Securing Success: Defense Salaries in Optics and Photonics

Defense engineers and scientists are among the highest paid in the optics and photonics community.

The highest paid sector in optics and photonics:

- Defense: $109,000
- Transportation: $88,500
- Semiconductor: $87,527
- Astronomy/astrophysics: $85,000
- Advanced manufacturing: $68,280
- Biomedical/biotech: $62,710
- Communications/networking: $58,676
- Environmental monitoring: $44,533
  
  Defense workers earn more on average than any other sector in optics and photonics.

How do defense salaries break down across organizations, disciplines, and countries?

Average defense salary

- Average Salary: $126,484
- 25th Percentile: $70,000
- Median: $109,000
- 75th Percentile: $153,000

A large majority of defense employees earn over $70,000 per year, with the top 25% earning more than $153,000.

Where do people in defense Optics and photonics work?

- 56% For-profit companies
- 31% Government/Military
- 14% Academic institutions

Which disciplines are most popular for defense workers?

- 16% Aerospace: $139,500
- 15% Optical systems: $96,500
- 10% Lasers: $120,000
- 8% Remote sensing: $117,000
- 7% Manufacturing: $96,500
- 6% Photonics: $104,400
- 6% Systems engineering/research: $127,000
- 5% Optical design: $71,656
- 5% Physics: $120,000
- 4% Interdisciplinary engineering/research: $98,000

Median salary

How do countries compare?

- United States: $128,010
- Israel: $105,063
- South Korea: $97,972
- Germany: $79,812
- Sweden: $76,313
- Canada: $71,656
- United Kingdom: $66,420
- South Africa: $52,914
- France: $50,045
- Italy: $45,607

Median salaries by country for defense optics and photonics workers.

Source: 2019 Optics & Photonics Global Salary Report

Full report and methodology: SPIECareerCenter.org