

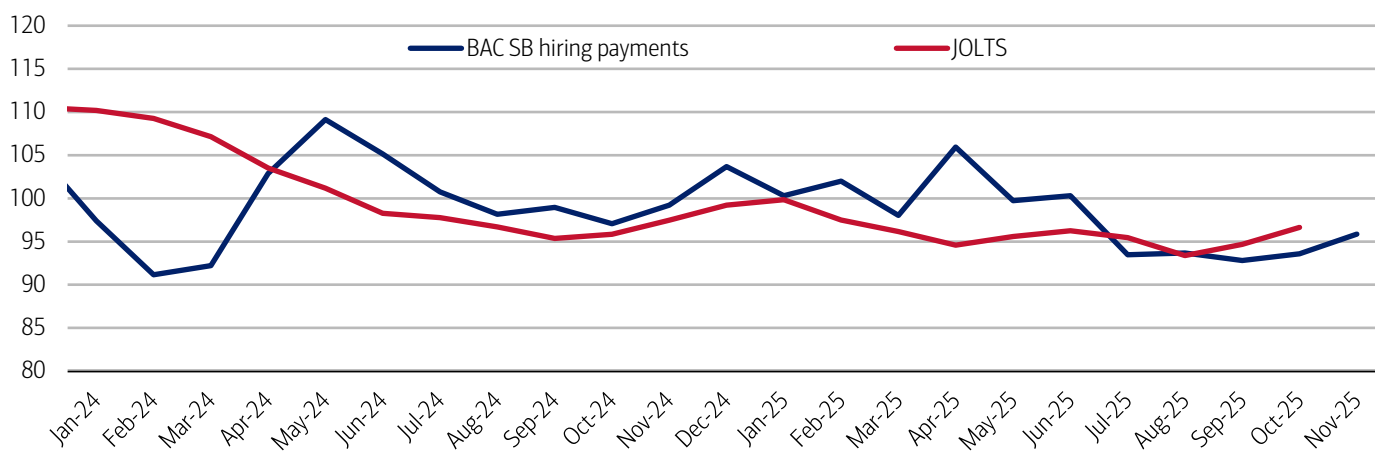
Daily Insights

Small business hiring: Chilled, but not frozen

23 December 2025

Though there was a slight upswing in the data in the last couple of months, small business hiring remains below 2024 levels

Small business (SB) payments to hiring firms per client and Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) job openings (monthly, indexed, 2024 average = 100, three-month moving average)



Source: Bank of America internal data, Haver Analytics

BANK OF AMERICA INSTITUTE

Small businesses employ nearly half of America's workforce, so shifts in their hiring behaviors can tell us a lot about the health of the labor market. Bank of America Institute's alternative hiring indicator – which runs a month ahead of JOLTS – found that despite some improvement in November, small business hiring remains below 2024 levels. And while BofA Global Research found that part of this cooling is due to a decrease in labor supply as opposed to frozen labor demand, some small businesses may be pulling back on hiring due to cost increases from tariffs and other pressures.

For more, read our publication: [Five themes from '25](#).

Happy holidays from the Bank of America Institute team! Daily Insights will be taking a brief pause, resuming January 5th, 2026.

Methodology

Selected Bank of America transaction data is used to inform the macroeconomic views expressed in this report and should be considered in the context of other economic indicators and publicly available information. In certain instances, the data may provide directional and/or predictive value. The data used is not comprehensive; it is based on **aggregated and anonymized** selections of Bank of America data and may reflect a degree of selection bias and limitations on the data available.

Any payments data represents aggregated spend from US Retail, Preferred, Small Business and Wealth Management clients with a deposit account or credit card. Aggregated spend include total credit card, debit card, ACH, wires, bill pay, business/peer-to-peer, cash, and checks.

Any **Small Business** payments data represents aggregate spend from Small Business clients with a deposit account or a Small Business credit card. Payroll payments data include channels such as ACH (automated clearing house), bill pay, checks and wire. Bank of America per Small Business client data represents activity spending from active Small Business clients with a deposit account or a Small Business credit card and at least one transaction in each month. Small businesses in this report include business clients within Bank of America and generally defined as under \$5mm in annual sales revenue.

Unless otherwise stated, data is not adjusted for seasonality, processing days or portfolio changes, and may be subject to periodic revisions.

The differences between the total and per household card spending growth rate can be explained by the following reasons:

1. Overall total card spending growth is partially boosted by the growth in the number of active cardholders in our sample. This could be due to an increasing customer base or inactive customers using their cards more frequently.
2. Per household card spending growth only looks at households that complete at least five transactions with Bank of America cards in the month. Per household spending growth isolates impacts from a changing sample size, which could be unrelated to underlying economic momentum, and potential spending volatility from less active users.
3. Overall total card spending includes small business card spending while per household card spending does not.
4. Differences due to using processing dates (total card spending) versus transaction date (per household card spending).
5. Other differences including household formations due to young adults moving in and out of their parent's houses during COVID.

Any household consumer deposit data based on Bank of America internal data is derived by anonymizing and aggregating data from Bank of America consumer deposit accounts in the US and analyzing that data at a highly aggregated level. Whenever median household savings and checking balances are quoted, the data is based on a fixed cohort of households that had a consumer deposit account (checking and/or savings account) for all months from January 2019 through the most current month of data shown.

Bank of America aggregated credit/debit card spending per household includes spending from active US households only. Only consumer card holders making a minimum of five transactions a month are included in the dataset. Spending from corporate cards are excluded. Data regarding merchants who receive payments are identified and classified by the Merchant Categorization Code (MCC) defined by financial services companies. The data are mapped using proprietary methods from the MCCs to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), which is also used by the Census Bureau, in order to classify spending data by subsector. Spending data may also be classified by other proprietary methods not using MCCs.

We consider a measure of services necessity spending that includes but is not limited to childcare, rent, insurance, insurance, public transportation, and tax payments. Discretionary services includes but is not limited to charitable donations, leisure travel, entertainment, and professional/consumer services. Holiday spending is defined as items in which spending in the November-December period is usually at least 20% of total annual spending on the category

Lower, middle and higher household income cuts in Bank of America credit and debit card spending per household, and consumer deposit account data are based on quantitative estimates of each households' income. These quantitative estimates are bucketed according to terciles, with a third of households placed in each tercile periodically. The lowest tercile represents 'lower income', the middle tercile represents 'middle income' and the highest tercile 'higher income'. The income thresholds between these terciles will move over time, reflecting any number of factors that impact income, including general wage inflation, changes in social security payments and individual households' income. The income and tercile in which a household is categorised are periodically re-assessed.

Generations, if discussed, are defined as follows: Gen Z, born after 1996; Younger Millennials: born between 1989-1995; Older Millennials: born between 1978-1988; Gen Xers: born between 1965-1977; Baby Boomers: 1946-1964; Traditionalists: pre-1946.

Any reference to card spending per household on gasoline includes all purchases at gasoline stations and might include purchases of non-gas items.

For our paycheck-to-paycheck analysis we use a sample of households that appears to have their primary banking relationship with Bank of America. We look at households who reside in the United States and have had a checking account for at least the past 12 months. We consider a measure of necessity spending that includes but is not limited to childcare, external credit card payments, gasoline, general retail, grocery, housing (mortgage/rent), insurance, cable TV/broadband, public transportation, tax payments, vehicle costs and payments. We consider spending across payment channels (ACH, credit and debit card, bill pay). Income is defined as regularly recurring payments into accounts, such as payroll, social security, unemployment insurance pensions, and annuity income. Households are defined as living paycheck to paycheck if in the quarter

their necessity spending exceeds 95% of their income. Note where individuals in a household bank with different banks it is possible not all of their spending and income could be captured, increasing the uncertainty around paycheck to paycheck estimates.

Any **Small Business** payments data represents aggregate spend from Small Business clients with a deposit account or a Small Business credit card. Payroll payments data include channels such as ACH (automated clearing house), bill pay, checks and wire. Bank of America per Small Business client data represents activity spending from active Small Business clients with a deposit account or a Small Business credit card and at least one transaction in each month. Small businesses in this report include business clients within Bank of America and are generally defined as under \$5mm in annual sales revenue.

Unless otherwise stated, data is not adjusted for seasonality, processing days or portfolio changes, and may be subject to periodic revisions.

Revenue tiers are determined by the combination of following factors: 1) stated revenue on small businesses credit or Paycheck Protection Program applications, 2) actual account inflow into Bank of America Deposit Accounts, and 3) third party revenue estimation.

The alternative hiring indicator consists of payments from Bank of America small business clients to small business-focused hiring firms which include both direct deposits through Automated Clearing House (ACH) and payments via credit and debit cards.

Data regarding merchants who receive payments are identified and classified by the Merchant Categorization Code (MCC) defined by financial services companies. The data are mapped using proprietary methods from the MCCs to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), which is also used by the Census Bureau, in order to classify spending data by subsector. Spending data may also be classified by other proprietary methods not using MCCs.

Our analysis for migration pattern is based on the group of Bank of America customers who had an open consumer checking, savings, credit and/or other investment accounts for every quarter between 4Q 2020 and 3Q 2024. Migration pattern is then extracted based on customer home addresses. This methodology yields a fixed sample size of roughly 45 million customers.

Because our data is based on a fixed sample of customers it will not capture the impact of international migration. Instead, our analysis is designed to look at how internal migration in the United States is changing. Accordingly, the overall population movements in the official Census Bureau data, which also accounts for international migration, will not necessarily align with our data in some MSAs, though our data should give similar directional signals.

Additional information about the methodology used to aggregate the data is available upon request.

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Disclosures

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