

General Contractor

You do not swing every hammer. You price the job, hire the trades, hold the schedule, and carry the risk.

TYPICAL PAY

\$114,990

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$70k to \$189k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Job sites, site trailers, homes under construction, commercial projects

How you get there

- 1 Finish high school** Grade 12
 Math, shop, drafting and English. Start working summers for a builder if you can, because time on site is what everything else is measured against.
- 2 Pick a route** 2 to 4 years
 Either a registered apprenticeship in carpentry or another trade, listed on [apprenticeship.gov](https://www.apprenticeship.gov), the United States Department of Labor site, or a four-year construction management degree.
- 3 Get experience on real jobs** 4 years, often while being paid
 Most states will not license you without documented years of construction experience. California, for example, wants four years at the journey level or above before you can even sit the exam.
- 4 Pass the license exams** Months of study
 Typically two: a law and business exam and a trade exam. Several states accept the National Association of State Contractors Licensing Agencies accredited exam, so one test can cover you in more than one state.
- 5 Get bonded, insured and licensed** Weeks
 Post the surety bond your state requires, buy liability and workers' compensation insurance, and the license is yours.

Pros and cons

- + Strong pay without a graduate degree
- + You can reach it from a paid apprenticeship with no debt
- + Something real stands there at the end of every job
- You carry the risk: bad weather, bad bids and unpaid invoices are all yours
- Long days that start before dawn and end with paperwork
- Construction is cyclical, and a downturn empties the order book fast

Optional boosts

Specialty classifications. Safety certifications. Estimating software. Building information modeling.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Construction Managers (11-9021.00)
 Contractors State License Board, State of California
 National Association of State Contractors Licensing Agencies
 American Council for Construction Education

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/general-contractor>

Good to know

California alone licenses 285,000 contractors

The state's Contractors State License Board oversees about 285,000 licensees across 45 different classifications, from general building to swimming pools to solar. It has its own enforcement staff who run un...

The schools cannot keep up

Accredited construction management programs graduate roughly 4,700 people a year in the whole country. The industry needs many times that, which is why graduates get several offers and why the tra...



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