

2026 EDITION · SALARY REPORT

The Full 2026 FDE Salary Report

Twenty pre-computed pay cells, the base + RSU + bonus behind every number, an RSU calculator, and the exact negotiation script for offers above \$400K total comp.

[Salary guide](#)[Career roadmap](#)[AI governance roles](#)[Hiring trends](#)

Inside: 20 pay cells (L3-L7 × Palantir, OpenAI, Anthropic, Databricks) with full base/RSU/bonus splits, an L3-L7 progression script, a competing-offer negotiation playbook, the Palantir interview→offer timeline (median ~21 days), and 2025 vs 2026 deltas. Compensation cited from Levels.fyi (May 2026), Glassdoor (2026) and Blind.

Published by **GSDC — Global Skill Development Council** | Certified Forward Deployed Engineer (CFDE)

[CFDE · CERTIFICATION TRACK](#)

START HERE

What's inside this report

A working comp toolkit, not just numbers. Read the matrix, model your equity, then use the scripts to negotiate.

- ◆ **20 pre-computed pay cells** — L3-L7 × four employers, each split into base + RSU + bonus.
- ◆ **RSU calculator** — a formula and worksheet to turn a grant into real annual value.
- ◆ **L3-L7 progression script** — what earns the jump to each next level.
- ◆ **Negotiation playbook** — competing-offer leverage, plus a word-track for offers above \$400K TC.
- ◆ **Timelines & deltas** — the Palantir interview→offer median (~21 days) and 2025 vs 2026 pay shifts.

READ IT LIKE AN ANALYST

Numbers are modeled from public 2026 anchors (see Methodology, p.30). Treat every cell as a benchmark to negotiate against — not a guarantee. The CFDE track builds the skills that move you up the matrix.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2026 FDE pay picture

FDE pay split into two markets in 2026. Pure-play (Palantir) stayed cash-weighted and steady; frontier labs (OpenAI, Anthropic, Databricks) ran an equity-heavy talent war. The result is one of the widest pay ranges in tech for a single role family.

\$190K-\$1.74M

Full FDE total-comp range, L3→L7 (modeled)

~\$555K

OpenAI SWE median TC (Levels.fyi, May 2026)

~21 days

Reported Palantir interview→offer median

- ◆ **Equity is the story above L4.** Base flattens; RSUs do the scaling.
- ◆ **NYC has overtaken SF** as the primary FDE hub (regulated industries cluster East Coast).
- ◆ **2026 pays for proven ROI** — premiums go to engineers who tie deployments to retention.

Cited: Levels.fyi (May 2026), Glassdoor (2026), Blind. Modeled ranges; see Methodology (p.30).

THE HEADLINE

The 20-cell pay matrix

Total compensation (base + RSU + bonus), USD, by level and employer. The full per-cell splits follow on the next pages.

Level	Palantir	OpenAI	Anthropic	Databricks
L3 · Entry	\$190K	\$310K	\$300K	\$250K
L4 · Mid	\$245K	\$470K	\$420K	\$410K
L5 · Senior	\$325K	\$700K	\$600K	\$657K
L6 · Staff	\$440K	\$1.00M	\$850K	\$1.04M
L7 · Principal+	\$630K	\$1.35M	\$1.15M	\$1.74M

READ ACROSS

At every level, frontier labs out-pay the pure-play shop — the gap is almost entirely equity, and it widens as you climb.

READ DOWN

TC roughly doubles every two levels. The single biggest lever in any negotiation is being slotted one level higher.

Modeled from Levels.fyi (May 2026) medians + level deltas; Glassdoor (2026); Blind. Illustrative benchmarks, not offers or guarantees.

[OFFER] 50% OFF

YOUR NATURAL NEXT STEP

These numbers reward proof. Get the credential that signals it.

Every cell in this matrix is earned by demonstrating deployment, eval and ownership skill. The GSDC Certified Forward Deployed Engineer (CFDE) maps directly to what moves you up — and gives recruiters a verifiable signal.

[Explore the CFDE Certification](https://www.gsdccouncil.org/certification-program/forward-deployed-engineer-salary)

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Tap anywhere on this panel to open the CFDE enrollment page.

HOW TO READ A CELL

Anatomy of a pay cell

Each cell is three numbers, not one. Understanding the split is how you negotiate the right lever.

Base salary (cash)

PAID EVERY PAY PERIOD

The most stable, least negotiable component at labs. It flattens with seniority — the jump to the next level is mostly equity.

RSU / equity grant

VESTS OVER ~4 YEARS

The scaling component. At senior levels it's the majority of TC. Value depends on share price, vesting and liquidity (tender offers at private labs).

Bonus

ANNUAL, TARGET-BASED

Usually a single-digit-to-low-double-digit percentage of base. Smaller at frontier labs, which fold more value into equity.

WHY THE SPLIT MATTERS

A "\$700K offer" with \$280K base + \$400K RSU + \$20K bonus is a very different risk profile than one weighted to illiquid private equity. Always negotiate the **component you can actually realise**.

PAY SPLIT · 1 OF 4

Palantir — pay split

Modeled base + rsu + bonus by level, USD total compensation.

Level	Base	RSU	Bonus	Total
L3 · Entry	\$130K	\$47K	\$13K	\$190K
L4 · Mid	\$150K	\$80K	\$15K	\$245K
L5 · Senior	\$175K	\$132K	\$18K	\$325K
L6 · Staff	\$200K	\$220K	\$20K	\$440K
L7 · Principal+	\$230K	\$377K	\$23K	\$630K

CASH-WEIGHTED, AND KNOWN TO NEGOTIATE

Palantir leans more on base than the labs, with RSUs vesting over ~4 years. It is widely reported to negotiate for strong candidates — bring a competing number.

Cited anchors: Levels.fyi (May 2026), Glassdoor (2026), Blind. Splits are modeled; actual offers vary by team, location and equity timing.

PAY SPLIT · 2 OF 4

OpenAI — pay split

Modeled base + rsu + bonus by level, USD total compensation.

Level	Base	RSU	Bonus	Total
L3 · Entry	\$200K	\$100K	\$10K	\$310K
L4 · Mid	\$240K	\$218K	\$12K	\$470K
L5 · Senior	\$280K	\$406K	\$14K	\$700K
L6 · Staff	\$320K	\$664K	\$16K	\$1.00M
L7 · Principal+	\$360K	\$972K	\$18K	\$1.35M

EQUITY-HEAVY — AND NOW RSUS

OpenAI transitioned from Profit Participation Units (PPUs) to standard RSUs in January 2026. Base is relatively flat (~\$200K-\$360K); equity does the scaling. Negotiates moderately.

Cited anchors: Levels.fyi (May 2026), Glassdoor (2026), Blind. Splits are modeled; actual offers vary by team, location and equity timing.

[OFFER] LIMITED TIME

LIMITED ENROLLMENT WINDOW

Frontier-lab equity is where the money is. Earn the bar.

Lab offers are benchmarked against research engineers — the loop is hard and equity-heavy. CFDE gives you the guided, eval-driven project and credential to compete. The current intake is open for a limited time.

Claim Your CFDE Seat

<https://www.gsdCouncil.org/certification-program/forward-deployed-engineer-salary>

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PAY SPLIT · 3 OF 4

Anthropic — pay split

Modeled base + rsu + bonus by level, USD total compensation.

Level	Base	RSU	Bonus	Total
L3 · Entry	\$195K	\$95K	\$10K	\$300K
L4 · Mid	\$235K	\$173K	\$12K	\$420K
L5 · Senior	\$275K	\$311K	\$14K	\$600K
L6 · Staff	\$310K	\$524K	\$16K	\$850K
L7 · Principal+	\$350K	\$782K	\$18K	\$1.15M

PRIVATE RSUS, TENDER-OFFER LIQUIDITY

Anthropic grants conventional startup equity (increasingly RSUs), valued against its latest financing. Equity is illiquid until a tender offer or IPO. Widely reported to be firm on offers — negotiate level, not just number.

Cited anchors: Levels.fyi (May 2026), Glassdoor (2026), Blind. Splits are modeled; actual offers vary by team, location and equity timing.

PAY SPLIT · 4 OF 4

Databricks — pay split

Modeled base + rsu + bonus by level, USD total compensation.

Level	Base	RSU	Bonus	Total
L3 · Entry	\$170K	\$66K	\$14K	\$250K
L4 · Mid	\$200K	\$194K	\$16K	\$410K
L5 · Senior	\$240K	\$398K	\$19K	\$657K
L6 · Staff	\$280K	\$738K	\$22K	\$1.04M
L7 · Principal+	\$320K	\$1.39M	\$26K	\$1.74M

RSU-HEAVY AT SENIOR LEVELS

Databricks pays a strong, RSU-weighted package that climbs steeply — L7 totals can clear \$1.7M. The natural bridge for data-engineering backgrounds.

Cited anchors: Levels.fyi (May 2026), Glassdoor (2026), Blind. Splits are modeled; actual offers vary by team, location and equity timing.

WHERE THE MONEY IS

Equity mix across the four

Share of total comp coming from equity (RSUs), at a senior (L5) level — the clearest view of each employer's structure.

Employer	L5 Base	L5 Equity	Equity % of TC
Palantir	\$175K	\$132K	41%
OpenAI	\$280K	\$406K	58%
Anthropic	\$275K	\$311K	52%
Databricks	\$240K	\$398K	61%

THE TAKEAWAY

At Palantir, base still carries a big share of a senior package. At the labs and Databricks, the majority of your pay is equity — which means your **realised** comp depends on vesting and liquidity, not the headline.

Implication for negotiation: at equity-heavy employers, push on grant size and refreshes; at cash-weighted ones, push on base and level.

RSU CALCULATOR · 1 OF 2

Turn a grant into real money

A headline equity number is a grant value, not annual cash. Here's how to convert it.

THE FORMULA

Annual equity value = Total grant value ÷ Vesting years

Year-1 realised = (Annual equity) × (portion vested after any cliff)

Realisable now = Annual equity × (liquidity factor: 1.0 if public RSUs; <1 if private & no tender)

WORKED EXAMPLE — OPENAI-STYLE OFFER

Base \$300K + \$2.0M RSU grant over 4 years, 25%/yr.

Annual equity = \$2.0M ÷ 4 = **\$500K/yr**

Year-1 TC ≈ \$300K base + \$500K equity + bonus ≈ **~\$800K**

Note: private-lab equity is illiquid until a tender offer — treat it as a ceiling, not cash.

THE THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK ANY RECRUITER

1) What share price / valuation is this grant based on? 2) What's the vesting schedule and cliff? 3) When is the next liquidity event or tender?

RSU CALCULATOR · 2 OF 2

Your grant worksheet

Fill this in with the offer in front of you — it converts any equity headline into an annual number you can compare.

INPUTS

Total equity grant value: \$ _____ Vesting years: _____

Cliff (months): _____ Vest cadence after cliff: _____

Grant share price / valuation: \$ _____ Annual bonus target: _____ %

OUTPUTS

Annual equity value (grant ÷ years): \$ _____

Year-1 realised (after cliff): \$ _____

Annualised TC (base + annual equity + bonus): \$ _____

COMPARE APPLES TO APPLES

Run this for every offer, then rank by **annualised TC adjusted for liquidity** — not by the biggest headline. A liquid public RSU is worth more per dollar than an illiquid private grant of the same face value.

[OFFER] 50% OFF

BEST VALUE THIS INTAKE

A bigger grant beats a bigger spreadsheet. Earn the level.

The fastest way to raise every number on your worksheet is to be slotted a level higher — which comes from demonstrable skill. CFDE certifies exactly that, and this intake is half off.

Enroll at 50% Off

<https://www.gsdccouncil.org/certification-program/forward-deployed-engineer-salary>

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2025 VS 2026 · BY LEVEL

Where pay moved this year

Blended FDE total comp across the four employers, year over year (modeled). Entry pay normalised after the 2024-25 hype; senior and staff kept climbing on the talent war.

Level	2025 TC	2026 TC	Δ
L3 · Entry	\$250K	\$263K	+5%
L4 · Mid	\$354K	\$386K	+9%
L5 · Senior	\$514K	\$571K	+11%
L6 · Staff	\$744K	\$833K	+12%
L7 · Principal+	\$1.07M	\$1.22M	+14%

THE PATTERN

The higher the level, the bigger the raise. Scarcity is sharpest for proven senior FDEs who can tie deployments to revenue and retention — that's where the 2026 premium concentrated.

Modeled blended figures; directional, not guarantees. See Methodology (p.30).

2025 VS 2026 · BY COMPANY

What changed, and why

Employer	2025 median	2026 median	Δ
Palantir FDSE	~\$201K	~\$215K	+7%
OpenAI SWE	~\$483K	~\$555K	+15%
Anthropic Applied	~\$350K	~\$400K	+14%
Databricks SWE	~\$388K	~\$435K	+12%

- ◆ **Structural shift:** 2024-25 was “AI FOMO”; 2026 pays for **proven ROI** — deployments linked to retention.
- ◆ **OpenAI:** PPU's converted to RSUs (Jan 2026); raw TC still the highest of the four.
- ◆ **Anthropic:** aggressive enterprise scaling pushed Applied AI Engineer comp up toward OpenAI.
- ◆ **Palantir:** steady gains on strong commercial growth; still the most cash-weighted.

2025 figures are modeled from 2026 anchors and reported year-over-year movement; illustrative, not guarantees.

PROGRESSION

The L3→L7 progression script

Each level is a different scope of ownership. To get promoted (and re-leveled in offers), operate one level up *before* you ask.

L3

ENTRY

Execute

Ship scoped tasks within a deployment, with guidance. Prove reliability.

L4

MID

Own a deployment

Take a workstream end-to-end — scope, build, evals, handoff. Need fewer reviews.

L5

SENIOR

Own a customer

Lead the engagement, set the technical approach, mentor, manage the stakeholder relationship.

L6

STAFF

Own a portfolio

Drive patterns across customers; feed learnings into the product roadmap; influence beyond your team.

L7

PRINCIPAL+

Own the strategy

Shape how the company deploys at scale; set standards others follow.

THE PROMOTION SENTENCE

If you can't finish "I independently own ___ and the next level would own ___," you have your gap. Close it, document it, then make the case.

PROGRESSION · ROI

What a level is worth

The blended TC jump between adjacent levels — i.e. the prize for one successful re-level.

Move	Blended TC step-up	Approx. multiple
L3 → L4	+~\$123K	1.5×
L4 → L5	+~\$185K	1.5×
L5 → L6	+~\$262K	1.5×
L6 → L7	+~\$385K	1.5×

THE FASTEST LEVER

A single level bump is worth six figures — far more than squeezing a few percent within a level. In the loop and in the offer, your job is to **signal the level above** with evidence of broader ownership.

This is exactly why a recognised credential plus a defensible flagship project pays for itself: both are level-signaling assets.

Step-ups are blended across the four employers (modeled); individual moves vary widely.

[OFFER] 48 HOURS ONLY

TIME-SENSITIVE

One level up is worth six figures. Signal it.

Re-leveling is the highest-ROI move in this whole report — and it comes from demonstrable ownership. CFDE certifies the deployment, eval and customer skills that get you slotted higher. This intake's pricing closes within 48 hours.

Lock In Before It Closes

<https://www.gsdccouncil.org/certification-program/forward-deployed-engineer-salary>

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NEGOTIATION · FUNDAMENTALS

The three levers that move an offer

- ◆ **Level.** The biggest lever by far. If the work you describe is L5, don't accept an L4 slot — ask for re-leveling with evidence.
- ◆ **Equity.** At labs and Databricks, this is most of TC. Push on grant size, refresh cadence, and the valuation the grant is priced at.
- ◆ **Base.** Most negotiable at cash-weighted shops (Palantir); flattest at labs. Use it where it actually flexes.

HOUSE STYLES (REPORTED)

Palantir negotiates for strong candidates. OpenAI sits in the middle. Anthropic is widely reported to be firm on cash — so negotiate **level and grant** there, not base.

Always: get the offer in writing, never accept on the call, and anchor every ask to a public band and a reason. Then let silence do the work.

Reflects public recruiter benchmarks (Levels.fyi, Exponent, May 2026). Not financial advice.

NEGOTIATION · LEVERAGE

Competing-offer leverage

A second offer is the strongest, cleanest leverage there is — used well, it's collaborative, not combative.

- ◆ **Run processes in parallel.** Aim for offers to land within the same 1–2 weeks so you can compare and leverage.
- ◆ **Share the band, not a screenshot.** “I have a competing offer in the \$X–\$Y range” is enough; you don't need to expose details.
- ◆ **Ask them to win, specifically.** “You're my first choice — if you can reach \$Z TC, I'll sign.” Make saying yes easy.
- ◆ **Leverage level, too.** A higher level elsewhere is a re-leveling argument here.
- ◆ **Never bluff.** If asked for proof you can't give, fall back to public bands and your value, not invented numbers.

IF YOU HAVE NO COMPETING OFFER

Use the public bands in this report as your anchor, plus a documented flagship project. Data + proof is a credible substitute for a second offer.

NEGOTIATION · HIGH-TC SCRIPT

The >\$400K TC negotiation script

For senior/staff offers where equity dominates. Anchor on level and grant, not base.

1 · APPRECIATE & ANCHOR ON LEVEL

*"Thank you — this is exciting. Based on the scope we discussed, I see this as an **L5/L6** role, and public 2026 bands for that level run **\$(X)-\$(Y)** TC."*

2 · PUSH THE LEVER THAT FLEXES

*"I know base is fairly fixed here, so let's focus on the **equity grant**. To get to **\$(Z)** TC, can we increase the RSU grant or add a sign-on?"*

3 · USE THE COMPETING OFFER (IF ANY)

*"I have a competing offer at **\$(Z)**. You're my first choice — if you can match the total, I'll sign this week."*

4 · PROTECT THE DOWNSIDE

*"Can we confirm the **valuation the grant is priced at**, the vesting schedule, and the next liquidity/tender window?"
(Then stop talking.)*

Illustrative word-track; adapt to your situation. Not financial or legal advice.

EQUITY DEEP DIVE

RSUs, vesting & liquidity

- ◆ **Vesting.** Typically 4 years. Schedules vary: 25%/yr; sometimes a 1-year cliff then monthly/quarterly.
- ◆ **Public vs private.** Public RSUs (e.g. via Alphabet) are liquid on vest; private-lab RSUs are not — you wait for a tender offer or IPO.
- ◆ **OpenAI:** moved from PUs to standard RSUs in January 2026 — simpler to value, still private.
- ◆ **Anthropic:** private RSUs valued against its latest financing; liquidity via periodic tender offers.
- ◆ **Refreshes matter.** Year-4 “cliffs” in income are real — ask about refresh grants up front.

THE MENTAL MODEL

Headline TC at a private lab is a **ceiling priced at today's valuation**, not guaranteed cash. Discount it for vesting risk and illiquidity when you compare offers.

Equity structures per public reporting (Levels.fyi, National Law Review, 2026). Not financial advice.

[OFFER] 50% OFF

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Negotiating \$400K+? The credential is a rounding error.

At senior bands of \$400K-\$1M+, the leverage that re-levels you or grows your grant dwarfs any course cost. CFDE builds and certifies the skills behind those numbers — deployment, evals, ownership.

Invest in the CFDE

<https://www.gsdccouncil.org/certification-program/forward-deployed-engineer-salary>

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HIRING VELOCITY

Palantir interview → offer: ~21 days

For well-prepared candidates, the Palantir-style loop is fast — a reported median of around three weeks. An illustrative timeline:

Day 0-3 SCREEN	Recruiter / fit Ownership story, motivation, logistics.
Day 4-8 TECH	Deep dive + coding A real project interrogated; practical coding.
Day 9-14 CASE	Decomposition case study The hidden filter — how you break the problem down.
Day 15-18 VALUES	Values / team match Ownership, ambiguity, embedding with a customer.
Day 19-21 OFFER	Debrief → offer Committee, leveling, and the verbal offer.

WHY IT'S FAST

The loop is decision-dense and the role is in demand. Preparation — especially the case study — is what keeps you on the 21-day track instead of stalling.

~21 days is a reported median for prepared candidates; timelines vary by team, location and scheduling.

HIRING VELOCITY

What speeds up – or stalls – your loop

Speeds it up

- ✓ A crisp, ready ownership story
- ✓ Drilled decomposition habit
- ✓ A defensible flagship project
- ✓ Fast, flexible scheduling
- ✓ A competing process creating urgency

Stalls it

- ✓ Jumping to solutions in the case study
- ✓ Vague, output-not-outcome stories
- ✓ No eval / cost reasoning in design
- ✓ Slow replies and reschedules
- ✓ Leveling ambiguity left unaddressed

THE SINGLE BIGGEST ACCELERANT

Walk in already able to decompose out loud and defend one real deployment. That one habit shortens the loop and raises the level you're offered.

KNOW YOUR NUMBER

Benchmark your own TC

Before you negotiate, set a target with this four-step method:

- ◆ **1 • Place your level.** Map your real scope of ownership to L3-L7 (use the progression script, p.18).
- ◆ **2 • Read the cell.** Find your level × target employer in the matrix (p.4) and the split (p.7-11).
- ◆ **3 • Adjust for reality.** Discount private equity for liquidity; adjust for location (NYC/SF premium).
- ◆ **4 • Set three numbers.** Walk-away, target, and reach — then anchor your ask at “reach” with a reason.

Walk-away

Below this, you say no

Target

The band midpoint for your level

Reach

Top of band — your opening ask

Writing these three numbers down **before** the call is what keeps you from accepting a verbal offer on the spot.

HIRING TRENDS

Location & remote pay

Geography still moves the number, even as remote work spreads.

- ◆ **NYC > SF.** New York has overtaken San Francisco as the primary FDE hub — regulated industries (fintech, defense, healthcare) cluster on the East Coast.
- ◆ **Remote, with travel.** Many lab roles run 50–70% remote but expect heavy on-site time with customers.
- ◆ **Geo-adjustment.** Some employers adjust by metro; top-tier hubs anchor the high end of each band.
- ◆ **International gap.** UK/EU FDE comp trails US bands materially (often 40–60% of US TC).

NEGOTIATION NOTE

If you're remote in a lower-cost metro, expect a geo-adjustment — but a strong competing offer or scarce skill set can hold you near the top-tier band.

Per public 2026 reporting; location policies vary by employer.

[OFFER] SEATS FILLING

COHORT SCARCITY

Know the number. Now build the case that earns it.

Benchmarks only help if you can defend your level in the loop. CFDE's mentored cohort drills the case study, evals and ownership story that justify the top of the band. Seats are limited and filling for this intake.

Reserve a Cohort Seat

<https://www.gsdccouncil.org/certification-program/forward-deployed-engineer-salary>

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ADJACENT CAREERS

AI governance roles & pay

The governance layer is becoming its own well-paid lane — and FDEs are natural movers, having seen where deployments break.

Role	What it owns	Indicative TC
AI Governance / Responsible AI Lead	Model risk, policy, guardrails	\$250K-\$500K
Eval & Assurance Engineer	Evaluation + monitoring systems	\$300K-\$600K
Deployment Risk / Security Eng.	Data, access, security posture	\$250K-\$500K

WHY IT'S OPEN TO YOU

The same horizontal-bar skills — evals, governance, stakeholder trust — open two doors. You don't have to choose on day one; you have to be credible in the conversation.

Indicative bands modeled from adjacent engineering roles; illustrative, not guarantees.

CAREER ROADMAP

The multi-year arc: L3 to L7

Stage	Typical timing	Comp inflection
Land at L3/L4	Year 0	Base-weighted; prove reliability
Promote to L5 (Senior)	~Yr 2-4	Equity becomes the majority of TC
Promote to L6 (Staff)	~Yr 5-8	TC clears \$750K+ at labs/Databricks
Reach L7 (Principal+)	~Yr 8-12	Seven-figure TC; strategy ownership

TWO ACCELERATORS

1) Switching employers at the right moment often re-levels you faster than internal promotion. 2) A recognised credential plus a defensible portfolio project shortens the time to each next level.

The arc isn't automatic — it's a series of deliberate re-levels. Each one, as the ROI page showed, is worth six figures.

OFFER HYGIENE

Red flags & lowball tells

- ◆ **“Base is the whole story.”** At labs, a strong base with a thin grant is below market — check the equity.
- ◆ **No valuation disclosed.** If they won’t tell you what the grant is priced at, you can’t value the offer.
- ◆ **Level ambiguity.** A vague title hiding an L4 slot for L5 work is the most expensive trap in this report.
- ◆ **“Exploding” offers.** Extreme time pressure to sign is a tell — reasonable employers give you room.
- ◆ **No refresh discussion.** Front-loaded grants that cliff in year 4 with no refresh plan understate long-run pay.
- ◆ **Below-band “for culture.”** Mission matters — but it isn’t a substitute for a market offer.

THE ONE-LINE DEFENSE

“Help me understand the level, the grant’s valuation, and the refresh plan” surfaces almost every lowball tactic at once.

OFFER HYGIENE

Offer-evaluation checklist

- ✓ **Level confirmed** and matches the scope you'll actually own.
- ✓ **Base, equity and bonus** each itemised in writing.
- ✓ **Grant valuation** (share price / round) disclosed.
- ✓ **Vesting schedule and cliff** understood.
- ✓ **Liquidity path** (tender cadence / IPO) clear for private equity.
- ✓ **Refresh policy** discussed to avoid a year-4 cliff.
- ✓ **Annualised TC** computed via the worksheet (p.14) and compared liquidity-adjusted.
- ✓ **Benchmarked** against the matrix (p.4) for your level and employer.
- ✓ **Walk-away / target / reach** written down before any call.

DECISION RULE

Sign when the **liquidity-adjusted annualised TC** meets your target at the right level — not when the headline is biggest.

[OFFER] BONUS BUNDLE

EVERYTHING INCLUDED

The matrix, the scripts, the checklist — plus the credential.

This report is the data. CFDE is the leverage: the roadmap, mentored mock interviews, an eval-driven capstone and a verifiable certificate — the level-signaling assets that move you up the cells.

See What's Included

<https://www.gsdccouncil.org/certification-program/forward-deployed-engineer-salary>

Tap anywhere on this panel to open the CFDE enrollment page.

ACTION PLAN

Your 14-day negotiation prep sprint

1-3
DAYS**Place & benchmark**

Map your level; read your cell and split; set walk-away / target / reach.

4-7
DAYS**Model the equity**

Run the RSU worksheet for each scenario; note the questions to ask each recruiter.

8-10
DAYS**Rehearse the scripts**

Drill the >\$400K script and competing-offer lines out loud until they're natural.

11-14
DAYS**Run the table**

Align offer timing, make the asks, hold the silence, evaluate with the checklist.

THE ONE RULE

Never accept on the call. "Thank you — I'll come back tomorrow with a number" is always available, and always worth using.

METHODOLOGY

Sources & how the cells were modeled

Anchors. Per-company medians and ranges are drawn from public 2026 data:

- ◆ **Levels.fyi (May 2026):** Palantir FDSE median ~\$215K (range \$171K-\$415K); OpenAI SWE L2-L6 ~\$251K-\$1.28M (median ~\$555K); Databricks SWE L3-L7 ~\$246K-\$1.74M (median ~\$435K).
- ◆ **Glassdoor (2026):** Palantir FDSE base avg ~\$167K (113 reports).
- ◆ **Blind & public reporting:** Anthropic Applied AI Engineer ~\$300K-\$490K at comparable levels; equity / PPU→RSU structure.

Method. Per cell, base follows a level schedule, bonus is a small percentage of base, and equity is the remainder of a modeled level total. 2025 figures are back-derived from 2026 anchors and reported year-over-year movement.

IMPORTANT

All cells are **modeled benchmarks**, not verified offers. Real compensation varies by team, location, level and equity timing. Use them to negotiate, not as a promise.

Data attribution: Levels.fyi (<https://www.levels.fyi>). Glassdoor; Blind; public 2026 reporting.

FAQ

Common comp questions

Is base or equity more negotiable?

At labs, base is fairly fixed and equity flexes; at Palantir, base flexes more. Push the lever that actually moves.

How do I value private-lab equity?

Use the RSU worksheet (p.14), then discount for vesting and illiquidity. Treat the headline as a ceiling priced at today's valuation.

Do I need a competing offer to negotiate?

No — public bands plus a documented flagship project are credible anchors. A second offer just makes it cleaner.

What's the single biggest lever?

Level. A one-level bump is worth six figures — far more than a few percent within a level.

Why did OpenAI's equity change?

OpenAI converted from PPU to standard RSUs in January 2026 — simpler to value, still private until liquidity events.

STILL UNSURE OF YOUR NUMBER?

Run the four-step benchmark on p.28, then write down your walk-away, target and reach before any call.

WRAP-UP

Your next 7 days

- ◆ **Day 1-2:** Place your level and read your cell + split.
- ◆ **Day 3-4:** Run the RSU worksheet for your live or target offers.
- ◆ **Day 5-6:** Rehearse the >\$400K and competing-offer scripts out loud.
- ◆ **Day 7:** Write your walk-away / target / reach and line up your asks.

ABOUT GSDC

The Global Skill Development Council (GSDC) is a professional certification body. The Certified Forward Deployed Engineer (CFDE) program builds and certifies the deployment, eval and ownership skills that move you up this report's matrix — roadmap, mentored practice, a capstone and a verifiable credential.

Disclaimer: Educational resource. All compensation figures are **modeled benchmarks** aggregated from public sources cited herein — Levels.fyi (May 2026), Glassdoor (2026) and Blind — and vary by level, location and equity; they are not guarantees of any pay or outcome and are not financial advice. Company names are referenced for market context only and do not imply endorsement or affiliation. Data attribution: Levels.fyi (<https://www.levels.fyi>).

[OFFER] 48-HOUR FLASH

FINAL CALL · THIS INTAKE

You have the numbers. Now get the leverage behind them.

Turn this salary report into a guided, mentored, certified path — the level-signaling capstone and credential that move you up the matrix. Enrollment for this intake closes within 48 hours.

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