Pearl Meyer

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A Decade of Compensation Trends in Cyber Security



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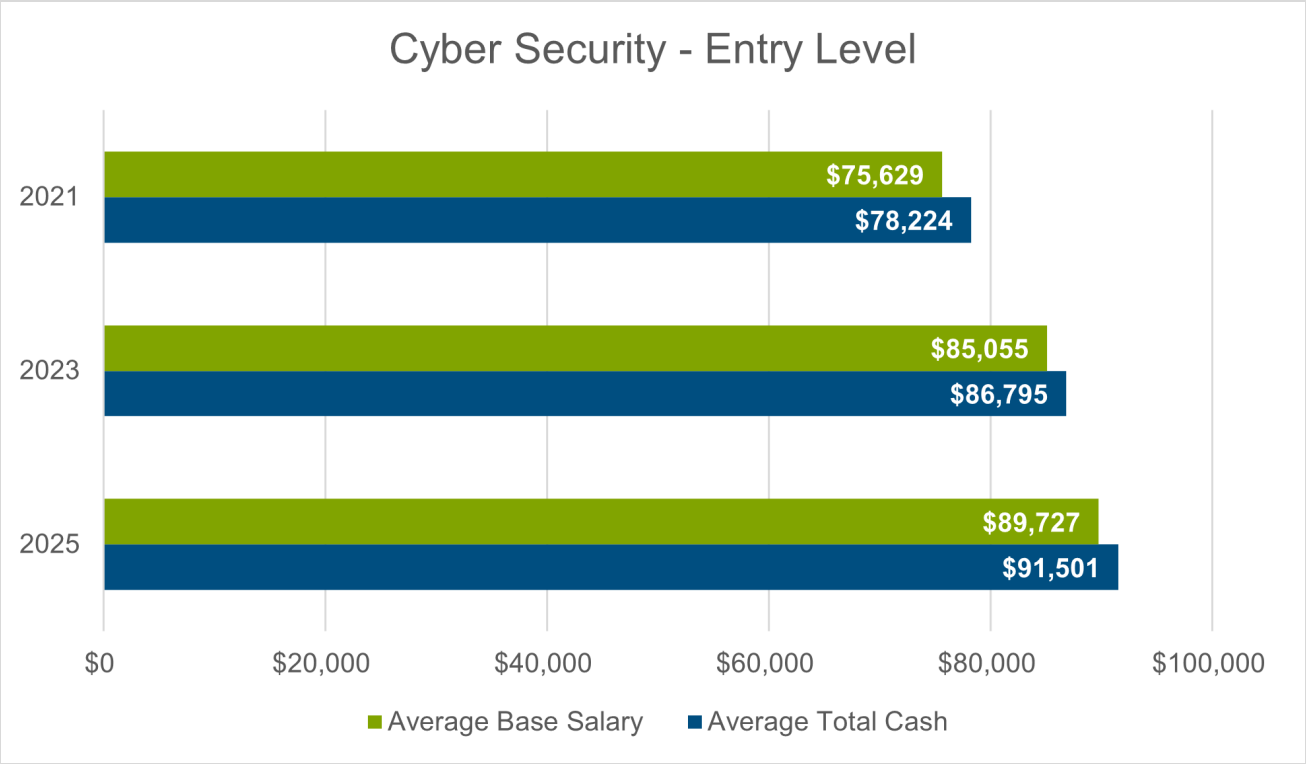
Over the past decade, Pearl Meyer has conducted an annual compensation survey in the rapidly evolving field of cyber security. Since 2015, this survey has provided valuable insights into compensation trends, helping organizations attract and retain top talent from interns and new college graduates to top executives in this critical area.

Rising Demand and Competitive Salaries

The demand for experienced professionals in cyber security has increased significantly over the last five years. As organizations increasingly rely on advanced technologies to protect their data, improve productivity, and drive innovation, they have been willing to offer competitive salaries to attract the best talent. Pearl Meyer's surveys show a consistent year-over-year increase in average compensation, both base salary as well as base salary plus any bonus opportunity, for entry-level talent and new college graduates in cyber security roles.

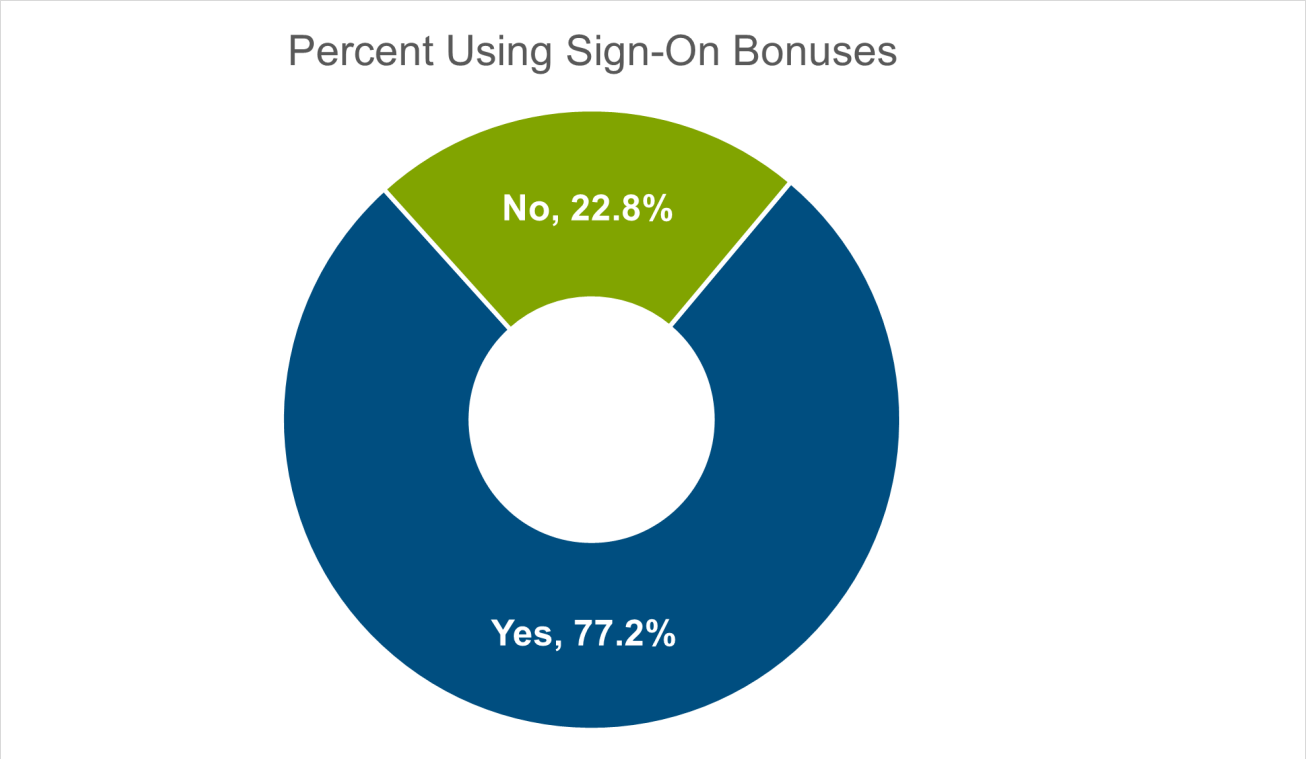


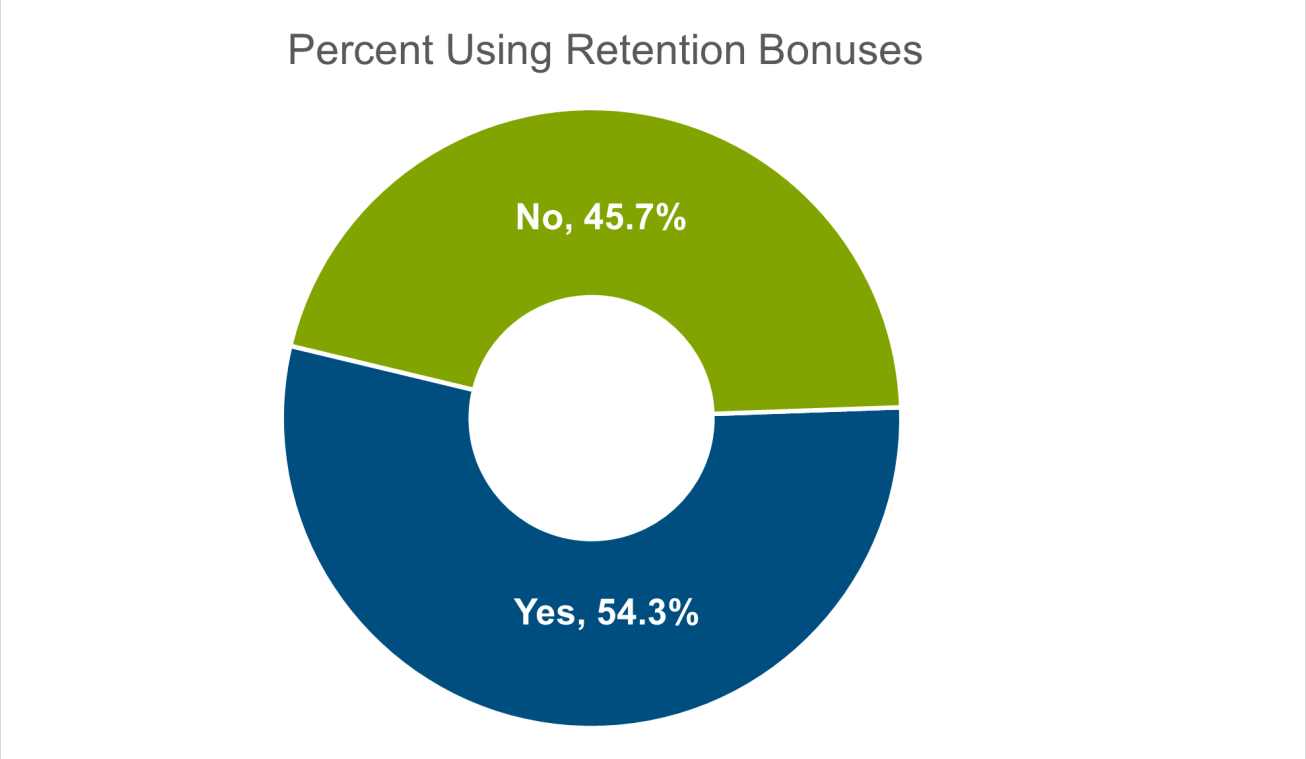
Rewarding Talent without Contributing to Salary Compression

One compensation concern with high-demand roles like cyber security is the risk of salary compression challenges due to the pressure to pay “whatever it takes” because of industry talent shortages to get talented individuals on board at early career levels. Salary compression occurs when there are little or no differences in pay to employees, combined with large differences in responsibilities, skill levels, or qualifications. Inequity may occur between supervisors and subordinates or between new and experienced personnel in the same position.

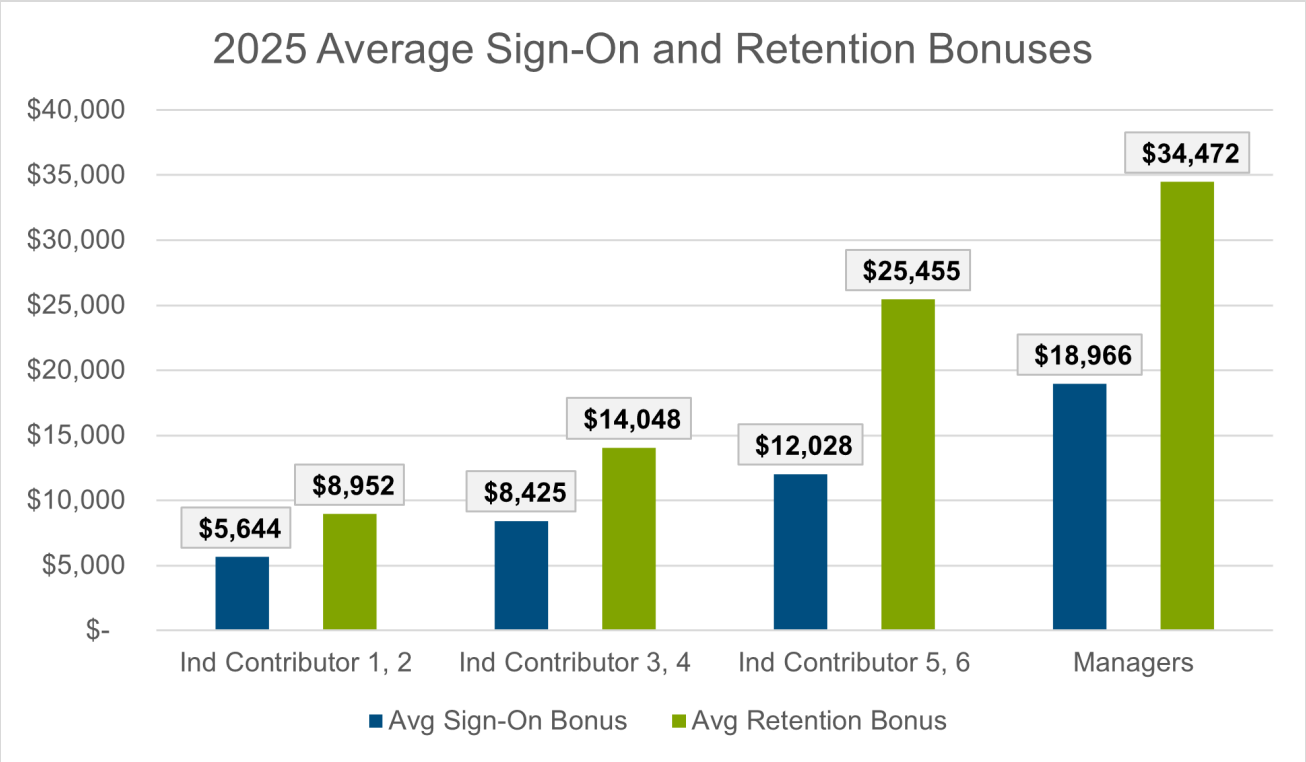
The rapid escalation of pay at the early levels in cyber security will likely contribute to salary compression if compensation is not adjusted at the higher levels. One way companies can help avoid this is by providing new hires and top talent with a one-time-only premium payout such as a sign-on bonus, rather than an ongoing additional base salary compensation that compounds over time.

Pearl Meyer’s survey found that 77.2% of organizations surveyed used sign-on bonuses to attract cyber security talent in 2025. This strategy not only helps to avoid compression but also serves as one of the most effective enticements for job candidates to quickly accept a position. Further, over 54% of organizations utilized retention bonuses in 2025, which is up from 48.5% of companies in 2021. This indicates that organizations are increasingly focused on retaining existing talent which is a wise financial strategy given the major costs associated with recruiting, hiring, and on-boarding new employees.



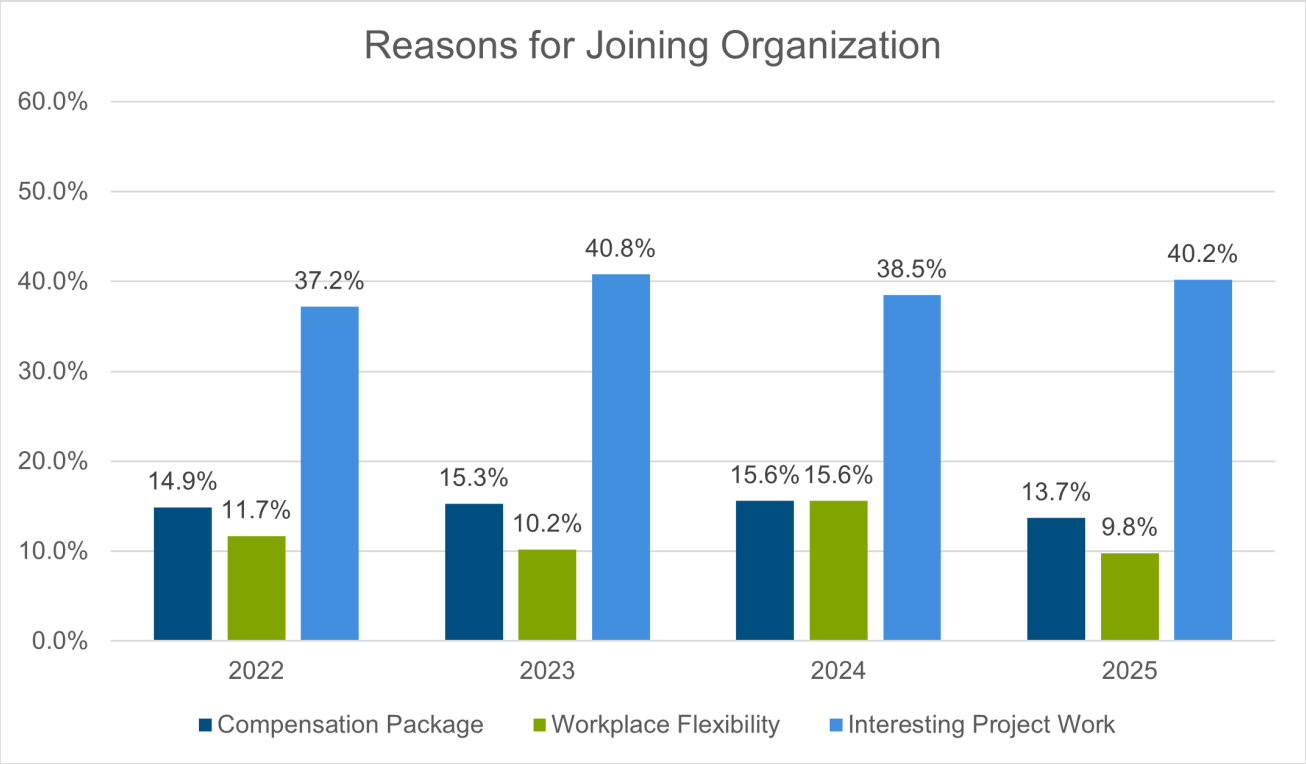

Percent Using Retention Bonuses
No, 45.7%
Yes, 54.3%

Organizations are investing significantly in cash awards to attract and retain cyber security talent. Average 2025 sign-on bonuses ranged from over $5,500 at entry levels to nearly $19,000 at management levels. Retention bonuses were higher at nearly $9,000 for entry levels to nearly $35,000 for managers.

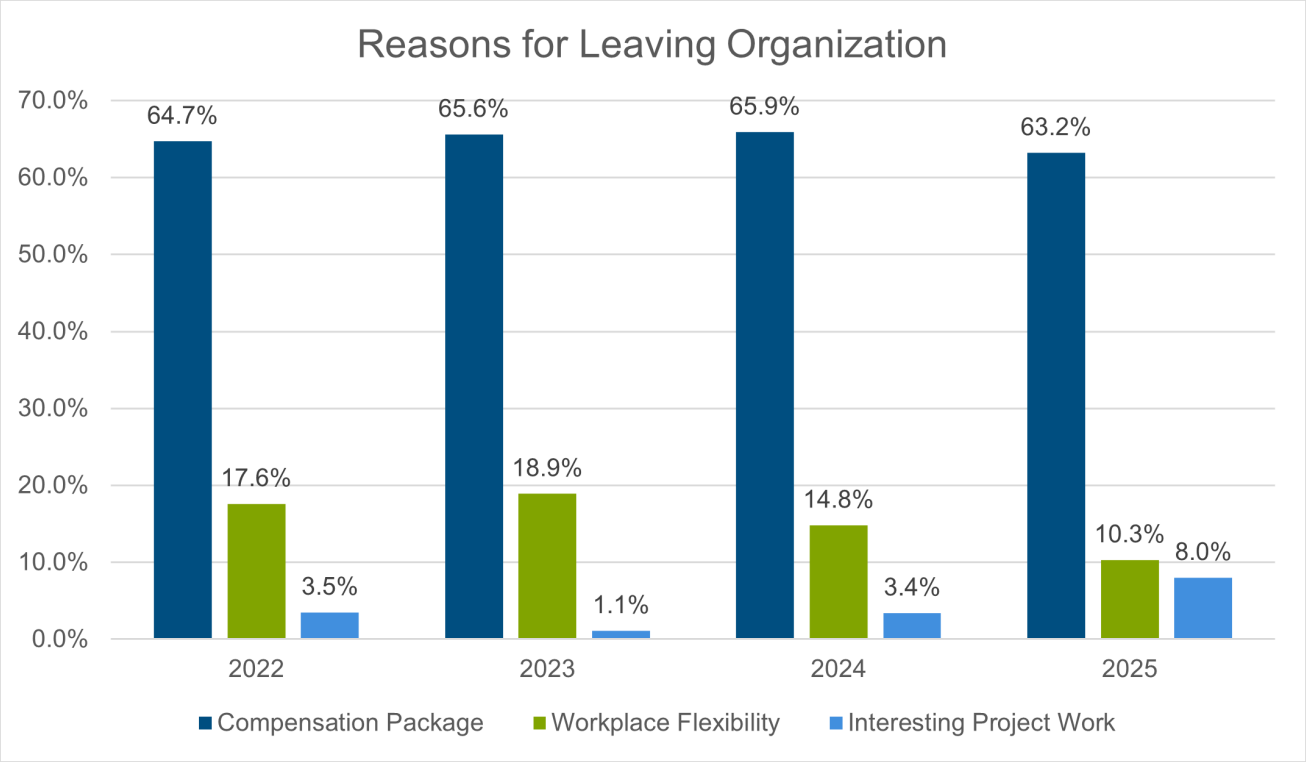


Competitive Salaries Alone Can’t Always Secure and Keep Top Talent

The annual survey includes a set of policies and practices questions and asks respondents to provide the top reason that cyber talent joins the organization. Over the last several years, interesting project work has been the top reason.



The survey also asks for the top reason cyber talent leaves the organization and compensation packages are consistently the top reason for voluntary turnover among these cyber security professionals.



The Importance of Timely Market Data

With cyber threats becoming more sophisticated and frequent, it is critical that organizations have the right cyber security employees in place to avoid and mitigate costly attacks. Pearl Meyer's compensation surveys over the past decade provide a comprehensive view of how salaries in cyber security have evolved. These insights are invaluable for organizations looking to remain competitive in the labor market.

The report serves as a valuable benchmarking resource to compare your company's pay practices to the rest of the market with detailed policies and practices information, and compensation data cyber security, AI, robotics, and data science roles from entry level to top executives. For more information, please review the full Cyber Security, AI, and Data Science Salary Survey prospectus.

To purchase a copy of the survey report, click here. For information on participating in next year's survey, contact survey@pearlmeyer.com.

About the Authors

Rebecca Toman is the vice president, Survey Business Unit at Pearl Meyer. In this role, she designs and publishes compensation and benefits surveys for a wide range of industries and employee populations. Rebecca is on the WorldatWork faculty where she teaches a course on Job Analysis and Documentation.

Dan is a survey account manager at Pearl Meyer. Dan manages a portfolio of compensation and benefits surveys, in addition to handling client accounts.

About Pearl Meyer

Pearl Meyer is the leading advisor to boards and senior management helping organizations build, develop, and reward great leadership teams that drive long-term success. Our strategy-driven compensation and leadership consulting services act as powerful catalysts for value creation and competitive advantage by addressing the critical links between people and outcomes. Our clients stand at the forefront of their industries and range from emerging high-growth, not-for-profit, and private organizations to the Fortune 500.