

State of FDE Hiring 2026

What 1,465 real job postings say about the hottest job in AI.



By **Salome**, topfdejobs

 **499 companies**, tracked daily on employers' own career boards

 Every role reviewed by our editor with Claude



INSIDE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The big picture

Forward deployed is the hottest title in AI, and it's a real engineering job: more than 8 in 10 postings require writing code, and the median role pays \$200k.

Between October 7 and October 28, 2026, topfdejobs tracked 1,465 forward deployed engineer postings at 499 companies, read from the employers' own career boards. Our editor reviewed every one with Claude, against a written definition of the role, and we left out recruiter reposts, duplicate postings and roles that only borrow the title.

We put that census next to the best third-party data on the role: Lightcast's posting counts, Google search interest and the money that AI labs, cloud providers and consultancies committed to forward deployment in the past year.

Real FDE job postings

1,465

Companies hiring

499

Median posted base pay

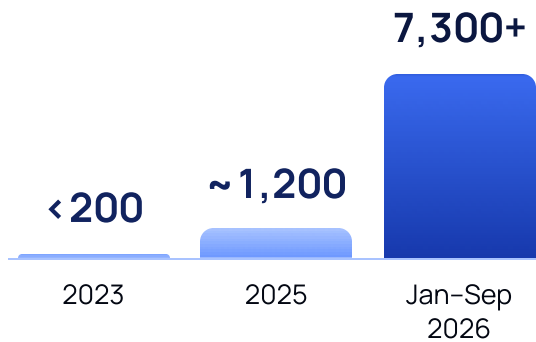
\$200k

Key findings

SIX THINGS TO KNOW

1 Demand went vertical.

US FDE job postings (Lightcast)



2 \$200k median pay, and AI labs pay \$93k more than consultancies.

AI labs

\$262k

Consultancies

\$169k

Median posted base pay. All roles: \$200k.

3 Remote barely changes pay, but it's rare.

Remote

\$194k

On-site

\$200k



But only **17%** of roles are remote.

4 It's an engineering job.

require writing code

88%

carry a sales quota

2.4%



Half mention travel, typically **50%** of the time.

5 The title mostly tells the truth. The label is spreading.

1 in 10

"Forward Deployed Engineer" postings isn't FDE work

But the label is spreading: Product Manager, CRM Architect, Analyst, even an accountant.

6 Four cities hold 45% of the jobs.

SF Bay Area



251

New York



198

Washington DC



92

London



89

45% of roles are in these four metros.

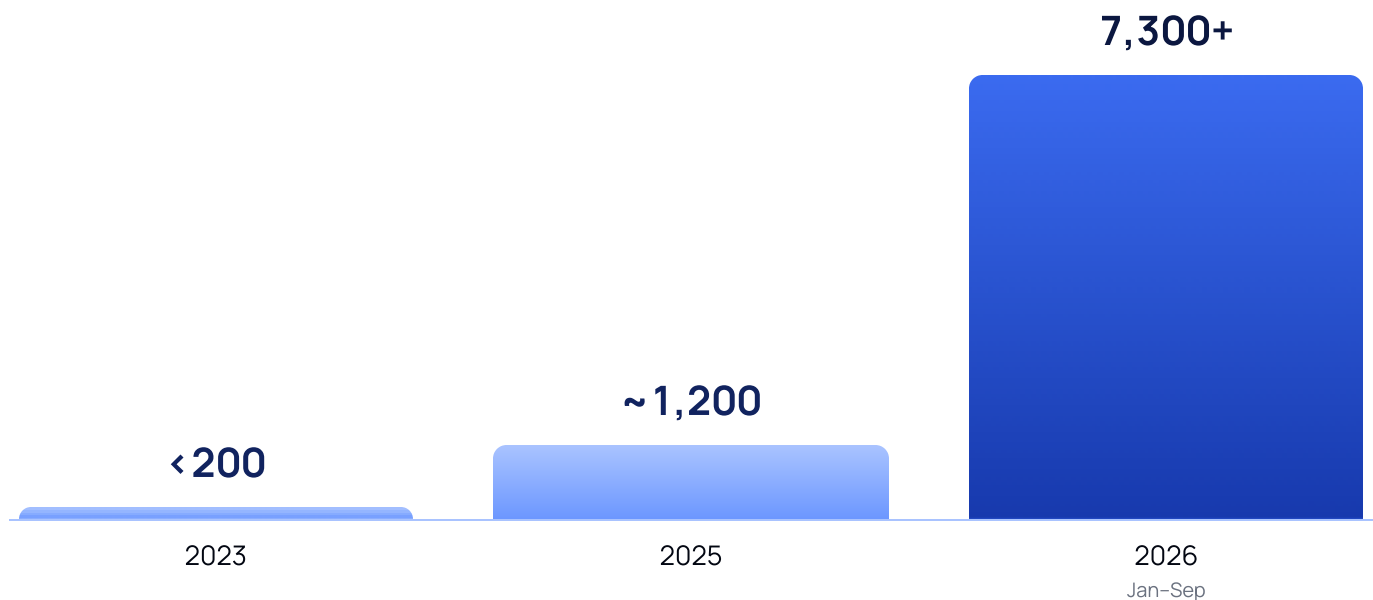
CHAPTER 1

From Palantir niche to category

Palantir built its business on engineers it sent to work inside customer organizations. For a decade the role stayed mostly there. Then generative AI turned "make it work in production at this customer" into the hardest problem in enterprise software, and every AI company needed people to solve it.

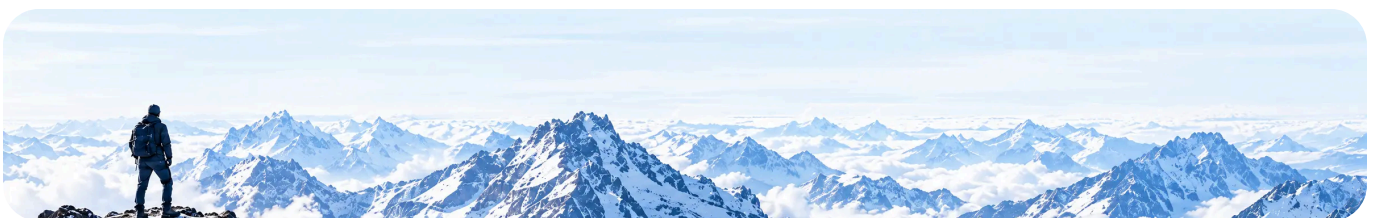
US FDE job postings went from a rounding error to thousands

Job postings with forward deployed engineer titles, United States



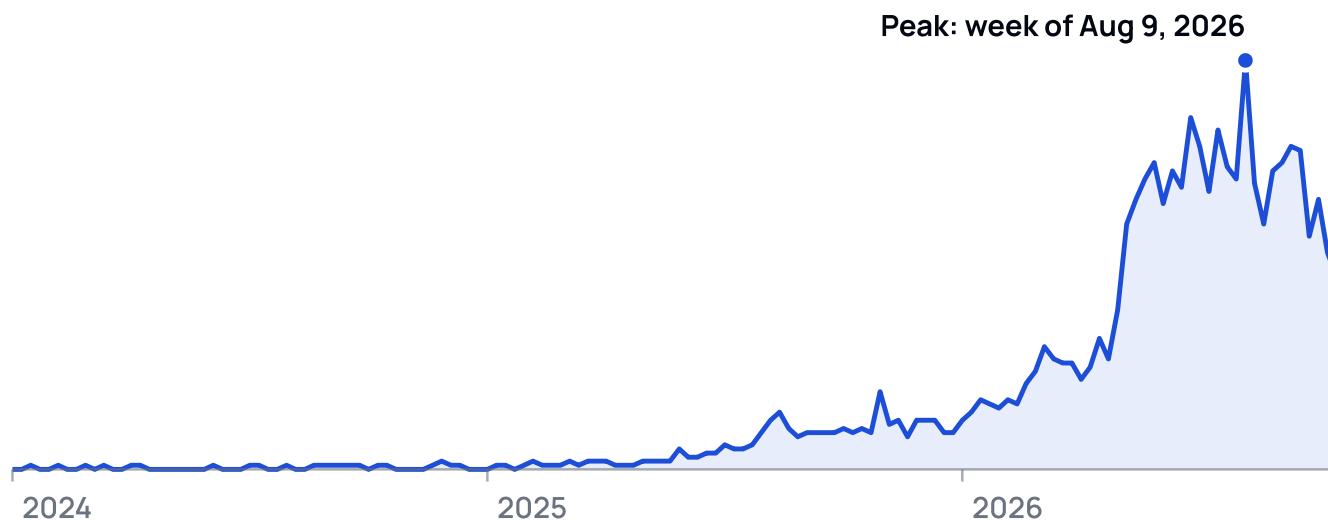
2026 covers January to September only. Lightcast counts every posting, including one role posted in several cities.

Source: Lightcast via CNBC, Oct 15, 2026 (US postings)



Search interest took off in 2026

Google searches for "forward deployed engineer", worldwide, weekly (100 = peak week)



Source: Google Trends, worldwide, weekly, 100 = peak week; pulled Oct 22, 2026

The money followed

Commitments to forward deployment, mid-2025 to October 2026

JUN 2025

a16z calls the FDE "the hottest job in startups"

NOV 2025

FT: Indeed FDE postings up 800%+ from January to September 2025

MAY 2026

Anthropic forms an enterprise AI services company with Blackstone, Hellman & Friedman and Goldman Sachs

MAY 2026

OpenAI launches the OpenAI Deployment Company with more than \$4B

JUN 2026

AWS commits \$1B to a forward deployed engineering org

JUL 2026

Microsoft launches the Frontier Company: about \$2.5B and 6,000 engineers and salespeople

SEP 2026

Accenture and Google Cloud aim to add 1,000 FDEs

OCT 2026

Anthropic commits \$100M to train 10,000 "Frontier Deployed Engineers" at customers and partners by the end of 2027

Source: Company announcements and press; links in the web edition

CHAPTER 2

Who's hiring

499 companies posted at least one real FDE role in our window. Startups make up the largest group. Among the employers we track directly, the biggest are the companies that made the role famous.



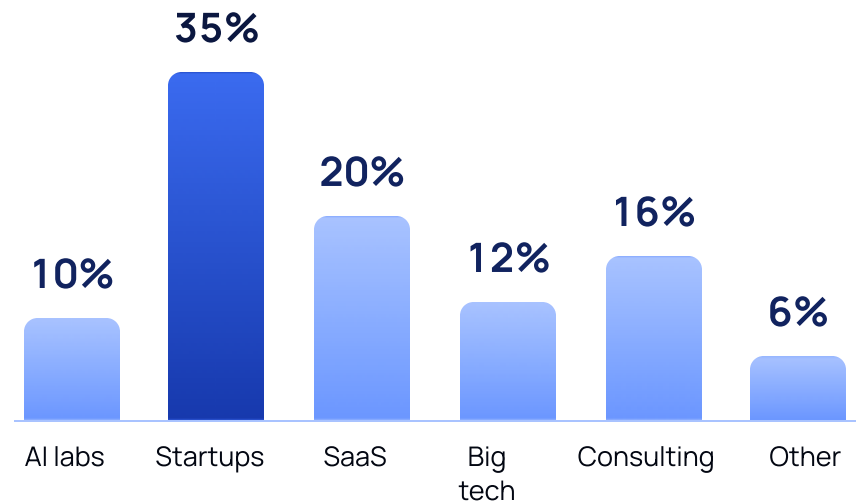
Companies hiring

499

with at least one real FDE role, October 7–28, 2026

A third of FDE roles are at startups

Share of FDE postings by employer type



Source: topfdejobs.com census of 1,465 FDE postings, October 7–28, 2026

Likely undercounts consultancies: several large ones post on Workday, which we only reach through job-search sites.

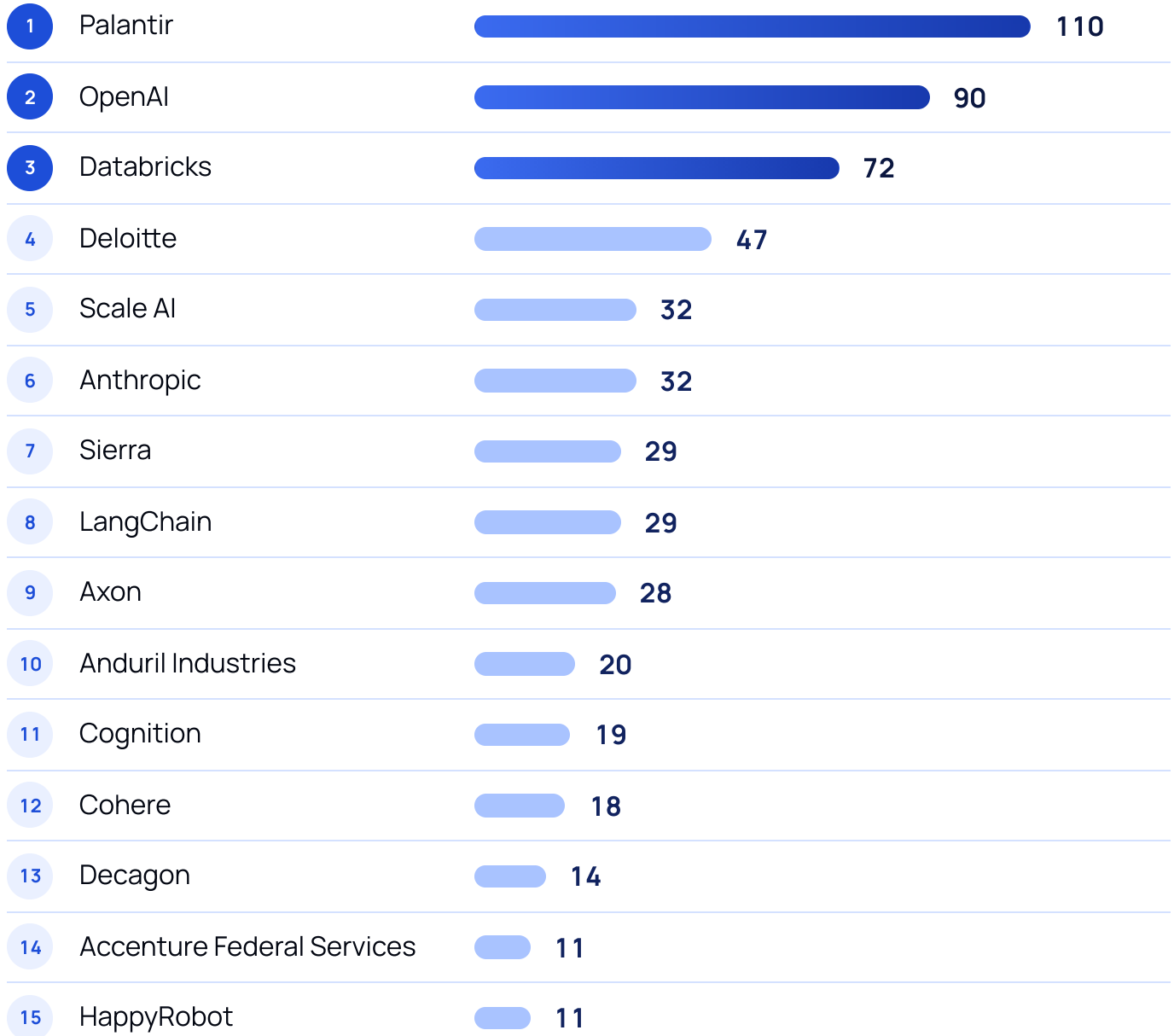
Startups and big tech mention equity, labs rarely do

Share of postings that mention equity, by employer type



Palantir, OpenAI and Databricks post the most FDE roles

FDE postings per company



Postings, not heads: one posting can hire several people, and some employers post one role separately for each city.

Source: topfdejobs.com census of 1,465 FDE postings, October 7–28, 2026



The top three alone posted **19%** of all FDE roles we tracked.

CHAPTER 3

What it pays

We only count pay that's written in the posting or the employer's job board field. 849 US-dollar postings qualify. The middle half of them pay between \$160k and \$232k base.

Median pay

\$200k

(849 postings with verified pay)

Entry n=48

\$140k

Mid n=344

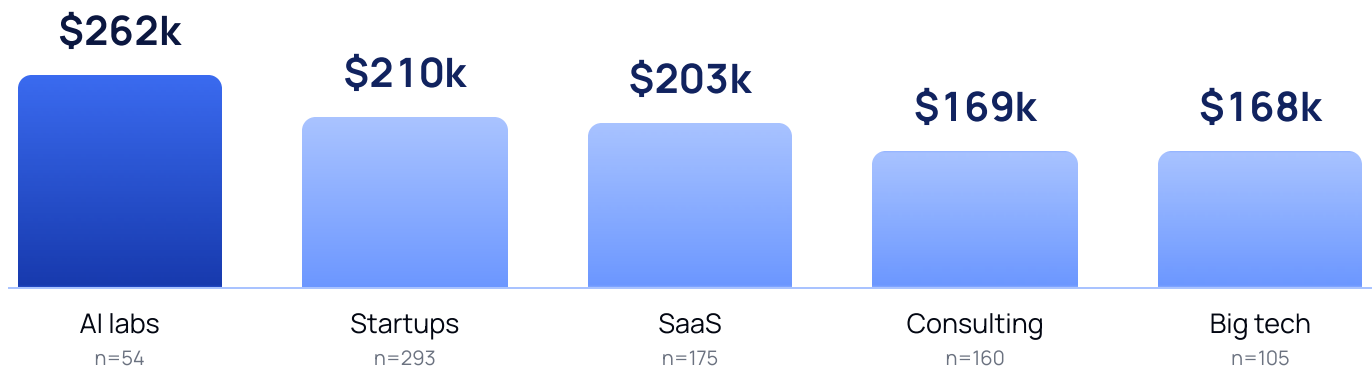
\$175k

Senior n=457

\$216k

AI labs pay \$93k more than consultancies

Median posted base pay by employer type



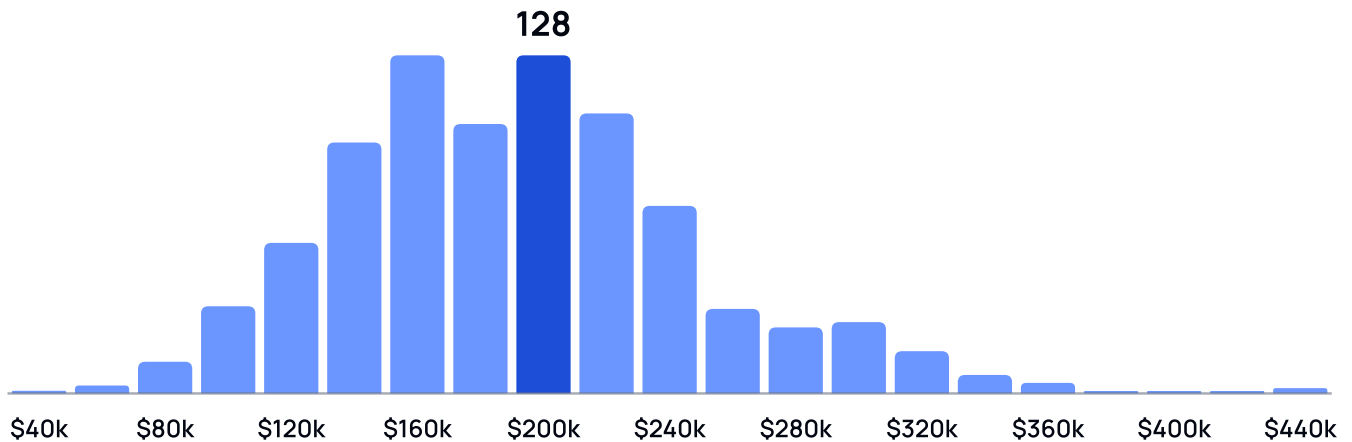
Source: topfdejobs.com, 849 US-dollar postings with verified pay (midpoint of the posted base range)



A quarter of pay ranges top out at **\$300k or more**.

The middle half of FDE roles post between \$160k and \$232k

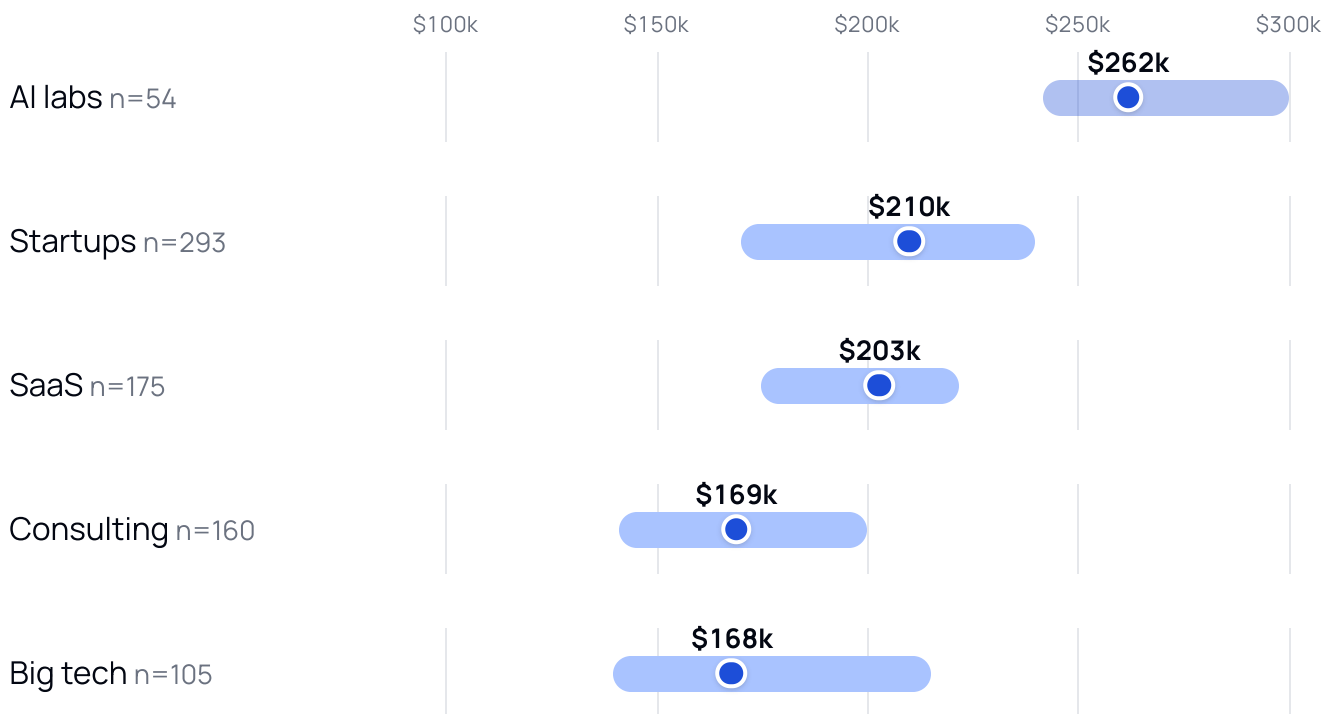
Postings by midpoint of the posted base range, \$20k bands



Source: topfdejobs.com, 849 US-dollar postings with verified pay (midpoint of the posted base range)

The spread inside each employer type

Posted base pay, middle half of postings and median



● Median — Middle half of postings (25th–75th percentile)

Source: topfdejobs.com, 849 US-dollar postings with verified pay (midpoint of the posted base range)

Remote roles pay about the same

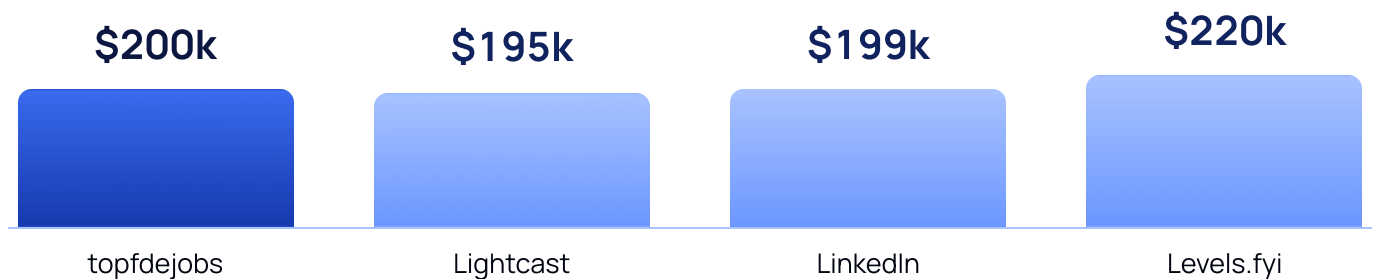
Median posted base pay by workplace



Source: topfdejobs.com, 849 US-dollar postings with verified pay (midpoint of the posted base range)

Every source lands near \$200k

Median FDE pay, by source



Not the same measure: we and Lightcast use posted ranges, LinkedIn uses member data, Levels.fyi is self-reported total pay including equity.

Source: topfdejobs.com; Lightcast via CNBC (Oct 15, 2026); LinkedIn via CNBC Make It (Aug 18, 2026); Levels.fyi (Oct 27, 2026)



BOTTOM LINE

Where you work matters more than how senior you are: the gap between AI labs and consultancies (\$93k) is bigger than the gap between mid-level and senior roles.

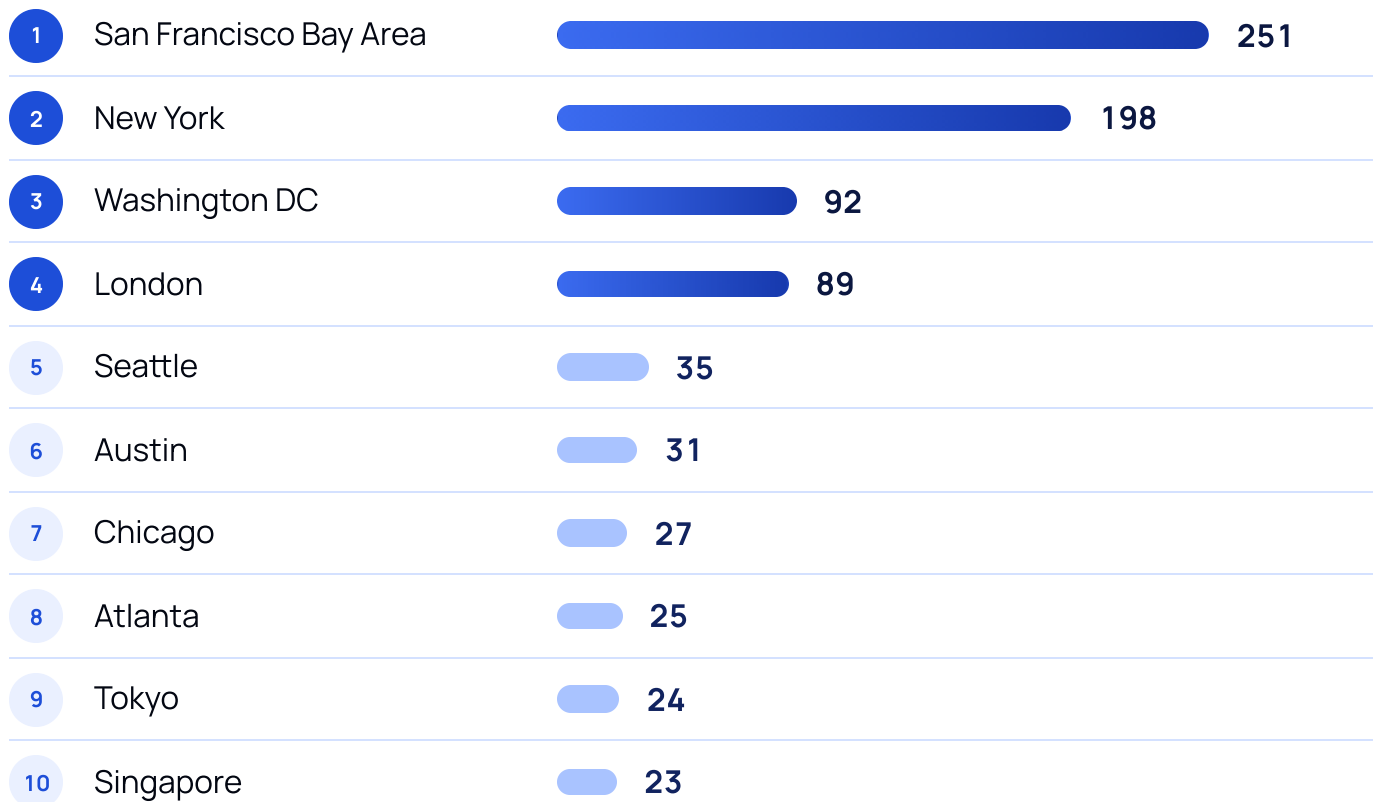
CHAPTER 4

Where and how

FDE work is close to the customer, and the jobs cluster where the customers and the AI companies are: the Bay Area, New York, London and Washington. Only 17% of postings are fully remote.

Four hubs hold 45% of the jobs

FDE postings by metro area



A posting that lists several cities counts once, for the first of these metros it names. Remote-only postings are left out of this chart.

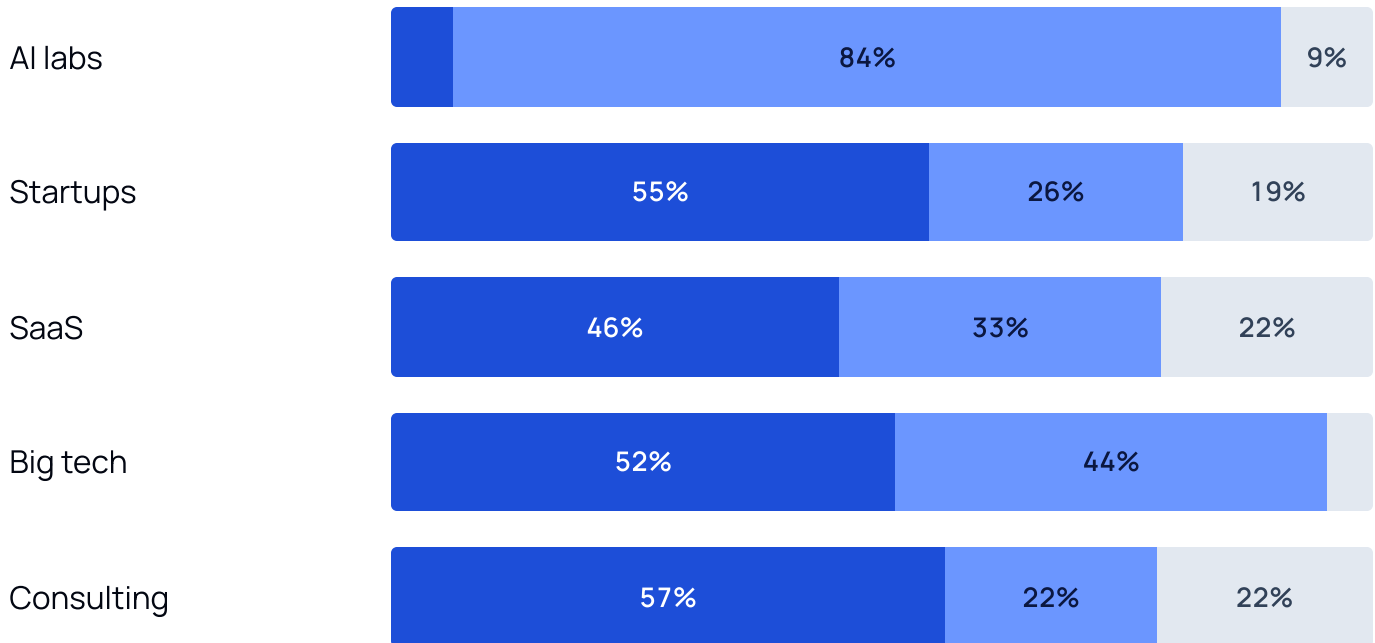
Source: topfdejobs.com census of 1,465 FDE postings, October 7–28, 2026



45% of FDE roles are in the Bay Area, New York, London or Washington DC.

AI labs want you in the office part of the week

Workplace policy by employer type

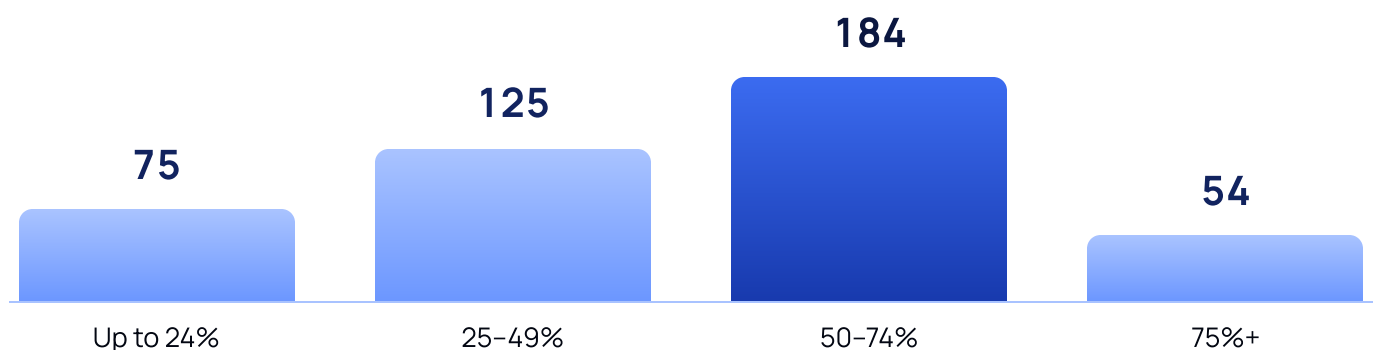


● On-site ● Hybrid ● Remote

Source: topfdejobs.com census of 1,465 FDE postings, October 7–28, 2026

When a posting names a number, it's typically 50% travel

Postings that state a travel percentage, by amount



Source: topfdejobs.com census of 1,465 FDE postings, October 7–28, 2026



52% of postings mention travel; 32% give a percentage.

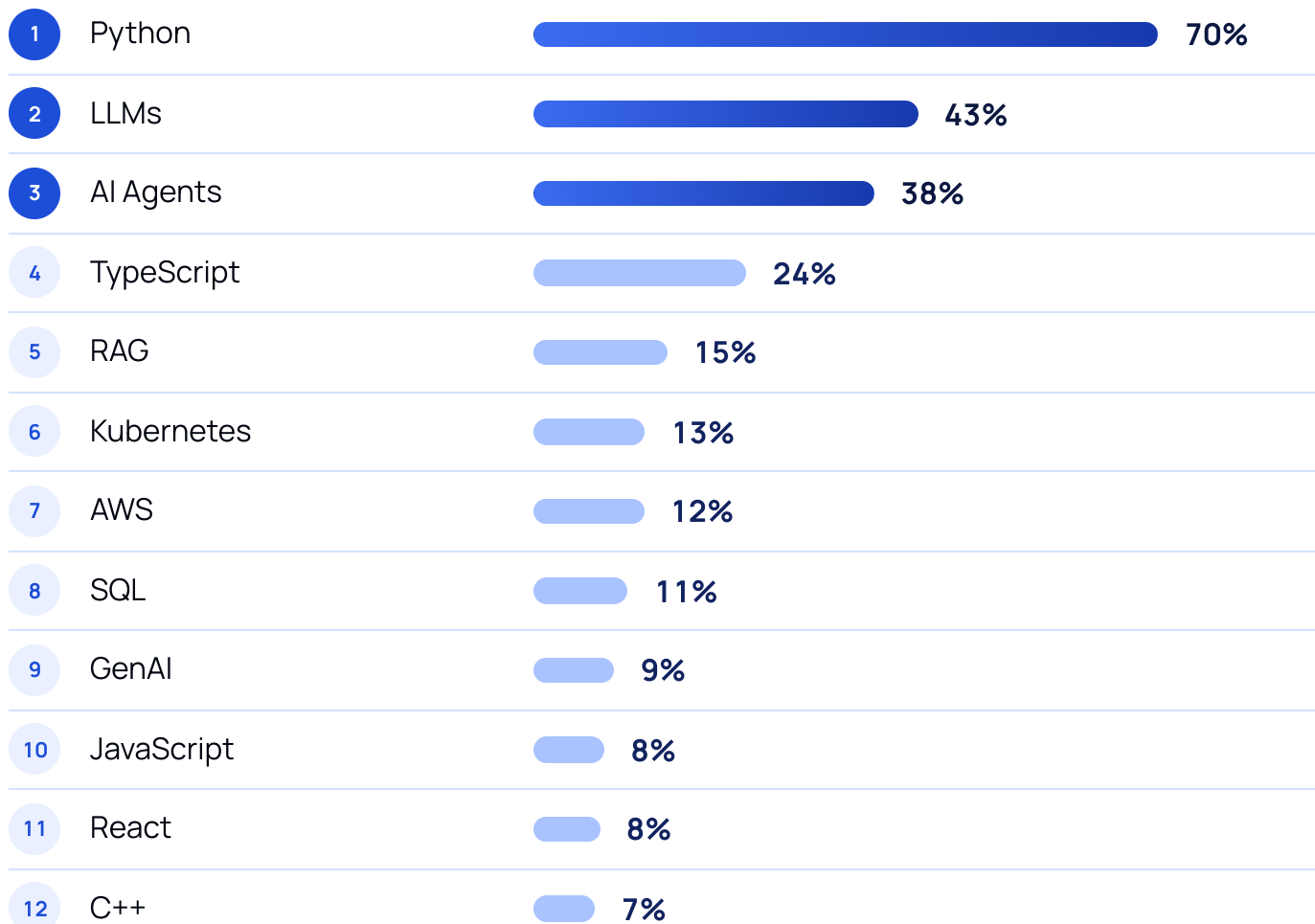
CHAPTER 5

What the job actually is

An FDE writes production code inside a customer's world: their data, their systems, their deadlines. 88% of postings require coding, and the skills asked for are the ones you'd expect from an engineer shipping AI into production.

Python and LLMs, then agents

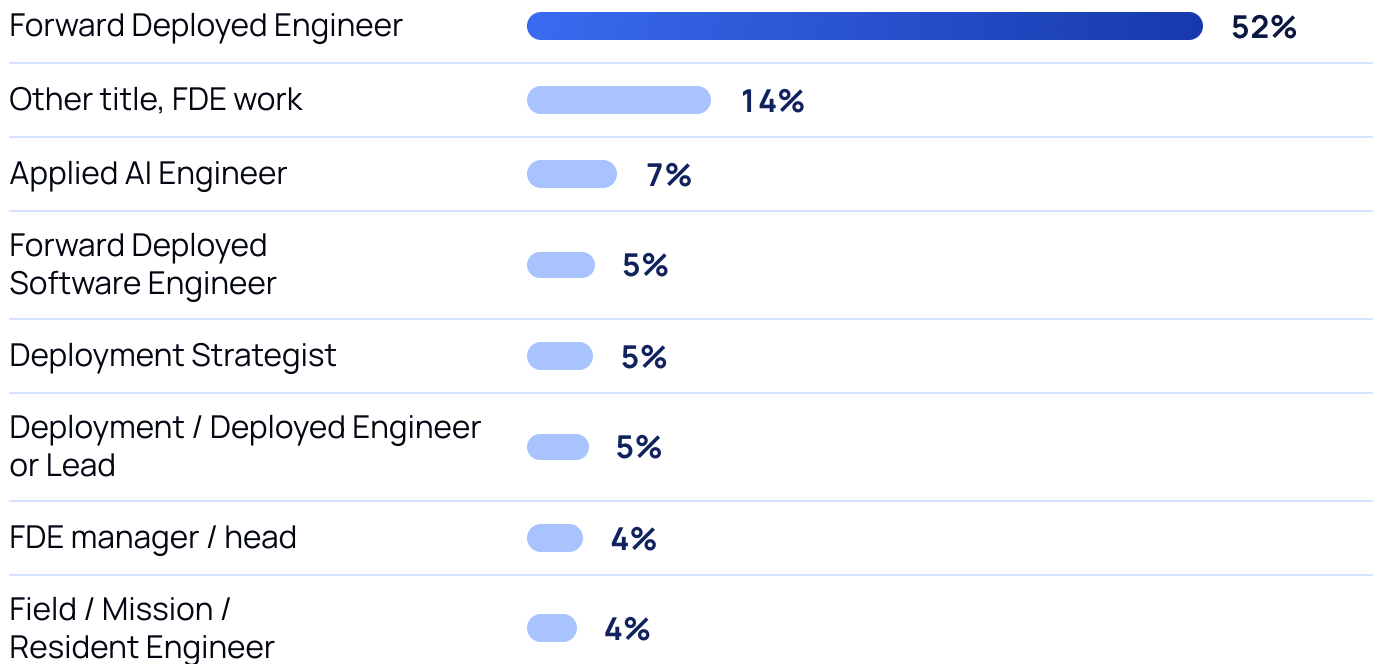
Share of postings asking for each skill



Source: topfdejobs.com census of 1,465 FDE postings, October 7–28, 2026

Half the roles carry the Forward Deployed Engineer title

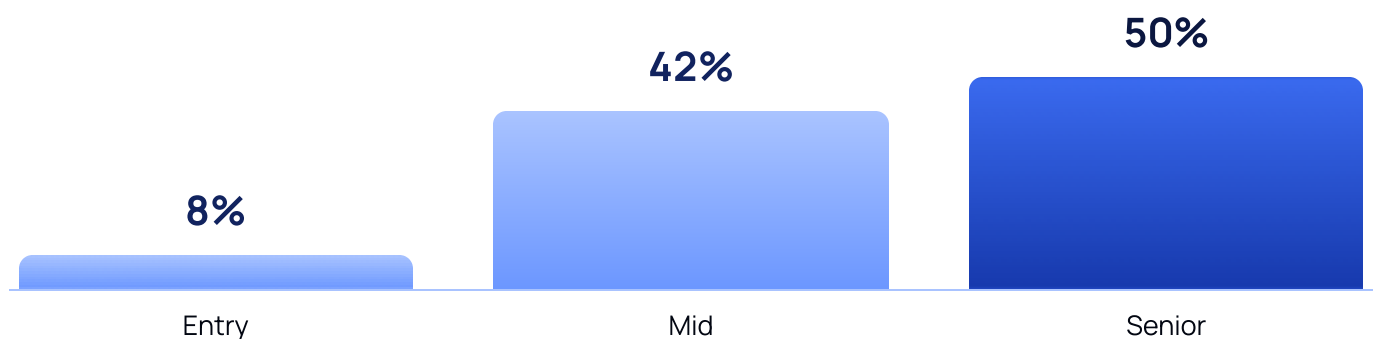
Job titles of real FDE roles, grouped



Source: topfdejobs.com census of 1,465 FDE postings, October 7–28, 2026

Mostly mid and senior roles

FDE postings by level



Source: topfdejobs.com census of 1,465 FDE postings, October 7–28, 2026



Only **6%** of postings say they're open to new grads or early-career engineers.

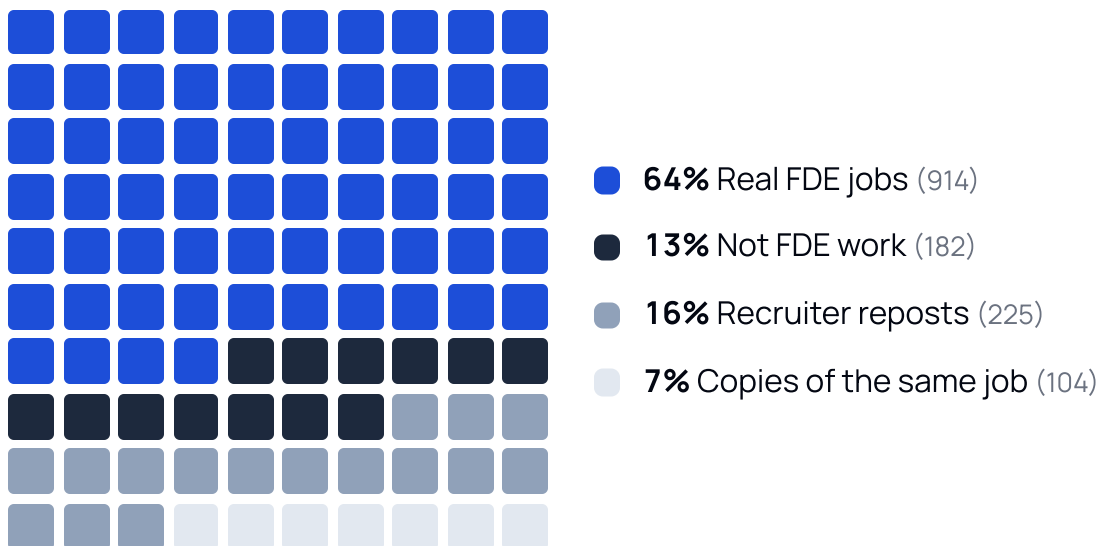
CHAPTER 6

What "forward deployed" actually means

The title is fashionable, so we checked how often it's honest. We read every posting with "forward deployed" in its title, with Claude, and asked one question: does this person write code inside a customer's environment?

Nearly two-thirds of "Forward Deployed" postings are real FDE jobs

All 1,425 "forward deployed" postings we pulled in, by what they turned out to be



Copies are the same role posted again (another city, another board). Recruiter reposts are agencies and aggregators advertising someone else's job.

Source: topfdejobs.com census of 1,465 FDE postings, October 7–28, 2026

of "Forward Deployed Engineer" titles

1 in 10

isn't FDE work (96 of 990)

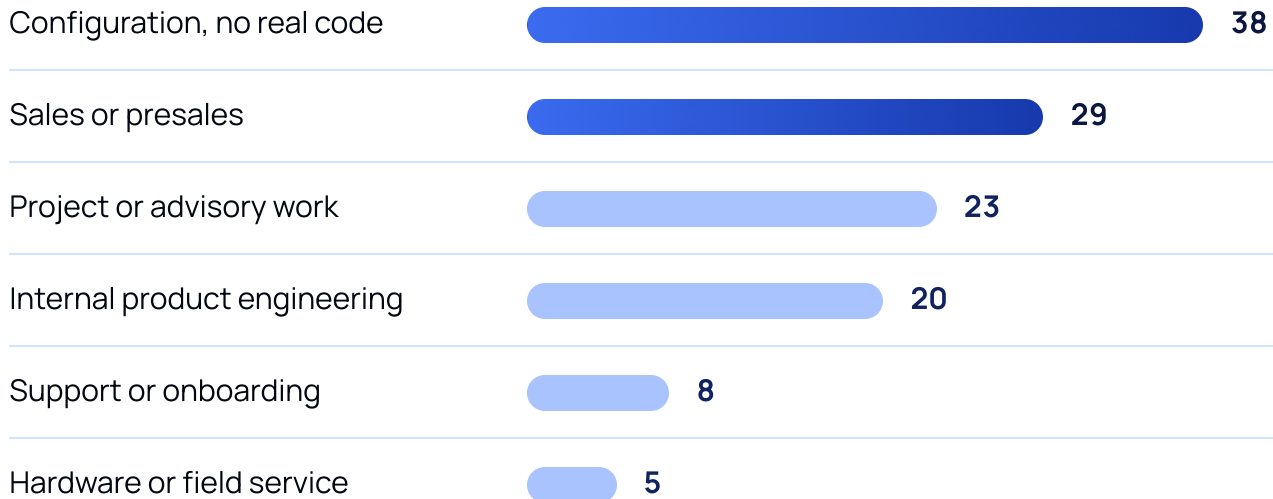
of all "Forward Deployed" titles

1 in 6

isn't FDE work (182 of 1,096, reposts and copies removed)

When it isn't FDE work, it's most often configuration or sales

Why "Forward Deployed" postings failed the test



The 123 postings the editor turned down with one of these reasons. Another 58 were approved first and pulled later; they count as not FDE work above.

Source: topfdejobs.com census of 1,465 FDE postings, October 7–28, 2026

The label is spreading

Some employers now put "Forward Deployed" in front of jobs that were never engineering roles. Titles we saw in October 2026:

Forward Deployed Product Manager

Forward Deployed CRM Architect

Forward Deployed Analyst

Forward Deployed Design Lead

Forward Deployed Accountant

BOTTOM LINE

The title mostly tells the truth: 1 in 10 "Forward Deployed Engineer" postings isn't FDE work. The bigger noise is recruiters reposting real jobs.

CHAPTER 7

Outlook

Demand keeps rising and the money is committed, but the people who build these teams disagree about how long the role lasts. Here is what they say, in their own words.

"Demand for forward deployed engineers is rising fast, and growing wages suggest employers are competing for a limited pool of talent."

Elena Magrini, Head of Global Research, Lightcast. CNBC, Oct 15, 2026

"The reality is that experienced FDEs cannot simply be recruited at the scale clients need."

Ram Ramalingam, Accenture. CNBC, Oct 15, 2026

"From OpenAI's side, we should always be temporary."

Colin Jarvis, Head of Forward Deployed Engineering, OpenAI. The Next Web, Sep 23, 2026

The case against

Gartner predicts 70% of enterprises will abandon agentic AI built by vendor forward deployed engineering by 2028, and warns of "FDE washing." (Gartner, Sep 29, 2026)

a16z: most "Palantirization" copycats risk becoming expensive services businesses; forward deployment should be time-boxed. (a16z, Jan 16, 2026)

ABOUT THIS REPORT

What's in our data

topfdejobs polls employers' own job boards (Ashby, Greenhouse, Lever, Workable) every six hours and searches Indeed, LinkedIn and Glassdoor daily for new FDE roles. A search hit only counts once we've found the employer's own posting. Since October 7, 2026 that produced 1,465 real FDE postings at 499 companies.

Real FDE postings

1,465

Companies

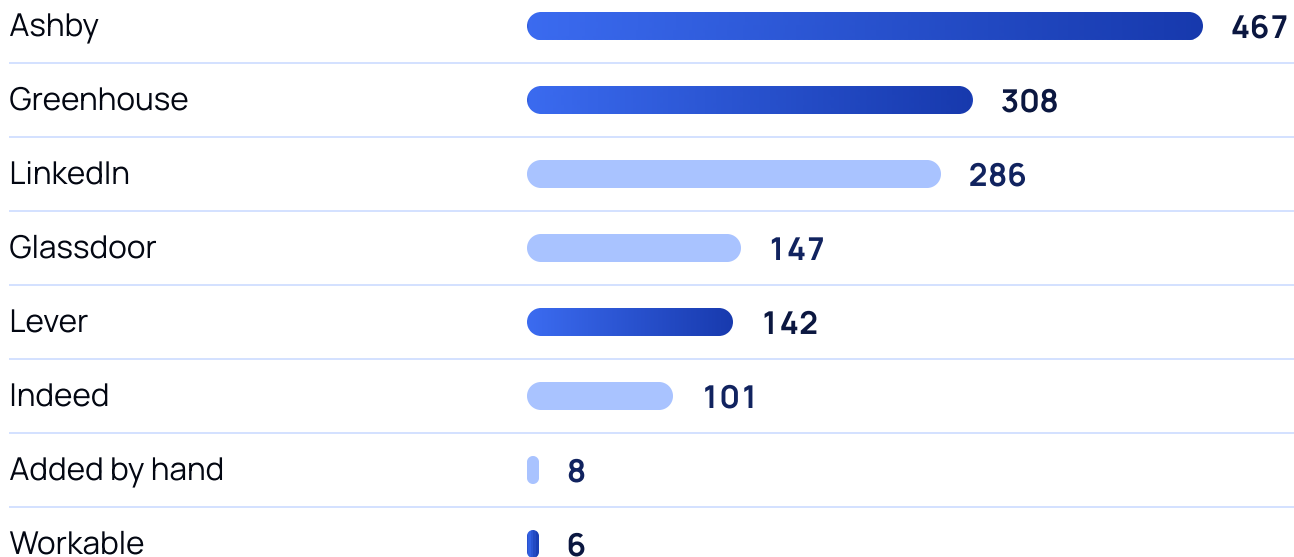
499

With verified pay

849

Most roles come straight from employers' own boards

Real FDE postings by where we found them



Source: topfdejobs.com census of 1,465 FDE postings, October 7–28, 2026

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Methodology

What counts as an FDE role

An engineer who writes production code inside or for a specific customer's environment. Sales engineers, solutions architects without hands-on build work, support, project management and configuration-only roles don't count, whatever the title says. Our editor reviews every posting with Claude: Claude reads each one and makes the first call against our written rules, which the editor sets and tunes.

Pay

Only pay from the employer's job board pay field or numbers written in the posting. We use the midpoint of the posted base range and leave out hourly, monthly and commission-only pay. Equity and bonus aren't included.

How we're likely wrong

We undercount employers without a public job board, employers on Workday and similar systems (which we only reach through Indeed, LinkedIn and Glassdoor, so large consultancies are underrepresented) and FDE work posted under unrelated titles. Our window is short, so we show no trends from our own data; growth figures come from Lightcast and Google. Employer types are our own classification.

Window

Every posting that was live on an employer's board at any point between October 7 and October 28, 2026, including roles first posted earlier. We count postings, not openings: one posting can hire several people, and some employers post one role separately for each city (each city counts; an exact duplicate, same company, title and city, counts once).

Labels

Travel, coding, quota, equity, seniority and skills come from a language model reading each posting, with samples checked against the posting text. Small shares (under 5%) carry the most error. 75 postings expired before we could read them; they count in the totals but not in any share that needs the posting text.

Third-party data

Each chart names its source. We never combine providers in one chart, because they count differently.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

How to cite

Salome, "State of FDE Hiring 2026," topfdejobs, October 29, 2026.
<https://topfdejobs.com/state-of-fde-hiring-2026>

About topfdejobs

topfdejobs.com is a job board for forward deployed engineers. Every role links straight to the employer's own posting, and is checked by our editor with Claude.

Read it online, get the data

Every chart with links to every source:

topfdejobs.com/state-of-fde-hiring-2026. The numbers from our census are free to reuse under CC BY 4.0:

topfdejobs.com/state-of-fde-hiring-2026-data.csv



FIND A ROLE
Your next forward deployed job
Real FDE jobs, checked by our editor with Claude, linked to the employer's own posting.
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EVERY WEEK
FDE Info, our free newsletter
Tools, field notes from deployments, and how FDE teams hire and pay.
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