

What AI Startups Actually Pay

Base salary bands from 487 live open roles across 261 companies, posted between 12 March 2026 and 8 September 2026. Ranges as advertised by the employer. No company is named, and no band is published unless at least 5 roles from 3 separate companies stand behind it.

→ 487 roles • 261 companies → 26 functions published → 24 suppressed as too thin

→ Updated 8 September 2026

01 HEADLINE FINDINGS

Six numbers worth taking away.

\$0

difference between the median base at a Seed company and a Series D+ company. Both sit at \$200K. Funding stage does not predict pay.

6.8%

of roles will sponsor a new visa. Most will transfer one you already hold - but only 38 of 557 will start one from scratch.

\$2.5K

separates the median remote, on-site and hybrid role. The remote discount does not exist in this market.

77.7%

of roles describe equity only as "competitive" - no percentage, no number. Fewer than one in five give a figure.

\$220K

median base midpoint across core engineering functions - ML, backend, infrastructure, full-stack, product and founding engineers.

37.5%

of roles offer no visa support of any kind, which is the single largest filter on an otherwise global talent pool.

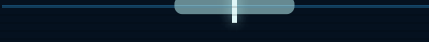
Base salary bands, 26 functions.

Each row is the interquartile band of advertised midpoints – the middle half of the market – with the median marked. Roles tagged with more than one function are counted under each. Rows marked * rest on fewer than 10 roles and should be read as indicative.

							\$75K	\$125K	\$175K	\$225K	\$275K	\$315K
FUNCTION	ROLES	COS	P25 – P75 BAND, MEDIAN TICK	P25	MEDIAN	P75						
ENGINEERING LEADERSHIP	13	12		\$222K	\$258K	\$303K						
INFRASTRUCTURE/DEVOPS/SRE	30	29		\$208K	\$239K	\$255K						
BACKEND ENGINEER	48	44		\$200K	\$225K	\$250K						
MACHINE LEARNING ENGINEER	49	43		\$200K	\$225K	\$250K						
SECURITY ENGINEER	10	10		\$198K	\$222K	\$271K						
PRODUCT DESIGN & UI/UX *	6	6		\$204K	\$219K	\$242K						
PRODUCT ENGINEER	44	41		\$200K	\$215K	\$232K						
FULL STACK ENGINEER	65	59		\$199K	\$212K	\$225K						
FOUNDING ENGINEER	40	37		\$189K	\$202K	\$225K						
DATA ENGINEER *	9	8		\$170K	\$202K	\$225K						
PRODUCT MANAGEMENT	22	20		\$189K	\$200K	\$221K						
RESEARCH ENGINEER *	7	6		\$180K	\$200K	\$270K						
AI / ML RESEARCHER *	5	4		\$170K	\$200K	\$288K						
FRONTEND ENGINEER *	9	8		\$199K	\$200K	\$215K						

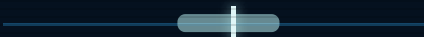
Stage buys you almost nothing.

The intuition is that a Series D company outbids a seed startup. In this sample it does not. Median base is flat from Pre-Seed through Series D+, and the widest gap between any two stages is smaller than the spread inside any single one of them.

				\$75K	\$125K	\$175K	\$225K	\$275K	\$315K
STAGE	ROLES	COS	P25 – P75 BAND, MEDIAN TICK	P25	MEDIAN	P75			
PRE-SEED *	9	9		\$178K	\$200K	\$224K			
SEED	221	133		\$175K	\$200K	\$225K			
SERIES A	150	70		\$165K	\$200K	\$225K			
SERIES B	61	26		\$181K	\$215K	\$250K			
SERIES C	10	6		\$176K	\$188K	\$233K			
SERIES D+	22	10		\$168K	\$200K	\$233K			
Series C rests on 10 roles from 6 companies – at the edge of the publication threshold, and the one row here that should not be leaned on.									

Remote is not discounted.

Remote, on-site and hybrid roles pay the same to within \$2,500 at the median. Whatever remote costs a candidate in this market, it is not base salary.

							\$75K	\$125K	\$175K	\$225K	\$275K	\$315K
WORKPLACE	ROLES	COS	P25 – P75 BAND, MEDIAN TICK		P25	MEDIAN	P75					
REMOTE	51	36			\$170K	\$200K	\$225K					
ON-SITE OR REMOTE *	5	5			\$152K	\$200K	\$240K					
ON-SITE	315	171			\$175K	\$200K	\$225K					
HYBRID	115	78			\$162K	\$198K	\$225K					
On-site roles list one or more named metros; remote roles are advertised without a required location. Nearly all roles in this sample are US-based, so this is not a cross-border comparison.												

Read the limits before you quote the numbers.

How it was built Snapshot taken 8 September 2026 Source Live open roles listed by companies hiring through external recruiters. 557 roles were collected; 487 survived filtering. Filters applied USD-denominated roles only (18 dropped as non-USD or with an unparseable range) and posted within 180 days of the snapshot (52 dropped as stale). The band Each role contributes the midpoint of its advertised range. Reported figures are the 25th percentile, median and 75th percentile of those midpoints. Publication threshold No band is published unless it rests on at least 5 roles from at least 3 distinct companies. 24 function segments were suppressed on this rule. This is what stops any single employer's numbers being read back out of a thin cell. What it cannot tell you Stated plainly, because these limits are real These are asks, not settlements Every figure is what an employer advertised, not what a candidate accepted. Real offers land inside, below and above these bands. Base only Equity is excluded because 77.7% of roles never quantify it. Bonus and commission are excluded too, so sales figures understate total compensation the most. No geography Almost every role in the sample is US-based and most list several metros at once. There is no defensible regional cut here, so none is published. Selection bias These are companies that hire through external recruiters – venture-backed, mostly early stage, mostly AI-adjacent. They are not a random sample of employers, and this is not a national wage survey. Seniority is not separated Function bands mix levels. A wide band usually means the function spans junior through staff, not that the market disagrees with itself.
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Benchmarking a role against this?

We run searches across these functions and see where offers actually close. Happy to tell you where your band sits.