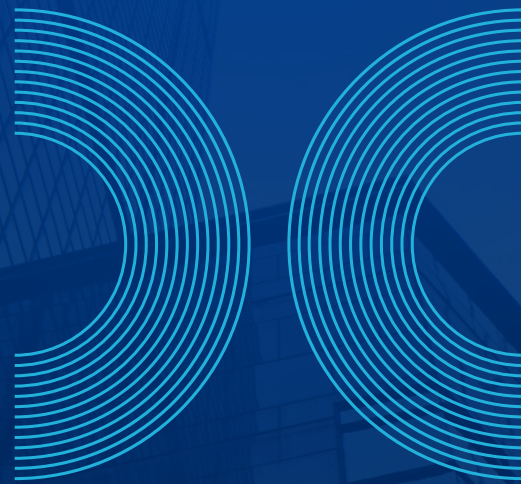




GLOBAL MID-MARKET

TALENT &
COMPENSATION
TRENDS



2025-26

www.cfoalliance.com

WELCOME TO THE 2025-2026 GLOBAL MID-MARKET

TALENT & COMPENSATION TRENDS REPORT

As we release this 2025–2026 CFO Alliance Talent & Compensation Trends Report in October 2025, we recognize that finance leaders are in the final stages of building 2026 budgets and strategic plans—often against a backdrop of volatility, uncertainty, and accelerating change. This report is designed to serve as a trusted guide through this critical planning season and well into the year ahead.

The reality of Q4 2025 is unlike any planning season we've faced in recent memory. Finance leaders are not just navigating spreadsheets. They are managing volatility in capital markets, uncertainty in geopolitical stability, and unprecedented disruption from AI adoption. Against this backdrop, compensation and talent strategies are no longer static line items; they are dynamic levers of resilience, growth, and credibility. The organizations that thrive in 2026 will be those whose CFOs can both read the numbers and read the moment.

The findings presented here reflect not just data, but the lived experiences of your peers—finance leaders navigating the dual challenge of steering their organizations through today's disruption while preparing them for the opportunities and risks of tomorrow. The rise of AI, the evolution of hybrid work, and the fierce competition for top talent are reshaping the finance function in real time.

At CFO Alliance, we undertook this Trends Report again this year with a clear purpose: to give finance leaders actionable insight and the confidence to make bold decisions as they finalize their budgets, prioritize investments, and design their 2026 people strategies. This report is not just an end-of-year reflection—it is a playbook for entering 2026 with clarity and conviction.

In collaboration with:



“As you put the finishing touches on your 2026 budgets and talent plans, use this report to look beyond the numbers. It is your guide to aligning compensation, culture, and capability-building with the realities of today and the opportunities of tomorrow. In times of uncertainty, finance leaders must be not only the stewards of capital, but the architects of growth.”

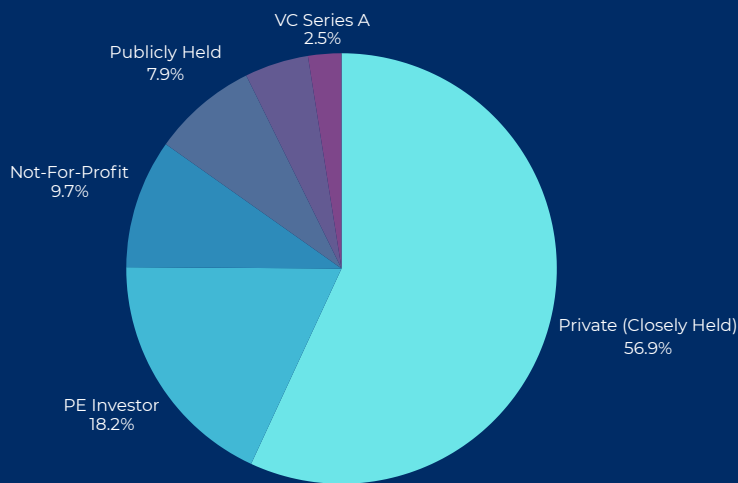
— Nick Araco, CEO, CFO Alliance



2025-26 Talent & Compensation Trends Report

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Ownership Structure



Participant Demographics

Our survey captured responses from 250+ finance leaders across diverse organizational structures and revenue ranges, providing a comprehensive view of the current mid-market landscape.

Top Industries

1. Professional Services
2. Real Estate/Construction
3. Health Care Services
4. Manufacturing/Distribution
5. Technology/SaaS

Top Revenue Range

1. \$10 Mil - \$50 Mil (**40%**)
2. \$50 Mil - \$250 Mil (**30%**)
3. \$250 Mil - \$500 Mil (**10%**)

Key Talent Challenges



"The pipeline challenge isn't just about identifying talent. It's about intentionally developing it. This shouldn't be outsourced to a generic leadership program. It must be just-in-time and immediately practical. Identify your best business athletes and help them build the 'muscles' required to lead at the next level."

-Eric Herrenkohl, Managing Director
AchieveNEXT



Finance leaders are navigating a shifting workforce landscape and identifying several pressing challenges for 2025–2026:

- Replacing Legacy Talent (33%) – A top priority is ensuring teams are equipped with future-fit skills to stay competitive.
- Integrating Emerging Roles (29%) – Many organizations are adding AI analysts and automation architects to drive digital transformation.
- Building Leadership Capacity (26%) – Leaders recognize the need to develop strong pipelines ahead of organizational growth.
- Balancing Productivity & Burnout (25%) – Sustaining performance while safeguarding employee well-being remains a critical focus.

Bottom Line

Replacing legacy talent is not simply about filling roles. It's about evolving skill sets at speed. CFOs are acutely aware that the war for talent has shifted from access to alignment: Aligning capabilities with strategy, and aligning people with purpose. In a market where high performers have options, the best defense against attrition is building environments that foster growth, adaptability, and shared ownership of outcomes.

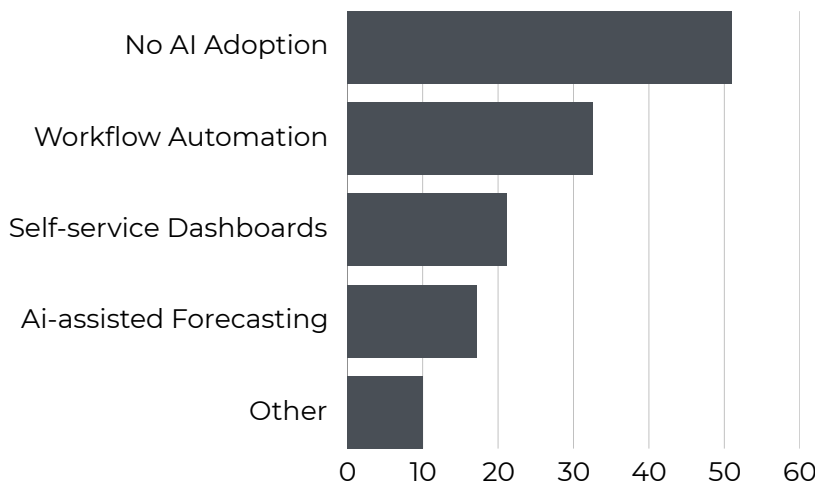
Incorporating AI?

Finance Seeks Certainty

A striking 51% of organizations have not yet adopted AI in their finance function, representing a significant opportunity gap. However, those who have integrated AI are seeing results in workflow automation (33%), self-service dashboards (21%), and AI-assisted forecasting (17%).



Percent of AI Integration in Finance Operations



"With less than 50% AI adoption in accounting, the hesitation highlights crucial concerns around financial data protection and accuracy. Embracing responsible AI integration is essential for unlocking efficiency while safeguarding the integrity of financial information."

-Katie Birkelo, President
Aspire Staffing Group

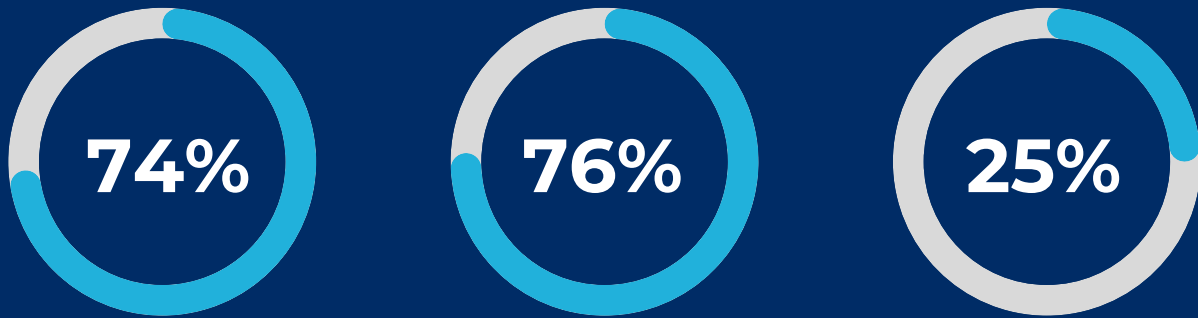


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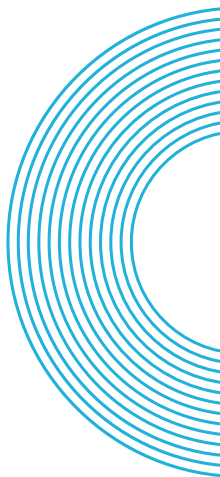
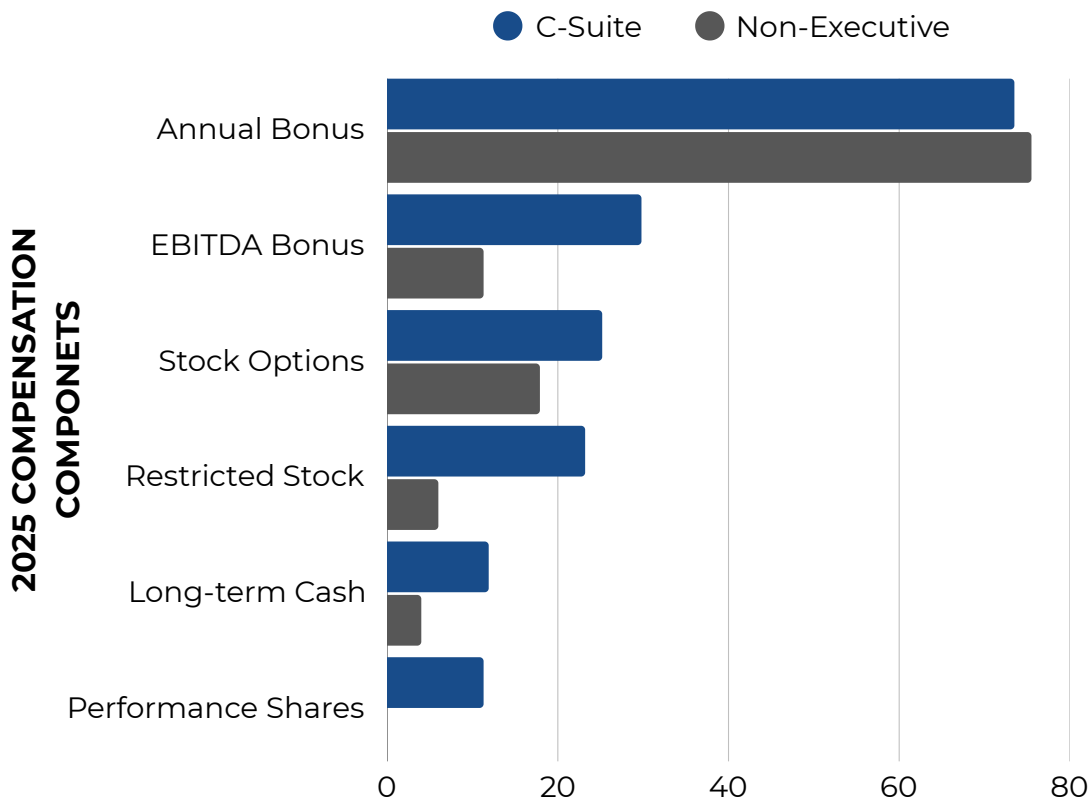
This hesitation reveals both risk and opportunity. AI is no longer optional infrastructure. It is the price of admission for finance teams seeking efficiency, credibility, and foresight. The real question is not if finance leaders adopt AI, but how responsibly they embed it to balance accuracy, data integrity, and ethical governance. By 2026, candidates will self-select toward organizations with mature digital practices, making AI readiness a talent differentiator as much as a technology choice.

COMPENSATION STRATEGY EVOLUTION

Finance leaders are fundamentally rethinking their approach to compensation, with a shift toward performance-based incentives and long-term value creation.



Annual bonuses remain the dominant incentive mechanism, with 74% of C-suite executives and 76% of non-executive finance professionals participating in annual bonus programs. However, equity-based compensation is gaining traction, with 25% of C-suite roles receiving stock options.



BASE SALARY BENCHMARKS

CFO

- Typical Range: \$250K–\$500K
- 54.1% earn in this range
- 57% saw increases vs. 2024

VP Finance

- Typical Range: \$200K–\$250K
- 33.3% earn in this range
- 53% saw increases vs. 2024

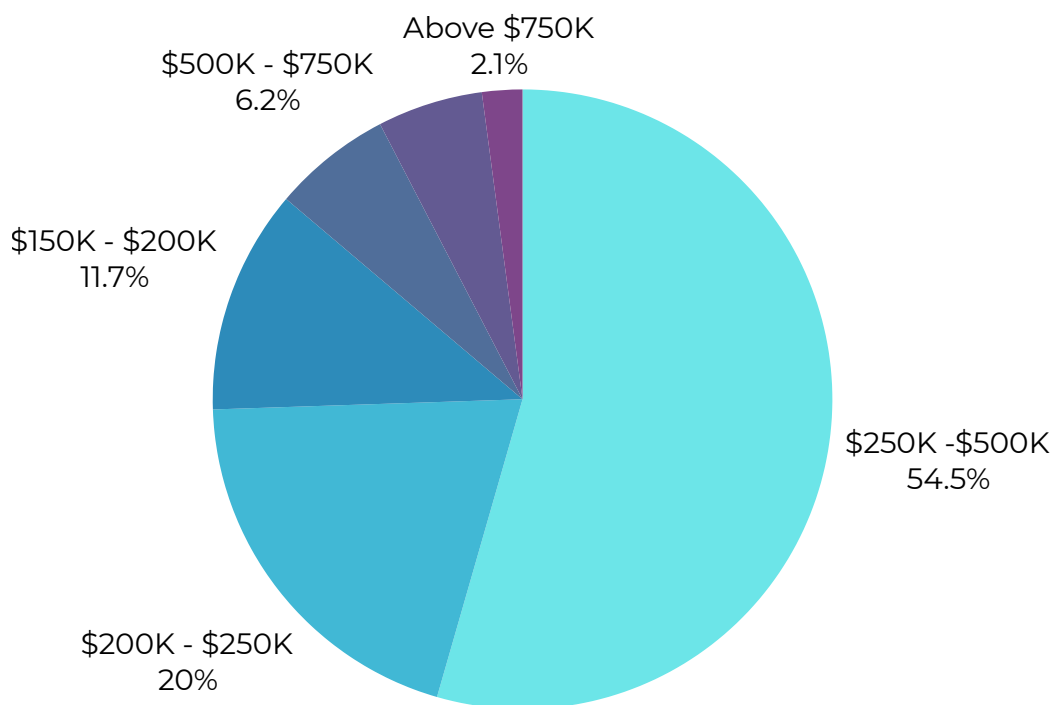
Controller

- Typical Range: \$175K–\$200K
- 23.8% earn in this range
- 64% saw increases vs. 2024

FP&A Lead

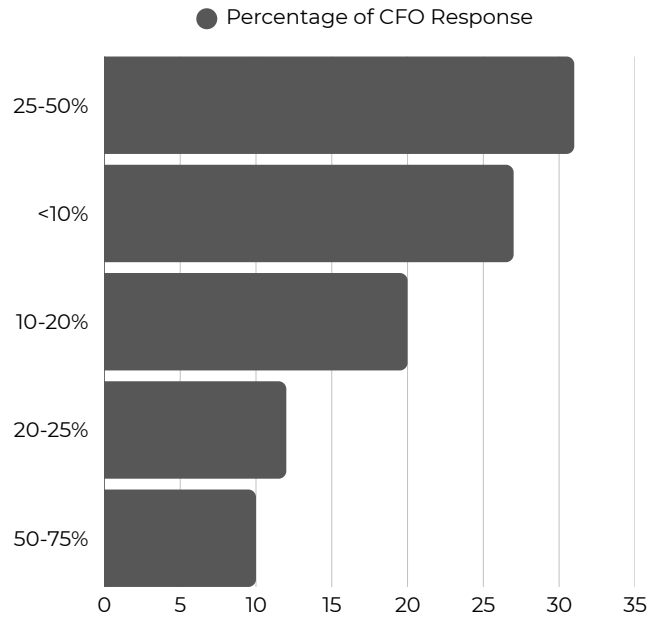
- Typical Range: \$125K–\$150K
- 17.2% earn in this range
- 60% saw increases vs. 2024

CFO Base Salary Distribution

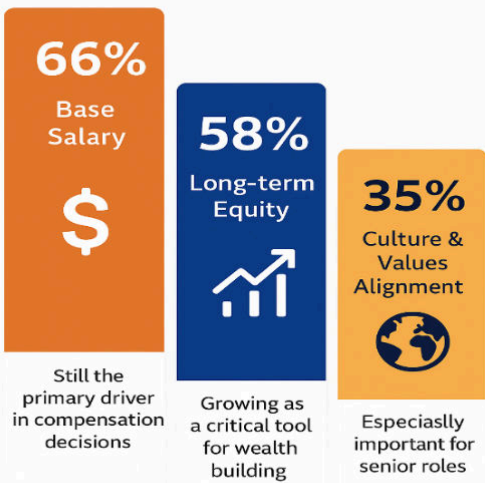


BONUS AND INCENTIVE STRUCTURES

Volatile markets mean CFOs can't simply 'buy loyalty.' Compensation must be tethered to both performance and purpose. Today's rising finance leaders want equity in outcomes, whether through literal ownership, tailored bonus structures, or visible pathways to leadership. In a labor market tempered by uncertainty, the message of compensation is as important as the math: it signals whether an organization is invested in its people for the long haul.



Career Decision Priorities for Finance Leaders



"In a competitive landscape, mid-market companies must recognize that offering targeted bonus eligibility and equity incentives is essential to attract and retain the next generation of accounting and finance professionals. Beyond competitive salaries, these tailored rewards foster loyalty, drive performance, and ensure your finance team remains a strategic asset in your growth journey."

-Katie Birkelo, President, Aspire Staffing Group



💡 Compensation Insights

CFO bonus structures vary widely, with 29% of organizations allocating 25–50% of base salary as bonus compensation. Interestingly, 16% of organizations provide no bonus at all, signaling a more conservative stance or reliance on alternative incentive models. Across other finance roles, 32% of Controllers and 40% of FP&A Leads receive bonuses in the 10–20% range, underscoring steady but modest incentive practices below the executive tier. At a broader level, 44% of organizations target 0–2.5% of revenue for total finance function spend, reflecting a disciplined approach to aligning talent investment with overall business performance.

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

01. Leadership Bench Strength

Most organizations describe their leadership pipelines as only moderate (51.7%), while a concerning 34% admit their bench is weak or nonexistent. This highlights a critical succession planning gap and signals potential risk in leadership continuity. In contrast, only 15% of organizations feel confident in their leadership bench, underscoring the urgent need for stronger talent development strategies.

The weakest link in today's mid-market isn't technology. It's talent continuity. With over one-third of organizations citing a thin bench, CFOs are right to be concerned. Succession planning is no longer an HR luxury; it is a strategic imperative. Future-ready finance organizations will invest in developing 'business athletes' who can flex across functions, lead through ambiguity, and step into critical roles when volatility demands it.

02. Skills for the Future

To address these challenges, companies are actively investing in future-fit skill development. The top priorities include Financial Operations Optimization (54%) and Strategic Thinking & Commercial Acumen (50%), alongside growing emphasis on Storytelling with Data (42%) and AI/Data Fluency (35%). At the same time, Leadership & Influence (33%) remains a vital focus, reflecting the ongoing need to cultivate stronger leaders capable of guiding teams through rapid transformation.



2025-26 Talent & Compensation Trends Report

The Future of Finance Leadership & Compensation

The 2025–2026 compensation landscape highlights a finance function in transition, one where the rules of engagement are rapidly evolving. Base salary growth remains steady, but it is no longer the sole lever for attracting and retaining talent. The future of competitive advantage lies in equity participation, professional development pathways, and organizational culture—elements that signal long-term investment in employees rather than short-term rewards.

Looking forward, AI adoption is a defining pivot point. With more than half of organizations still lagging, the gap between innovators and late adopters will only widen. Finance leaders who embed AI into daily operations, forecasting, compliance, and decision-making will redefine efficiency benchmarks and talent expectations. By 2026 and beyond, candidates will increasingly gravitate toward employers that can demonstrate a digitally mature environment, where analytics and automation are not afterthoughts but embedded capabilities.

Equally pressing is leadership pipeline readiness. Over one-third of organizations cite weak succession plans, exposing a vulnerability that will only become more costly in the coming years. To secure continuity, organizations must invest today in developing the next generation of finance leaders, equipping them not only with technical expertise but also with strategic agility, data storytelling skills, and the ability to lead through ambiguity.

Compensation strategies are also set to evolve further. The growing adoption of equity-based incentives, performance-linked bonuses, and differentiated rewards will reshape how organizations recognize and retain high performers. By aligning rewards with both organizational outcomes and individual growth trajectories, companies will be better positioned to foster commitment while promoting long-term value creation.

At the same time, employee well-being will become a strategic imperative. With 41% of leaders already citing burnout as a risk, sustainable performance models will define the finance organizations of the future. Flexible career paths, mental health support, and balanced workloads will not be optional extras, but core levers of productivity and retention.

The Future of Finance Leadership & Compensation (Con't)

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Ultimately, the organizations that will thrive are those that:

- Balance innovation with resilience, adopting AI while building safeguards for workforce adaptability.
- Reimagine leadership development, preparing succession pipelines that are proactive rather than reactive.
- Redefine compensation, blending equity, performance, and development as signals of long-term commitment.
- Champion well-being, protecting human capital as diligently as financial capital.

The next 12–18 months will test not only the agility of your numbers, but the agility of your people. The CFOs who win will be those who embed AI thoughtfully, align compensation with both resilience and retention, and actively develop future leaders rather than waiting for them to emerge. In short, in an uncertain economy, talent strategy is a financial strategy. This report equips you not just with benchmarks, but with a blueprint for action. As you translate these insights into impact, we invite you to leverage the connections, roundtables, and resources of The CFO Alliance—because no finance leader should navigate this environment alone.



More Inquiries And Information About Us

ABOUT ACHIEVENEXT



AchieveNEXT empowers individuals, teams, and enterprises to exceed ambitious growth goals through a powerful combination of peer communities, performance benchmarking data, and innovative talent solutions. Our peer networks, The CFO Alliance and The CHRO Alliance, bring together growth-focused leaders who help each other make confident decisions on Strategy, People, Technology, and Risk.

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ABOUT ASPIRE STAFFING GROUP



Founded in 2005 and headquartered in Philadelphia, Aspire Search and Staffing, LLC is a premier provider of finance and accounting talent solutions, serving as the parent company of Aspire Business Consulting and Aspire Executive Search. With offices in Philadelphia, Denver, and Chicago, Aspire partners with clients to deliver best-in-class financial leaders and consulting services that strengthen organizations and drive sustainable growth.

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THANK YOU!

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