Union Labor Costs In Construction
2019
Construction Labor Research Council
This report, previously called *Trends and Outlook*, contains both general and detailed information on compensation for union craft workers in the construction industry, as analyzed by the Construction Labor Research Council (CLRC). Data are presented for the nation as a whole, nine geographic regions, and 18 different craft breakouts. In addition, the report has trend lines which show the union craft total package increase history, as well as results for already negotiated future increases.

**Exhibit 1** illustrates how total package rates in 2018 are distributed across a range. As the exhibit clearly highlights, the plurality of total package rates in 2018 were in the $50.01–$60.00 range. Most other total package rates landed in the adjacent ranges. Consequently, over 75 percent of all total package rates were from $40.01 to $70.00.

The following associations sponsor this report:

- Associated General Contractors of America (AGC)
- Central States Insulation Association (CSIA)
- FCA International (FCA)
- International Council of Employers of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (ICE)
- Mechanical Contractors Association of America (MCAA)
- National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA)
- National Fire Sprinkler Association (NFSA)
- North American Contractors Association (NACA)
- Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors’ National Association (SMACNA)
- Signatory Wall and Ceiling Contractors Association (SWACCA)
- The Association of Union Constructors (TAUC)
Exhibit 2 displays results for the total package for 2018 by region. The US average (which is the average of the craft averages) was $55.17. As shown in Exhibit 2, the largest average total package in 2018 was in the Southwest Pacific region ($66.61) and the smallest in the Southeast ($39.67). The highest average total package was $26.94 (68 percent) higher than the smallest.

Exhibit 2
Total package rates by region in descending order

Southwest Pacific: $66.61
Middle Atlantic: $63.83
New England: $62.88
East North Central: $56.59
Northwest: $56.53
United States: $55.17
West North Central: $53.66
Mountain Northern Plains: $51.42
South Central: $43.61
Southeast: $39.67

$0.00 $15.00 $30.00 $45.00 $60.00 $75.00

$26.94 / 68%

Regions

New England: CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT
Middle Atlantic: DC, DE, MD, NJ, NY, PA
Southeast: AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA
East North Central: IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI, WV
West North Central: IA, KS, MO, NE
South Central: AR, LA, NM, OK, TX
Mountain Northern Plains: CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY
Southwest Pacific: AZ, CA, HI, NV
Northwest: AK, ID, OR, WA

NOTE: In addition to actual differences, variation in total package average rates from region to region and craft to craft can be influenced by the composition of the data sample. For example, a craft’s average rate may be partially affected by having more/less data from regions with higher/lower rates. Similarly, the total package average rate in a particular region may be partially due to that region having more/less data from crafts with higher/lower rates.
The average total package rates by craft for 2018 are illustrated in Exhibit 3. The data ranged from $42.56 for Roofers to $70.44 for Plumbers. The highest rate was $15.27 (28 percent) higher, and the smallest was $12.61 (23 percent) lower, than the US average.

There were three crafts with an average total package higher than $60.00. There were five crafts with an average lower than $50.00. All 10 of the other craft averages fell between $50.00 and $60.00.

Exhibit 3
Total package rates by craft in descending order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Craft</th>
<th>Total Package Rate</th>
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<td>Plumbers</td>
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<td>Boilermakers</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipefitters/Plumbers</td>
<td>$65.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaziers</td>
<td>$59.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Engineers</td>
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<td>Insulators</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Millwrights</td>
<td>$56.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricklayers</td>
<td>$55.71</td>
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<td>Electricians</td>
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<td>United States</td>
<td>$55.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carpenters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cement Masons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plasterers</td>
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<td>Teamsters</td>
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<td>Painters</td>
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<td>Laborers</td>
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<td>Roofers</td>
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Exhibit 4 gives a detailed look at union craft rates in construction in 2018 using a craft by region matrix. It shows the total package rate, base wage rate, fringe benefits (health & welfare and retirement) & other rate, and the rate count (number of data points) for each craft for each region, as well as for the US. Be sure to use caution when looking at rates with fewer than five data points.

### Exhibit 4
**Total package, wage rate, and fringe benefits & other: craft by region**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>United States</th>
<th>NE</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>ENC</th>
<th>WNC</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>MNP</th>
<th>SWP</th>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>MNP</td>
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### Exhibit 4 (continued)

#### Total package, wage rate, and fringe benefits & other: craft by region

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<td>$19.23 $10.71 $18.75 $17.76 $23.17 $17.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate Count</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pipefitters/Plumbers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Package</td>
<td>$75.40</td>
<td>$47.79 $62.83 $67.82 $44.61 $53.07 $75.41 $69.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wage Rate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$43.03 $33.03 $36.49 $42.91 $31.18 $31.40</td>
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<td>Rate Count</td>
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<td><strong>Plumbers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Package</td>
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<td>- $67.12 $68.36 $53.07 $74.35 $70.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage Rate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$43.71 - $38.70 $38.00 $31.93 $46.03 $41.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate Count</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6 - 4 1 - 1 - 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plasterers</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Package</td>
<td>$71.19</td>
<td>$45.58 $34.28 $54.04 $45.22 $30.84 $42.82 $59.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage Rate</td>
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<td>$28.79 $26.08 $32.63 $27.16 $20.71 $24.86 $38.01</td>
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<td>Fringe Benefits &amp; Other</td>
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<td>$16.79 $8.20 $21.41 $18.06 $10.13 $17.96 $21.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate Count</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Roofers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Package</td>
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<td>$47.01 $32.34 $49.82 $50.27 $42.82 $59.98</td>
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<td>Wage Rate</td>
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<td>$29.09 $23.98 $31.06 $32.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fringe Benefits &amp; Other</td>
<td>$19.72</td>
<td>$17.91 $8.35 $18.76 $18.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate Count</td>
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<td>3 10 6 4 - - 2 2 5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sheet Metal Workers</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Package</td>
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<td>$71.29 $41.76 $61.89 $56.29 $44.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage Rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fringe Benefits &amp; Other</td>
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<td>$32.65 $15.21 $27.59 $20.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate Count</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teamsters</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Package</td>
<td>$52.56</td>
<td>$47.79 $38.31 $49.80 $47.37 $60.05 $50.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage Rate</td>
<td>$29.23</td>
<td>$25.16 $26.63 $31.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fringe Benefits &amp; Other</td>
<td>$23.33</td>
<td>$22.63 $11.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate Count</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 9 7 3 - - 3 8 35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Exhibit 5
**Defined contribution retirement and vacation prevalence by craft**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Craft</th>
<th>Defined Contribution</th>
<th>Vacation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boilermakers</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricklayers</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cement Masons</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricians</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaziers</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insulators</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Workers</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborers</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millwrights</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Engineers</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painters</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipefitters/Plumbers</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plasterers</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbers</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roofers</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheet Metal Workers</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamsters</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exhibit 5 shows** the prevalence of two nonstandard fringe benefits (defined contribution retirement and vacation) for all crafts and the US. Carpenters had the largest prevalence of defined contributions at 26 percent, meaning that 26 percent of all carpenter wage sheets had a line item for defined contribution retirement payments. The largest prevalence for vacation was with the Boilermakers at 38 percent. On average, nine percent of total packages for union crafts in construction in the US had defined contribution retirement and 16 percent had vacation pay.

### Exhibit 6
**US average rates and proportions**

**Exhibit 6** addresses the average US distribution of wages, health & welfare, retirement, and other costs. Both the dollar amount and proportion of the average US total package are shown. Wages made up the majority of the total package at $33.40 (61%). Of the fringe benefits, retirement was the largest category at $10.51 (19%), followed by health & welfare at $8.39 (15%). The “Other” category, which includes vacation, apprenticeship, unallocated and all other payments, was $2.87 (5%).
The stacked bar chart in Exhibit 7 is similar to the pie chart in Exhibit 6, showing the proportion of each category in the total package (wage rate, health & welfare, retirement, and other) for the US and each craft. The crafts are in descending order based on the wage percentage. Roofers had the largest proportion of the total package in wages. Teamsters had the largest proportion for health & welfare. Boilermakers led all crafts in the proportion of their total package funding retirement. Please note that Exhibit 7 is not indicative of the dollar amount of each craft’s total package (all crafts sum to 100 percent). Rather, it illustrates how the total package is distributed across the four categories.

**Exhibit 7**
*Proportions of total package by craft*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Craft</th>
<th>Wage</th>
<th>H&amp;W</th>
<th>Retirement</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roofers</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insulators</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricians</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painters</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamsters</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cement Masons</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricklayers</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plasterers</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Engineers</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborers</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millwrights</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipefitters/Plumbers</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaziers</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheet Metal Workers</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbers</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boilermakers</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Workers</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0%  | 20%  | 40%  | 60%  | 80%  | 100%
New Settlement Increases (2018)

The first year of new settlements reached in 2018 (includes all data for 2018) for union crafts in the construction industry had an average increase of 3.0 percent ($1.70). The median, which is less affected by outliers, was similar at 3.0 percent ($1.56). Exhibits 8 and 9 show the 13-year trend, plus a two year forecast, for the total package.

Exhibit 8
First year increases in new settlements, shown as percentages

Exhibit 8 shows that, in percentage terms, the average increase for the first year of settlements has slowly and steadily risen since 2010/11, from 1.7 percent in 2010 to 3.0 percent in 2018. The gradual trend is forecasted to extend to 3.3 percent by 2020.

Exhibit 9
First year increases in new settlements, shown as dollars

Exhibit 9 similarly shows that the average dollar amount increase for the first year of settlements has grown by nearly $1.00 since 2011 ($0.73 in 2011 to $1.70 in 2018). The average increase is projected to be $1.95 by 2020.

The first year of settlements is useful for understanding current trends. The all settlements data is better for summarizing the total amount actually paid/earned by contractors/employees.
All Settlement Increases

This section of the report includes not only increases negotiated during 2018 (see New Settlement Increases), but also previously negotiated increases that will take effect during the current and upcoming years. Exhibits 10 and 11 show the trend lines for all negotiated increases from 2005 through 2018, and project the increases for 2019 and 2020. The average increase for 2018 was 2.8 percent and $1.49. CLRC projects an increase to 3.0 percent and $1.65 by 2020. That will be the first time increases have reached 3.0 percent since 2010.

Exhibit 10
All increases, shown as percentages

Exhibit 10 shows that, in percentage terms, the average increase rose slowly, by half a percent, from 2012 to 2018. As was the case with first year data, increases before the Great Recession were much higher.

Exhibit 11
All increases, shown as dollars

Exhibit 11 shows that the average dollar amount increase grew by $0.27 from 2012 to 2018 and remains well below the high mark of $2.01 in 2008. By 2020 CLRC projects the average increase to be $1.65 for all years of settlements.
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