



# Make or Break Race and Ethnicity in Entry-Level Compensation for Arts Administrators in Los Angeles County

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# Make or Break Race and Ethnicity in Entry-Level Compensation for Arts Administrators in Los Angeles County

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CENTER FOR BUSINESS &  
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# Executive Summary

This study looks at earnings, debt, and other forms of financial support for entry-level arts administrators, finding troubling differences between BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) arts administrators and their White counterparts. Building on the quantitative findings, this study dug deeper, conducting interviews to understand how those earnings and differences are experienced in the daily lives of the people who, despite the challenges they face, pursue a career in the arts.

Our survey of entry-level arts administrators in LA County found that

- Average annual earnings from all sources was \$36,847, slightly higher than the LA County minimum wage of \$31,200 but lower than the living wage of \$40,248.
- Average annual earnings for entry-level arts administrators were \$32,027 for BIPOC respondents, just above minimum wage for a full-time position, but it was \$43,437 for White respondents, a difference of \$11,410, or 35 percent higher. No matter their education level, White respondents earned more than BIPOC respondents.
- Average annual earnings increased with age and education level and did not vary significantly according to employer type, but actually decreased for respondents with more than one job.
- Two-thirds of entry-level respondents reported carrying some kind of debt, most commonly student loans, followed by debt for housing, transportation, business, or health.

The term BIPOC as used in this study includes Black, Indigenous, and all people of color, recognizing that people who are not of European or White ancestry face varying types of discrimination and prejudice.

- Average student debt was \$32,724, and varied significantly according to education level, race, and age. More BIPOC respondents carry student debt, but their average debt was about half of what it was for White respondents.

Through interviews with a small subset of people who took the survey we discovered how they experience earnings that are too low for the cost of living in LA County. They work overtime or find ways to reduce their expenses in order to cover everything, including student debt payments. Their career path feels precarious and affects their sense of self-worth. Many question whether they should continue in the field. In hard times, many turn to family for support, which gives a long-term career advantage to those whose families hold greater wealth.

What also came through in our interviews is that the experiences of entry-level BIPOC arts administrators are different from those of their White colleagues, and both are aware of it. Some see those differences in earnings as the result of a power imbalance between predominantly White employers and BIPOC employees or job applicants. The lower amount of student debt carried by BIPOC arts administrators is seen as additional proof that they have less access to education that could secure greater earnings and career opportunities, though the data show they might still earn less than their equally-educated White colleagues. Visibility of BIPOC arts

administrators, especially in leadership roles, is seen as a critical. Transparency of compensation, benefits, and working conditions is needed for both accountability and to help people searching for entry-level jobs in arts administration make informed decisions.

The report ends with a series of recommendations to address the challenges and disparities revealed by the study, including the following:

Organizations employing entry-level arts administrators can

- Conduct a demographic analysis of salaries, contracts, fees, and other payments to all people who do work on your behalf to determine whether certain groups may be experiencing lower pay than others
- Reevaluate job requirements for entry-level positions, especially for education, experience, and mobility, and eliminate those that are not relevant to job-specific tasks
- Explore how pay for staff, contractors, artists, volunteers, and others may affect your organization's ability to achieve its mission and DEI goals, and discuss the implications for fundraising with your board and funders
- Be publicly transparent about both compensation and the demographic makeup of your organization's staff and leadership
- Explore how your organization can support debt relief for your staff and advocate for expansion of student debt relief programs

Arts funders can

- Implement recommendations from the Full Cost Project to ensure the arts nonprofits you fund have the resources they need to pay the full cost of employment
- Incorporate pay equity into grantee requirements for diversity, equity, and inclusion

- Require grantees to make public demographic data about their workforce including leadership and board members

This study offers both empirical data and a starting point for action and change. Arts organizations and their funders can take responsibility for that change by looking inward at their own workforce and practices while also taking collective action with others.