

Know the numbers before you enroll.

28 PAGES

US salary benchmarks by level, the certified-vs-non-certified pay premium, and a clear ROI model — plus the full syllabus and exam blueprint. The data to make an informed decision before you invest a dollar or an hour.

01 US salary benchmarks by level**02 ROI & pay-increase data****03 Certified-vs-non-certified premium****04 Full syllabus****05 Exam blueprint & weightings****06 Complete Learn-by-Doing list**

Issued by the Global Skill Development Council — companion to the GSDC AI certification program. Figures are US market benchmarks, not guarantees.

ORIENTATION

How to use this guide

This guide leads with the numbers. It lays out what AI roles pay in the US, what a recognized credential adds, and how to run the return on investment for yourself — then shows exactly what the certification covers. Decide with data, not a sales pitch.

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A note on the figures. All salary numbers are US market benchmarks compiled from public 2025–2026 sources and presented as ranges. They describe the market, not a promise of individual pay.

SECTION A

The Headline Numbers

Four figures that frame the whole decision. The detail and sources follow in later sections.

~\$153K

Average US AI engineer base salary, 2025–2026

Up to 25%

Pay premium for AI-skilled workers vs non-AI peers

~18%

Typical base-pay growth in the first three years

32%

Of certified pros got a raise; ~1 in 3 of those over 20%

Sources: Indeed / Glassdoor / Levels.fyi compilations (2025–2026); PwC 2025 Global AI Jobs Barometer; TripleTen 2026; Pearson VUE 2025 Value of IT Certification report.

Why this matters before you enroll. The cost of a certification is small and one-time. The salary bands it helps you reach are large and recurring. This guide quantifies both sides.

SECTION A

How to Read This Data

A few rules so the numbers stay honest and useful.

BASE Base salary only, unless total comp is stated.

RANGE Bands, not points — your number depends on role, city and employer.

US US market figures; other regions differ widely.

2025-26 Current data; AI pay moves fast, so recheck before negotiating.

Base vs total compensation

Base salary is the fixed annual figure. Total compensation adds bonus and equity, and at larger tech firms can push numbers far above base — sometimes by six figures at senior levels. Where this guide cites total comp, it says so explicitly.

Compare like with like. When negotiating, confirm whether a quoted figure is base or total comp. Mixing the two is the most common way candidates misread an offer.

RELATED CERTIFICATION

50% OFF

These numbers are why the AI certification pays for itself

The credential behind this salary data is open for enrollment — at half price.

[Explore the Program >](#)

SECTION B

US Salary Benchmarks by Level

AI compensation rises steeply with experience. These are US base-salary bands compiled from public 2025–2026 market data.



Bands compiled from Indeed, Glassdoor, Levels.fyi, Built In and TripleTen (2025–2026). Base salary; total comp at large tech firms runs higher.

The mid-to-senior jump is the steep one. Crossing from mid to senior is where pay accelerates fastest — and where a validated, demonstrable skill set matters most.

SALARY BENCHMARKS

Entry Level — 0 to 2 Years

RANGE Roughly \$100K–\$120K base in the US; higher in San Francisco and New York.

AVG Around \$99K–\$103K average base across all locations.

DRIVERS Foundational ML skills, a degree or strong project work, and tool fluency.

EDGE A recognized credential plus a project portfolio helps clear the first screen.

ENTRY-LEVEL SNAPSHOT (US)

National range : \$100,000 - \$120,000

SF / NYC start : \$115,000 - \$135,000

Average base : ~\$99,000 - \$103,000

Sources: KORE1 (2026), People in AI, TripleTen (2026).

Entry is competitive. Most entry AI roles expect real project evidence. The portfolio you build toward certification is exactly that evidence.

SALARY BENCHMARKS

Mid Level — 3 to 5 Years

RANGE Roughly \$140K–\$160K base, the steepest year-over-year growth of any band.

GROWTH Around 9% year-over-year reported for engineers with 3–5 years of hands-on ML.

DRIVERS Shipping production systems independently; early specialisation.

EDGE Specialisation (e.g. LLM work) can add a 25–40% premium over the median.

MID-LEVEL SNAPSHOT (US)

Base range : \$140,000 - \$160,000
YoY growth : ~9% (steepest band)
Specialist boost : +25% to +40% over median

Sources: MRJ Recruitment 2026 benchmarks; Rise AI Talent Report 2026; Codecademy 2026.

Mid is where bidding wars happen. Demand outstrips supply for engineers who can ship without oversight. That scarcity is what drives the fastest raises.

SALARY BENCHMARKS

Senior & Lead — 5+ Years

RANGE

Base often exceeds \$200K; senior specialists reach \$200K–\$312K base.

TOTAL

Total comp at leading firms can reach \$300K–\$500K+ with equity and bonus.

DRIVERS

System design, architecture, leadership and mentoring.

EDGE

The AI-skill premium widens sharply with seniority — over 70% at some top firms.

SENIOR SNAPSHOT (US)

Senior base	: \$200,000 - \$312,000
Total comp (top)	: \$300,000 - \$500,000+
Lead / Principal	: \$155,000 - \$250,000+ base

Sources: *Acceler8 Talent (2026)*; *KORE1 (2026)*; *Codecademy (2026)*. Total comp includes equity and bonus.

Seniority compounds the premium. The pay gap between AI-skilled and non-AI peers is small at entry and very large at senior level.

LIMITED-TIME OFFER

LIMITED
TIME

Move into the higher salary band with a recognized credential

A globally recognized AI certification — enrollment open for a limited window.

Claim Your Seat >

SALARY BENCHMARKS

Pay by Specialisation

Within AI, some specialisations command a clear premium over the median.



Sources: Indeed (ML engineer ~\$183K); Rise AI Talent Report 2026 (LLM premium); Acceler8 Talent 2026 (safety/alignment premium). Bars are illustrative of relative premium.

Specialise deliberately. The largest premiums attach to scarce, high-demand specialisations. A structured program is the fastest way to build toward one.

SALARY BENCHMARKS

Pay by US Geography

Location still shapes pay, even with remote work. The Bay Area leads; strong second-tier markets follow.

Market	Relative pay	Notes
SF Bay Area	Highest	Senior total comp frequently \$300K+
New York City	Very high	Strong in fintech and cloud
Seattle	Very high	Cloud-infrastructure heavy
Other major hubs	High	Boston, Austin, LA and similar
Remote / national	Variable	Often benchmarked to a tier, not a city

Sources: Codecademy 2026; KORE1 2026. California alone holds roughly a third of US AI job postings (TripleTen 2026).

Geography is a lever, not a cap. Remote roles increasingly pay to a market tier rather than your zip code — widening access to the higher bands.

SECTION C

The Certification Pay Premium

Across IT broadly, a recognized certification is associated with measurable pay and career gains. AI and GenAI credentials are called out as commanding the highest premiums in 2025–2026.

32%

Of certified professionals received a salary increase

~31%

Of those raises were above 20%

83%

Of raises came within six months of certifying

\$12K–\$20K

Typical reported pay gap vs non-certified peers

Sources: Pearson VUE 2025 Value of IT Certification report (24,000 professionals); Global Knowledge; CompTIA; Robert Half Technology Salary Guide 2025–2026 (AI / GenAI among highest-premium skills).

Certification is a signal and a skill. It clears résumé screens and validates ability — but the pay gain comes from pairing it with demonstrable work, which the program is built to produce.

CERTIFICATION PREMIUM

What the Premium Looks Like

A simplified view of how a credential plus demonstrated skill can shift a base salary.



Illustrative model based on PwC 2025 (up to 25% AI-skill premium) and Rise 2026 (specialisation premium). Not a guarantee; individual results vary by role, employer and market.

The premium widens with seniority. Reported AI-skill premiums run around 6% at entry and exceed 70% at senior level in some top firms — the credential matters more as you climb.

HALF-PRICE ENROLLMENT

50% OFF

Put the certified pay premium to work for you

Validate your AI skills and step toward the numbers on these pages.

[Get Certified >](#)

CERTIFICATION PREMIUM

Beyond the Salary Line

Pay is the headline, but the survey data shows the benefits run wider.

Confidence

82% of certified pros said they gained confidence to pursue new opportunities.

Promotion

63% received or anticipated a promotion around the time of certifying.

Work quality

Around 80% felt it improved their work quality or ability to innovate.

Mobility

A recognized credential travels across employers and borders.

Source: Pearson VUE 2025 Value of IT Certification Candidate Report.

The raise is the lagging indicator. Confidence, promotions and better work usually come first — the salary increase tends to follow within months.

CERTIFICATION PREMIUM

Why Demand Stays High

The premium exists because demand for AI skills is outrunning supply — a gap that is widening, not closing.

Skill scarcity

1

Mid-level engineers who can ship production AI are in short supply; every team wants them.

Doubling interest

2

Candidates pursuing AI / ML certifications more than doubled from 17% (2022) to 35% (2024).

Cross-industry pull

3

AI hiring is no longer just Big Tech — finance, health, retail and the public sector all compete.

Sources: KORE1 2026; Pearson VUE 2025; Robert Half 2025–2026.

Early movers capture the premium. Premiums are largest while a skill is scarce. Certifying now positions you ahead of the rising wave of candidates.

SECTION D

The ROI Model

Whether a certification pays off is arithmetic, not faith. Here is the model — run your own numbers into it.

THE ROI FORMULA

$ROI = (\text{annual salary increase}) / (\text{total cost of certifying})$

total cost = exam + study materials + time

ROI > 2.0 => paid back in under ~2 years

ROI > 4.0 => paid back in ~6 months

Model structure adapted from standard certification ROI guidance (G&E Training, 2025).

Use your own figures. Plug in a conservative salary increase and your real costs. Even a modest raise against a one-time cost usually clears the 2.0 bar comfortably.

ROI MODEL

ROI — A Worked Example

An illustrative case using conservative, round numbers. Your inputs will differ.

Input	Illustrative value
Current base salary	\$100,000
Conservative post-cert increase	10% = \$10,000 / year
One-time cost (exam + study + time)	assume a modest figure, \$C
First-year return	\$10,000 – \$C
Ongoing return	\$10,000 every year after

The asymmetry is the point. The cost is paid once; the higher salary recurs every year. That is why certification ROI compounds heavily in your favour over a career.

Illustrative only. A 10% increase is conservative against the up-to-25% AI-skill premium in the cited data.

**48
HOURS
ONLY**

OFFER VALID 48 HOURS

Your enrollment discount expires in 48 hours

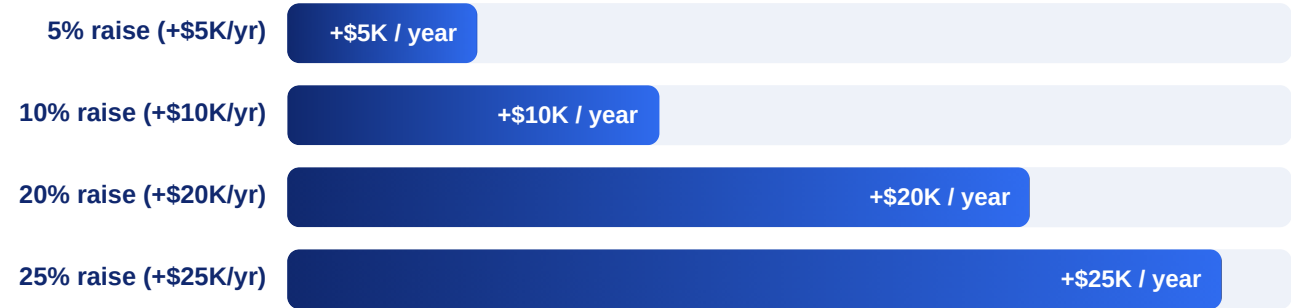
Lock in the AI certification program before the window closes.

[Secure My Spot >](#)

ROI MODEL

ROI Across Different Raises

How the payback period shrinks as the salary increase grows, on a \$100K base.



On a \$100,000 base. 20%+ raises are within the range Pearson VUE 2025 reports for ~1 in 3 of those who got an increase.

Bigger raise, faster payback. At a 20% increase, even a few thousand dollars of cost is recovered in weeks, not years. The downside case is mild; the upside is large.

ROI MODEL

ROI — Run Your Own

Fill these in with your real figures before you decide.

YOUR ROI WORKSHEET

A Current annual salary \$ _____

B Expected % increase _____ %

C Annual increase (A x B) \$ _____

D One-time cost to certify \$ _____

ROI = C / D = _____

Payback (months) = D / C x 12 = _____

Decide on the number, not the mood. If your ROI clears 2.0, the decision is straightforward. Most realistic AI-salary inputs clear it with room to spare.

SECTION E

The Official Syllabus

What the certification actually covers — the skills behind the salary bands. Each module builds toward a portfolio artifact.

Module	Focus
M1 · AI Foundations	Types of AI, key techniques and terminology.
M2 · Generative AI & Tools	LLMs, assistants and effective prompting.
M3 · Data & Evaluation	Preparing data and judging AI outputs.
M4 · Applied Projects	Scoping, building and documenting real work.

Skills first, salary second. The pay premium is a consequence of demonstrable skill. The syllabus is engineered to build exactly the skills employers pay for.

SECTION E

The Official Syllabus — cont.

Module	Focus
M5 · Automation	Redesigning processes with AI in the loop.
M6 · Responsible AI	Fairness, privacy, oversight and ethics.
M7 · AI Strategy & Maturity	Value, readiness and capability assessment.
M8 · Capstone	Assembling and presenting a full deliverable.

What you can demonstrate

BUILD Ship AI-assisted work end to end

JUDGE Evaluate outputs and data quality

SCOPE Frame and prioritise use cases

SHIP Deliver responsibly, with oversight

RELATED CERTIFICATION

The ROI math points one way — toward certification

50% OFF

A small, time-bound investment against a market-rate salary increase.

[Run the Numbers >](#)

SECTION E

Syllabus — Skills & Outcomes

What each module proves you can do — the lines a hiring manager pays a premium for.

Module	You can demonstrate...
M1–M2	Explaining AI clearly and using generative tools effectively.
M3–M4	Preparing data, evaluating outputs and shipping a project.
M5–M6	Automating a process and applying responsible-AI practices.
M7–M8	Assessing maturity and delivering a presented capstone.

Portfolio-ready. Every row is an artifact you can show and a line you can defend — the evidence that converts a credential into a raise.

SECTION F

The Exam Blueprint

How the certification exam is weighted, so you study to the test instead of guessing at it.

Domain	Weight	What it tests
Foundations	15%	Types, techniques, terminology
Generative AI & Tools	25%	Prompting, assistants, fluency
Data & Evaluation	20%	Prep, quality, bias and error
Automation & Projects	20%	Process redesign, applied work
Responsible AI & Strategy	20%	Ethics, oversight, maturity

Where to spend your time. Generative AI, tools and evaluation are nearly half the exam — weight your revision there.

SECTION F

Exam Format & Preparation

Format at a glance

Item	Detail
Style	Multiple-choice and scenario questions
Basis	The eight syllabus modules, by blueprint weight
Mode	Online, remotely accessible
Result	Digital certificate and shareable badge on passing

A four-step prep plan

- ✓ Work the syllabus modules in order.
- ✓ Complete the Learn-by-Doing artifacts as you go.
- ✓ Drill the high-weight domains: generative AI, tools, evaluation.
- ✓ Sit a practice run, then close your weakest domain.

Study to the blueprint. Let the weightings, not your comfort zone, decide where your revision hours go.

SECTION G

The Learn-by-Doing List

The certification is applied. These are the deliverables you build — the portfolio that turns the credential into a raise.

1. Use-case canvas

Scope one AI opportunity on a page.

2. Tool evaluation

Compare AI tools against requirements.

3. Prompt library

Reusable, structured prompts for a workflow.

4. Automation map

A process redrawn with AI steps.

5. Data readiness check

A small dataset prepared and assessed.

6. Output evaluation

An AI result judged against a rubric.

7. Ethics review

A use case run through an ethics gate.

8. Capstone deliverable

All of it, assembled and presented.

LIMITED-TIME OFFER

ENDS
SOON

A higher salary band is a certified move

Validate the skills employers pay a premium for with an industry credential.

[Get Certified >](#)

SECTION G

Learn-by-Doing — How It Works

Each deliverable follows the same rhythm, so your portfolio compounds as you study.

Brief

A real-world scenario sets the goal and constraints.

Build

You produce the artifact using the module's skills.

Review

It is checked against a rubric mapped to the syllabus.

Refine

Feedback drives one improvement pass before sign-off.

Reuse

The artifact joins your professional portfolio.

Relate

Each piece links to the next toward the capstone.

Evidence is what pays. The salary premium attaches to demonstrable skill. These artifacts are that demonstration — the bridge from credential to compensation.

SECTION H

Make the Decision

You have the numbers. Run them through this checklist before you enroll.

- ✓ You know the salary band you are targeting.
- ✓ You have estimated a conservative post-cert increase.
- ✓ You have totalled the one-time cost to certify.
- ✓ Your ROI clears 2.0 on your own figures.
- ✓ You are ready to build the portfolio, not just pass a test.

If the math clears, act. The premiums in this guide are largest for early movers while AI skills are scarce. A clear ROI plus rising demand is a strong signal to proceed.

HALF-PRICE ENROLLMENT

HALF
PRICE

Pass the exam these benchmarks are built around

The official syllabus and blueprint — backed by the certification, now at half price.

Join the Program >

SECTION H

The Numbers, On One Page

Entry	~\$100K–\$120K base in the US
Mid	~\$140K–\$160K base, fastest-growing band
Senior	\$200K–\$312K base; \$300K–\$500K+ total comp
AI premium	Up to 25% over non-AI peers; wider with seniority
Cert raises	32% got a raise; ~1 in 3 of those over 20%
ROI	One-time cost vs a recurring salary increase

All figures are US market benchmarks from public 2025–2026 sources, presented as ranges. Not a guarantee of individual pay.

FROM DATA TO DECISION

Know the numbers. Then enroll.

The data is in front of you. The next step is to act on it.

- ✓ Pick your target salary band from the benchmarks.
- ✓ Run your own ROI with the worksheet on page 18.
- ✓ Map your study to the exam blueprint.
- ✓ Enroll and start building the portfolio that earns the premium.

The cost is once; the raise recurs. Everything in this guide points to the same conclusion: for most people, a clear-ROI AI credential is a decision the numbers support.

48
HOURS
LEFT

OFFER VALID 48 HOURS

Last call: know the numbers, then enroll

The 48-hour enrollment window is closing. Turn this salary data into your own.

[Enroll Now >](#)