

The Real Story on *AI Salaries* in Canada

Compensation insights,
emerging roles and
hiring trends shaping
the AI workforce in 2026



*Connecting top talent
to meaningful work.*



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AI hiring is moving quickly, but *compensation* hasn't settled into something consistent yet.

What we're seeing in the market is a wide range of salaries depending on the exact job title (whether it includes 'AI' or not), how hands-on the role is, how mature the organization's AI strategy is, and whether the work is truly AI-focused or simply AI-adjacent.

To bring some clarity, we've combined:

- **Market data** from our licensed product Payfactors by Payscale
- **Real compensation** from roles we've placed

The result is a practical view of where salaries are actually landing today across entry, mid, and senior levels.



It's also important to recognize that "entry-level" in AI often doesn't mean early career. In many cases, these professionals have worked in tech for years.

An AI Developer, for example, may already have years of experience as a software developer before transitioning into AI-focused work. These candidates don't land in the entry-level range for salaries.



Salary Snapshot

AI titles are multiplying fast. Here's where compensation is landing across the roles we're seeing most in the market.

Job Title	Entry-Level	Mid-Level	Senior	Key Responsibilities
AI Architect	—	\$130K–\$165K	\$165K–\$200K+	Designs end-to-end AI systems, defines architecture, selects tools/models, ensures scalability and governance
AI Engineer	\$90K–\$115K	\$115K–\$145K	\$145K–\$175K+	Builds, trains, and deploys models, works with data pipelines, integrates AI into applications
AI Solutions Architect	—	\$120K–\$150K	\$150K–\$200K+	Bridges business + technical, translates needs into AI solutions, leads implementations
AI Business Analyst	\$65K–\$85K	\$85K–\$110K	\$110K–\$130K	Gathers requirements, identifies AI opportunities, supports use case development and adoption
AI Director	—	\$130K–\$170K	\$170K–\$210K+	Leads AI strategy, manages teams, aligns AI initiatives with business goals
AI Adoption Lead	—	\$115K–\$130K	\$130K–\$160K	Drives AI rollout, change management, training, internal enablement
AI Developer	\$70K–\$90K	\$90K–\$130K	\$130K–\$165K	Develops AI-powered features, works with APIs, LLMs, automation tools

Gen AI UX Designer	\$70K–\$90K	\$90K–\$120K	\$120K–\$150K	Designs AI interactions, prompt flows, user journeys for AI products
Gen AI QA Lead	—	\$95K–\$125K	\$125K–\$155K	Tests AI outputs, ensures quality, bias mitigation, performance validation
AI & Automation Specialist	\$60K–\$80K	\$80K–\$100K	\$100K–\$120K	Implements automation tools, builds workflows, connects systems using AI
Prompt Engineer	\$60K–\$85K	\$85K–\$120K	\$120K–\$150K	Designs prompts, optimizes outputs, builds prompt libraries and workflows
AI Consultant	\$70K–\$90K	\$90K–\$130K	\$130K–\$165K	Advises clients on AI strategy, use cases, vendor/tools selection
SEO / GEO / AIO Specialist	\$60K–\$85K	\$85K–\$110K	\$110K–\$140K	Optimizes content for search + AI discovery, structures content for LLM visibility
AI Artist	\$70K–\$90K	\$90K–\$120K	\$120K–\$150K	Creates AI-generated visuals, trains models for creative outputs, supports branding/content

Emerging AI Roles to Watch

Not every AI role has fully defined salary benchmarks yet. These are the titles we're seeing on the rise, but where compensation is still evolving:

- > Manager of AI Agents
- > AI Change Management Lead
- > AI Governance & Risk Lead
- > AI Experience Designer (AI XD)
- > AI Training & Development Lead
- > AI Knowledge Engineer

How including 'AI' in the job title impacts *compensation*

In most cases, adding AI to a role increases the salary range.

We're typically seeing a

10-25% premium when a role shifts from traditional to AI-enabled.

For example

IT Business Analyst > **AI Business Analyst**

Software Developer > **AI Developer**

Marketing Specialist > **AI / Automation Specialist**

This premium reflects:

- Higher demand for AI-related skills
- A smaller, still-developing talent pool
- The expectation that these roles will drive efficiency, automation, or innovation

It's not just a title change.

The expectation of impact is higher, and *compensation follows*.

How to interpret *entry-level* AI Salaries

Entry-level ranges in AI can be misleading.

At this level, candidates are typically not building or developing AI systems directly.

They are often:

- > Using AI tools in their day-to-day work
- > Supporting AI-focused teams or initiatives
- > Contributing to workflows that include AI, but not owning development

Hands-on AI development, architecture, and strategy typically begin at the mid-level.



What Drives AI Salaries *Higher or Lower*?



AI compensation can vary widely, even for roles with similar titles. In many cases, the difference comes down to how close the role is to hands-on AI development, how much ownership the person has, and how directly their work is expected to impact the business.

A candidate who uses AI tools in their day-to-day work will typically fall into a different compensation range than someone designing AI systems, building models, integrating LLMs, or leading an organization's AI strategy.

Here are the key factors that can move compensation up or down:

Depth of hands-on AI experience

The biggest compensation driver is whether the candidate is truly building with AI or simply using AI-enabled tools.

Candidates who are developing models, integrating AI into products, working with LLMs, or building automation workflows tend to command higher salaries. Candidates who are using AI tools to improve productivity, support analysis, or streamline existing work may still bring valuable experience, but they typically fall closer to traditional salary ranges for their function.

Level of ownership

Compensation also increases when the role moves from support to ownership.

Someone contributing to an AI project will usually be priced differently than someone responsible for defining the strategy, selecting tools, managing stakeholders, setting governance practices, and ensuring the work is adopted across the organization.

The more accountability attached to the role, the higher the range tends to be.





Technical stack and specialization

Specific technical skills can also raise compensation, especially when they're tied to tools and platforms that are in high demand.

Experience with LLMs, Python, machine learning frameworks, MLOps, Azure OpenAI, AWS, data pipelines, API integrations, or model evaluation can push candidates toward the higher end of a range.

This is especially true when a candidate can connect the technical work to practical business outcomes, not just experimentation.

Business impact expectations

AI roles are often tied to efficiency, automation, cost savings, product improvement, or new ways of working.

When the expectation is that the person will help reduce manual work, improve decision-making, support revenue-generating products, or lead a major transformation initiative, compensation typically rises.

In other words, employers aren't only paying for AI knowledge. They're paying for the potential impact that knowledge can create.

Industry and operating environment

Compensation can also shift depending on the industry.

Organizations in finance, insurance, government, healthcare, enterprise technology, and highly regulated environments may pay more for candidates who understand security, privacy, governance, compliance, and complex stakeholder environments.

In these cases, AI expertise alone may not be enough. The premium often comes from combining AI skills with industry context.

Stage of AI maturity

A company's AI maturity also matters.

Organizations in the early stages may pay a premium for candidates who can bring structure, clarity, and direction. They may need someone who can assess opportunities, recommend tools, build a roadmap, and help leaders understand where AI can realistically create value.

More mature organizations may pay more for deep specialization, such as model deployment, AI governance, agent development, or advanced automation.

The takeaway: the title matters less than the scope. The more hands-on, specialized, accountable, and business-critical the role is, the more likely it is to sit at the higher end of the compensation range.



Canada vs US AI Salaries

How Canadian AI Salaries Compare to the US

Canadian tech and AI salaries are consistently **lower** than US compensation, but the gap is often larger than most employers expect.

What's driving the gap

A few structural factors explain most of the difference — larger tech ecosystems, stronger equity and bonus packages, and higher salary ceilings at the senior and leadership level. The gap tends to be most noticeable in specialized AI roles, where demand is high and the talent pool is still developing.

What this means for employers in Canada

Canadian AI salaries are competitive. But for specialized roles, candidates are often aware of what the market looks like beyond our borders, and that awareness shapes what they expect.

The gap isn't uniform across every role. Contract and hourly rates in Canada tend to be more competitive, and mid-level positions sit closer to US equivalents than senior or executive roles do. Understanding where your specific role lands matters more than any headline number — and it's something we can help you work through.



Recent data shows that U.S. salaries are about 51% higher than Canadian salaries (Wage.is).

An Altis Client Story



The Hire That Kept Getting Extended

Building AI Capability with a Full Stack GenAI Developer

Role AI Full Stack Developer (GenAI / RAG focus)

Client Multi-national financial services firm

Location Toronto (Hybrid)

The Challenge

A leading financial services organization was investing in AI-driven solutions to enhance internal tools and customer-facing applications. They needed a highly specialized developer who could bridge traditional full stack engineering with emerging Generative AI capabilities.

This wasn't a typical full stack hire.

The role required someone who could:

- Design and build scalable applications end-to-end
- Work hands-on with Generative AI, specifically Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG)
- Navigate both modern front-end frameworks and Python-based AI development
- Operate effectively in a highly regulated, enterprise environment

The market for this kind of talent is tight. Many candidates have either strong software engineering backgrounds or AI experience, but rarely both at a production-ready level.

The client initially scoped this as a short-term contract (2.5 months) to accelerate early development. However, they needed someone who could deliver impact quickly while also having the potential to grow with the team long-term.

Our Approach



We treated this as a highly targeted, specialized search rather than a volume-driven process.

01

Deep role calibration

We worked closely with the client to refine what “good” looked like in this evolving space.

That meant aligning on:

- Practical RAG experience vs. theoretical AI knowledge
- Ability to ship production-ready applications, not just prototypes
- Comfort across Python (AI) and React/Next.js (front end)
- Experience working with modern AI tooling and frameworks

03

Rigorous screening for real capability

Given how quickly AI skills are evolving, we went beyond keyword matching.

Our screening focused on:

- Depth of understanding in RAG architectures
- Hands-on experience building and debugging AI-powered applications
- Ability to explain trade-offs, performance considerations, and real-world implementation challenges

02

Focused talent mapping in a niche market

Rather than relying on traditional pipelines, we conducted a targeted search across:

- AI-focused engineering communities
- Developers working with LLM frameworks, vector databases, & applied AI systems
- Candidates with experience across full stack & machine learning

We prioritized candidates who had:

- Built and deployed real-world GenAI applications
- Experience with tools like LangChain, LangGraph, vector databases, and model evaluation frameworks
- Strong engineering fundamentals to ensure scalability

04

Partnership throughout the process

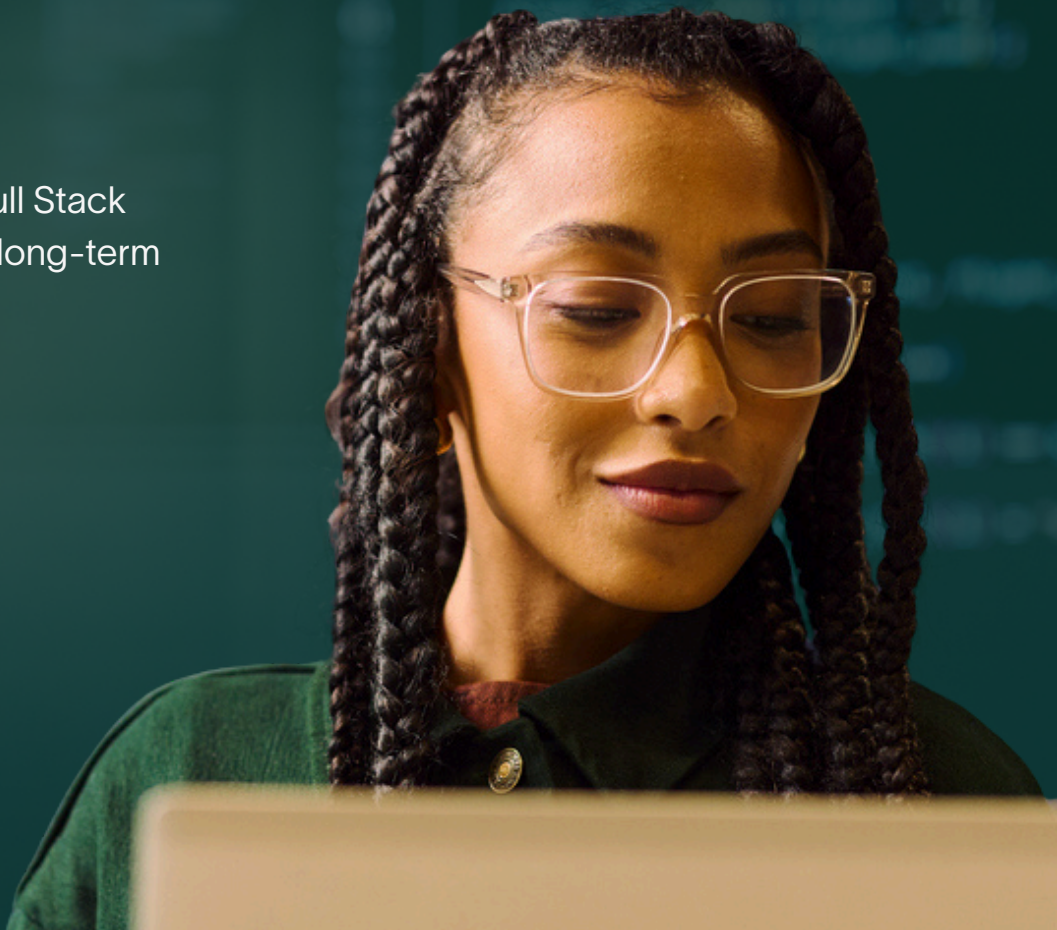
We stayed closely aligned with the client’s technical team, ensuring feedback loops were tight and the process moved quickly without compromising quality.

The *Results*

We successfully placed a **highly skilled** AI Full Stack Developer who met both the immediate and long-term needs of the team.

Immediate Impact

- > Contributed to the design and development of scalable AI-powered application systems
- > Built and refined features leveraging Generative AI and RAG
- > Delivered clean, well-tested, production-ready code across both front-end and back-end environments
- > Collaborated effectively with technical teams to solve complex implementation challenges



Beyond the original scope

- > What began as a 2.5-month contract was **extended twice** due to strong performance
- > The candidate became a **key contributor** to the team's AI initiatives
- > Ultimately, the client converted the contractor into a **permanent employee**

Long-term value

- > **Strengthened** the client's internal AI capabilities
- > **Accelerated** delivery of AI-driven applications
- > Provided **stability** and **continuity** in a rapidly evolving area of the business

AI compensation is evolving *quickly*, and no two roles look exactly the same.

If you're looking to hire or want to sense-check where your roles should sit, we're here to help.

> You can get started here:

Hire with Altis

> Or request a custom salary benchmark tailored to your role and market:

Request a Salary Report

And if you want to talk it through, we're always here.

