

2025-26

AEC Salary Guide

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
01 INTRODUCTION	5
02 SURVEY PARTICIPANTS	6
Survey Methodology	
Demographics	
03 SURVEY RESULTS – COMPENSATION BY	8
All Disciplines	
Experience	
Region	
Key Locations	
Salary Satisfaction	
04 BENEFITS & TOTAL COMP ANALYSIS	19
PTO, Retirement, Performance Bonus	
Top Ranked Benefits	
05 WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY TRENDS	24
06 RETENTION	25
07 The Talent Landscape	27
Market Availability Across AEC Disciplines & Locations	
08 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS	32
ABOUT SNIPEBRIDGE	34

Executive Summary



2025–26 AEC Salary Guide – Key Findings & Strategic Actions

The 2025–26 Salary Guide reveals a profession at a turning point. While profitability remains strong across the AEC industry, salary satisfaction has dropped 20% year-over-year, and 66% of professionals are actively or *passively exploring new roles*. The industry's retention crisis is no longer emerging, it is fully underway.

Top 5 Salary Insights

1. Raises drive satisfaction – Employees who received raises report 83% satisfaction vs. 65% for those who did not and show 2.3× higher dissatisfaction without one.
2. Mid-career compression is the #1 flight risk – Professionals with 5 to 10 years of experience see only 13.8% salary growth during a period when responsibilities double. This is the most aggressively recruited cohort.
3. Design technology roles' compensation outpaces traditional design – BIM, digital design, and data-driven roles show the fastest salary acceleration as AI adoption reaches mainstream use.
4. Regional disparities are widening – Pacific + Northeast markets command the highest pay, but inflation-adjusted wages are falling behind cost-of-living.
5. Entry-level salary compression threatens future pipelines – AEC firms are losing early-career talent to technology and consulting, which offer significantly higher starting salaries.

Top 5 Total Rewards Insights

1. PTO + Hybrid Flexibility = New Non-Negotiables – 42% of employees' top-requested benefits relate to time off or flexibility.
2. Retirement savings matter more than ever – Mid-sized firms (101–500 employees) lead the market with the strongest 401(k) match competitiveness.
3. Bonuses peak sharply at senior levels – Bonus payouts increase 5.2× from early career to 20+ years experience.
4. Benefits satisfaction doesn't guarantee retention – Even among professionals satisfied with benefits, 55% are exploring other opportunities.
5. *Onsite-only* firms face severe talent disadvantages – Firms with rigid onsite policies struggle to attract and retain mid-career and senior professionals.

Top 5 Retention Risks

- Compensation misalignment
- Lack of career advancement visibility
- Limited flexibility
- Unclear skill development investment
- Cultural stagnation

Strategic Imperatives for AEC Firms in 2025–26

1. Adopt proactive, market-based compensation reviews.
2. Define transparent, measurable career pathways.
3. Modernize total rewards with clear emphasis on flexibility & PTO.
4. Invest aggressively in digital and AI upskilling across teams.
5. Integrate compensation, benefits, culture & advancement into one cohesive value proposition.

The firms that adapt quickly will retain talent, strengthen delivery, and emerge from the current downturn with a deeper, more loyal bench.

Introduction



The 2025–26 Snipebridge Salary Guide arrives at a critical inflection point for the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) industry. After two years of post-pandemic stabilization and increased job mobility, the talent landscape has shifted again, this time toward heightened wage pressure, declining salary satisfaction, and an intensifying retention crisis.

In 2024, firms focused on talent attraction, flexible work, and navigating a competitive labor market. In 2025, the priority has transformed: retention now represents the single greatest threat to operational continuity and project delivery.

Salary satisfaction has dropped 20 percentage points year-over-year, even as technical and leadership salaries have increased. Economic pressures, inflation-adjusted wage stagnation, and limited bonus growth in key career bands are driving widespread dissatisfaction. Meanwhile, the rapid acceleration of AI, digital workflows, and BIM adoption has redrawn compensation expectations for design technology roles, widening the gap between traditional and emerging competencies.

Benefits once considered differentiators (hybrid work, meaningful PTO, competitive retirement contributions) are now baseline expectations. Firms lacking clarity in career progression or transparency in compensation strategy face disproportionate turnover, particularly among mid-career professionals poised for leadership.

This guide provides the industry with fresh salary benchmarks, regional analyses, and evidence-based recommendations to build competitive, equitable, and future-ready talent strategies. The message is clear: in 2025–26, firms that invest in proactive compensation, transparent pathways, and digital upskilling will retain the talent the industry cannot afford to lose.

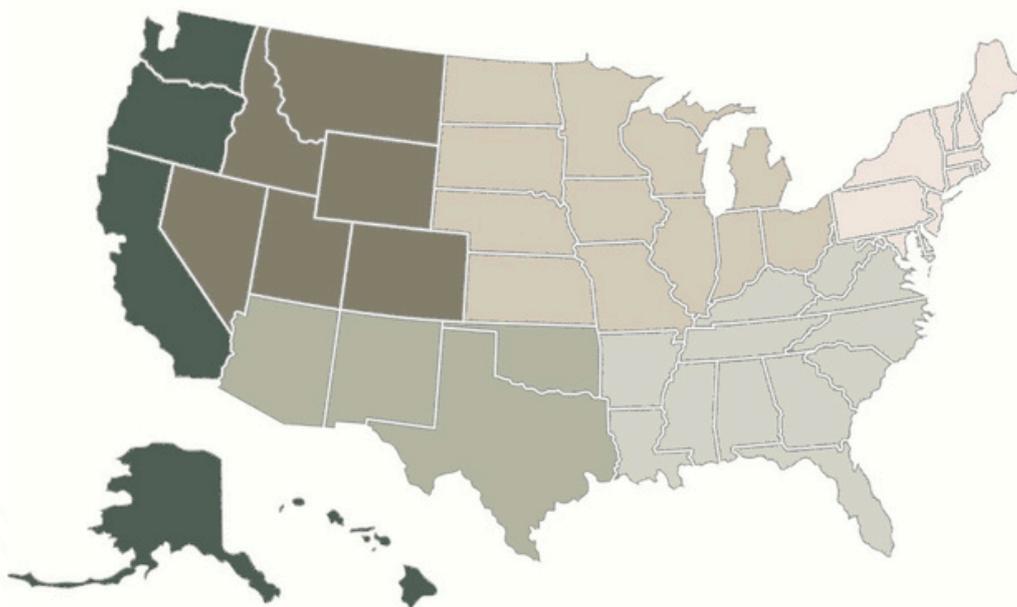
Survey Participants



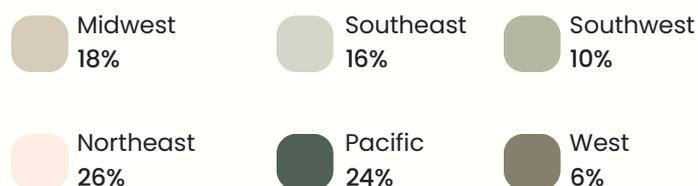
Survey Methodology

The 2025-26 Salary Guide is built upon a diverse cross-section of the AEC industry. This data spans all major U.S. regions, covers the full experience spectrum from entry-level to senior leadership, and includes firms ranging from intimate boutique studios to global enterprises. This broad demographic composition, which notably features a near-equal gender split and expanding ethnic diversity, strengthens the data's reliability.

The insights that follow reflect the multifaceted realities of today's AEC workforce, equipping firms with the benchmarks needed to build competitive, equitable talent strategies.



Participants by Region



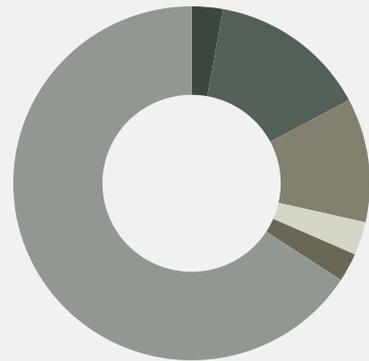
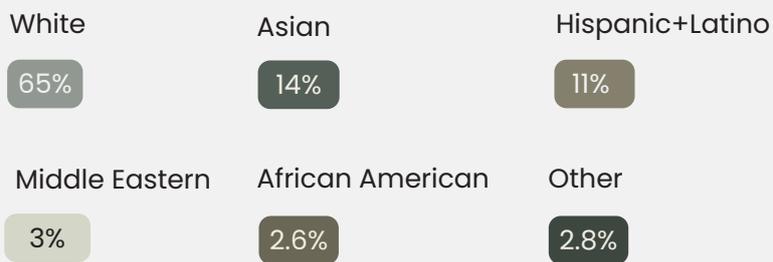
Demographics



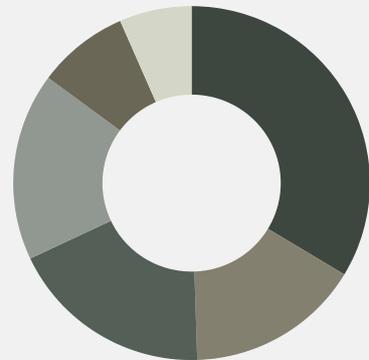
Gender



Ethnicity



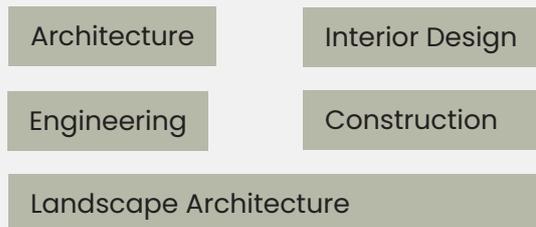
Years of Experience



Education

Bachelors	45%
Masters	53%
Other	1.6%

Disciplines



Survey Results



Compensation - All Disciplines

This section provides an overview of compensation across all roles and levels represented in the 2025 Snipebridge Salary Survey. It offers a comprehensive snapshot of current salary benchmarks in the industry, capturing variations by discipline and seniority. Beyond base pay, this section presents professionals' satisfaction levels with their current compensation packages, offering insight into how employee perceptions align with experience, job responsibilities, and prevailing base salary benchmarks.

Job Title	Base Salary			Satisfied	Not Satisfied
	Minimum	Average	Maximum		
Architect Level I	\$ 60,000.00	\$ 79,104.00	\$ 103,000.00	57%	43%
Architect Level II	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 84,750.00	\$ 120,000.00	70%	30%
Architect Level III	\$ 65,000.00	\$ 91,625.00	\$ 134,000.00	64%	36%
Architectural Designer I	\$ 47,840.00	\$ 70,000.00	\$ 120,600.00	94%	6%
Architectural Designer II	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 77,000.00	\$ 174,720.00	78%	21%
Architectural Designer III	\$ 52,000.00	\$ 85,000.00	\$ 149,760.00	38%	62%
Associate	\$ 44,000.00	\$ 90,500.00	\$ 166,000.00	80%	20%
Associate Principal	\$ 97,500.00	\$ 132,500.00	\$ 175,000.00	86%	14%
BIM Manager	\$62,000.00	\$125,000.00	\$178,500.00	87%	13%
BIM Specialist	\$68,000.00	\$98,000.00	\$150,000.00	84%	15%
Construction Admin	\$70,000.00	\$110,000.00	\$225,000.00	-	-
Construction PM	\$114,000.00	\$165,000.00	\$200,000.00	100%	0%
Director	\$110,000.00	\$158,481.00	\$220,000.00	100%	0%
Draftsperson	\$48,000.00	\$61,500.00	\$87,360.00	-	-
Engineer*	\$62,000.00	\$119,000.00	\$400,000.00	80%	20%
Graphic Designer	\$40,000.00	\$67,000.00	\$72,000.00	-	-
Human Resources	\$70,000.00	\$89,000.00	\$108,000.00	100%	0%
Interior Architect	\$60,000.00	\$94,000.00	\$120,000.00	-	-
Interior Designer I	\$58,000.00	\$70,000.00	\$88,000.00	67%	33%
Interior Designer II	\$58,000.00	\$71,900.00	\$103,000.00	75%	25%
Interior Designer III	\$75,000.00	\$90,000.00	\$125,000.00	33%	67%

You've reached the end of the preview.
Unlock the full 35-page Salary Guide,
including complete salary tables,
regional heatmaps, bonus benchmarks,
and top retention insights.

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guide straight to your inbox.

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