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## On Your Mark, Get Set, Hire!

**A glimpse into the world's most massive recruiting effort behind the Olympic Games -- in this case, the upcoming mega-event in Rio de Janeiro.**

By [Carol Patton](#)

Monday, February 22, 2016



For 17 days in August, 10,500 of the world's greatest athletes from 206 different countries will be competing in the world's biggest sporting event in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the host of the 2016 Summer Olympics Games.

But before the first starting pistol is ever fired, another world competition of sorts has been happening behind the scenes.

Recruiters have been clamoring to find, train and manage roughly 150,000 people with all sorts of skills and backgrounds to help stage the event, which includes the 2016 Paralympic Games as well. That workforce will be composed of approximately 6,000 staff on the payroll of the Rio Olympic Committee, 60,000 volunteers and 85,000 contractors. For the past six years, a massive recruiting effort has been under way involving the Rio Olympic Committee and Manpower Group Solutions, the official Olympics staffing provider, to fill nearly every sort of job imaginable -- 502 different jobs, at last count.

Henriquez Gonzalez, the HR director who leads the 2016 Rio games' workforce and corporate HR functional areas, says recruitment for paid staff started in 2010.

Back then, the first recruitment wave was focused on selecting people on the planning side, such as those needed to design the venues or process vendor bids, for example. By January 2016, 2,200 people out of the estimated 6,000 needed were already hired.

"On average, they will work for five months with us," says Gonzalez, who previously worked for 19 years at Shell Brasil as HR director and Latin American HR director. "Now we're working on the operational side [of] these events, [people] operating services [such as travel coordinators]."

### Global Appeal and Diversity

Early last year, eight recruiting centers for volunteers were set up in Rio, Sao Paulo, and other cities, as well as in different regions throughout Brazil, to attract and build a more diverse and inclusive workforce, Gonzalez says. All centers were closed late last year except the largest one in Rio, which is expected to remain open until May or June.

So far, Gonzalez says, 60,000 volunteers have applied online at [rio2016.com](#) and were interviewed, mostly face-to-face, by the 50 recruiters at all eight centers. Surprisingly, an additional 40,000 people outside South America applied online for volunteer positions. However, he suspects only 10,000 will be ready and willing by game time, pointing to the high cost of international travel. Looking ahead, he believes recruiters will conduct roughly 80,000 interviews targeting volunteer positions.



"Today, we have in the [Olympic organization], 100 expatriates bringing their years of experience," Gonzalez says, referring to individuals working in Rio from other countries who were hired as paid staff. "By [game day], we're going to have 200 internationals who are the technical officials for sports. We're still looking for more nationals, more people from Rio, especially for specific areas such as language [translators], physicians, and people with permits [such as] drivers."

But make no mistake: Regardless of position, he says, all Olympic jobs are uncommon. People must be passionate about their work, possess the capacity to adapt themselves to a new country or perhaps continent, and have the ability to successfully interact with both the public and private sectors.

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"Finding the right persons with the right skills and keeping them engaged in the beginning is the most challenging, especially the volunteers, because something of this size was never done in Brazil," he says, explaining that the number of paid staff for the Olympic Games has doubled in size every year since 2010.

Despite Gonzalez' thriving HR career, he says, this event has opened the door to a new world unbeknownst to many senior HR executives.

People who have not been involved in recruitment for the Olympic Games, he says, "don't have a clue" about the complexity involved, such as integrating thousands of jobs and people, managing projects with a clear end date, using project-management tools, or contending with the huge engagement and reward efforts that are required.

"There are many learnings we can share with start-ups, traditional companies and companies that are opening their doors to other countries," he says.

So can Manpower. The company is not only responsible for recruiting approximately half of the 6,000 paid staff, but also for providing contact information for another 450,000 candidates to Olympic vendors, merchandising organizations and media outlets, such as Samsung and NBC Universal, says Jim McCoy, global practice leader at Manpower Group Solutions for recruitment-process outsourcing in Boston.

"We have an obligation to make available to them candidates for potential employment on a temporary basis during [the games]," he says, adding that, since Manpower began recruiting last September, several thousand people have applied online each week at [www.talentosmanpowergroup.com.br](http://www.talentosmanpowergroup.com.br). "[We'll] make sure there are plenty of identified individuals who can support all of the various needs of purveyors [or] suppliers that would be operating during the Olympics."

Just how the global Zika virus -- now a big concern in Brazil and other countries -- will impact this year's games remains to be seen.

Although the virus "is a hot topic" in numerous cities and countries now, says McCoy, it "has not really come up as an issue in recruiting."

"A lot of the early recruiting has been focused on Brazilian nationals," he says, "and even for foreign candidates, they all seem to have studied the risks and, like us, are following international news sources for guidance.

"I suspect," he adds, "we'll likely see increased coverage and more guidance coming from the World Health Organization and the Olympic Committee as we get closer to the games."

**1,000 Interviews Per Week**

McCoy says Manpower's first recruitment step was to work backwards. When do key people or managers need to be in place? Other considerations included local commitments made to Rio government officials to hire as many locals as possible. He says one big source of candidates, for example, has been municipal retirees.

"We have [determined] exactly how many candidates we need to speak to every day of the week until the very last person is onboarded," he says, adding that Manpower recruiters will increase in head count from 25 to 120 in the months ahead. "We typically are interviewing around 1,000 people a week and will do so for a period of roughly 20 weeks."

Manpower's recruitment team is centrally located in Rio, locally trains staff and manages the overall process. However, McCoy also works with the Rio team to help manage productivity and results by reviewing key performance indicators on a daily basis, such as number of individuals hired, and adjusts accordingly.

After applying online, candidates typically receive an email response, thanking them for applying and are then asked to schedule an in-person interview.

McCoy says Gonzalez' HR team -- composed of 155 people -- developed the job criteria that Manpower uses to recruit and screen candidates. Once team members decide which candidates to hire, they notify Manpower recruiters who then initiate the onboarding process.

But with so many candidates to screen, interviewing quickly became a challenge. McCoy suggested streamlining the process by using Montage video interviewing technology to videotape all candidate interviews. Team members receive a video portfolio along with candidate biographies and interviewer notes that can be reviewed at any time. This approach is much more efficient, says McCoy, because members can quickly provide feedback on candidates and hiring decisions to Manpower recruiters.

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Likewise, Manpower also uses Talentify, a Brazilian-developed applicant-tracking system that is compatible with Montage and also incorporates Brazil's legal requirements for foreign workers.

Not surprisingly, other challenges popped up along the way. Included in the criteria for many paid staff and volunteer positions is that candidates must be bilingual in Portuguese and English, which definitely limits the available talent pool. Portuguese is the native language of just a handful of countries -- Brazil, Mozambique, Angola, Portugal, Guinea-Bissau, East Timor, Equatorial Guinea, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe.

Meanwhile, many highly specialized positions also require direct searches, McCoy adds, referring to sophisticated IT positions as one example, or testers to prevent or catch anti-doping rule violations.

"We're canvassing individuals with the profiles we need across Brazil first," he says. "If it occurs that we don't have enough candidates, that's when we look for external sources outside of Brazil. A lot of that is being done through social media. We've trained all of our recruiters in very extensive Boolean search (a type of search that produces more

relevant results by combining keywords such as "and", "not" and "or") so they can identify a profile very quickly and start contacting those people."

However, he believes Brazil supports a "burgeoning" IT industry with many professionals attracted to Olympic jobs. Although some can't -- or may be reluctant to -- replace their permanent job with a five-month position, he says, "we're




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...through some part of may be reluctant to replace their permanent jobs that a true human problem, he says, "We're seeing so much enthusiasm around the games within Rio that the candidate pools are fairly strong in those areas."

Generally, one out of every 10 or 20 job candidates is hired, says McCoy. However, that ratio is fluid depending upon the position. Take hospitality jobs, some of which require minimal skills. He says 99 percent of the candidates could be turned away since many people apply for such jobs. But the opposite occurs with specialized roles such as those involving some IT jobs. One out of every three job candidates may end up being hired.

While he has no doubt that Manpower will meet its established hiring goals, McCoy is also ensuring that the company's recruiters are aligned with the changing needs of the Rio Olympic Committee, which can shift on a daily basis. With a large Manpower operation in Brazil, he says, it's easy for his team to scale up or down as needed, be flexible with workflow or design processes, and "change on a dime."

"In a program like this, you have to expect the unexpected," says McCoy. "You really need a team that is adept at change management and can move very quickly . . . . We want recruiters who are very clever in the way they source candidates [and] engage candidates, but also, if we need to change a workflow in a day, there's no pushback. It's truly an understanding that this is what we need to do to get the games done and really feel that alignment toward the end goal."

**Worth Remembering**

Gonzalez plans to leave a legacy regarding his HR team's gold-medal performance. Other than delivering a successful event, he hopes the global employment market perceives all paid staff and volunteers as "persons with experience who are able to deliver [in] complex, huge events."

Just as important, he says, everyone needs to leave the event feeling proud of their achievements and share their experiences with their family, friends, employers and community.

"It's fantastic to see how people can adapt and be passionate about [their role] when they have a clear view of the meaning of their job," Gonzalez says. "The most important thing I do everywhere I go is to make sure everybody has a good vision about what we're representing a better sense of what they're doing. This enables us to attract, invest and track the right person increase our retention levels, and increase productivity . . . . This will be what I can share. If you recruit the right person, you can minimize your problems."

*Send questions or comments about this story to [hreletters@lrp.com](mailto:hreletters@lrp.com).*

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