2026
Hiring and Salary Guide

4 Corner
RESOURCES

Introduction

Welcome to 4 Corner Resources' 2026 Hiring and Salary Guide!

Each year, my team and I look forward to creating this resource, not just because we love data (we do), but because it gives us a chance to step back, make sense of the noise, and share a practical, human view of what's happening in the labor market. And 2025 gave us plenty to unpack.

Despite an unpredictable economic backdrop, the job market showed remarkable resilience once again. Inflation continued to cool, wage growth steadied, and hiring held firm in many sectors. But stability didn't mean simplicity. Talent shortages persisted, especially in healthcare, skilled trades, and technical fields, where demand continues to outpace supply. Employers also faced a new wave of workforce questions: How much should AI reshape hiring? How do you build teams when expectations around flexibility, compensation, and career mobility are shifting so quickly? And what does "productivity" really look like in a world where hybrid work has become the norm rather than the exception?

AI, in particular, has moved from a buzzword to a daily reality, reshaping job descriptions, workflows, interview processes, and the skills companies prioritize. At the same time, candidates are placing more emphasis on stability, well-being, and meaningful work.

The challenge for employers in 2026 will be balancing technological efficiency with the very human experience of being hired, onboarded, and supported at work.

This guide brings together insights from thousands of conversations with employers and job seekers, our proprietary hiring data, and results from our recent Employee Mindset Survey and AI Perception and Threat Survey. Our goal is simple: help you navigate the year ahead with clarity, confidence, and a strategy grounded in real-world trends, not headlines.

Whether you're an HR leader building long-term workforce plans, a hiring manager tackling day-to-day recruiting challenges, or someone who simply enjoys understanding where the labor market is headed, I hope you'll find this guide both useful and thought-provoking. Explore the latest salary benchmarks, industry trends, and actionable recommendations you can put to work immediately.

For ongoing insights throughout the year, be sure to subscribe to our newsletter and connect with us on LinkedIn.

Most importantly, here's to a successful, rewarding, and forward-thinking 2026.

Pete Newsome

The Calibration Economy: 2026 Job Market Trends and Strategies

The job market enters 2026 with a sense of cautious steadiness. The wild swings between hiring sprees and hiring freezes have settled, yet the workplace continues to evolve in ways that leave both employers and workers slightly uneasy.

Companies are weighing new technology investments, budget pressures, and shifting workforce expectations. Employees are evaluating their prospects in a market that feels recognizable in some ways and entirely new in others. The pace of change is uneven, which makes this moment harder to read and more important to understand.

We're calling this new environment the Calibration Economy.

Organizations are reassessing how they deploy talent, where they place their resources, and which roles truly move the needle. Hiring decisions are slower and more deliberate because the margin for error feels smaller. Workers are staying put longer, even when they feel ready for a change. The path forward looks tighter and more competitive, and that tension shapes movement across nearly every sector. Some industries are leveling off while others gain momentum, and this mismatch influences how both employers and candidates behave.

Several distinct forces are contributing to this recalibration:

- AI is reshaping how work gets done and which skills carry the greatest value.

- Blue-collar roles are gaining strength, while many white-collar paths are contracting.

- Budgets are tighter, and compensation has flattened, even as transparency expands.

- Hybrid work has settled into a long-term pattern that feels permanent, although expectations about presence continue to shift.

- Education and experience requirements are being rewritten.

- Recruiting is becoming more automated.

- Employees are staying in place longer, which affects mobility, succession planning, and skill development.

- Compliance is becoming more complex.

The forces listed will not move in a straight line, nor will they affect every organization equally. That makes this year especially important for leaders. As such, clear visibility into the pressures shaping the labor market and an accurate understanding of where expectations are shifting are essential for making strong workforce decisions.

The ten dynamics outlined in this section provide that context. They highlight how employer priorities are evolving, how worker behaviors are changing, and how the structure of work continues to transform. The salary data that follows offers a grounded view of compensation realities across the roles we support every day.

The Calibration Economy calls for careful planning and sharper talent decisions. Our goal with this guide is to give you the clarity and confidence to navigate that landscape with precision.

01
The rise of Agentic AI and the Superworker

If 2024-2025 was the era of generative AI experimentation, 2026 is the era of "Agentic AI." Organizations are moving beyond using AI as a passive assistant to deploying AI agents capable of autonomous decision-making and workflow execution. This shift is redefining productivity standards and creating a new archetype of employee: the Superworker.

From chatbots to autonomous agents

Gartner expects that 40 percent of enterprise applications will include task-specific AI agents in 2026, compared to less than 5 percent in 2025. These agents operate as independent problem-solvers, handling everything from procurement to scheduling to Tier 1 HR support.

Employees who learn to leverage these agentic systems can produce at levels once associated with entire teams. Some use multi-agent configurations where one model researches, another drafts, and a third checks compliance, while the human sets the direction. Productivity is no longer measured only by skill but by how effectively a worker manages their digital counterparts.

Despite mounting pressure from AI automation, US workers remain surprisingly optimistic. Data from our Q4 AI Perception and Threat Survey shows employees believe that more than half of their responsibilities could technically be replaced by AI, yet 71 percent of managers view AI as very or extremely positive for their careers. Most believe the technology will elevate their work rather than diminish it.

This optimism has benefits. Workers who see AI as an opportunity tend to adopt it more quickly and achieve stronger business outcomes. It also carries a warning for employers. When employees acknowledge that 56 percent of their job duties could be automated, organizations may struggle to justify unchanged salary levels or traditional headcount structures. That tension will shape conversations about pay, performance, and expectations throughout 2026.

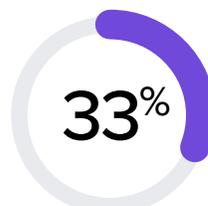### What leaders should take from this

Agentic AI isn't just a technology shift; it rewrites what productivity means. This trend will influence nearly every workforce decision by the end of 2026.
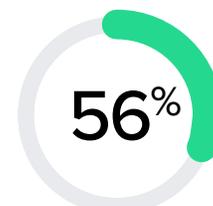
Optimism amidst potential displacement

What percentage of your responsibilities do you think could be replaced by AI?

2025 Hiring Market Survey

33% Staff level and below

56% Manager and above

02
The Blue-Collar Renaissance and the White-Collar Recession

One of the most striking shifts shaping 2026 is the reversal of long-standing assumptions regarding the relationship between education and opportunity. The traditional white-collar pathway, once seen as the safest route to upward mobility, is losing ground as automation reshapes entry-level professional work. At the same time, the skilled trades are experiencing a surge in demand that is both structural and long-lasting.

The erosion of entry-level knowledge work

For generations, a four-year degree functioned as a near guarantee of a stable professional career. That guarantee no longer holds. Agentic AI is eliminating or absorbing much of the work once reserved for new graduates. Tasks such as research, data processing, and basic coding, which historically served as foundational early-career responsibilities in finance, law, marketing, and administration, are now being completed faster and more accurately by automated systems.

This has created a bottleneck for young professionals. With fewer openings available, the result is a paper ceiling that feels increasingly immovable for generalist degree holders trying to enter saturated fields.

The skilled trades boom

While early-career white-collar roles contract, the skilled trades are surging. Massive federal infrastructure investments, the continued buildout of green energy systems, and the explosive growth of data centers have created sustained demand for technicians, electricians, HVAC specialists, machinists, and other hands-on professionals.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the US will add more than five million jobs by 2034, with a disproportionate share coming from healthcare support roles and technical trades. Growth in specialized occupations such as wind turbine technicians is approaching 50 percent, and the need for data center construction and maintenance talent is so acute that employers are competing aggressively for workers.

These jobs offer clear economic incentives. Many provide a six-figure earning potential without the debt burden of a traditional four-year degree.

> " *Skilled trades are no longer a fallback option. They have become a clear path to financial stability and career mobility.*
>
> 2025 Hiring Market Survey

The educational pivot: Vocational enrollment trends

Students have responded decisively. Rising tuition costs, concerns about ROI, and the immediate earning potential of trade programs have shifted enrollment patterns. The National Student Clearinghouse reported that by Spring 2025, vocational-focused community colleges saw enrollment increases of nearly 11.7 percent, and momentum has only strengthened heading into 2026.

Gen Z, the most cost-conscious generation in modern history, is increasingly selecting paths that minimize debt and accelerate entry into the workforce. Plumbing, electrical work, welding, and specialized manufacturing programs are filling with students who once would have pursued business or liberal arts degrees.

What leaders should take from this

The economy is sending a clear signal. There's a rising premium for hands-on, technical work, while the automatic advantage of a generalized bachelor's degree is fading. As a result:

- Workforce strategies must adapt to attract and retain trade talent that now commands premium value.

- Early-career white-collar hiring will require a rethinking of job design and training pathways.

- Partnerships with vocational programs may deliver stronger pipelines than traditional university recruiting.

The Blue-Collar Renaissance is no longer an emerging trend. It is a structural shift that will define talent strategy for the next decade and beyond.

03
The Forever Layoff and Rolling Rightsizing

Workforce reductions have taken on a new shape in 2026. The era of large, highly publicized layoffs has been replaced with something quieter and more persistent. Instead of sweeping cuts, organizations are relying on regular micro-adjustments to stay aligned with market conditions, budget pressures, and AI-driven productivity gains. This pattern, often invisible externally, is what many employees now describe as the Forever Layoff.

Stealth cut mechanics

Companies are increasingly using small-scale reductions to manage headcount without triggering legal requirements or negative headlines. By keeping reductions below the threshold required by the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining

Notification (WARN) Act (typically 50+ employees), companies avoid mandatory 60-day notice periods and negative press. This strategy allows companies to continuously calibrate their workforce against quarterly financial results and AI integration progress.

The data paints a clear picture. As our Q4 Employee Mindset Survey shows, while 77 percent of employees feel very or extremely confident about their current job stability, nearly half report being very or extremely anxious about their long-term future. Workers trust the job they have today, but they are worried about what comes next. They see roles disappearing, restructuring becoming routine, and automation expanding.

What's your level of anxiety about your future in the job market?

Not anxious at all	8%
Not very anxious	18%
Neutral	25%
Very anxious	24%
Extremely anxious	23%
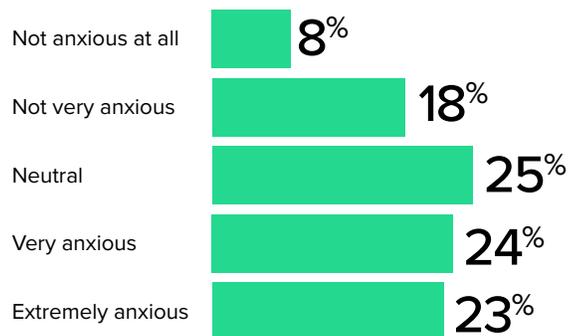
2025 Hiring Market Survey

What leaders should take from this

While rolling rightsizing is a cost-management tactic that makes sense on paper, it also shapes how employees behave, engage, and plan their careers. Leaders should recognize several implications:

- Clear communication about organizational priorities becomes essential.

- Career pathways must be visible and attainable to counter rising anxiety.

- Workforce planning must account not only for skill needs but also for morale and trust.

- Employers that build stability and psychological safety will stand out in a market defined by uncertainty.

The Forever Layoff is a defining feature of the Calibration Economy. The organizations that succeed will be those that manage efficiency without sacrificing the human experience that keeps teams committed and productive.

04
The Compensation Stagnation and the Transparency Tipping Point

Compensation trends in 2026 reflect a major reset. The rapid wage growth of the post-pandemic years has cooled, and organizations are approaching pay with greater discipline. This shift is happening as transparency laws expand nationwide, pulling back the curtain on pay practices and creating new pressures for employers.

Stabilization of salary budgets

Salary increase budgets have leveled off at roughly 3.5 percent for 2026 after several years of inflation-driven spikes. This stability signals a shift from reactive wage adjustments to more controlled spending. Employers are holding firm as they navigate economic uncertainty and rising expectations for productivity gains driven by automation.

Workers feel the impact. Our Q4 Employee Mindset Survey indicates that only a minority of employees feel their pay is well above average for their cost of living. Most say they are hovering around average or falling behind, and that creates tension as transparency makes comparisons easier than ever.

The state-level transparency patchwork

A patchwork of state laws has effectively created a nationwide transparency standard. Updates to California's SB 642, along with new rules in Massachusetts and New Jersey, require employers to publish good-faith pay ranges in job postings, share pay scales for promotions and internal transfers, and retain detailed compensation records for audit purposes.

These rules bring clarity, but they also expose disparities that were previously hidden. Employees can now compare their pay to open roles in their market, to peers in similar roles, and even to colleagues inside their own organization.

How would you rate your level of comparison compared to the average cost of living where you live?

23% — Well above average
24% — Somewhat above average
34% — Average
14% — Somewhat below average
5% — Well below average
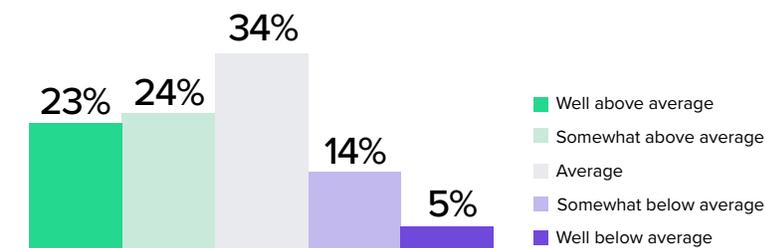
2025 Hiring Market Survey

Pay compression

Transparency often reveals a common challenge: pay compression. When organizations hire new employees at modern market rates, tenured employees may find that newcomers are earning as much or more, even with years of additional experience or company-specific expertise.

With salary budgets holding at 3.5 percent, employers have limited room to address those inequities. The result is a noticeable rise in employee frustration. Workers can see where they stand, and the math is harder to ignore.

What leaders should take from this

Compensation strategy requires more nuance than ever. Leaders need to strike a balance between disciplined budgets and competitive pay practices. Considerations include:

- Investing selectively in mission-critical or hard-to-fill roles.
- Auditing internal pay structures regularly to identify compression.
- Leveraging transparency proactively rather than reactively.
- Strengthening the overall employee value proposition to offset slower wage growth.

The organizations that succeed in 2026 will be those that treat compensation as both a financial decision and an engagement strategy. Pay clarity is no longer optional, and employees are paying attention.

> *Pay compression is not just a financial issue. It influences trust, productivity, and, ultimately, retention.*

Search salary data in your area!

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05
The Human-Centric Skill Premium

As AI commoditizes technical execution, the value of "human-centric" skills is reaching an all-time high. The skills that machines cannot replicate (empathy, complex negotiation, and ethical judgment) are becoming the primary determinants of career advancement.

Redefining "soft" skills as power skills

For years, organizations referred to communication, collaboration, and emotional intelligence as soft skills. That label no longer fits. These abilities now determine who thrives in AI-enabled workplaces. Deloitte's human capital research reinforces this shift, noting that leaders are now expected to focus less on task management and more on the psychological safety and trust necessary to guide teams through rapid change.

Employers are placing a premium on:

- **Contextual judgment**, especially the ability to interpret nuance, tone, and ambiguity.

- **Ethical oversight**, which is becoming essential as organizations deploy AI tools that can influence hiring, compensation, and performance decisions.

- **Interpersonal influence**, particularly in roles that require persuasion, conflict resolution, and relationship-building.

The "human-in-the-loop" governance role

As AI tools take on greater responsibility, organizations need to ensure that they are fair, accurate, and accountable, creating a growing need for professionals who can act as human safeguards. HR teams, managers, recruiters, and business leaders are being asked to understand how automated tools make decisions and to recognize when human judgment needs to override algorithmic output.

A hybrid skill set is now required: technical literacy to understand AI, combined with the ethical grounding to know when not to use it. The companies that build strong human-in-the-loop practices will reduce risk, strengthen trust, and avoid costly compliance issues.

What leaders should take from this

The Human-Centric Skill Premium is more than a workforce trend. It is a competitive differentiator. Employers who cultivate these skills will see stronger teams, better decisions, and more effective AI adoption. The shift should influence:

- Leadership development programs.

- Performance criteria and promotion pathways.

- Hiring priorities for both individual contributors and managers.

- Reskilling efforts that balance technical training with human-centered capability building.

As AI accelerates, the most valuable employees will be those who bring sound judgment, empathy, and influence to the table. Those qualities are becoming a true premium in the Calibration Economy.

06
The Stabilization of Hybrid and "Slo-Mo" RTO

The "Return to Office" wars have largely concluded, but the tension behind them hasn't disappeared. The market has settled into a long-term hybrid structure, yet the rules of engagement are shifting in subtle ways. Employees want flexibility for the same reasons they did during the pandemic, and employers want in-person presence for the reasons they always have. The compromise looks stable on the surface, but a quiet power dynamic is shaping how hybrid work actually functions.

The workforce has sorted into two broad camps. Some prefer four or five days in the office, while many others have embraced

a two- or three-day hybrid model. Even so, employee preferences remain clear. According to our Q4 Employee Mindset Survey, nearly half of workers say they would be extremely or very interested in a fully remote role even if it meant taking a pay cut. Flexibility has evolved from a perk into a core lifestyle value.

At the same time, 43 percent of employees currently work fully in the office, and only about a quarter of them prefer it. This mismatch continues to create friction. Workers may comply with attendance policies, but they still prioritize autonomy over location.

The hybrid settlement and financial trade-offs

How many days during the standard workweek (Monday – Friday) are you required to be in the office vs. desired?
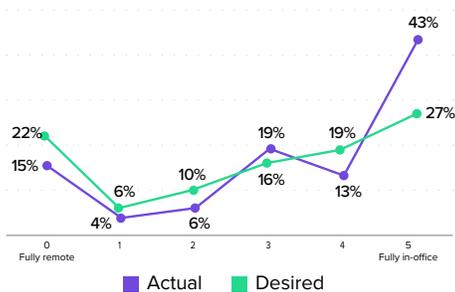
How interested would you be in a fully remote position if it meant you had to accept lower pay?
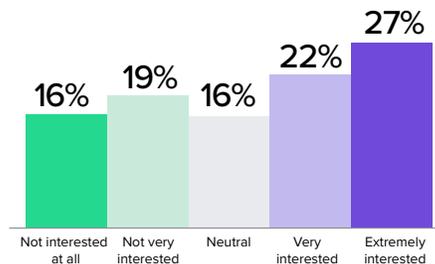
2025 Hiring Market Survey

Proximity bias and "Slo-Mo RTO"

A more discreet form of return-to-office pressure has emerged. Glassdoor research shows that remote and hybrid employees are receiving lower performance ratings and fewer promotions than peers who spend more time onsite. Career trajectories increasingly reflect presence, not just performance.

This shift has created what many describe as "Slo-Mo RTO", a gradual, unspoken push that rewards visibility. No dramatic mandates or ultimatums, just a steady reminder that those who are seen more often tend to advance faster. The result is a two-tier workforce where flexibility is permitted, but influence gravitates toward employees who are physically present.

What leaders should take from this

Hybrid is here to stay, but it requires intentional leadership. Organizations should consider:

- Being transparent about how presence affects opportunities, so expectations are clear.

- Training managers to evaluate outcomes rather than proximity.

- Ensuring high performers can thrive regardless of work location.

- Designing hybrid policies that reflect business needs without undermining trust.

The companies that get this right will be those that balance flexibility with fairness, supporting both performance and culture in a workplace where visibility still carries weight.

> " *Like it or not, career mobility often favors the workers who are seen most often, not just those who perform best.*
>
> 2025 Hiring Market Survey

07
The Education Reset and the Decline of the Degree

The Bachelor's degree, long the "gold standard" for employability, is losing its monopoly on professional signaling in 2026. Employers are rethinking how they evaluate talent, and workers are reconsidering whether a traditional four-year path is worth the rising costs. This shift is reshaping hiring practices, credentialing, and the early-career landscape.

The rise of "new collar" jobs

Many employers, including state governments and major technology companies, have removed degree requirements from broad categories of roles. As skills-first hiring becomes more common, organizations are relying on practical assessments, portfolio reviews, and demonstrated competencies rather than university credentials.

This shift has fueled rapid growth in micro-credentials, bootcamps, and certificate programs. The National Student Clearinghouse reports that undergraduate certificate programs are now the fastest-growing credential type, rising 6.6 percent in Fall 2025. Students are choosing shorter, more targeted pathways that align with specific job skills and faster entry into the workforce.

The "thinking" gap

While skills-first hiring has expanded, it comes with new challenges. Employers are finding that bootcamp graduates often arrive with technical proficiency but may lack broader analytical or critical thinking abilities. These capabilities, once reinforced through traditional academic pathways, are becoming harder to find.

At the same time, universities face enrollment pressures and shrinking liberal arts programs. As those programs contract, the supply of workers with strong reasoning, communication, and problem-solving skills may diminish. This gap is especially important in AI-enabled workplaces, where judgment and discernment are increasingly valuable.

The need for reliable, AI-free critical thinking assessments is one response to this trend. Employers want clearer ways to evaluate a candidate's decision-making ability, ethical reasoning, and capacity to navigate complexity.

What leaders should take from this

The Education Reset is not simply a shift in credentials. It is a transformation in how talent enters and moves through the workforce. Leaders should consider:

- Expanding hiring pipelines beyond four-year institutions.

- Building internal development programs to grow the critical thinking capabilities that degree programs used to reinforce.

- Using assessments that evaluate both hard skills and cognitive agility.

- Strengthening partnerships with community colleges, certificate providers, and workforce training programs.

This trend reshapes entry-level hiring and long-term workforce strategy. Organizations that adapt early will gain access to wider, more diverse talent pools and be better positioned to fill skill gaps that AI cannot solve.

08
The All-AI Recruiting Process

Recruiting has entered a new era. The volume of applicants, the pressure to hire faster, and the rapid adoption of agentic AI tools have pushed organizations toward end-to-end automation. While human judgment still anchors final decisions, the path candidates take to reach those decisions is increasingly driven by software rather than people.

The automated funnel and "black box" rejections

AI is now embedded across nearly every stage of the recruiting funnel. Automated systems parse resumes, conduct initial screenings, rank candidates by fit, and even schedule interviews. Gartner expects that by 2027, three out of four hiring processes will include AI proficiency assessments. Yet the steps leading up to that point are often fully automated.

This shift has created a new candidate experience: the "black box" rejection. Applicants apply, engage with automated prompts, and get filtered out with no sense of what happened or why. For employers, automation delivers speed and scale. For job seekers, it can feel opaque and discouraging.

Both realities are shaping the labor market.

The candidate counter-strike

As employers lean on automation, candidates are responding with automation of their own. AI-assisted mass applying, sometimes called "lazy applying," has exploded. Tools that auto-fill applications or apply to hundreds of roles at once flood talent pipelines with high volume but low signal.

This surge has forced employers to rely even more heavily on AI filters to manage the noise. The result is an arms race in which both sides use automation to keep up with the other. Human interaction is often pushed further and further down the process.

What leaders should take from this

AI is now essential to modern recruiting, but its impact must be managed thoughtfully. Key considerations for employers include:

- Ensuring that automated tools accurately and fairly reflect role requirements.

- Creating intentional human touchpoints that improve candidate trust and engagement.

- Monitoring AI-driven screening outcomes for unintended bias or adverse impact.

- Training recruiters to work effectively with automated systems rather than around them.

The organizations that thrive in 2026 will blend AI efficiency with the human connection that candidates still value. Automation can strengthen recruiting, but only when complemented by the judgment, empathy, and communication that define a positive candidate experience.

> " *AI has made a complete mess of the job search process. There's no putting that genie back in the bottle, so AI will also be needed to improve it.*

09
Limited Employee Mobility and "Job Hugging"

Employee mobility is at its lowest level in years. The rapid movement that defined the Great Resignation has given way to a period of caution, stability, and long-term attachment to current roles. Workers are choosing security over exploration, creating a stickier labor market that directly affects hiring, career progression, and talent planning.

Job hugging and the Big Stay

Workers are holding onto their current positions longer, even when their long-term plans include a change. Monster research shows that nearly three in four employees expect to remain in their roles for at least the next two years. This shift is driven by a combination of economic uncertainty, the fear of being the "newest hire" during budget cuts, and concerns about how AI might reshape job responsibilities.

Our Q4 Employee Mindset Survey clearly reflects this tension. Most employees feel confident in their current jobs, yet nearly half feel very or extremely anxious about their future in the labor market. That emotional split creates a workforce that is steady on the surface but hesitant beneath it. Workers may want growth or new challenges, but they hold off because the risk feels higher than the reward.

" *Employees trust the job they have today more than the market they see ahead.*

The experience paradox

Reduced mobility creates fewer openings for new hires at every level. When employees stay put, turnover slows, and the number of available seats shrinks. At the same time, automation has eliminated many of the simpler tasks that historically helped early-career workers build foundational skills. As a result, many "entry-level" roles now require three to five years of experience.

This combination narrows the path into the workforce. The Class of 2026 faces a competitive landscape in which the number of junior openings is limited, and employers prefer candidates with hands-on experience. This creates a form of career gridlock that will require new hiring models and training pathways to solve.

How confident are you in the stability of your role at the company?
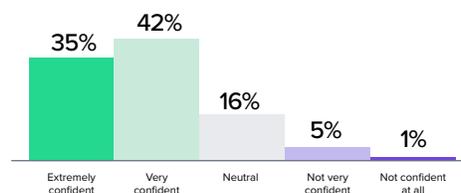
2025 Hiring Market Survey

Extremely confident	Very confident	Neutral	Not very confident	Not confident at all
35%	42%	16%	5%	1%

What's your level of anxiety about your future in the job market?

Not anxious at all	Not very anxious	Neutral	Very anxious	Extremely anxious
8%	19%	25%	24%	23%
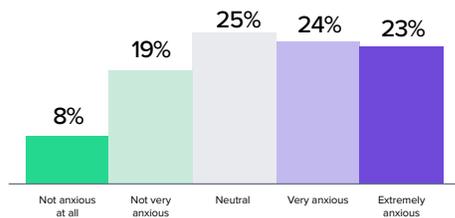
2025 Hiring Market Survey

What leaders should take from this

The slowdown in movement has real implications for workforce strategy. Leaders should consider:

- Strengthening internal mobility so employees grow without leaving.

- Reducing inflated experience requirements where job design can support learning.

- Creating apprenticeship-style pathways that rebuild early-career training.

- Proactively identifying high-potential employees before stagnation sets in.

The Big Stay is reshaping the workforce. Employers that invest in growth, clarity, and opportunity will stand out to workers who want stability but still need a way forward.
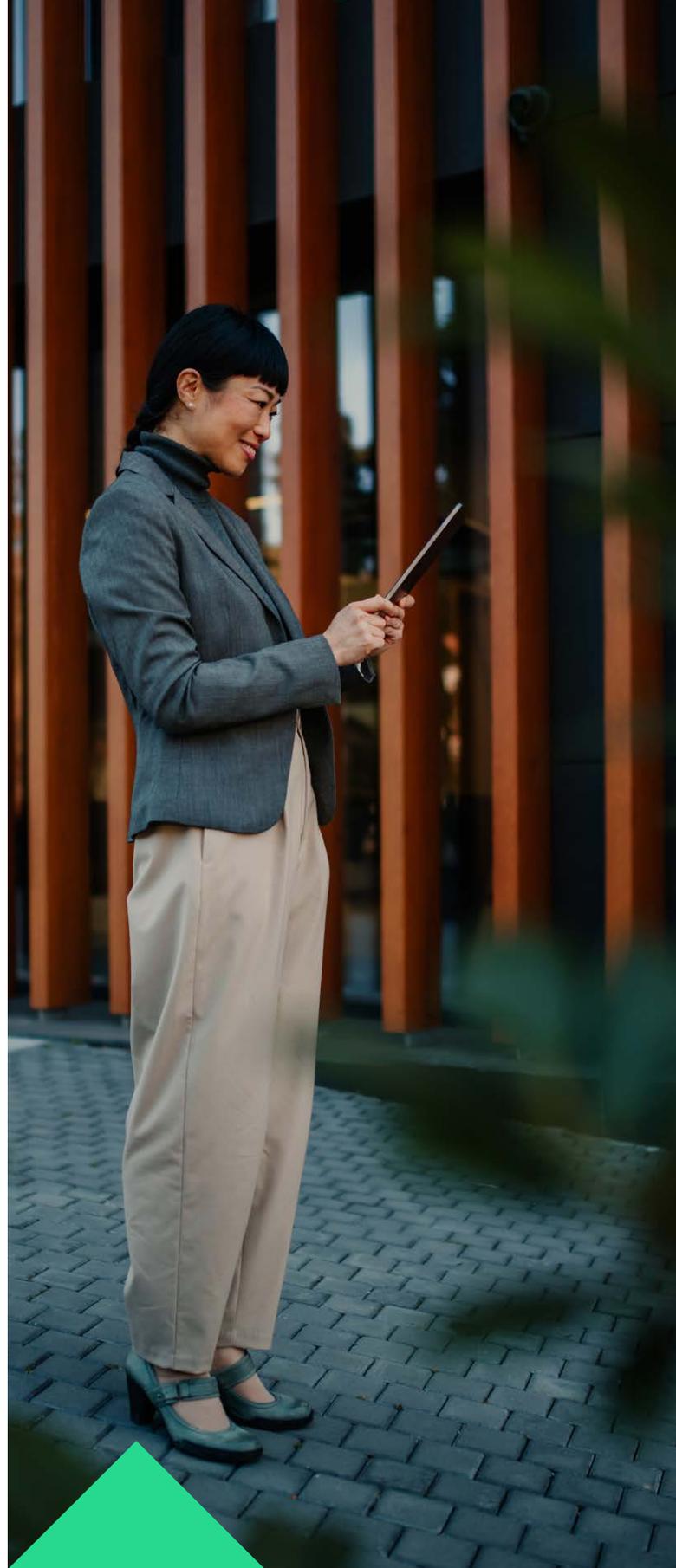
10
The Modernization of Compliance

Compliance has entered a period of rapid transformation. The pace of regulatory change is faster, the scrutiny is higher, and the tools required to stay compliant look very different than they did even a year ago. As organizations adopt AI, hire globally, and navigate new workforce models, compliance is shifting from a static function to a dynamic, continuously evolving discipline.

The H-1B visa overhaul

Immigration policy is one of the biggest compliance shocks moving into 2026. New federal actions have increased costs and tightened requirements, fundamentally altering how employers access foreign talent.

Two changes stand out:

1. **The $100,000 H-1B fee**

   A presidential proclamation issued in late 2025 imposed a $100,000 fee on new H-1B petitions for beneficiaries outside the US. This change has dramatically reduced the offshore-to-onshore talent pipeline, especially for mid-sized technology firms that relied heavily on skilled international workers.

2. **The H-1B Modernization Rule**

   Effective January 2025, this rule clarified specialty-occupation definitions, reduced opportunities for misuse, and protected F-1 students through cap-gap extensions that prevent lapses. These updates create a more structured but more restrictive system.

   The combined effect is clear. Hiring foreign talent now requires more strategy, more documentation, and a deeper internal commitment to retaining the employees already in place. For many employers, immigration planning has shifted from a routine administrative task to a critical workforce priority.

> " *The increased H-1B fee will force employers to use the program as intended, to the benefit of American workers.*
>
> 2025 Hiring Market Survey

State-level AI regulation

AI regulation is becoming a major component of HR compliance. Colorado's AI Act, effective in 2026, sets a new benchmark by requiring explainability, risk assessment, and human oversight for AI systems used in employment decisions. Similar legislation is taking shape in California and New York.

These rules place new responsibilities on HR teams, including:

- Demonstrating that hiring algorithms are not discriminatory.

- Documenting how automated decisions are made.

- Maintaining human review for critical employment actions.

- Preserving audit-ready logs of AI-related processes.

This pushes compliance into new territory, where legal, HR, IT, and risk management must collaborate far more closely than they have in the past.

What leaders should take from this

Compliance is no longer a back-office function. It is a core strategic capability. Leaders should consider:

- Building cross-functional compliance teams that include HR, legal, IT, and data science.

- Screening vendor tools more rigorously, especially AI systems that influence hiring and performance.

- Training managers on the legal responsibilities associated with automated systems.

- Treating immigration planning as a long-term workforce strategy, not a transactional process.

Organizations that modernize their compliance infrastructure will reduce risk, move more confidently, and stay ahead of increasingly complex regulatory shifts.

Salaries

Accounting and Finance

	Low	Average	High
Accounting Assistant	$38,566	$47,147	$59,065
Accounting Director	$130,862	$150,366	$185,622
Accounting Manager	$90,409	$109,215	$140,776
Accounts Payable Clerk	$43,199	$51,328	$61,518
Accounts Payable Manager	$76,566	$89,280	$105,118
Accounts Payable Specialist	$44,957	$52,459	$63,511
Actuary	$92,689	$129,300	$147,866
Billing Specialist	$40,669	$54,225	$67,781
Bookkeeper	$37,308	$49,743	$62,179
Certified Public Accountant	$72,052	$96,069	$120,086
Chief Financial Officer	$240,489	$395,862	$545,980
Controller	$118,132	$157,509	$175,969
Cost Accountant	$78,992	$105,323	$131,654
Credit Analyst	$58,717	$78,289	$97,861
Finance Director	$152,644	$189,568	$210,653
Financial Analyst	$66,645	$88,860	$111,075
Junior Accountant	$46,687	$62,263	$77,829
Loan Officer	$75,846	$95,686	$115,879

Accounting and Finance (continued)

	Low	Average	High
Loan Processor	$45,689	$52,406	$69,876
Senior Accountant	$86,807	$96,323	$127,649
Staff Accountant	$62,497	$70,258	$81,657
Treasurer	$128,536	$183,711	$225,867
Underwriter	$69,146	$80,364	$90,671

Admin and Clerical

	Low	Average	High
Administrative Assistant	$37,555	$45,058	$62,875
Data Entry Clerk	$32,063	$40,666	$50,105
Executive Assistant	$57,863	$66,896	$85,980
File Clerk	$29,875	$37,865	$49,875
Office Administrator	$52,727	$60,767	$68,998
Office Coordinator	$38,924	$45,383	$57,235
Personal Assistant	$34,466	$42,907	$59,447
Receptionist	$34,778	$40,869	$45,395
Secretary	$41,289	$46,218	$49,048

Architecture, Engineering, and Construction

	Low	Average	High
Architectural Designer	$75,630	$86,426	$106,411
Architectural Project Manager	$90,865	$101,895	$126,587

Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (continued)

	Low	Average	High
AutoCAD Designer	$55,876	$74,900	$84,625
BIM Modeler	$59,966	$75,302	$92,368
CAD Designer	$46,893	$64,542	$75,632
CAD Drafter	$45,365	$66,352	$79,632
Chemical Engineer	$92,456	$106,856	$140,652
Civil Engineer	$95,877	$105,689	$145,896
Construction Foreman	$67,774	$90,366	$112,958
Construction Manager	$75,689	$98,653	$115,863
Construction Project Captain	$64,325	$75,986	$94,686
Construction Project Manager	$83,683	$111,577	$139,471
Construction Scheduler	$59,863	$79,685	$85,679
Construction Superintendent	$72,464	$96,619	$120,774
Construction Vice President	$119,564	$159,418	$199,273
Electrical Engineer	$80,141	$106,854	$133,568
Environmental Engineer	$78,128	$104,170	$130,213
Geotechnical Engineer	$70,689	$96,659	$109,368
Geothermal Energy Engineer	$90,685	$108,562	$120,586
GIS Specialist	$60,865	$73,055	$88,658
Industrial Engineer	$83,738	$96,974	$121,991
Interior Designer	$57,312	$67,070	$79,672
Junior Architect	$57,891	$70,633	$85,495
Junior Architectural Designer	$52,429	$60,863	$72,940

Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (continued)

	Low	Average	High
Mechanical Engineer	$89,184	$99,801	$117,397
Petroleum Engineer	$110,059	$141,455	$187,664
Principal Architect	$106,347	$123,005	$206,615
Process Engineer	$86,896	$96,471	$116,871
Revit Technician	$58,034	$65,234	$71,153
Senior Architect	$102,933	$133,649	$199,382
Senior Architectural Designer	$87,722	$95,272	$105,697
Structural Engineer	$88,820	$94,382	$113,291
Surveyor	$65,899	$77,224	$82,379

Aviation

	Low	Average	High
Aircraft Electrician	$66,843	$78,954	$102,000
Aircraft Inspector	$68,077	$80,566	$94,149
Aircraft Mechanic	$59,875	$69,983	$92,513
Aircraft Painter	$50,762	$58,602	$74,173
Airplane Mechanic	$59,346	$69,755	$91,327
Aviation Engine Mechanic	$66,586	$75,346	$95,627
Avionics Technician	$56,064	$72,929	$92,362

Call Center and Customer Service

	Low	Average	High
Call Center Manager	$71,606	$87,340	$100,591
Call Center Operations Manager	$53,408	$64,948	$86,007
Call Center Representative	$32,079	$36,343	$52,183
Collections Manager	$59,773	$73,732	$92,640
Collections Representative	$40,862	$49,199	$63,197
Customer Service Director	$85,139	$116,444	$134,171
Customer Service Manager	$59,916	$67,662	$79,103
Customer Service Representative	$32,436	$42,085	$53,747
Help Desk Manager	$86,336	$99,942	$123,534
Help Desk Specialist	$47,781	$57,373	$69,572
Inbound Customer Service Representative	$29,002	$36,517	$48,101
Outbound Customer Service Representative	$33,189	$39,660	$51,096
Telemarketer	$33,136	$36,754	$43,433

Healthcare

	Low	Average	High
Cardiac Sonographer	$72,769	$86,663	$108,182
Certified Medical Assistant	$33,083	$39,022	$45,152
Certified Nursing Assistant	$41,802	$48,766	$53,731
Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist	$109,085	$177,576	$272,838

Healthcare (continued)

	Low	Average	High
Clinical Data Manager	$78,574	$105,341	$132,828
Credentialing Specialist	$38,817	$48,057	$60,754
EKG Technician	$40,634	$49,536	$61,598
Healthcare Customer Care Representative	$32,403	$40,654	$48,454
Healthcare Enrollment Specialist	$42,504	$58,067	$70,767
HEDIS Coordinator	$62,518	$72,253	$87,576
Medical Biller	$41,722	$49,130	$54,066
Medical Coder	$39,996	$47,627	$56,615
Medical Scribe	$32,743	$39,485	$49,232
Patient Access Representative	$35,767	$39,812	$49,252
Patient Care Coordinator	$41,908	$48,409	$66,905
Pharmacist	$111,915	$128,449	$143,453
Pharmacy Technician	$35,123	$42,208	$54,079
Provider Operations Specialist	$55,482	$65,232	$68,104
Provider Relations Specialist	$51,246	$59,597	$69,686
Reimbursement Specialist	$41,278	$48,271	$58,728
Respiratory Therapist	$68,900	$80,304	$87,870
Verification Representative	$37,342	$42,790	$52,508

Hospitality

	Low	Average	High
Director of Housekeeping	$59,868	$72,947	$80,319

HR & Recruiting

	Low	Average	High
Benefits Administrator	$56,406	$71,891	$85,168
Benefits Analyst	$57,145	$64,284	$83,725
Benefits Specialist	$47,045	$60,843	$76,850
Chief Human Resources Officer	$130,295	$211,482	$334,859
Compensation Analyst	$63,225	$74,745	$89,079
Corporate Recruiter	$65,100	$80,416	$97,814
HR Administrator	$52,250	$63,722	$76,024
HR Coordinator	$44,044	$57,582	$68,985
HR Director	$91,980	$122,924	$159,265
HR Generalist	$58,206	$73,007	$83,579
HR Manager	$81,988	$99,542	$118,292
HRIS Manager	$91,433	$116,184	$134,683
Payroll Manager	$74,873	$90,690	$96,937
Payroll Specialist	$47,244	$53,033	$57,917
Recruiter	$58,606	$63,951	$70,159
Recruiting Coordinator	$45,006	$55,182	$61,725
Recruiting Manager	$94,365	$107,848	$117,846
Talent Acquisition Specialist	$62,164	$67,399	$77,871

Legal

	Low	Average	High
Bankruptcy Attorney	$82,371	$110,816	$140,863
Corporate Counsel	$103,668	$147,206	$241,483
Court Reporter	$56,202	$69,538	$80,747
E-Discovery Specialist	$62,174	$79,782	$93,650
Estate Planning Attorney	$89,561	$128,691	$173,795
General Counsel	$144,839	$235,540	$296,457
Intake Specialist	$39,883	$46,804	$62,181
Intellectual Property Attorney	$113,848	$182,172	$214,732
Labor Attorney	$96,882	$109,298	$144,864
Law Firm Administrator	$62,375	$80,229	$90,521
Legal Assistant	$44,060	$54,416	$75,599
Legal Clerk	$38,642	$48,866	$63,226
Legal Data Entry Specialist	$30,275	$40,040	$50,861
Legal Investigator	$46,300	$60,244	$86,884
Legal Receptionist	$35,678	$46,306	$58,656
Legal Secretary	$50,145	$62,870	$72,819
Litigation Support Specialist	$59,937	$69,886	$92,363
Paralegal	$53,494	$58,904	$87,064
Personal Injury Attorney	$110,052	$128,727	$190,479
Real Estate Attorney	$141,062	$151,324	$175,458
Tax Attorney	$136,639	$152,004	$201,362

Marketing & Creative

	Low	Average	High
Animator	$59,535	$67,647	$93,791
Art Director	$84,777	$98,656	$121,462
Artist	$53,305	$58,672	$98,606
Assistant Brand Manager	$56,186	$66,542	$93,530
Brand Ambassador	$36,905	$44,100	$55,875
Brand Manager	$78,812	$95,994	$121,534
Chief Marketing Officer	$115,060	$192,070	$255,775
Communications Director	$83,052	$107,783	$134,046
Community Manager	$46,452	$56,839	$71,894
Content Manager	$62,769	$73,476	$92,803
Copywriter	$50,683	$68,576	$78,285
Creative Director	$94,658	$125,484	$168,365
CRM Specialist	$69,569	$89,978	$110,662
Digital Marketing Analyst	$54,807	$67,555	$88,878
Digital Marketing Director	$96,977	$128,625	$146,012
Digital Marketing Manager	$71,350	$88,026	$105,050
Email Marketing Manager	$76,854	$94,809	$119,113
Email Marketing Specialist	$51,316	$62,855	$79,197
Event Coordinator	$33,311	$44,370	$62,226
Event Planner	$39,248	$49,006	$67,920

Marketing & Creative (continued)

	Low	Average	High
Graphic Designer	$56,743	$78,354	$90,152
Instructional Designer	$58,631	$72,188	$88,574
Market Research Analyst	$58,516	$67,085	$80,726
Marketing Analyst	$59,787	$71,470	$76,231
Marketing Assistant	$41,309	$47,298	$53,200
Marketing Associate	$42,575	$52,152	$67,795
Marketing Director	$122,593	$138,751	$159,156
Marketing Manager	$84,109	$112,695	$125,393
Media Buyer	$58,858	$68,936	$79,754
Public Relations Specialist	$59,227	$68,699	$83,231
Report Developer	$86,869	$93,171	$98,848
SEM Strategist	$76,863	$83,381	$88,240
SEO Manager	$75,742	$87,851	$93,340
SEO Strategist	$68,248	$77,493	$87,839
Social Media Coordinator	$46,473	$56,282	$65,033
Social Media Manager	$60,581	$72,756	$82,564
UI Designer	$82,247	$92,217	$105,049
UX Designer	$84,943	$96,214	$118,157
Web Analytics Manager	$113,098	$128,681	$141,873
Web Developer	$87,370	$98,230	$105,980

Mortgage and Real Estate

	Low	Average	High
Appraiser	$54,778	$68,218	$84,739
Mortgage Broker	$83,837	$93,873	$109,155
Mortgage Loan Officer	$75,967	$82,833	$88,425
Mortgage Loan Processor	$43,331	$53,500	$65,734
Mortgage Underwriter	$64,559	$73,509	$88,509
Property Manager	$51,341	$56,333	$67,070
Real Estate Appraiser	$55,706	$65,406	$74,031
Real Estate Broker	$77,492	$83,924	$92,458
Realtor	$54,319	$58,825	$70,538

Sales

	Low	Average	High
Account Executive	$61,434	$73,896	$90,718
Account Manager	$45,938	$60,642	$79,478
Business Development Manager	$77,001	$95,056	$108,006
Customer Success Manager	$56,975	$75,604	$92,528
Inside Sales Representative	$48,165	$55,436	$70,105
Outside Sales Associate	$56,608	$64,667	$76,347
Sales Assistant	$35,801	$43,795	$52,058

Sales (continued)

	Low	Average	High
Sales Director	$133,514	$142,343	$150,120
Sales Engineer	$90,718	$97,118	$103,775
Sales Manager	$112,041	$130,077	$143,388
Sales Representative	$61,653	$65,813	$71,934
Technology Solutions Sales Representative	$84,564	$117,383	$131,380
Vice President of Sales	$121,735	$179,564	$203,789

Technology

	Low	Average	High
AI Engineer	$102,500	$140,652	$212,540
Applications Architect	$98,247	$157,905	$188,609
Backend Developer	$93,720	$107,711	$141,076
BI Developer	$85,932	$112,204	$143,249
Big Data Engineer	$93,714	$155,767	$164,865
Blockchain Developer	$90,768	$121,441	$160,787
Business Analyst	$79,385	$93,188	$114,613
Business Intelligence Analyst	$92,036	$105,666	$123,010
Business Systems Analyst	$79,452	$100,649	$123,784
C++ Developer	$101,910	$107,656	$131,912

Technology (continued)

	Low	Average	High
Cable Installer	$43,541	$57,299	$72,654
Chief Information Officer	$158,611	$273,259	$390,590
Chief Information Security Officer	$154,666	$211,560	$267,942
Chief Technology Officer	$131,698	$210,500	$372,379
Cloud Architect	$99,597	$150,865	$201,612
Cloud Engineer	$98,267	$128,650	$190,046
Computer Programmer	$77,107	$98,552	$125,372
Cyber Security Analyst	$90,900	$121,412	$160,369
Data Analyst	$74,315	$89,981	$110,633
Data Architect	$109,413	$131,917	$145,770
Data Scientist	$109,531	$126,065	$166,112
Database Administrator	$94,127	$96,590	$133,889
Database Architect	$101,255	$136,864	$154,307
Database Developer	$95,630	$138,704	$147,732
Desktop Support Technician	$57,870	$63,824	$78,499
DevOps Engineer	$102,571	$129,630	$151,458
Drupal Developer	$88,189	$111,002	$147,909
Enterprise Architect	$105,738	$161,134	$191,573
ETL Developer	$90,527	$107,924	$144,909
Field Service Technician	$49,170	$59,648	$71,022

Technology (continued)

	Low	Average	High
Frontend Developer	$80,344	$106,644	$128,157
Full Stack Developer	$94,096	$123,695	$149,992
Information Security Analyst	$93,218	$107,216	$138,377
IT Auditor	$80,645	$81,500	$96,629
IT Director	$114,331	$173,967	$232,399
IT Manager	$109,724	$116,788	$204,204
IT Project Manager	$92,275	$128,047	$170,853
IT Support Technician	$49,767	$55,130	$72,655
Java Developer	$94,210	$114,986	$138,478
Javascript Developer	$91,441	$117,282	$126,889
Linux Engineer	$92,891	$110,697	$140,687
Machine Learning Engineer	$111,693	$123,681	$152,804
Mobile Application Developer	$98,438	$106,978	$124,373
Mobile Designer	$83,985	$92,035	$115,307
Network Administrator	$76,734	$86,346	$103,255
Network Architect	$111,969	$127,307	$161,393
Network Engineer	$92,281	$103,653	$118,776
Network Operations Manager	$91,753	$103,648	$119,401
PHP Developer	$70,878	$80,991	$101,915
Principal Wireless Engineer	$107,443	$131,299	$163,616

Technology (continued)

	Low	Average	High
Programmer	$71,239	$84,692	$92,020
Python Developer	$97,402	$109,847	$122,139
QA Manager	$97,414	$108,273	$114,642
Quality Analyst	$55,287	$61,613	$74,290
React Developer	$85,230	$88,234	$105,548
Rust Developer	$99,431	$107,582	$120,849
Salesforce Administrator	$92,177	$98,848	$107,108
Salesforce Developer	$104,003	$117,521	$131,934
Scrum Master	$106,629	$111,306	$116,068
Security Analyst	$95,846	$109,242	$116,239
Security Compliance Manager	$110,675	$116,520	$120,159
Security Engineer	$107,004	$122,800	$128,725
Software Developer	$111,559	$131,885	$142,653
Software Development Manager	$127,778	$152,749	$177,510
Software Engineer	$111,454	$136,969	$150,636
Solutions Architect	$108,494	$132,508	$154,249
SQL Developer	$93,388	$98,705	$107,346
Storage Engineer	$89,357	$105,632	$119,146
Systems Administrator	$78,610	$99,357	$119,904
Systems Analyst	$94,711	$109,203	$121,497

Technology (continued)

	Low	Average	High
Systems Engineer	$112,098	$128,708	$140,164
Technical Support Specialist	$56,942	$63,499	$71,201
Technical Trainer	$65,889	$80,678	$94,619
Technical Writer	$78,359	$87,583	$98,403
Telecommunications Administrator	$83,666	$92,526	$98,032
Telecommunications Engineer	$87,616	$102,993	$116,375
Telecommunications Technician	$58,747	$65,466	$71,871
UI Designer	$81,586	$92,285	$105,162
UI Developer	$88,430	$101,179	$111,754
UX Developer	$88,365	$97,508	$119,286
Vice President of Information Technology	$127,680	$179,801	$213,310
VoIP Engineer	$89,803	$101,586	$116,969
Web Designer	$74,930	$82,935	$95,296
Web Developer	$87,792	$98,362	$107,020
WordPress Developer	$77,820	$85,399	$103,295

Transportation and Logistics

	Low	Average	High
Dispatcher	$38,666	$46,746	$60,958
Fulfillment Coordinator	$37,972	$45,140	$60,703
Logistics Coordinator	$47,345	$55,686	$74,219
Logistics Manager	$78,717	$93,054	$121,667
Shipping and Receiving Clerk	$34,484	$40,581	$44,255
Supply Chain Analyst	$70,396	$78,041	$89,941
Supply Chain Manager	$98,198	$107,010	$122,397
Warehouse Manager	$54,673	$70,683	$80,841

Conclusion

As we look ahead, 2026 brings a blend of innovation and transformation that's unlike any hiring environment we've seen before. Technology continues to accelerate what's possible in recruiting, but the real differentiator remains how organizations choose to use it, with intention, transparency, and a genuine commitment to improving the candidate experience. Employers who stay curious about emerging tools, pay close attention to shifting worker expectations, and thoughtfully refine their hiring strategy will be the ones best positioned to compete for talent in the year ahead.

Today's workforce is selective, and that's a strength, not a barrier. Candidates are clearer than ever about what matters to them: meaningful work, fair compensation, flexibility, growth, and a culture that supports their well-being. Organizations willing to listen, adapt, and build a compelling value proposition will continue to stand out in a crowded market.

By staying informed, agile, and open to new approaches, you'll be prepared to navigate whatever this evolving labor market brings. And if you'd like help applying these insights to your own hiring strategy, my team and I are here to support you. We partner with companies of all sizes to build efficient, people-centered recruitment processes and hire skilled professionals who align with your culture, goals, and budget.

Here's to a successful, strategic, and forward-thinking 2026. Let's make it a great year for your organization.

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