SECURITYBUDGET RESEARCH REPORT

# Security Staffing and Salary Report (2026)

Vendor-neutral benchmarks for security headcount, loaded salary cost, and the in-house SOC vs. MDR tradeoff across organization sizes.

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People are almost always the largest line in a security budget, and they are the hardest to estimate because the number lives at the intersection of headcount ratios, loaded salary cost, and the build-vs-buy decision on monitoring. This report uses public wage data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and budget-benchmark patterns from the IANS / Artico Security Budget Benchmark to put defensible ranges around each of those. The figures are ranges, not promises - your actual cost depends on geography, seniority mix, and how much you outsource.

## What a security hire actually costs

BLS reports a **median wage of $129,180** for Information Security Analysts in May 2025, with a wide spread by experience and market: **$75,090 at the 10th percentile** and **$199,850 at the 90th**. Once benefits, payroll taxes, equipment, software seats, training, and management overhead are added at a planning assumption of 30%, the **fully loaded median lands near $168K per FTE**.

| Wage point (BLS, Information Security Analysts) | Base salary | ~Loaded (+30%) |
|---|---|---|
| 10th percentile | $75,090 | ~$97,600 |
| Median | $129,180 | ~$168,000 |
| 90th percentile | $199,850 | ~$259,800 |

When you build a staffing budget, use the **loaded** figure. A plan that counts only base salary will understate the true cost of every hire by roughly a third.

## How many people do you need?

Headcount ratios are blunt instruments, but they anchor the conversation. A widely used planning heuristic is **about one security FTE per 300 employees**. That ratio tightens to roughly **1:100** in heavily regulated or mature organizations (finance, healthcare, critical infrastructure) and loosens toward **1:500** in lean or lower-risk shops that lean heavily on automation and managed services. IANS / Artico benchmark data consistently shows staffing as the single largest category of security spend, so small changes in this ratio move the whole budget.

| Employees | FTE at 1:300 (typical) | Loaded cost (~$168K/FTE) | Regulated (1:100) | Lean (1:500) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 50 | ~0.2-0.5 (often fractional/outsourced) | ~$80K-$160K | ~0.5 | ~0.1 |

| Employees | FTE at 1:300 (typical) | Loaded cost (~$168K/FTE) | Regulated (1:100) | Lean (1:500) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 200 | ~0.7 → round to 1 | ~$168K | ~2 | ~0.4 |
| 800 | ~2.7 → 3 | ~$504K | ~8 | ~1.6 |
| 2,500 | ~8.3 → 8-9 | ~$1.34M-$1.51M | ~25 | ~5 |
| 5,000 | ~16.7 → 16-17 | ~$2.69M-$2.86M | ~50 | ~10 |

A few notes on reading the table. Below roughly 200 employees, the security function is often a fraction of one role - a part of an IT generalist's time plus outsourced services - rather than a dedicated hire. As organizations cross into the thousands, the "typical" column understates need if any 24/7 monitoring is done in-house, because shift coverage does not scale linearly with employee count.

## The 24/7 problem: in-house SOC vs. MDR

Round-the-clock monitoring is where staffing math breaks the simple ratios. Covering a security operations center 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - across shifts, weekends, holidays, and vacations - requires roughly **8-12 FTE** purely for coverage, regardless of company size. At a loaded cost near $168K each, that is **$1.34M-$2.02M per year in salaries alone**, before tooling and management.

> *For most mid-market organizations, building a 24/7 in-house SOC is the most expensive way to buy detection. The shift-coverage floor of 8-12 analysts arrives long before the company is large enough to keep them all busy - which is exactly why managed detection and response exists.*

This is the core of the build-vs-buy decision. **Managed detection and response (MDR)** delivers 24/7 monitoring as a service, typically priced per endpoint in the range of **~$3-$45 per endpoint per month** depending on coverage depth and vendor. For an 800-person firm with, say, 1,000 endpoints, even the upper end of that range stays well under the $1.3M-$2M salary floor of an in-house SOC - and it removes the recruiting and retention burden of staffing night shifts in a tight labor market.

| Approach | Rough annual cost | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| In-house 24/7 SOC | $1.3M-$2M (salaries only) | 8-12 FTE for shift coverage; tooling extra |
| MDR service | ~$3-$45 / endpoint / month | Scales with endpoints, not shifts |

The point is not that MDR is always cheaper or always right - large, mature, highly regulated organizations often run hybrid models with an in-house team plus an MDR partner. But for organizations below a few thousand employees, the shift-coverage math usually favors buying monitoring and reserving in-house FTEs for engineering, governance, and incident leadership.

## Building the staffing line

Put the pieces together in this order:

1. **Pick a ratio** based on your regulatory profile and maturity (1:100, 1:300, or 1:500).
2. **Multiply by loaded cost** (~$168K/FTE) rather than base salary.
3. **Decide on 24/7 coverage** - fold in either an 8-12 FTE SOC floor or an MDR line, not both.

4. **Add a seniority mix.** The BLS percentile spread means a team blending junior analysts (near the 10th percentile) with senior engineers and a leader (toward the 90th) will cost more than a flat median assumption suggests.

## Staffing scenarios by operating model

| Operating model | Internal roles | External coverage | Planning implication |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lean SMB | IT owner or fractional security lead | MDR, vCISO, annual testing | Avoids a premature full-time SOC hire but requires clear vendor accountability. |
| Mid-market hybrid | Security lead, engineer, GRC, incident owner | MDR for nights and queue coverage | Internal staff focus on architecture, remediation, and business risk. |
| Regulated enterprise | Dedicated engineering, GRC, threat, and response teams | Specialist retainers and surge support | Higher ratio and seniority mix; validate role overlap before adding tools. |

These models are not maturity rankings. An outsourced monitoring service can be the more resilient design if it provides coverage that an undersized internal team cannot sustain.

## Methodology and limitations

Base wages use the BLS May 2025 Information Security Analyst distribution. The 30% loading factor is a planning assumption for benefits and overhead, not a BLS statistic. The 1:300 headcount ratio is a budgeting heuristic rather than an occupational standard; regulation, product-security scope, geography, and outsourcing can produce substantially different staffing levels. Contractor and managed-service costs belong in the same operating-model comparison so the analysis does not make internal labor look artificially expensive or cheap.

## How to use this

Use the Cybersecurity Budget Calculator to turn your headcount and risk profile into an estimated staffing line, then layer in the in-house-vs-MDR decision above. Treat the ratios and salary figures as planning ranges to pressure-test against your own market data - not as fixed targets - and refresh them as wage data and your coverage needs evolve.

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