
The Real Story on Compensation in 2025

Real Data, Real Roles, Real Pay



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Compensation in 2025 isn't what it used to be, and that's not a bad thing.

Today's pay landscape is shaped by more than job titles and tenure. Technology and skills are evolving at an alarmingly fast pace, career paths are less linear than they once were, candidates are weighing purpose, flexibility and compensation all at once, and employers are striving to keep pace.

In this guide, we go beyond broad trends to show what actually moves the needle. Using [real-time data](#) and [real-world roles](#), we explore how compensation shifts based on location, experience, education and more. So, whether you're hiring or simply rethinking your compensation approach, this guide offers a grounded look at what today's candidates expect, and what tomorrow's top talent will demand.

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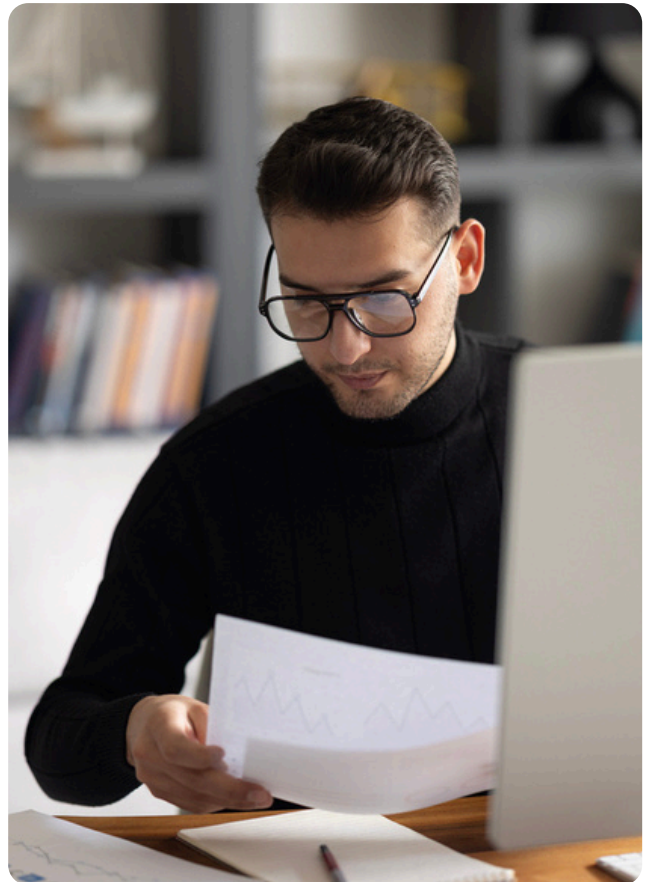
What's Really Going on With Compensation Today?

By: Kathryn Tremblay

Canada's labour market is frenetic these days, fluctuating between huge highs and lows. Layer on an economy rocked by U.S. tariffs, and it's no wonder employers are unsure about the salary landscape these days.

Here's what we're experiencing:

- Some roles are flooded with resumés, while others sit open for weeks. (Think: This month, we received 400 applicants for the position of Admin Clerk but less than 10 for a skilled IT professional.)
- Entry-level roles in fields such as library sciences, writing, data entry and web development have thinned out, while positions in AI and machine learning, cybersecurity, contract management and compliance are surging.
- Skills mismatches persist, with many qualified "generalists" applying for roles requiring specialized skills. (Think: Many years of experience in the same industry and same role, knowledge of the latest software programs, multiple certifications, etc.)
- Some employers are reducing their workforce (due to the uncertainty in the market, or they're turning to AI to fill in the gaps); others are aggressively going after top talent with premium wages and signing bonuses in highly specialized areas.
- Soft skills are in demand and hard to quantify. Employers are increasingly seeking candidates with those hard-to-measure human qualities (e.g., adaptability, creativity, communications, etc.), especially given the rise of automation. However, these skills are not only hard to measure, but also difficult to reflect in a compensation model.
- Candidates increasingly consult social media and AI for salary data—which often inflates their expectations (more on this later).



“The market is fragmented, fast-moving and shaped by forces far outside the individual employer’s control.”

-Kathryn Tremblay, Co-founder and Owner, Altis

The compensation rollercoaster

Over the past five years, we've cycled through COVID hiring spikes, the remote vs. return-to-office standoff, widespread burnout and all the new employee expectations ushered in during the pandemic.

We've also seen AI automate tasks that were once considered untouchable at a time when many firms were already in the midst of major digital transformations.

As if that wasn't enough, global tariffs and the rising costs of everything from energy and real estate to transportation and borrowing are fueling further uncertainty. And then, there's the mass retirement of Baby Boomers, leaving the working generations left to grapple with knowledge transfer and leadership successions.

So, it's no surprise compensation is in flux.

Rethinking the compensation model

Historically, you may have relied on a combination of market benchmarks, total rewards strategies and experience-based intuition. But can those same formulas—many of them written in the 1980s—really hold up in this new landscape?

- We're seeing salaries drop for roles that are becoming more automated (e.g., data processing, and some in customer/admin support, arts/entertainment).
- We're seeing salaries soar in specialized roles tied to audit, emerging tech, cyber and data security—especially for experienced leaders in these areas.

June 2025: PwC's data showed that the wages of workers with AI skills are on average 56% higher compared to workers without these skills in the same occupation, up from 25% last year.

PwC, as reported in CNBC

Bottom line:

The market is fragmented, fast-moving and shaped by forces far outside the individual employer's control. If your compensation strategy is still built on a formula like "inflation + 2% = annual salary increase," it may not be working today.

We're seeing entire job categories being redefined, and skills that weren't even on the radar five years ago command a premium (think: AI prompt engineering, low-code platform mastery or data privacy compliance).

We're also seeing candidates arriving from wildly varied pathways. For example, a cybersecurity architect with a degree plus 10 years' experience vs. a self-taught professional with cutting-edge skills. This challenges legacy salary bands.

And regardless of their pathway, many of today's candidates are arriving with inflated salary expectations. Payscale found that 1 in 5 workers use social media (e.g., TikTok, Reddit, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) for salary intel, while 18% of workers consult ChatGPT. Of this latter group, almost one-third said ChatGPT gave them higher salary expectations than other sources.

What does this mean for your compensation plans today?

Be prepared to counter inflated asks with transparent salary criteria beyond tenure and show the full breadth of your offering.

- Pay based strictly on tenure won't attract top performers. Acquired and proven self-acquired skills are key.
- Job titles alone can't justify a salary band.
- Compensation must reflect real-time market skills, not legacy frameworks.
- Job seekers are comparing salaries using ChatGPT and social media.
- Salary is one piece of a much bigger value equation (up next).

Base salary: Still the key driver

Base salary is still the first thing candidates look at. It's what determines whether someone clicks the job ad, takes the recruiter call or accepts the offer. But it's more complicated than it used to be. Here are some key questions to consider:

- Are your salary ranges too broad to be useful—or too narrow to be competitive?
- Is your base salary capped based on outdated assumptions?
- Can we still compare candidates the way we used to given that degrees, certifications and flexible work models have evolved so drastically?
- Are soft skills like adaptability, creativity and leadership potential now outweighing traditional checkboxes like years of experience or formal credentials?
- And most importantly, does the job description even reflect the current role?

“Base salary determines whether someone clicks the job ad, takes the recruiter call or accepts the offer. But it's more complicated than it used to be.”

Yes, base salary still matters most of all, but other factors like learning opportunities, premium skill sets, flexibility and lifestyle design increasingly sway decisions on job offers.

In this deep dive on compensation, we outline the 11 compensation drivers (on top of base salary) that are shaping today's offers.

Then, we'll apply them to 6 in-demand roles, showing you exactly how changes to job design—like location, education, supervisory scope or budget responsibility—can change the offer.

[Let's get into it.](#)



Kathryn Tremblay,
**Co-founder and
Owner, Altis**

Beyond Base Pay:

11 compensation drivers reshaping offers today

1 Learning Opportunities

With today's focus on current skills and new technologies, employer-led learning is a must-have, influencing pay expectations and retention. Candidates who can see how they'll gain new skills with a prospective employer are often more open to accepting a slightly lower base salary because they see the long-term payoff. In fact, employers that offer regular upskilling report stronger retention and internal promotion rates. Conversely, roles with no learning investment often need to offer higher salaries to stay competitive.

What you can do

Create a structured learning program or budget. Offer access to certifications, AI tools, micro-credentials and emerging tech, especially in industries where skills and tools are changing fast, such as IT and finance.

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

Add a "Learning & Development" line in employment offers. For example, "\$1,000 annual upskilling budget" or "2 professional development days per quarter." Reminder: Giving time off for learning may be a more cost-effective option than paying for expensive courses, if the learning can be done in a structured experiential setting. For example, you may wish to enable a process-driven, creative go-getter to work alongside your Process Engineer or Documentation Specialist to master skills on the job.



2 Career Development Pathways

When people see a clear future in your organization, regardless of whether they're interested in people leadership, they're more likely to accept a realistic salary offer. Whereas if the only growth option is "get promoted eventually" or "become a people leader," you may need to overpay to compete right now.

A mapped path to more senior roles or lateral expertise-based moves builds long-term engagement and reduces salary pressure at entry.

Keep in mind, senior individual contributors (ICs) may be just as valuable as managers and leaders, and if you don't reflect this in their compensation, they may stagnate or even leave. Organizations with dual tracks see stronger engagement, higher retention and better internal mobility

What you can do

When possible, develop job-family maps or career ladders that show advancement, salary ranges and next steps. For smaller organizations where career-mapping is more difficult, demonstrate a pathway to lateral progress through bigger projects, more decision-making and greater autonomy. Build parallel career paths with comparable salaries for the leadership path, and the technical or contribution mastery path.

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

- Refer to the career growth path in job descriptions and offers, for example: "This role is part of the HR Career Path: HR Generalist → Senior HR Advisor → HR Business Partner → HR Manager, each with defined responsibilities and salary bands."
- In offer letters and interviews, show that advancement and salary growth are available through both people leadership and IC tracks. For example, "This role offers access to two unique career progression tracks: our Principal track for individual contributors and our Leader track for those who opt for people leadership. Both tracks offer salary bands aligned with leadership roles."



3 Unique Project Work

When budgets are tight and base salaries can't stretch higher, meaningful work can be a powerful differentiator. Roles that offer visibility or the opportunity to work on innovative or "brag-worthy" projects are often more attractive to candidates than higher-paying but routine jobs. The chance to build something new, work cross-functionally or lead a first-of-its-kind initiative adds long-term career value—and this can make your offer stand out even if the base pay is average.

What you can do

Highlight unique or high-impact projects in interviews and postings. Let candidates know how they'll grow their portfolio.

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

Add a value statement in offers like, "This role supports a cross-functional national pilot project with direct visibility to the executive team."



4 Work Location – Part A: Remote vs. Hybrid vs. Onsite

Work location now affects compensation in a few key ways:

- Candidates often expect higher pay to compensate for full-time onsite roles. While work location was not part of the compensation equation pre-COVID, it's now an essential part of the attraction and recruitment conversation.
- Top talent wants some level of flexibility. During the pandemic, some candidates may have moved out of major cities or away from the downtown core, seeking more affordable living options. Today, these candidates face additional commute time and travel costs to work onsite. Still, entry-level talent seems to seek more onsite options as they see the need for more experiential learning and a stronger professional network.
- Some employers are discussing changing their pay model for fully remote positions to reflect the employee's residential location (lower-cost geographies) or the cost and time savings of commuting. Note: The subject of remote work and the effect on compensation is often discussed, but actions are not seemingly underway. It's an area in flux: many employers are mandating return to office more assertively in 2025-2026, and yet many employees remain keen on remote work.
- If your flexibility aligns with candidates' lifestyles, you may not need to outbid the market. But if your location policy limits flexibility, you may need to compete more on salary. Employees in permanent positions are weighing the cost and time of daily travel more than ever as they consider accepting another role.

What you can do

Be transparent. Set location expectations early on, starting with the job ad, and consider if your policy aligns with what the market values. Travel cost offsets may be a solution if it can be supported in your budget (e.g., public transportation, gas or parking reimbursement).

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

Include a line like, "Hybrid role (2 days onsite)," or "Remote work available across Canada, with compensation aligned to national benchmarks." Clarify whether pay is adjusted based on location.



4 Work Location – Part B: Big City vs. Smaller Market

Your company location—and where your employee lives—can significantly impact compensation. In Canada, salaries are typically 10–20% higher in major urban centres like Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary due to higher costs of living, increased competition and industry concentration. Roles based in smaller cities or rural areas often pay less, but they may offer a lifestyle advantage or more flexibility, which some candidates see as a trade-off.

With increased requests for flexibility (sometimes in the form of remote work or flexible hours), many professionals living outside large cities expect national market pay, especially in high-demand, high-skilled roles. That means you can't always offer a local-market salary if you want top talent—especially for roles in tech, AI, specialized finance and professional services.

What you can do

- Benchmark compensation based on the talent market you're hiring from—not just your headquarters' location.
- Decide if you'll offer national, regional or location-adjusted pay and be transparent about it.

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

Consider adding language like this: "Salary is benchmarked using national market data for this role, regardless of candidate location." or "This role is based in Ottawa, and compensation reflects the local cost of living and market demand."



5 Education ROI

Formal education is no longer a guarantee of higher pay. In many roles, especially in tech and HR, relevant experience or certifications may have more value. For example, a cybersecurity expert who is self-taught may bring as much value or more as the formally trained computer science graduate.

Candidates may expect less pay if they're newer grads. If a job unnecessarily requires a degree and additional certifications, you may need to offer higher pay than the position actually requires. For example, a bachelor's degree may be equivalent to two years of direct experience.

What you can do

Revisit degree and certification requirements. Offer support for upskilling or retooling in fast-changing areas.

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

Include lines like, "Education assistance or certification reimbursement available," or "Post-secondary degree preferred, but relevant experience considered."

6 Flex Hours & Lifestyle Design

Flexibility directly impacts how competitive your offer feels. Many professionals are willing to accept slightly lower salaries for true work-life balance. But if the flexibility isn't real—or if it's poorly communicated—expect to pay more. Canada's productivity concerns are also pushing employers to better define performance expectations alongside flexibility.

The present tug-a-war between lifestyle/flexibility and the need for performance/productivity is at play, and there isn't a clear winner yet.

What you can do

Implement core hours or output-based performance models that support flexibility without sacrificing results.

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

State in your offer: "Flexible work hours with core availability between 10am–4pm," or "Results-based model with no set daily schedule, and monthly performance metrics."

7 Travel Expectations

Business travel isn't universally appealing anymore. Frequent travel requirements may push candidates to expect more compensation. Clear travel requirements can help you stay salary neutral; in other words, attract candidates who are seeking business travel. In general, in recruitment today, the lure of business travel has waned considerably.

What you can do

Define the purpose and frequency of travel and pair it with appropriate compensation or time-in-lieu if required (level of role dependent).

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

Use phrasing like, "Up to 10% domestic travel annually, with travel bonus and per diem included."

8 Premium Skills and Multiple Languages

Specific in-demand skills like AI fluency, cybersecurity and cloud architecture now carry built-in market premiums—often a 10–20% higher base salary. Likewise, candidates who are bilingual, particularly in French, command higher salaries.

If you're hiring for these skills without adjusting pay, you will find talent harder to attract and keep. A flat salary band may not work across these in-demand skill sets.

What you can do

Identify which premium skills are essential and benchmark pay accordingly. Consider spot bonuses, skill premiums or incentives.

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

Add a separate line in your offer: "\$85,000 base + \$5,000 AI skill premium." This helps differentiate your offer.

9 P&L Accountability

If someone manages a budget or business line, they're not just overseeing, but driving outcomes. That added accountability often justifies a salary bump. Roles with financial oversight typically earn 15–25% more than similar titles without it.

What you can do

Redefine job descriptions and salary bands for roles with true ownership of profit and loss or business outcomes.

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

Include language like this in your offer: "This role includes ownership of a \$2.5M annual operating budget. Compensation reflects strategic and financial accountability."



10 Vacation & PTO Leverage

More and more candidates are comparing PTO across offers. Some will accept a lower salary in exchange for more paid time off. No doubt, PTO has become a powerful differentiator.

What you can do

When possible and if your culture and business can support it, expand time-off options like sabbaticals or summer hours.

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

Be clear. Break-down your time off allowances in your offer with language like this: "20 vacation days annually + 2 wellness days + 1 paid volunteer day."

11 Bonuses, Stocks Options, Pensions and RRSP Matching

Bonuses

They're a powerful tool, especially when the base salary is capped. They can help close offers, motivate performance and reward impact without permanently raising fixed costs. According to Gallagher, 70% of Canadian employers use bonuses to support retention and reward top talent.

When offering bonuses, candidates expect transparency. Whether tied to performance, projects or company results, clearly explain how and when bonuses are paid.

How bonuses impact compensation

Bonuses let you offer competitive total compensation without raising base pay—and they're a strong motivator for high performers.

What you can do

- Define your bonus structure clearly
- Use signing, retention or milestone bonuses to win top candidates, especially those with specialized, in-demand skills

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

Include language like this in your offer: "Up to 10% annual bonus based on results" or "\$5,000 signing bonus paid after 30 days."

Stock options, pensions and RRSP matching programs

Stock options are more common to incentivize early hires and key management in startups that may lack cash; rolling stock options may be available in major public companies. These are less common in everyday compensation plans, more so for executive comp plans.

Access to a pension or RRSP matching program increases retention (StatsCan).

What you can do

- Describe and discuss stock options with top candidates and top performers.
- Share the pension plan or RRSP matching programs with top candidates and review it annually with employees so they remain connected with it. (Note: Employees sometimes forget about this benefit when comparing job offers, so this element is not as front and centre as it could be.)

How to include this in your compensation/total rewards offering

Include language like this in your offer: "5% RRSP match" or "Equity grant of 1,500 shares, 4-year vesting" or "Defined benefit pension after 6 months."

Compensation as a package

In 2025, compensation is about the full picture, not just dollars. And candidates are weighing this full picture, assessing salary alongside career growth, flexibility, learning opportunities, manager quality, paid time off and overall lifestyle fit.

So, if your offer focuses primarily or only on the base salary, there's an opportunity to shore up your total rewards offering with a combination of the 11 elements listed above.

Example

Pull together all the elements of the offer into a clean, easy-to-read summary like this:

- Base Salary: \$82,000
- Skill Premium: \$3,000 (for AI tools or bilingualism)
- Learning & Development: \$1,000/year for certifications or upskilling
- Vacation & Wellness: 20 vacation days + 2 wellness days
- Work Style: Hybrid model (3 days remote, 2 in office in downtown Toronto)
- Career Path: Clear advancement to Manager or Senior IC track
- Health & Wellness: Comprehensive benefits plan, EAP, etc.

When you lay out compensation as a thoughtful package, you attract better candidates and close offers faster.



Snapshot:

6 Real Roles and Real-Time Salary Ranges from Payscale

To bring all of this to life, below, we've applied real-time salary data from Payscale to six in-demand roles in specific locations.

Each role is shown in two ways:

- The base salary for the role in a specific geographic location
- The base salary for the role in a specific geographic location PLUS additional criteria (e.g., varying years of experience, increased responsibilities, upgraded skills or credentials et.)

In this way, we clearly show how changing just one factor—like adding supervisory duties, requiring a university degree or adjusting the years of experience required—can have a real impact on compensation expectations.

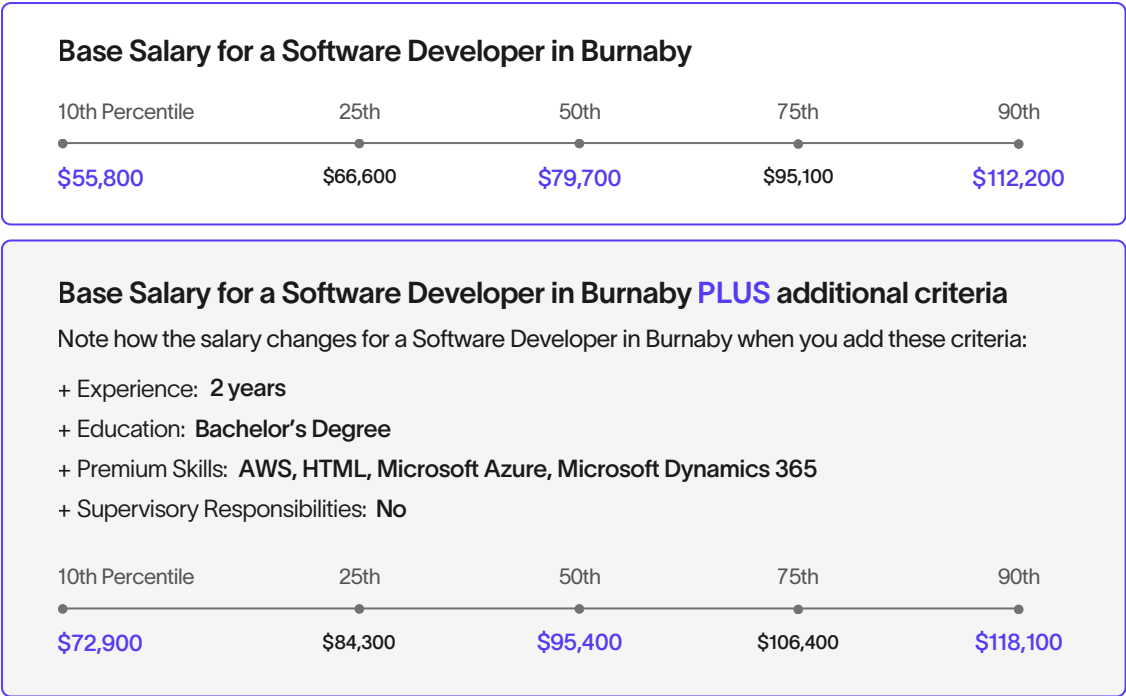
Use this information as a guide to benchmark your own roles and understand how job design, expectations and education influence what top candidates expect to be paid.

We're analyzing these six roles:

- Software Developer
- Executive Assistant
- Cybersecurity Architect
- HR Business Partner
- Director of Finance
- Construction Project Manager

Software Developer

Software Developer |  Burnaby, BC





Education stats (Canada)

- 95% of Software Developers have post-secondary education (Brookfield Institute).
 - About 60–70% hold a bachelor's and 15% a master's degree.
- For acquiring knowledge, developers rely heavily on self-driven learning (Idego Group).
 - 65.6% learn to code on their own, 59.5% use online resources, 40.4% take online courses or certifications, and 10.2% come through coding bootcamps.



HR Business Partner

HR Business Partner |  Ottawa, ON



HR Business Partner |  Calgary, AB



Education stats (Canada)

71% of HRBPs have a bachelor's degree, with 21% advancing to a master's; only a small fraction earn a doctorate or just an associate degree.

Cybersecurity Engineer

Cybersecurity Engineer | 📍 Hamilton, ON



Cybersecurity Engineer | 📍 Winnipeg, MB



Education stats (Canada)

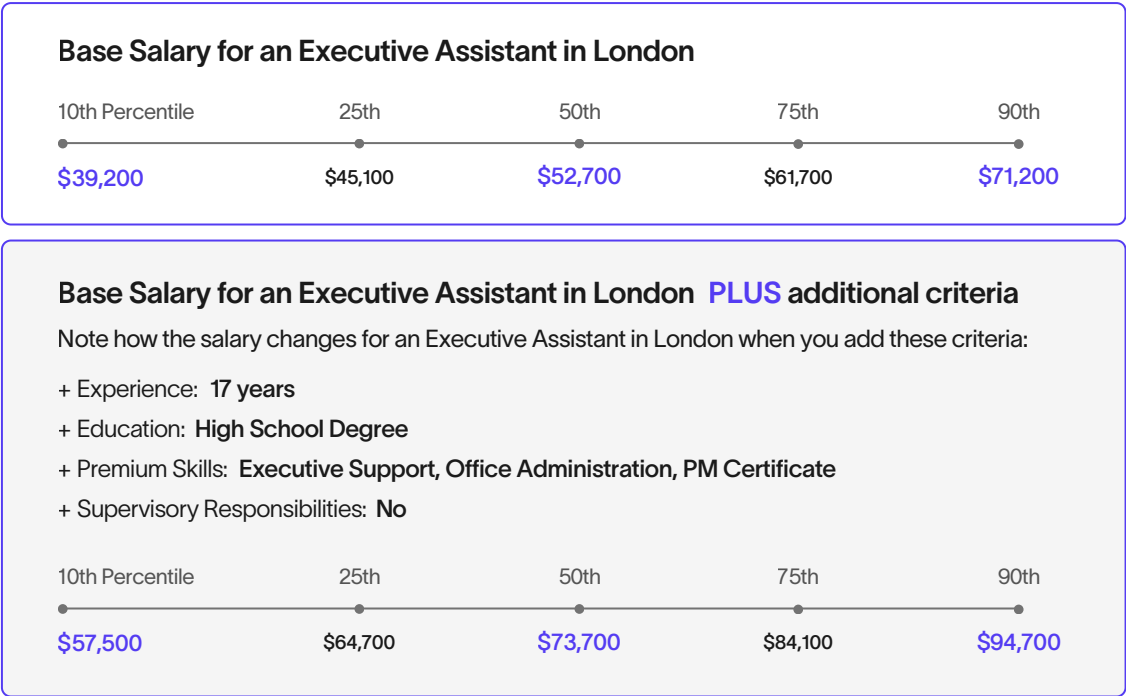
- 70–80% of Cybersecurity Architects have a bachelor's degree.
- ~20–30% have a master's degree.

Executive Assistant

Executive Assistant |  Vancouver, BC



Executive Assistant |  London, ON



Education stats (Canada)

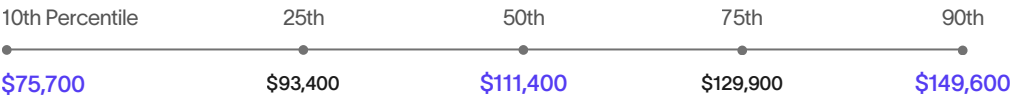
Most Executive Assistants have a college diploma (35–40%), followed by either a high school diploma or a bachelor's degree (each held by about 25–30%), while fewer than 5% hold a master's degree.

Director of Finance

Director of Finance |  Halifax, NS



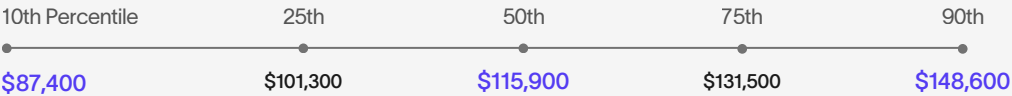
Base Salary for a Director of Finance in Halifax



Base Salary for a Director of Finance in Halifax PLUS additional criteria

Note how the salary changes for a Director of Finance in Halifax when you add these criteria:

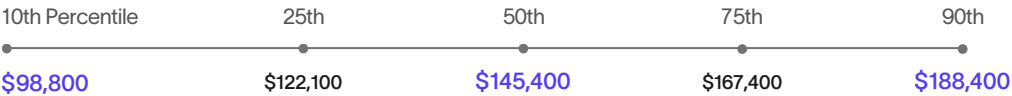
- + Experience: 8 years
- + Education: Bachelor's + CPA
- + Premium Skills: Compliance, Cash Flow Management, GL Accounting
- + Supervisory Responsibilities: Team of 2



Director of Finance |  Toronto, ON



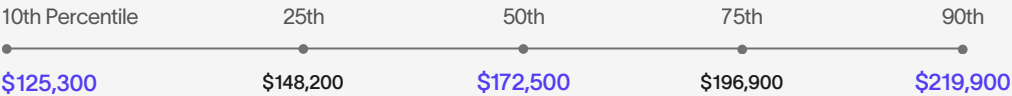
Base Salary for a Director of Finance in Toronto



Base Salary for a Director of Finance in Toronto PLUS additional criteria

Note how the salary changes for a Director of Finance in Toronto when you add these criteria:

- + Experience: 19 years
- + Education: MBA + CPA
- + Premium Skills: Business Analysis, Investment Management, Leadership
- + Supervisory Responsibilities: Team of 8



Education stats (Canada)

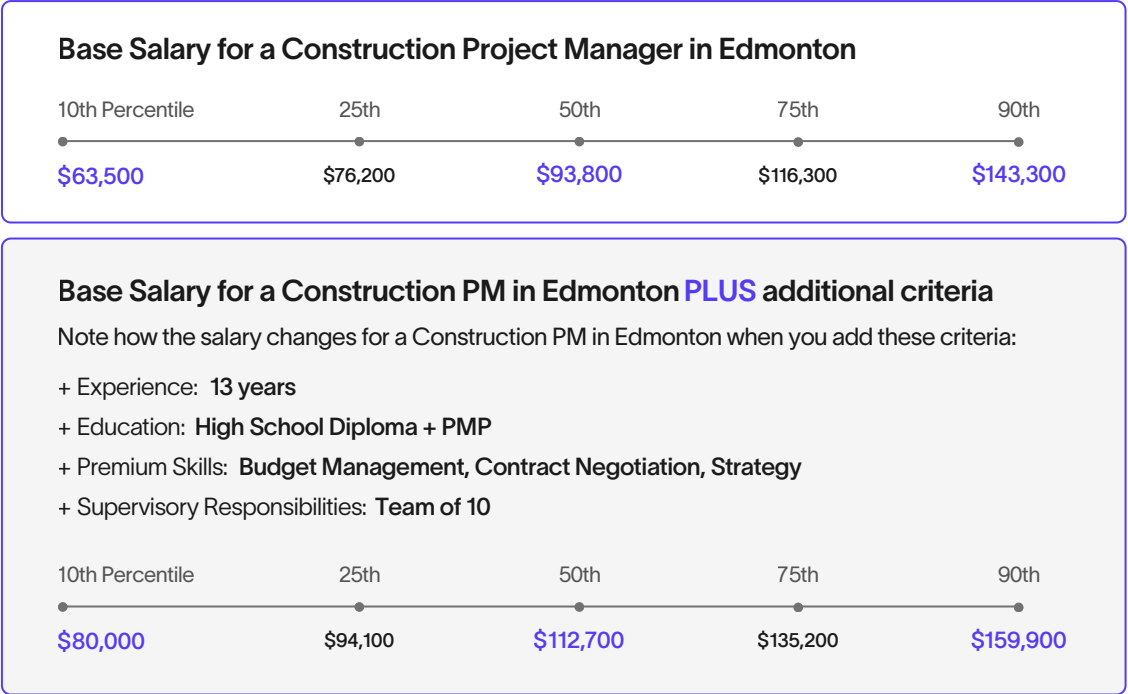
Most Finance Directors hold a bachelor's degree in accounting, finance or business—often paired with a CPA designation—while about 20–25% also have a master's degree, such as an MBA or master's in finance; fewer than 10% have only a diploma or alternative credential.

Construction Project Manager

Construction Project Manager | 📍 Ottawa, ON



Construction Project Manager | 📍 Edmonton, AB



Education stats (Canada)

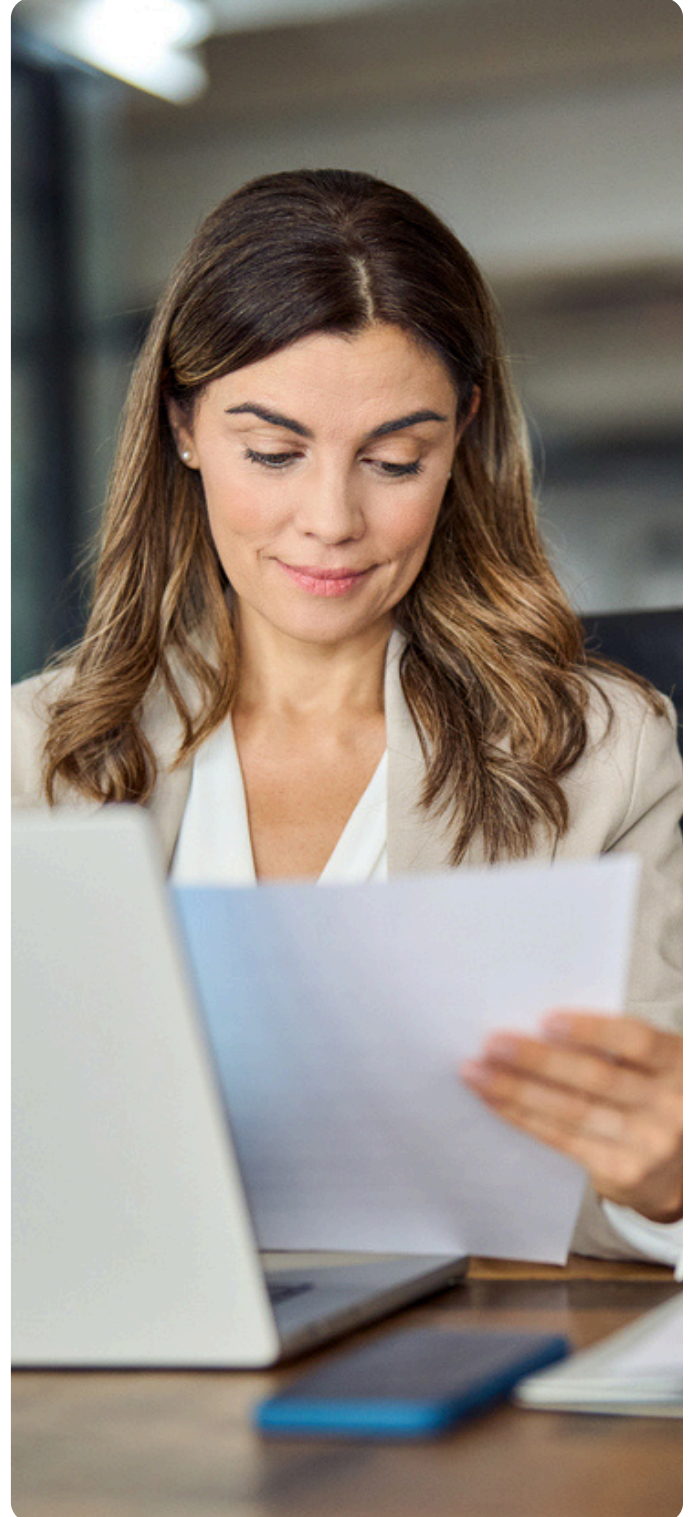
Most Construction Project Managers hold either a bachelor's degree (about 50–60%)—typically in construction management, engineering or architecture—or a college diploma (30–35%), while a smaller portion have only a high school education with significant experience or certifications, and fewer than 5% hold a master's degree.

Compensation is a dynamic story

It reflects not just what a role is worth, but what a candidate brings, what the future holds and how your organization is positioned to support growth.

The most effective offers in 2025 are clear, intentional and aligned with what today's professionals value most.

By looking beyond the base salary and understanding the drivers that shape pay, you'll be better equipped to attract the right people and build a compensation strategy that evolves with the market well into the future.





Connecting top talent *to meaningful work*

Questions about compensation?

We want to hear from you.

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