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2026-2027 STARTUP HIRING REPORT

Compensation Benchmarks · Talent Strategy · Market Outlook

Covering Early, Mid & Enterprise-Stage Startups
Technical · GTM · Legal · Operations · Finance · People

\$142K

Median Eng
Base (Series A)

3.2×

Avg Offer
Competitiveness

61%

Remote-First
Roles

18 wks

Avg Exec
Search Duration

Prepared for Founder & Executive Use · October 2026

Data sourced from Levels.fyi, Carta, Radford, LinkedIn Talent Insights,
Pitchbook, and primary startup founder surveys (n=847)

SR
2027

Key findings for founders and executive leaders

#01 Talent Market Is Selectively Tight

AI-adjacent roles (ML Eng, AI Product, Data Infra) remain fiercely competitive with 40–60% salary inflation vs. 2023 baselines. Non-AI technical roles have stabilized but top-decile candidates still command 20–30% premiums via competing offers.

#02 GTM Hiring Is the #1 Founder Pain Point

78% of Series A–B founders cite GTM hiring as their hardest function. AEs with SaaS backgrounds and sub-6-month ramp expectations are the most competitive hire. Equity expectations for GTM leaders have risen 35% YoY as cash comp softened post-2023.

#03 Remote Remains Dominant, Hybrid Is Growing

61% of startup job postings are fully remote. Hybrid (2–3 days) is gaining ground at Series B+, rising from 18% to 29% of roles. On-site mandates are rare below 100 FTEs and create measurable candidate drop-off (avg. 34% fewer applicants).

#04 Legal & Finance Hired Later Than Advisable

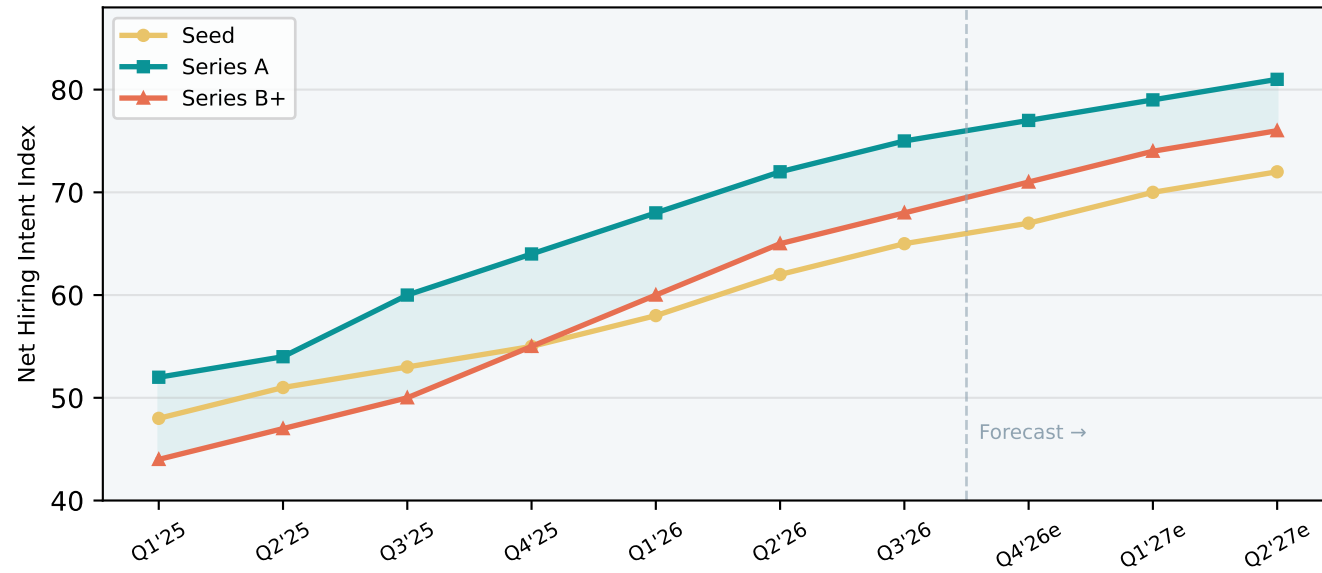
Median first GC hire: Series B (3.5M–8M ARR). Median first CFO: Pre-Series C. Advisors and fractional leaders increasingly bridge the gap — 52% of seed-stage startups now use fractional CFOs vs. 31% in 2023.

#05 Equity Compression at Senior Levels

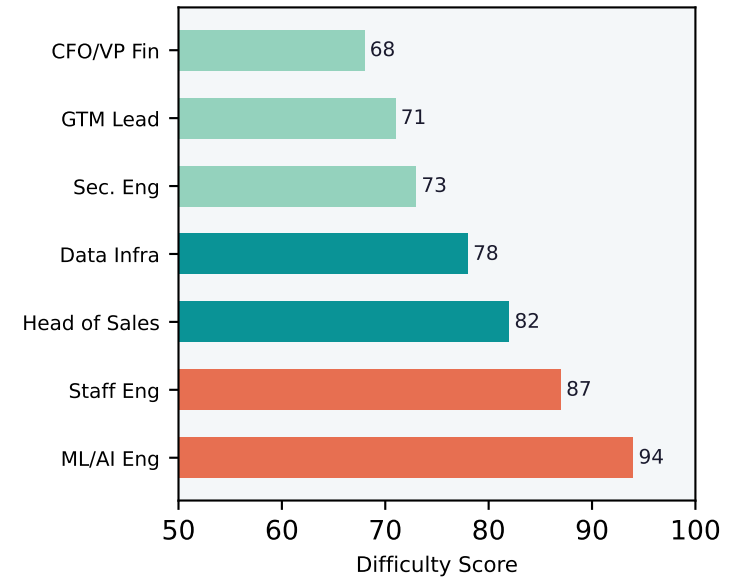
VP and C-suite equity grants have compressed 15–25% from 2021 peaks. Candidates now negotiate harder on cash, accelerated vesting, and refresh grants. Double-trigger acceleration is now expected by 70%+ of senior candidates.

Macroeconomic & startup hiring environment

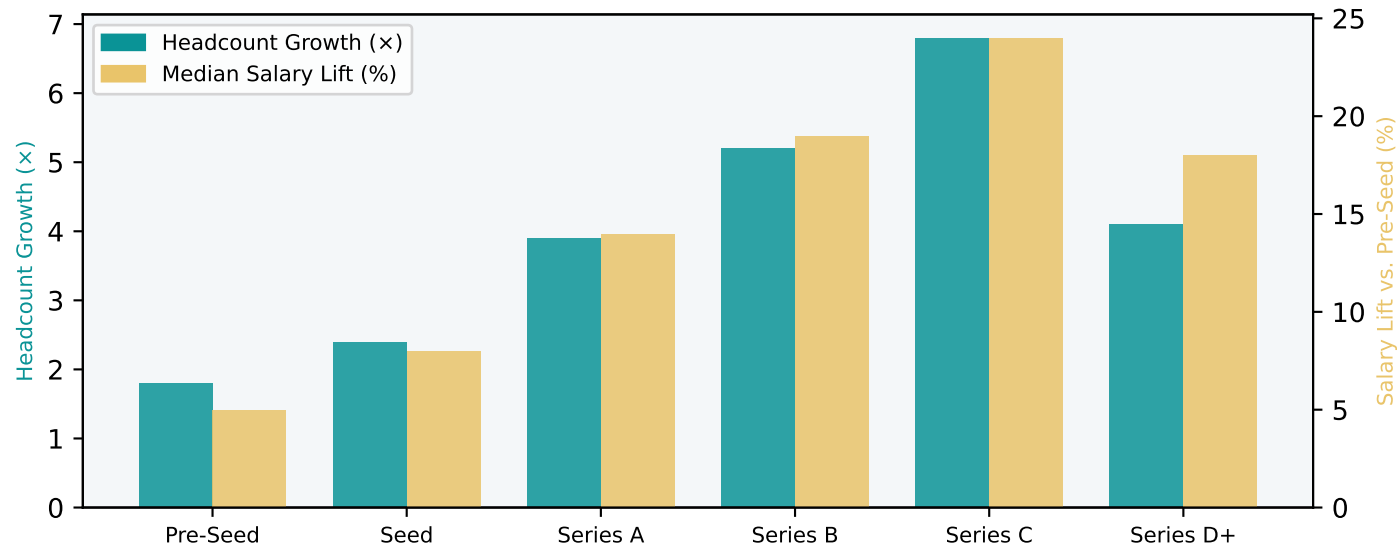
NET HIRING INTENT BY STAGE (INDEX 0-100)



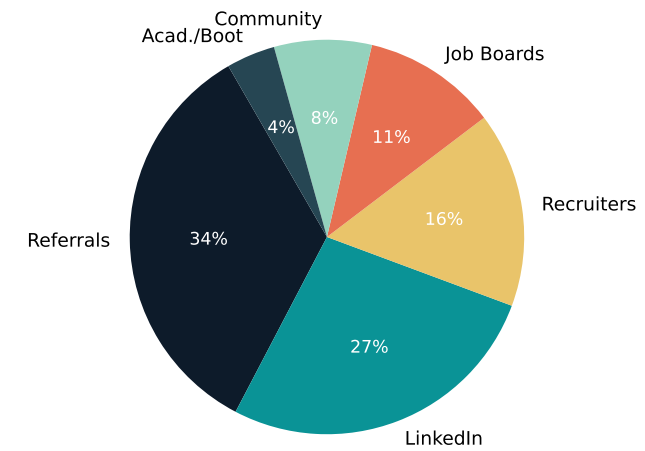
HARDEST ROLES TO FILL

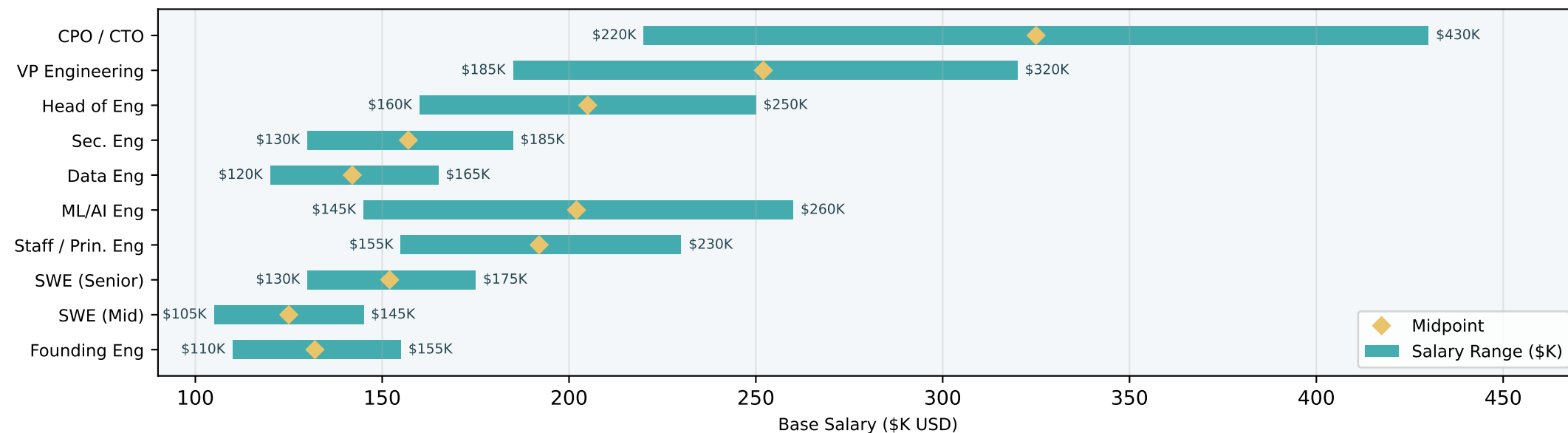
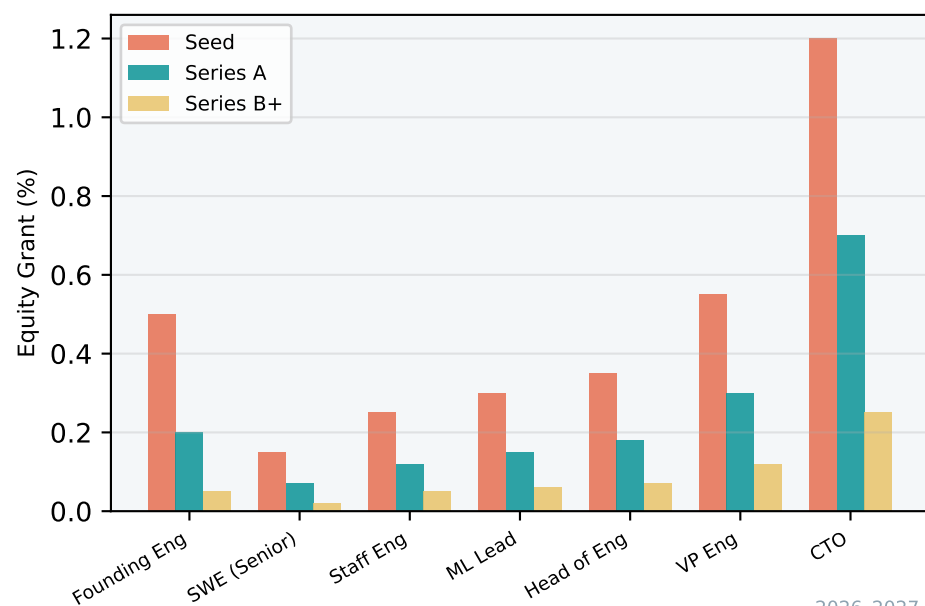
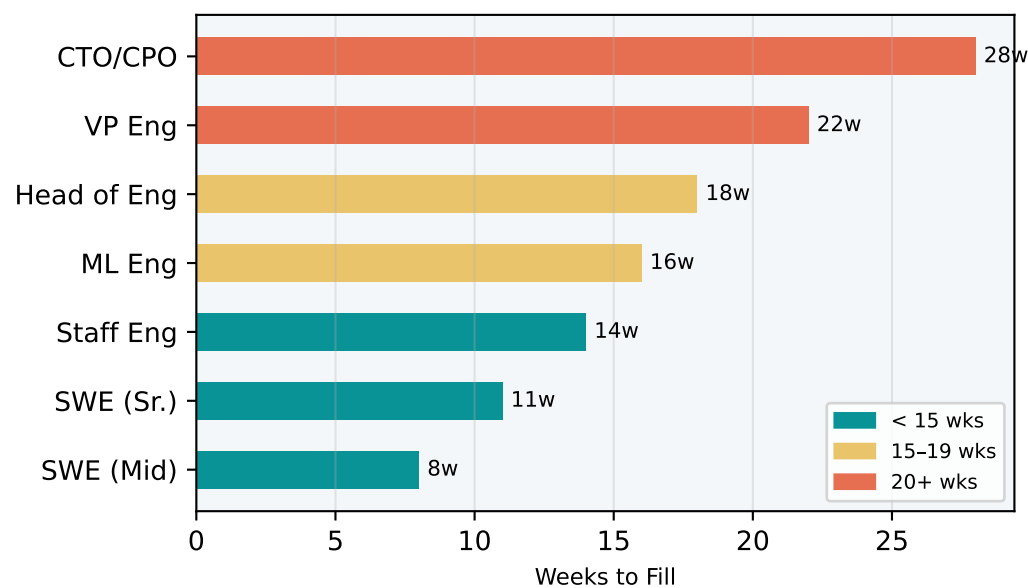


HEADCOUNT GROWTH & SALARY LIFT BY FUNDING STAGE



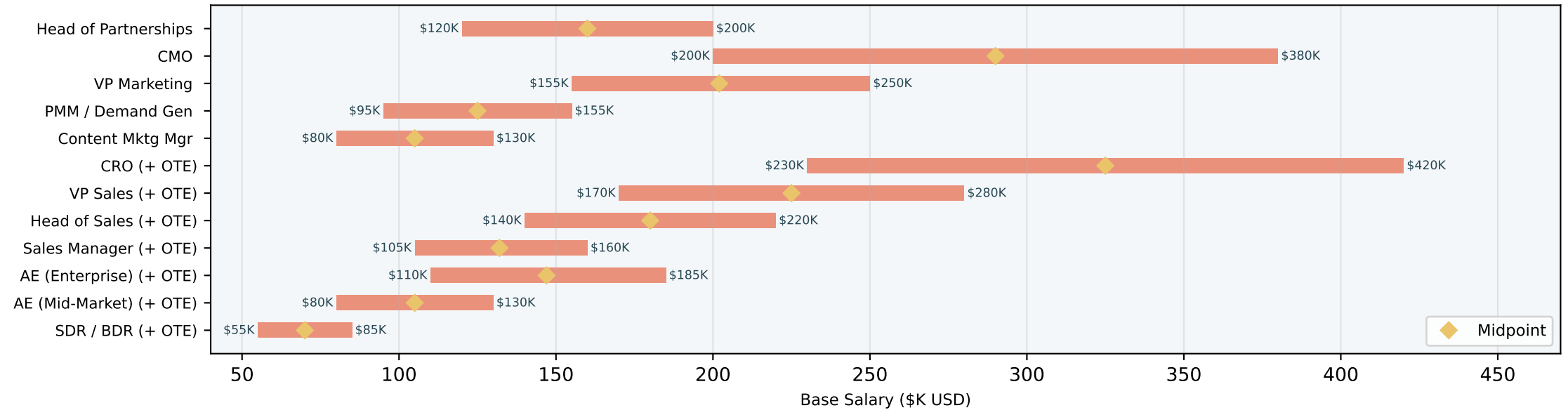
TALENT SOURCE MIX



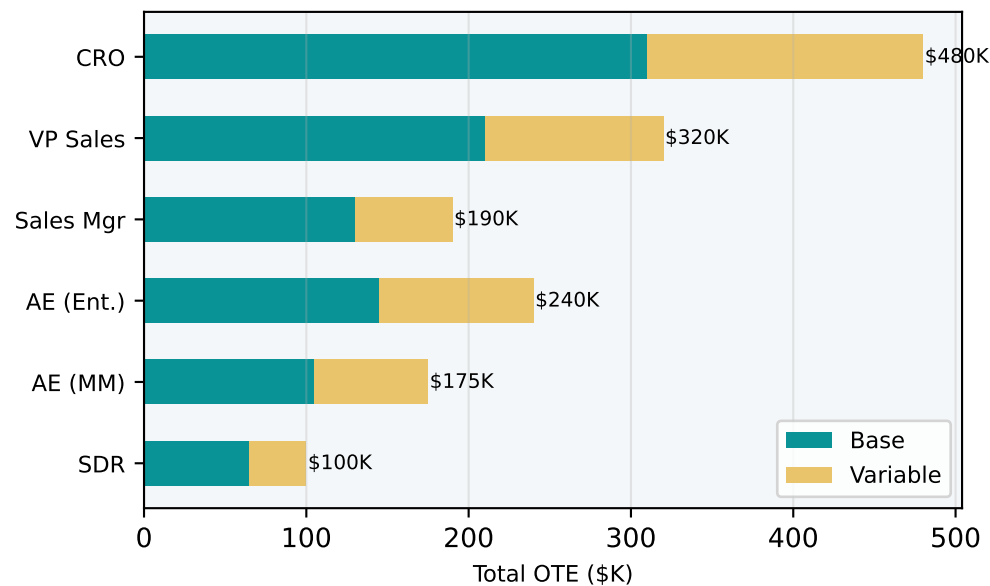
BASE SALARY RANGES — SEED → SERIES B+ (\$K USD, US MARKET)**TYPICAL EQUITY GRANTS BY STAGE (%)****AVERAGE TIME-TO-FILL (WEEKS)**

Sales, marketing, growth, partnerships & revenue leadership

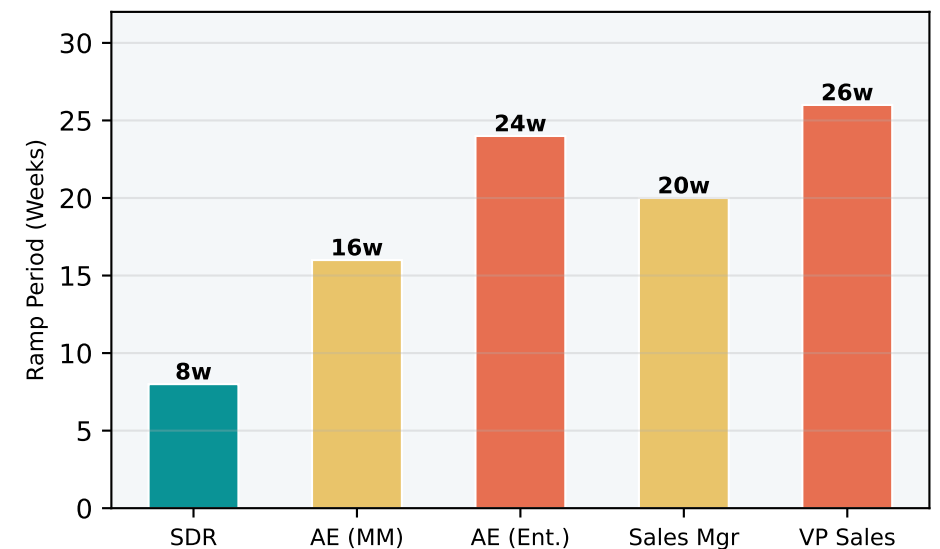
BASE SALARY RANGES — GTM ROLES (\$K USD) | SALES ROLES SHOWN AS BASE; OTE TYPICALLY 1.8-2.2×



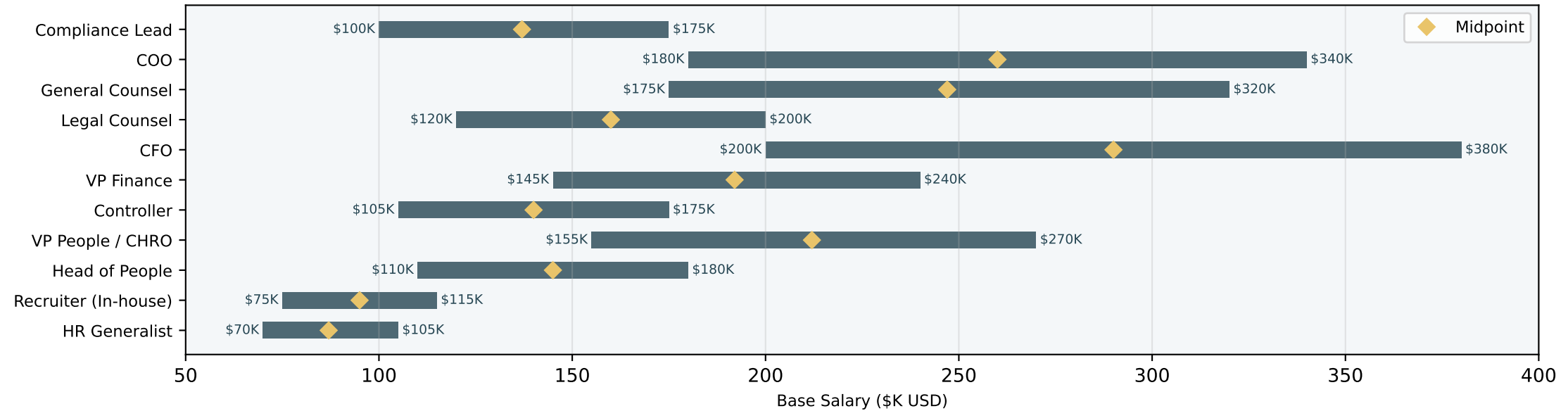
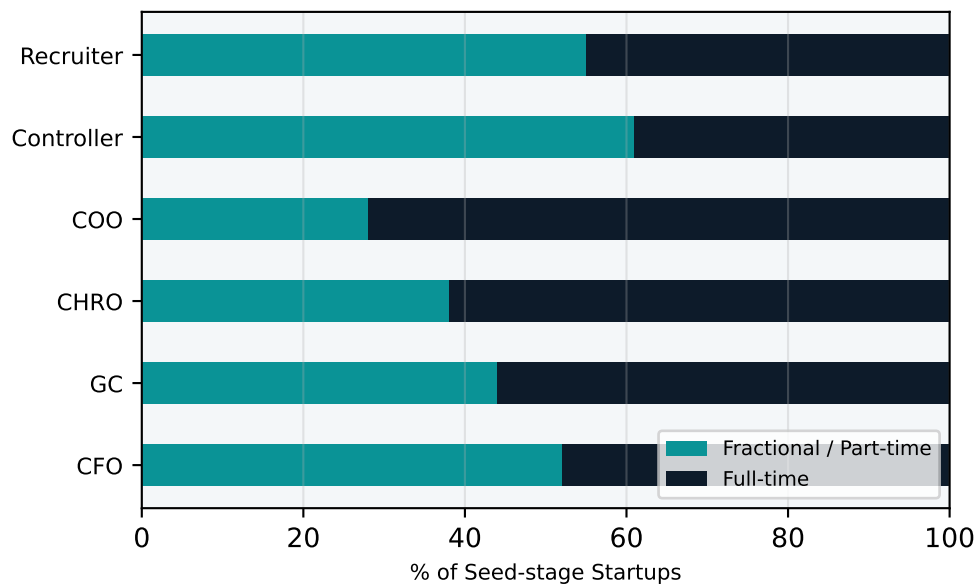
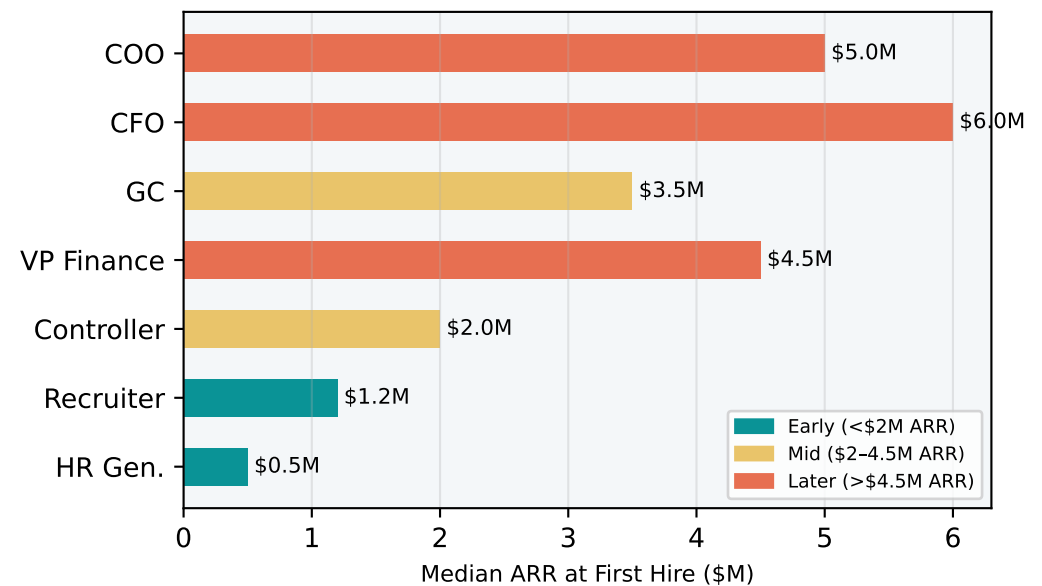
OTE BREAKDOWN — BASE VS. VARIABLE



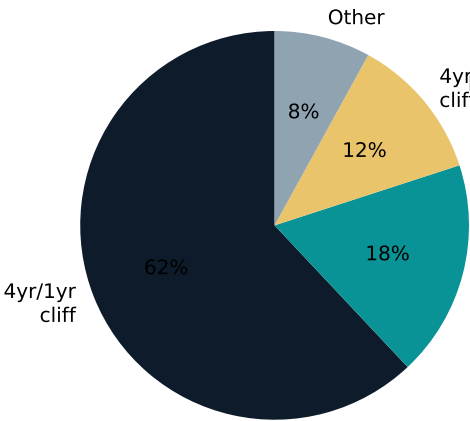
EXPECTED RAMP PERIOD BY ROLE



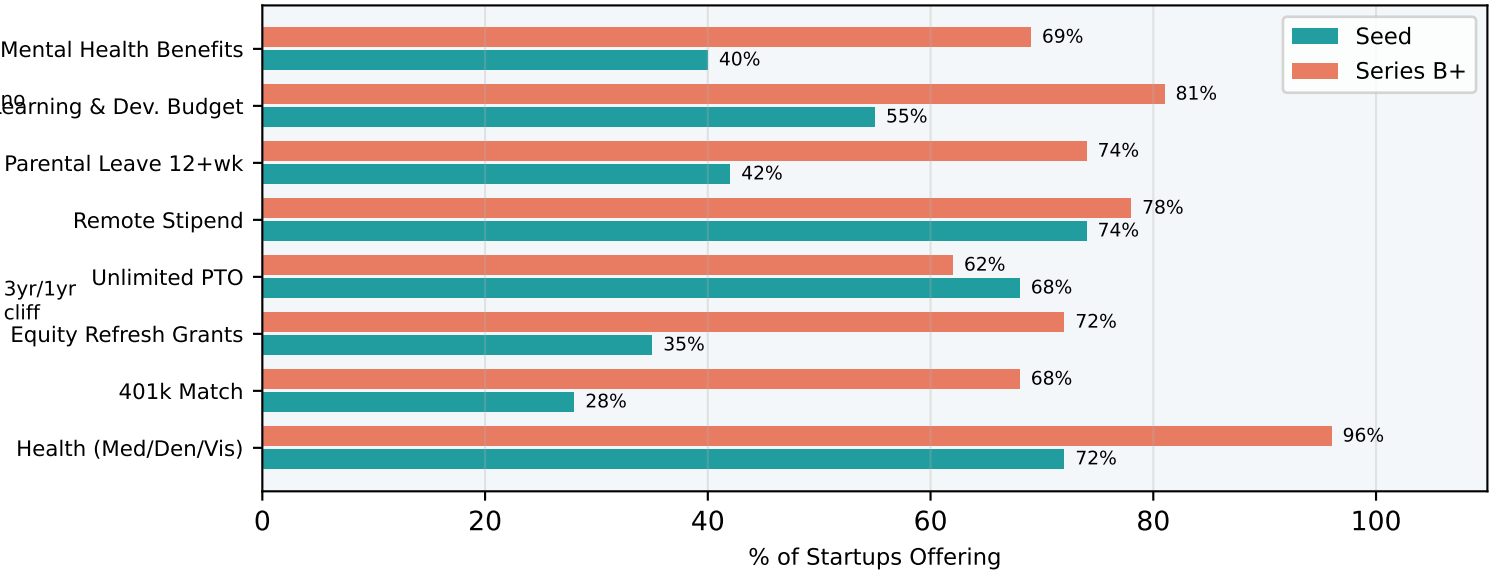
GC, CFO, COO, HR/People, Compliance & Fractional roles

BASE SALARY RANGES — LEGAL, FINANCE & OPS (\$K USD)**FRACTIONAL VS. FT ADOPTION (SEED STAGE)****MEDIAN ARR AT FIRST HIRE BY FUNCTION**

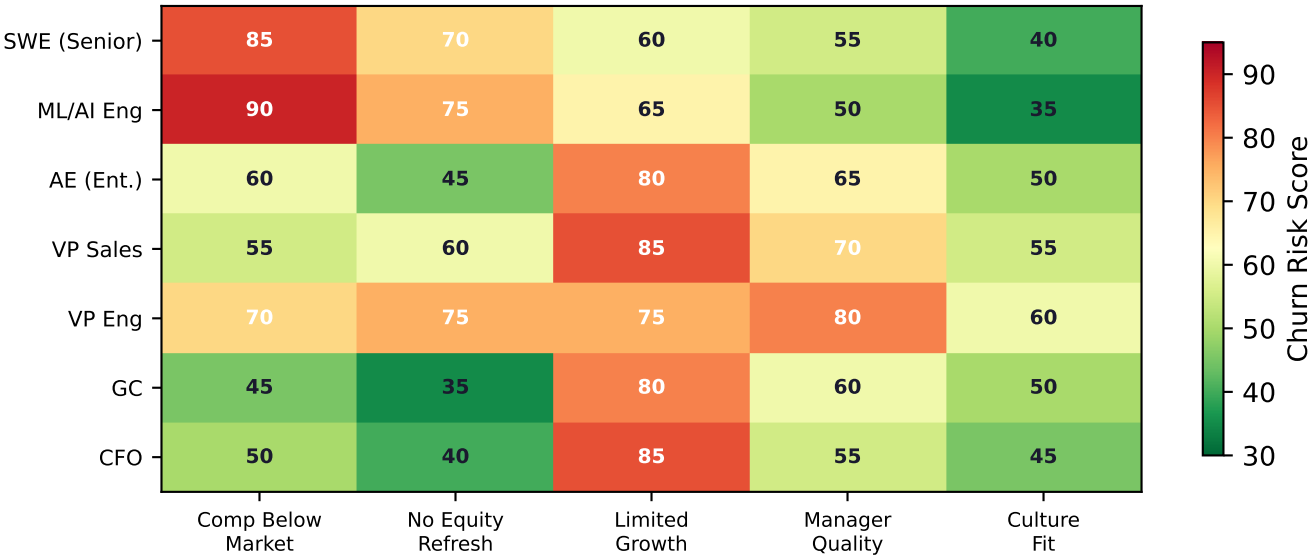
VESTING SCHEDULE MIX



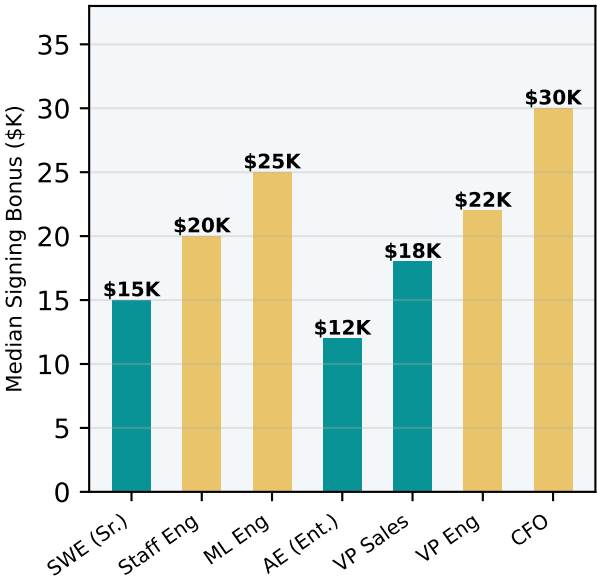
BENEFITS ADOPTION RATE BY STAGE



RETENTION RISK HEATMAP — CHURN RISK SCORE BY ROLE & FACTOR



MEDIAN SIGNING BONUSES (\$K)

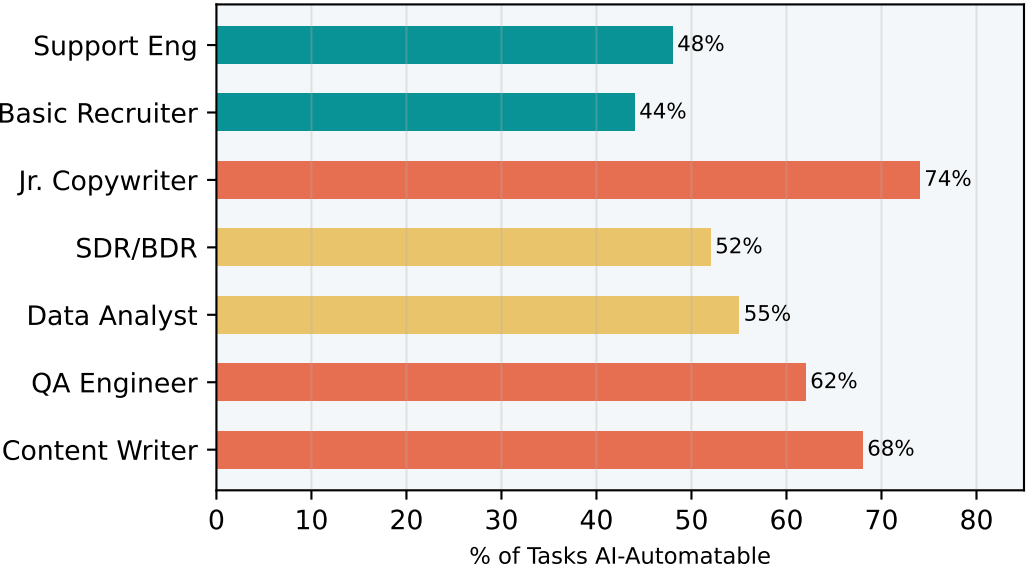


Which roles to hire when, and how to sequence your team

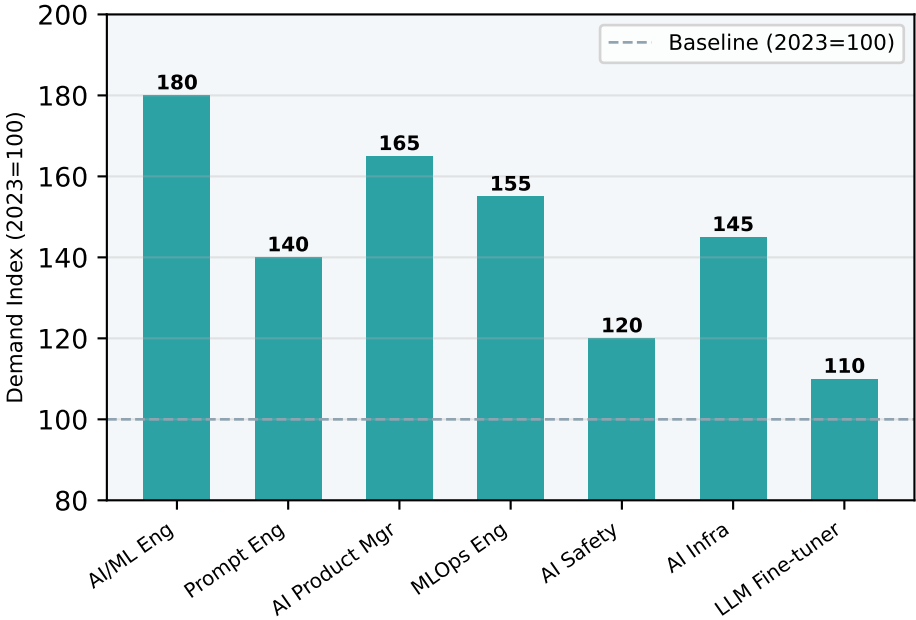
PRE-SEED · <\$500K Raised	SEED · 1M-4M Raised	SERIES A · 5M-20M Raised	SERIES B · 20M-80M Raised	SERIES C+ · \$80M+ Raised
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-founders cover all functions • 1-3 engineers (often founding eng) • NO dedicated GTM, Finance, or Legal yet • Leverage advisors & fractional CFO • Focus: product-market fit signal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First 3-8 FTE engineers • Founding AE or Head of Sales (if B2B) • 1 generalist marketer or PMM • Fractional CFO + bookkeeper • Outside counsel (no in-house yet) • HR Generalist if >15 FTEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale eng to 10-20 FTEs; add Staff/Leads • Build out AE team (3-6 reps) • VP Sales or Head of Sales (key hire) • Head of Marketing or VP Marketing • In-house Recruiter (critical) • Controller + VP Finance • People/HR Lead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CTO, VP Eng, Head of Data/ML • CRO or VP Sales (if not already) • CMO or VP Marketing • General Counsel (first in-house) • CFO (full-time) • COO or Chief of Staff • Head of Customer Success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C-suite complete; functional VPs • GM / Division Heads for new bets • Dedicated Security, Compliance leads • CHRO / VP People at scale • Strategy, Corp Dev, M&A roles • Board-level CFO caliber

How AI is reshaping team composition and role demand

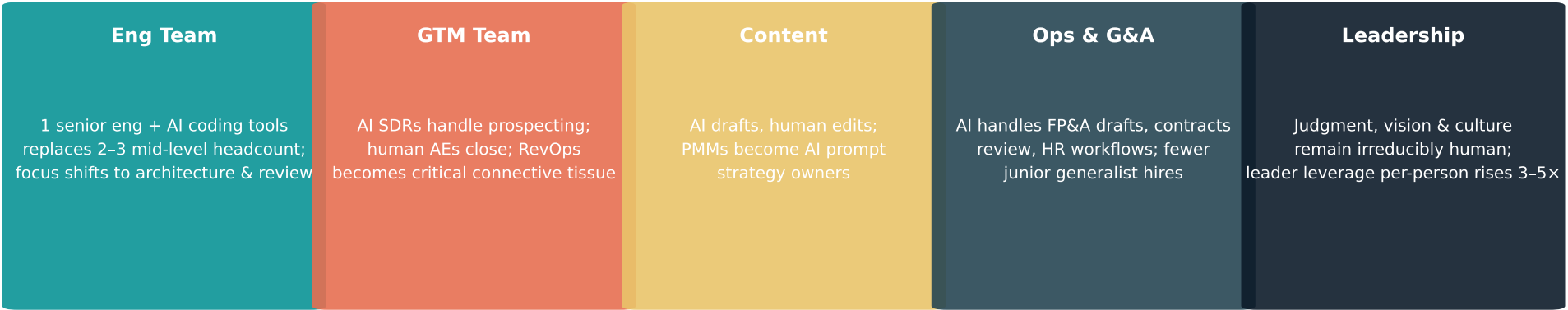
ROLES W/ HIGHEST AI TASK DISPLACEMENT



NET-NEW AI ROLE DEMAND INDEX



The AI-Augmented Startup Team Model — 2027 Outlook



Actionable guidance for 2026–2027 hiring decisions

✂ **Move Faster Than the Market**

Top candidates are off the market within 10–14 days of first outreach. Streamline your process to ≤4 interview rounds. Use a scorecard to align interviewers before the first screen.

□ **Lead With Total Comp Transparency**

Publish salary bands publicly or share them in the first call. Candidates who learn comp late drop 3× more often. Include equity value illustration at current 409A and 3 exit scenarios.

□ **Embrace Remote as a Competitive Moat**

Remote-first startups access 4× the talent pool at equivalent comp. On-site mandates below 100 employees reduce qualified applicant flow by 30–40% in technical and GTM roles.

□ **Invest in Referral Infrastructure**

Employee referrals produce 2.3× better retention at 18 months vs. LinkedIn hires. Build a structured referral bonus (5K–15K for senior hires) and track pipeline quarterly.

□ **Use Fractionals to Derisk Senior Hires**

Before committing to a \$300K+ GC or CFO, run a 90-day fractional engagement. 67% convert to full-time within 6 months — with dramatically higher fit confidence on both sides.

□ **Bake AI Aptitude Into Every Job Description**

Candidates who are AI-native are 20–40% more productive in early data. Assess AI fluency in every role — even non-technical — as a tier-1 evaluation criterion going forward.