

# Real Estate Alert

## Firms Cautiously Optimistic on Hiring, Again

Green shoots are springing up in the commercial real estate job market, with fewer firms seeking to reduce their workforces and most planning to hold staffing levels steady or to grow this year, according to **Ferguson Partners**.

Only 9% of public and private investment shops and brokerages surveyed by the Chicago-based firm reported plans to reduce staff in 2026, a six-year low. That's down from 27% that cut ranks in 2025, and a peak of 30% the previous year.

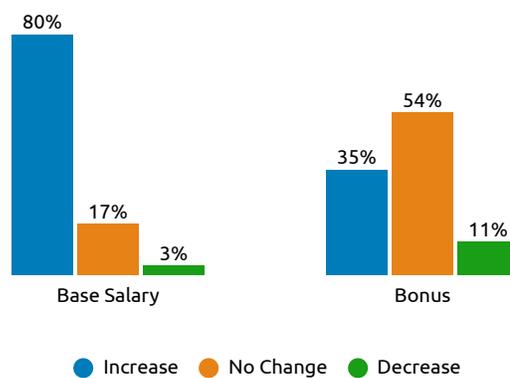
Meanwhile, 49% of respondents plan to keep their head count steady, while 42% plan to increase staff by an average of 6.4%. Last year, just over a third of firms reported making no changes, while 39% increased their head count by an average of 9.1%.

In the three years since rising borrowing costs and economic volatility tempered property sales, firms largely have pulled back on hiring. Many instead turned their focuses to strategic hires, so-called rightsizing and retaining top performers amid a bumpy recovery. But once again, a cautious optimism is creeping in, according to 151 companies that in October and November participated in Ferguson's 2025-2026 United States Year-End Real Estate Compensation and Hiring Pulse Survey.

"We are seeing a more positive market sentiment," Ferguson president **Graham Beatty** said, pointing to an uptick in the search firm's activity over the month following the survey. "The environment shifted more from a macro perspective, and we are seeing interest from our clients that we were not seeing three to six months ago."

To be sure, last year started on a positive note as well, when

### Salaries Expected To Rise, Bonuses To Plateau



Source: Ferguson Partners

47% of firms surveyed by Ferguson **predicted** growth. But many of those plans were disrupted by the introduction of President **Donald Trump's** tariffs and the economic uncertainty that ensued. Since then, borrowing costs have declined while sales volumes have continued to build. Through the third quarter, property sales across the five major sectors were up 21% versus a year ago, according to **Green Street's** Sales Comps Database.

Predictions for head-count increases in 2026 now appear to

**See HIRING on Page 2**

**REAL ESTATE ALERT: January 6, 2026**

Click here for [more information](#) or call 949-640-8780.

# Real Estate Alert

## Hiring ... From Page 1

align with those from 2020 to 2023. “After a few stagnant years of hiring, the trend is beginning to revert, although it’s not fully there yet,” said **Charlie Apfelbach**, a managing director in Ferguson’s compensation consulting group.

Asset- and property-management pros remain most in demand. “Many firms are leaning into creating alpha through operational excellence,” Apfelbach said.

Meanwhile, demand for transaction professionals has

climbed to its highest level since 2021, an indicator that firms are increasingly optimistic about the investment environment.

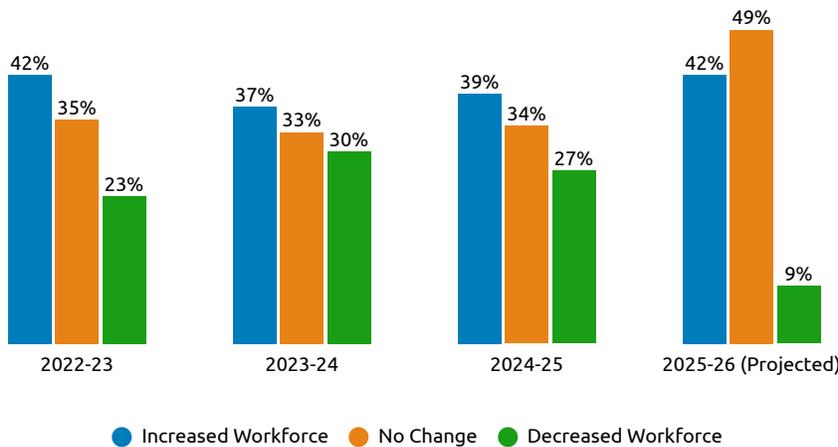
With an eye toward increasing property sales, most firms said they plan to hold bonuses steady and increase salaries this year. Fifty-four percent projected no changes to 2025 bonus payouts, with 35% anticipating an increase and 11% a decrease. Meanwhile, 80% of firms plan to raise base salaries an average of 3.4%.

“There is optimism that 2026 will mark the beginning of a recovery, and some firms are approaching [yearend compensation decisions] as an investment

in retaining top talent — even if company performance doesn’t necessarily support it,” Apfelbach said. With continued pressure on bonus pools, firms increasingly are emphasizing greater differentiation in bonuses for top performers to remain competitive with the overall market.

“We are starting to see transaction volume increase again, and anytime that occurs, it starts to feed the machine,” driving demand for professionals and the ability of firms to increase pay, Beatty said. “We do tend to look at acquisitions as an indicator of the market having frothiness ... that will be beneficial to real estate as an asset class.” ❖

### Property Firms More Upbeat on Hiring



Source: Ferguson Partners

**REAL ESTATE ALERT: January 6, 2026**

Click here for [more information](#) or call 949-640-8780.