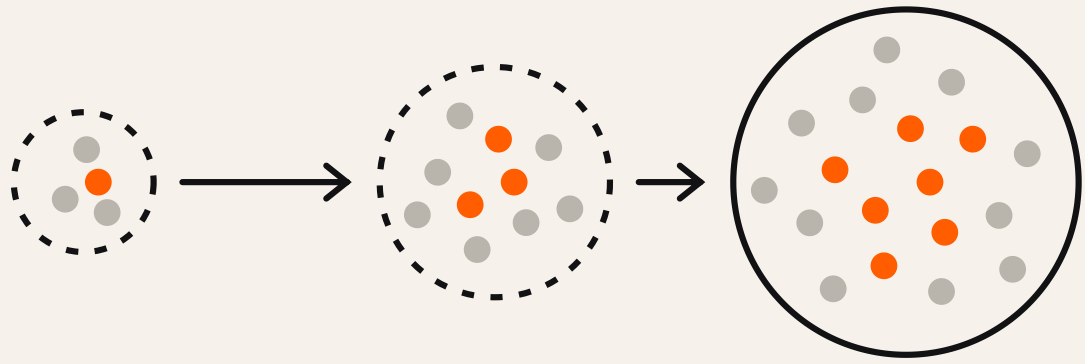
- LinkedIn Recruiter Lite: about $170 a month, 30 InMails
- LinkedIn Recruiter: roughly $8,000–$15,000 a seat a year
- Juicebox (AI people search): from about $99 a seat a month, billed yearly

Tools and costs

- Typical agency fee: 15–25% of first-year salary, up to 25–30% for senior or hard-to-fill roles
- Retained search: around 25–35%
- MakersForge: a flat fee by level, from €11,000

Method 4: Talent Community

Build the bench before you need it.



A group of people you keep warm over time: people who'd like to work with you one day, hearing from you regularly.

When a role opens, they're already interested.

Method 4: Talent Community

Low risk, once it's running.

The cost is effort, every month.



2 **Risk**

People in your community **already know you** and chose to hear from you.

3 **Money**

Tools, content and events add up, and **the cost runs every month,** not just when you're hiring.

The only method where results compound.

Method 4: Talent Community

What it asks of you

Patience, and a lot of it.

4 Obligation

A community needs feeding. **Go quiet for a few months** and it goes cold.

4 Set up

The biggest set-up of the four: **the list, the content** and a reason to join.

2 Time to result

Slow to build. **Fast once it's there.**

3 Management

Someone has to **own it month to month,** or it fades.

Method 4: Talent Community

When to use it

Use it for

- ✓ Roles you hire for every year
- ✓ Growing studios with a steady hiring plan
- ✓ Disciplines where you want to be the first name people think of

Skip it for

- ✗ A one-off hire
- ✗ A role you need filled next month, if you don't already have a community

Start it before you need it, not when you do.

Method 4: Talent Community

Setting it up

Steps, tools and what it costs.

Steps

1. Pick the disciplines you hire for every year.
2. Give people a reason to join: insight, early access to roles, events.
3. Post on a schedule, every month.
4. Track who's engaged, so you know who to call when a role opens.

Tools

- Discord or Slack: free
- A newsletter (Substack, beehiiv): free to start
- Getro: talent network software (paid)
- A talent pool in your ATS, for example Teamtailor

What it costs

Time, and a salary for the person running it. Some tools can start free.

Industry tools

A starting list, grouped by what they're for.

Games job boards

- Hitmarker
- Games Jobs Direct
- Games Jobs Live
- GamesIndustry.biz Jobs
- Work With Indies
- Remote Game Jobs
- LinkedIn Jobs

Talent validation

- Verital (verital.ai)

Search and sourcing

- LinkedIn Recruiter and Recruiter Lite
- Juicebox (AI people search)
- ArtStation, GitHub and game credits, for finding people by their work

Applicant tracking (ATS)

- Teamtailor
- Workable
- Recruitee
- Personio
- Greenhouse
- Ashby
- Lever

Talent community

- Discord
- Slack
- Substack
- beehiiv
- Getro
- Your ATS's talent pool

About MAKERSFORGE

Done-for-you D2C recruitment for mobile game studios.

Find the people you want. We find specific talent for your studio and engage them directly, so you have the highest chance of converting the best people for your studio.

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