

SALARY GUIDE

2026 Welding & Fabrication Salary Guide

National and state-level wage benchmarks for the 10 most-recruited roles, sourced from BLS Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics — with every proxy classification labeled, not hidden.

How to read this guide.

Every wage figure below is sourced directly from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics — Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) May 2025 release (the current release as of this writing) and the Occupational Outlook Handbook's standing 2024–34 projections, except two figures explicitly marked (2024) where a 2025 update couldn't be independently cross-verified. These are **national figures for the closest matching BLS occupational classification**, not internal placement data, and not a substitute for a live local wage check.

Several welding/fabrication roles don't map to a single, distinct BLS occupation. Where that's the case, we've used the closest reasonable classification and said so explicitly — we don't fabricate a number where the data doesn't exist.

By role, BLS-sourced.

ROLE	MEDIAN ANNUAL	MEDIAN HOURLY	OUTLOOK 2024–34
Structural / Pipe / Combo Welder	\$53,750	\$24.84	+2%
Certified Welding Inspector (CWI)*	\$47,460 (2024)	\$22.82	0%
Fabrication Shop Foreman**	\$86,450 (mean)	—	—
Structural Ironworker / Erector	\$62,780	\$30.18	+4%
Fabrication Project Manager***	\$114,990	—	+9%
Estimator	\$77,070 (2024)	\$37.05	−4%

Wage figures reflect BLS OEWS May 2025 (the current release) except where marked (2024) — those two occupations' May 2025 figures could not be independently cross-verified against a second source, so we kept the last confidently-sourced number rather than guess.

*Proxy: BLS "Quality Control Inspectors" (SOC 51-9061) — CWI-credentialed inspectors typically command a premium over this broad-category median.

**Proxy: BLS "First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers" (SOC 47-1011), mean wage — most recent figure available for this classification.

***Proxy: BLS "Construction Managers" (SOC 11-9021) — fabrication PMs on structural/piping scopes track closely with this classification nationally.

STATE VARIATION

The welder median swings by roughly \$30,000 depending on state.

STATE	WELDER MEDIAN (BLS OEWS, MOST RECENT STATE BREAKDOWN)	NOTE
Hawaii	~\$76,970	Highest state median in the dataset
Texas	National median range	Most welders employed nationally — 52,820
California	National median range	2nd-highest employment — 28,300
West Virginia	~\$47,000	Lowest state median in the dataset

National median above reflects the current May 2025 OEWS release. State-level medians and employment-by-state figures reflect the most recent state-level breakdown we could independently verify (2024 vintage) — state tables lag the national release and a newer breakdown may exist; verify before quoting a specific state figure to a client. Local certification premiums (pipe, structural, CWI) apply on top of these baselines and vary by market — see our metro pages for market-specific context.

RELATED TRADES CONTEXT

Pipe welding sits inside a broader, faster-growing pipe trades market.

Pipe and pipeline welders' closest BLS-adjacent occupation — Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters (SOC 47-2152) — shows meaningfully stronger fundamentals than the general welding classification:

\$63,800 median annual wage, May 2025 — about 19% above the general welder median.

+4% growth projected 2024–2034, with **~44,000 openings per year** for plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters — roughly as fast as the average for all occupations.

Roles without a distinct BLS classification

Robotic / Automated Welding Technician — closest to BLS "Welding, Soldering, and Brazing Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders" (SOC 51-4122), a lower-wage category than skilled manual welding; contractors report paying at or above general welder rates for candidates who can also program and troubleshoot the cell, not just tend it.

Welding Engineer — no distinct BLS occupation exists for this hybrid role. Base pay typically tracks with broader mechanical/industrial engineering classifications — but we're not going to put a specific number here without a real source for it.

What moving up the AWS ladder is actually worth.

The wage tables above are national medians for the closest BLS occupational match — they don't capture the premium a specific, active credential commands over a general "welder" listing. Based on the proxy classifications and role progression documented earlier in this guide, the general pattern holds across the trade:

- **Certified Welder → Certified Welding Supervisor (CWS):** moving into crew leadership carries the Fabrication Shop Foreman proxy premium — roughly 60% above the base welder median.
- **Certified Welder → Certified Welding Inspector (CWI):** inspection work shifts the pay basis entirely, tracking closer to the Quality Control Inspector proxy classification.
- **Field / pipe code work (API 1104, ASME IX):** pipe and pipeline welders track with the higher-paying Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters classification — about 19% above the general welder median.

These are directional patterns drawn from the proxy classifications already cited, not a separate BLS "premium" statistic — BLS does not publish a certification-premium figure directly.

METRO CONTEXT

National medians are a floor, not a forecast, for any specific market.

Every figure in this guide is a national median. Local wages move with industrial concentration, cost of living, and how tight the local certified-welder supply is — the same dynamic that puts Hawaii roughly \$30,000 above West Virginia at the state level. Heavy industrial and energy corridors (Gulf Coast petrochemical, for example) typically run above the national baseline for pipe and process welding specifically.

See our metro service-area pages at mytradetalent.com/service-areas for market-specific wage context in the regions we actively recruit.

Base wage is the start of the conversation, not the end of it.

Especially for field welders, total compensation typically includes more than the base hourly or annual figure captured in BLS wage data:

- **Per diem** for travel/field assignments — standard practice for pipeline and turnaround work, structured separately from base pay.
- **Overtime structure** — many commercial fabrication and field roles run substantial scheduled overtime, which materially changes take-home pay versus the base annual figure.
- **Certification reimbursement** — AWS testing and renewal fees, sometimes shop-provided as a retention lever.
- **Tool and PPE allowances** — vary widely by employer and worth confirming explicitly rather than assuming.

When benchmarking an offer against this guide's medians, weigh the full package, not just the base figure.

USING THIS GUIDE

Benchmark honestly — including against yourself.

If you're consistently losing candidates at the offer stage, compare your actual offer — base plus the total-compensation factors above — against the national median for the specific role, not the trade in general. A "welder" offer benchmarked against the general median will look competitive right up until the candidate you want turns out to be a combo welder with pipe-code experience, who's worth closer to the Plumbers/Pipefitters/Steamfitters figure.

If you're not sure where a specific role or region should land, that's exactly the kind of question a specialized recruiting partner should be able to answer with market data, not a guess.

Specialty and inspection roles take longer to fill than generalist welder searches.

We don't have a single published BLS time-to-fill figure for welding specifically — that data isn't part of the OEWS or Occupational Outlook Handbook release. But the pattern holds directionally across the trade: general structural or pipe welder searches move faster than searches for CWI-credentialed inspectors, welding engineers, or robotic welding technicians, simply because the qualified pool is smaller and more specialized at each step up.

The practical implication is the same one that runs through this whole guide: the roles that take longest to fill reactively are exactly the roles a standing, pre-verified pipeline helps most.

How welding pay compares to adjacent commercial trades.

TRADE	NATIONAL MEDIAN (BLS, MOST RECENT RELEASE)
Welders, Cutters, Solderers, Brazers	\$53,750
Plumbers, Pipefitters, Steamfitters (SOC 47-2152)	\$63,800
Structural Iron and Steel Workers	\$62,780
Construction Managers (SOC 11-9021)	\$114,990

Figures as cited earlier in this guide, gathered here for side-by-side comparison. First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades (SOC 47-1011, mean \$86,450) sits between the two — see the National Wage Benchmarks table for the full context on each proxy classification.



Every hire from zero is a *tax* on your team.

My Trade Talent maintains a live, credential-verified pipeline of welders and fabricators on a flat monthly retainer — so open seats fill with qualified people, not guesses.

Schedule a Discovery Call

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