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The outlook for professionals such as financial analysts and senior accountants is increasingly bright, and talent shortages are leading to higher salaries for in-demand specialties, [new research](#) from Robert Half International shows. Nearly three in five (59 percent) chief financial officers (CFOs) interviewed for a [Robert Half](#) survey said it is at least somewhat challenging to find skilled financial professionals today.

The survey was developed by Robert Half, the world's largest specialized staffing firm. It was conducted by an independent research firm and is based on interviews with more than 1,400 CFOs from a stratified random sample of U.S. companies with 20 or more employees.

CFOs were asked, "How challenging is it for your company to find skilled financial professionals today?" Their responses:

- Very challenging – 5%
- Somewhat challenging – 54%
- Not challenging – 37%
- Don't know/no answer – 4%

"Companies are looking for financial staff who can manage fundamental accounting needs, prepare their organizations for growth and ensure they are in compliance with regulatory requirements," said Paul McDonald, Robert Half senior executive director. "However, hiring accounting and finance professionals has become increasingly competitive. The unemployment rates for many financial positions remain below the national average, resulting in candidate shortages in some specialties."

Following are key accounting and finance positions experiencing particularly strong

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technology (IT) expertise, are sought to optimize financial systems, support enterprise resource planning projects and help their organizations make better-informed decisions. According to Robert Half's Salary Guide, business analysis managers at large companies (more than \$250 million in sales) are expected to see a jump in starting salaries of 4.4 percent in 2013, compared to a 3.3 percent average increase for all financial positions.

Senior accountants: Companies are looking for accountants, especially CPAs, to maintain the general ledger, compile financial reports, and oversee accounts receivable and payable. In addition to functional expertise, firms seek candidates with excellent communication and problem-solving abilities.

Internal auditors: These professionals help evaluate the effectiveness of financial and information systems, internal controls, and management and operational practices. Demand remains strong for these specialists; the unemployment rate for accountants and auditors was 4.6 percent in the fourth quarter of 2012.

IT auditors: Professionals in this fast-growing specialization understand the relationship between IT audit procedures, business process controls and risks. Salaries for IT auditor positions at all levels are expected to see above-average increases in 2013.

Cost accountants: Professionals who can merge cost accounting with financial planning and analysis skills, particularly in a manufacturing context, are in demand to help companies minimize costs.

Compliance officers: Given the evolving regulatory environment, companies are seeking specialists to oversee compliance initiatives and report their findings to management. The profession had a 3.8 percent unemployment rate in the fourth quarter of 2012.

Controllers: Controllers are needed to plan, direct and coordinate activities such as

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searches that include tapping their contacts for referrals, networking with industry associations and working with a specialized financial recruiter,” McDonald added. “Companies also should look within their ranks to develop the skills they need by offering training and mentoring opportunities to their internal teams.”

The national study was developed by Robert Half. It was conducted by an independent research firm and is based on more than 1,400 telephone interviews with CFOs from a random sample of U.S. companies with 20 or more employees. For the study to be statistically representative and ensure that companies from all segments are represented, the sample was stratified by geographic region and number of employees. The results were then weighted to reflect the proper proportion of employees within each region.

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