

# 2021 Newspaper Salary Survey

June 2021



*Washington Newspaper Publishers Association*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WNPA completed a salary survey in April 2021 among member paper employees. The survey looked at three areas – personal employee profile, newspaper profile, and salary/wages. The survey asked about the responding employee's individual data; we did not ask managers to report on behalf of employees. There were 119 total respondents, with 101 providing pay information.

**To facilitate comparisons in this analysis, we focused on the *median wage* of all employees combined.** We focused on *median* wage because it is a more stable statistic than averages, especially when there is wide range for wages. For those reporting an annual salary, we calculated the equivalent hourly wage from the full-time salary (i.e., divided by 2080 hours).

**Topline Results.** Respondents skewed toward those who worked in the industry for more than 10 years. More than 85% offered employees at least some benefits. The primary drivers of job satisfaction were “Living in a community I enjoy” and “Flexible work hours.”

Most respondents (45%) were paid salaries; 39% were paid an hourly wage and 16% of respondents were paid on a “base wage + commission” basis. Salaried employees were paid a higher median wage.

Pay among respondents was most affected by role at the newspaper, where publishers and editors earned the highest median wage (\$28.85 and \$19.62, respectively). Marketing/sales employee median base pay was \$15.72. Reporters, content designers, and office staffers earned the least (\$15.43, \$16.75 and \$15.63, respectively).

Size of the newspaper (circulation) was positively correlated with salary and wages, where small circulation papers had lower pay, and large circulation papers had higher pay. One inconsistency in the data was lower wages for mid-size papers, ranging from 6,000 to 10,000 circulation. There was no obvious explanation for this result, so it was likely a shortcoming in the representativeness of the sample in that group.

Length of time in the newspaper industry directly affected overall pay, where those with the longest tenure were paid the most. The trend was muted among those working 7 years or less in the industry, where there was no difference in median wage.

Finally, there were essentially no differences in pay based on the respondents' perceived cost of living in their community.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

WNPA was asked several times about newspaper salaries in Washington state. With little salary information specific to the newspaper industry from our state, we decided to undertake a brief survey among WNPA newspaper employees to see where things stand.

The anonymous data were collected online from April 8-30, 2021 using Survey Monkey. There were 119 employees of Washington newspapers who completed the survey, though not everyone completed every question.

The survey was sent to 475 employees of WNPA members. An open survey link was also distributed so the opportunity to participate was available to all employees (not just those for whom we have email contact info). About 1/3 of respondents entered the survey using the open link, which increased the representativeness across newspapers.

## EMPLOYEE PROFILE

**Tenure.** The employee profile skewed toward employees who have worked in the newspaper industry for over 10 years (65%). The remaining employees were evenly distributed across the “less than 10-year” employment ranges.

### Years worked in newspaper industry.

Tenure	Responses	(n)
Fewer than 2 years	9.2%	11
2-4 years	9.2%	11
5-7 years	8.4%	10
8-10 years	8.4%	10
<b>More than 10 years</b>	<b>64.7%</b>	<b>77</b>

**FT/PT and Gender.** The employees who responded were mostly full-time employees (85%). The part-time employees were evenly distributed across roles (sales, design, reporter, etc.). Gender was evenly split (51% female, 49% male).

Employment Status	Responses	(n)
<b>Full-time</b>	<b>84.9%</b>	<b>101</b>
Part-time	15.1%	18
Gender		
Male	48.7%	54
Female	51.4%	57

**Primary Role.** Just over 60% of respondents were primarily in publisher, editor or reporter roles. Marketing/Sales employees accounted for another 17%. The remainder were content designers (8%), bookkeeping (6%), front office/classifieds (4%), and circulation (3%). Later in the report, we combined the last three roles together because we had few respondents in each role.

It’s a little curious that we have more respondents classified as bookkeepers than front office staff, but that may reflect a “data-driven” response bias among employees who work with reports and numbers in their primary role. Simply put, bookkeepers perhaps were more inclined to respond to the survey than front office staff.

### Primary Role at the Newspaper

Role	Responses	(n)
<b>Publisher</b>	<b>18.5%</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Editor</b>	<b>20.2%</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Reporter</b>	<b>21.8%</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Marketing/Ad sales</b>	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>20</b>
Content designer	7.6%	9
Circulation	2.5%	3
Front office staff/Classifieds	4.2%	5
Bookkeeping	5.9%	7
Other (please specify)	2.5%	3

## NEWSPAPER PROFILE

**Circulation.** Nearly half of employees (46%) reported working at a newspaper with a circulation of 1000-4000. This is in line with WNPA member newspaper circulation sizes. Unfortunately, no employees responded from papers with a circulation less than 1000; those papers represent 11% of WNPA membership (based on number of papers, not number of employees, a key difference to keep in mind while making the comparison). Still, not having any data from the small-circulation papers is a gap worth acknowledging in the results.

### Newspaper Circulation.

Newspaper Circulation	Responses	(n)	% WNPA Member Papers
Less than 1,000	0.0%	0	11.4%
1,000-2,400	21.6%	24	27.1%
2,401-4,000	24.3%	27	22.9%
4,001-6,000	18.0%	20	12.9%
6,001-10,000	20.7%	23	5.7%
More than 10,000	15.3%	17	20.0%

**Employee Benefits.** Some benefits were offered to 85% of employees. 82% of employees were offered paid vacation, followed by health insurance (69%) and retirement saving plans (65%). 15% of employees were not offered any benefits; this status was largely associated with the smallest circulation papers.

### Benefits offered by newspaper.

Benefits	Responses	(n)
Health insurance	69.1%	76
Retirement saving plans (IRA, 401k, etc.)	64.6%	71
<b>Paid vacation</b>	<b>81.8%</b>	90
No benefits	14.6%	16

**Cost of Living.** Compared to Washington as a whole, most employees reported residing in areas with an *average* cost of living (43%) or *higher* cost of living (39%). The rest of employees (18%) report living in an area with a lower cost of living compared to Washington as a whole.

### Estimated cost of living in your area.

Cost of Living	Responses	(n)
My area has a lower cost of living	18.0%	20
My area has an average cost of living	43.2%	48
My area has a higher cost of living	38.7%	43

**Job Satisfaction.** When asked to rate the importance of factors contributing to overall job satisfaction besides salary, the top factor (Top 2 box or Very/Somewhat important) was “Living in a community I enjoy” by 92% of employees. Next in importance was having “Flexible work hours” (78%).

“Opportunity for advancement” importance was split among employees more than other factors: 47% of employees rated ‘advancement’ most important (Top 2 box) and 28% of employees ranked it least important (Bottom 2 box).

**Important factors in job satisfaction.**

<b>Job Satisfaction</b>	Top 2 Box		Bottom 2 Box	
	(Most Imp)	(n)	(Least Imp)	(n)
Having up-to-date technology	65.5%	72	10.0%	11
<b>Flexible work hours</b>	<b>78.2%</b>	86	6.4%	7
Opportunity for advancement	47.3%	52	28.2%	31
<b>Living in a community I enjoy</b>	<b>91.8%</b>	101	2.7%	3
Chance to improve skills	67.3%	74	7.3%	8

## SALARY/WAGE PROFILE

Interpreting wage data can be tricky because of the wide pay range across individuals at newspapers. Averages can be skewed by just a few of high/low pay data. For this reason, we focused on *median* pay because it is a more stable statistic in analysis. As mentioned earlier, to facilitate comparison of wages, we combined the hourly wage across all employees. For those paid an annual salary, we recalculated salary to an hourly wage to include it in the analysis.

**External comparison data.** To give some context to Washington newspaper wages in this survey, it is useful to provide some national and statewide wage statistics for comparison purposes.

Statewide, the Washington Office of Financial management reported a salary average of \$65,640 in 2018 (across all industries). This is higher than their estimated US national average of \$57,519 in 2018.

More specific to the newspaper industry, in May 2020 the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported a Washington statewide *median* wage for “Editors” and “News Analysts, Reports & Journalists” of \$26.44, significantly more than the median reported in our survey. This is probably explained by the inclusion of larger metro dailies in the Washington estimates by the BLS.

The BLS reported a *median* wage among *non-metro* editors/journalists of \$20.05 in Eastern and Western Washington (which likely removed the impacts of metro daily salaries). Still, their wage estimate was higher than the WNPA overall median of \$17.31. It’s hard to explain the differences without more detailed information on the composition of the BLS database (what papers were included in their study, and how many).

**Pay model penetration.** Most employees (45%) earned a salary and 39% earned an hourly wage. 16% of respondents reported earnings primarily from a Base+Commission model.

### Paid hourly, salary or base+commission.

Pay Model	Responses	(n)
Hourly	38.7%	46
<b>Salary</b>	<b>45.4%</b>	54
Base+Commission	16.0%	19

**Base+Commission pay model.** The Base+Commission pay model represented a relatively small part of the overall respondents (16%). The Base+Commission model does not include income from commissions (only base pay is represented). It’s worth remembering the total income among Base+Commission employees will be measurably higher than the base pay represents, after the average 5% commission is applied to sales.

### Base+Commission Pay by Role.

Base Pay by Role	Average	Median	Range
<b>Total Base Pay (n=16)</b>	<b>\$23.81</b>	<b>\$17.00</b>	<b>\$12.00 - \$72.12</b>
- Marketing/Sales (n=12)	\$18.56	\$15.00	\$12.00 - \$46.63
-Total Commission % (n=14)	4.8%	5%	1.3% - 10%

**Salary by Pay Model.** Overall, there was moderate differences in median wages across pay models in the WNPA survey. Focusing on the median wage, salaried works were paid more (\$21.39) than Base+Commission workers (\$17.00) and hourly wage earners (\$15.43). Hourly wage earners earned less, but they were also more likely to work part-time which may account for the lower wages.

**Wage by Pay Model.**

Pay Model	Average	Median	Range	Est. Annual Salary	F/T (%)
Paid Salary (n=42)	\$23.12	\$21.39	\$15.63 - \$57.69	\$48,090	89%
Paid Hourly (n=43)	\$16.54	\$15.43	\$13.50 - \$23.75	\$34,403	76%
Paid Base+Commission (n=16)	\$23.81	\$17.00	\$12.00 - \$72.12	\$49,525	95%
<b>Combined Hourly Wage (n=101)</b>	<b>\$20.67</b>	<b>\$17.31</b>	<b>\$12.00 - \$72.12</b>	<b>\$42,994</b>	<b>85%</b>

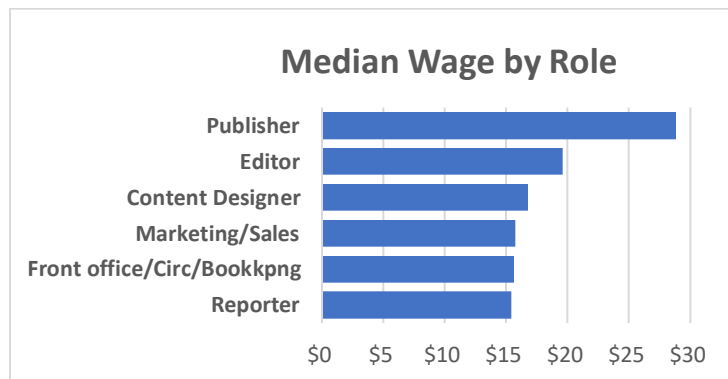
**Salary/Wage by Role.** Not surprisingly, wages differed significantly across roles, with a wide range of pay within each role. Publishers and editors were paid more than reporters and the rest of the newsroom staff, earning an hourly median of \$28.85 and \$19.62, respectively.

**Wage by Role.**

Hourly Wage By Role	Average	Median	Range	Est. Annual Salary
<b>Total (n=101)</b>	<b>\$20.67</b>	<b>\$17.31</b>	<b>\$12.00 - \$72.12</b>	<b>\$42,994</b>
<b>Publisher (n=17)</b>	<b>\$30.86</b>	<b>\$28.85</b>	<b>\$13.94 - \$72.12</b>	<b>\$64,189</b>
<b>Editor (n=23)</b>	<b>\$20.71</b>	<b>\$19.62</b>	<b>\$15.50 - \$27.40</b>	<b>\$43,077</b>
Reporter (n=25)	\$16.21	\$15.43	\$13.50 - \$21.15	\$33,717
Marketing/Sales (n=16)	\$20.24	\$15.72	\$12.00 - \$48.08	\$42,099
Front Office/Circ./Bookkeeping (n=12)	\$18.01	\$15.63	\$14.70 - \$35.76	\$37,461
Content Designer (n=8)	\$17.74	\$16.75	\$13.46 - \$26.44	\$36,899

**Reporters.** The wages for reporters were somewhat surprising – their median hourly wage ranks relatively low among newsroom roles. The range of reporter pay was the smallest among roles, meaning the data were not skewed by outliers.

There were 25 reporters in the wage dataset. 84% of reporters were paid hourly, which could explain the lower wage. Overall, full-time hourly wage earners were paid less than full-time salary employees, with a difference of \$7.50 per hour.

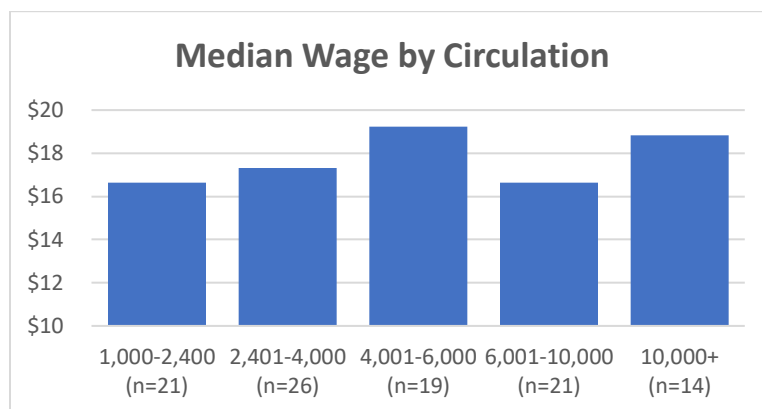


**Salary/Wage by Circulation.** In general, the smaller the circulation size of the newspaper, the lower the pay. Newspapers in the 4000-6000 circulation range included two significant outliers which bumped up wages in the group. With the outliers removed, the median drops from \$19.23 to \$18.27 for that circulation group, putting it more in line with trend.

Still, one inconsistency remained where lower wages for mid-size papers (6,000 to 10,000 circulation) had lower wages. There was no obvious explanation for this result, though it may be a shortcoming in the data sample.

**Wage by Circulation.**

Wage By Circulation	Average	Median	Range	Est. Annual Salary
<b>Total Hourly (n=101)</b>	<b>\$20.67</b>	<b>\$17.31</b>	<b>\$12.00 - \$72.12</b>	<b>\$42,994</b>
1,000-2,400 (n=21)	\$17.00	\$16.64	\$13.50 - \$23.56	\$35,360
2,401-4,000 (n=26)	\$20.22	\$17.31	\$12.00 - \$57.69	\$42,058
4,001-6,000 (n=19)	\$23.39	\$19.23	\$12.75 - \$72.12	\$48,651
6,001-10,000 (n=21)	\$18.96	\$16.63	\$13.46 - \$33.65	\$39,437
More than 10,000 (n=14)	\$25.90	\$18.82	\$15.63 - \$48.08	\$53,872

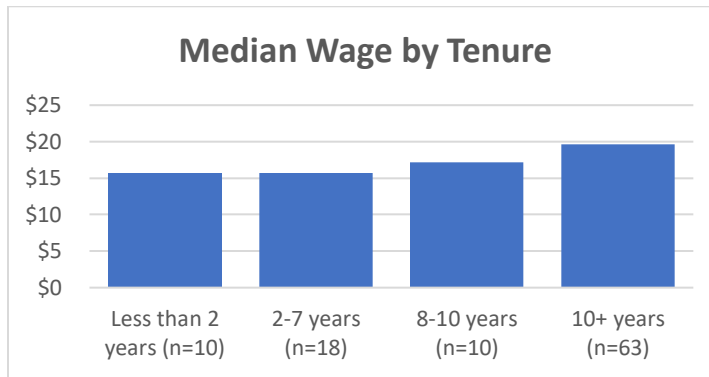




**Salary/Wage by Tenure.** As one would expect, employees with more total years in the industry were paid more than those with less tenure. That said, there is little difference among those with the least tenure (7 years or less). This may suggest newspapers are paying those newest to the industry more upon hire.

**Wage by Tenure.**

Wage By Tenure	Average	Median	Range	Est. Annual Salary
<b>Total (n=101)</b>	<b>\$20.67</b>	<b>\$17.31</b>	<b>\$12.00 - \$72.12</b>	<b>\$42,994</b>
Fewer than 2 years (n=10)	\$16.33	\$15.75	\$14.50 - \$19.23	\$33,966
2-7 years (n=18)	\$16.06	\$15.75	\$13.69 - \$18.50	\$33,405
8-10 years (n=10)	\$18.23	\$17.16	\$12.75 - \$27.40	\$37,918
More than 10 years (n=63)	\$23.07	\$19.62	\$12.00 - \$72.12	\$47,986



**Salary by Cost of Living.** We asked about perceived cost of living in one’s area, as a proxy for geographic area. The hypothesis was that wages would be higher in high cost of living regions, and lower in low cost of living regions.

We found very little difference in median wage by perceived cost of living. The hypothesis may not be fully supported by this data, but that may be due more to the use of *perceived* cost of living estimates than independent estimates for cost of living.

**Wage by Cost of Living.**

Wage by Cost of Living	Average	Median	Range	Est. Annual Salary
<b>Total (n=101)</b>	<b>\$20.67</b>	<b>\$17.31</b>	<b>\$12.00 - \$72.12</b>	<b>\$42,994</b>
My area has a <b>lower</b> cost of living (n=18)	\$17.90	\$16.83	\$13.94 - \$29.00	\$37,232
My area has an <b>average</b> cost of living (n=43)	\$21.85	\$17.75	\$12.00 - \$72.12	\$45,448
My area has a <b>higher</b> cost of living (n=40)	\$20.65	\$17.00	\$12.75 - \$57.69	\$42,952

**Contact.** If you have questions about this survey, please feel free to contact Janay Collins, WNPA Member Services at [ads@wnpa.com](mailto:ads@wnpa.com) or 360-344-2938 (Wed-Fri).