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2026 TEXAS CONTRACT RATE GUIDE

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Table of contents

Introduction

Providing an overview of the salary guide and explaining the data collection process for accurate market analysis.

Cloud computing

Average hourly rates by experience level along with key talent insights in Texas.

Director’s comments, market overview and employee insights

In-depth analysis of industry trends and expert insights, including the digital market sentiment and the impact of AI on the job market.

Analytics

Average hourly rates by experience level along with key talent insights in Texas.

Data science / AI / ML

Average hourly rates by experience level along with key talent insights in Texas.

Programmatic

Average hourly rates by experience level along with key talent insights in Texas.

Introduction

Welcome to Digital Republic Talent's 2026 Texas contract rate guide

Following the incredible response to our annual US and UK Salary Guides, we are now expanding our analysis to provide in-depth insights into the Texas market. We are excited to present an updated overview of average hourly rates for the most common job roles in the following markets: Data Science, Cloud Computing, ML, AI, Analytics and Programmatic.

Our methodology involved independent surveys, internal analysis, online sources and data consolidation to ensure accurate salary insights. For this edition, we focused on the average hourly rates in Texas.

In addition to the average hourly figures, we provide key talent statistics, analysis of hiring trends, valuable insights into popular workplace topics, as well as key market predictions for 2026.

By utilizing these resources, we aim to provide you with the most accurate and up-to-date contract rate information in the industry. We hope that this guide proves valuable in your understanding of the current market landscape and assists you in making informed decisions regarding compensation.

Director’s comments

Richard Manso, Founder & Managing Director of Digital Republic Talent

Executive Summary – 2026 Tech and Digital Hiring Outlook

The 2026 talent market is defined by cautious optimism with continued salary growth, especially in AI, ML and data science, following a year of market normalisation. While economic uncertainty has led some tech firms to slow permanent hiring, demand for niche talent remains high, particularly in AI, cloud, and cybersecurity.

Generative AI is reshaping job scopes and driving demand for hybrid skill sets, while psychometric-led hiring is improving retention by ensuring stronger cultural alignment. The market is polarising, with specialists in high demand and generalists facing increased competition. Texas continues to be a key tech hiring hub, and in digital media, hiring remains strong despite consolidation, with flexible models gaining traction across both sectors.

The outlook for 2026 suggests cautious optimism in tech hiring. While economic headwinds persist, businesses are expected to gradually re-invest in key digital and data capabilities, particularly in AI, cloud and analytics, driven by innovation needs and competitive pressure. Flexible, value-led hiring models will continue to dominate, with an emphasis on specialist talent that can deliver measurable impact.

Job Market Overview in Texas

Texas remains a high-growth market for AI, Machine Learning, Analytics, Data Science and Digital Media roles, with Austin and Dallas ranking among the top 10 US cities for tech hiring. Salaries for mid-level Data Scientists and ML engineers in Texas now average between $125,000–$150,000, with senior roles exceeding $180,000.

Demand is particularly strong in energy, healthcare and enterprise consulting, where AI and data applications are driving operational efficiency and product innovation. Digital media talent is also in demand, especially those skilled in programmatic, performance analytics, and CDPs. While some firms have slowed permanent hiring, flexible models such as contract, freelance or subscription-based are gaining traction to meet project needs without long-term headcount risk.

Director’s comments

Richard Manso, Founder & Managing Director of Digital Republic Talent

Why Some Companies Are Slowing Hiring Amid Economic Uncertainty

Across both markets, hiring has become more selective as organisations respond to tightening budgets, cautious client demand, and increased investor pressure to improve operational efficiency. Rather than rapid scaling, firms are prioritising business-critical and ROI-driven roles, particularly where automation and AI enable leaner teams to deliver more with less. Combined with budget constraints and the need for agility, many organisations are delaying permanent headcount expansion and increasingly turning to flexible, project-based, or contract talent to maintain delivery without long-term cost commitments.

Contract and Freelance Hiring Outlook

In 2026, contract and freelance hiring in the U.S. tech and digital sectors is expected to accelerate as companies seek flexibility amid ongoing economic uncertainty. Businesses are prioritising short-term, high-impact hires across AI, data, cloud, and digital media to maintain momentum without expanding permanent headcount.

In specific cases, senior contractors in areas like MLOps, LLM engineering and cloud security are commanding hourly rates of $100–$150.

Demand is also rising for freelance specialists in programmatic media, AI training, and data analytics. Remote work, compliance platforms, and project-based scoping have made contingent hiring easier and more scalable. Growth-stage companies and agencies are favouring embedded talent and subscription-based recruitment models. This shift reflects a broader trend: performance-led, flexible hiring that reduces overhead while securing top-tier talent.

The Surge in Demand for AI/ML, Cloud and Cybersecurity Talent

The surge in demand for AI/ML, cloud and cybersecurity talent is being driven by accelerated digital transformation, competitive innovation and growing security threats. Organisations adopting AI and cloud technologies require specialists in ML, MLOps, LLM engineering and secure infrastructure. With these capabilities now core to modern business operations, demand for deeply specialised

Director’s comments

Richard Manso, Founder & Managing Director of Digital Republic Talent

professionals remains at an all-time high across both regions.

How Psychometric-Led Hiring Is Improving Retention

Psychometric-led hiring is playing a growing role in improving retention by ensuring stronger alignment between candidates and company culture, values and working styles beyond technical skills alone. By assessing behavioural traits, motivation, emotional intelligence and team compatibility, employers are identifying candidates more likely to stay engaged and succeed long-term. This data-driven approach is proving especially valuable in fields such as AI, data and cloud, and in hybrid or remote-first environments.

The Polarisation of the Job Market

The tech labour market has become increasingly polarised, with strong demand for specialised talent and growing competition for more generalist roles. As businesses prioritise measurable outcomes and leaner teams, investment is focused on niche experts who can deliver immediate, high-impact solutions. In contrast, generalist candidates face increased competition, particularly as automation reduces the need for broad, non-specialised roles.
This shift is encouraging professionals to upskill, specialise and build deeper domain expertise to remain competitive.

Hiring in Digital Media and Flexible Talent Models

Hiring across the digital media and agency sector remains active but more selective as organisations respond to shifting client budgets and consolidation. Despite restructuring in some areas, demand remains strong for programmatic, paid media, analytics and performance-driven talent. Across the US, agencies and in-house teams are increasingly favouring flexible hiring models, including contract and freelance, to scale delivery and manage costs.

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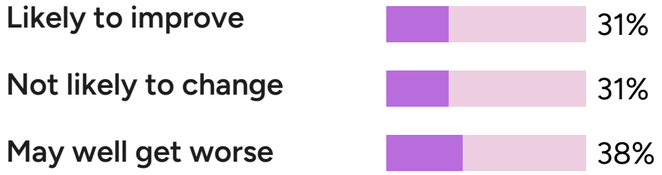
Insights

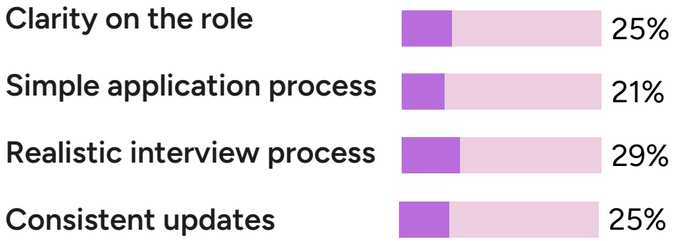
2026 digital hiring landscape and candidate insights

The following polls capture real-time sentiment from digital and technology professionals across AI, Data, Cloud, Analytics and Programmatic markets. They provide a snapshot of current expectations around the job market, growth areas, hiring success factors and candidate priorities as we look ahead to 2026. The results offer valuable context to the charts below, highlighting the key themes shaping both hiring and career decisions.

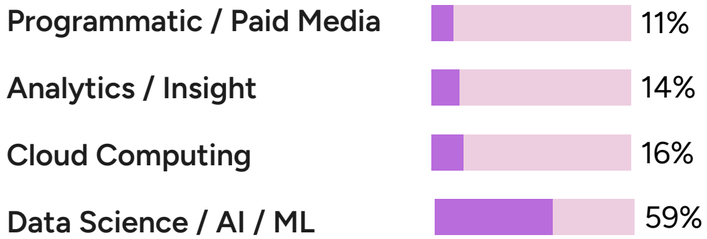
What are your thoughts on the job market for 2026?



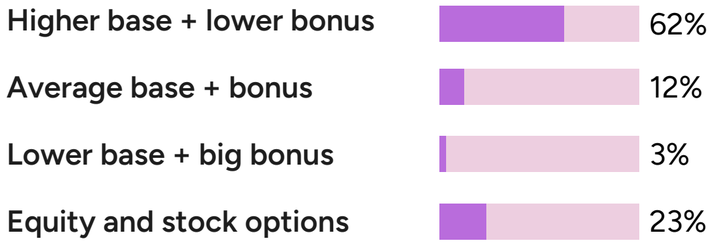
What matters most to you when applying for a role?



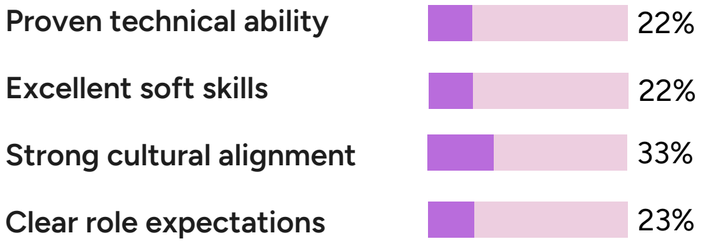
Which of the following markets do you think will experience the most growth in 2026?



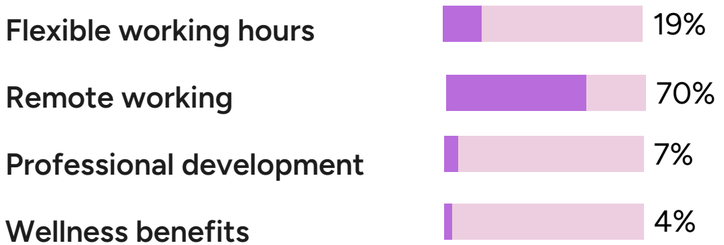
If you could choose, which type of compensation structure would you prefer?



Which factor has the biggest impact on long-term success when hiring technical talent?



What's the biggest perk an employer can provide?



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Data science
AI / ML

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Data science / AI / ML - Contract

Average hourly contract rates - Texas

Market	Entry Level	Mid Level	Manager / Lead / Principal	VP / Head of / Director
Data Science	$55	$80	$100	$130
Machine Learning	$55	$85	$105	$130
AI	$60	$95	$115	$135
Deep Learning	$55	$75	$95	$125
Computer Vision	$55	$85	$95	$120
MLOps	$55	$80	$105	$125
Natural Language Processing	$70	$95	$115	$130

The following estimates are rough ranges for hourly rates in USD ($) for the mentioned role types in Texas. These figures serve as a general guide, and it's important to consider various factors when determining the appropriate hourly rate for contract employment, such as specific location, the scope of responsibilities, level of expertise, and market demand.

Market overview and talent insights

Data science / AI / ML

The data science and AI/ML market is expected to continue growing in 2026 as organisations operationalise GenAI and invest in modern analytics, machine learning and MLOps platforms. The data science platform market is forecast to reach approximately $204B in 2026, while worldwide AI spending is projected to exceed $2.0T, driven by AI software, infrastructure, and enterprise adoption across sectors including software, banking, retail and healthcare. “AI-ready data” is emerging as a key constraint, with 63% of organisations lacking adequate data management practices for AI, reinforcing the premium on specialist talent as demand continues to outstrip supply.

- **2,701,174** Professionals within the US talent pool on LinkedIn
- **42%** Growth in professionals with AI & ML skills in the US
- **497,960** Professionals in the US changed jobs during the past year
- **17,679** Full-time open job posts in the US
- **1.3** Median length of service in the US
- **63% / 37%** Male / female split in the US

- **156,458** Professionals within the Texas talent pool on LinkedIn
- **47%** Growth in professionals with AI & ML skills in Texas
- **30,764** Professionals in Texas changed jobs during the past year
- **4,578** Full-time open job posts in Texas
- **1.3** Median length of service in Texas
- **67% / 33%** Male / female split in Texas

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Analytics

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Analytics - Contract

Average hourly contract rates - Texas

Market	Entry Level	Mid Level	Manager / Lead / Principal	VP / Head of / Director
Web Analytics	$55	$70	$85	$95
Conversion Rate Optimisation	$50	$65	$80	$90
Insight	$50	$65	$80	$90
Product	$60	$75	$90	$105
Implementation	$55	$75	$90	$100

The following estimates are rough ranges for hourly rates in USD ($) for the mentioned role types in Texas. These figures serve as a general guide, and it's important to consider various factors when determining the appropriate hourly rate for contract employment, such as specific location, the scope of responsibilities, level of expertise, and market demand.

Market overview and talent insights

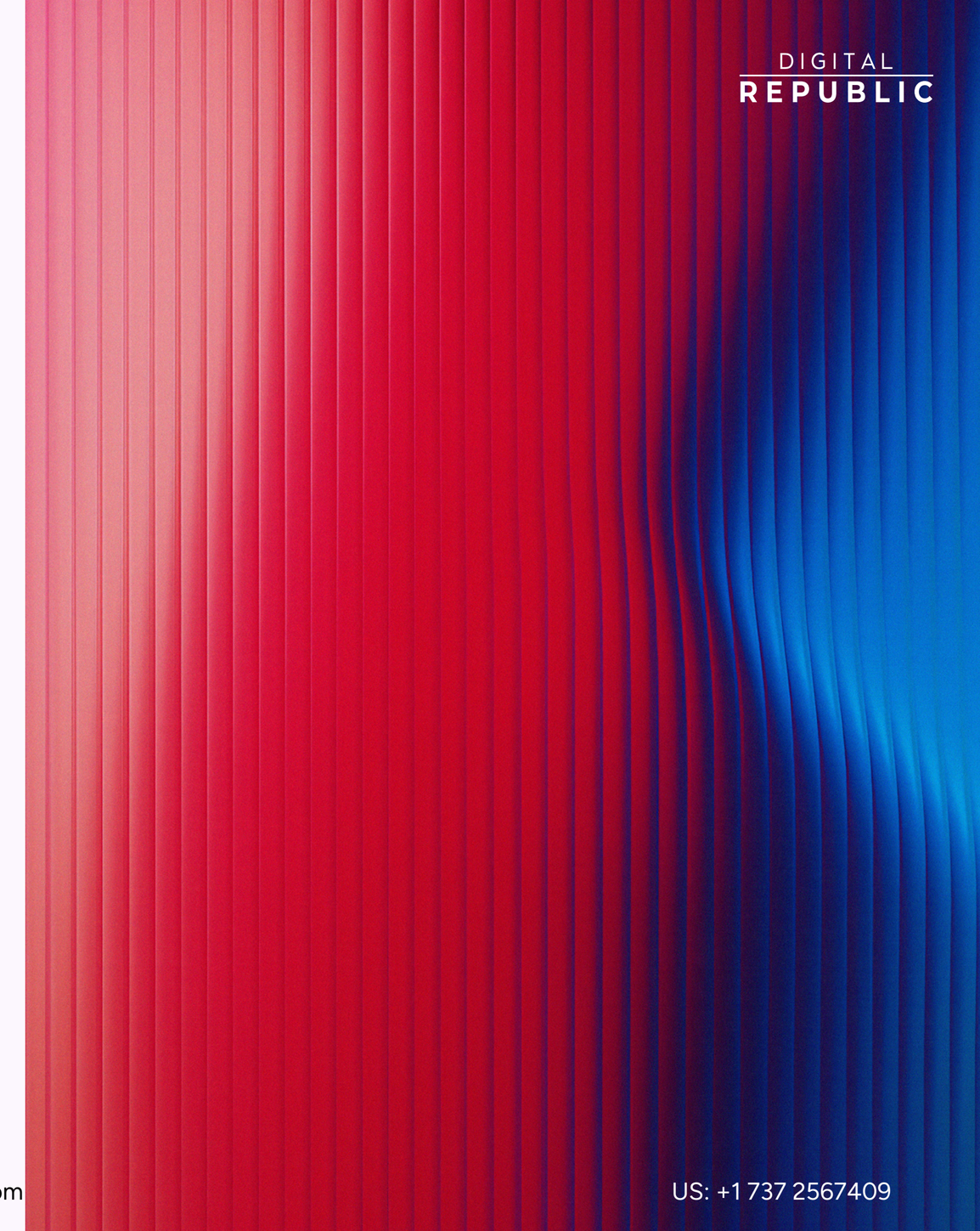
Analytics

Predictive and real-time analytics, GenAI-enabled BI, and IoT/edge data are accelerating Analytics investment in 2026. The global data analytics market is projected to grow from $82.23B in 2025 to $402.70B by 2032 (25.5% CAGR), with real-time and edge-driven use cases among the fastest-growing segments. Gartner expects 75% of new analytics content to be contextualized via GenAI by 2027, pushing augmented, self-service analytics to more business users. As a result, demand is rising for talent who can pair analytics engineering with business-facing storytelling, governance and responsible AI.

- **866,331** Professionals within the US talent pool on LinkedIn
- **8%** Growth in professionals with Analytics skills in the US
- **153,209** Professionals in the US changed jobs during the past year
- **1,893** Full-time open job posts in the US
- **1.8** Median length of service in the US
- **56% / 44%** Male / female split in the US

- **139,689** Professionals within the Texas talent pool on LinkedIn
- **12%** Growth in professionals with Analytics skills in Texas
- **20,915** Professionals in Texas changed jobs during the past year
- **2,401** Full-time open job posts in Texas
- **1.9** Median length of service in Texas
- **57% / 43%** Male / female split in Texas

Cloud computing



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Cloud computing - Contract

Average hourly contract rates - Texas

Market	Entry Level	Mid Level	Manager / Lead / Principal	VP / Head of / Director
Cloud Infrastructure	$60	$80	$105	$130
Data Architecture	$65	$90	$110	$135
Data Engineering	$60	$80	$105	$125
Cloud Training	$65	$90	$125	$140
DevOps	$65	$90	$125	$135
Site Reliability Engineering	$60	$80	$120	$135

The following estimates are rough ranges for hourly rates in USD ($) for the mentioned role types in Texas. These figures serve as a general guide, and it's important to consider various factors when determining the appropriate hourly rate for contract employment, such as specific location, the scope of responsibilities, level of expertise, and market demand.

Market overview and talent insights

Cloud computing

The Cloud market stays in high-growth mode in 2026 as enterprises scale AI workloads and modernize core applications. IDC expects public cloud services spending to double by 2028 (19.4% CAGR), underscoring continued momentum into 2026. Gartner projects end-user public cloud services spending in Europe to grow 24% in 2026 and that public cloud will exceed 45% of enterprise IT spending by 2026. Hybrid remains the default, with 90% of organizations are expected to run hybrid cloud by 2027, driving demand for secure, governable IaaS/PaaS and integrated AI platforms.

- **3,343,822** Professionals within the US talent pool on LinkedIn
- **13%** Growth in professionals with Cloud skills in the US
- **406,675** Professionals in the US changed jobs during the past year
- **17,650** Full-time open job posts in the US
- **2.0** Median length of service in the US
- **75% / 25%** Male / female split in the US

- **247,306** Professionals within Texas talent pool on LinkedIn
- **16%** Growth in professionals with Cloud skills in Texas
- **28,834** Professionals in Texas changed jobs during the past year
- **9,290** Full-time open job posts in Texas
- **2.1** Median length of service in Texas
- **77% / 23%** Male / female split in Texas

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Programmatic

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Programmatic - Contract

Average hourly contract rates - Texas

Market	Entry Level	Mid Level	Manager / Lead / Principal	VP / Head of / Director
Account Management	$55	$70	$85	$95
Trading	$55	$70	$85	$95
Media Buying	$50	$65	$80	$90
Sales / Business Development	$50	$65	$80	$90
AdOps	$50	$65	$80	$90

The following estimates are rough ranges for hourly rates in USD ($) for the mentioned role types in Texas. These figures serve as a general guide, and it's important to consider various factors when determining the appropriate hourly rate for contract employment, such as specific location, the scope of responsibilities, level of expertise, and market demand.

Market overview and talent insights

Programmatic

Programmatic advertising remains the engine of digital display growth in 2026, with US programmatic display spending projected to surpass $200B. Globally, programmatic is expected to deliver nearly all net-new display growth, accounting for ~96% of new display ad dollars in 2026. AI-driven bidding, audience modeling and creative automation continue to improve performance, while budgets consolidate into more data-rich, curated environments (including retail media and private marketplaces). Connected TV keeps gaining share, with ~$37.7B in US CTV ad spend projected for 2026 on the way to $46.9B by 2028.

- **1,361,029** — Professionals within the US talent pool on LinkedIn
- **35%** — Growth in professionals with Programmatic skills in the US
- **232,676** — Professionals in the US changed jobs during the past year
- **879** — Full-time open job posts in the US
- **1.9** — Median length of service in the US
- **53% / 47%** — Male / female split in the US

- **110,834** — Professionals within the Texas talent pool on LinkedIn
- **12%** — Growth in professionals with Programmatic skills in Texas
- **17,581** — Professionals in Texas changed jobs during the past year
- **876** — Full-time open job posts in Texas
- **1.8** — Median length of service in Texas
- **51% / 49%** — Male / female split in Texas

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Get in touch today

We hope you've found our 2026 Texas Contract Rate Guide useful. Should you require any further information, please feel free to contact us via any of the channels listed.

If you are interested in average hourly and daily rates, please check our 2026 Texas Salary Guide.

If you are interested in a new role or hire, contact our friendly team who are fully equipped with market intel. Visit our Advice Hub on our website for various resources to support your job-seeking and hiring needs.

For further information on our products and services, or if you have any questions on the content of our 2026 Texas Contract Rate Guide, please contact us at info@digitalrepublictalent.com.

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