

What Drives H-1B Approval?

Forecasting Employer and Wage Trends

2020–2026

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Why H-1B Approvals Matter



Sundar Pichai (Google)



Satya Nadella (Microsoft)

PROBLEM

H-1B policy uncertainty raises cost and risk for U.S. employers competing for global STEM talent.

In FY2024, over 780K H-1B registrations competed for 85K slots.

GOAL

Predict approval probability & wage trends.

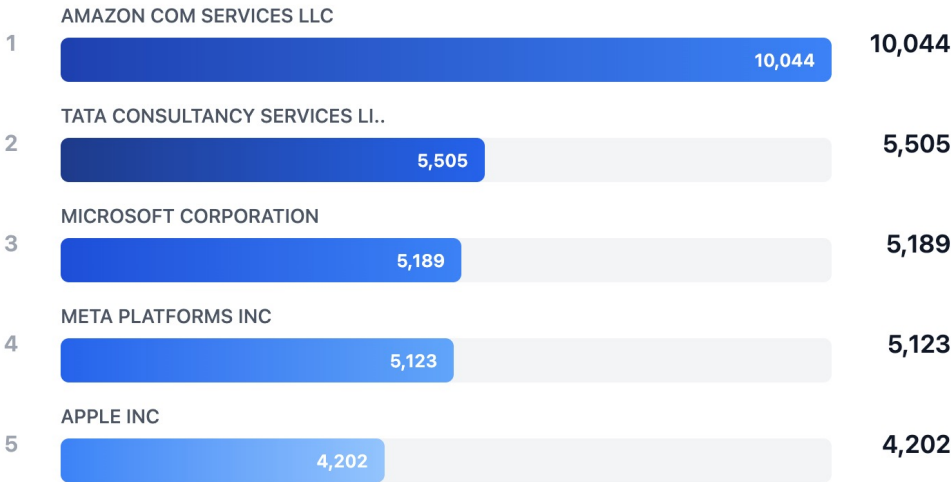
Identify key cost drivers and policy implications.

STAKEHOLDERS

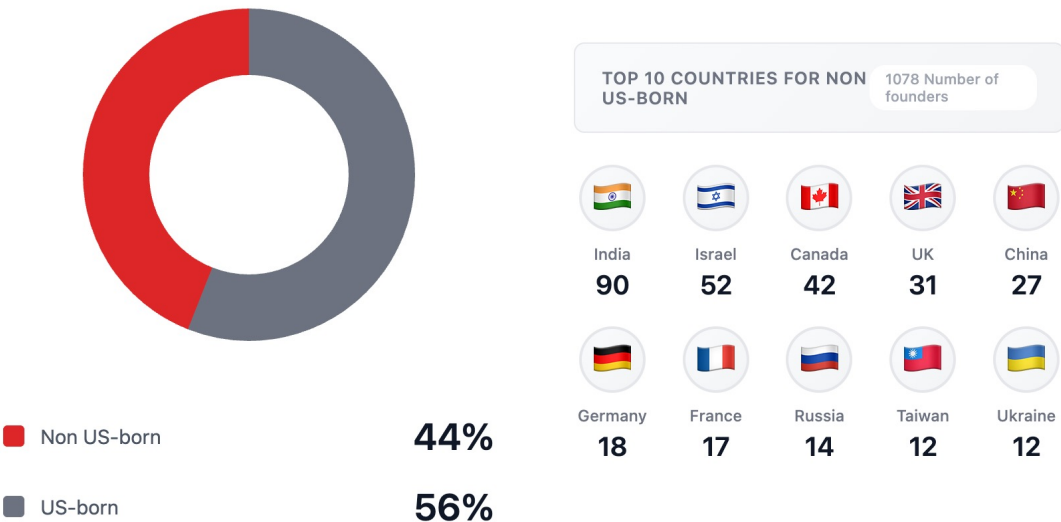
Employers (budgeting), Policymakers (equity, access).

Top 5 H-1B Employers

DATA AS OF: 6/30/2025



Unicorn Founders: Countries of Birth



Data & Methods — FY2020–2024 Overview

SCOPE (ROWS)

3,447,443

FY2020–2024

OVERALL APPROVAL RATE

92.4%

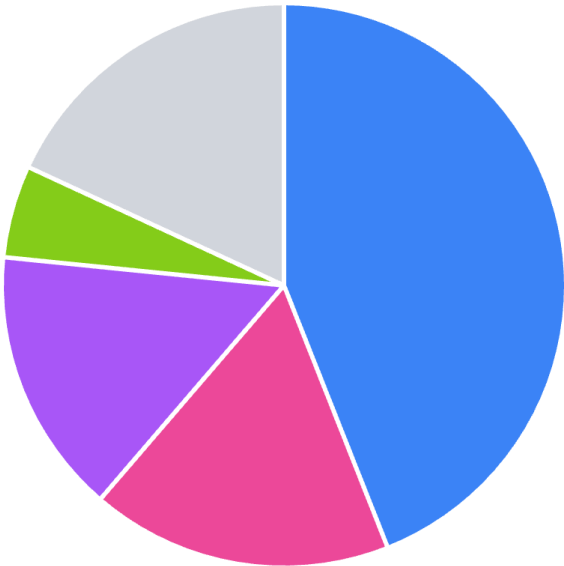
CERTIFIED / All filings

AVG ANNUAL WAGE

\$117,859

Median \$107,000 | IQR \$85,000–\$140,000

H-1B Top Job Roles Share (SOC Title, 2020–2024)



Others (IT/Systems)
44.0%



Software Developers, Applications
17.3%



Software Developers
15.3%



Computer Systems Analysts
5.3%



Other Roles (merged <5%)
18.1%

MODELS

- **Logistic Regression** → approval probability
- **K-means** → employer segments
- **Linear Regression** → wage patterns

TOP PREDICTORS

Employer

45%

SOC

28%

State

15%

Year

8%

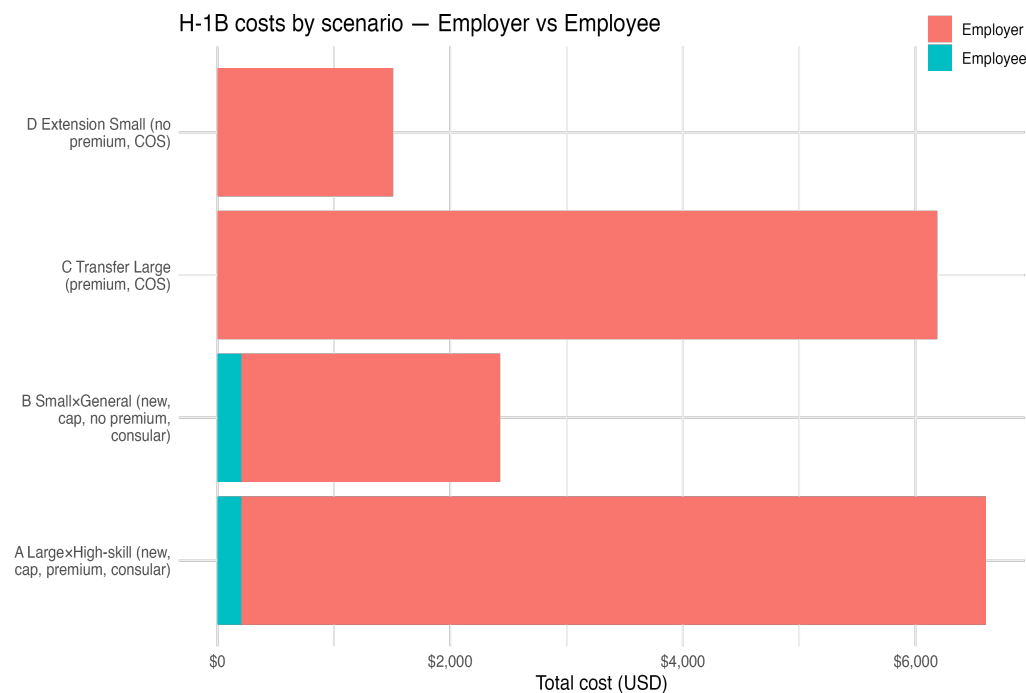
Wage

4%

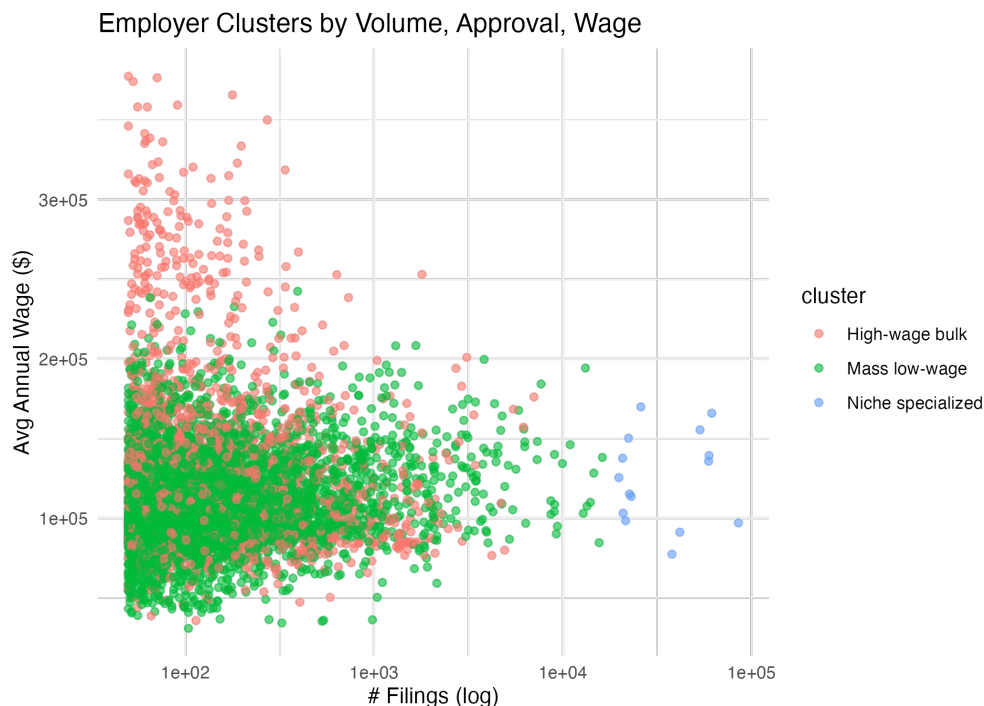
Heavily concentrated in software & systems roles

Why Big Employers Dominate H-1B Approvals: The Cost Barrier

Who pays the most?



Employer covers most mandatory fees
(ACWIA, Fraud, Premium Processing, etc.)



Three employer clusters identified by K-means

Cost per case

\$6–7K for large tech
& consulting firms

Barrier to entry

High cost = **filter** for
large employers

Result

Same firms dominate
filings and approvals

R^2

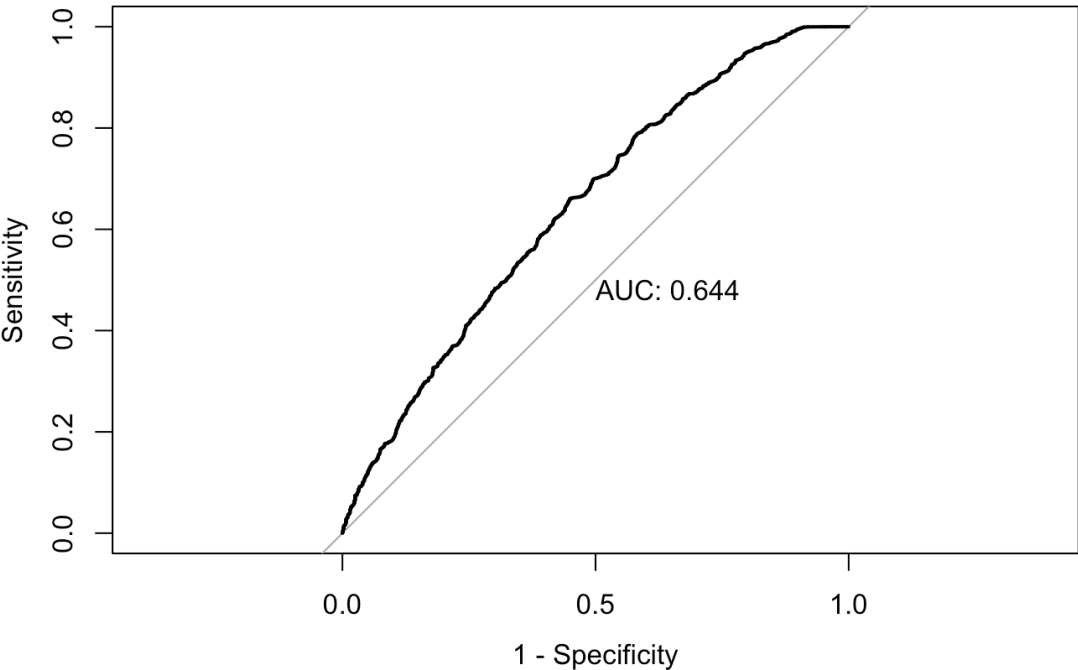
0.7

Silhouette

0.45

Key Drivers of H-1B Approval: Logistic Regression Findings

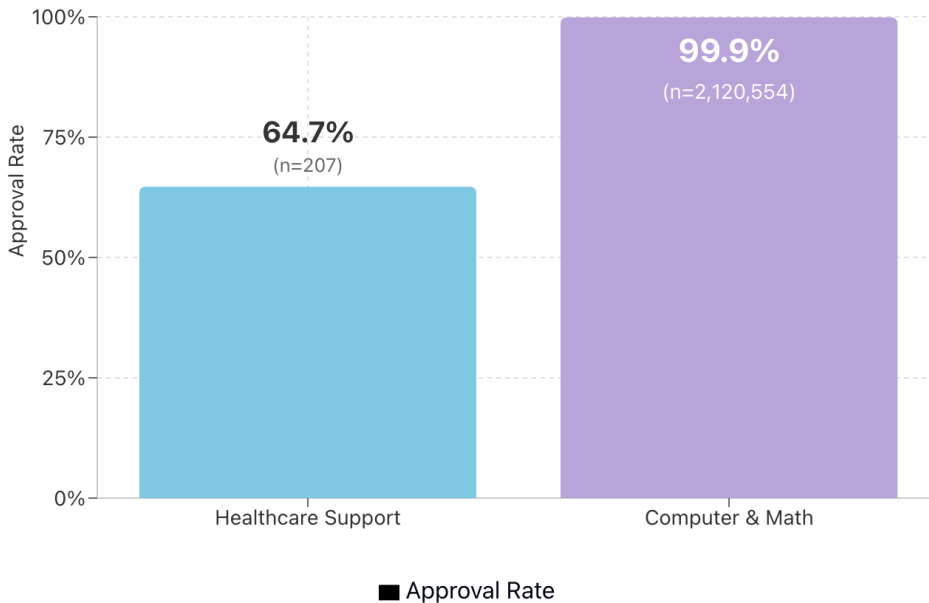
ROC — Logistic Model



10% random sample; Certified/Denied only

Highest vs Lowest Approval Rates by Occupation

FY2020–2024; Certified/Denied only; SOC with $n \geq 200$



MODEL

Logistic regression on FY2020–2024 sample

Controls: year, state, SOC (2-digit),
employer group

WAGE EFFECT

Neutral after controls

OR ≈ 1.00 per **+\$10k** (CI overlaps 1)

PERFORMANCE

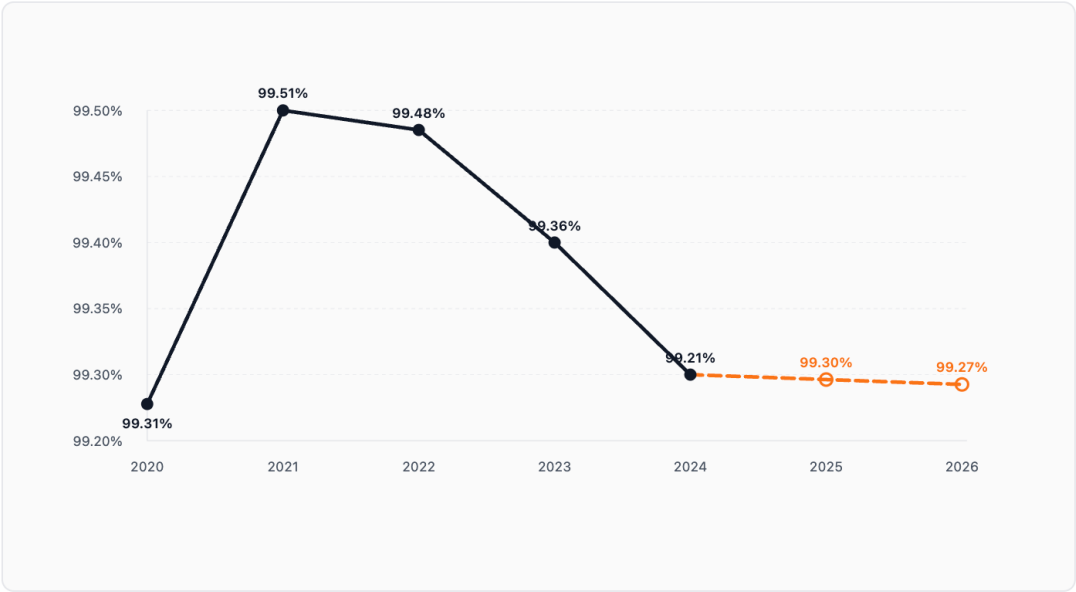
AUC = 0.64

ACCURACY

92%

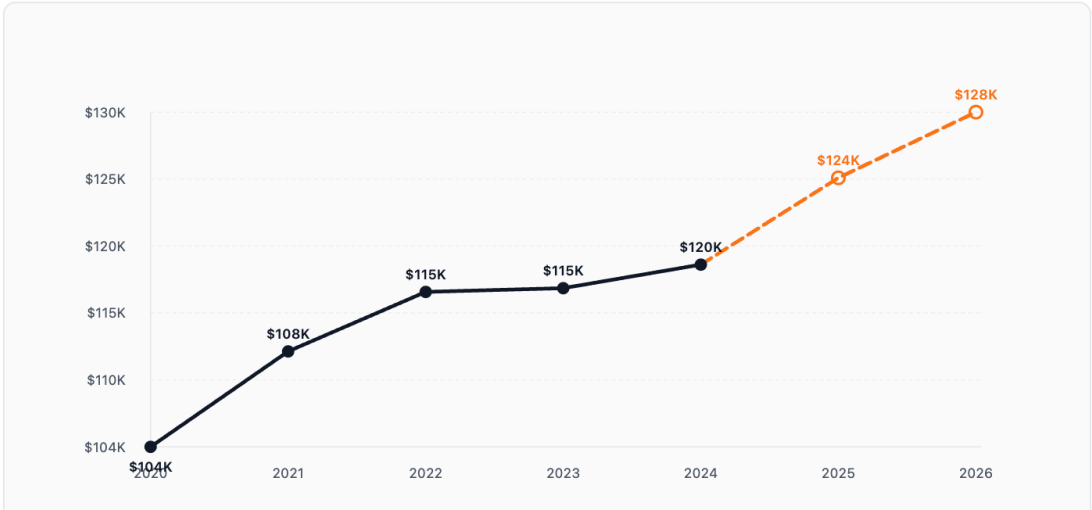
H-1B Macro Trends: Stable Approvals, Rising Wages

H-1B LCA Certification Rate — Annual (2020–2026F)



— Actual (2020–2024) - - - Forecast (2025–2026)

H-1B Median Wage — History, 2025 Nowcast & 2026 Forecast



FORECAST

- Certification Rate — **99.30% (2025); 99.27% (2026)**
- Median Wage — **≈ \$124K (2025); ≈ \$128K (2026)**

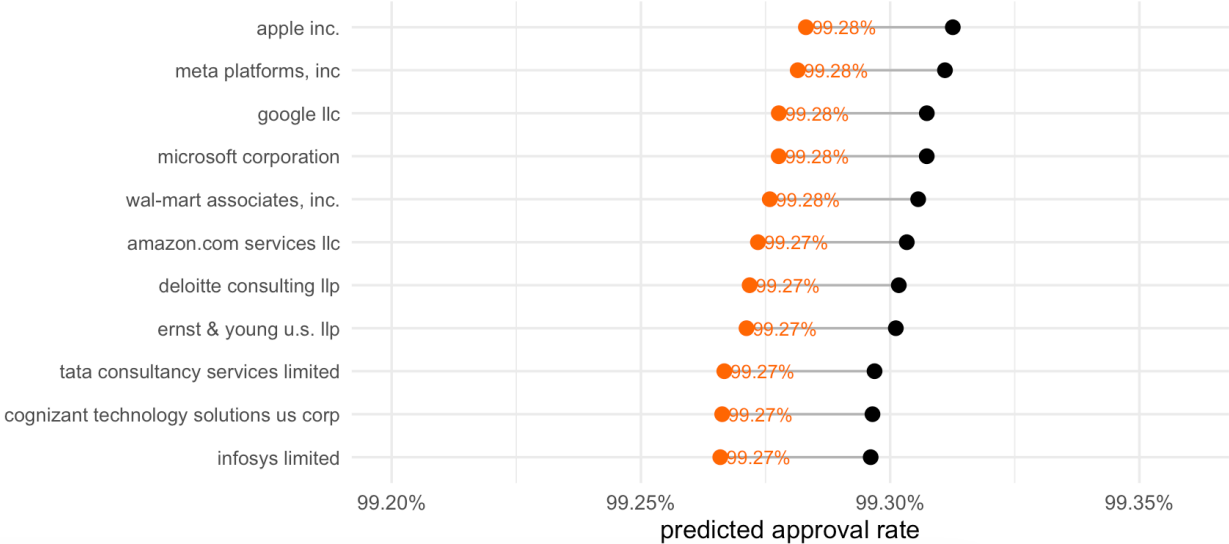
METHOD

LCA certification rates and wage medians calculated annually (2020–2024) using certified cases; Integrated **2025 YTD** data (~346K filings) with **Q4 uplift adjustment** to estimate 2025 full-year wages. Linear and regression-based forecasts extend both trends through **2026**.

Reflects **DOL LCA certification outcomes** (not USCIS petition approvals). Wages annualized across pay units (hourly, weekly, monthly, yearly).

Employer & Occupation Forecasts — Stable Approvals, Widening Wage Gap

predicted h-1b employer approval — 2025 vs 2026
black = 2025; orange = 2026. employers with ≥200 filings (2025 ytd profile).



FORECAST

Employer approvals remain ~**99.3%**;

Wage growth is led by:

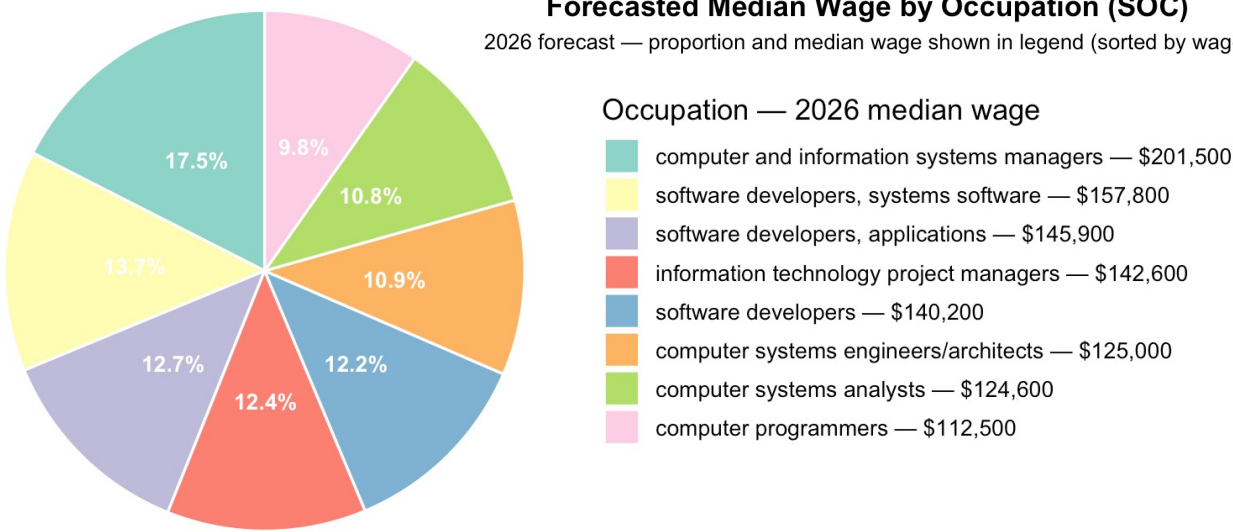
- IT/ Tech Managers: **\$201K**
- Senior Developers: **\$146K — \$158K**

METHOD

Used **2025-YTD** employer and SOC data to project 2026 outcomes (logistic + trend model).

Forecasted Median Wage by Occupation (SOC)

2026 forecast — proportion and median wage shown in legend (sorted by wage)



KEY INSIGHTS

Top firms (**Apple, Meta, Google, Microsoft**) show stable approval trends; wage gap between senior and entry IT roles continues to widen.

Business Implications — What These Trends Mean for Employers

Approval stability → Predictable hiring

H-1B approval rates stay ~99%; policy risk remains low.

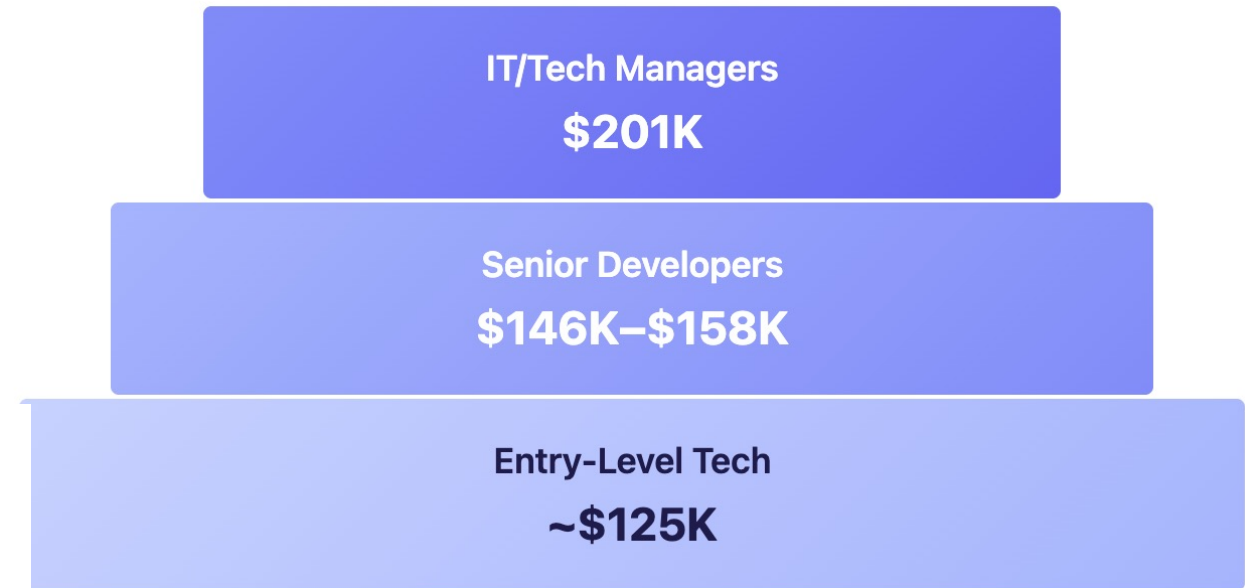
Rising wages → Higher cost pressure

2026 median \$201K for IT/tech managers; +STEM salary growth.

Talent polarization → Upskilling required

Senior tech roles outpace entry-level; skill gap widening.

2026 Wage Gap by Role Level



Gap widening: Senior roles outpace entry by \$76K+