BRAVO TALENT GROUP
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2026 ANNUAL REPORT

Skilled Trades Salary Report

Pay ranges, demand trends, and regional breakdowns for America's 12 most in-demand trades — backed by BLS data and real placement intel.

530K+
Unfilled trade jobs in 2026

$188.7B
US staffing market size

12
Trades covered in this report

Compiled from BLS, AGC, and Bravo Talent Group placement data

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SECTION 01

The State of Trades Hiring in 2026

America's skilled trades workforce is in crisis. The generation that built the country's infrastructure is retiring — and there aren't enough trained replacements. For employers, this means every credentialed hire is harder, slower, and more expensive than it was five years ago.

530K+
Construction worker shortage in 2026 (AGC)

456K
Net new trade workers needed in 2027

$1T
Annual cost of the skills gap (JLL, 2026)

> **"Skilled trades are no longer the backup plan — they are the plan."**
>
> — Metaintro, 2026 Trades Salary Guide

For mid-market contractors ($5M–$100M revenue), this shortage hits hardest. Large national contractors can offer stock and relocation packages. Small shops rely on relationships. Mid-market firms compete on comp — and the firms that understand the real market rate win the hiring war.

Salary Ranges by Trade

All figures are annual W-2 salary. Ranges reflect national data; regional multipliers in Section 03. Source: BLS Occupational Employment Statistics, May 2025; Blue Collar Recruiter 2026 Trades Report; Bravo Talent Group placement data.

TRADE	ENTRY	JOURNEYMAN	SENIOR/MASTER	JOB GROWTH
⚡ Electrician (Commercial/Industrial)	$35K–$45K	$62K–$95K	$95K–$180K+	+9%
❄️ HVAC Technician (Commercial)	$32K–$42K	$55K–$85K	$85K–$160K+	+5%
🔧 Plumber / Pipefitter	$33K–$43K	$58K–$85K	$85K–$130K+	+6%
🔥 Welder (Structural/Pipe)	$32K–$40K	$50K–$75K	$75K–$120K+	+3%
🏗️ Ironworker / Structural Steel	$38K–$48K	$60K–$88K	$88K–$140K+	+4%
🛠️ Industrial Mechanic / Millwright	$35K–$45K	$58K–$82K	$82K–$130K+	+5%
🪵 Carpenter (Commercial)	$30K–$40K	$50K–$72K	$72K–$110K+	+3%
⚙️ Machinist / CNC Operator	$34K–$44K	$52K–$75K	$75K–$115K+	+4%
🔩 Sheet Metal Worker	$33K–$43K	$55K–$78K	$78K–$120K+	+4%
🏢 Elevator Installer / Repair Tech	$45K–$55K	$75K–$99K	$99K–$150K+	+6%
✈️ Aviation Maintenance Tech	$40K–$52K	$65K–$92K	$92K–$145K+	+7%
🏭 Industrial Maintenance Tech	$36K–$46K	$58K–$80K	$80K–$125K+	+5%

Note: Ranges represent base W-2 compensation. Overtime, per diem, benefits, and union scale can add 20–40% on top. Union markets (IL, NY, OR) typically run 15–25% higher than the national median.

SECTION 03

Regional Pay Breakdown

Geography moves compensation more than almost any other factor. A journeyman electrician in Chicago earns $120K+. The same certification in rural Tennessee starts at $55K. Employers competing regionally need to know their local market — not the national median.

NORTHEAST (NY, MA, CT, NJ)

+20–30%

above national median

Highest wages in the country, driven by union density and high cost of living. NYC metro electricians routinely clear $100K at journeyman level.

PACIFIC COAST (CA, WA, OR)

+18–28%

above national median

Strong union presence and high housing costs push wages up. Tech infrastructure buildout in Seattle and Bay Area is driving electrician demand to record levels.

MIDWEST (IL, MN, OH, MI)

+5–15%

above national median

Chicago is a standout — union scale drives strong wages. Manufacturing belt states offer solid compensation with lower cost of living, making real wages competitive.

SUN BELT (TX, FL, AZ, GA)

–5 to +10%

vs. national median

Right-to-work states keep wages more competitive. Texas and Florida construction booms are tightening supply fast — expect upward pressure through 2028.

⚠️ The Retention Problem

When an employer offers below-market rates, a credentialed tradesperson leaves within 90 days — often to a competitor that did the research. The cost of a bad hire in the trades averages **1.5–2x annual salary** when you factor in overtime, project delays, and re-recruitment.

SECTION 04

What Employers Are Offering to Win

Salary is table stakes. The employers winning the talent war in 2026 are layering in benefits and incentives that most candidates haven't seen before. Here's what's moving the needle.

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Sign-On Bonuses

$2,000–$10,000 sign-on bonuses for journeyman and master-level hires are now common in high-demand markets. Electricians and HVAC specialists command the highest. Usually vests over 12 months.

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Health & Benefits

Employer-paid medical (not just offered) is increasingly the differentiator. Top-performing contractors now cover 100% of employee premiums and 50–75% for dependents. Family coverage is the closer.

🚚

Tool Allowances & Vehicles

$1,500–$3,000/year tool stipends or company-issued vehicles are common for service roles. For mobile trades (HVAC, plumbing), a company van is often worth $8,000–$12,000 in effective compensation.

📈

Profit Sharing & Retention Bonuses

Mid-market contractors are increasingly offering 3–8% profit sharing for foreman-level and above. Annual retention bonuses of $1,500–$5,000 at the 12-month mark are proving effective at reducing turnover.

🎓

Continuing Education & Licensing

Paying for license renewals, continuing ed courses, and specialty certifications costs the employer $500–$2,000/year but signals long-term investment. Candidates at journeyman level rank this in their top 3 decision factors.

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Predictable Schedules

Experienced tradespeople increasingly choose predictable hours over overtime pay. Employers offering 4×10 schedules or guaranteed 40-hour weeks with no mandatory weekend work are seeing significantly lower voluntary turnover.

SECTION 05

Outlook: The Next 3 Years

The shortage won't resolve itself. The trades pipeline that should be replenishing the retiring workforce hasn't kept up — and the tailwinds from infrastructure legislation, data center buildout, and renewable energy make demand for credentialed tradespeople structurally higher through 2030.

⚡ **Electricians — Hottest Trade Through 2030**

AI data center construction, EV charging infrastructure, and solar installation are driving demand far faster than supply can respond. McKinsey projects U.S. data center capacity needs to double or triple by 2030 — every facility requires hundreds of licensed electricians. +9% job growth, but real demand growth is 15–20%.

❄️ **HVAC — Heat Pump Transition Adding Demand**

Federal incentives and building code changes are accelerating the shift from gas to heat pump systems. Techs with heat pump and building automation certifications are commanding 20–30% premiums. Expect commercial HVAC salaries to increase faster than residential.

✈️ **Aviation Maintenance — Hidden Opportunity**

Global fleet expansion and an aging AMT workforce create a structural shortage. FAA certification requirements make this trade nearly impossible to offshore, giving credentialed techs exceptional leverage. +7% official growth understates real demand.

🏭 **Industrial Maintenance — Reshoring Tailwind**

U.S. manufacturing reshoring — semiconductors, EVs, pharmaceuticals — is driving sustained demand for industrial maintenance technicians who can keep automated production lines running. Salary growth is outpacing other trades in this sector.

SECTION 06

We don't send warm bodies. We send the right person.

Bravo Talent Group specializes exclusively in skilled trades placement for mid-market contractors and industrial employers. Every candidate we present is credential-verified, reference-checked, and matched on fit — not just availability.

90-Day
Retention Guarantee on every placement

48 Hours
Typical time from brief to first match

12+
Trades we place — no generalist staffing

FOR EMPLOYERS

Ready to hire?

Tell us the role, the trade, and when you need them. We'll have qualified, verified candidates in front of you within 48 hours.

hire@bravotalentgroup.com

FOR TRADESPEOPLE

Looking for the right fit?

We only present you to employers who respect craft, pay fairly, and offer real career paths. No pressure, no lowball jobs.

work@bravotalentgroup.com

Data sources: BLS, AGC, Blue Collar Recruiter, JLL, McKinsey