



THE CHAMBERS GROUP

The Battery Belt Talent Report

Q2 2026 | Southeast Advanced Manufacturing

The state of engineering and manufacturing talent across the Battery Belt corridor — EV battery, SiC semiconductors, aerospace & defense, and industrial automation. Who is hiring. What they cannot find. And what is actually working.

\$48B+

Committed Investment

12,000+

Open Roles Estimated

68 days

TCG Avg. Time to Fill

1 in 3

A&D Engineers Age 55+

About This Report

Published quarterly by The Chambers Group. All data, market benchmarks, and compensation ranges reflect active searches, candidate conversations, and placement activity within the Battery Belt corridor through Q1 2026. Statistics are directional field intelligence — not national surveys. Compensation figures reflect observed offers in active Southeast corridor searches, not national averages.

Section 1: The Investment Landscape

The Southeast United States is experiencing the most significant advanced manufacturing buildout in its history. Capital is arriving faster than the workforce can follow — and the gap between facility completion dates and full operational capability is widening every quarter.

More than \$48 billion in advanced manufacturing investment has been committed across the Battery Belt corridor through 2030, spanning North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama. These are not projections — these are facilities under construction, ramping operations, or already producing now.

Active and Ramping Facilities

Company	Location	Sector	Jobs
Toyota Battery Mfg NC	Liberty, NC (Randolph County)	EV Battery	5,000+
AESC	Florence, SC	EV Battery	1,620
Scout Motors	Blythewood, SC (Richland County)	EV / Auto	4,000+ at build-out
BMW Manufacturing	Spartanburg, SC	EV / Auto	1,000+ net new
Wolfspeed — The JP	Siler City, NC (Chatham County)	SiC Semiconductor	1,800
Boeing South Carolina	North Charleston, SC	Aerospace & Defense	Ongoing growth
Rolls-Royce Solutions	Aiken, SC	Aerospace & Defense	Active expansion
Schaeffler	Cheraw, SC	EV Components	700+
Corvid Technologies	Mooresville, NC	Aerospace & Defense	Specialized growth
Hydrite Chemical	Laurens County, SC	Industrial / Chemical	New facility 2028

The capital is here. The engineers who know how to build these operations from scratch are not. That gap — between what facilities need and what the candidate market can deliver right now — is the defining challenge of the Battery Belt in 2026.

Section 2: The Talent Gap

The Battery Belt’s workforce challenge is not a pipeline problem in the traditional sense. The engineers exist. The experienced manufacturing leaders exist. They are simply not where the jobs are — and they are not responding to the channels most facilities rely on to find them.

<p>68 Days — TCG Avg. to Fill Engineering roles, Battery Belt</p>	<p>~80% Passive Candidates Of the most qualified talent</p>	<p>3x Annual Salary Documented cost of a bad hire</p>
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Why Traditional Sourcing Is Failing

Across the Battery Belt, the candidates with the most relevant experience — those who have built a production line from scratch, managed a facility ramp-up under pressure, or navigated AS9100 compliance in a live aerospace environment — are not browsing job boards. They are running lines right now.

The talent most in demand is the talent least likely to be reached by traditional sourcing. This creates a structural advantage for organizations that invest in relationship-based access to this candidate pool before an active search begins — not during it.

Search Difficulty by Role — Battery Belt Corridor

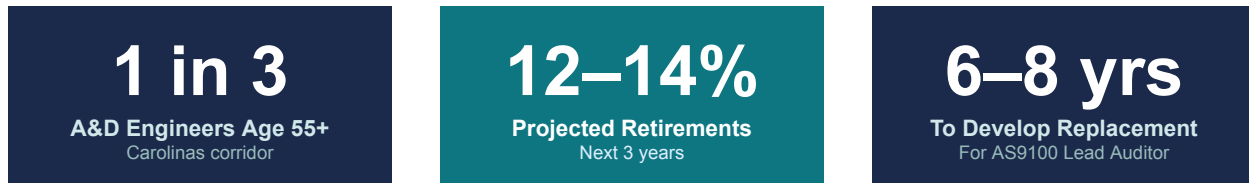
Role	Difficulty	TCG Avg. Timeline	Key Market Constraint
Plant Manager / Site Director	Critical	90–120 days	Greenfield ramp experience in the SE is rare; most institutional knowledge sits in the Midwest or overseas
Quality Manager (AS9100 / IATF)	Critical	75–100 days	Lead Auditor certification combined with EV or aerospace sector experience is a scarce combination
SiC Process / Epitaxy Engineer	Critical	90–120+ days	200mm transition experience nearly nonexistent outside Wolfspeed; Device Physicists and Yield Engineers equally rare
Battery Systems / HV Architect	Critical	75–100 days	Cell-level process knowledge limited to fewer than a dozen domestic facilities; High Voltage Architects in high demand
Manufacturing Engineer (EV)	High	60–90 days	Experience is emerging but concentrated in Midwest and West Coast — relocation required for most placements
Director of Operations (Ramp)	High	75–100 days	Greenfield ramp leadership commands significant premium and is genuinely scarce in the Southeast
Commissioning & Validation Engr	High	45–75 days	C&V talent pulled simultaneously across pharma, semiconductor, and EV — three competing demand pools

Role	Difficulty	TCG Avg. Timeline	Key Market Constraint
Controls / Automation Engineer	High	45–60 days	Industrial automation demand accelerating; SE supply lagging facility build-out pace significantly
Supply Chain Director (Battery)	High	60–90 days	Post-IRA reshoring creating demand without equivalent domestic talent depth in the corridor
Energy Storage / BESS Engineer	High	60–90 days	Emerging sector; Grid Interconnection Managers and Battery Test Engineers especially scarce
Maintenance Manager / Reliability	Medium	45–60 days	Steady demand; corridor growing faster than the local technician supply pipeline can follow
Avionics / Composite Mfg Engineer	Medium	50–70 days	Strong A&D corridor in SE but retirement wave tightening the experienced candidate pool quickly

The most expensive decision in manufacturing hiring is not a bad hire. It is lowering the bar to end a long search. You did not save four months — you spent thirteen.

Section 3: The Aerospace & Defense Talent Drought

Of the four sectors The Chambers Group works in, aerospace and defense faces the most acute near-term talent crisis — and the one with the least flexibility to solve quickly. The reasons are structural, compounding, and already accelerating.



Why Aerospace & Defense Is Different

EV and battery manufacturing talent shortages are primarily a geography problem — the experience exists domestically, concentrated in the Midwest and West Coast. Moving it to the Southeast is solvable. Aerospace and defense is a fundamentally different challenge.

The combination of AS9100 Rev D certification experience, active production environment knowledge, clearance eligibility, and in many cases composite manufacturing expertise narrows the available candidate pool to a fraction of total engineering talent. The retirement wave is not redistributing this knowledge — it is removing it from the market entirely.

The Southeast A&D corridor — Boeing North Charleston, Rolls-Royce Aiken, Corvid Technologies Mooresville, Curtiss-Wright Davidson, Parker Hannifin Mooresville, Collins Aerospace Monroe — is competing simultaneously for the same shrinking pool of experienced engineers.

The facilities that are ahead of this problem are not recruiting harder. They are retaining smarter — and they started building succession infrastructure years before the retirement math became urgent.

Bridging the Talent Gap: What Actually Works

The conversations happening inside the most forward-looking Battery Belt manufacturers reveal a common set of strategies — not recruiting tactics, but structural approaches that reduce dependency on external talent pipelines. Facilities implementing these are not just solving a near-term staffing problem. They are becoming harder to compete against as employers.

<p>0 1</p>	<p>Build an internal academy</p>	<p>The most sophisticated manufacturers are not waiting for the pipeline to improve. They are building it internally. Structured onboarding-to-mastery programs — often modeled on earn-and-learn frameworks — pair incoming engineers with senior talent in a formal apprenticeship structure. The result is dual: knowledge transfer happens before the senior engineer retires, and the incoming engineer develops loyalty to the facility that trained them. Retention rates in these programs consistently outperform external hires in equivalent roles.</p>
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02	Design learning paths before the seat opens	<p>Advanced facilities are mapping skill development requirements 18 to 24 months ahead of projected need. This means identifying not just what the role requires today, but what it will require at full operational capacity — and building a curriculum around that target state. Companies that do this correctly find themselves with a credible promotion pipeline that reduces external search dependency and creates genuine career trajectory for manufacturing technicians and engineers alike.</p>
03	Use the ramp-up phase as a talent development window	<p>Greenfield facility buildouts create a unique opportunity that most operators underutilize. The 12 to 18 months before full production is a natural period to bring talent in at a development level, train them on the specific equipment, processes, and standards of that facility, and promote them into full roles as production scales. Facilities that treat ramp-up as a talent development window rather than a staffing emergency consistently reach full operational capability faster and with lower turnover in the critical first two years.</p>
04	Create deliberate knowledge transfer before it is too late	<p>In facilities where 30 to 40 percent of the senior engineering workforce is within five years of retirement, structured knowledge transfer programs are not optional — they are operational continuity planning. The most effective versions create formal documentation of institutional process knowledge, pair retiring engineers with successors in a defined co-ownership model for key roles, and establish a timeline with accountability. Organizations that implement this early recover institutional knowledge that would otherwise disappear when the engineer walks out.</p>
05	Partner with search firms before the seat is open	<p>The facilities filling roles fastest are not reaching out when the requisition is approved. They are in ongoing conversations with specialized search partners who know their operations, their culture, and the candidate community before the need becomes urgent. This shifts the search from reactive to proactive — and in a tight talent market, that timing advantage routinely determines whether a facility ramps on schedule or spends six months in catch-up mode.</p>

Section 4: Emerging Sectors to Watch

Beyond the four established sectors The Chambers Group works in today, the Battery Belt intelligence picture points to adjacent markets that are beginning to generate real talent demand across the Southeast corridor. These are not projections — early hiring activity is already visible in each.

<p>Battery Energy Storage (BESS) Grid-scale storage</p>	<p>Grid-scale battery storage is growing rapidly across the Southeast to support renewable energy integration and AI data center power demands. Form Energy’s iron-air technology recently secured a 12 GWh commercial agreement — signaling significant acceleration. Key roles in early demand: Energy Storage Engineers, Grid Interconnection Managers, Battery Test Engineers, Systems Integration Engineers.</p>
<p>Industry 4.0 & Smart Factories Digital manufacturing</p>	<p>As Battery Belt facilities automate to combat labor shortages, demand for digital integration specialists is accelerating sharply. MES implementation, IIoT connectivity, and smart factory architecture roles command significant premium and are chronically understaffed. Key roles: Digital Manufacturing Architects, MES Implementation Consultants, Smart Factory Engineers, IIoT Specialists.</p>
<p>Urban Air Mobility (eVTOL) Electric aviation</p>	<p>eVTOL sits at the intersection of aerospace and EV — and requires the hybrid talent profile that already exists in the Southeast A&D corridor. Significant venture capital is flowing into this sector with Huntsville AL and the Carolinas emerging as natural hubs. Key roles: Electric Propulsion Engineers, Flight Control Systems Engineers, Airframe Structural Engineers, Certification Engineers.</p>
<p>Autonomous Mobile Robots (AMR) Warehouse & logistics automation</p>	<p>AMR deployment inside Battery Belt manufacturing and logistics facilities is accelerating. Roles in this sector are highly specialized and rarely filled through traditional sourcing. Key roles: SLAM Engineers, Perception Engineers, Fleet Managers, Hardware Test Engineers, Robotics Programmers.</p>
<p>Advanced Mfg Leadership Cross-sector executive roles</p>	<p>As Battery Belt facilities mature past ramp-up, demand for experienced Plant Directors, VPs of Manufacturing, and Supply Chain executives with multi-site P&L ownership is rising sharply. These roles sit across all four established sectors and require a combination of technical depth and operational leadership that is genuinely rare in the Southeast talent pool.</p>

Section 5: Compensation Benchmarks

The Battery Belt talent market is repricing rapidly. Facilities anchoring offers to 2022 or 2023 compensation data are consistently losing candidates — often to direct competitors in the same corridor. The benchmarks below reflect observed market conditions in active Battery Belt searches through Q1 2026.

Note: Ranges reflect base salary observations from active searches in the Southeast corridor only. Sign-on bonuses (increasingly common at \$10K–\$30K for critical roles), equity participation, and relocation packages are not reflected below but are standard in competitive offers.

Role	2024 Range (Observed)	2026 Range (Observed)	Movement
Plant Manager (Battery / EV)	\$130K–\$165K	\$155K–\$195K	+18–22%
Quality Manager (AS9100 / IATF)	\$105K–\$130K	\$118K–\$148K	+12–15%
Manufacturing Engineer (EV Battery)	\$85K–\$110K	\$95K–\$125K	+10–14%
SiC Process / Epitaxy Engineer	\$95K–\$125K	\$115K–\$150K	+20–25%
Director of Operations (Ramp)	\$145K–\$180K	\$165K–\$210K	+14–18%
Battery Systems / HV Architect	\$110K–\$140K	\$130K–\$165K	+16–20%
Controls / Automation Engineer	\$80K–\$105K	\$90K–\$118K	+10–13%
C&V Engineer (Pharma / EV)	\$90K–\$115K	\$100K–\$130K	+11–14%
Energy Storage / BESS Engineer	\$95K–\$120K	\$110K–\$140K	+14–18%
Supply Chain Director	\$130K–\$160K	\$145K–\$180K	+12–16%
Maintenance Manager	\$85K–\$105K	\$92K–\$115K	+8–12%

Candidates receiving competing offers in this market are choosing on total package — not just base salary. Sign-on bonuses, accelerated review cycles, and clear advancement paths are increasingly the factor that determines whether a top candidate accepts your offer or the one down the road.

Section 6: What Is Actually Working

Across searches in the Battery Belt corridor, a clear pattern has emerged. The facilities filling roles fastest are not doing more recruiting — they are doing different recruiting. The distinction matters enormously when the candidate pool is thin and time-to-fill is measured in months.

The Three-Part Framework for Competitive Hiring

01	Relationship-first sourcing	The most qualified candidates are passive — not responding to postings, not actively looking. They respond to trusted contacts and respected voices in their sector. Facilities that have invested in building relationships with this community ahead of an active search consistently fill faster and with stronger outcomes than those starting cold.
02	Speed as a competitive weapon	Time-to-offer matters more than most hiring teams realize. Candidates receiving multiple opportunities in this market are making decisions in days, not weeks. The single most common reason top candidates choose a competitor is that the other process moved faster. A structured decision timeline shared upfront — and adhered to — significantly reduces dropout at offer stage.
03	Honest market positioning	Candidates in this market are well-networked. They know which facilities are well-run and which are not. Authentic employer positioning — including honest conversations about the challenges of a ramp-up environment — consistently outperforms polished recruitment marketing in both candidate quality and first-year retention. Transparency in the process builds the trust that makes offers stick.

The Retained Search Advantage

In a market where the best candidates are passive and time-to-fill is measured in months, the structure of the search engagement matters as much as the execution. Retained search — where the recruitment partner is fully committed to the search from day one and not dividing attention across contingency work — consistently outperforms contingency models on speed, candidate quality, and first-year retention.

The Chambers Group operates exclusively on a retained basis. When every day of an open engineering seat has a measurable operational cost, the search model cannot afford to be a passive one.



About The Chambers Group

Boutique Executive Search | Battery Belt Manufacturing | Southeast US

The Chambers Group specializes exclusively in Battery Belt advanced manufacturing talent across the Southeast US. We operate in four core sectors: EV and battery technology, SiC semiconductors, aerospace and defense, and industrial automation.

We operate on a 100% retained basis. Every search we take receives our full attention from day one.

96%

New Hire Retention Rate

2-Year

Replacement Guarantee

100%

Retained Search Model

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If you are building something in the Battery Belt corridor — or you have an open seat that has been open too long — let's have a conversation.

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Market data and compensation ranges reflect field intelligence from active Battery Belt searches through Q1 2026. All figures are directional estimates.