RESEARCH

The 2026 Fractional CTO Market Report

Rates, costs and demand, from 40 public sources

What fractional CTOs charge, what a full-time CTO costs instead, and why demand is growing. Desk research compiled by Kompella Technologies in November 2026, with every figure sourced.

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The short version

Fractional CTOs who publish data charge about **$200 an hour**, and a part-time retainer of roughly two days a week typically costs **$8,000 to $15,000 a month** in the US [1][2][3]. Vendor marketing pages quote much higher, up to $500 or $600 an hour [5][7][9]. Only about 1 in 10 providers publishes a price at all [3].

A full-time startup CTO in the US earns an average base salary of **$155,000 at Seed, $196,000 at Series A and $238,000 at Series B**, before equity of 1% to 4% for a hired CTO [15][16]. A fractional CTO is not automatically cheaper in cash once you buy two or more days a week. The case for it is speed, seniority, flexibility and keeping equity.

Fractional leadership is growing fast from a small base: about **24 in every 1,000 new executive job ads in 2026**, up from 9 five years earlier [26]. Two forces push it on: venture money is concentrating in fewer, larger, AI-heavy rounds [29][30], and almost every engineering team now uses AI tools that it does not fully trust [33][34].

About this report

This is desk research, not a survey. Kompella Technologies, a fractional CTO firm, compiled it from 40 public sources: provider price pages, marketplace data, payroll and salary datasets, job-ad analytics, funding trackers and industry surveys. Each source was opened and read on 22 November 2026, and each figure carries its source number. Where a figure is a marketing claim with no stated method, it is labelled as one.

Two limits matter. Most providers do not publish prices, so price data describes the minority that does [3]. And Kompella sells fractional CTO services, so we have a stake in this market; our own prices are shown separately in section 7 and are not mixed into any market figure.

Correction. This page replaces an earlier one, "The 2026 Fractional CTO Compensation & Engagement Survey", which presented figures as the results of a survey of 50+ fractional CTOs. That survey was never run. Those figures were Kompella's estimates and are withdrawn. A real survey of fractional technology leaders runs from December 2026 to January 2027; its results will be published with the sample size and method stated.

1. What fractional CTOs charge

The data-backed range

The three sources with a stated method agree closely [1][2][3]:

MEASURE	FIGURE	SOURCE
Median hourly rate	$200 an hour (average $203)	Go Fractional, 1,500 profiles [1]
Middle half of hourly rates	$150 to $250 an hour	Go Fractional [1]
US monthly retainer, median	$8,000 a month	Rates Index, 14 providers [3]
Middle half of US retainers	$4,237 to $11,312 a month	Rates Index [3]

MEASURE	FIGURE	SOURCE
Retainer at about 15 hours a week	$9,000 to $15,000 a month	Go Fractional [1]
Average scope of a CTO engagement	20 hours a week	Go Fractional survey [2]

By region, Go Fractional's profiles put the average at $211 an hour in the US and $204 in the UK [1]. Its UK and Australian samples are too small to rely on.

What vendor pages say

Marketing pages publish wider and higher ranges, usually without a method:

SOURCE	HOURLY	MONTHLY RETAINER
Upwork [4]	$117 to $208	Not stated
MentorCruise [5]	$150 to $500	$8,000 to $25,000 by days a week
A.Team [6]	Not stated	$4,000 to $25,000; interim $20,000 to $40,000
Arc.dev [7]	$300 to $500 (San Francisco, New York)	$5,000 to $30,000
Fractionus [8]	$250 to $500	$9,000 to $22,000
Fractional Pulse [9]	$200 to $600	$8,000 (Seed) to $30,000 (Series B)
Lemon.io [10]	$100 to $200	$10,000 to $20,000 for 10 to 20 hours a week

The gap is the first finding of this report. Measured data clusters around $200 an hour and under $15,000 a month. Vendor pages stretch to $500 or more an hour and $30,000 or more a month.

Buyers and sellers disagree

On Go Fractional's marketplace, employers post fractional CTO roles at an average of **$143 an hour, while CTOs ask $212** [2]. On its live rate page the gap is $158 against $204 [1]. Expect the first conversation about price to start about a third apart.

Only 1 in 10 providers publishes a price

Of 1,577 fractional-provider websites read for the Fractional Rates Index, **10.7% publish any price** [3]. Every price figure in this report describes that minority.

Outside the US

MARKET	FIGURE	SOURCE
UK, day rate	£1,000 to £1,600 a day (London £1,200 to £1,600)	Fractional Quest [11]
UK, monthly	£3,000 to £7,000 at 1 to 2 days a week	Fractional Quest [11]
UK, monthly	£4,000 to £20,000 on retainer	CTO on Demand [12]
UK, monthly	£6,000 to £16,000	Fractionus [8]
Australia, monthly	A$6,000 to A$25,000 ("indicative only")	Expert360 [13]
Australia, monthly	A$9,000 to A$18,000	Fractionus [8]
India, monthly	About Rs 3 lakh (one Bengaluru firm)	YourStory [14]

We found no published fractional CTO price for Singapore or the UAE.

2. Fractional CPO and fractional Chief AI Officer

ROLE	HOURLY	MONTHLY	SOURCE
Fractional CPO	$194 average; middle half $150 to $250	$9,000 to $15,000 at 15 hours a week	Go Fractional [1]
Fractional CPO, US	About $181	Median $7,000	Rates Index, 12 providers [3]
Fractional Chief AI Officer	$210 average; middle half $150 to $250	$8,400 to $14,000 at 14 hours a week	Go Fractional, 4 job posts [1]

A fractional CPO costs slightly less than a fractional CTO. Chief AI Officer rates match CTO rates, but the data rests on very few job posts.

3. What a full-time CTO costs instead

United States, by startup stage

STAGE	AVERAGE CTO BASE SALARY	SOURCE
Seed	$155,000	Kruze Consulting payroll data [15]
Series A	$196,000	Kruze [15]
Series B	$238,000	Kruze [15]

STAGE	AVERAGE CTO BASE SALARY	SOURCE
All SaaS, median	$163,386	FounderPath, 1,237 salaries [16]
All US companies, average	$224,550 base, $280,985 total cash	Built In, self-reported [17]

A hired CTO at Series A to B typically receives **1% to 4% equity**; a co-founder CTO 10% to 25% [16]. Kruze's 2024 data showed hired CTOs earning far more cash than founding CTOs: about $293,000 against $177,000 at Series A [15].

Other markets

MARKET	FIGURE	SOURCE
UK and Europe	CTO base at the 75th percentile: £199,560	Ravio, 1,000+ executives [18]
Singapore	Base salary 260,000 / 310,000 / 435,000 (25th, 50th, 75th percentile)	Robert Half 2026 guide [19]
Australia	Base salary 235,000 / 285,000 / 315,000 (25th, 50th, 75th percentile)	Robert Half 2026 guide [20]
India	Average base ₹40.4 lakh (103 profiles)	Payscale [21]
UAE	Average base AED 426,758 (48 profiles)	Payscale [22]

The Robert Half guides do not state a currency; local currency is the likely reading. The India and UAE samples are small and self-reported.

The arithmetic

At the data-backed median of $8,000 a month, one day a week of a fractional CTO costs about $96,000 a year. Two days a week at $15,000 a month costs $180,000 a year. A full-time Series A CTO costs about $196,000 in base salary [15], plus 1% to 4% equity [16].

So in cash, a fractional CTO at two or more days a week costs about as much as a full-time hire. The real differences are elsewhere: no equity, no recruiting search, a start in weeks rather than months, a senior operator who has done the job before, and an engagement you can resize or end.

4. Interim CTOs

An interim CTO fills an empty seat, usually close to full time. UK data is the most complete:

MEASURE	FIGURE	SOURCE
Average interim day rate, all roles	£907 (private sector £1,004)	Institute of Interim Management 2026 [23]

MEASURE	FIGURE	SOURCE
Average assignment length	10 months	IIM 2026 [23]
Share of last assignments delivered fractionally	About 25%	IIM 2026 [23]
London CTO, SME, typical day rate	£1,000	Hays 2025 [24]
Startup or scale-up CTO, typical day rate	£1,200 (range £800 to £1,600)	Hays 2025 [24]
Advertised CTO contracts, median	£788 a day (10 rates)	ITJobsWatch [25]

US marketplaces quote interim or near-full-time CTOs at $20,000 to $40,000 a month [6].

5. How big is the fractional market?

- **Executive job ads.** 24 in every 1,000 new executive job ads in the US were fractional in 2026, up from 9 five years earlier. CFO roles are the largest share, at 20% [26].
- **People.** At least 34,000 US workers had "fractional" in their job title in 2025, up 265% since 2019 [27].
- **Demand.** US fractional job ads more than doubled to 677 in 2025, and reached nearly 1,000 in the first seven months of 2026. 97% came from small and mid-sized companies [27].
- **Independent work overall.** A record 74.9 million Americans did independent work in 2026 [28].

The honest reading: fractional leadership is growing quickly, but it is still a niche, a little over 2% of executive hiring. It is driven by small and mid-sized companies, and finance roles lead it, not technology.

6. The forces behind the demand

Venture money is concentrating

- **AI takes most of the money.** In Q3 2026, AI companies raised $102 billion, 64% of all venture funding worldwide [29]. In the US, AI was 82.7% of venture deal value in the first three quarters of 2026 [30].
- **Seed is small by comparison.** Seed funding worldwide was $13 billion in Q3 2026, against $40.6 billion early-stage and $105 billion late-stage [29].
- **Fewer rounds outside the US.** In India, seed funding fell 37% in January to September 2026, and the number of funding rounds fell 38%, according to Tracxn data reported by Outlook Business [31]. In Australia, 2025 funding rose to A$5.1 billion but the number of deals fell 17% [32].

When fewer startups raise and each round must stretch further, senior technical leadership on a part-time budget becomes more attractive.

AI is everywhere, and trust is low

- 84% of developers use or plan to use AI tools, but 46% distrust their accuracy and only 33% trust it [33].
- 66% of developers cite AI answers that are "almost right, but not quite" as their top frustration [33].

- Google's DORA research finds 90% of technology professionals use AI at work, and that AI adoption still has a negative relationship with software delivery stability [34].
- GitHub counts more than 180 million developers, and about 80% of new users try its AI coding assistant in their first week. India has the second-largest developer base, 21.9 million [35].
- 76% of organisations report having a Chief AI Officer in 2026, up from 26% in 2025, in IBM's survey of 2,000 CEOs [36].

The gap between adoption and trust is where senior technical oversight earns its keep: choosing where AI goes, measuring whether it works, and keeping systems stable.

Senior engineering talent is in demand again

US software development job ads in mid-2026 were 27.5% below their pre-pandemic level. The recovery since early 2025 has been concentrated in senior roles (71% of the increase) and in jobs with AI in the title [37]. US tech unemployment was 2.8% in October 2026 [38]. Senior technical leaders are scarce, and full-time ones are expensive to hire.

Regulated industries carry more risk

- **US healthcare.** 2025 was a record year for large healthcare data breaches reported to the US regulator: about 772 breaches affecting about 138.5 million people, more than 80% from hacking and IT incidents [39].
- **EU AI Act.** The rules for high-risk AI systems now apply from 2 December 2027 for standalone systems, and from 2 August 2028 for AI built into regulated products, after a May 2026 agreement to delay them [40].

For healthtech and fintech startups, compliance is an architecture decision from the first week, which is one more reason to put a senior technologist in the room early.

7. Where Kompella's prices sit

Kompella publishes three monthly tiers, shown here next to the market data and not included in it.

KOMPELLA TIER	KOMPELLA PRICE	MARKET COMPARISON
Advisory	$8,000 a month	At the US median retainer of $8,000 [3]
Fractional	$15,000 a month	At the top of the $9,000 to $15,000 range for about 15 hours a week [1]
Embedded	$25,000 a month	Above most published retainers; priced for 3+ days a week
Interim CTO	From $25,000 a month ($30,000 for PE portfolio companies)	Within the $20,000 to $40,000 interim range [6]

8. How to use this when you hire

- **Ask for a monthly price for a defined scope**, not an hourly rate. Published hourly quotes vary by up to five times between providers.
- **Expect about $200 an hour as the middle of the market**; quotes far above it should come with proof of results in your industry.
- **Compare against a full-time hire honestly.** At two days a week or more, the cash cost is similar. Buy fractional for speed, seniority and flexibility, not only for savings.
- **For AI work, ask how they measure whether it works.** Adoption is easy; trust and stability are the hard part.

What's next: the 2027 survey

From December 2026 to January 2027, Kompella is surveying people working now as fractional, part-time or interim CTOs, VPs of Engineering, CPOs and Chief AI Officers. Results will be published in early 2027 with the sample size, dates, cleaning rules and how respondents were found. To take part or to get the results, email ganesh@kompella.io.

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All sources opened and read on 22 November 2026. "Marketing" means a price range published by a seller without a stated method.

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