



ALTITUDE SEARCH GROUP

The 2026 Finance Leadership Compensation Guide

Base, bonus, and equity benchmarks for Controller through CFO, built for companies that make, build, or ship a physical product.



In This Guide

01	Foreword	03
	How finance leadership pay moved this year in hardware, medical device, manufacturing, robotics, aerospace and defense, and clean energy.	
02	How to Read These Ranges	04
	Base against bonus, why the spread is wide, and where equity actually shows up.	
03	2026 Compensation Bands	05
	Six roles, Controller through CFO, benchmarked by base, bonus, and equity.	
04	Geography	12
	How to adjust any range in this guide for market, rather than reading city by city tables.	
05	2026 Compensation Sentiment	13
	What is driving pay, hiring pace, and offer structure, including signing and retention terms.	
06	Where This Data Comes From	16
	The named 2025 and 2026 surveys and reports behind every range.	
07	Talk Through Your Search	17
	Benchmarking a role, market, or company stage this guide does not capture cleanly.	

Looking for one number fast? Go straight to your role in the compensation bands, then apply the geography adjustment on page 12.



SECTION 01

Foreword

Finance leadership hiring across hardware, medical device, manufacturing, robotics, aerospace and defense, and clean energy companies has moved differently than the broader finance market this year. Base pay is climbing at a measured pace across most levels, while bonus and equity are doing more of the work at the top of the range, particularly for CFOs and SVPs of Finance.

This guide benchmarks base and total compensation for the roles we place most often, Controller through CFO, at companies from roughly 50 to 1,000 employees, spanning venture backed through pre IPO and mid market private. It draws on public compensation surveys and industry reports, not on our own search fee data, so treat these ranges as market composites rather than a single number for any one search.

6 Roles benchmarked, Controller through CFO	50-1,000 Employee range of the companies covered	6 Named public surveys cross referenced
---	--	---

Altitude Search Group is an executive search firm placing finance and accounting leadership at companies that make, build, or ship a physical product. The sectors in this guide are the ones we work in every week.



SECTION 02

How to Read These Ranges

01 Base and bonus are shown separately

The mix between the two shifts considerably as you move from Controller to CFO, so a single blended number hides the part of the package you actually negotiate.

02 Ranges reflect real market variance

Public surveys disagree with each other at every level we checked, so we show a realistic spread rather than a single average.

03 Equity is noted where it is common, not guaranteed

Whether a company grants options, profit interests, or nothing at all depends more on stage and ownership structure than on title alone.

04 Geography is an adjustment, not a separate set of city tables

See the geography section on page 12 for how to apply it to any range in this guide.

HOW TO USE THE TABLES THAT FOLLOW

Find your role, read the base range first and set your cash band there. Then read bonus and equity as the rest of the package you are competing against, and decide which components you are using to close the gap.



PART ONE

2026 Compensation Bands

Six roles, Controller through CFO, benchmarked by base, bonus, and equity.



ROLE 01 OF 06

Controller

COMPONENT	2026 RANGE	DETAIL
Base salary	\$150k-\$225k	National composite across venture backed, pre IPO, and mid market private companies.
Target bonus	10-20%	Target percentage of base, typically tied to company and individual performance.
Equity	None to modest	Small option grants show up in venture backed or pre IPO companies, but are not universal.

BASE RANGE IN CONTEXT

\$100K – \$650K



WHERE COMPANIES LAND

Seed and Series A companies tend to land in the lower third of this range. Profitable, later-stage companies land in the upper third.



ROLE 02 OF 06

Director of Finance / Director of Accounting

COMPONENT	2026 RANGE	DETAIL
Base salary	\$135k-\$205k	Overlaps the Controller band. Scope and reporting line matter more than title here.
Target bonus	10-20%	Target percentage of base, most often paid annually.
Equity	Modest or none	Modest options in venture backed companies. Often no equity in lower middle market private firms.

BASE RANGE IN CONTEXT

\$100K – \$650K



WHERE COMPANIES LAND

Same pattern as Controller. Earlier stage skews lower, later stage and profitable skews higher.



ROLE 03 OF 06

VP of Finance

COMPONENT	2026 RANGE	DETAIL
Base salary	\$185k-\$300k	Wide band. Systems, FP&A, and operational scope drive placement within it.
Target bonus	15-30%	Target percentage of base, increasingly tied to company level metrics.
Equity	Common	Common in venture backed and pre IPO companies, typically larger grants than Controller or Director level.

BASE RANGE IN CONTEXT

\$100K - \$650K



WHERE COMPANIES LAND

This is where stage starts to change the shape of the package, not just the base number. Earlier stage trades lower cash for real equity upside.



ROLE 04 OF 06

SVP of Finance

COMPONENT	2026 RANGE	DETAIL
Base salary	\$250k-\$400k	Cash weight increases as a company matures and governance tightens.
Target bonus	20-40%	Target percentage of base, commonly tied to plan and margin performance.
Equity	Meaningful	Meaningful equity is common at pre IPO and sponsor backed firms. Packages skew more cash heavy as a company matures.

BASE RANGE IN CONTEXT

\$100K – \$650K



WHERE COMPANIES LAND

Pre-IPO and sponsor backed companies lean on equity here more than any other level below CFO.



ROLE 05 OF 06

CFO, Mid-Market / Portfolio-Company Scale

COMPONENT	2026 RANGE	DETAIL
Base salary	\$250k-\$450k	Ownership structure and board expectations set the base as much as revenue does.
Target bonus	30-50%	Target percentage of base, often with transaction-linked upside.
Equity	Common	Options or profit interests are common. Equity can be a major share of total value at earlier stage companies.

BASE RANGE IN CONTEXT

\$100K – \$650K



WHERE COMPANIES LAND

Venture-backed, earlier stage companies sit toward the lower end of base with more equity upside attached. Profitable, later pre-IPO companies sit toward the higher end with less equity dependence.



ROLE 06 OF 06

CFO, Larger / Later-Stage / Institutional Scale

COMPONENT	2026 RANGE	DETAIL
Base salary	\$350k-\$600k+	Scales with company size, capital structure, and governance requirements.
Target bonus	40-75%+	Target percentage of base, scaling with size and governance.
Equity	Largest grants	Larger grants, long term incentive plans, or option equivalents matter more here. Annualized equity can exceed cash at the top end.



WHERE COMPANIES LAND

Sponsor backed and late pre-IPO companies cluster toward the lower end of this range. Companies with public-company-like governance cluster toward the higher end.



SECTION 04

Geography

A workable adjustment for 2026 is to expect major metro markets to run about 10 to 20 percent above the national ranges above, high cost secondary metros to run about 5 to 10 percent above, and smaller or lower cost markets to run about 5 to 15 percent below.

MARKET TYPE	ADJUSTMENT TO BASE
Major metro markets	+10% to +20%
High cost secondary metros	+5% to +10%
Smaller or lower cost markets	-5% to -15%

WHY THERE ARE NO CITY BY CITY TABLES

Company size, revenue, and industry still matter more than geography alone, which is part of why national compensation surveys default to national averages rather than city by city tables.



PART TWO

2026 Compensation Sentiment

What's actually driving pay, hiring pace, and offer structure this year.



SECTION 05

Compensation Sentiment

Base pay is doing more of the lifting than bonus expansion

Across manufacturing, hardware, medical device, robotics, aerospace and defense, and clean energy, finance leadership pay is growing at a pace similar to, or a step behind, the hottest commercial functions, but ahead of broad back office averages once the role touches systems, automation, FP&A, cost accounting, pricing, or operational decision support. For Controllers and Directors of Finance, companies are leaning more on base salary growth than on richer bonus pools to stay competitive. For VP Finance, SVP Finance, and CFO, bonus and equity still carry real weight, but base remains the easiest lever for most companies to pull in the near term.

Hiring is active, but more selective at the top

Hiring for senior finance leadership is still active but more selective and slower moving than for earlier career accounting roles. Searches take longer when a company wants a finance leader who combines technical accounting depth with operational rigor, systems fluency, and the ability to present to a board. Demand is strongest where finance leadership can directly influence gross margin, supply chain, working capital, capital planning, and audit readiness.

Clean energy and defense-adjacent roles carry a premium

In clean energy and defense adjacent businesses specifically, project accounting, government contract familiarity, revenue recognition expertise, and capital raise experience push compensation above what a generic private company finance role would command.



SECTION 05 · CONTINUED

Signing and Retention

Sign on bonuses, retention bonuses, and clawback provisions show up in 2026 offers, but they are not the default. They tend to appear when a company is trying to close the gap created by a candidate's forfeited bonus or equity at their current employer, or when a role is tied to a transaction, an audit cycle, or a transition period after a close.

Clawback provisions specifically are most common at later stage or sponsor backed companies, where equity, bonus acceleration, or transaction bonuses are large enough, and governance tight enough, to justify one.

LEVEL	TYPICAL OFFER STRUCTURE IN 2026
CFO and SVP Finance	Most likely to include a clawback or repayment condition, particularly where equity or transaction bonuses are large.
Some VP Finance	Clawback or repayment terms appear where the role is transaction or transition linked.
Controller and Director	More often a straightforward base plus target bonus structure.



SECTION 06

Where This Data Comes From

These ranges are built from named 2025 and 2026 compensation surveys and reports, cross referenced against each other rather than taken from a single source.

Robert Half	Finance and Accounting Salaries and Salary Trends. Published March 11, 2026.
Workday	The Definitive 2026 CFO Salary Guide. Published January 6, 2026.
Aon	Radford McLagan Compensation Database, manufacturing sector coverage including aerospace and defense, automotive, and industrial goods companies.
The Conference Board	In Corporate America, 2026 Pay Raise Budgets Projected. Published September 2, 2025.
Bennett Financials	CFO Compensation Report 2026: Startup vs Mid-Market vs Enterprise. Published November 17, 2025.
HR Source	2026 National Executive Compensation Survey, coordinated with the Employer Associations of America. Published June 2026.



Want a Read on Your Specific Search?

None of these ranges answer the harder question, which is what a specific candidate is actually worth for your specific search. That comes down to what the role needs to do inside your business, not what a survey says the title is worth on average. If you are benchmarking a role, a market, or a company stage that is not captured cleanly above, that is exactly the kind of conversation we are glad to have.



Sabina Levin

PRESIDENT, ALTITUDE SEARCH GROUP

sabina@altitudesearchgroup.com

650-695-3496

BOOK A CONVERSATION

altitudesearchgroup.com/book/