

Candidate sourcing outreach email template

A short, specific first message to a passive candidate that gets replies instead of deletes.

Updated October 15, 2026. Written and reviewed by the HRTally Research Team.

When to use this template

Use this when you are reaching out to someone who hasn't applied, often found through LinkedIn, a referral, a conference, or your talent pool. Passive candidates get a lot of recruiter messages, most of them generic. The ones that get replies are short, specific about why this person, and honest about the role and pay.

Think of the first message as asking for a conversation, not selling a job. Lead with something real about their work, give two or three facts about the role, and make the ask small. A follow-up after four or five days roughly doubles reply rates, but stop after two follow-ups. Our recruiting CRM buyer guide shows tools that schedule sequences and track who has already been contacted.

Version 1: First outreach

SUBJECT [Candidate first name], your work on [Specific project]

Hi [Candidate first name],

I came across your [talk at, article on, or work on] [Specific thing] and was impressed by [one concrete detail].

I'm hiring a [Job title] at [Company], where we [one sentence about what the company does]. The role [one sentence on the most interesting part of the work], reports to [Manager name], and pays [Pay range] plus [key benefits or equity].

I don't know if you are open to a move, but would you be up for a 15-minute call next week to hear more? No preparation needed.

[Recruiter name]

[Title], [Company]

[LinkedIn or calendar link]

Version 2: Follow-up after no reply

SUBJECT Re: [Original subject]

Hi [Candidate first name],

Following up on my note from last week about the [Job title] role at [Company]. I know these messages pile up.

If the timing isn't right, no problem at all. Just let me know, and I will check back in a few months if that's okay. If you know someone who might be a fit, I would be grateful for an introduction.

[Recruiter name]
[Company]

Subject lines to try

- [Candidate first name], your work on [Specific project]
- Quick question about your next move
- [Job title] at [Company], open to a chat?
- Re: [Original subject]
- Saw your talk on [Topic]

How to personalize it

- Reference something specific the person did, not just their job title.
- Include the pay range. It's the first thing most passive candidates want to know.
- Keep the first message under 120 words.
- Make the ask a short call, not an application.

Mistakes to avoid

- Copy and paste flattery like your impressive background.
- Attaching a full job description to the first message.
- Sending more than two follow-ups.
- Reaching out to employees of a client if you have a no-poach agreement in your contract.

Legal and compliance notes

Agreements between employers not to recruit each other's employees can violate federal antitrust law, and the Department of Justice and FTC have warned HR teams about them. Don't agree with other companies to stay away from their employees, apart from narrow restrictions tied to a legitimate business deal. If you message candidates in California, applicant personal data is covered by the CCPA, so be ready to explain how you collected it if asked.

| When to send it

Tuesday through Thursday mornings in the candidate's time zone tend to get the best response. Send the first follow-up four or five business days later and the second about a week after that.

| Before you hit send

- The job title, pay range, and dates match what is in your applicant tracking system.
- Every placeholder in brackets has been replaced or deleted.
- Candidates who will be interviewed or assessed are told how to request an accommodation.
- Nothing in the message comments on age, family, health, or other protected characteristics.
- A real person is named as the contact, with a reply address someone checks.

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