BUILDING TEAMS IN THE MOUNTAIN WEST

A Hiring & Compensation Insight Report

2026

Brought to you by RNG Group

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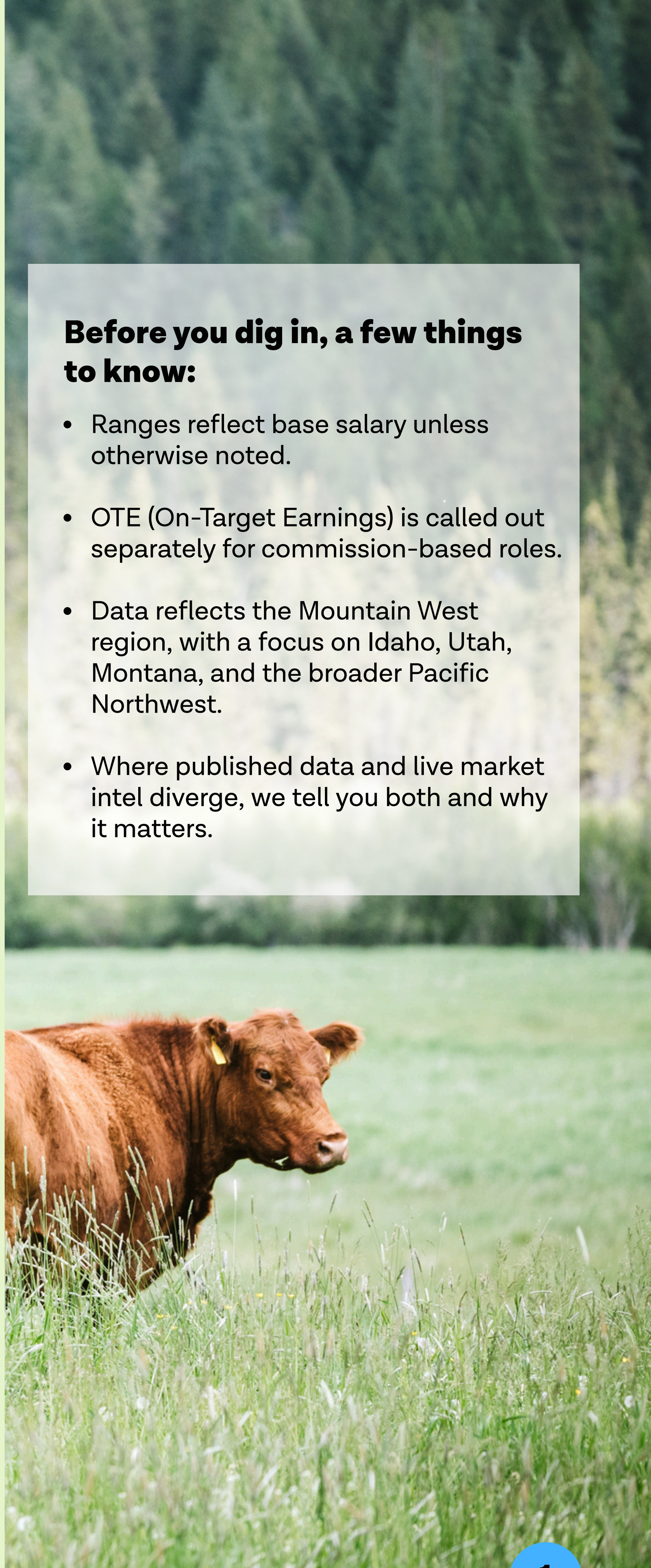
Why This Matters

Hiring data has a problem: it's always looking backward.

The salary surveys, job board averages, and compensation benchmarks that most companies rely on are typically 12 to 18 months behind the real-time market. For a high-growth company trying to move fast, that lag is inconvenient, but more importantly, it's expensive. It leads to lost candidates, misaligned offers, and roles that sit open longer than they should.

At RNG Group, we've spent 10+ years placing talent across the Mountain West. We talk to candidates and hiring managers every day. We know what offers are getting accepted, what's getting misunderstood, and where the market is moving before the data catches up.

This report combines published compensation data with what we are seeing on the ground in 2026. In a region growing as fast as ours, real-time intel matters. Whether you are a founder building your first team, an operator scaling quickly, or an investor trying to understand what talent costs in this market, this is for you.



Before you dig in, a few things to know:

- Ranges reflect base salary unless otherwise noted.
- OTE (On-Target Earnings) is called out separately for commission-based roles.
- Data reflects the Mountain West region, with a focus on Idaho, Utah, Montana, and the broader Pacific Northwest.
- Where published data and live market intel diverge, we tell you both and why it matters.

Mountain West Talent Landscape

The Region Is Having a Moment. The Data Proves It.

The Mountain West isn't a secondary market anymore. Over the past decade, Idaho, Utah, Montana, and the broader Pacific Northwest have become some of the fastest-growing economic regions in the country, shifting the talent market accordingly.

While job openings across the U.S. have declined by an average of 10% since 2020, Idaho has gone in the opposite direction entirely — posting a **+21% increase in job openings,** the highest of any state in the nation.

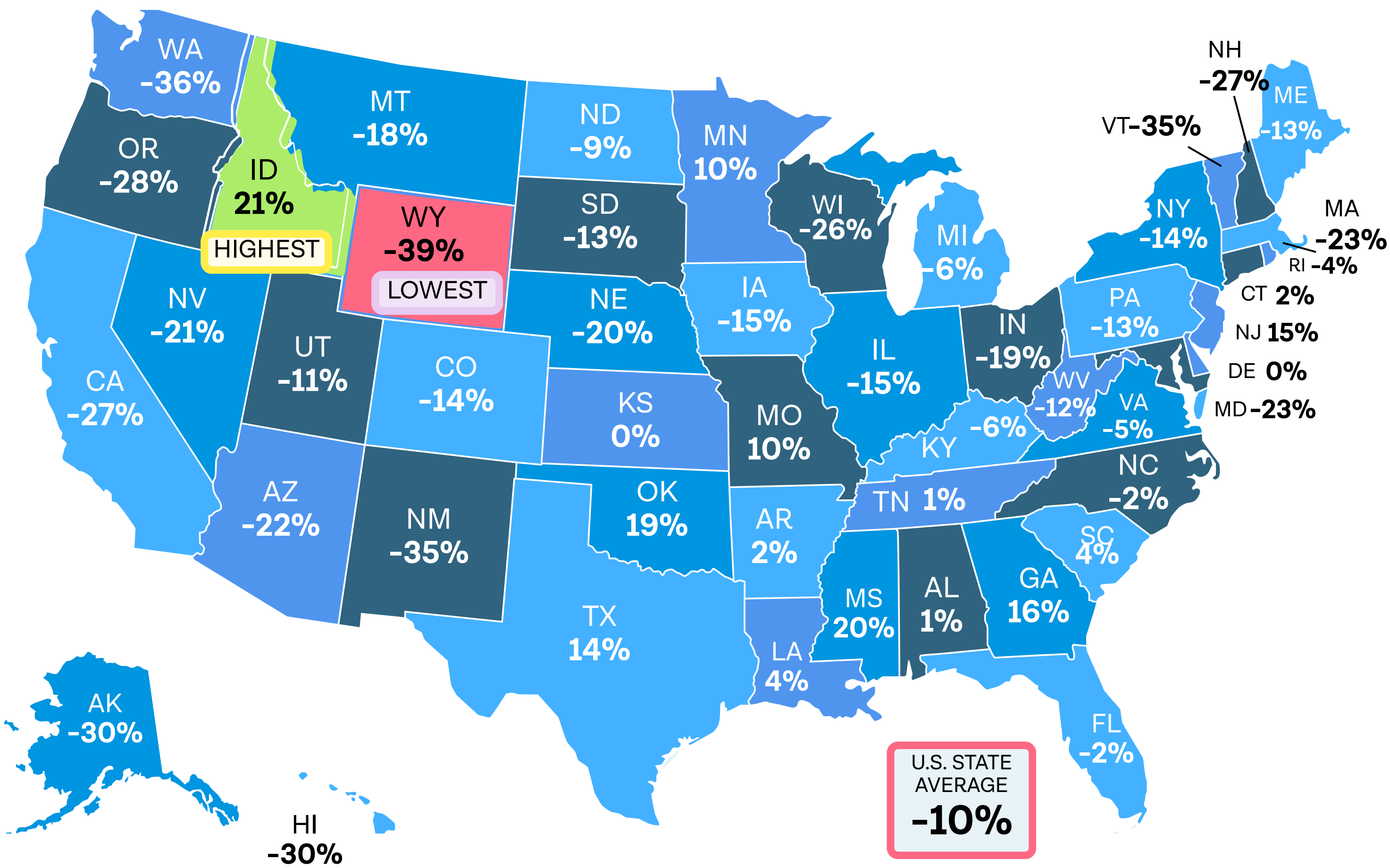
(Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce / Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2026.)
see below.

That's not a coincidence. It's the result of sustained population growth, a maturing startup ecosystem, and an influx of businesses and capital that have been quietly building something real in this region.

Hiring Demand

Since 2020

Change in job openings from Feb. 2020 vs. Jan 2026



Driving Factors

People are moving here... and they are staying.

Idaho has ranked among the top states for net migration for most of the past decade.

Boise, Salt Lake City, Bozeman, and Spokane have all seen significant influxes of workers relocating from coastal markets, bringing with them startup experience, professional networks, and in many cases, compensation expectations shaped by Seattle or San Francisco.

The West Coast slowdown is a Mountain West opportunity.

Tech hiring has contracted sharply across **Washington (-36%), Oregon (-28%), and California (-27%)** since 2020. Engineers, GTM leaders, and operators are available in ways they weren't three years ago, and many are actively open to relocating to markets with lower cost of living and higher quality of life.

For well-positioned Mountain West companies, this is a genuine hiring window.

The startup ecosystem is maturing.

What was once a region defined by agriculture, manufacturing, and outdoor recreation has added a legitimate technology and venture layer. The deal flow, the founder community, and the investor appetite are here. Events like **Seed to Growth** exist because the ecosystem has earned them.

Cost of Living

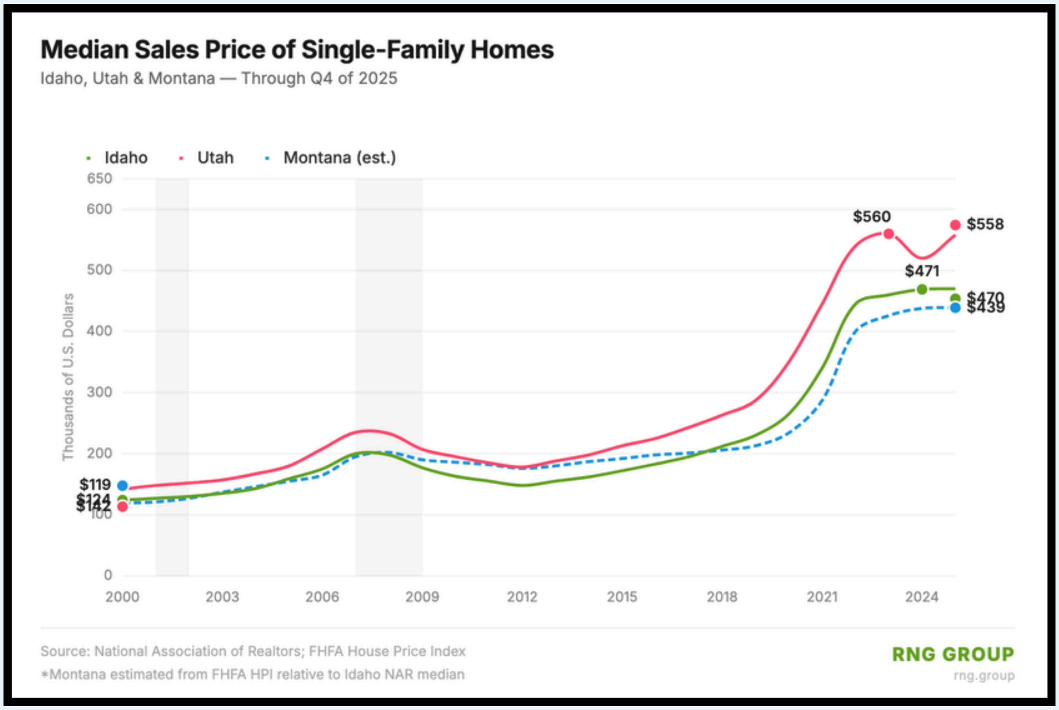
Compensation expectations have followed growth. The Mountain West used to offer a meaningful cost-of-labor discount compared to coastal markets. That gap has narrowed considerably, particularly in tech, GTM, and senior leadership roles.

At the same time, housing costs in key markets have risen sharply and contribute significantly to the compensation conversation:

- **Boise**: Median home price ~$450K–$475K
- **Salt Lake City:** ~$500K–$525K
- **Bozeman:** ~$575K–$625K
- **Sun Valley / Hailey corridor:** Among the highest cost-of-living in Idaho

Candidates weighing a Mountain West opportunity against a remote role with a coastal employer are doing the math on total value not just base salary. Companies that speak confidently to compensation, equity, quality of life, and community win more often than those who can't.

Median Sales Price of Single-Family Homes



Idaho is the fastest-growing job market in the country. The talent is here, or it's on its way. The companies that win will be the ones who understand what the market actually looks like today .

What it Costs to Hire

Most salary surveys are built on data collected months ago, averaged across broad geographies, and published long after the market has moved.

What follows are published benchmarks alongside RNG's live market intelligence from active searches in 2026. Where there's a gap between the two, we tell you, because that gap is usually where hiring mistakes happen.

Base salary is listed unless otherwise noted. OTE (On-Target Earnings) reflects total compensation including commission or variable pay for revenue-generating roles. Ranges reflect the Mountain West market and will vary based on company stage, scope of role, and candidate experience.

**Some industries will impact these numbers differently. Reach out if you would like to discuss specifics.*

GTM & Revenue Roles

Role	Published Data	RNG Market Rate 2026	OTE
Business Development	$45k-$65k	$75k-$110k	Up to $150k
Account executive	$65k-$95k	$100k-$180k	$320k + (50/50 split)
Marketing Manager	$50k-$70k	$55k-$90k	N/A
Director of Marketing	$100k-$140k	$100k-$150k	N/A
Sales Engineer	$100k-$130k	$100k-$180k	Scope-dependent
Customer Success Manager	$60k-$85k	$75k-$125k	N/A
Product Manager (senior/lead)	$110k-$160k	$115k-$250k	N/A

The gap is biggest in GTM. Published data on BDR and AE compensation is dramatically understated — often by 30–50%. Companies benchmarking off public data for these roles are building offers that won't close. If you're hiring in sales, assume the market is higher than anything you've Googled.

Technical Roles

Role	Published Data	RNG Market Rate 2026
Software Engineer (mid, 3-6yrs)	$100k-$130k	$100k-$150k
Software Engineer (Senior)	$130k-$165k	$130k-$220k

The AI premium is real. Senior engineers who are fluent in AI tooling and modern development practices are commanding top-of-range compensation. The spread between a strong generalist and an AI-enabled engineer is widening. If you're building a technical team, budget for this now. One area of modest softening: mid-level tech roles have seen slight candidate flexibility as the West Coast tech contraction has increased available talent. This is the one segment where patient, well-positioned companies may have a small negotiating window but don't count on it lasting.

Operations & Administrative Roles

Role	Published Data	RNG Market Rate 2026
EA / Office Manager	$55K–$75K	$55K–$75K
EA / Chief of Staff-leaning	$75K–$95K	$75K–$115K+
Accounting Admin / Bookkeeper	$45K–$65K	$45K–$75K
Controller	$110K–$150K	$115K–$165K
Customer Support	$40K–$58K	$50K–$70K
Operations Manager / Supply Chai	$75k- $110k	$75k-$110k

The EA/Chief of Staff trap. This is one of the most common mismatches we see at the early-stage level. A founder budgets $60K–$70K for an office manager and actually needs a strategic operator who can manage schedules, vendors, internal comms, and executive priorities simultaneously. That person costs $90K–$115K+. Getting clear on scope before you post the role — and budgeting accordingly — saves significant time and money.

A Word on Equity

For early-stage companies where cash comp is constrained, equity can be a genuine differentiator but only if it's structured and communicated well. Candidates at every level are increasingly equity-literate, particularly those coming from coastal markets or prior startup experience.

The candidates you want most, particularly those coming out of coastal markets or previous startups, have seen equity done right and done wrong. They know the difference between a meaningful grant and a number on a piece of paper that was never going to be worth anything. They're asking real questions: what's the vesting schedule, is there a cliff, how does the cap table look, are refresh grants on the table?

A few things we see:

- Equity offered at all levels (not just exec) signals trust and shared ownership
- Vesting schedules and cliff periods matter
- For senior hires, equity is often expected regardless of base compensation
- Refresh grants tied to tenure or performance can be a retention tool that costs less than a backfill

Before rolling out an equity program, talk to your investors, or potential investors, early. Alignment on how equity is structured and offered to employees can prevent costly corrections down the road and signals to future capital partners that you're building with intention.

What High-Growth Companies Get Wrong When Hiring

The Most Expensive Hiring Mistakes We See

After 10+ years and 300+ placements across the Mountain West, we've seen the same mistakes show up again and again — across industries, company stages, and org sizes. They're rarely about bad intentions. They're almost always about moving fast without a clear process.

Posting Before You're Ready

The most common and costly mistake in startup hiring is treating a job posting as the starting point. It isn't. A job post is the output of a clear internal conversation, one that answers:

- What does this person actually own?
- What does success look like in 90 days? In a year?
- What kind of person thrives in our current stage and culture, not just on paper?
- What are we actually willing to pay?

Companies that skip this step end up interviewing the wrong candidates, making offers that don't land, or hiring someone who checks the boxes but doesn't fit the reality of the role. The fix isn't complicated, it just requires slowing down for 48 hours before you post.

Benchmarking Comp Off Outdated Data

Companies lose great candidates every day not because they're unwilling to pay, but because their initial offer signals that they haven't done their homework. In a candidate's mind, a lowball offer isn't just a number, it's information about how the company operates. Use current market data. Talk to people who are actively placing candidates. Build enough flexibility into your offer range that can move when you find the right person.

Confusing Speed with Urgency

Early-stage companies often feel like every hire is on fire. That urgency is understandable. But urgency without process produces bad hires, and a bad hire at the wrong stage can set a company back significantly.

The companies we partner with that scale most successfully share one thing in common: despite needing to move quickly, they resist the urge to treat recruiting as a quick fix. By aligning on priorities first, they're able to move fast and well, filling multiple roles in a compressed timeline without sacrificing quality or culture fit.

Hiring for Today, Not for Scale

Startups often hire for the immediate need...someone to handle what's on fire right now. The problem is that the person who can manage chaos at 10 employees isn't always the person who can build and lead a team at 50.

This doesn't mean you need to over-hire for a future that isn't guaranteed. It means being honest about the trajectory of the role and finding someone who can grow into it, or being clear that it's a bridge hire and planning accordingly.

Underestimating Culture Fit at the Early Stage

At 5, 10, or 15 people, every hire changes the culture. A technically strong candidate who doesn't share the company's values or work style has an outsized negative impact at the early stage that they simply wouldn't have at a 200-person company with established norms.

The best early-stage hires are people who are genuinely excited about the problem you're solving, comfortable with ambiguity, and willing to take on whatever comes with being part of a startup — including everything that's hard about it.

Going It Alone Too Long

Most founding teams start by hiring through their own networks. That works until it doesn't. Personal connections fill the first few seats, but they rarely have the reach, the process, or the time to source across multiple functions simultaneously while also running a business.

The companies that scale well know when to bring in outside support not as a sign of failure, but as a strategic decision to protect their most valuable resource: time.

The Cost of Getting it Wrong

A bad hire at the manager level costs an estimated **3 to 5 times** that person's annual salary when you account for lost productivity, team disruption, and the time and resources it takes to backfill. Hiring well isn't a nice-to-have. At the growth stage, it's one of the highest-leverage decisions you make, and it compounds in both directions.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the average cost of a bad hire runs to as much as 30 percent of the employee's first-year earnings. On a $60,000 role, that is $18,000 gone before you start the search over. On a $100,000 role, that is $30,000.

For specific values based on your roles and hiring needs, check out our free cost-per-hire calculator.

A Simple Framework for Smarter Hiring

A Smarter Hiring Process Doesn't Have to Be Complicated

STEP 1: Define Before You Post

Get aligned internally before anything goes live.

That means agreeing on the core responsibilities of the role (not a wish list), what success looks like at **30, 90, and 180 days**, the non-negotiables versus the luxuries, your real compensation range, and who owns the process and what the decision timeline looks like. This conversation takes a few hours. Skipping this costs weeks, preparing saves you.

STEP 2: Know Your Market

- Talk to people who are actively placing candidates in your market.
- Build a comp range with enough flexibility to move on the right person.
- Understand what candidates at this level are evaluating beyond salary: equity, growth, flexibility, mission, etc.
- Know your competition: who else is hiring for this role, and what are they offering?

STEP 3: Build a Process That Respects Everyone's Time

The best candidates are evaluating you as much as you're evaluating them. A slow, disorganized interview process is a bad signal to high-level candidates.

- Define your interview stages upfront and communicate them clearly.
- Set internal timelines and hold to them.
- Give candidates meaningful feedback at each stage.
- Make decisions quickly when you find the right person. Great candidates don't stay available long.

STEP 4: Hire for Where You're Going, Not Just Where You Are

- Can this person grow with us, or are they a bridge to the next hire?
- Do they have the resilience and adaptability that startup life requires?
- Are they truly excited about what we're building or just looking for a job?

There's no wrong answer to the bridge hire question, sometimes that's exactly what you need. The key is being honest about it internally so you're evaluating the right things.

STEP 5: Don't Go It Alone Longer Than You Should

Your network will get you started. It won't get you scaled. Knowing when to bring in outside support (and choosing the right partner when you do) is one of the highest-leverage decisions an early-stage company can make.

The right recruiting partner doesn't just source candidates. They bring market intelligence, process discipline, and a network built over years in your region and industry. They save you time, protect your culture, and help you make better decisions under pressure.

Ready to End Your Hiring Headaches?

RNG Group is a boutique recruiting firm built for companies that are serious about growth. We've spent 10+ years placing talent across the Mountain West and we know this market better than anyone. Whether you're building your first team or scaling your tenth hire into a hundred, we'd love to talk.

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