



2026 EDITION

SALARY GUIDE IN THE **AI ERA**

Technology

Real 2026 benchmarks for the roles building AI, cloud, security, and software infrastructure.

DATA & AI · CLOUD & DEVOPS · SECURITY · FULL STACK & SOFTWARE

WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

Hiring for AI, cloud, and security roles doesn't work the way it did three years ago. Titles have multiplied, skill requirements have shifted toward AI fluency, and pay bands have moved with them.

This guide breaks down what 16 roles across four clusters pay right now: Data & AI, Cloud & DevOps, Security, and Full Stack & Software Engineering. Figures reflect national labor market data, gathered from multiple industry sources and cross-checked for consistency.

Use it to set a realistic budget before you open a req, sanity-check an offer before you send it, or figure out whether a candidate's number is actually market rate.

For a closer look at your local market, reach out to Prodigy Resources directly.

HOW TO READ THIS GUIDE

We report compensation in three tiers, tied to experience and skill level rather than years alone.

- **Low:** a candidate who's new to the role or still building core skills.
- **Average:** moderate experience, most requirements met, often with relevant certifications.
- **High:** extensive experience, advanced skills, frequently with specialized certifications.

National U.S. base salary figures. Hub markets like New York, DC, and San Francisco typically run well above these numbers; smaller markets often run below. There's a real example of that gap in the Market Trends section.

A note on Full Stack & Software.

Software engineering titles vary widely across sources, so those bands are blended from multiple 2026 market sources. Treat them as directional rather than exact.

THE NEW CORE INFRASTRUCTURE

KEY ROLES: DATA ENGINEER, DATA SCIENTIST, DATA ARCHITECT, ANALYTICS/BI ENGINEER, AI/ML ENGINEER

Data and AI roles stopped being a specialty function a while back. AI/ML engineer salaries are growing 4.4% year over year, faster than any other tech role in this guide. Data scientist is close behind at 4.1%, more than double the 1.6% average across all of tech.

+4.4%

AI/ML Engineer YoY

+4.1%

Data Scientist YoY

ROLE	LOW	AVG	HIGH
Data Engineer	\$127,000	\$156,250	\$180,750
Data Scientist	\$121,750	\$153,750	\$182,500
Data Architect	\$136,750	\$166,750	\$189,750
Analytics / BI Engineer*	\$109,250	\$130,500	\$156,500
AI/ML Engineer	\$134,000	\$170,750	\$193,250

*Reported under the title "Business Intelligence Developer" in national compensation data.

SKILLS THAT MOVE PAY UP

Python and SQL are table stakes. What separates a mid-band offer from a high-band one: production experience with cloud ML platforms (AWS, Azure, GCP), MLOps work, hands-on LLM/RAG experience, or a real statistics background.

CAREER PATHS

Data track: Analyst → Analytics/BI Engineer → Data Engineer → Data Architect → Head of Data.
AI track: Software/Data Scientist → AI/ML Engineer → Senior AI Engineer → AI Architect.

THE BACKBONE THAT MAKES **AI WORK**

KEY ROLES: DEVOPS ENGINEER, CLOUD ENGINEER, CLOUD ARCHITECT, PLATFORM ENGINEER / SRE

Every AI model, every data pipeline, every product that stays online at 2am runs on infrastructure someone built and someone else keeps from falling over. DevOps engineer salaries are growing 3.0% year over year, nearly double the market average.

+3.0%

DevOps Engineer YoY

ROLE	LOW	AVG	HIGH
DevOps Engineer	\$118,000	\$145,750	\$173,750
Cloud Engineer*	\$110,000	\$132,000	\$155,000
Cloud Architect*	\$139,250	\$171,750	\$202,250
Platform Engineer / SRE	\$114,250	\$140,000	\$170,500

*Reported as "Network/Cloud Engineer" and "Network/Cloud Architect" in national compensation data.

SKILLS THAT MOVE PAY UP

Kubernetes and containerization. Infrastructure as code, with Terraform the one most job postings name specifically. CI/CD pipeline ownership. Observability, meaning someone who can read the dashboards during an incident, not just build them.

CAREER PATHS

Infrastructure track: Sys Admin → Cloud Engineer → DevOps/Platform Engineer → Cloud Architect.

Reliability track: Software Engineer → SRE → Senior SRE / Platform Lead.

PROTECTING THE AI-ENABLED ENTERPRISE

KEY ROLES: CYBERSECURITY ENGINEER, SECURITY ARCHITECT, CYBERSECURITY ANALYST, NETWORK SECURITY ENGINEER

More AI adoption means more attack surface. Cybersecurity engineer pay grew 4.0% year over year, the third-fastest growth rate in tech for 2026, behind only AI/ML engineer and data scientist.

+4.0%

Cybersecurity Engineer YoY

ROLE	LOW	AVG	HIGH
Cybersecurity Engineer	\$118,500	\$144,000	\$190,750
Security Architect	\$138,250	\$157,250	\$176,000
Cybersecurity Analyst	\$102,250	\$122,250	\$147,750
Network Security Engineer	\$119,500	\$145,500	\$169,750

SKILLS THAT MOVE PAY UP

Cloud security across AWS, Azure, and GCP. Identity and access management. Real incident response experience, not just a certification about it. CISSP, CISM, and CEH still open doors, especially for architect-level roles.

CAREER PATHS

Operations track: Cybersecurity Analyst → Cybersecurity Engineer → Senior Security Engineer → Security Architect.

Cloud/security track: Cloud Engineer → Network Security Engineer → Principal / Architect.

THE ENGINEERS WHO SHIP THE PRODUCT

KEY ROLES: FULL STACK ENGINEER, BACKEND ENGINEER, FRONTEND ENGINEER

Bands are blended from current 2026 market sources, so treat them as directional. Title definitions vary a lot across sources ("full stack engineer" vs. "developer" vs. "software engineer"), which is part of why the ranges are wide. Figures are national base salary, excluding equity and bonus.

ROLE	LOW	AVG	HIGH
Full Stack Engineer	\$110,000	\$137,000	\$164,000
Backend Engineer	\$117,000	\$151,000	\$172,000
Frontend Engineer	\$101,000	\$123,000	\$144,000

WHAT WE'RE SEEING IN PLACEMENTS

\$165K+

Next.js + TypeScript
seniors

\$175K+

Python + React with LLM
integration

\$180K+

Full stack who also own
AWS + Kubernetes

SKILLS THAT MOVE PAY UP

TypeScript, cloud infrastructure (AWS especially), and real system design, not just shipping features.

NOTES WORTH FLAGGING

- Backend now edges out frontend on base, but the gap is narrowing as frontend work (React Server Components, performance budgeting) gets more complex.
- Total comp runs well above base at senior level once equity and bonus stack on, often \$180,000 to \$360,000 for senior engineers.
- Hub markets and remote-benchmarked roles run higher, same pattern as the rest of the guide.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY MOVING IN 2026

STATE OF THE MARKET

1.6%

avg. tech salary growth YoY, down from 2.9% (2024) and 3.5% (2023)

87%

of tech leaders report paying a premium for specialized skills

Break it down by role and the picture changes: AI/ML engineer +4.4%, data scientist +4.1%, cybersecurity engineer +4.0%, all more than double the market average. Roles tied to AI, data, and security are pulling almost all of this year's salary growth.

LOCATION AND REMOTE GUIDANCE

Hub markets run well above national benchmarks. Example: Security Architect's national range is \$138,250–\$176,000; in Washington, DC that role runs roughly \$183,873–\$234,080, about 33% higher across every tier.

Remote roles increasingly get benchmarked closer to hub-market rates, especially for harder-to-fill roles. Budget accordingly for a remote Data Architect or AI/ML Engineer.

NEW ROLES WORTH WATCHING

Agentic AI engineer/developer, AI strategy consultant, AIOps engineer, and LLM engineer are gaining traction heading into 2026. None are standardized yet, so pay bands are still being written.

HIRING AND RETENTION TIPS

Competitive pay gets a candidate to the table. Once there, candidates weigh a modern stack and problems worth solving, a real path into architecture or leadership, support for certifications, and workloads that don't burn people out in year one.



NEXT STEPS

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

Use this guide as a starting point, not a final answer. Scope the role, set a realistic budget against the tier that matches your requirements, and build the offer from there.

For localized ranges, roles outside this guide, or help finding the right person for one of these positions, reach out to Prodigy Resources directly.

A NOTE ON OUR METHODOLOGY

This guide is built from national labor market data, gathered nationwide and pulled from multiple industry sources to reflect the market as it stands.

Figures are estimates, not hard numbers. Actual pay will vary by location, company size, industry, and individual experience.