



# Salary Guide Q1 2026

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## Founder's Note

At the middle of last year, we released our 2025 H2 Salary Guide. As we head into Q1, it felt important to share an update, not because the market has shifted dramatically, but because it largely hasn't.

We're still operating in a tight market. Skilled candidates who genuinely meet role requirements remain hard to find, while expectations from employers continue to rise, often beyond what the market can realistically deliver. At the same time, we're seeing more mid-to-senior professionals actively on the market than in previous years, particularly compared to junior talent. In our niche, this has created an interesting dynamic: highly skilled candidates at the top end of the salary spectrum, and employers with more quality options to choose from, but only if they know how to assess them properly.

Contract and fixed-term roles continue to be popular, especially for project-based work. Many businesses are still focused on cost control, choosing to advertise roles directly and turning to recruitment partners primarily when roles become difficult to fill.

On the candidate side, one shift has been clear. People are spending more time on their CVs, asking better questions, and actively upgrading their LinkedIn profiles. Over the past 12 months, we've spent more time advising candidates in this space than ever before. LinkedIn is no longer optional, it's effectively your public resume. How you present your experience, your skills, and your point of difference matters, and many candidates still underestimate its impact.

For employers, the rise of AI in job searching has changed the game. Reviewing resumes alone is no longer enough. Assessment and interview processes need to go deeper, beyond keywords and formatting, to uncover capability, context, and cultural fit. This is where a true recruitment partner adds value: working closely with you to identify great people not just on paper, but in practice.

This guide reflects what we're seeing every day, in conversations with clients, candidates, and leaders navigating a complex hiring landscape. As always, our goal is clarity, realism, and helping both sides make better decisions in the market.

**Sonia Ottaviani**

Founder & Director, Elite Talent Solutions



## Introduction

The 2026 Salary Guide has been developed to provide clarity and context for organisations hiring across Transformation, Change, Project Delivery, Program Management, and HRIS / HCM functions.

Drawing on over 25 years of recruitment experience, recent placement data, and real-time market insight, this guide reflects current salary benchmarks and the broader hiring dynamics shaping the market in 2026.

While salary data remains an important reference point, successful hiring in this sector continues to be driven by speed to market, clarity of scope, delivery leadership, and access to specialist talent. This guide is designed to support informed decision-making — whether you are planning a hire, scaling delivery capability, or assessing market alignment.

## Key Market Shifts – 2026

- Demand remains strong across **Transformation, Change, Project Delivery, Program Management, and HRIS / HCM**, driven by enterprise-wide system upgrades, optimisation programs, regulatory requirements, and large-scale transformation initiatives.
- Organisations continue to favour **contract and fixed-term engagements** to manage delivery risk, maintain flexibility, and secure niche expertise.
- Project and Program Delivery capability is increasingly valued alongside technical expertise, with a strong focus on governance, stakeholder management, and execution discipline.
- Hiring timelines remain tight. Employers who align early on scope, budget, and decision-making authority consistently secure stronger outcomes.
- Salary growth has stabilised compared to previous peak periods; however, **experienced delivery leaders and platform-specific HRIS specialists continue to command a premium.**

## Candidate Behaviour – 2026

Candidates are prioritising:

- Quality, scale, and impact of delivery programs
- Strong sponsorship and empowered leadership
- Flexibility and hybrid working models
- Senior Project and Program professionals remain highly open to **contract roles**, particularly where projects are outcomes-driven and well-governed.
- Passive candidates continue to engage most effectively through **targeted headhunting and trusted networks**, rather than job board advertising.
- Retention decisions are increasingly driven by career progression, leadership quality, and delivery success — not salary alone.

## Most In-Demand Roles – 2026

- Project Managers & Project Delivery Leads
- Program Managers
- Change Managers
- Transformation Leads
- HRIS / HCM Specialists (Payroll, Workforce Management, Core HR Platforms)
- Senior Delivery & Transformation Leaders

## Salary Benchmarks – 2026



(Permanent salaries are base, exclusive of superannuation)

Role	Sydney	Melbourne	Brisbane
Project Manager	\$125k – \$155k	\$115k – \$145k	\$110k – \$140k
Program Manager	\$165k – \$215k	\$155k – \$205k	\$150k – \$195k
Change Manager	\$135k – \$165k	\$125k – \$155k	\$120k – \$150k
Transformation Lead	\$170k – \$220k	\$160k – \$210k	\$155k – \$200k
HRIS/HCM Specialist	\$125k – \$170k	\$120k – \$160k	\$115k – \$155k

## Contract Rates (Daily) – 2026

Role	Sydney	Melbourne	Brisbane
Project Manager	\$850 – \$1,100	\$800 – \$1,150	\$750 – \$1,050
Program Manager	\$1,200 – \$1,600	\$1,100 – \$1,550	\$1,050 – \$1,400
Change Manager	\$950 – \$1,250	\$900 – \$1,200	\$850 – \$1,100
Transformation Lead	\$1,200 – \$1,600	\$1,100 – \$1,600	\$1,050 – \$1,400
HRIS/HCM Specialist	\$900 – \$1,300	\$850 – \$1,150	\$800 – \$1,050

## What This Means for Employers

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- Salary alignment is now the baseline — **clarity of scope, speed of decision-making, and flexibility** are the true differentiators.
- Project Delivery and Program Management roles are increasingly outcomes-focused, with clients seeking leaders who can manage complexity, risk, and cross-functional stakeholders.
- HRIS talent shortages are **skill- and platform-specific**, with deep implementation and optimisation experience commanding premiums.
- Contractors expect certainty: clearly defined deliverables, realistic timelines, and empowered sponsors.
- Organisations that engage early and partner closely reduce delivery risk and cost escalation.

## Closing Note

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As we move into 2026, the market for Transformation, Change, Project Delivery, Program Management, and HRIS talent remains competitive and highly specialised. Employers who combine market-aligned remuneration with clear scope, strong leadership, and flexible engagement models will continue to secure the professionals who drive meaningful outcomes.

At Elite Talent Solutions, we are proud to partner with organisations across Australia and New Zealand, delivering trusted advice and specialist talent that goes beyond recruitment.

