

INDUSTRY WHITEPAPER

The Definitive Guide to Elevator Maintenance

Practical strategy for hiring, verifying, and retaining elevator mechanics and inspectors — for contractors competing for one of the smallest, most tightly licensed labor pools in the commercial trades.

This is the smallest, most tightly gated labor pool we recruit for — and that changes how you have to hire.

I'm Michael Carter, President of My Trade Talent. Most of the trades we recruit for have a search-volume problem: too many unqualified applicants clicking "apply" on a job board. Elevator maintenance has almost the opposite problem. The Bureau of Labor Statistics tracks the whole occupation — Elevator and Escalator Installers and Repairers — at roughly 24,200 people nationwide, and most states won't let someone touch the work without a license. There simply isn't a large pool to sift through.

What surprised me most when we started building a pipeline in this trade is how little of the hiring activity shows up in search data at all. People search "elevator mechanic salary." They search how to get licensed. Almost nobody searches "hire an elevator mechanic" — this hiring runs on apprenticeship pipelines, state licensing boards, and direct industry relationships, not open postings.

This guide is what we'd want if we were staffing this trade ourselves: an honest look at the labor market, the ten roles that matter, and a hiring process built around verifying a license and a credential — not around getting more resumes into an inbox.

The five things to take away if you read nothing else.

- **This is one of the smallest labor pools in the commercial trades we recruit for.** BLS tracks Elevator and Escalator Installers and Repairers (SOC 47-4021) as a single occupation of roughly 24,200 people nationwide.
- **Licensing gates entry in most states.** Mechanics typically complete a multi-year registered apprenticeship recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor before they're licensed to work independently.
- **Inspection work carries its own credential on top of that.** A Qualified Elevator Inspector (QEI) credential, governed by the ASME QEI-1 standard, requires documented training, at least a year of verifiable inspection experience, and a passing exam.
- **Almost none of this hiring shows up as search volume.** Our research found no meaningful hiring-intent search volume for this trade at all — candidates and researchers search pay and licensing, not "hire an elevator mechanic."
- **A standing, license-verified pipeline outperforms reactive hiring here more than in almost any other trade** — precisely because the qualified pool is this small and this hard to see coming through a job board.

INTRODUCTION

Elevator maintenance hiring doesn't run on job boards. It runs on licensing boards.

Every property manager and elevator contractor we talk to eventually asks some version of the same question: why doesn't posting an opening work here the way it works for other trades? The answer is structural. This is a small, credential-gated occupation, and the people qualified to do the work aren't spending their time browsing job boards — they're already working, already licensed, and already known within a narrow professional network.

~24,200 people nationwide are employed as Elevator and Escalator Installers and Repairers (BLS SOC 47-4021) — a comparatively small, single occupational code covering mechanics, service techs, maintenance techs, escalator techs, and modernization techs alike.

Hiring-intent search volume for this trade — anything resembling "hire an elevator mechanic" — did not surface at all in our research pull. That's the honest picture: this is a licensing- and referral-driven hiring market, not a search-driven one.

That absence of search volume doesn't mean the labor is easy to find. It means the shortage doesn't show up the way it does in bigger trades, where a contractor can watch applicant volume rise and fall with the market. In elevator maintenance, the constraint is upstream of search entirely: a fixed, licensed pipeline that grows only as fast as apprenticeship programs and state boards produce new licensed mechanics.

Where the search interest actually sits

"Elevator mechanic salary" alone draws roughly 6,600 searches a month, with pay and apprentice-pay variants adding several thousand more — call it roughly 9,700 combined monthly searches across the salary cluster. Certification and licensing terms ("elevator mechanic license," "elevator mechanic certification," "licensed elevator mechanic") add another 360 or so combined. People are curious about pay and how to get licensed. They are not typing hiring-intent queries into Google — because this hiring doesn't happen there.

Two separate credentials gate this trade, not one.

Most states require a license to work as an elevator mechanic, and most mechanics earn it by completing a multi-year registered apprenticeship recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor before working independently. That's the first gate.

Inspection work sits on top of that as a second, separate gate. A Qualified Elevator Inspector (QEI) credential — governed by the ASME QEI-1 standard and issued through accredited certifying bodies — requires documented training, at least a year of verifiable inspection experience, and a passing exam, with annual continuing-education recertification. A QEI credential is not itself a BLS occupation; it's a credential held by inspectors who are otherwise counted under the nearest fitting BLS category. Neither the state license nor the QEI credential is optional in most jurisdictions where the work occurs.

THE VERIFICATION PROBLEM

"Licensed" and "QEI-certified" are both checkable claims — verify them, don't take them on trust.

A resume can say "licensed elevator mechanic" or "QEI-certified" without a hiring manager having any efficient way to confirm it's true, still active, or held in the state where the work will happen. Verifying a state license means checking directly with that state's licensing board. Verifying a QEI credential means checking directly with the certifying body that issued it — not taking a resume claim, a business card, or a prior employer's word for it.

Skipping that step is exactly the kind of shortcut that shows up later as a failed code inspection, an insurance problem, or a contractor who legally cannot sign off on the work you hired them to do.

The positions commercial elevator maintenance contractors recruit for most.

Several of these roles are grouped under the same BLS occupational code, or mapped to the nearest real category, since this trade doesn't have a dedicated code for every specialty. A full wage breakdown, with every proxy classification labeled, is in the companion Salary Guide.

ROLE	WHAT THEY DO
Elevator Mechanic / Installer	Installation, maintenance, and repair of elevators
Elevator Service Technician	Routine maintenance and callback repair on existing units
Elevator Maintenance Technician	Scheduled preventive-maintenance contract work
QEI-Certified Inspector	Code-compliance inspection under the ASME QEI-1 standard
Escalator Technician	Escalators and moving walkways
Elevator Modernization Technician	Upgrading controllers, cabs, and drive systems on existing units
Elevator Project Manager	Bid-to-build oversight on modernization and new-installation contracts
Elevator Service Dispatcher / Coordinator	Schedules service calls, callbacks, and inspection appointments
Elevator Estimator	Takeoffs and bid pricing for installation and modernization contracts
Elevator Controls / Electronics Technician	Diagnoses and repairs elevator controllers and electronics

HIRING PLAYBOOK

Verify the license and the credential before you screen for anything else.

- **Verify the state license directly with the state licensing board.** Don't take "licensed" at face value — confirm it's active and held in the state where the work will happen.
- **Verify QEI status directly with the issuing certifying body** for any candidate doing inspection work — not from a resume line or a prior employer reference.
- **Match experience to equipment type.** Hydraulic, traction, and MRL (machine-room-less) systems draw on different troubleshooting knowledge, and older relay-logic controllers behave nothing like modern microprocessor-based ones.
- **Build the pipeline before a seat opens.** With a labor pool this small and this license-gated, waiting until you have an opening puts you behind contractors who already have a warm, verified bench.

A full interview framework — including specific questions by role — is in the companion Interview Guide.

Contingency fees are a tax on urgency. A retainer is a tax on nothing.

Most staffing agencies work on contingency — a percentage fee, often 20-25% of first-year salary, paid only when a hire lands. That model incentivizes speed over fit, and gives the agency no reason to maintain a licensed, credential-verified pipeline for a niche this small.

My Trade Talent works on a flat monthly retainer instead:

- We're incentivized to build a standing, license-verified pipeline — not just fill one seat and move on.
- Your cost doesn't spike with three open seats and doesn't disappear with zero — it's predictable.
- We stay accountable for fit over time, not just for a signed offer letter.

Generalist contingency agencies rarely maintain a deep bench of licensed elevator mechanics or QEI-certified inspectors, because the credentialing bar is high and the pool is small. A recruiting partner built specifically around this trade fills faster, with better-fit candidates — especially for harder-to-staff specialties like modernization or inspection.

THE HIDDEN COST OF VACANCY

An open seat in a licensed trade doesn't just sit empty — it moves inspections and callbacks onto everyone else.

In elevator maintenance specifically, a vacant seat has a sharper edge than in most trades: you can't legally backfill it with just anyone. A missing QEI inspector means inspections either wait or get outsourced at a premium. A missing licensed mechanic means callbacks and preventive-maintenance visits pile onto the technicians you already have, and eventually onto response time for the buildings you serve.

Use our free **Cost of Vacancy Calculator** at mytradetalent.com/cost-of-vacancy to model what a specific open seat is costing your operation in overtime, coverage, and missed service windows — by role and days vacant.

In a labor pool this small, licensed mechanics and QEI inspectors know their options.

When the qualified pool is measured in the tens of thousands nationally, not millions, word travels fast about which contractors are worth working for. Candidates in this trade consistently weigh a handful of specifics:

- **Equipment mix.** Mechanics want to know whether they'll be working hydraulic, traction, or MRL systems — and whether the shop invests in keeping equipment current.
- **Callback and on-call policy.** How entrapments and after-hours callbacks actually get handled and compensated matters more here than in almost any other trade.
- **A real path toward QEI certification.** Contractors who can describe, specifically, how they support a mechanic toward inspection credentials retain longer than ones who mention it vaguely.
- **Route and territory stability.** Predictable routes and realistic call volume beat a vague promise of "flexibility."

None of this replaces competitive pay. But at parity, the contractor who answers these questions specifically wins the candidate the vaguer competitor loses.

RETENTION

The credential path that gets someone licensed is also what keeps them.

Because a state elevator mechanic license and a QEI credential are both individually held, portable, and career-defining, they double as a retention lever most contractors underuse. A mechanic who sees a concrete, funded path toward QEI certification — inspection work, different hours, less physical wear over time — has a real reason to stay rather than shop their license every time a competitor calls.

Predictable callback rotation matters just as much. Technicians who know their on-call schedule well in advance, with clear compensation for entrapment and after-hours calls, report meaningfully less turnover than technicians managed route-to-route with no visibility.

What "license-verified pipeline" actually means, operationally.

A standing pipeline in this trade isn't a bigger applicant pool — there isn't one to build. It's a smaller, continuously-verified one, maintained instead of assembled under deadline. In practice, that means:

- State licenses and QEI credentials are confirmed directly with the issuing board or certifying body before a candidate ever reaches your desk — not after an offer is extended.
- Candidates are tagged by actual equipment experience (hydraulic, traction, MRL, controller generation) rather than self-reported skill level.
- The pipeline stays warm between openings, so a seat filling today doesn't leave you starting from zero when the next one opens.

THE RECRUITING PARTNER QUESTION

Four questions worth asking any recruiter before you sign with them.

- **"How do you verify a state license or a QEI credential?"** If the answer doesn't mention contacting the licensing board or certifying body directly, the candidates you're seeing haven't been verified — just represented.
- **"What happens to the pipeline if I don't have an open seat this month?"** Contingency recruiters have no incentive to maintain one. Ask what stays warm between placements.
- **"What's your fee structure if a placement doesn't work out in the first 90 days?"** Get this in writing before you need it, not after.
- **"Do you specialize in this trade, or is elevator maintenance one of a dozen categories you cover?"** Specificity in the answer usually tracks with specificity in the candidates — this pool is too small for a generalist to know well.

FINAL WORD

The pool isn't going to get bigger. The verification process can get better.

Elevator maintenance will keep being one of the smallest, most tightly licensed labor pools in the commercial trades — that's not a temporary condition to wait out. Contractors who build their hiring process around verifying a license and a credential, and around a pipeline maintained continuously rather than assembled under deadline, will simply spend less time and money on this problem than the ones who don't.

ABOUT MY TRADE TALENT

A flat-rate recruiting partner built for commercial trades.

My Trade Talent recruits for commercial trades contractors nationally on a flat monthly retainer — no per-hire contingency fee, no incentive to rush a placement that doesn't fit. We maintain live, license- and credential-verified candidate pipelines across elevator maintenance and nine other commercial trades verticals.

Get in touch: mytradetalent.com · (314) 886-7975 · staffing@abstraktmg.com

Registered apprenticeships and state boards, not job boards.

Unlike trades where candidates surface through open postings, elevator mechanics overwhelmingly enter the field through registered apprenticeship programs recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor, which combine paid on-the-job training with classroom instruction over several years before a mechanic is eligible for a state license. QEI candidates layer certifying-body training and documented, verifiable inspection experience on top of an existing mechanic background.

That matters for sourcing: this candidate pool doesn't live on generic job boards the way larger trades do. Relationships with apprenticeship program coordinators, state licensing boards, and direct industry referrals consistently surface stronger, verifiable candidates than a generic posting ever will in this trade specifically.

Modernization and inspection are the two hardest specialties to staff — for different reasons.

Modernization work requires a mechanic comfortable moving between generations of technology: older relay-logic controllers on the units coming out, modern microprocessor-based controllers on the units going in, plus the code-compliance steps that have to be documented at every stage of the upgrade — not just the parts swap. Inspection work requires the QEI credential itself, which takes documented training and at least a year of verifiable field experience to earn, on top of whatever mechanic experience came before it.

Both specialties draw from the same small base of roughly 24,200 nationally licensed mechanics and technicians — which is exactly why contractors who need modernization or inspection capacity specifically should expect a longer search than a general maintenance-technician search, and should start that search before the seat is actually empty.



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

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

Schedule a Discovery Call

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