ClearanceJobs®

THE 2026 SECURITY CLEARANCE COMPENSATION REPORT

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ClearanceJobs

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT, ALEX SCHILDT

The national security workforce has weathered another year of change. Compensation is rising. Demand remains strong. And yet, 2025 has tested the system in ways few anticipated. Return-to-office mandates, workforce restructuring, executive orders, agency buyouts, and heightened scrutiny across federal organizations have created uncertainty for many professionals who serve the mission every day.

Through it all, one constant remains: the work matters.

Clearance holders continue to carry enormous responsibility. Agencies are adapting. Contractors are recalibrating. Federal employees are reassessing their career paths. But the data in this year's report confirms what we see every day at ClearanceJobs. The cleared workforce is resilient. Compensation reached a new high. Mobility increased. And despite instability in parts of the federal landscape, the demand for skilled, trusted professionals did not diminish.

For candidates, your clearance remains one of the most valuable credentials in the labor market. It is not simply a hiring requirement. It is proof of trust, accountability, and mission alignment. In a year when many evaluated their options, the market continued to reward experience, certifications, and leadership. The opportunity is still there for those willing to grow, adapt, and step into evolving mission needs.

For employers, this environment presents both pressure and opportunity. Federal workforce shifts have introduced new talent into the market. At the same time, retirement trends and competition for technical expertise are intensifying. Compensation, flexibility, and career development are no longer secondary considerations. They are central to retaining and attracting the professionals who keep our nation secure.

At ClearanceJobs, supporting the mission has always been at the heart of what we do. We are proud to connect cleared professionals with meaningful work and to equip employers with the insights they need to compete. But our commitment extends beyond job postings. We continue to expand how we serve this community through deeper workforce data, research, policy analysis, digital content, events, and partnerships that strengthen the broader national security ecosystem.

This is a workforce in motion, not in retreat. The landscape may shift, but the mission endures. ClearanceJobs will continue to stand alongside the professionals and organizations who carry it forward, providing clarity in times of uncertainty and insight in moments of change.

Your clearance keeps you in demand. Our mission is to ensure the community that depends on it remains strong, informed, and connected for the year ahead.

Alex Schildt
ClearanceJobs, President

The national security landscape may be shifting, but one thing is holding steady: compensation for cleared professionals. Despite policy shake-ups and contract fluctuations, the paychecks for security-cleared talent aren't slowing down—and good news is that neither is the demand. With an average salary increase of almost $7,000, the cleared workforce is proving its value, and employers are stepping up to keep top talent.

In a field where stability has been shaken up, one thing is clear: national security careers don't just offer mission-driven work—they deliver solid pay, even in uncertain times. Those who made it through 2025 are breathing a sigh of relief – and bracing for the year ahead.

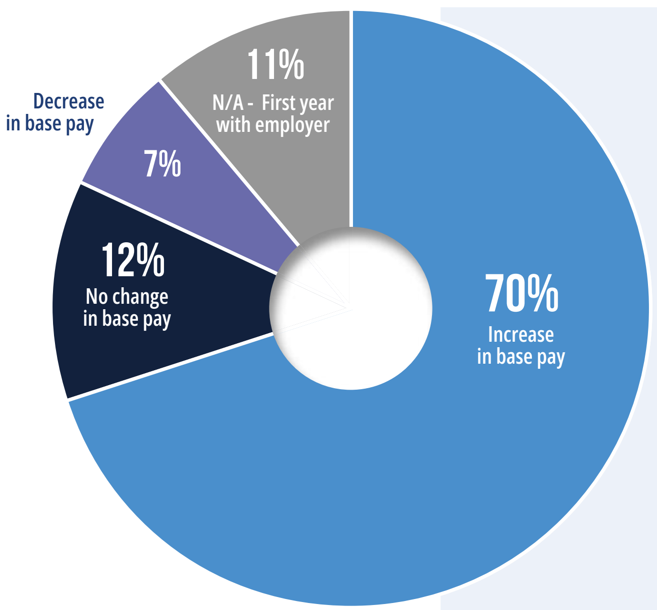
The demands on the federal workforce – both civilian and contractor show no signs of lessening. It's an important time to go where the work is needed, based on leadership requirements, and never stop leveling up. The compensation will follow.

Cleared candidates had an almost 6% boost in compensation in 2025, reaching a new high at $126,125. Once again, over two-thirds of the cleared workforce got an increase in their base pay.

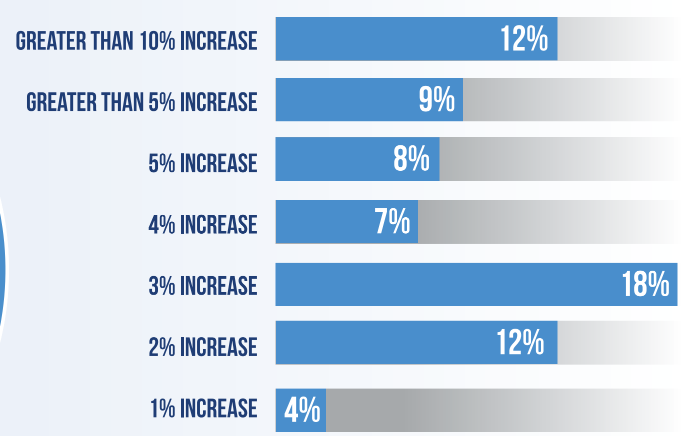
In a year marked by policy recalibrations, contract shifts, and broader federal workforce uncertainty, that growth stands out. The data suggests that even as programs evolve and priorities adjust, the market continues to reward cleared expertise. Employers may be navigating volatility, but they are still investing in the talent required to execute the mission. The upward trend in pay is an early indicator of a workforce that remains in demand, even when the environment around it feels anything but predictable.

The data highlights a familiar trend in the cleared labor market: most professionals moved forward, but not all movements looked the same. The workforce is largely advancing, with performance and mobility serving as key accelerators. At the same time, the realities of working in a federally influenced pay environment where contracts, rate ceilings, and structured systems are clearly evident in shaping the boundaries of growth.

CHANGE IN BASE PAY



BASE PAY INCREASE



Seven in ten cleared professionals reported an increase in base pay, while 12% saw no change and 7% experienced a decrease. Another 11% were in their first year with a new employer. Among those who received raises, the most common increases fell in the 2% to 3% range, suggesting many employers followed structured or incremental adjustment models. At the same time, a meaningful share saw more significant gains. Nearly one in five reported increases of more than 5%, and 12% experienced raises greater than 10%. That distribution reflects a blend of standard annual adjustments and targeted compensation moves designed to retain or attract high-value cleared talent.

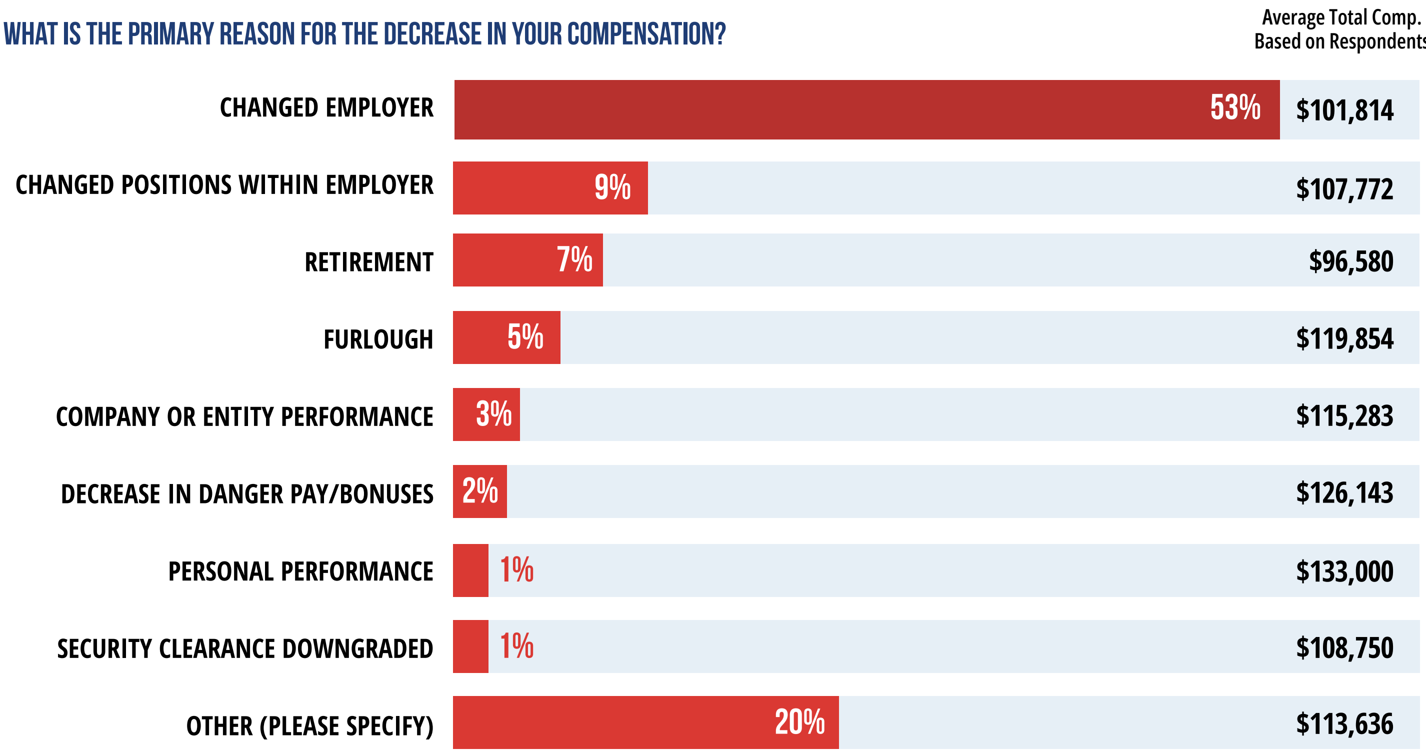
When we look at why pay increased, performance still leads the way. Personal performance was the top driver, cited by 38% of those receiving a raise. Cost-of-living adjustments and mandated increases together accounted for a sizable share as well, underscoring the role of structured pay systems in government and government-adjacent roles. But mobility mattered too. Ten percent reported higher compensation after changing employers, and additional respondents saw increases through internal promotions or moving into new roles within their organization. Even in a clearance-constrained environment, strategic career moves translated into measurable gains.

WHAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON FOR YOUR INCREASE IN COMPENSATION

		Average Total Comp. Based on Respondents
PERSONAL PERFORMANCE	38%	$138,134
MANDATED PAY INCREASE	16%	$120,734
COST OF LIVING INCREASE	15%	$131,613
CHANGED EMPLOYER	10%	$137,014
COMPANY OR ENTITY PERFORMANCE	7%	$133,180
INTERNAL PROMOTION / RANK INCREASE	6%	$125,639
CHANGED POSITIONS WITHIN EMPLOYER	4%	$124,320
OBTAINED HIGHER LEVEL OF CLEARANCE	1%	$125,276
DEPLOYED	<1%	$127,533
OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	3%	$126,282

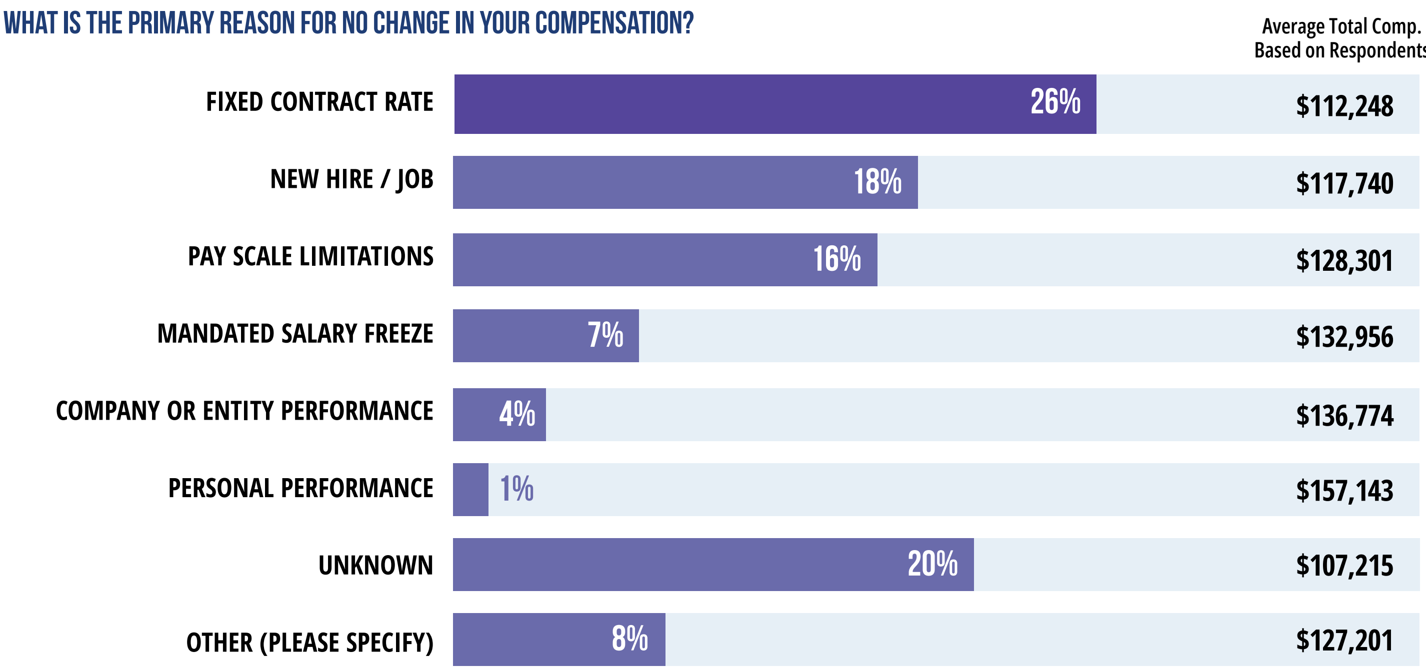
On the flip side, decreases in compensation were most often tied to employer changes. More than half of those who saw a pay cut had switched jobs. That reflects the complexity of the market. Not every move is upward in salary, and some professionals trade compensation for stability, location, mission fit, or long-term opportunity. Smaller percentages cited furloughs, reduced bonuses, retirement transitions, or company performance as contributing factors.

WHAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON FOR THE DECREASE IN YOUR COMPENSATION?



For those whose compensation did not change, structural constraints dominated. Fixed contract rates, pay scale limitations, and mandated freezes were among the most common explanations. In other words, the absence of a raise was often less about individual value and more about the framework surrounding the role.

WHAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON FOR NO CHANGE IN YOUR COMPENSATION?



COMPENSATION BY CLEARANCE LEVEL

Clearance level remains one of the clearest drivers of compensation in the national security workforce. Professionals with a DoD Secret clearance average $107,439. Compensation climbs significantly at the Top Secret level to $126,839, and those with TS/SCI clearances report $139,261. Intelligence agency clearance holders earn the highest average at $165,063, reflecting the premium placed on highly sensitive mission work. DOE Q/L holders average $127,155, DHS clearance holders $123,256, Public Trust $103,192, and other government clearances $123,501. In a year marked by workforce shifts and agency restructuring, higher-level clearances continue to command a meaningful salary advantage.

CLEARANCE	AVERAGE TOTAL COMP	COMP. CHANGE SINCE 2024	% OF RESPONDENTS
Dept of Defense Secret	$107,439	7%	31%
Dept of Defense Top Secret	$126,839	2%	14%
Dept of Defense Top Secret/SCI	$139,261	5%	34%
Dept of Energy (Q or L)	$127,155	-1%	2%
Intelligence Agency (CIA, FBI, NSA)	$165,063	2%	7%
Dept of Homeland Security	$123,256	6%	2%
Public Trust	$103,192	5%	5%
Other Government Agency	$123,501	5%	5%

COMPENSATION BY POLYGRAPH LEVEL

Polygraph status carries a substantial compensation premium. Professionals with a Lifestyle or Full Scope polygraph average $149,875, while those with a CI polygraph report $148,128. Cleared professionals without a polygraph earn significantly less at $118,680. The nearly $30,000 gap underscores the value of access to highly sensitive intelligence environments. As agencies recalibrate staffing and mission priorities in 2025, polygraphed professionals remain among the most in-demand and highest-compensated segments of the cleared workforce.

Lifestyle or Full Scope Polygraph

11% of Respondents | 6% Compensation Change from 2024

$149,875

CI Polygraph

14% of Respondents | 6% Compensation Change from 2024

$148,128

Don’t have a current Polygraph

75% of Respondents | 5% Compensation Change from 2024

$118,680

COMPENSATION BY OCCUPATION

Compensation is more than a number on a paycheck. It signals where demand is strongest and how the market values specific skill sets over time. When we break salaries down by job category and career stage, a clear pattern emerges: technical expertise and progression into leadership consistently drive higher earnings.

IT now leads at the entry level, with professionals earning $82,753 in their first two years, followed closely by intelligence roles at $77,848 and engineering at $75,916. Even at the starting line, the premium for technical and mission-critical skills is evident.

As careers advance, the separation becomes more pronounced. By the senior level, engineers average $150,651 and IT professionals reach $147,300. Intelligence professionals are not far behind at $140,397.

At the management level, the ceiling rises again. Engineering managers top the chart at $186,671, followed by intelligence leadership at $168,776 and IT management at $168,028. Business and finance leaders also cross the $160,000 mark. Even sectors that start lower, such as emergency, healthcare, and science roles, show strong growth over time, climbing from $60,109 at entry level to $140,768 in management roles.

The takeaway is not simply that some fields pay more. It is that experience compounds differently depending on specialization. Technical tracks and mission-aligned roles show steady and meaningful increases at each stage. Leadership responsibility adds another layer of compensation growth across nearly every category.

In the cleared workforce, skills aligned with evolving national security priorities command a premium, and that premium widens as professionals gain experience and step into greater responsibility.

OCCUPATION	ENTRY LEVEL (less than 2 yrs experience)	EARLY CAREER (2+ yrs experience)	MID-LEVEL (5+ yrs experience)	SENIOR LEVEL (10+ yrs experience)	MANAGEMENT (Manager/ Director of Staff)
Business / Finance / Management	$61,833	$82,139	$98,660	$129,412	$161,000
Engineering	$75,916	$95,572	$112,648	$150,651	$186,671
Emergency / Healthcare and Science	$60,109	$82,636	$97,266	$122,479	$140,768
Intelligence / Linguist	$77,848	$85,983	$107,544	$140,397	$168,776
IT	$82,753	$92,723	$115,602	$147,300	$168,028
Government Contractor/ Military and Law Enforcement / Security	$66,299	$73,567	$92,131	$115,551	$145,019
All Other Positions	$73,937	$74,938	$95,705	$117,814	$141,398

COMPENSATION BY LOCATION

Geography still matters in the cleared labor market, and the pendulum is clearly swinging back toward physical workplaces. After several years of steady growth in remote and hybrid flexibility, 2025 marked a reversal. In 2024, 57% of respondents said their employer allowed remote or hybrid work. That dropped to 49% in 2025. At the same time, those reporting no remote option jumped from 39% to 47%. The shift aligns with broader federal return-to-office mandates and signals a recalibration across agencies and contractors alike.

As more organizations require in-person presence, geography regains influence in shaping both opportunity and earnings. The Washington, D.C. metro area remains the center of gravity. Virginia accounts for 21% of respondents with an average total compensation of $138,748. Maryland follows at 10% with the highest average among the top states at $139,303. The District itself comes in at $136,369. Taken together, the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia region represents 38% of the cleared workforce in our survey, with an average compensation of $138,473.

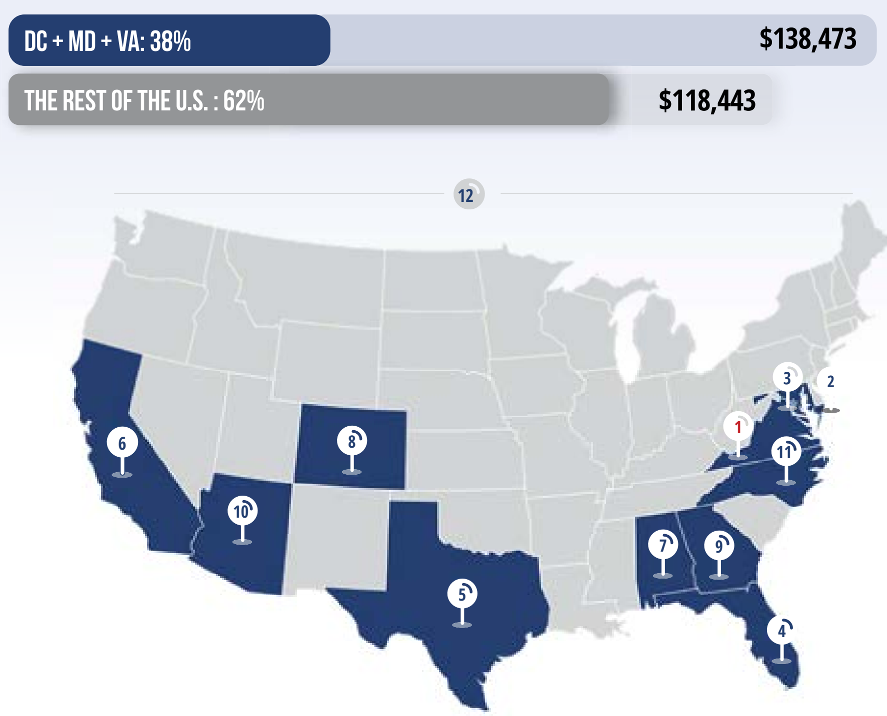
That figure stands nearly $20,000 higher than the rest of the country, where the average comes in at $118,443. The premium reflects proximity to headquarters functions, program management, policy leadership, and high-density mission sets that continue to cluster around the National Capital Region.

Outside the Beltway, strong regional hubs are holding their own. Colorado posts an average of $138,256, reinforcing its role in space, intelligence, and defense innovation. California reaches $125,104, while Florida, Texas, Alabama, and Arizona all fall into the $112,000 to $119,000 range. These markets may not carry the same density as the D.C. metro area, but they reflect the steady decentralization of national security work into space corridors, shipbuilding regions, cyber hubs, and operational commands across the country.

More than a quarter of respondents fall into the "Other" category, with average compensation at $117,194. That dispersion signals a workforce that is broader than the traditional power centers, even if pay still concentrates where mission leadership resides.

TOP STATES FOR CLEARANCE HOLDERS

RANK	STATE	AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF RESP.
1	Virginia	$138,748	21%
2	Maryland	$139,303	10%
3	D.C.	$136,369	7%
4	Florida	$118,330	7%
5	Texas	$112,705	7%
6	California	$125,104	6%
7	Alabama	$117,085	4%
8	Colorado	$138,256	4%
9	Georgia	$109,293	3%
10	Arizona	$119,053	2%
11	North Carolina	$109,572	2%
12	Other	$117,194	27%



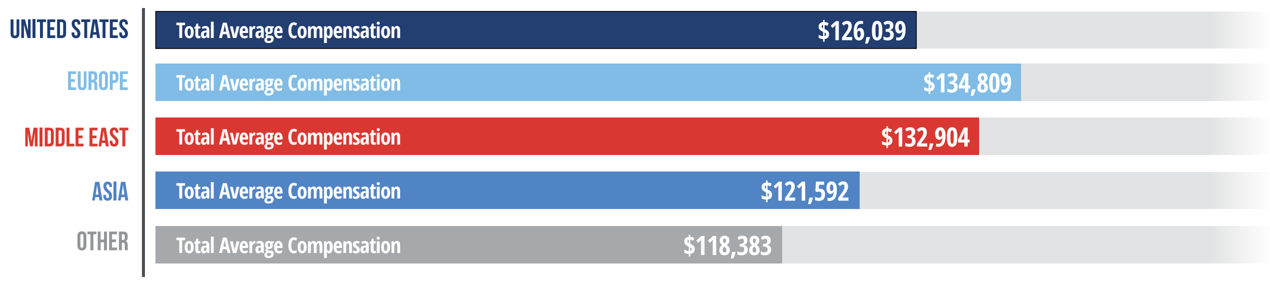
TAKING YOUR CLEARANCE OCONUS

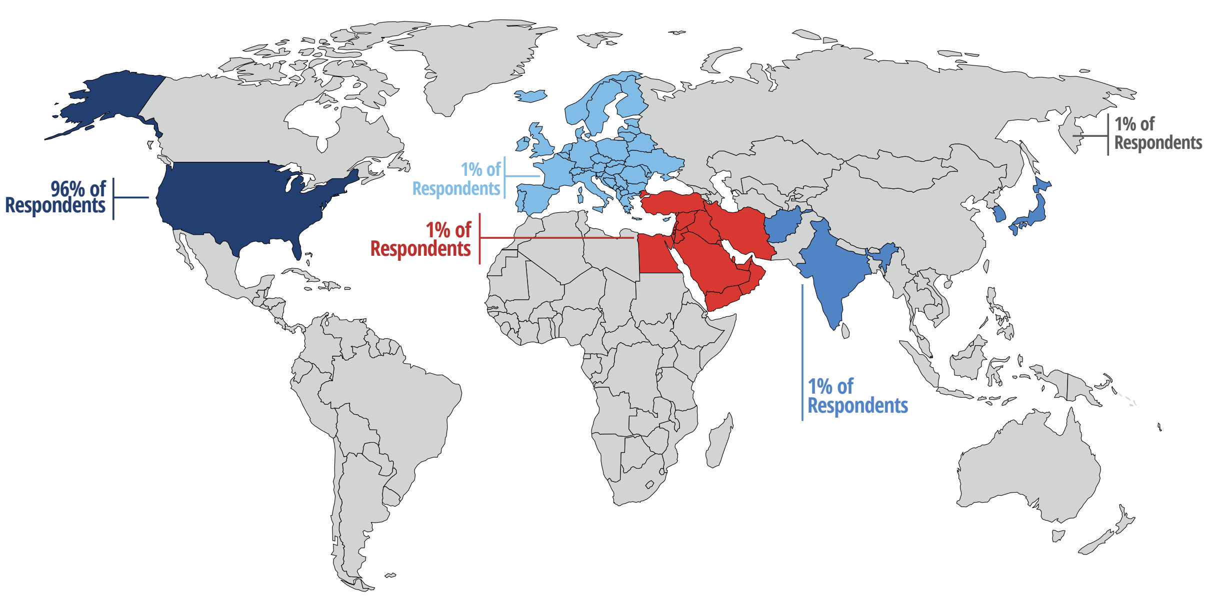
While 96% of respondents are based in the United States, overseas assignments continue to offer a compensation premium. Cleared professionals in the U.S. report an average total compensation of $126,039. Those in the Middle East average $134,809, and Europe follows closely at $132,904. Asia and other overseas locations vary, but international roles consistently track above or near stateside averages.

OCONUS roles make up only about 4% of respondents combined, underscoring how selective and specialized these positions have become. But the data suggests that when organizations need cleared talent abroad, they are willing to pay for it.

Overall, the location tables reinforce a consistent theme: while cleared work is spreading geographically, compensation still clusters around mission density, strategic priorities, and leadership centers. The map may be expanding, but the premium for proximity to core national security operations remains intact.

OCONUS TOTAL AVERAGE COMPENSATION





CLIMBING THE COMPENSATION LADDER IN NATIONAL SECURITY

Experience continues to be one of the strongest predictors of pay in the cleared workforce. Entry-level professionals average $73,213, posting a healthy 6% increase year over year. Early-career professionals, however, remained flat at $84,542, signaling a pause in growth at that stage. It is not uncommon to see compression early on, particularly in structured pay environments, but it does place added pressure on employers to think carefully about retention during those formative years.

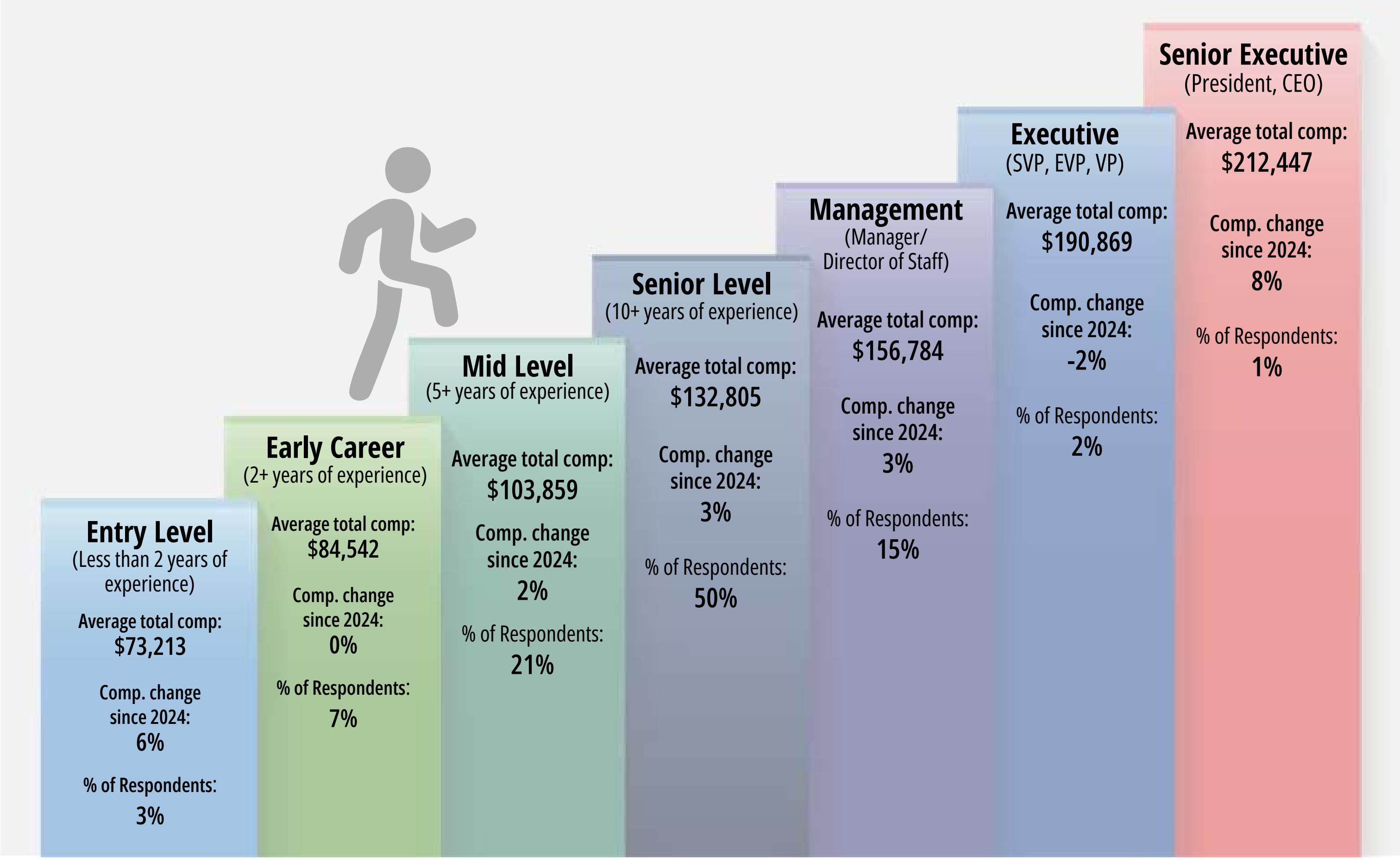
By the mid-career mark, compensation crosses firmly into six-figure territory at $103,859, with a 2% increase over the prior year. From there, growth becomes more pronounced. Senior-level professionals average $132,805, reflecting a 3% increase and reinforcing the premium placed on a decade or more of cleared experience.

Management roles climb to $156,784, also up 3%. Leadership responsibility continues to carry weight in compensation decisions, particularly as programs grow more complex and oversight intensifies.

At the executive tier, the story becomes more nuanced. Vice president and senior vice president roles average $190,869, down slightly by 2%, suggesting some volatility at that level. In contrast, senior executives, including presidents and CEOs, saw an 8% increase, reaching $212,447.

Overall, the ladder remains intact. Compensation builds steadily with experience, and the most significant earning potential still sits at the intersection of longevity, leadership, and accountability.

TOTAL COMPENSATION BY CAREER LEVEL



EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATIONS

Education continues to correlate with higher compensation in the cleared workforce, but the path to strong earnings is not limited to a single degree track.

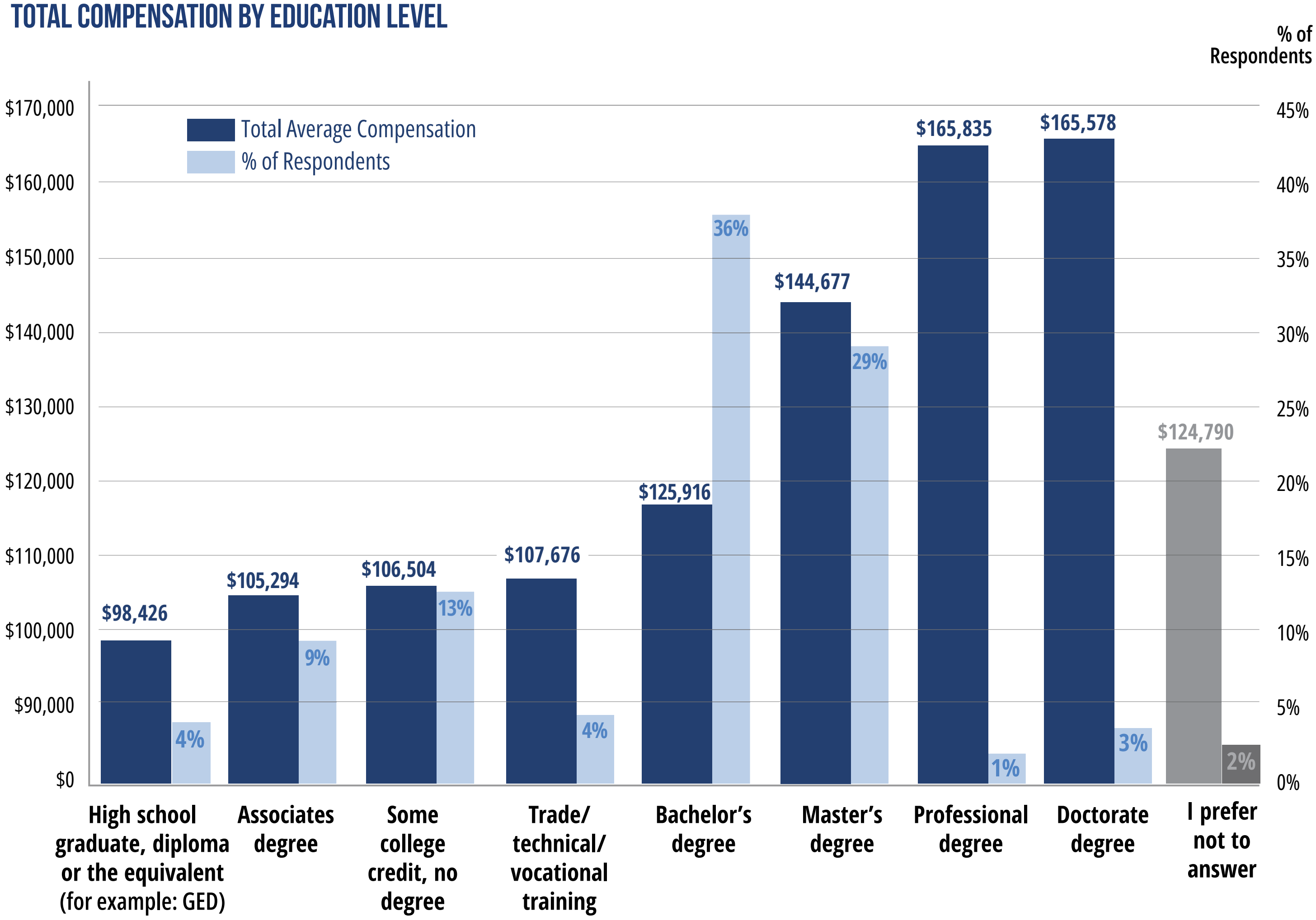
High school graduates report an average total compensation of $98,426, while those with some college credit earn $106,504. Trade, technical, and vocational training comes in at $107,676, reinforcing the value of specialized skill development. Associate degree holders average $105,294. These figures underscore an important reality in national security work: hands-on skills and mission alignment can translate into competitive pay, even without a four-year degree.

That said, compensation rises meaningfully with higher levels of education. Bachelor’s degree holders, who make up the largest segment of respondents at 36%, average $125,916. A master’s degree pushes average compensation to $144,677, nearly a $19,000 increase over a bachelor’s. At the top end, professional and doctorate degrees both land around $165,000, reflecting the premium placed on advanced expertise and leadership-level qualifications.

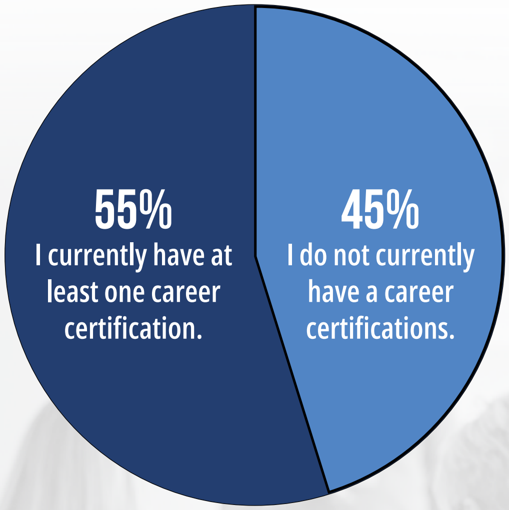
Certifications tell a similar story. Cleared professionals with at least one career certification average $133,662, compared to $117,530 for those without. More than half of respondents report holding a certification, and the roughly $16,000 difference highlights how technical credentials and validated skills continue to command a premium.

While the cleared industry offers multiple entry points, additional education and recognized certifications consistently expand earning potential. As agencies and contractors balance degree requirements with skills-based hiring models, formal education and certifications remain powerful levers for long-term compensation growth.

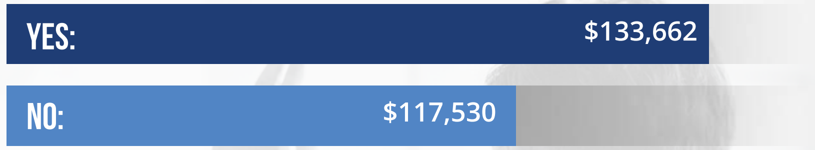
TOTAL COMPENSATION BY EDUCATION LEVEL



TOTAL COMPENSATION BY CERTIFICATE



AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION BY RESPONDENTS



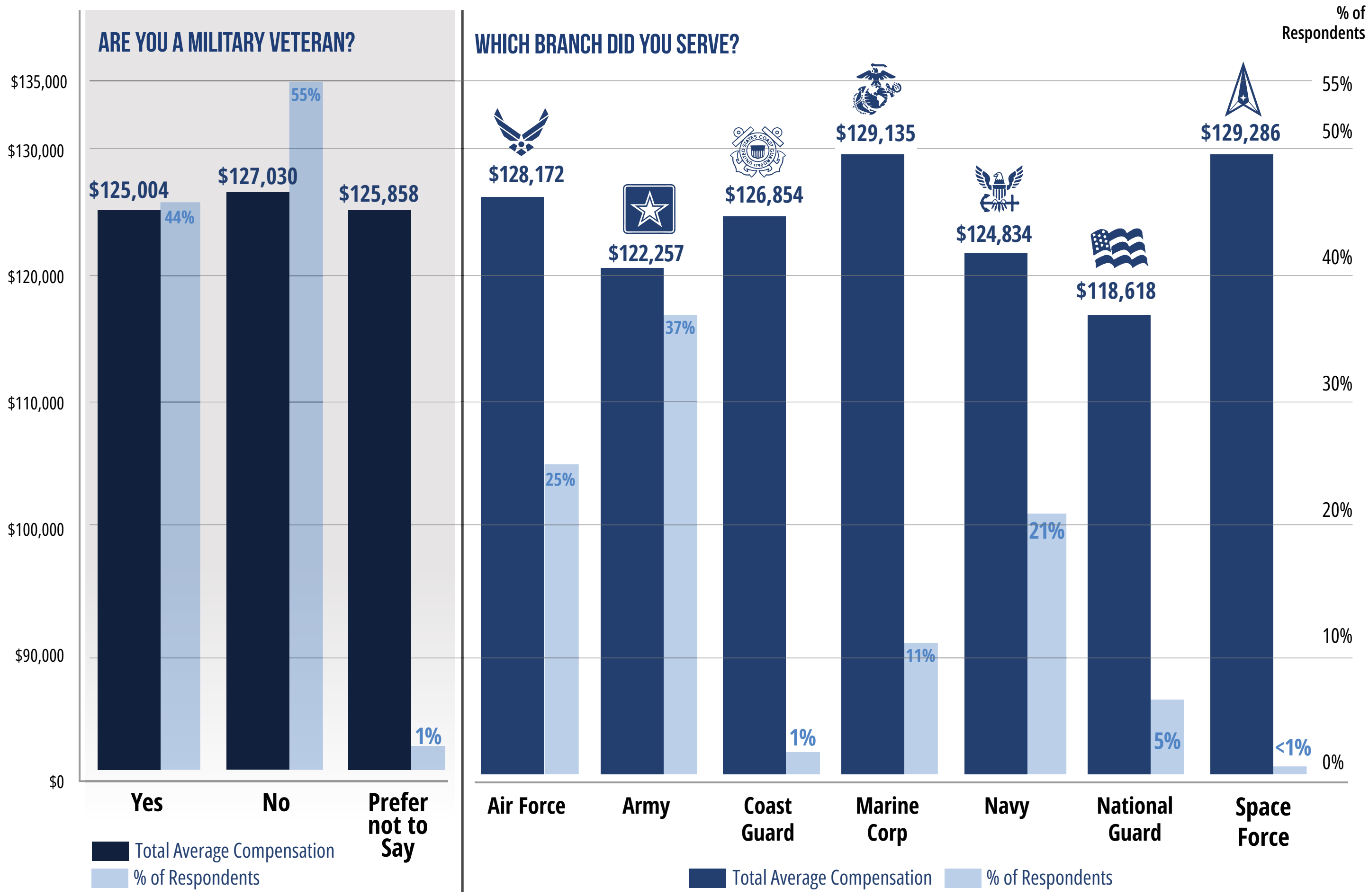
VETERANS IN THE CLEARED WORKFORCE

Veterans remain a significant portion of the cleared community, but their share continues to edge downward. This year, 44% of respondents reported prior military service, compared to 55% who did not. The cleared workforce is still deeply shaped by military experience, but the balance is gradually shifting as more civilians enter national security roles through technical and specialized career paths.

The compensation gap between veterans and non-veterans persists, though it is narrower than in past years. Veterans report an average total compensation of $125,004, compared to $127,030 for non-veterans. The difference is not dramatic, but it reinforces that military service alone does not automatically translate into higher pay. Earnings are influenced by role, location, education, certifications, and whether an individual transitions into technical or leadership tracks after service.

Looking at service branches, compensation varies but remains relatively clustered. Marine Corps veterans report an average of $129,135, followed closely by Air Force veterans at $128,172. Navy veterans average $124,834, while Army veterans, who make up the largest share at 37%, report $122,257. Coast Guard veterans average $126,854. National Guard respondents report $118,618. Space Force compensation trends high at $129,286, though the sample size is too small for broader conclusions.

The data suggests that while veteran status remains an asset in the cleared market, it is one piece of a larger equation. Post-service specialization, advanced credentials, and alignment with high-demand mission areas increasingly shape earning potential. For those transitioning out of uniform, the opportunity remains strong, but strategic positioning matters more than ever.



COMPENSATION BY ROLE IN NATIONAL SECURITY:

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE VS. CONTRACTOR

The gap between government employees and contractors remains, but it continues to evolve alongside broader federal workforce shifts.

Government employees report an average total compensation of $124,404 in 2025, reflecting an 8% increase year over year. Contractors, who make up 68% of respondents, average $129,264, with a 6% increase. The difference between the two now sits at just under $5,000, narrower than in prior years. While contractors still command a premium, government compensation growth outpaced contractors this year.

That shift comes against a complicated backdrop. The 2025 return-to-office mandates, executive orders reshaping agency priorities, and the ripple effects of DOGE-driven efficiency measures have all influenced federal workforce sentiment. As agencies faced restructuring conversations and public scrutiny around staffing levels, more federal employees began exploring private sector options. Recruiters report an influx of government talent open to making the jump, motivated not just by pay, but by perceived stability and flexibility.

Independent consultants remain at the top of the compensation spectrum, averaging $145,206, though growth slowed to just 1%. Private business owners average $126,923. Meanwhile, those who report being employed but no longer working in a cleared role earn significantly less at $98,054, even with a 14% increase over last year. The contrast underscores the financial value attached to maintaining an active clearance.

Taken together, the data reflects a market in motion. Contractors continue to offer a salary edge. Government roles posted strong gains this year, but government and policy shifts, organizational restructuring, and workforce scrutiny in 2025 have prompted more federal employees to reconsider where they sit within the national security ecosystem. Compensation remains competitive across both paths, but mobility between them appears to be increasing.

EMPLOYER	AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION	COMP CHANGE SINCE 2024	% OF RESPONDENTS
Government Employee	$124,404	8%	21%
Government Contractor	$129,264	6%	68%
Independent Consultant	$145,206	1%	2%
Private Business Owner (not a consultant)	$126,923	2%	1%
I am employed, but no longer work in a cleared position	$98,054	14%	8%

COMPENSATION BY GOVERNMENT AGENCY

Compensation increased across most major agencies in 2025, but the intensity of those increases varied, reflecting both mission priorities and organizational turbulence.

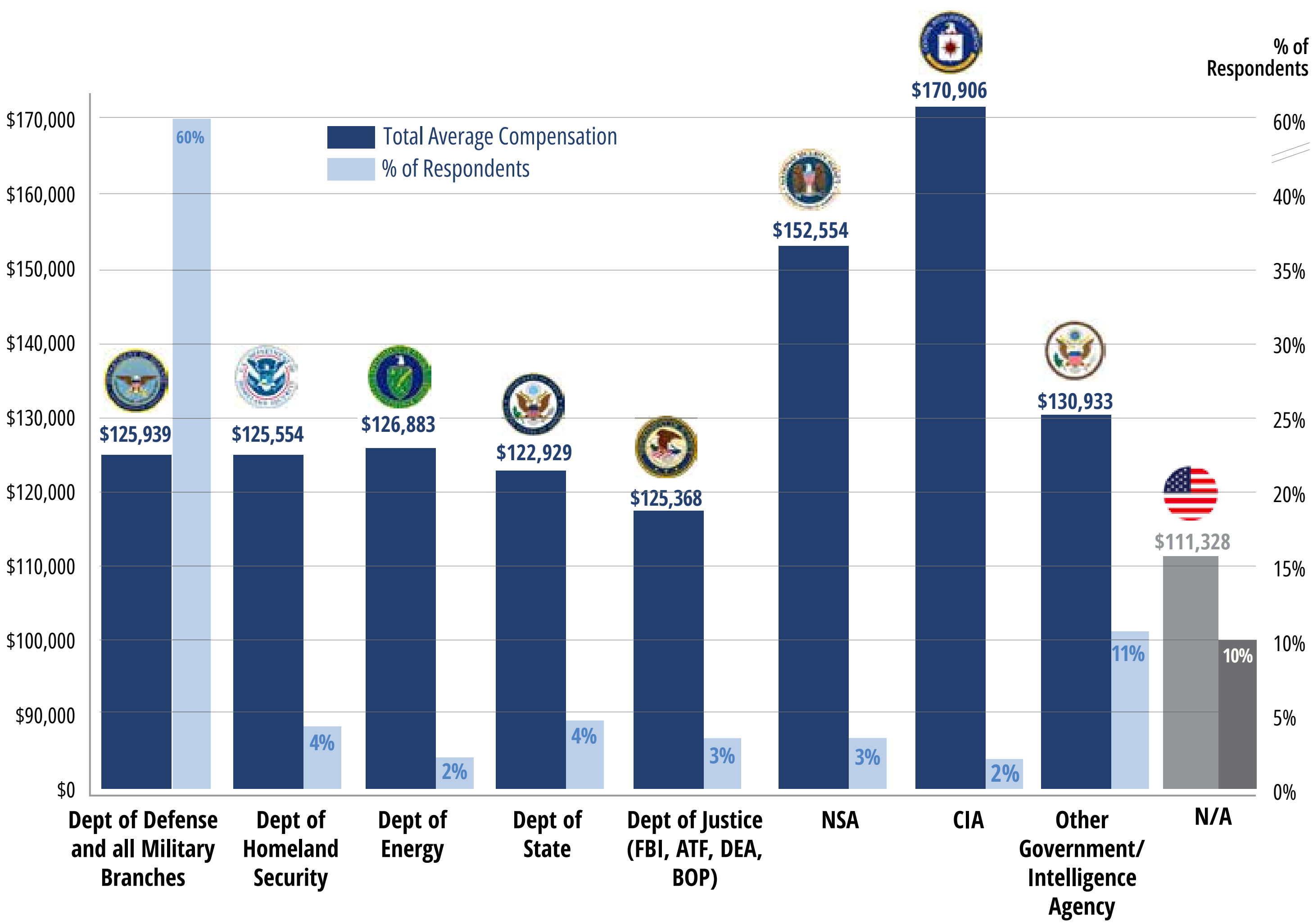
The Department of Defense (which also goes by the Department of War, following Executive Order 14347) and military branches remain the largest employer of cleared professionals, representing 60% of respondents. Average total compensation reached $125,939, a 6% increase over 2024.

Within the Intelligence Community (IC), salaries remain notably higher. NSA employees report average compensation of $152,554, up 7%, while CIA employees top the chart at $170,906, also up 7%. Those numbers reflect the premium attached to highly specialized intelligence roles. However, 2025 has not been a quiet year. Agency-wide buyout offers and restructuring efforts have introduced uncertainty, raising questions about long-term workforce composition and institutional knowledge retention.

Elsewhere, the Department of Homeland Security averages $125,554, up 7%, while the Department of State posts $122,926, with a 3% increase. The Department of Energy remains steady at $126,883, with no year-over-year change. The Department of Justice, which includes agencies such as the FBI, ATF, and DEA, shows a slight 1% decline to $125,368, suggesting possible budget or staffing recalibrations in certain components.

"Other Government or Intelligence Agencies" report one of the stronger gains at 8%, averaging $130,933. That category often captures smaller or mission-specific entities where pay can move more aggressively to meet niche talent demands.

Restructuring efforts, policy shifts, and workforce realignments in 2025 signal that while pay is holding steady or rising, the operating environment for cleared professionals inside government is anything but static.



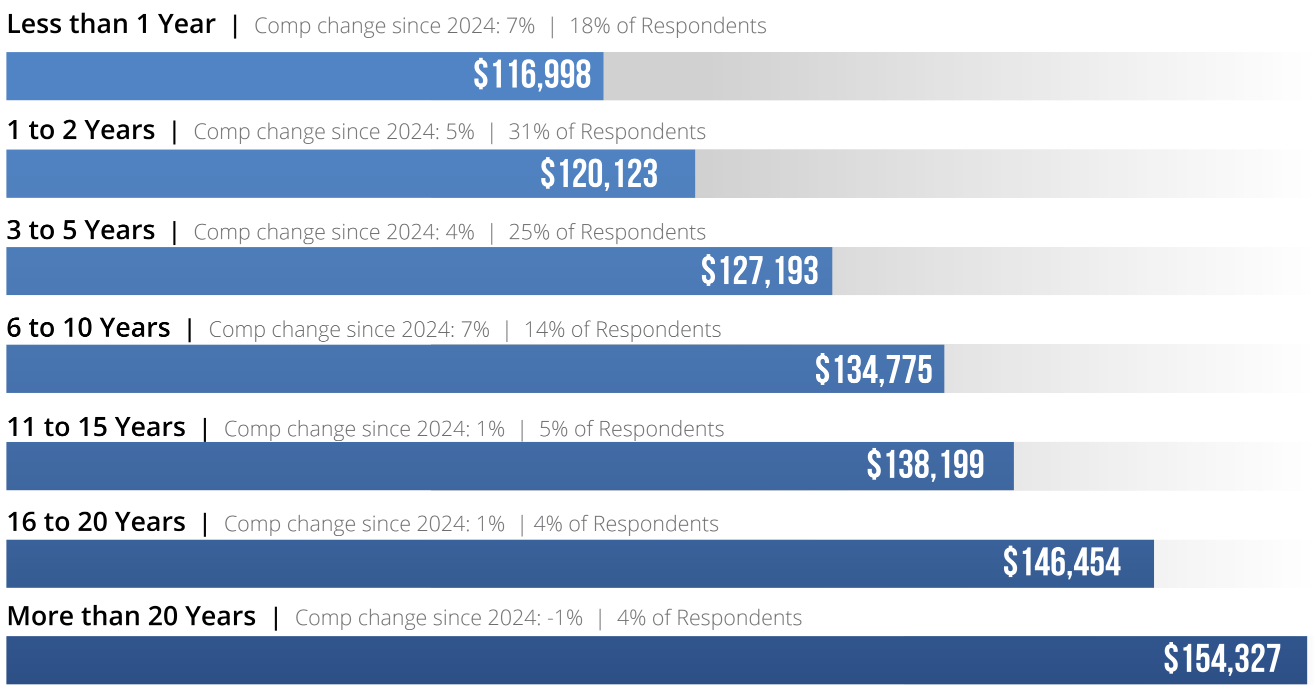
COMPENSATION AND SATISFACTION

In national security roles, mobility is common. But the 2025 data shows that longevity still carries weight.

Professionals with less than one year at their current employer average $116,998, reflecting a strong 7% increase over 2024. Those in the one to two-year range report $120,123, up 5%. By three to five years, compensation climbs to $127,193 with a 4% increase. Early tenure growth is steady and meaningful, particularly as more federal employees and contractors have shifted roles amid 2025 policy changes and workforce restructuring.

Mid-tenure employees continue to see solid returns. Those with six to ten years at their organization average $134,775, up 7%. After that point, growth becomes more incremental. Employees with 11 to 15 years report $138,199, with a modest 1% increase. The 16 to 20-year group averages $146,454, also up 1%. Those with more than 20 years at their employer earn the highest average compensation at $154,327, though this group saw a slight 1% dip year over year.

TOTAL COMPENSATION BY YEARS WITH CURRENT EMPLOYER



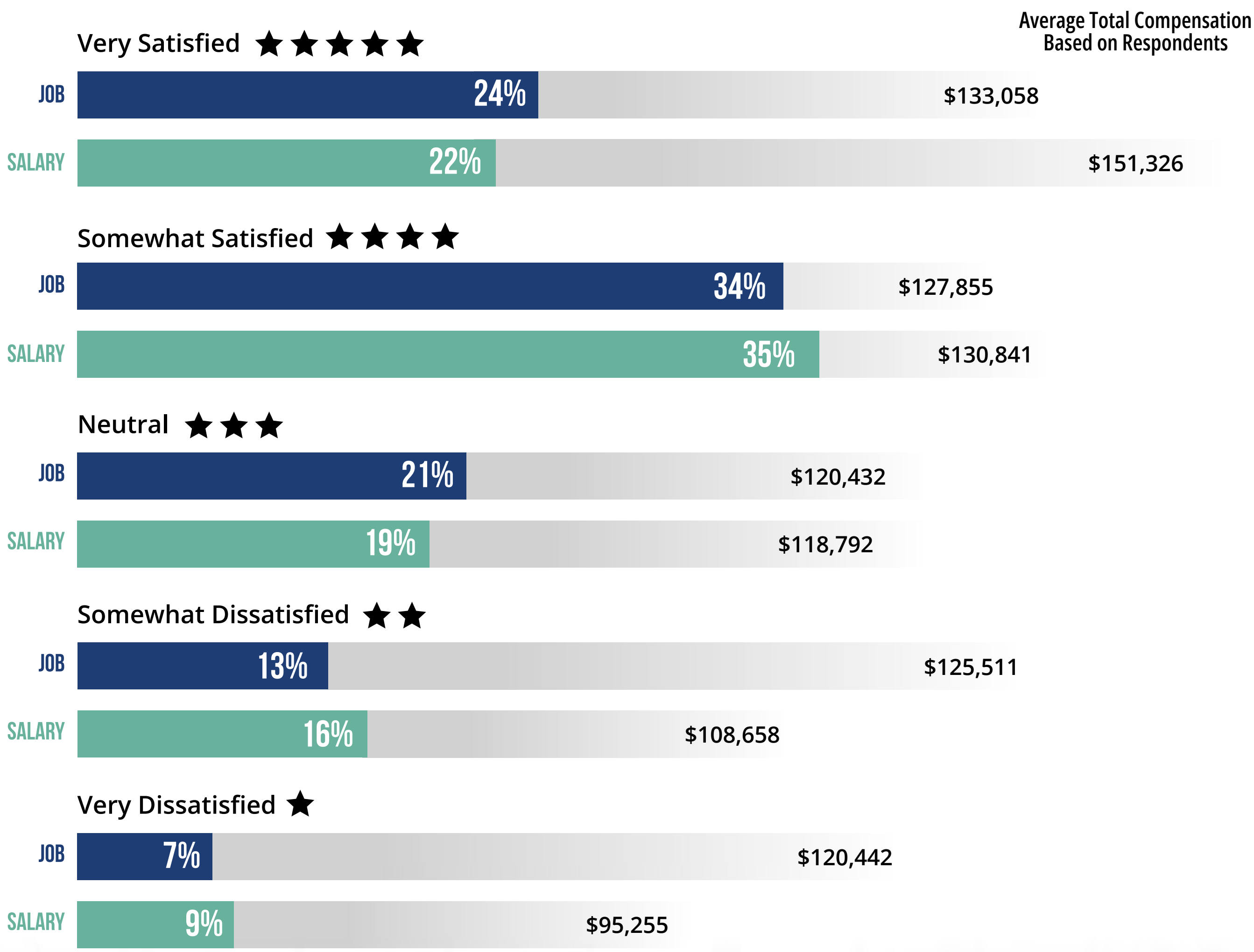
JOB AND SALARY SATISFACTION

Compensation and satisfaction remain closely linked, though not always in a perfectly linear way.

Twenty-four percent of respondents report being very satisfied with their jobs, earning an average of $133,058. Another 34% are somewhat satisfied, averaging $127,855. Neutral respondents report $120,432. Interestingly, those who are somewhat dissatisfied report slightly higher compensation at $125,511 than neutral respondents, suggesting that factors beyond pay influence job sentiment. Very dissatisfied employees average $120,442.

Salary satisfaction shows a clearer correlation. Those very satisfied with their pay average $151,326. Somewhat satisfied respondents earn $130,841. Neutral respondents average $118,792. At the lower end, somewhat dissatisfied employees report $108,658, and very dissatisfied respondents average $95,255. The relationship between higher earnings and pay satisfaction is unmistakable.

LEVELS OF SATISFACTION



WHAT WOULD INCREASE EMPLOYEE HAPPINESS?

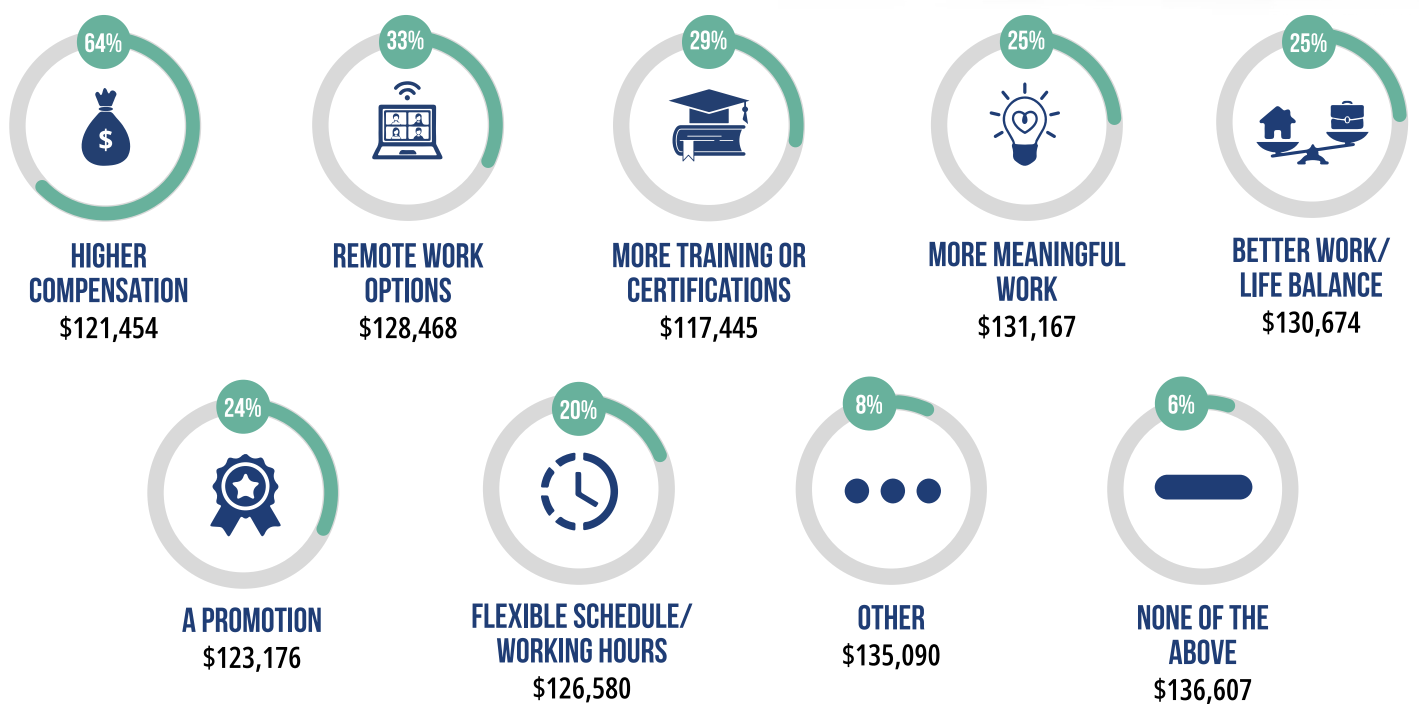
When asked what would improve workplace happiness, the top answer remains higher compensation, selected by 64% of respondents. Those selecting this option average $121,454, reinforcing that even six-figure earners are looking for continued growth.

Remote work options remain significant at 33%, though that preference now exists in tension with 2025 return-to-office mandates. Respondents prioritizing remote work average $128,468. Flexible schedules follow at 20%, averaging $126,580. More training or certifications, selected by 29%, comes with an average compensation of $117,445, reflecting a desire for upward mobility and skills advancement.

Meaningful work and better work-life balance each draw 25% of respondents, with average compensations of $131,167 and $130,674 respectively. Interestingly, the 6% who selected "None of the above" report the highest compensation at $136,607, suggesting that higher pay may reduce pressure for additional workplace changes.

Across all responses, the pattern is consistent. Compensation remains the dominant lever of satisfaction, but flexibility, development, and purpose continue to shape how cleared professionals evaluate their roles. In a year marked by federal restructuring, return-to-office mandates, and increased cross-movement between government and contractor roles, employers who balance competitive pay with adaptability will be better positioned to retain top talent.

WHAT WOULD INCREASE EMPLOYEE HAPPINESS?

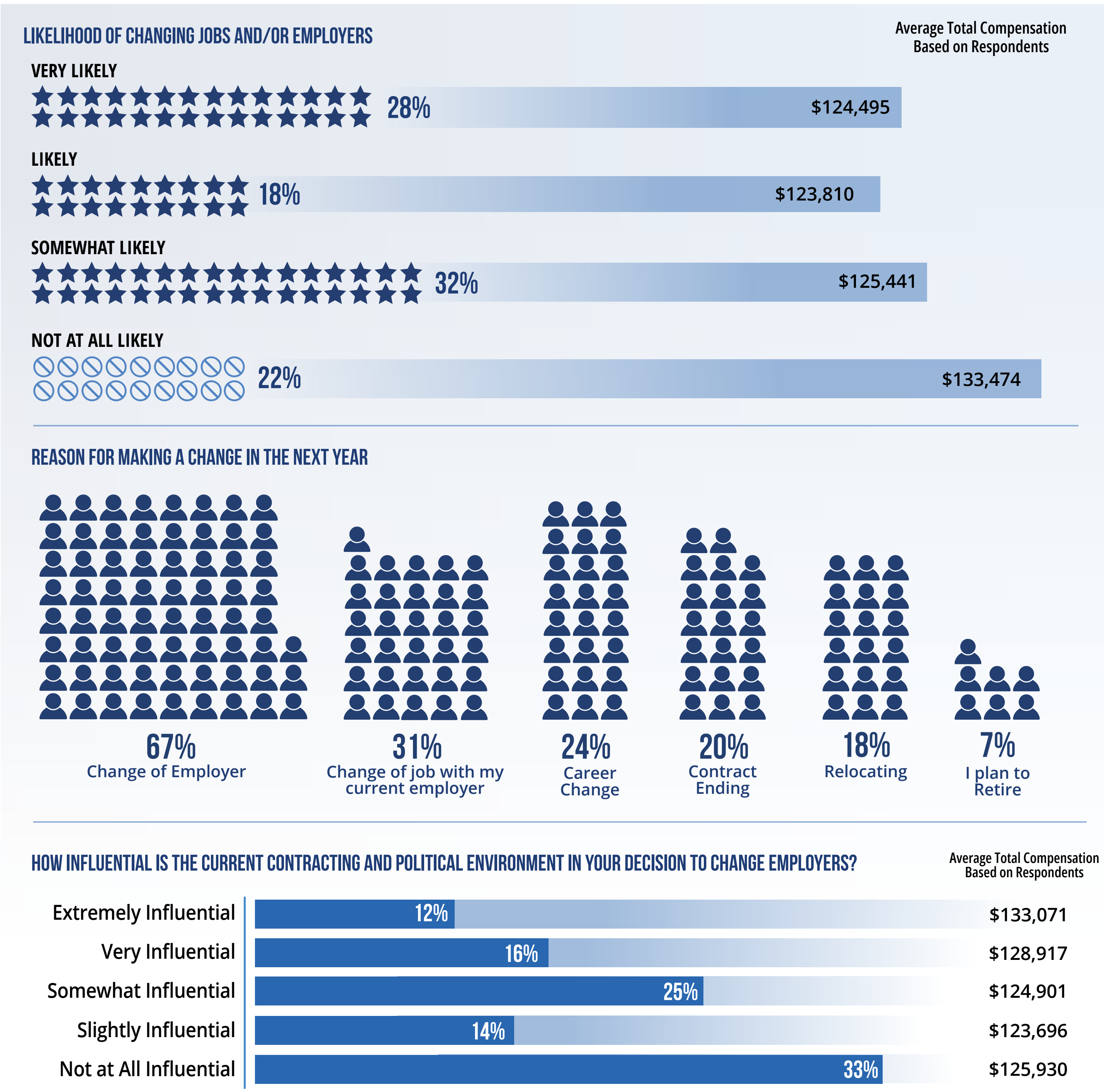


**Average Total Compensation Based on Respondents

LIKELIHOOD OF CHANGING JOBS

Most cleared professionals remain open to change. Seventy-eight percent of respondents are at least somewhat likely to change jobs in the next year. Only 22% say they are not at all likely to move. Interestingly, those least likely to leave earn the highest average compensation at $133,474. Very likely movers report $124,495, likely movers $123,810, and somewhat likely movers $125,441. The pattern reinforces a consistent theme throughout this report: higher pay correlates with greater stability.

The broader contracting and political environment is also influencing decisions. Twelve percent say it is extremely influential, and another 16% say it is very influential. Those who report the environment as extremely influential average $133,071, suggesting that even well-compensated professionals are weighing policy shifts and budget realignments in their career calculus. Still, one-third say the environment is not influential at all, highlighting the resilience of mission-driven work in national security.



LIKELIHOOD OF LEAVING CLEARED INDUSTRY

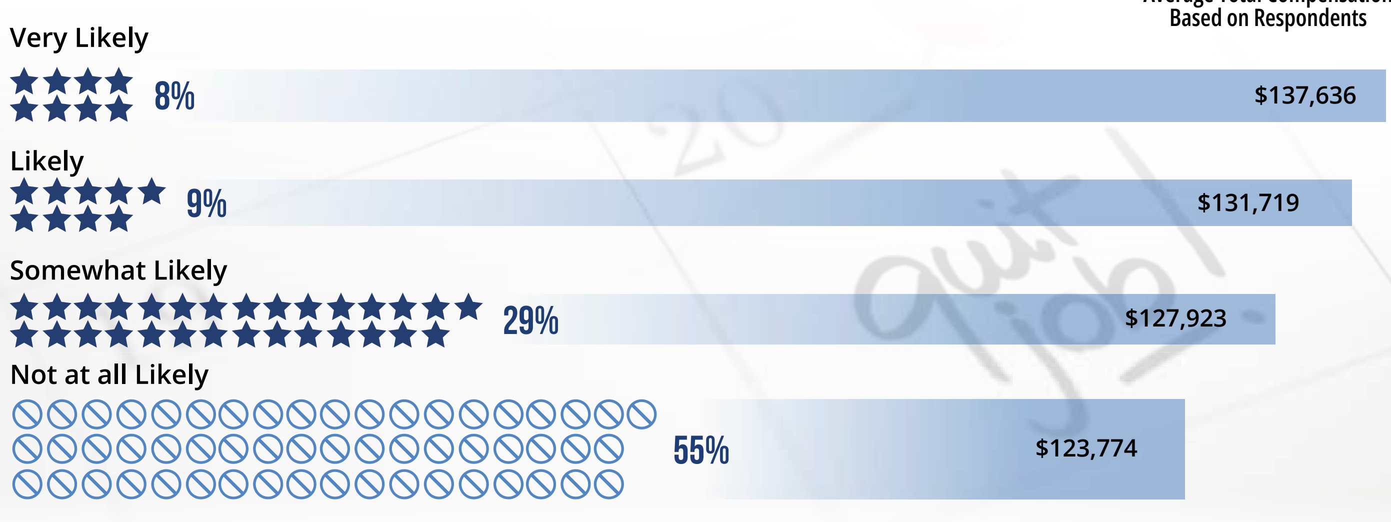
Looking longer term, 55% say they are not at all likely to leave the cleared industry in the next five years, down modestly from prior years. Those committed to staying average $123,774. Meanwhile, 46% are at least somewhat likely to exit, including 8% who say they are very likely to leave. Notably, the very likely group reports the highest average compensation at $137,636, followed by likely at $131,719 and somewhat likely at $127,923.

Retirement is the leading driver at 25%, reflecting the ongoing demographic shift within the cleared workforce. Another 24% say they simply want to keep their options open. Seeking higher compensation accounts for 15%, and 14% are considering a broader career change. Relocation and contract endings each account for 6%, while only 1% cite potential clearance issues.

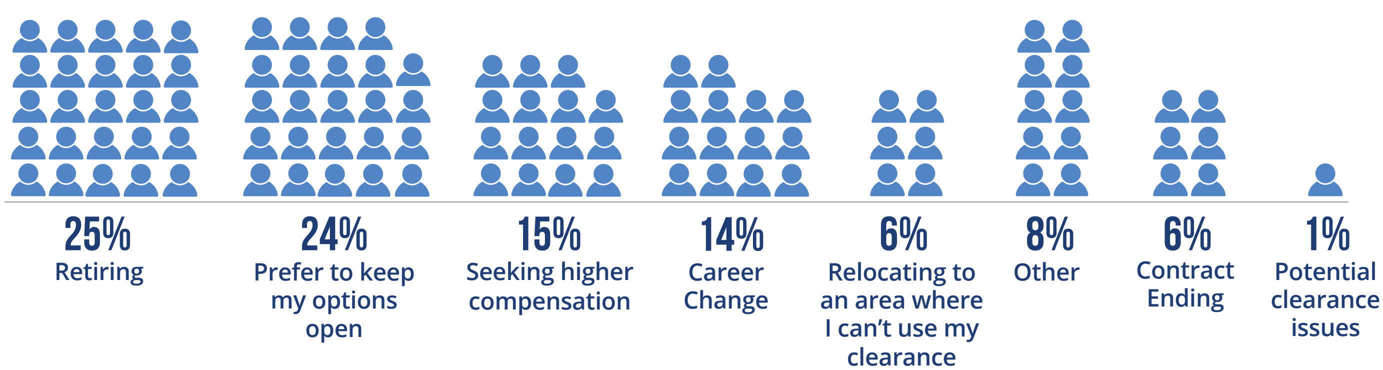
The data reveals an important nuance. Compensation matters, but it is not the only lever. Even high earners are evaluating flexibility, portability, and long-term career optionality. As more federal employees explore contractor roles amid 2025 restructuring and workforce uncertainty, and as seasoned professionals approach retirement, the industry faces both opportunity and risk.

Retention in the years ahead will depend not only on competitive salaries, but also on career mobility, mission clarity, and perhaps most critically, the ability to maintain and transfer clearances more seamlessly across roles. Clearance portability could prove to be one of the most impactful workforce policy discussions of the next decade.

LIKELIHOOD OF LEAVING THE CLEARED INDUSTRY IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS



REASON FOR LEAVING THE CLEARED INDUSTRY



COMPENSATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The broader demographic data points to a workforce in transition. Experienced professionals continue to anchor compensation at the top, while younger cohorts steadily grow their presence. Gender representation remains uneven, but incremental progress is visible. In a year marked by workforce restructuring and increased movement between government and contractor roles, how agencies and employers cultivate the next generation of cleared talent will shape both representation and compensation trends in the decade ahead.

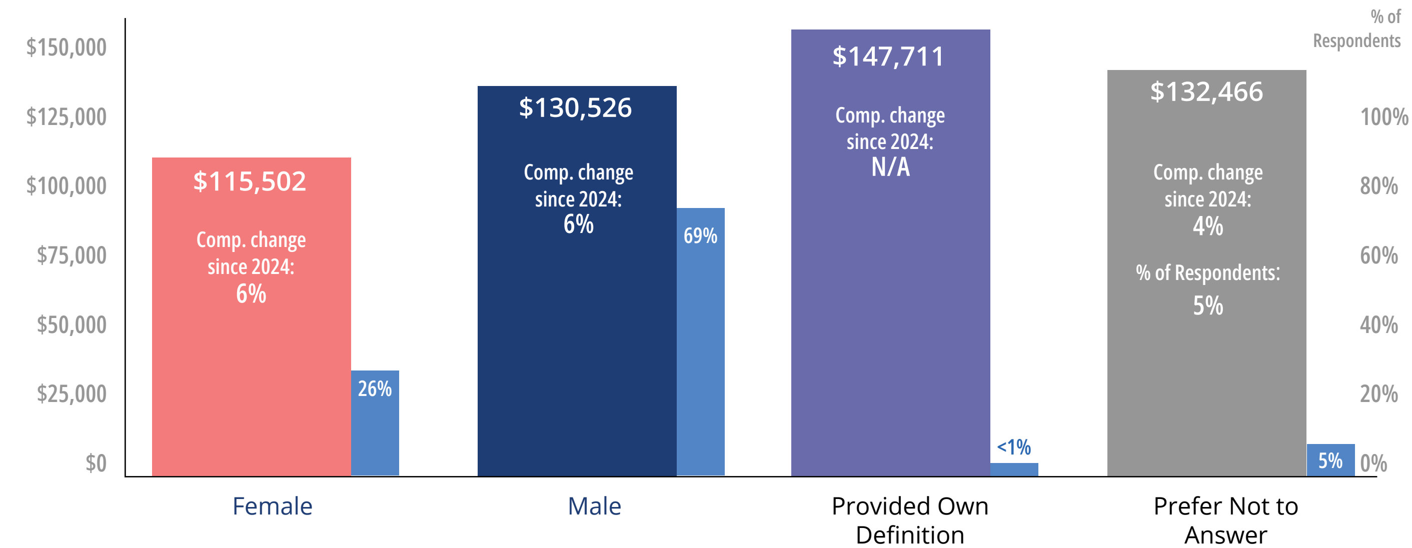
COMPENSATION BY GENDER

Women represent 26% of respondents, while men account for 69%. Female respondents report an average total compensation of $115,502, compared to $130,526 for male respondents. Both groups saw a 6% increase year over year, meaning the gap remains consistent even as overall compensation rises.

Those who provided their own gender definition report the highest average at $147,711, though this represents a very small share of respondents. Those who preferred not to answer average $132,466.

As with most compensation analysis, raw numbers do not tell the full story. Role type, career stage, agency affiliation, technical specialization, and years of experience all influence earnings. Still, the persistence of a gap underscores the importance of promotion pathways, leadership development, and pay transparency.

AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION BY GENERATION

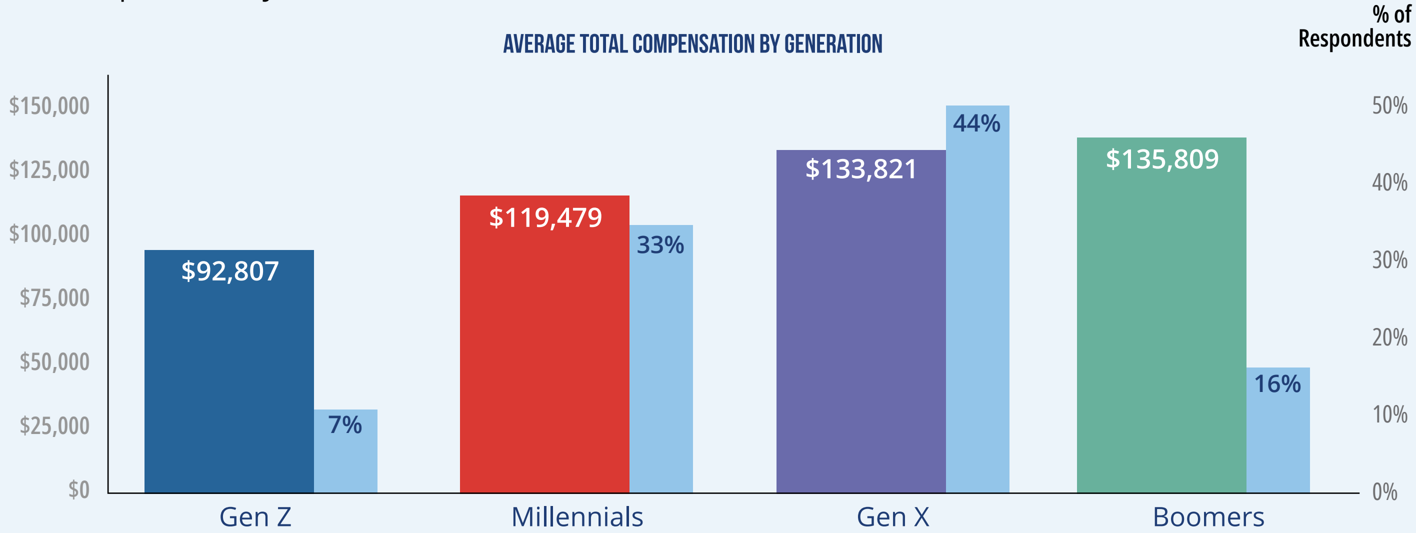


COMPENSATION BY AGE

Compensation rises predictably with age and tenure. Boomers report the highest average total compensation at $135,809, closely followed by Generation X at $133,821. Millennials average $119,479, while Generation Z reports $92,807.

The generational spread reflects more than just age. It mirrors career stage, leadership responsibility, and time in cleared roles. Gen Z's smaller footprint and lower average compensation align with entry and early-career positioning. Millennials, many of whom are now in mid-career or early leadership roles, are firmly in six-figure territory. Gen X and Boomers continue to dominate senior and management ranks, which drives their higher averages.

As retirement remains the leading driver of potential exits from the cleared workforce, this age distribution has implications for succession planning. Agencies and contractors alike will need to accelerate development pathways for Millennials and Gen Z professionals if they want to sustain institutional knowledge and leadership continuity.



CLEARED COMPENSATION IN 2026: A WORKFORCE IN MOTION

Compensation for cleared professionals reached a new high in 2025, averaging $126,125, a 6% increase over the prior year. On paper, that signals strength. But the story behind the numbers is more complex.

The past year was marked by return-to-office mandates, executive orders, DOGE-driven efficiency reviews, agency buyouts, and a noticeable influx of federal employees exploring contractor roles. Agencies adjusted. Contractors recalibrated. Employees reassessed risk. And through it all, compensation continued to rise.

The data reveals a workforce that is not retreating, but repositioning. Most cleared professionals remain open to changing jobs. A significant share are at least somewhat influenced by the contracting and political environment. The silver lining to the changing environment is that mobility between government and industry is increasing.

Looking ahead to 2026, the cleared labor market does not appear fragile. It appears fluid. Agencies will continue to restructure. Contractors will compete aggressively for proven talent. Federal employees will weigh stability against opportunity. The mission will move forward.

APPENDIX A

TOTAL COMPENSATION BY STATE
State with 100 or more respondents shown

STATE	AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION	COMP. CHANGE SINCE 2024	% OF RESPONDENTS
Alabama	$117,085	6%	3%
Alaska	$106,713	*N/A	<1%
Arizona	$119,053	7%	2%
Arkansas	$98,964	*N/A	<1%
California	$125,104	4%	6%
Colorado	$138,256	8%	4%
Connecticut	$129,621	*N/A	<1%
Delaware	$111,440	*N/A	<1%
D.C.	$136,369	6%	7%
Florida	$118,330	5%	6%
Georgia	$109,293	7%	3%
Hawaii	$127,184	*N/A	1%
Idaho	$105,708	*N/A	<1%
Illinois	$116,922	*N/A	1%
Indiana	$119,220	*N/A	1%
Iowa	$110,518	*N/A	<1%
Kansas	$118,703	*N/A	<1%
Kentucky	$118,580	*N/A	1%
Louisiana	$103,313	1%	1%
Maine	$112,900	*N/A	<1%
Maryland	$139,303	6%	9%
Massachusetts	$139,917	*N/A	1%
Michigan	$117,978	*N/A	1%
Minnesota	$102,515	*N/A	<1%
Mississippi	$111,457	*N/A	<1%
Missouri	$119,756	8%	2%
Montana	$107,769	*N/A	<1%
Nebraska	$104,710	*N/A	<1%

STATE	AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION	COMP. CHANGE SINCE 2024	% OF RESPONDENTS
Nevada	$114,154	*N/A	1%
New Hampshire	$116,057	*N/A	<1%
New Jersey	$123,020	*N/A	1%
New Mexico	$115,767	-1%	2%
New York	$123,677	8%	1%
North Carolina	$109,572	6%	2%
North Dakota	$94,865	*N/A	<1%
Ohio	$120,082	7%	2%
Oklahoma	$108,841	*N/A	1%
Oregon	$123,739	*N/A	<1%
Pennsylvania	$116,721	*N/A	1%
Puerto Rico	$99,507	*N/A	<1%
Rhode Island	$95,354	*N/A	<1%
South Carolina	$113,188	13%	2%
South Dakota	$106,387	*N/A	<1%
Tennessee	$109,795	*N/A	1%
Texas	$112,705	2%	7%
Utah	$117,336	*N/A	1%
Vermont	$119,300	*N/A	<1%
Virginia	$138,748	5%	19%
Washington	$121,593	3%	2%
West Virginia	$116,878	*N/A	<1%
Wisconsin	$116,105	*N/A	<1%
Wyoming	$118,807	*N/A	<1%
I don't work in the United States	$128,138	0%	<1%

** N/A due to low sample size

APPENDIX B

TOTAL COMPENSATION BY JOB CATEGORY

OCCUPATION	AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF RESPONDENTS
Aerospace and Aviation	$125,080	5%
Business - HR	$110,974	2%
Business - Legal	$131,978	1%
Business - Sales	$163,821	1%
Business - Support	$93,059	3%
Construction/Facilities	$115,478	2%
Emergency	$116,292	1%
Engineering - Chemical	$138,360	<1%
Engineering - Civil	$116,145	<1%
Engineering - Electrical	$123,635	2%
Engineering - Mechanical	$116,325	1%
Engineering - Systems	$159,327	3%
Finance	$123,615	3%
Government Contractor	$108,468	8%
Healthcare and Science	$118,144	1%
Intelligence	$138,803	5%

OCCUPATION	AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF RESPONDENTS
IT - Database	$137,559	1%
IT - Data Science	$143,365	2%
IT - Hardware	$130,028	4%
IT - Security	$142,823	8%
IT - Software	$155,223	7%
IT - Support	$104,040	6%
IT - Tech Writing	$112,577	1%
IT - QA and Test	$130,324	1%
Linguist	$101,551	1%
Logistics	$96,091	4%
Management	$149,407	10%
Military and Law Enforcement	$126,215	3%
Security	$109,857	11%
Trainer/Instructor	$113,003	2%
Visual and Creative	$114,331	1%

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Security Clearance Salary Survey is administered online by ClearanceJobs. The 2025 data presented here was collected between September 9 and December 31, 2025. Security-cleared respondents were invited to participate in the survey through notifications on ClearanceJobs home page and various communications and links.

This report focuses on both the findings for the 2025 survey and the comparison of those results for a nearly identical survey conducted one year prior (2024 compensation information).

In 2025, there were 27,963 survey participants, a decrease of -10% over the 2024 survey. After excluding survey respondents without security clearance, those who were unemployed, active-duty military, students, those whose compensation was below $18,000 or above $400,000, and finally incomplete or duplicate questionnaires, there remained 11,533 usable responses in 2025 and 13,177 usable responses in 2024.

By definition, all respondents included in this analysis have an active or current security clearance issued by the U.S. federal government, are not active-duty military, are employed, and reported compensation figures between $18,000 and $400,000. Dollars are as reported in the survey year and not adjusted for inflation.

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