As AI Skills Become the Hardest to Find, ManpowerGroup Launches 2026 VivaTech Startup Challenge: "Human First, Digital Always"

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New global challenge invites startups to develop AI-powered workforce solutions that put people in control

MILWAUKEE, March 24, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- As organizations race to deploy artificial intelligence, and as demand for workers with AI skills has overtaken engineering and traditional IT, a more fundamental question is emerging: who is this technology really serving?



To help answer that question, ManpowerGroup has launched its 2026 VivaTech Startup Challenge, "Human First, Digital Always: Redefining the Future of Work." This year's challenge calls on the world's most innovative startups to build AI-powered solutions that give organizations speed and scale without leaving people behind.

"The innovation that will truly reshape work is rarely sitting in plain sight; you have to go find it. In a period of disruption this intense, startups are where the most agile, ground-breaking thinking is happening. That's why this challenge matters: it brings their speed and ingenuity together with ManpowerGroup's deep, long-standing understanding of what clients and candidates actually need," said Valerie Beaulieu-James, Chief Growth & Innovation Officer at ManpowerGroup. "And we're excited to partner with the builders, established and emerging, who will join us in creating a human first, digital always future of work. That's the innovation we're proud to incubate."

According to ManpowerGroup's 2026 Talent Shortage Survey, drawing from 39,000 employers across 41 countries, 72% of employers report difficulty filling roles, with demand for AI capabilities now outpacing engineering and traditional IT skills for the first time. For ManpowerGroup, which places people in roles across 70+ countries every day, that shift isn't theoretical. The winners will be those who deploy AI in ways that empower people, not replace them.

ManpowerGroup will bring this human-first approach to AI innovation to the global stage at VivaTech in Paris.

"Technology and innovation are central to how ManpowerGroup creates long-term value for clients, candidates, and society. France has established itself as a cornerstone of our innovation ecosystem, where advanced technology, entrepreneurial energy, and talent expertise come together. VivaTech embodies this dynamic and reinforces our belief that the future of work is built at the intersection of human potential and digital intelligence," Riccardo Barberis, President Northern Region and France at ManpowerGroup, said.

The Challenge: "Human First, Digital Always"
This year's challenge is organized around a single conviction: AI and humans are not in competition; they are in collaboration. ManpowerGroup has identified two areas where that collaboration can transform the future of work:

- **Challenge 1: Agentic AI for Workforce Delivery at Scale**
  Organizations need to fill roles fast, yet workforce delivery still depends on human availability, multiple vendors, and time-consuming coordination. This challenge asks: how can agentic AI add speed and scale, particularly when a temporary assignment ends and redeployment is critical? ManpowerGroup is looking for solutions where AI does the heavy lifting and humans make the calls that count.
- **Challenge 2: Skills as Currency, People in Control**
  AI has the potential to reshape jobs at scale and people need to see where their skills fit and feel ownership of their careers. This challenge asks: how do we put workers in the driver's seat as technology evolves? ManpowerGroup is seeking AI solutions that make skills visible, portable, and actionable, building skills that travel with people, not locked to a job title or a single employer.

What Winning Startups Receive
Selected finalists and winners will gain access to opportunities designed to accelerate their growth and market reach:

- **Proof of Concept:** Collaborate with ManpowerGroup to develop and pilot a solution within one of our global markets.
- **Pitch Studio at VivaTech:** Present live to an audience of global business and technology leaders at Europe's premier innovation event.
- **Client Access:** Join a ManpowerGroup-hosted client event and connect directly with enterprise decision-makers.
- **Global Visibility:** Present to ManpowerGroup stakeholders worldwide and meet our Chief Growth and Innovation Officer.

Selection Criteria
Submissions will be evaluated across five dimensions:

- **Future of Work Impact:** Clear value proposition for human-first, AI-powered workforce transformation.
- **Innovation & Differentiation:** Original solution with a strong innovation edge and defensible approach.
- **Scalability Potential:** Ability to scale globally across markets, industries, and workforce segments.
- **Team and Vision:** Committed team with a clear long-term vision and execution capability.
- **Market Traction:** Demonstrated adoption, customer validation, or strong product-market fit.

Timeline
Applications will be accepted through April 13, 2026. Finalists will be announced on May 4 and will pitch live on the VivaTech Pitch Studio in Paris on June 17, 2026.

Apply now and join ManpowerGroup at VivaTech 2026: vivatechnology.com/challenges/manpower-group-2026

ABOUT MANPOWERGROUP
ManpowerGroup® (NYSE: MAN), the leading global workforce solutions company, helps organizations transform in a fast-changing world of work by sourcing, assessing, developing, and managing the talent that enables them to win. We develop innovative solutions for hundreds of thousands of organizations every year, providing them with skilled talent while finding meaningful, sustainable employment for millions of people across a wide range of industries and skills. Our expert family of brands – Manpower, Experis, and Talent Solutions – creates substantially more value for candidates and clients across more than 70 countries and territories and has done so for more than 75 years. We are recognized consistently for our diversity – as a best place to work for Women, Inclusion, Equality, and Disability, and in 2026 ManpowerGroup was named one of the World's Most Ethical Companies for the 17th time – all confirming our position as the brand of choice for in-demand talent.

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