



Arts Pay NJ 2025
Summary findings from the 2025 statewide
compensation and workforce study

BAKERRICHARDS ARTSPAY NJ

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Cover image: American Mariachi at Two River Theater
Photo Credit: T. Charles Erickson

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Made possible by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

New Jersey arts service organizations



Executive Summary

Arts Pay NJ 2025 is the second statewide compensation and workforce study of New Jersey's nonprofit arts sector, drawing on 534 individual responses and 123 organizational submissions covering 6,521 personnel. The 2025 survey expands coverage to include freelancers, teaching artists, volunteers, and university/government-affiliated workers for the first time, alongside deeper questions on workload, well-being, and internships.

Compensation and pay

- Full-time median salary rose 12% to \$71,750, with gains across all role levels. But 62% still feel underpaid - a proportion that barely shifted despite objective improvement.
- Hourly workers saw no gain at all: their median is flat at \$25, a real-terms decline.
- The race pay gap nearly doubled (\$5K to \$9.3K) and the gender gap more than tripled (\$3K to \$9.5K).

Hours and workload

- 61% routinely work beyond contracted hours, structurally unchanged since 2023.
- 82% of full-time workers have no overtime eligibility.
- At executive level, 53% work 10+ extra hours weekly.
- Nearly half the sector rates work-life balance as fair or worse.

Benefits and transparency

- Paid parental leave saw the largest single gain (25% to 37%), but remains far from standard.
- Only 6% have employer childcare support despite one-third having dependents.
- 53% of entry-level workers don't know their employer's health premium contribution.
- Transparent pay practices appeared as a new named priority for the first time in 2025.

Sustainability and equity

- Job-seeking among 18–29 year olds doubled to 40%, but 64% of job-seekers want to stay in arts. This is a retention problem, not an attraction problem.
- People of Color are concentrated in entry-level roles (15% vs 7% White) and underrepresented at senior level.
- Women are underrepresented at executive level (8% vs 23% of men).

Invisible workforce

- Teaching artists (110+ respondents, first time asked): 51% have inconsistent schedules, 50% cite low pay, 46% lack any benefits, 33% do unpaid preparation as standard.
- Freelancers: 77% travel unpaid, 65% prepare unpaid, 63% lack consistent written contracts, 41% ineligible for unemployment.
- One-third of all respondents also volunteer.

Why we're confident in this picture

534

individual workers
responses

123

organizations
participated

6,521

personnel account for

2nd

edition allows for
comparisons with
2023

Independently Analyzed

Baker Richards collected, anonymized, and analyzed all data independently.

2023 to 2025 comparisons

2023–2025 comparisons may reflect both real change and differences in respondent mix / expanded 2025 scope, and should be read carefully where employment type changed

A note on subgroups

Where sample sizes are smaller, findings are presented as directional. The strength of this study lies in the consistency of patterns across groups.

Who's in this data

Based on 534 individual responses

72% women, 24% men

This is a heavily female workforce and that shapes nearly every finding in this report.

76% White, 18% People of Color

Subgroup analysis for POC respondents is directional given the base size, but patterns are consistent across multiple measures.

66% full-time employees

The rest: 18% part-time, 9% freelance/contract, 6% self-employed. Benefits, hours, and pay structures differ sharply across these groups.

37% middle level, 25% senior, 12% executive, 11% entry

The respondent pool skews mid-career. Entry-level voices are present but smaller and their data is among the most striking.

37% hold a master's degree or higher

70% of all degrees are in arts-related fields. This is a credentialed workforce being paid below what those credentials typically command elsewhere.

50% hold more than one job

Half in arts-only roles, half combining arts with other fields. Multi-job holding is an income portfolio strategy

“I’m in my 30s and feel I can’t build a financial future for myself that includes family planning or long-term stability. That’s frustrating and depressing, and affects how long I feel I can continue to work in the arts.”

- Age 30 to 39, Woman, Full-time employee

New Jersey's arts sector added **\$29.2 billion** to the state economy in 2023, growing at twice the rate of the broader economy.

148,000 workers generate that value.

Each worker produces roughly **\$197,000** in economic output while earning a median salary of **\$71,750**.

Six Headline Findings

- 1 Pay has risen. The experience of being paid hasn't
- 2 The number on a contract is only part of what workers are actually paid
- 3 Overwork isn't an exception. It's how the sector operates
- 4 Workers don't always know what they're receiving – and neither do employers
- 5 The sector may be selecting for who can afford to stay
- 6 We've been counting some workers out of the conversation entirely

What's improved between 2023 and 2025

Full-time median salary	\$64,000 → \$71,750	+12% nominal / +6% real
Entry-level median	\$44,000 → \$47,750	+9% nominal / +3% real
Senior median	\$76,355 → \$87,749	+15% nominal / +9% real
Employer health insurance	42% → 48%	+6 percentage points
Retirement plan access	45% → 56%	+11 percentage points
Paid parental leave	25% → 37%	+12 percentage points
Bereavement leave	50% → 63%	+13 percentage points
Union membership	16% → 21%	Modest but consistent rise

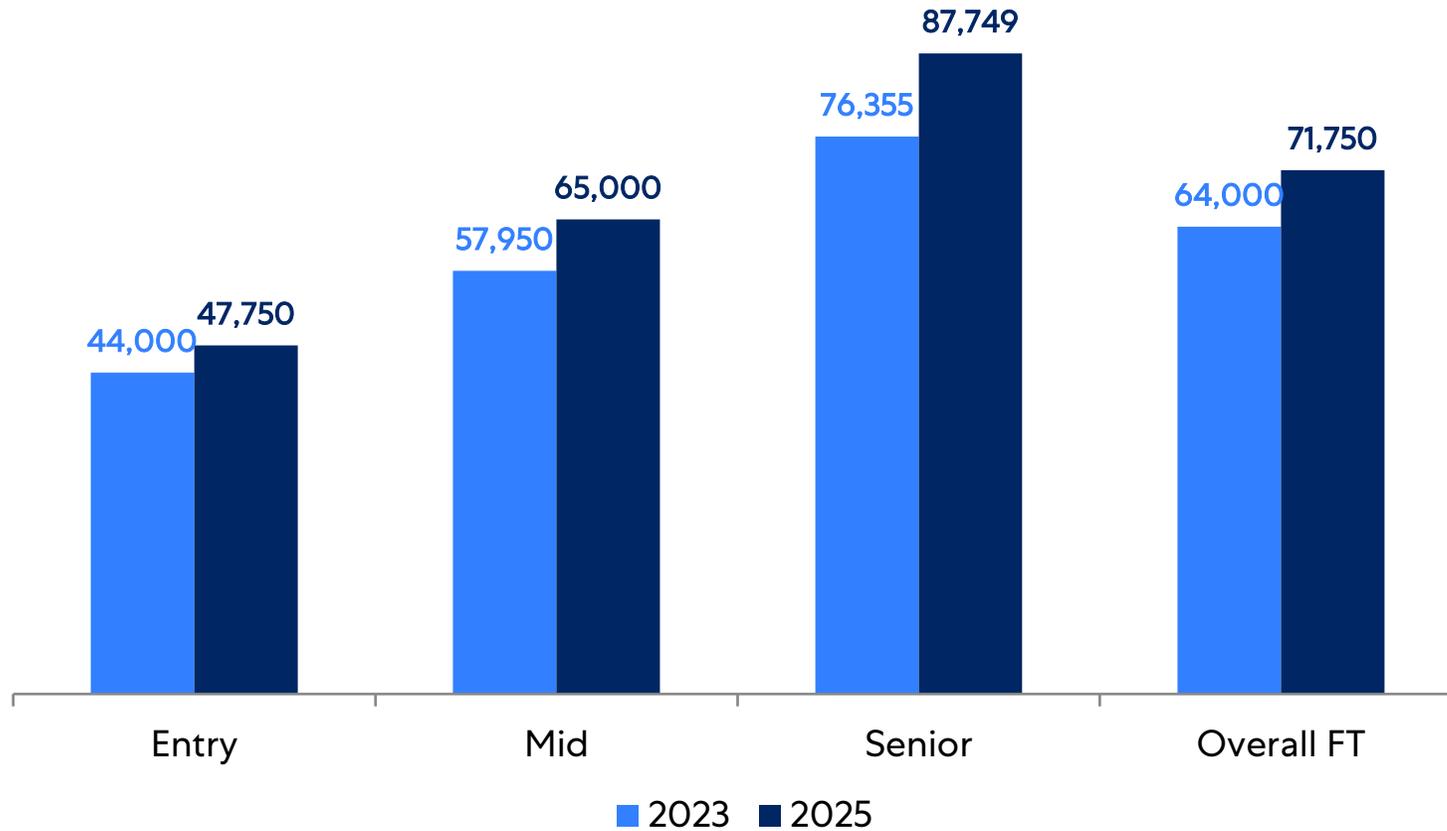
What's **unchanged or worsened** between 2023 and 2025

Hourly median wage	\$25 (flat since 2023)	<i>Real-terms decline</i>
Overtime ineligibility	88% → 82%	<i>Structurally unchanged</i>
Hours worked gap	Remains at 62%	<i>Unchanged</i>
Perceived underpayment	69% → 62%	<i>Stubbornly high despite raises</i>
Job-seeking intent (overall)	36% → 37%	<i>No improvement</i>
Race pay gap	\$5k gap → \$9.27k gap	<i>Has widened since 2023</i>
Gender pay gap	\$3k gap → \$9.5k gap	<i>Has widened since 2023</i>
Exec-level overwork	52% → 53% 10+ extra hrs	<i>No change at top</i>

Pay has risen. The experience of being paid hasn't

If salaries went up, why doesn't it feel that way? The gains are real but absorbed by health costs, by flat hourly rates, by the gap between the number on a contract and the money that reaches a worker's pocket. The perception of being underpaid has only marginally shifted despite objective improvement.

Wages are up. Perceptions haven't moved.



Entry up 9%, mid up 12%, senior up 15%, overall FT up 12%. A 12% nominal salary increase only shifted the “feel underpaid” proportion by 7 points. The gains are real. They are just not being felt.

Perceptions of pay

62% still feel underpaid

Down from 69% in 2023 – but salaries rose 12%. The gap between objective gain and felt experience is the story.

Hourly Workers

\$25/hr – unchanged

Flat since at least 2022 – a real-terms decline for hourly workers while salaried peers gained ground.

"Raises have been minimal... barely covered increased costs of health insurance... take-home pay was virtually unchanged."

- Age 50 to 59, Woman, Full-time employee

The number on a contract is only part of what workers are actually paid

Compensation is not just the salary figure. It is salary plus the value of benefits, minus the cost of working – hours, unpaid time, unknown premium contributions. A worker who gets a raise but absorbs a health cost increase may not experience a meaningful gain

Salary interacts with hours, overtime, and benefit costs

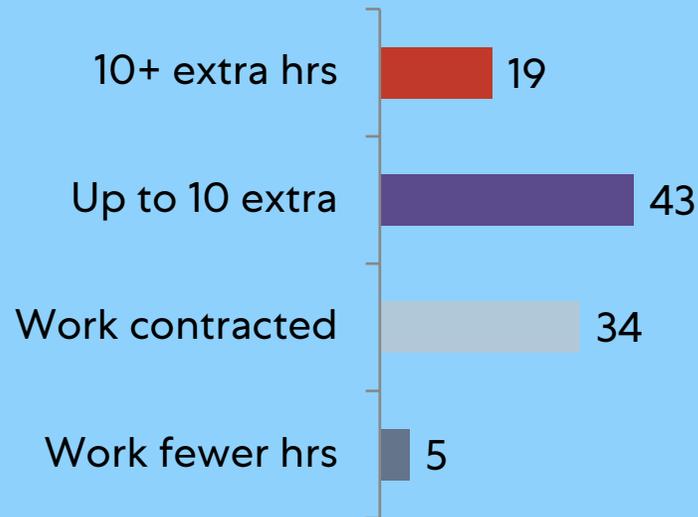
82%

of full-time workers have no overtime eligibility (down from 88% in 2023)

Part-time workers face sharply lower benefit access than full-time – the gap is widest on health insurance and parental leave.

61%

routinely work beyond contracted hours – structurally unchanged since 2023



Healthcare premium

Many don't know what employer covers – "don't know" responses persist even among those with staff handbooks

Retirement match

Only 42% have employer contribution (up from 32% in 2023)

Dental insurance

37% (2023) → 43% (2025)

Vision insurance

30% (2023) → 38% (2025)

Childcare assistance

Only 6% have any support

Workers notice what's missing on both sides of the compensation bundle

62%

feel salary falls below expectations

44%

feel benefits fall below expectations

6%

have any employer childcare assistance

Two separate gaps

The 44% who feel benefits fall short are not a subset of the 62% salary figure – these are two distinct dissatisfactions that overlap but are independently felt.

When both feel inadequate, the gap between what the role demands and what it offers is wider than either number alone suggests.

The childcare signal

Only 6% have employer childcare support. One in three respondents has a child under 18. The mismatch between workforce composition and benefit provision is most visible here – this is a structural gap.

Most arts workers don't do it alone

Hidden support structure

Spouse/partner income. Parents. Savings. A second job. The sector's compensation model assumes – without stating it – that someone else is helping cover the gap. This is the hidden infrastructure that makes low arts pay structurally viable.

Reliance on outside income

When 70% of respondents say they rely on outside income, that's a demonstration of sector-level dependency. It means the current pay model is only sustainable for workers who have access to household resources beyond their own earnings – and it selects, over time, for who those workers can be.

70%

rely on income or financial resources outside their own work

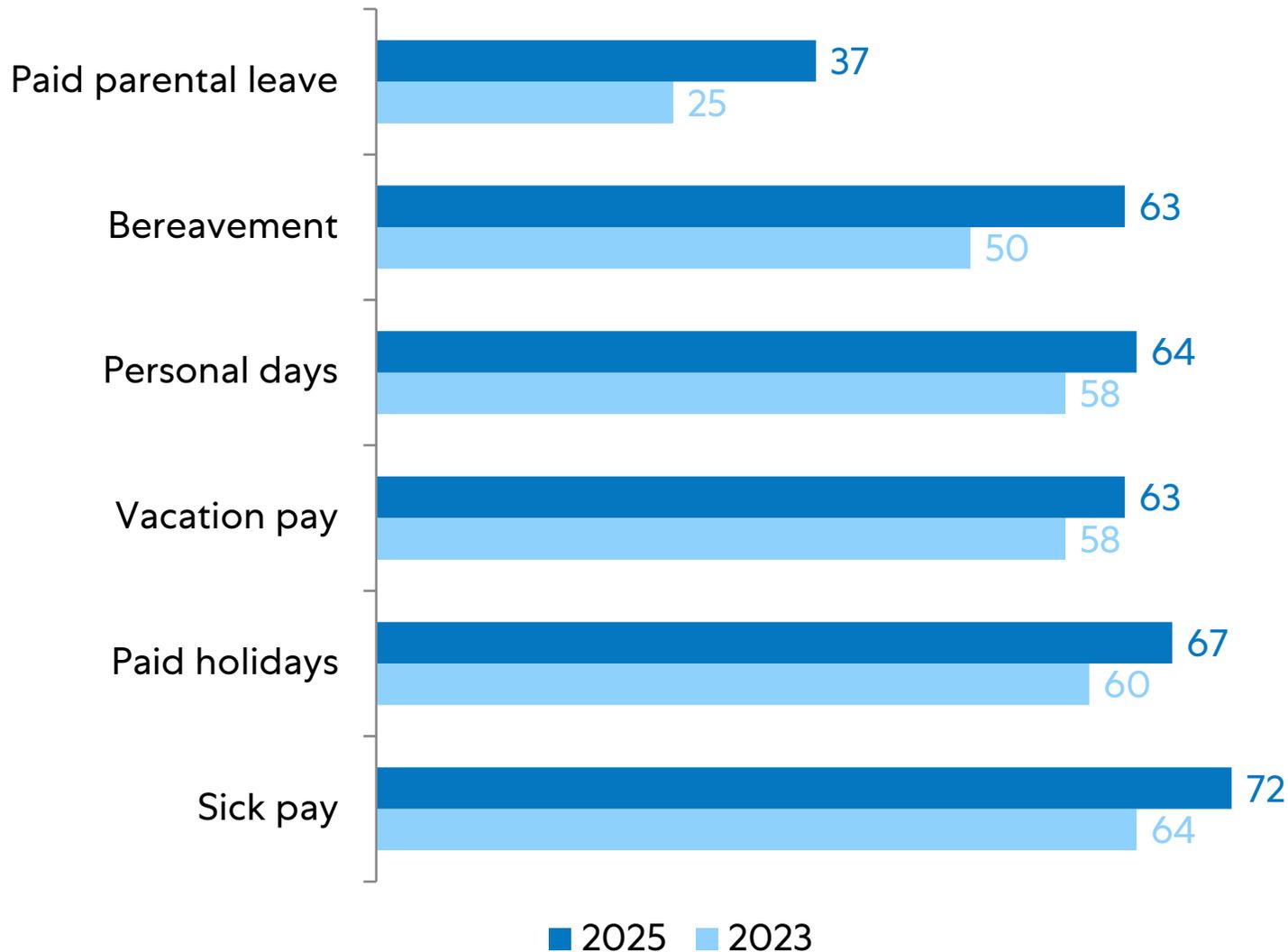
<30%

describe arts income as their primary or sole household income source

57%

of even full-time employees rely on other household income

Paid parental leave: the sector's biggest single gain



Parental Leave

37%

now have paid parental leave (up from 25% in 2023)

Still not universal

At 37%, paid parental leave remains far from standard. Full-time workers are more than three times as likely to have it as part-time workers (50% vs 15%). The improvement is real – but the gap remains stark.

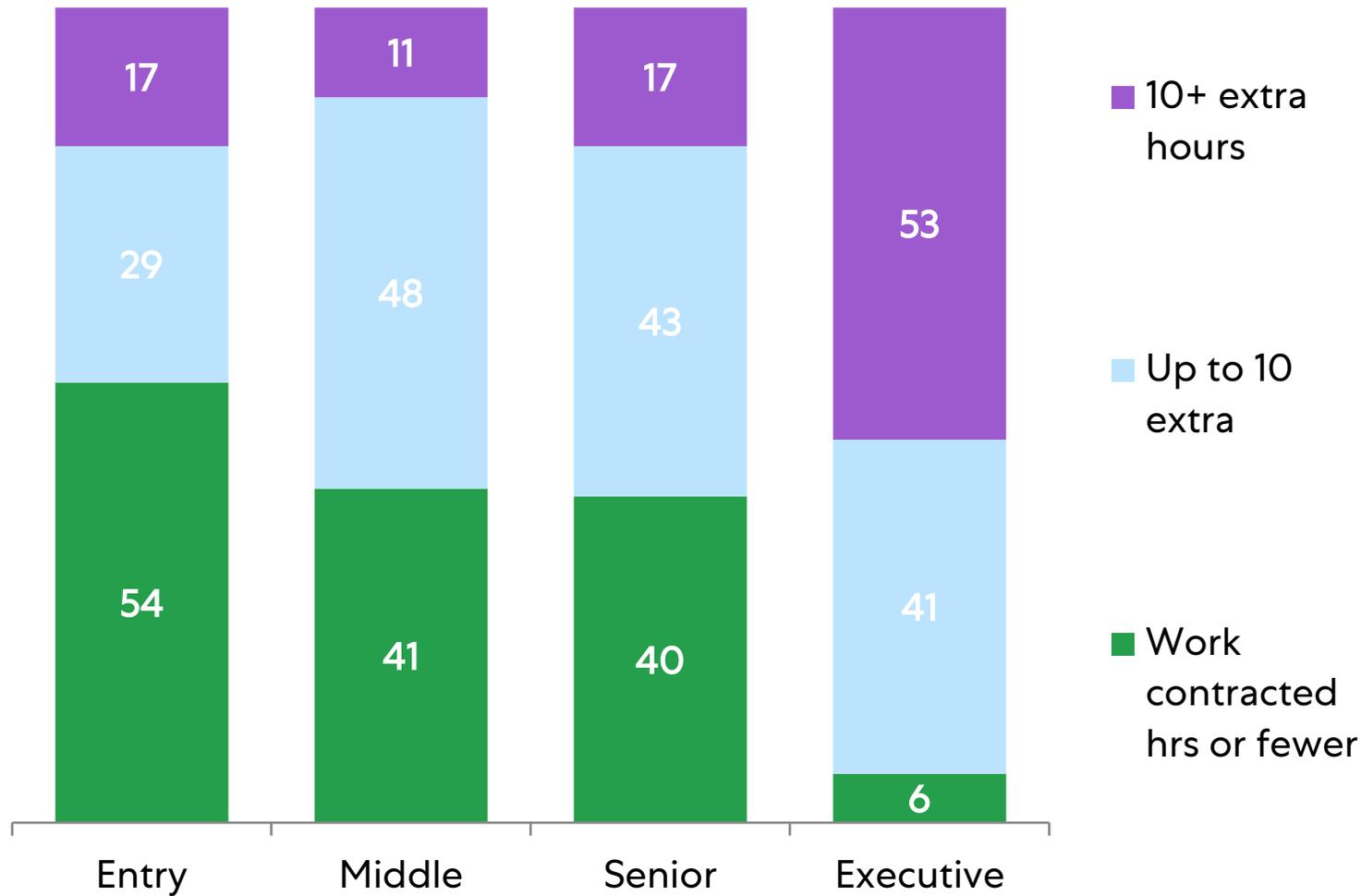
“More of a dialogue between leaders and staff regarding compensation and benefits, especially in a changing financial world. Some benefits may be more helpful than others.”

- Age 30 to 39, Woman, Full time employee

Overwork isn't an exception. It's how the sector operates.

Hidden labor is normalized. This is not a story about occasional long weeks. It is how work is often structured and experienced. Overwork is consistent, structural, and – in open-text responses – named in moral terms by workers themselves.

The sector asks more than it acknowledges



53%

of Executive-level staff work 10+ hours beyond contracted expectations (52% in 2023)

Moral language

Open-text responses use words like 'demoralizing' and 'unethical' a consistent pattern in both 2023 and 2025 surveys

77%

of those with multiple jobs hold 2+ arts roles. Portfolio work as economic necessity, not lifestyle preference

Work-life balance: nearly half the sector rates theirs as fair or worse



“Sometimes when we have shows or events I could work over 50–70 hours... multiple weeks in a row... it really wipes me out.”
- Mid-level; full-time; one job in arts

"The lack of pay & benefits and the way that has been normalized despite extremely high expectations on staff is demoralizing. It even feels unethical at times. The amount of work and skill required is not properly compensated."

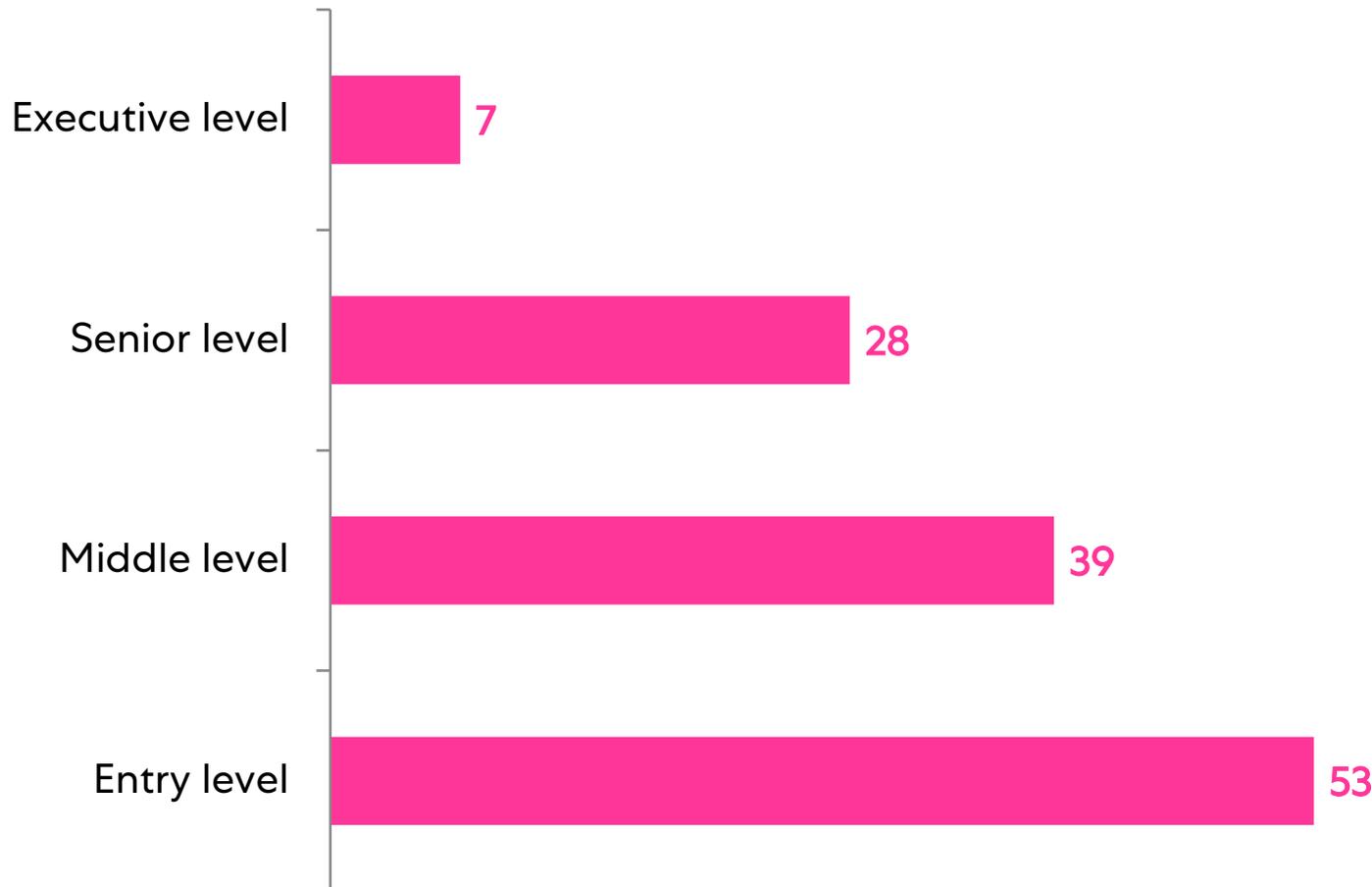
- Part time employee

Workers don't always know what they're receiving – and neither do employers.

This is a communication and culture problem across the sector. Some employers don't have clear documented benefit structures. Some have them but don't communicate them effectively. The result: workers can't evaluate their total compensation and employers may not realise what's unclear.

Clarity about what is offered costs very little – its absence compounds everything else

% who don't know employer's health premium contribution



69%

cite higher pay as top priority – but 'more transparent pay practices' was also named as a new distinct factor in 2025

Freelancers hardest hit

Often lack written contracts, clear rate structures, or advance notice. Many unaware they may be eligible for unemployment benefits.

Where it works

Respondents describe transparency – clear pay bands, defined hours, known benefit structures – as good practice precisely because it's not universal.

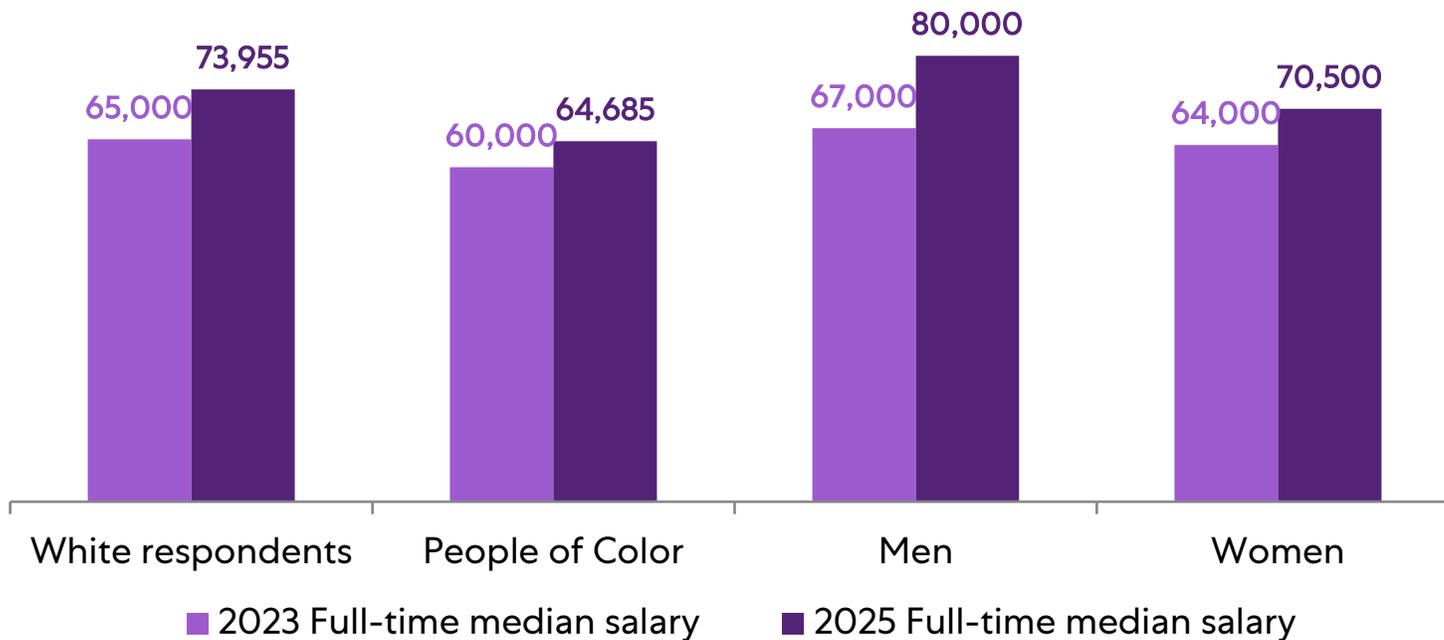
“I hope in the future compensation is built into an employee’s overall growth plan with an organization. Often times, it falls on the employee to ask for more after they have been with an organization longer and/or have taken on more work.”

- Age 18 to 29, Woman, Full time employee

Sustainability is not evenly distributed.

The sector is selecting, unintentionally but systematically, for who can afford to stay. The salary gains are real – but they are not reaching everyone equally. Three dimensions of that inequality are clearest in the data: race, gender and age

The pay gap has widened since 2023



Race pay gap: \$5,000 in 2023 → \$9,270 in 2025

Gender pay gap: \$3,000 in 2023 → \$9,500 in 2025

People of Color

- Salary falls below expectations (73% vs 58% White)
- Benefits fall below expectations (52% vs 41% White)
- Higher representation at middle level (52% vs 44% White)

Gender

Women are more likely than men to report salary below expectations (66% vs 49%) and are underrepresented at executive level (8% vs 23%).

Neurodiversity

10% (2023) → 15% (2025), a 50% increase. Flexibility and hybrid work appear repeatedly as conditions that make work sustainable for this group.

The young worker signal: job-seeking has surged among under-30s



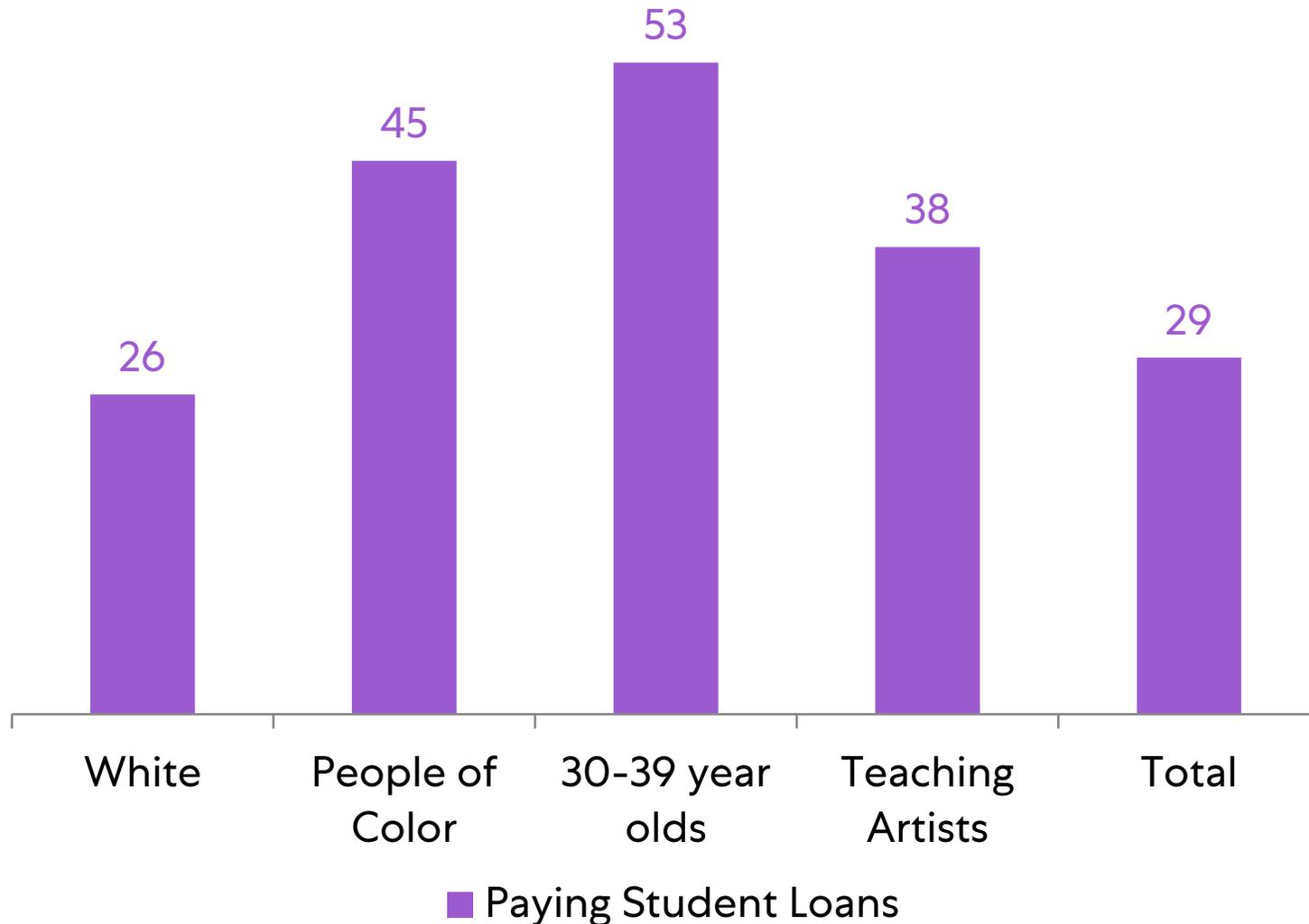
40%

of 18-29s are actively job-seeking
(up from 20% in 2023)

But they want to stay in the arts

64% of job-seekers want to stay in the arts sector. They're not leaving arts work – they're leaving the conditions. Salary growth has not reached early-career workers where it matters most.

Education costs compound the affordability gap



This is a workforce where 37% hold a master's degree and 70% of degrees are arts-related. The sector asks for credentials it doesn't fully compensate.

For workers already earning below market benchmarks, student loan payments reduce effective take-home pay further – and the burden falls hardest on the groups least able to absorb it.

Among POC respondents, nearly half carry student debt compared to 26% of White respondents.

Among 30–39 year olds – the cohort building careers and starting families – it's 53%.

This is another way of measuring the affordability problem seen in the pay gap and the job-seeking surge.

"Pay for entry-level exhibitions/museums/art gallery staff is typically abysmal. While my salary doesn't pay me enough to pay rent for a one-bedroom in nearly all of northern New Jersey, it is still higher than similar jobs in this sector."

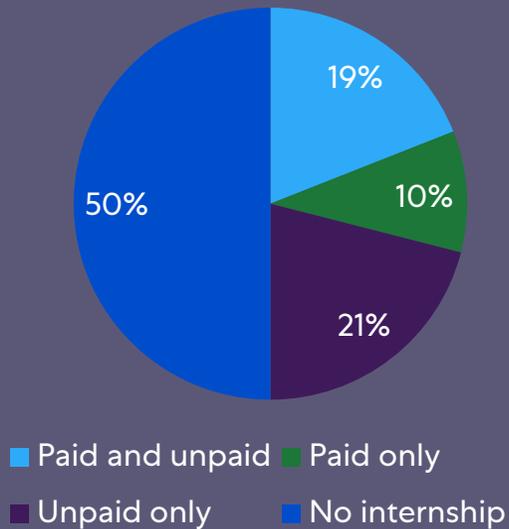
- Age 18-29, Woman, Full time employee

We've been counting some workers out of the conversation entirely.

The 2025 survey deliberately went looking for workers who had been outside the frame: teaching artists, freelancers, and through the internship questions, people whose pathway in may have been blocked before it began.

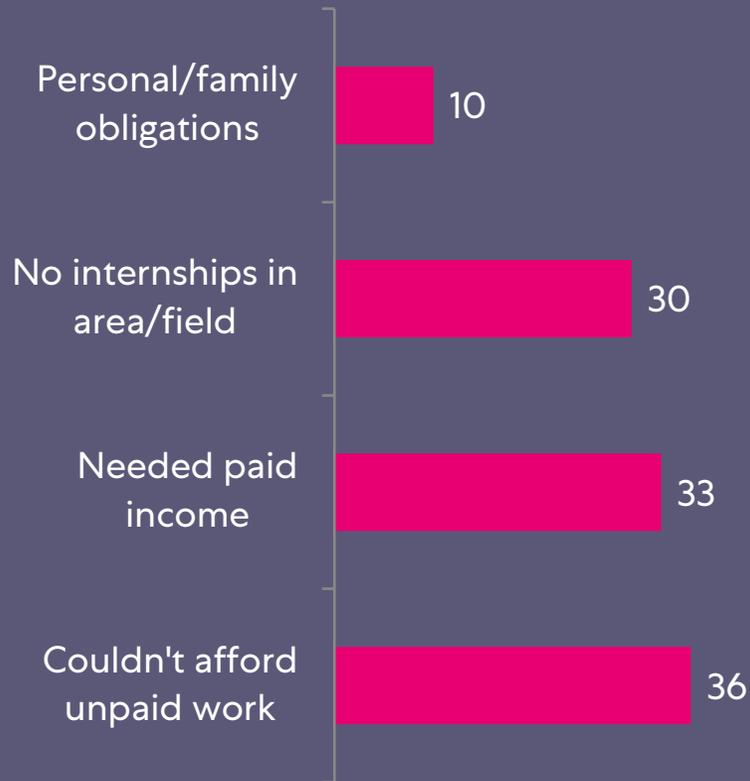
Internships: how you get in – but not equally accessible

Internship participation



Most internships did not directly lead to a job offer – but affordability means the pathway is not equally available to all.

Reasons for not doing an internship



50%

of respondents had at least one internship

21+hrs

per week – many unpaid internships required this

36%

couldn't afford to work unpaid – #1 barrier

Teaching artists: high-skill work with no floor

110+ teaching artists responded – asked directly for the first time in 2025

14% describe it as their full-time primary profession. The rest are assembling income:

- 40% use teaching as **supplemental income** to other work
- 38% **combine it** with other arts roles.

51% have **inconsistent work schedules** – work exists when booked, disappears when it isn't

50% cite **low pay rates** as a primary concern

46% lack any **employment benefits**

33% do **unpaid preparation** as a structural condition of the role – not an exception

Freelancers: when every hour has a cost and many aren't paid

48% freelance and contract workers responded in 2025

77% travel to engagements without pay - **67%** also travel without cost reimbursement

65% prepare without pay before the paid work begins

48% report waiting time between sessions as unpaid

63% have no written contract, or only sometimes do

41% are ineligible for unemployment when work dries up

62% say low pay is the reason they've declined work

"As a freelancer, every waking hour feels devoted to some work that needs to be done for the work days to happen."

- Age 50 to 59, Woman, Freelance/Contract worker

The sector runs on goodwill it has never had to account for

33% of all respondents – across every worker type, every career level, every employment status – also volunteer for arts organizations.

47% board service or governance

47% event support

25% mentoring

"Sometimes my low compensation can already feel like volunteering. At the level of expertise I'm at, I no longer do work for free."

– Age 30–39, Woman, Full-time employee

What organisations say about why pay is where it is

From the organisation survey (123 organisations)

88%

say increased unrestricted funding is what they most need to improve compensation

81%

say better grant funding for staff costs

99%

say available funding/revenue is the top factor shaping their pay decisions

54% of non-institutional organisations set pay primarily based on available budget, rather than using formal salary ranges or benchmarking.

This is not indifference – it is a structural constraint. Most arts organisations want to pay more. They describe a funding environment where restricted grants cover programmes but not the people who run them, and where unrestricted revenue is too thin to close the gap.

60% of organisations are increasing salary levels as a priority for the next three years.

But only 47% are optimistic they'll be able to do it. The gap between intent and capacity is the employer-side version of the same story workers are telling.

In Summary

- 1 Pay has gone up. Most workers don't feel it.
- 2 Compensation is a bundle and it's not fully understood by either sides
- 3 Overwork is normalized. The sector asks more than it acknowledges
- 4 Transparency costs nothing and is still not standard
- 5 The gains aren't shared equally – by race, gender, or age
- 6 A significant part of this workforce has been invisible

What would make a difference

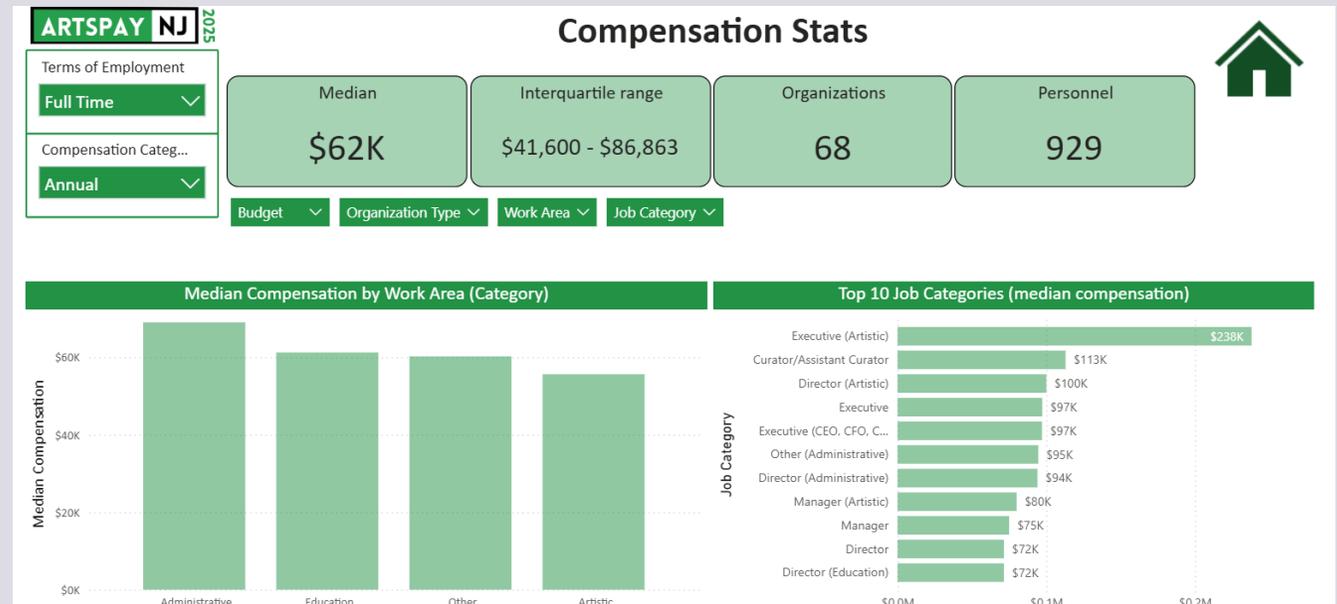
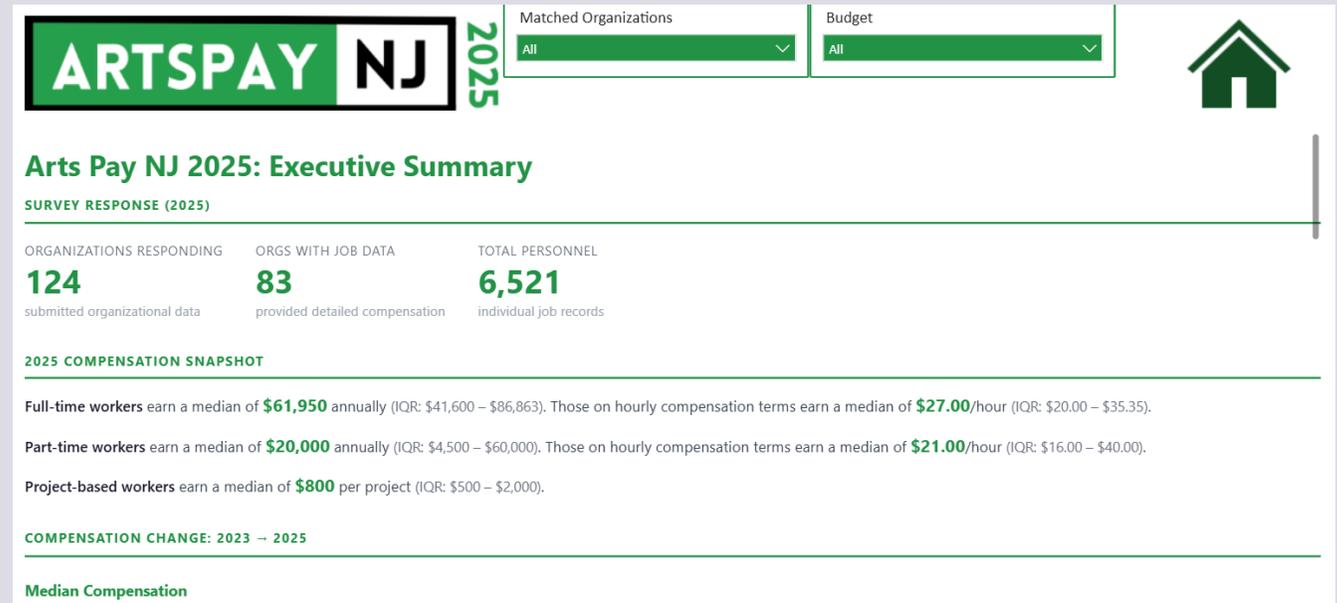
- 1 Clarify workload boundaries.** After-hours norms, peak-period expectations, and comp time should match reality rather than assumed goodwill.
- 2 Increase transparency.** Pay bands, progression criteria, benefit summaries, and the employer share of healthcare premiums. Workers can't evaluate their compensation if they don't know what it includes
- 3 Strengthen the benefits floor.** Healthcare support, retirement contributions, parental leave, and reimbursements. Where salary can't rise quickly, benefits are where organisations can make the biggest difference
- 4 Standardise freelance and teaching artist contracts.** Written terms, cancellation/payment timelines, paid or reimbursed preparation and travel.
- 5 Reduce entry-path affordability barriers.** Move internships toward paid models or provide stipends and support where unpaid persists. The sector's pipeline is filtered by who can afford to enter it

The data is yours to use

The Arts Pay NJ Compensation Dashboard is free to access and updated with 2025 data.

Filter by organization type, budget size, role level, and employment status to benchmark your organization against the sector.

[Dashboard](#)



Appendix: Comparison Data Tables

Key Stats: Gender

Metric	Men (n=105)	Women (n=321)	Total (n=534)
Median Annual Salary (FT)	\$80,000	\$70,500	\$71,750
Median Hourly Rate	\$26.78	\$25.00	\$25.00
Feel underpaid	49%	67%	62%
Master's degree+	33%	42%	39%
Student loans	23%	30%	29%
Rely on outside income	68%	71%	70%
Actively job seeking	16%	20%	18%
PTO days (median)	25	22	22
Avg benefits offered	8.8	8.8	7.9
Work-life balance: Excellent/Good	67%	49%	52%
Work-life balance: Fair	26%	36%	34%
Work-life balance: Poor/Very poor	8%	15%	13%
Hours: Expected (mean)	37.7	34.3	35.0
Hours: Actual (mean)	43.0	39.3	40.0
Single arts job	42%	57%	50%
Multiple jobs	58%	43%	50%

Key Stats: Race

Metric	People of Color (n=85)	White (n=336)	Total (n=534)
Median Annual Salary (FT)	\$64,686	\$73,956	\$71,750
Median Hourly Rate	\$23.00	\$25.38	\$25.00
Feel underpaid	73%	58%	62%
Master's degree+	36%	39%	39%
Student loans	45%	26%	29%
Rely on outside income	67%	71%	70%
Actively job seeking	26%	16%	18%
PTO days (median)	20	25	22
Avg benefits offered	8.2	9.0	7.9
Work-life balance: Excellent/Good	48%	55%	52%
Work-life balance: Fair	36%	34%	34%
Work-life balance: Poor/Very poor	15%	11%	13%
Hours: Expected (mean)	36.3	34.6	35.0
Hours: Actual (mean)	38.8	39.8	40.0
Single arts job	40%	57%	50%
Multiple jobs	60%	43%	50%

Key Stats: Role Level

Metric	Entry (n=57)	Middle (n=195)	Senior (n=134)	Executive (n=63)	Total (n=534)
Median Annual Salary (FT)	\$47,750	\$65,000	\$87,749	\$80,000	\$71,750
Median Hourly Rate	\$20.00	\$25.00	\$40.00		\$25.00
Feel underpaid	58%	63%	55%	71%	62%
Master's degree+	22%	36%	43%	40%	39%
Student loans	38%	36%	21%	11%	29%
Rely on outside income	68%	69%	65%	84%	70%
Actively job seeking	30%	17%	17%	8%	18%
PTO days (median)	20	22	25	30	22
Avg benefits offered	7.0	9.2	9.4	7.0	7.9
Work-life balance: Excellent/Good	54%	52%	57%	52%	52%
Work-life balance: Fair	35%	36%	33%	25%	34%
Work-life balance: Poor/Very poor	11%	12%	10%	22%	13%
Hours: Expected (mean)	32.1	35.5	36.5	35.2	35.0
Hours: Actual (mean)	32.7	40.2	42.4	45.4	40.0
Single arts job	47%	61%	56%	41%	50%
Multiple jobs	53%	39%	44%	59%	50%

Key Stats: Age

Metric	18 to 29 (n=68)	30 to 39 (n=81)	40 to 49 (n=97)	50 to 59 (n=76)	60+ (n=83)	Total (n=534)
Median Annual Salary (FT)	\$49,950	\$65,500	\$80,000	\$82,656	\$73,956	\$71,750
Median Hourly Rate	\$20.00	\$25.00	\$35.00	\$35.00	\$27.88	\$25.00
Feel underpaid	69%	63%	63%	62%	63%	62%
Master's degree+	15%	42%	51%	39%	41%	39%
Student loans	51%	53%	29%	12%	7%	29%
Rely on outside income	69%	60%	70%	74%	72%	70%
Actively job seeking	40%	20%	16%	16%	7%	18%
PTO days (median)	20	22	25	22	30	22
Avg benefits offered	7.7	9.4	10.0	9.1	7.4	7.9
Work-life balance: Excellent/Good	51%	43%	45%	53%	65%	52%
Work-life balance: Fair	38%	42%	39%	30%	28%	34%
Work-life balance: Poor/Very poor	10%	15%	15%	17%	7%	13%
Hours: Expected (mean)	32.1	36.7	39.2	35.4	29.3	35.0
Hours: Actual (mean)	34.8	38.7	44.4	41.1	37.0	40.0
Single arts job	43%	52%	48%	61%	46%	50%
Multiple jobs	57%	48%	52%	39%	54%	50%

Key Stats: Job Function

Metric	Administrative (n=250)	Artistic/Creative (n=141)	Education /Engagement (n=91)	Total (n=534)
Median Annual Salary (FT)	\$71,000	\$82,500	\$72,000	\$71,750
Median Hourly Rate	\$22.75	\$25.00	\$26.50	\$25.00
Feel underpaid	62%	61%	64%	62%
Master's degree+	35%	34%	58%	39%
Student loans	30%	22%	40%	29%
Rely on outside income	67%	77%	68%	70%
Actively job seeking	16%	16%	22%	18%
PTO days (median)	24	24	20	22
Avg benefits offered	9.8	4.4	7.4	7.9
Work-life balance: Excellent/Good	54%	55%	42%	52%
Work-life balance: Fair	32%	33%	44%	34%
Work-life balance: Poor/Very poor	14%	12%	14%	13%
Hours: Expected (mean)	36.7	32.6	32.1	35.0
Hours: Actual (mean)	41.7	37.0	38.8	40.0
Single arts job	64%	35%	37%	50%
Multiple jobs	36%	65%	63%	50%

Key Stats: Discipline

Metric	Performing (n=347)	Service /Education (n=322)	Visual (n=229)	Media (n=95)	Multi-disciplinary (n=125)	Total (n=534)
Median Annual Salary (FT)	\$73,507	\$68,000	\$70,000	\$82,721	\$80,000	\$71,750
Median Hourly Rate	\$27.90	\$22.88	\$22.00	\$25.00	\$22.75	\$25.00
Feel underpaid	58%	68%	69%	70%	61%	62%
Master's degree+	37%	38%	36%	41%	40%	39%
Student loans	27%	32%	26%	30%	27%	29%
Rely on outside income	69%	69%	80%	67%	79%	70%
Actively job seeking	15%	18%	22%	23%	16%	18%
PTO days (median)	22	25	25	33	25	22
Avg benefits offered	8.4	8.0	7.5	7.1	7.8	7.9
Work-life balance: Excellent/Good	53%	53%	53%	55%	45%	52%
Work-life balance: Fair	36%	31%	31%	36%	41%	34%
Work-life balance: Poor/Very poor	12%	16%	15%	9%	14%	13%
Hours: Expected (mean)	35.4	36.1	34.0	32.2	35.3	35.0
Hours: Actual (mean)	40.6	40.3	39.6	39.3	41.9	40.0
Single arts job	49%	48%	52%	36%	52%	50%
Multiple jobs	51%	52%	48%	64%	48%	50%