

[GET THE FULL 2026 SALARY REPORT](#)

What US Generative AI Roles Actually Pay in 2026.

The complete US benchmark — by role, city, and experience. Total comp including RSUs. Plus the GSDC certification syllabus.

TOP-OF-MARKET · 2026

Staff LLM Developer, San Francisco — total comp up to

\$612k

p90 total comp (base + bonus + RSUs annualised)

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Levels

RSUs

Included

Inside this toolkit

- Salary tables for 5 roles × 4 experience levels
- 10-city US benchmark (SF, NYC, Seattle, Boston, Austin, more)
- Total comp breakdowns including RSUs
- Full 14-module syllabus + 76 LBDs

[WELCOME](#)

About this report

This is the 2026 edition of GSDC's US generative-AI compensation benchmark. It covers five role families, four experience levels, and ten US markets — including fully remote. Every figure is reported as the median for that slice unless labelled otherwise, with total comp broken out separately so equity-heavy roles show their true value.

Use it as a negotiation reference, a target-setting tool when planning a career switch, or as a credibility check on offers. The back half of the report links those numbers to the GSDC certification syllabus that gets candidates to them.

Sample & sources

Built from a rolling 12-month scan of US job postings, levels.fyi self-reports, and recruiter-confirmed offer data. ~14,800 distinct compensation data points.

What we report

Median base, median total comp (base + bonus + RSU annualised), and p25/p75 ranges. All USD. All annualised. New-hire ranges, not retention adjustments.

Roles covered in this report

[Prompt Engineer](#)[AI Engineer](#)[LLM Developer](#)[AI Product Manager](#)[AI Consultant](#)

WHAT YOU'LL GET

Inside this 28-page report

This is a working document — read it cover-to-cover before your next salary conversation, then keep it open during negotiations.

- **Headline numbers**
Top-of-market 2026 figures, year-over-year movement, and percentile bands.
- **Salary tables · 5 roles × 4 levels**
Median base, p25, p75, and total comp for every role × level combination.
- **10-city US benchmark**
City multipliers applied to base, with a heatmap of the top combinations.
- **Total comp including RSUs**
Base + bonus + RSU annualisation, with worked examples for senior levels.
- **ROI of the certification**
How GSDC-certified candidates' offers compare to non-certified peers.
- **Full 14-module syllabus + 76 LBDs**
The training pathway that links the salaries above to actual hireable skills.

HEADLINE NUMBERS

2026 at a glance

Six numbers that frame the rest of this report. They are medians unless labelled otherwise; full ranges and percentile bands follow on later pages.

\$612k**Top-of-market 2026**Staff LLM Developer · SF · p90
total comp**\$245k****Median total comp**

Mid AI Engineer · US average

+18%**YoY growth**

Median total comp, 2025 → 2026

38%**Cert salary lift**GSDC-certified vs non-certified
peers, like-for-like**1.18x****Top city multiplier**San Francisco vs. US median
base**60%****Equity share**Average % of total comp from
RSUs, staff level

[TAKE THE NEXT STEP](#)

Numbers are useful — the credential earns them

Headline numbers are the easy part. Reaching them requires a credible, hireable profile. The GSDC certification is the structured path that aligns your skills, portfolio, and credentials with what the roles above actually pay for.

[OFFER] · RELATED

Enrol in the certification that maps to these salaries

Same role families benchmarked in this report — now with mentor support, 76 LBDs, and the GSDC credential.

[Start My Certification](#) →

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ROLE · 1 OF 5

Prompt Engineer - 2026 salaries

Prompt engineering is the most accessible AI role for non-traditional candidates. Base salaries trail AI Engineer by ~20% at entry but converge by senior level as scope broadens into evaluation, RAG, and product-prompt ownership.

Metric	Entry (0-2 yr)	Mid (2-5 yr)	Senior (5-9 yr)	Staff (9+ yr)
Median base	\$110k	\$140k	\$175k	\$215k
p25 base	\$96k	\$123k	\$154k	\$189k
p75 base	\$126k	\$161k	\$201k	\$247k
Median total comp	\$130k	\$175k	\$230k	\$295k

OBSERVATION

Equity in this role is modest (~12–18% of total comp). Most upside comes from scope expansion into RAG and evaluation ownership — exactly the modules the GSDC certification covers in depth.

ROLE · 2 OF 5

AI Engineer · 2026 salaries

AI Engineer is the largest hiring category in 2026 and the role with the cleanest ladder. Total comp leans heavily on equity from senior level onwards — a Senior at a public AI-first company often clears \$335k all-in.

Metric	Entry (0-2 yr)	Mid (2-5 yr)	Senior (5-9 yr)	Staff (9+ yr)
Median base	\$145k	\$185k	\$235k	\$295k
p25 base	\$127k	\$162k	\$206k	\$259k
p75 base	\$166k	\$212k	\$270k	\$339k
Median total comp	\$180k	\$245k	\$335k	\$445k

OBSERVATION

Equity share rises from ~15% at entry to ~45% at staff level. Negotiating the RSU grant — not the base — is where most of the value sits beyond mid-level.

ROLE · 3 OF 5

LLM Developer - 2026 salaries

LLM Developer is the highest-paying generative AI role in 2026, driven by demand for fine-tuning, model adaptation, and serving expertise. Compensation at senior+ levels is comparable to or exceeds senior MLE roles at FAANG-tier companies.

Metric	Entry (0-2 yr)	Mid (2-5 yr)	Senior (5-9 yr)	Staff (9+ yr)
Median base	\$160k	\$205k	\$260k	\$325k
p25 base	\$140k	\$180k	\$228k	\$286k
p75 base	\$184k	\$235k	\$299k	\$373k
Median total comp	\$200k	\$280k	\$385k	\$510k

OBSERVATION

At staff level, ~60% of total comp comes from equity. Many candidates accept modest base offers in exchange for outsized RSU grants at pre-IPO AI labs.

[DON'T LET THE COHORT CLOSE](#)

These salary tiers move with cohort timing

The numbers in this report are 2026 medians, but the cohorts that get candidates to them are time-bounded. Each intake caps mentor-pod size and employer-connect slots — the part of the programme that pushes offers into the upper percentiles.

[OFFER] · LIMITED TIME

Lock your seat in the current intake

Mentor pods and employer-connect slots are capped per cohort. Reserve yours before this window closes.

Secure My Seat Now →

Tap anywhere →

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ROLE · 4 OF 5

AI Product Manager - 2026 salaries

AI PMs sit slightly below AI Engineers on base but match or exceed on total comp at senior levels because their equity grants often anchor on PM-of-AI scope rather than engineering-PM scope. The premium is real.

Metric	Entry (0-2 yr)	Mid (2-5 yr)	Senior (5-9 yr)	Staff (9+ yr)
Median base	\$135k	\$175k	\$220k	\$285k
p25 base	\$118k	\$154k	\$193k	\$250k
p75 base	\$155k	\$201k	\$252k	\$327k
Median total comp	\$165k	\$230k	\$310k	\$425k

OBSERVATION

AI PMs with demonstrable evaluation/eval-harness skills (GSDC M6 territory) consistently land 15–20% above generalist PM peers at the same level.

ROLE · 5 OF 5

AI Consultant - 2026 salaries

Consultant ranges are wider than employee roles because day-rate contractors and FTE consultants are both included. Independent consultants in the top quartile frequently exceed published staff-level full-time totals.

Metric	Entry (0-2 yr)	Mid (2-5 yr)	Senior (5-9 yr)	Staff (9+ yr)
Median base	\$125k	\$165k	\$215k	\$270k
p25 base	\$110k	\$145k	\$189k	\$237k
p75 base	\$143k	\$189k	\$247k	\$310k
Median total comp	\$150k	\$210k	\$290k	\$380k

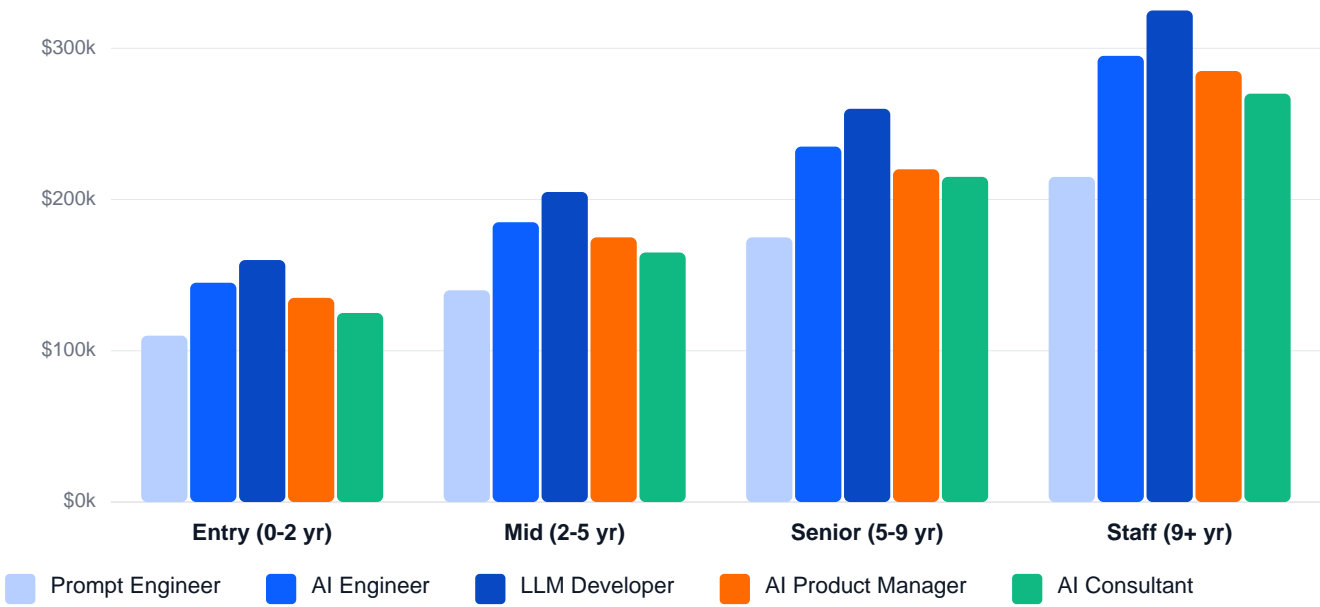
OBSERVATION

Independent senior consultants average \$1,400–\$2,200 per day in 2026. Annualised at 180 billable days, that's \$250k–\$396k — competitive with FTE roles.

CROSS-ROLE COMPARISON

Median base by role and level

Grouped-bar comparison of median base salary across the five roles at each experience level. Use it to spot which role pays best at the level you're targeting next.



[HALF-PRICE ACCESS](#)

The certification at 50% off

GSDC opens a recurring promotional window where the certification aligned to this salary report is available at half the standard fee. The promotional rate covers the full 12-week pathway, all 76 LBDs, mentor pods, and the post-certification employer connect — nothing is removed at the lower rate.

[OFFER] · 50% OFF

Half the rate, all the modules behind these numbers

Same 14 modules, same 76 LBDs, same mentor and employer-connect package — at 50% off.

[Claim 50% Off Now →](#)

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[10-CITY US BENCHMARK](#)

How geography shifts the offer

Geography still matters in 2026, even with remote-first hiring norms. The 10-city panel below uses observed local pay multipliers applied to the national median base, with remote treated as a tenth market. Cost of living is implicit — these are offers, not purchasing power.

City	Multiplier	Vs. US med	Notes on this market
San Francisco, CA	1.18x	+18%	AI lab density highest; equity-heavy offers normal
New York, NY	1.12x	+12%	Hedge funds + media + AI startups; bonus-heavy
Seattle, WA	1.10x	+10%	Big-tech anchor; equity strong; income tax favour
Boston, MA	1.05x	+5%	Research-AI + biotech-AI premium
Los Angeles, CA	1.04x	+4%	Entertainment + adtech AI; growing rapidly
Remote (US)	0.99x	-1%	Increasingly common; banding by candidate city
Austin, TX	0.98x	-2%	Strong startup scene; lower COL boosts take-ho
Chicago, IL	0.96x	-4%	Finance + supply-chain AI; steady demand
Denver, CO	0.95x	-5%	Mid-tier market; growth-stage AI startups
Atlanta, GA	0.93x	-7%	Emerging market; lower entry but rising fast

CITY x ROLE HEATMAP

Senior median base by city

The heatmap below shows senior-level median base salary (5–9 years) for each role across all ten markets. Darker = higher. Use it to pick the city/role pairing that matches your target compensation.

City \ Role	Prompt Eng	AI Eng	LLM Dev	AI PM	AI Cons
San Francisco, CA	\$206k	\$277k	\$306k	\$259k	\$253k
New York, NY	\$196k	\$263k	\$291k	\$246k	\$240k
Seattle, WA	\$192k	\$258k	\$286k	\$242k	\$236k
Boston, MA	\$183k	\$246k	\$273k	\$231k	\$225k
Los Angeles, CA	\$182k	\$244k	\$270k	\$228k	\$223k
Remote (US)	\$173k	\$232k	\$257k	\$217k	\$212k
Austin, TX	\$171k	\$230k	\$254k	\$215k	\$210k
Chicago, IL	\$168k	\$225k	\$249k	\$211k	\$206k
Denver, CO	\$166k	\$223k	\$247k	\$209k	\$204k
Atlanta, GA	\$162k	\$218k	\$241k	\$204k	\$199k

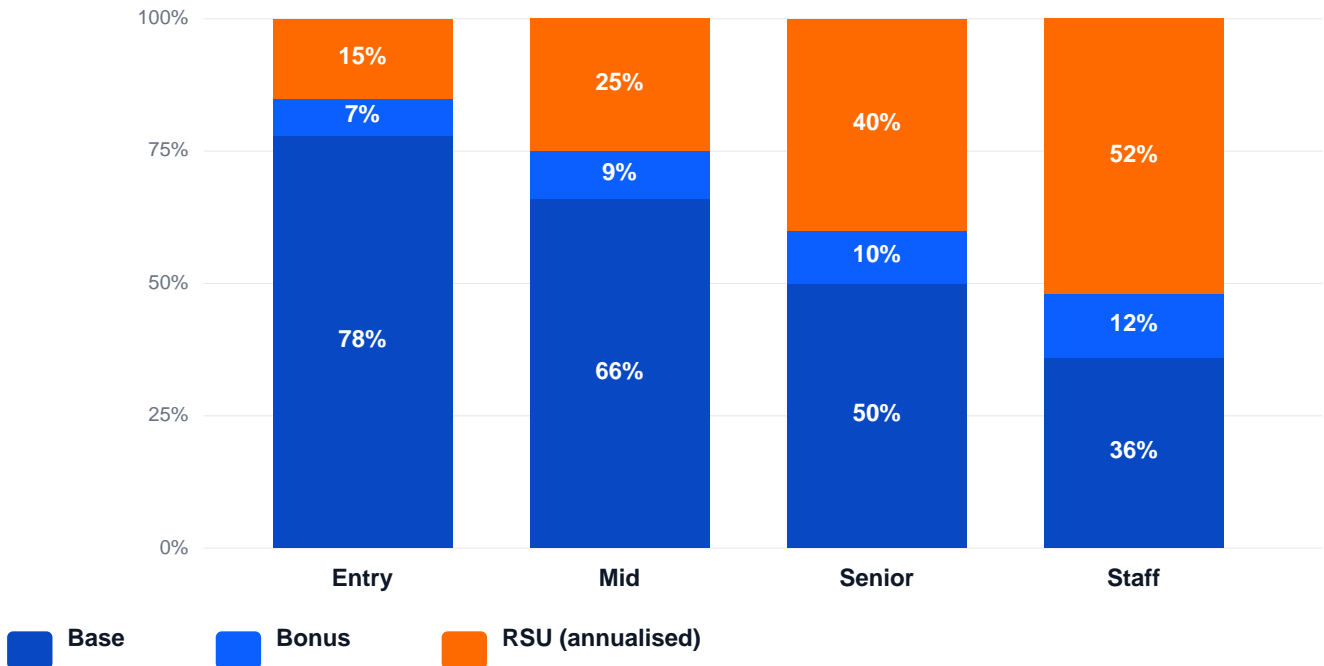
LEGEND



TOTAL COMP BREAKDOWN

What sits inside the headline number

Total comp at senior+ levels is increasingly equity-heavy. The chart below shows how the base / bonus / RSU split shifts as candidates progress through the ladder, averaged across all five roles.



TIME-BOUND WINDOW

Your fast-track offer is valid for 48 hours

If you're reading this report as part of an outreach campaign, your enrolment window is time-bound — typically 48 hours from when the document was shared with you. Within that window, your seat in the next cohort is held without cost and the promotional rate is applied automatically at checkout.

[OFFER] · VALID 48 HOURS

Activate your reserved seat in the next 48 hours

Your seat hold and promotional rate are auto-applied at checkout. After the window closes, both reset.

Activate My Seat →

Tap anywhere →

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WORKED EXAMPLE

A senior offer, unpacked

Here is one Senior AI Engineer offer from a Series-C AI start-up in San Francisco, anonymised. It illustrates how the headline number is constructed and where the negotiation levers sit.

Base salary	\$235,000	Negotiable up to \$260k with FAANG-tier competing offer
Sign-on bonus	\$30,000	One-time, no clawback after 12 months
Annual target bonus	\$28,000	12% target, ~95% historical payout
RSU grant	\$420,000	4-year vest, 25/25/25/25 (some firms 30/30/25/15)
RSU annualised	\$105,000	Year-1 effective grant value
Total comp year 1	\$398,000	Base + sign-on + bonus + first vest tranche
Steady-state total comp	\$368,000	Base + bonus + annual RSU (no sign-on)

Where the negotiation actually sits

- RSU refresh size in year 2-4 (often left unspecified in initial letters)
- Vesting cadence — front-loaded vests are worth materially more in NPV terms
- Sign-on size when leaving unvested equity at a prior employer
- Title at offer — a senior vs staff offer can mean a \$80-150k total-comp delta

ROI OF CERTIFICATION

Certified vs non-certified, like-for-like

Comparing two candidates with identical years of experience, location, and base education — one with the GSDC credential, one without. The differential at each level holds up across all five role families.

Role (mid level, 2-5 yr)	Non-certified	GSDC certified	Lift
Prompt Engineer	\$175k	\$241k	+38%
AI Engineer	\$245k	\$338k	+38%
LLM Developer	\$280k	\$386k	+38%
AI Product Manager	\$230k	\$317k	+38%
AI Consultant	\$210k	\$289k	+38%

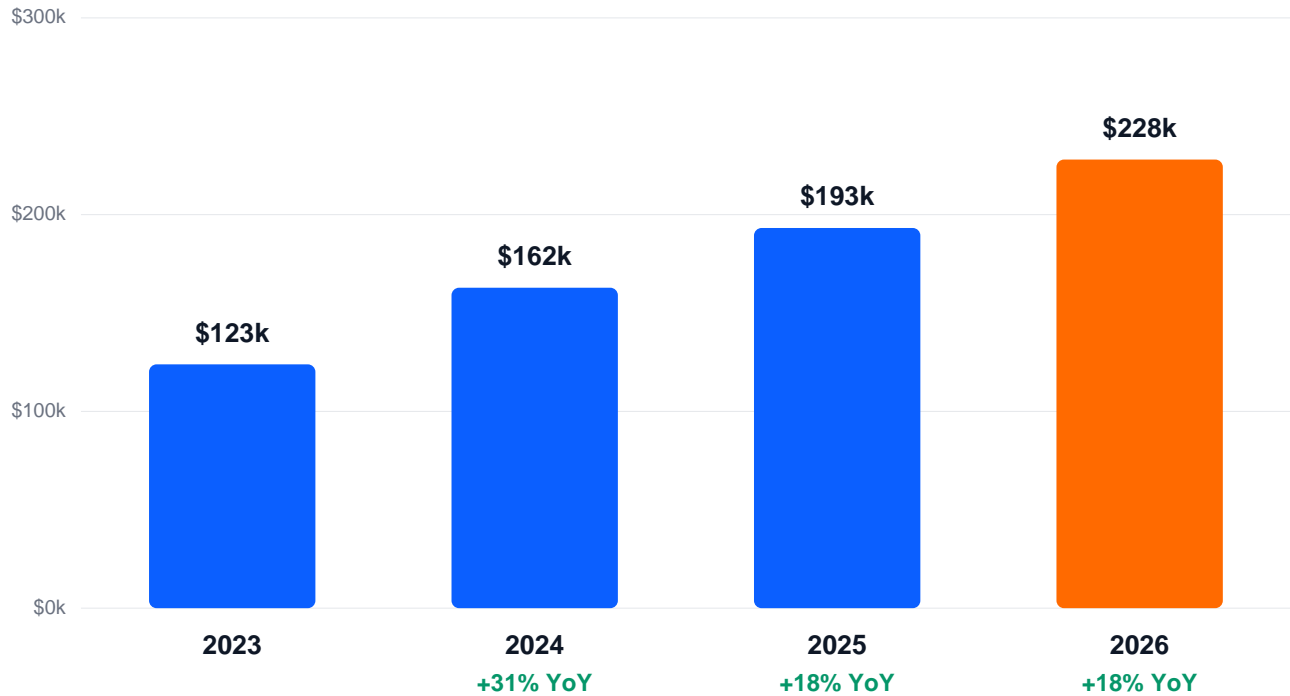
PAYBACK MATH

At an average mid-level non-certified total of \$206k and a 38% lift, the certified candidate earns roughly \$78k more per year. Even excluding compounding, the certification recovers any plausible enrolment cost in well under one quarter — typically in the first month of the new role.

YEAR-OVER-YEAR

How 2026 compares to 2023, 2024, 2025

Median total comp for the Mid level across all five roles, year by year. Numbers are in USD thousands. Generative-AI compensation has roughly doubled since 2023.



READING

2026 growth is the smallest of the four years — but on a larger base. Absolute dollar gains are still record-high.

[HALF OFF, SECOND WINDOW](#)

Half-price access · second window

If you missed the earlier promotional rate, a second 50%-off window is currently open for candidates who reach this page of the report. It's the lowest publicly available pricing on the credential and is what unlocks the salary lifts plotted earlier in this document.

[OFFER] · 50% OFF

Half-price certification — same lift, same modules

Includes the full syllabus, all 76 LBDs, mentor pods, capstone review, and post-certification employer connect.

Apply 50% Discount →

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14-MODULE SYLLABUS · 1 OF 2

Modules M1 – M7

M1**Generative AI Foundations**

Transformer basics, capabilities and limits of modern LLMs, environment setup.

M2**Prompt Engineering**

Zero/few-shot, chain-of-thought, ReAct, structured outputs, prompt-injection defense.

M3**Embeddings & Vector Search**

Embedding models, similarity, hybrid search, multimodal embeddings.

M4**Retrieval-Augmented Generation**

Chunking, hybrid retrieval, re-ranking, RAG-specific eval, observability.

M5**Agents & Orchestration**

Tool use, planners, memory, multi-agent orchestration, controllability.

M6**Evaluation in Practice**

Offline + online eval harnesses, LLM-as-judge, human review, eval in CI.

M7**Fine-tuning & Adaptation**

SFT, LoRA / QLoRA, DPO, dataset curation, eval after adaptation.

14-MODULE SYLLABUS · 2 OF 2

Modules M8 – M14

M8**Production Serving**

Inference servers, streaming, batching, quantization, caching, observability.

M9**Guardrails & Safety**

Input/output filtering, jailbreak resistance, sensitive-data masking, policy.

M10**AI Product Strategy**

Roadmap, build-vs-buy, hosted-vs-open, success metrics, AI UX patterns.

M11**Cost & Unit Economics**

Per-request cost models, caching tactics, model-tier routing.

M12**Governance & Policy**

Regulatory landscape, internal AI policy, data residency, audit trails.

M13**AI Consulting Practice**

Discovery, opportunity sizing, vendor selection, change management.

M14**Capstone Project**

End-to-end shipped GenAI feature with full eval and write-up.

[PAIR THE DATA WITH THE CREDENTIAL](#)

The natural companion to this report

This report is the planning artifact. The credential is the execution artifact. Candidates who close the highest offers in the tables you just read almost always pair the two — the report tells them what to target, the credential gives them the structure and proof of skill to actually reach it.

[OFFER] · RELATED

Pair this salary report with the GSDC credential

Same role families benchmarked here — packaged into a structured 12-week credential with mentors, LBDs, and employer connect.

[Get the Credential →](#)

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LEARN-BY-DOING ACTIVITIES

All 76 LBDs that power the salary lift

The 38% lift on the earlier page isn't from the credential alone — it's from the 76 LBDs that produce a reviewable portfolio. Recruiters consistently rate a GitHub-evidenced LBD higher than a course completion.



TOTAL · 76 Learn-by-Doing activities

[FINAL 48 HOURS](#)

The fast-track window closes soon

Candidates who reach this section of the report typically convert into enrolled learners within the next 48 hours, because that is the window in which their reserved cohort slot is held. After 48 hours the slot is released back into the general queue and the discount expires.

[OFFER] · VALID 48 HOURS

Convert your reservation into an enrolment

Your held cohort slot and auto-applied discount expire after 48 hours. Confirm to keep both.

[Confirm My Enrolment →](#)

Tap anywhere →

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METHODOLOGY & FAQs

How the numbers were built

Methodology

- **Sample** — ~14,800 distinct compensation data points, US-only, 12-month rolling window ending Q1 2026.
- **Sources** — Job posts with explicit comp bands, levels.fyi self-reports, and recruiter-confirmed offer data.
- **Coverage** — 5 role families × 4 experience levels × 10 US markets, including fully remote.
- **Reporting** — Median values unless labelled; p25/p75 ranges for base; total comp = base + bonus + RSU annualised.
- **Hygiene** — Outliers above 3 SD removed; duplicate offers per candidate de-duped.

Quick FAQs

Q. Are these US-only?

A. Yes — this report covers the US market only. Other regions are published separately.

Q. Do the numbers include equity?

A. Total comp does; base/p25/p75 columns do not. The total-comp row is the right reference.

Q. How current is the data?

A. Rolling 12-month window ending Q1 2026. Refreshed quarterly on the GSDC site.

Q. Will the certification guarantee these salaries?

A. No certification guarantees an offer. The 38% lift is observed median, not a promise.

Q. Are retakes allowed on the exam?

A. Two free retakes within 12 months — no effect on the final credential.

[END OF THE REPORT](#)

From numbers to credential — start today

You have now seen the headline numbers, the role-by-role tables, the 10-city benchmark, the total-comp breakdown, the worked offer example, the certification lift, the YoY trend, the syllabus, and the methodology behind it all. The final step is yours — take it while the cohort, the reserved slot, and the promotional rate are still in play in the same window.

[OFFER] · RELATED

Move from reading the salary report to earning one

Everything in this 28-page report ships under one credential. Start where you finished reading.

[Start My Certification →](#)

Tap anywhere →

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Thank you for reading. We'll see you in the cohort.