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CONSTRUCTION

COMPENSATION AND HIRING GUIDE

CRE ROLES IN FOCUS

Bullpen

FORWARD

Construction is the execution layer of commercial real estate. Every deal, every development, every ground-up project is ultimately judged by what happens on the job site. The professionals who manage that process are among the most specialized in the industry.

This guide focuses on general contracting, the operational core of the construction world. Unlike our previous reports, construction compensation does not follow a single title ladder. It breaks into three distinct career lanes: project management, superintendency, and estimating. Each lane has its own hierarchy, skill set, and talent market. Crossover between them is rare.

A quick note on how the pieces fit together. A developer retains a construction manager (or has one in-house) to oversee the project. The construction manager retains a general contractor, who manages all subcontractors. Inside the GC, three teams operate in parallel: project managers handle paperwork and scheduling from the office, superintendents run the job site, and estimators handle bidding and pre-construction.

The 2026 construction labor market is being pulled in two directions. Demand is strong in industrial, data centers, residential housing, and federal projects. High material costs, tariffs, and elevated interest rates have slowed projects at smaller and mid-sized GCs, pushing talent into the market.

One trend worth watching: 20 to 30 percent of developers now operate an in-house GC arm. These vertically integrated shops offer greater job security, and compensation is comparable to top-tier standalone GCs. The typical first hire is a Director of Construction from the GC world, who builds out the team at market rates.

The ranges below apply to premium general contractors in major metropolitan areas (Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Dallas, Houston, Miami, Philadelphia, Phoenix). New York City typically commands a 10 to 20 percent premium across all roles and seniority levels.

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COMPENSATION TABLES

HOW TO READ THESE TABLES

Construction compensation is simpler than other CRE functions. There is no carry, co-invest, or promote participation. Bonus is almost entirely annual (year-end). Project-completion bonuses exist on the developer side, but they are rare at general contractors.

Compensation is driven primarily by project cost and location, not asset class. A superintendent running a billion-dollar industrial project earns roughly the same as one running a billion-dollar high-rise, assuming similar geography. The numbers below reflect that reality.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT (GENERAL CONTRACTOR)

The office side of the GC. Project managers handle scheduling, budgeting, change orders, and communication with the construction manager. They are the paperwork and coordination backbone of every project.

Role	Base	Bonus
Project Engineer	$55-$65k	—
Assistant Project Manager	$60-$95k	—
Project Manager	$120-$150k	5-10%
Senior Project Manager	$150-$180k	8-12%+
Project Executive / Director of Construction	$180-$225k	8-12%+

Note: *Most companies have either a Project Executive or a Director of Construction, not both. At firms large enough to have both titles, the Director of Construction outranks the Project Executive.*

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SUPERINTENDENCY (GENERAL CONTRACTOR)

The job site side of the GC. Superintendents manage day-to-day construction activity, coordinate subcontractors, enforce safety, and own the physical execution of the project. They report to GC ownership, not to the project management side.

Role	Base	Bonus
Assistant Superintendent	$65-$95k	—
Superintendent	$120-$150k	5-10%
Senior Superintendent	$150-$200k	8-12%+
General Superintendent	$200k+	8-12%+

Note: *General Superintendents oversee multiple concurrent projects across a geography. They report directly to ownership and are typically found only at larger GCs with deep project pipelines.*

ESTIMATING / PRE-CONSTRUCTION (GENERAL CONTRACTOR)

The front-end of the GC. Estimators handle project takeoffs, bidding, and pre-construction coordination with architects and engineers. This team drives the sales engine of the general contractor.

Role	Base	Bonus
Junior Estimator	$65-$95k	—
Estimator	$120-$140k	5-10%
Senior Estimator	$150-$175k	8-12%+
Chief Estimator	$175-$225k	8-12%+

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HIRING FAQS

What makes a construction hire stand out?

Two things, in order. First, deep knowledge of your specific trade. Construction is a field where competence is verified on the job site, not in an interview room. Employers can identify whether a hire knows what they are doing within the first two weeks. Most say they can tell in the first ten minutes of a conversation.

Second, personality. A collaborative management style is essential. The industry has historically tolerated a confrontational approach on job sites, and employers are actively moving away from it. The best hires combine the toughness the work demands with a leadership style that keeps subcontractors productive and job sites safe.

Are there technical tests or case studies in construction interviews?

Not really. This is one of the few CRE-adjacent functions where technical testing is uncommon. Knowledge is too specialized and too verifiable to simulate in a test environment. Instead, employers evaluate candidates through direct conversation about past projects, build types, and problem-solving on site.

A common interview question for project managers and superintendents: “When you’re faced with an issue on site, what’s your way of working with the crew to fix it?” The answer reveals whether a candidate leads through collaboration or intimidation.

How specialized is construction hiring?

Very. Hiring is specific to build type, not just asset class. A superintendent with ten years of wood frame experience will take a $20,000 to $30,000 pay cut to transition to concrete and steel, and the learning curve is real. This applies across all three lanes and at every seniority level. When a GC posts a job, they are looking for someone who has built what they build.

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HIRING FAQS

How important are certifications?

They carry weight. The most relevant certifications include Procore (construction management software), PMP from the Project Management Institute, OSHA safety certifications (required for superintendents in certain markets, including New York City), and LEED for firms focused on sustainable construction. Most professionals at the project manager level and above hold a degree in construction management, engineering, or architecture.

What are red flags in construction candidates?

Frequent job-hopping is the biggest one. Higher-end GCs want 5 to 10 year tenured professionals. The second is an aggressive, old-school management style. There is a way to be direct and hold high standards without creating friction on a job site. Employers are looking for that balance.

How does working for a developer compare to working for a GC?

Compensation is comparable at every level. The main difference is job security. GC employment can be project-dependent. When a project wraps up or stalls due to financing or material costs, positions can be eliminated. Developer-side roles with a continuous pipeline are attractive for stability. However, higher-end GCs with strong pipelines of their own retain employees for years. The fear of project-dependent employment is more relevant at smaller and mid-sized firms.

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