MARKET INTELLIGENCE REPORT | 2026 | UNITED STATES

US PRECISION GRINDING TALENT REPORT 2026

The Definitive Talent & Hiring Intelligence Report for US Precision Grinding Leaders

This report is designed for hiring managers, operations leaders and senior teams working in precision grinding across the US. It looks at how talent moves through the market, where the challenges sit, and what that means for companies operating across OEMs, distribution and end-user manufacturing in aerospace, automotive, medical, semiconductors and cutting tools.

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$1.2B+
US GRINDING MARKET (2026)
Mid-range across multi-source 2025-2026 estimates

~4-5%
MARKET GROWTH
Sustained mid-single-digit growth through 2030

1.9M
MANUFACTURING JOB GAP
Projected unfilled US mfg roles by 2033 (Deloitte / MI)

4-6 mo
SPECIALIST HIRING TIMELINES
For grinding-specific roles without specialist support

00 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT MACHINING, AUTOMATION AND AI. GRINDING RARELY GETS THE SAME ATTENTION.

But it is the process that ultimately determines whether a part passes or fails. Across aerospace, medical, automotive and semiconductor manufacturing, grinding is where tolerances are actually achieved. It controls surface finish, geometry and consistency in a way other processes cannot.

As requirements tighten, grinding is no longer just a finishing step. It is a constraint on production, quality and throughput.

That shift is happening at the same time as a structural talent shortage.

The engineers who understand grinding processes, machines and applications are limited, highly specialised and increasingly difficult to replace. Much of that expertise sits with a workforce approaching retirement, while demand continues to rise.

DEMAND

INCREASING

Aerospace, EV, medical, semis. All pulling on the same precision capability.

SUPPLY

SHRINKING

Specialist engineers retiring faster than the apprenticeship pipeline replaces them.

THE GAP

WIDENING

A capability shortfall that compounds with every quarter of inaction.

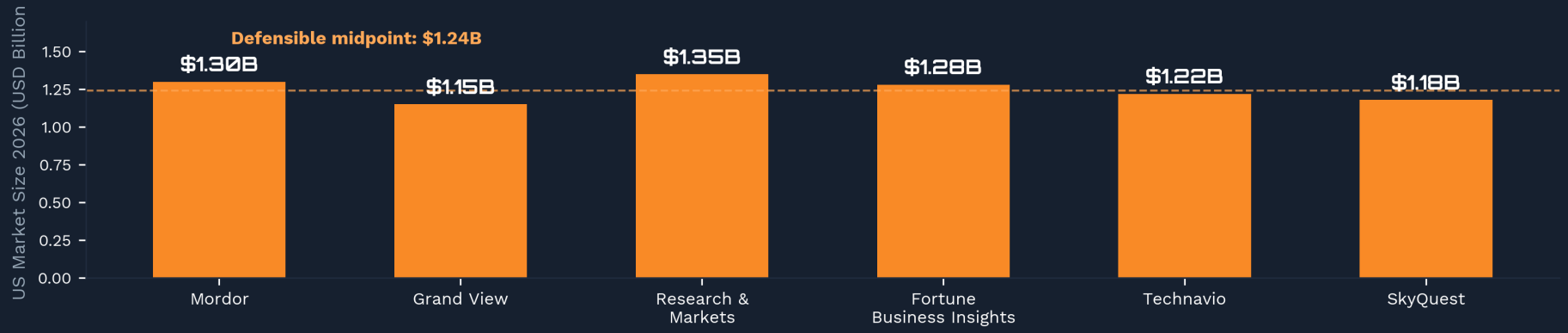
Grinding is not just another hiring challenge. It is becoming a capability gap across US manufacturing — and the employers who treat it as routine engineering recruitment will fall behind those who treat it as a strategic talent priority.

01 MARKET OVERVIEW

Sector Scale & Growth

Market size estimates vary by source and definition, but consistently place the broader US grinding machinery market in the ~$1.1B–$1.3B range. Precision CNC grinding represents a specialist segment within this total, but sits at the centre of high-value manufacturing demand.

US GRINDING MACHINERY MARKET (ALL SEGMENTS) | MULTI-SOURCE 2026 ESTIMATES | USD BILLIONS



Estimates include the wider grinding machinery market (CNC, industrial and conventional equipment). Definitions vary by source.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DATA

~$1.2B
BROADER MARKET 2026
Mid-range across multi-source estimates

4.3-5.0%
CAGR TO 2030
Sustained mid-single-digit growth

67.5%
CNC SHARE
CNC platforms dominate the modern install base

65%+
PRECISION SHARE
Precision grinders lead by revenue

KEY MARKET DRIVERS IN 2026

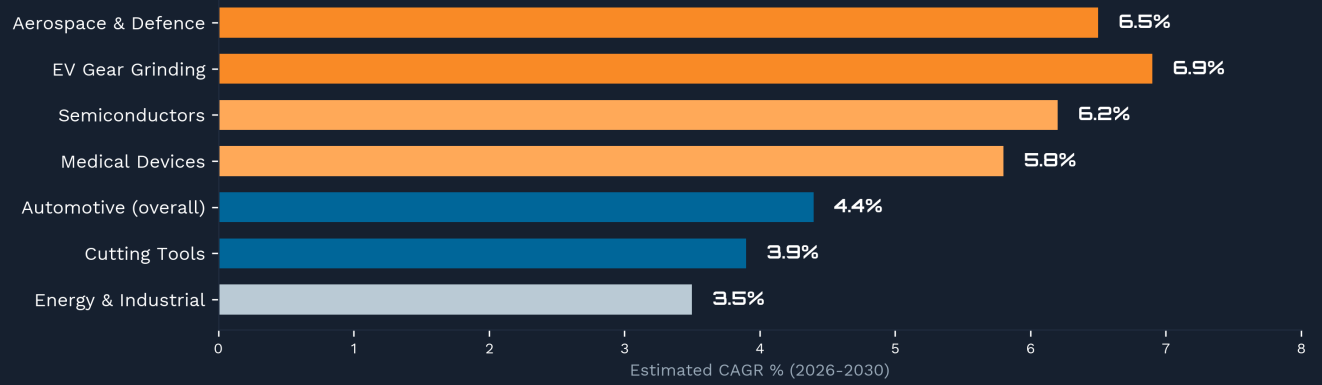
- **Reshoring is structural, not rhetorical.**
  244K US manufacturing jobs announced in 2024 via reshoring and FDI. ~240K projected for 2025. 88-90% high-tech. (Reshoring Initiative)
- **Skilled labour is the binding constraint.**
  3.8M net new US manufacturing workers needed 2024-2033. Up to 1.9M unfilled without intervention. (Deloitte / Manufacturing Institute)
- **Aerospace and defence is the highest-growth end-user.**
  A&D grinding demand projected at ~6.5% CAGR. Engine OEM backlogs and DoD FY2026 budget ($961.6B) are the primary signals.
- **EV powertrains reshape demand, do not reduce it.**
  Gear grinding is the fastest-growing sub-category, driven by EV drivetrain tolerances: sub-10 micron, surface finish below 0.2 Ra.
- **Industry 4.0 is now the spec, not the upgrade.**
  Closed-loop control, in-process gauging and predictive maintenance are standard expectations on 2026 grinding platforms.

02 DEMAND DRIVERS BY SECTOR

Grinding demand is driven less by machine type and more by end-use application requirements.

The sectors below drive the vast majority of US grinding machinery demand in 2026. Each carries its own hiring implications.

RELATIVE DEMAND GROWTH BY END-USER (2026-2030)



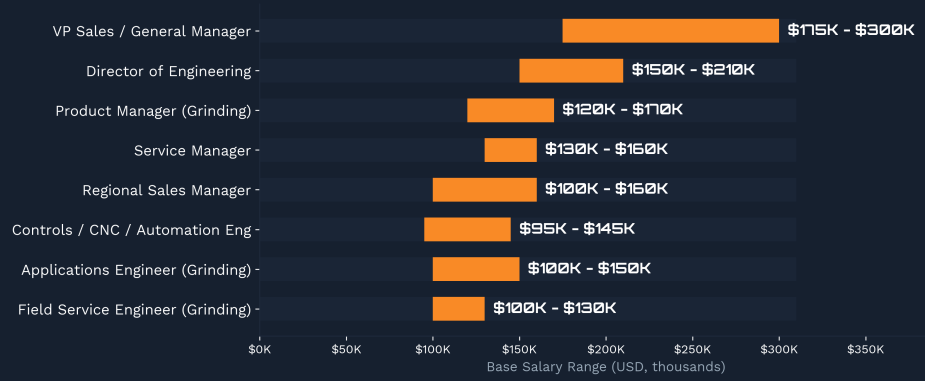
SECTOR	POSITION	DEMAND SIGNAL	TALENT IMPLICATION
Aerospace & Defence	**High-growth / above-market**	GE Aerospace $1B US capex 2026 incl. $33M Greenville SC grinding line. DoD FY2026 $961.6B.	Flight-critical tolerances. NADCAP / AS9100. Premium talent already employed.
Automotive & EV	**Largest by volume**	EV gearbox tolerances drive gear grinding. Auto retained ~32% of US market in 2024.	ICE-to-EV transferable talent. Midwest concentrated. Gear depth differentiates.
Medical Devices	**High-growth**	Implants, bone screws, surgical instruments. Sub-micron surface finish. FDA regulated.	Clean room familiarity, biocompatible knowledge, documentation rigour. Narrow pool.
Semiconductors	**Emerging**	CHIPS Act flowing into fab capacity. SiC substrate grinding, wafer finishing.	Ultra-precision capability. Small, geographically concentrated pool (AZ, NY, TX, OH).
Cutting Tools	**Steady, non-cyclical**	Drills, end mills, inserts, form tools. CNC T&C grinder market to $6.8B by 2035 (MRFR).	ANCA, Walter, Schütte, Rollomatic depth. Smaller specialist pool. Underserved.
Energy & Industrial	**Stable backbone**	Turbine blades, oil & gas, power generation. Consistent Midwest / South customer base.	Traditional grinding skillset. Fewer certification barriers than aerospace.

> *Every sector driving US grinding demand in 2026 requires a different combination of technical depth, regulatory fluency and customer-facing capability. Employers who treat them as interchangeable hire poorly.*
>
> **— Kensington360 Market Intelligence, 2026**

03 SALARY BENCHMARKS USA 2026

Salary data for precision grinding and machine tool roles, benchmarked against current 2026 US market conditions. Grinding-specific premiums of 15-25% above generalist CNC equivalents are now standard, particularly for Field Service and Applications roles where brand-specific machine knowledge is scarce.

BASE SALARY RANGES BY GRINDING ROLE | USD 2026 | BLS + K360 MARKET INTELLIGENCE



Figures reflect base salary. Total compensation (bonus, overtime, vehicle, commission) can materially increase overall earnings.

ROLE	BASE SALARY	DIFFICULTY	MARKET NOTES
Field Service Engineer (Grinding)	$100K - $130K	●●●●●	Most in-demand role. Brand-specific depth (Studer, Kellenberger, Gleason, ANCA) commands $10-15K premium.
Applications Engineer (Grinding)	$100K - $150K	●●●●●	Hard to source. Requires wheel selection, dressing, feeds/speeds, plus customer-facing capability.
Regional Sales Manager	$100K - $160K	●●●●○	OTE up to $300K. Territories typically 6-10 states. Most RSMs worked across 2-3 OEM brands.
Service Manager	$130K - $160K	●●●●○	Bridges technical and management. Former FSE background essential. Often promoted internally.
Controls / CNC / Automation Eng	$95K - $145K	●●●●○	Growing demand as grinders integrate automation. Fanuc/Siemens knowledge essential.
Product Manager (Grinding Line)	$120K - $170K	●●●●○	Technical + commercial. Rarely advertised openly. Typically a confidential backfill.
Director of Engineering (OEM)	$150K - $210K	●●●●○	Deep grinding expertise. Oversees product design. Rarely transacts openly.
VP Sales / General Manager	$175K - $300K+	●●●○○	PE-backed OEMs offer equity. Market is discreet and relationship-driven.

Grinding-specific premiums of 15-25% above general CNC equivalents are now standard. Pay bands set against generalist manufacturing benchmarks will lose you candidates at offer stage.

04 THE CANDIDATE MARKET

The challenge in grinding is not simply a shortage of engineers. It is a shortage of specific, experience-based expertise.

Grinding capability is typically developed within OEM environments and tied closely to particular machine platforms, applications and customer industries. As a result, the available talent pool is both limited and highly specialised. Experience is not easily transferable between different machine brands or grinding processes, and developing that capability takes time.

In practice, this means training timelines are measured in months or years rather than weeks, and replacing experienced engineers is significantly more complex than in general CNC roles. Much of this knowledge is not formally documented but built through hands-on experience, pattern recognition and repeated exposure to specific machines and applications. This type of tacit knowledge, which is difficult to codify or transfer, is a defining characteristic of advanced manufacturing.

As a result, the grinding talent market operates differently to broader manufacturing. The pool of experienced engineers remains small, highly networked and largely passive, with most individuals already employed and not actively seeking new opportunities. Hiring outcomes are therefore driven less by volume and more by targeted access to the right experience.

THE TALENT SHORTAGE BY THE NUMBERS

3.8M
MANUFACTURING WORKERS NEEDED
Projected net new US manufacturing roles by 2033

1.9M
COULD GO UNFILLED
If workforce and skills gaps are not addressed

65%
CITE TALENT AS PRIMARY CHALLENGE
Share of US manufacturers identifying recruitment and retention as their biggest issue

ACUTE SPECIALIST SHORTAGE

Grinding carries a compound shortage. Manufacturing talent is already limited, but grinding-specific expertise is concentrated within a small number of OEM ecosystems. Engineers with deep experience on specific machine platforms are rare, and replacement timelines are often measured in months or years rather than weeks.

ACCELERATING RETIREMENT WAVE

A significant proportion of the current grinding workforce is approaching retirement. As they exit, knowledge of specific machines, applications and customer environments leaves with them. Much of this expertise is experience-based and not easily transferred, making replacement increasingly difficult.

~15%
ACTIVE CANDIDATES
Only a small proportion of the grinding talent market is actively exploring new opportunities at any given time.

~85%
PASSIVE CANDIDATES
The majority of experienced engineers are employed and require direct outreach and a compelling opportunity to consider a move.

4-6 MONTHS
TYPICAL TIME TO FILL
Hiring timelines are extended due to the need for specific experience, with further delays where brand expertise or travel is restrictive.

05 HIRING LANDSCAPE

Who's Competing for the Same Talent

Grinding hiring does not happen in isolation. The market is driven primarily by a small number of OEMs that originate talent, supported by distributors and niche specialists competing for the same limited candidate pool.

COMPANY	US ACTIVITY	ROLES COMPETING FOR	MARKET POSITION
United Grinding NA	Very Active	FSE, Applications, Service Mgr, Sales	Multi-brand leader (Studer, Walter, Blohm). Sets US pay and training benchmark.
Gleason Corporation	Very Active	FSE, Applications, Engineering, Leadership	Gear grinding specialist. Strong exposure to EV drivetrain and aerospace demand.
ANCA	Active	Applications, FSE, Sales	Global leader in tool & cutter grinding. Highly competitive for applications talent.
Kellenberger	Active	FSE, Service, Applications	High-precision cylindrical grinding heritage. Strong installed base in US.
Danobat	Active (targeted)	Applications, FSE, Project roles	European OEM with strong innovation focus in high-precision grinding.
JTEKT / Toyoda	Moderate	FSE, Applications	Automotive-driven grinding demand, particularly in the Midwest.
Okamoto	Moderate	FSE, Applications, Sales	Surface and cylindrical grinders. Stable US presence.

SECONDARY / NICHE PLAYERS

Bourn & Koch · *Growing*
Strong in Blanchard, rebuilds, vertical grinding
Koyo Machinery USA · *Lower volume*
Cylindrical / internal. Niche hiring footprint
GCH Tool Group · *Specialist*
Rebuilds, parts, retrofits. Experienced technicians

DISTRIBUTORS — COMPETE, DO NOT ORIGINATE

Ellison Technologies · *Very Active*
Sales Engineers, Applications, FSE
Methods Machine Tools · *Active*
FSE, Sales, Applications

Distributors hire from the same talent pool but do not develop it.

KEY MARKET DYNAMICS

01 OEMs DEFINE THE POOL

Grinding talent is overwhelmingly trained inside OEM environments. Most engineers built careers on specific brands.

02 BRAND-SPECIFIC VALUE

Grinding expertise is often brand-locked. A Studer or ANCA engineer is not immediately transferable without retraining.

03 NO SINGLE BENCHMARK

Compensation varies by application (gear vs cylindrical vs T&C), geography and customer segment. No one sets the rate.

04 DISTRIBUTORS COMPETE

Distributors compete directly for FSEs and Apps. Lower travel and broader exposure offset lighter technical depth.

05 SPEED IS DECISIVE

Strong candidates secure multiple offers within 3-4 weeks. Outcomes are driven by speed and clarity, not brand alone.

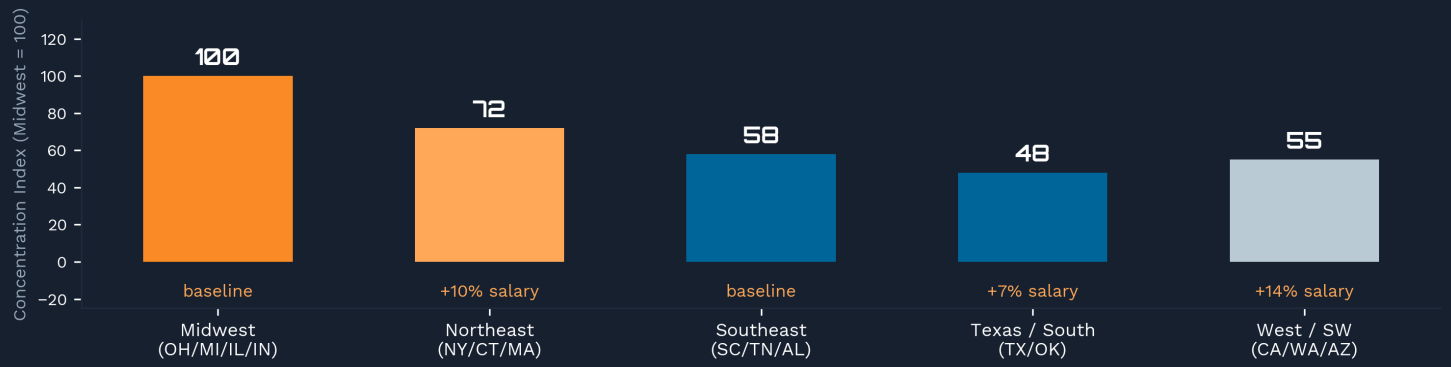
> ***The practical implication: hiring in grinding is not a broad engineering search.***
> ***It is a targeted acquisition of experience from a defined group of OEM ecosystems.***

06 REGIONAL TALENT CLUSTERS

Where US Grinding Talent Lives

Grinding talent in the US is not evenly distributed. Decades of programme-specific industrial history have concentrated expertise in specific metros. Matching the industrial DNA of your candidates to your programme context is one of the highest-leverage moves available to hiring leaders in this market.

RELATIVE TALENT CONCENTRATION BY US REGION | MIDWEST = 100 INDEX



REGION / METRO	ANCHOR	GRINDING TALENT RELEVANCE	NOTABLE EMPLOYERS
Midwest (OH/MI/IL/IN)	Densest grinding cluster	Miamisburg OH, Wixom MI, Elgin IL. Auto, energy, cutting tool, industrial.	United Grinding, Kellenberger, Bourn & Koch, Koyo
Northeast (NY/CT/MA)	Gear + aerospace propulsion	Rochester NY (Gleason), Boston MA (Methods). Hartford CT propulsion corridor.	Gleason, Methods, Pratt & Whitney, Sikorsky
Southeast (SC/TN/AL/GA)	Growing A&D + reshoring	Greenville SC (GE Aerospace blade line), Huntsville AL, Charleston SC (Boeing).	GE Aerospace, Boeing, Lockheed, Tier 1 suppliers
Texas / South (TX/OK)	Emerging defence + energy	Dallas-Fort Worth (Lockheed, Bell Textron). Houston energy corridor.	Lockheed, Bell Textron, GKN, L3Harris
West / SW (CA/AZ/WA)	Aerospace, space, semi	LA / El Segundo, Seattle (Boeing, Blue Origin), Phoenix (TSMC). Highest salaries.	Boeing, SpaceX, Blue Origin, Honeywell, TSMC

Midwest grinders carry automotive and cutting tool DNA. Northeast grinders carry aerospace propulsion. Southeast grinders carry reshored production. That institutional knowledge does not travel easily. Matching background to programme context reduces hiring risk and time to productivity.

07 PRACTICAL HIRING GUIDANCE 2026

HIRING PROCESS COMPARISON | OPTIMAL ~30 DAYS vs TYPICAL 60-90+ DAYS | SENIOR GRINDING ROLES

01 SPEED

2-3 stages over no more than 2 weeks for FSE and Applications hires. Phone screen, technical, offer. Pre-agree approval chains before search begins.

02 BRIEFING

Specify machine brands, travel %, territory, reporting line and what "good" looks like in first 6 months. Vague briefs produce mismatched candidates.

03 PACKAGE

Know market position before posting. Section 03 ranges are starting point. Aim for 60th-75th percentile. Bottom-of-range hires leave faster.

04 RETENTION

Onboarding is part of the hire. 90-day plan, factory training, equipment, named mentor. FSEs leaving in 12 months cite onboarding as primary reason.

05 EVP

Articulate the role clearly. Why is this a better grinding career? What training? What install base? What does progression look like? Prepare honest answers.

06 FLEXIBILITY

Clarify working arrangements in first conversation. If hybrid, say so upfront. If office-based, explain why. Ambiguity costs candidates at offer stage.

07 BROADENING

Consider adjacent candidates. A strong cylindrical CNC FSE can often be trained on your machine range in 3-6 months. Transferable controls knowledge is undervalued.

08 PROACTIVITY

Build warm relationships before you need them. IMTS visibility, LinkedIn presence, specialist recruiter relationships. Reactive hiring produces worse outcomes.

The cost of a slow or unsuccessful grinding hire in lost productivity, service capacity and team burden almost always exceeds the investment in a faster, better-quality process. The best time to start a grinding search is before you urgently need to.

08 KEY TAKEAWAYS

01 TREAT GRINDING AS A SPECIALIST MARKET

Compensation benchmarks, screening criteria and sourcing channels for qualified grinding engineers are different from general CNC. Generalist frameworks underdeliver.

02 THE TALENT POOL IS SMALLER THAN ASSUMED

The US market for experienced grinding FSEs and Applications Engineers is a few hundred people, deeply networked, overwhelmingly passive.

03 BRAND DEPTH IS THE PRIMARY PREMIUM

Studer, Kellenberger, Gleason, ANCA depth commands 10-20% above generalist CNC rates. Pay bands that ignore this lose candidates at offer stage.

04 SPEED IS AN UNDERRATED ADVANTAGE

30 days from first interview to offer. 3 stages maximum. Candidates who are right for you are interviewing with your competitors simultaneously.

05 MATCH REGIONAL DNA TO PROGRAMME

Midwest grinder = auto + cutting tool DNA. Northeast = aerospace propulsion. Southeast = reshored production. Background match reduces hiring risk.

06 TALENT STRATEGY IS COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

With 1.9M US mfg jobs projected unfilled by 2033, access to precision grinding talent will differentiate employers who execute capex plans from those who cannot.

READY TO BUILD YOUR GRINDING TEAM?

Kensington360 is a specialist recruitment firm for Industry 4.0. We place the engineers, managers and leaders who build the technologies that matter.

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Report produced by Kensington360 using primary research, public company disclosures, BLS / Deloitte / Manufacturing Institute / Reshoring Initiative data, and multiple 2025-2026 market intelligence sources. Data snapshot: Q2 2026. Figures are estimates and may vary by source.