

As Technology Needs Grow, One Sector Has No Shortage of Jobs



"We're hiring as fast we can," said Platinum Solutions chief Laila Rossi, left. (By Jahi Chikwendiu -- The Washington Post)

By [Kim Hart](#)

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Platinum Solutions, a Reston information technology firm that serves the government, needs to find new employees so fast that it hired four full-time recruiters. At any given time, the company has 20 to 40 job openings, and it recently opened an office in West Virginia that has 65 employees.

"We're hiring as fast as we can," said chief executive *Laila Rossi*. "The past six months have been the peak for us."

She said the company used to have a new employee start every few weeks. Now it's common to see nine or 10 begin work in a single day, week after week.

At a time when most industries are slashing costs and headcounts, IT firms in the Washington region are experiencing growth thanks to continued government contracts and an increased reliance on technology in nearly every sector of the economy. The demand for IT expertise has helped keep the local economy stronger compared with other regions of the country.

The federal government is expected to increase spending on technology services by 3.5 percent over the next five years, according to a report released last week by *Input*, a Reston market research firm. The estimate is lower than last year's growth forecast of 4.1 percent, but "fairly optimistic considering the change in administration and the economic situation," said *Deniece Peterson*, manager of industry analysis.

"This is a spend-to-save administration," she said, meaning that the government is investing in IT systems now to create savings down the road in health care, energy costs and agency

communication networks. She expects the stimulus package to contribute at least \$15 billion to the industry over the next two to three years.

And President Obama's push to increase the federal workforce and rely less on contractors will still create opportunities for local firms, she said.

"It will only add to the need for IT services," she said. "Even if there is a slight bump in federal employment, the government still has to supply the technological infrastructure for those workers. There's still a gap to be filled by the contracting community."

So firms have boosted their recruitment efforts. *CACI*, the Arlington-based contractor, has 200 open positions at any given time, said *Larry Clifton*, CACI's senior vice president of recruiting and workforce management. The company is looking particularly for candidates with expertise in cybersecurity, health IT and energy-saving technologies.

Clifton said the job market is also stable for recent college graduates, who understand social networking, cloud computing and other initiatives being pushed by the administration.

"There's definitely a glut of kids out there -- really sharp people -- who are looking for jobs or waiting tables," he said, adding that the number of résumés he receives has doubled during each of the past three quarters.

Lockheed Martin, one of the largest systems integrators for the government, typically hires 16,000 people a year, and that number has held steady even during the recession. The Bethesda-based defense giant has beefed up its internship program by 30 percent to create opportunities for college students and recent graduates, especially those with an interest in cybersecurity and protecting databases, corporate staffing director *Mike Byrne* said.

Computer Sciences Corp. of Falls Church is also placing more emphasis on college recruiting, with plans to hire more than 300 new graduates this year, up from 250 last year. It still hires a larger number of midcareer professionals. The competition for skilled workers can be fierce, recruitment director *Jim Gattuso* said.

"As the market started to tighten up and opportunities started to shrink, we saw it as an opportunity to be more aggressive," he said. "We can be more choosy about students and other candidates."

Smaller firms are also finding the need to augment their staffs. *MicroServe*, an IT consulting and contracting firm in Gaithersburg, employs 12 people. By the end of the year, it plans to triple that number. *Rick Albert*, who founded the firm in 1991, says he is trying to be well-positioned for an economic recovery.

"This year will be a record year for us," he said. "Whether there's a recovery or not, we help cut IT costs for commercial and government agencies" by consolidating servers in databases and reducing energy needs, he said.

"A lot of new projects are getting off the ground right now," said *Barry Downs*, branch manager for *Robert Half Technology*, a recruiting firm in the District.

The firm released a report citing increased interest in cybersecurity, Web-based and cloud-computing systems, and recovering information from devices. In interviews with 1,400 chief information officers, 20 percent of technology executives expect to add a mix of full-time and contract workers in the third quarter. Thirty percent cited the need for more customer support as a factor driving the hiring, and 27 percent cited rising workloads as a factor.

But with a larger number of candidates on the market, salaries are lower than a year or two ago, Downs said.

"A recent college graduate looking to make \$50,000 may be competing with someone with five years of experience willing to work for the same amount," he said. "Clients can get more for a little less -- getting more experience but at a lower salary is very appealing."

Kim Hart writes about Washington's technology scene every Monday. Contact her at hartk@washpost.com.