



UUA Office of Church Staff Finances
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Congregational Salary Program

Salary Process Guidance

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Introduction

Compensation is about more than numbers. Your compensation policies and practices are a way of living our values as Unitarian Universalists – in particular, the values of equity, transparency, and economic justice.

The purpose of this process document is to equip you to make good decisions about salaries for your staff. We do that by providing 1) a set of values-based policies and practices, and 2) instructions for use of our Recommended Salary Ranges: determining your Geo Index and congregational size profile, choosing the appropriate job level for each of your employees, and using the Ruler Method to decide where to place employees pay' within their respective ranges.

For the '23-'24 year, we've made significant changes to our approach. If you have accessed this document before looking at our introductory information, please turn to these first:

- [Introducing a New Congregational Salary Program \(PDF\)](#)
- [Unconscious Bias in Compensation \(YouTube\)](#)

In order to access our new Recommended Salary Ranges page, you will be asked to confirm that you've reviewed the two resources above.

Two Key Concepts

1. Economic Justice

The goal of economic justice is to create opportunities for all to thrive. Within the context of employee pay, it comprises:

- **Distributive Justice**, the **amount of pay** given to employees
- **Procedural Justice**, the **process used** to make and implement pay decisions

Process is Primary!

Going forward, we are putting more of our emphasis on **procedural justice** – in other words, helping you ensure that your pay policies and practices are equitable, transparent, and furthering economic justice. Refer to the Values-Based Policies and Practices starting on page 4.

Supporting Distributive Justice

While shifting much of the focus to process, we are continuing to provide Recommended Salary Ranges to assist with **distributive justice**. Refer to the Recommended Salary Ranges section of this document.

Distributive and Procedural Justice Intersect

Lifting up those at the lower end of the pay scale is a vital part of economic justice. As such, we are giving special attention to lower wage earners and those who fall at the lower end of their respective pay ranges. Some of the ways we're bringing up the low end through our salary structure are:

- **Lowest salary:** The lowest annual wage you will find listed is \$30,300, which is \$14.57/hour for 40 hours/week, year-round. This is for the Support Level, Size Profile A, Geo Index 1.
- **Consistent salary ranges:** All expected minimums are now set at 90% of their respective midpoints. This eliminates different recommended starting pay for market-equivalent (same midpoint) jobs and will make it easier for staff to reach the midpoint.
- **Placement:** We're introducing the Ruler Method to help leaders place staff appropriately within their respective ranges. Based on our suggested process, satisfactorily performing employees will reach midpoint within no more than five years.

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2. Salary Alignment

Salary alignment is about pay comparisons. There are two general types kinds of pay comparisons you can make:

- **External Alignment:** pay that's competitive with that of similar jobs in a locality, external to their employer
- **Internal Alignment:** pay that's equitable relative to others' pay within their own organization or staff team

In general, in thinking about the fairness of their pay, most employees think first of internal alignment. Does their pay seem appropriate relative to that of their coworkers?

In setting pay for employees, nearly all organizations grapple with external versus internal alignment because broader market pricing for particular roles doesn't always line up cleanly with what makes sense internally.

Because we are an Association of Congregations, we also talk about **UU Market Alignment**, by which we mean pay comparisons between people doing similar work in different UU congregations.

Career Path and Community-Based Positions

Our Recommended Salary Ranges are constructed with **UU career path** employees in mind – in other words, for those whose equivalent work is within Unitarian Universalism. These are staff with more potential for career development and progression within our faith and who are more likely to view their work as a vocation.

Employees in **community-based positions** (those not tied to UU career paths) have more potential for local job opportunities and are more likely to be attentive to the local job market. For these employees, consider setting salaries based on similar jobs in your community to ensure that you are competitive. Contact us if you need help finding information about local wages in your area; looking for comparable local job openings is one strategy.

The distinction between career path and community-based staff is not a perfect dichotomy. Some positions could belong in both categories, or it might depend on who is filling the role. Still, it is a helpful concept when thinking about how to prioritize UUA Recommended Salary Ranges versus local wages.

Internal alignment (relative pay within the staff team) is important to nearly every employee, whether career path or community-based. Employees want to see that staff salaries “make sense” relative to each other. For career path employees who may want to seek work in other Unitarian Universalist congregations, **UU market alignment** is also important.

Internal alignment is valued by all employees, but aligning pay with the external market is also important for some positions.

Values-based Policies and Practices for Salary Administration

Here are some policies and practices to consider. You are probably already doing some of these things. Which ones might you work to incorporate next?

For All Employees

- ✓ We have completed the UUA's [Pay Administration Checklist](#) within the past year as a review of common legal requirements of pay administration, including ministerial tax provisions.
- ✓ We have a clear and unified process for determining annual salary changes for all employees.
- ✓ We are transparent with staff about who is involved and what criteria are used for determining annual salary changes.

- ✓ We pay all staff at least the living wage for our locality. See [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#): use 1 adult, 0 children.
- ✓ We track the ratio of the highest to the lowest wage paid to our employees on a per-hour basis recognizing that monitoring this ratio over time helps ensure that lower-paid employees, (who generally have less leverage) get appropriate increases relative to those with more power in the system. For 40-hour, year-round staff, divide annual wage by 2,080 to get hourly rate.
- ✓ We keep abreast of local wage norms for community-based positions.
- ✓ If we make use of UUA Recommended Salary Ranges, we do our best to move well-performing staff through their respective ranges over time. See Ruler Method, page 10 of this document.
- ✓ We are aware of annual cost-of-living increases and strive to provide raises that help staff maintain their purchasing power. (The UUA tracks and posts the 3rd quarter CPI-U.)
- ✓ We have a process in place to check for salary alignment across the staff team. Do salaries make sense relative to each other, taking into account differences in role and experience?
- ✓ We review salaries for potential bias and are aware of state laws relating to pay equity. (See [Race, Gender, and LGBTQIA+ Wage Gaps Are Real](#), from Diversity Jobs, our [Staffing for Diversity](#) page, and our [Unconscious Bias in Compensation](#) video.)
- ✓ Every employee knows about benefits offered by the congregation, which benefits they are eligible for, and their own cost for those benefits, if any.

Note to congregations in the UU Organizations Retirement Plan: Every employee (18 and older) can authorize voluntary contributions via salary deferral from day one of employment or anytime thereafter, regardless of hours. Make sure you are reminding all staff of this benefit on a regular basis. Voluntary contributions help employees save for their future and reduce their current tax burden.

For New Hires

- ✓ When we advertise a position, we include the salary (fixed, minimum, or range).
- ✓ We do not ask job candidates for salary history. (Doing so is illegal in some states.) See [Stop Asking Job Candidates for Their Salary History](#), from Harvard Business Review.
- ✓ In discussing salary with a candidate for an open position, we share how the salary offer was determined, including sharing UUA Recommended Salary Ranges, local wage norms, or other information used.
- ✓ In discussing salary with a candidate for an open position, we explain the general process for determining annual salary adjustments.

- ✓ In discussing compensation with candidates, we explain the benefits offered by the congregation, which ones the employee would be eligible for, and the cost to the employee, if any.

Recommended Salary Ranges

The UUA provides Recommended Salary Ranges in four congregational size profiles for six job levels. These are explained below, followed by information about the Ruler Method for placing and moving employees within their respective recommended ranges. Here are the key documents you'll need (aside from this Process Guidance) in order to use our Recommended Salary Ranges:

- [Geo Index Listing \(PDF\)](#): The Geo Index for your congregation's location provides an adjustment to national pay norms based on local wages. (For Canadian congregations, see [Canadian Geo Index Listing \(PDF\)](#).)
- [Congregational Size Profiles \(PDF\)](#): New size categories (4) are based primarily on membership, with budget and staffing levels as supplemental information.
- [Job Level Rubric \(PDF\)](#): The job level of each employee is based on job characteristics.

Have available our
Geo Index Listing,
Congregational Size
Profiles, and Job
Level Rubric.

All of these documents can be found on our [Congregational Salary Program](#) page.

Ranges Based on Full-Time, Year-Round Work

UUA Recommended Salary Ranges are annual salaries based on a full-time exempt or 40-hour nonexempt workweek for year-round employees.

- **For part-time positions**, prorate the recommendations. For a 24-hour position, for instance, you would multiply the posted numbers by 24/40.
Note: It may take a higher pay rate to attract part-time staff, especially for positions with very limited hours. This can be especially helpful to those who need to work multiple jobs and/or who may need to purchase their own insurance and provide for their own retirement. These are often positions for which local wage comparisons are important to consider, as well.
- **For an hourly rate**, divide our annual numbers by 2080 (which is 52 x 40). See the note above about part-time staff.
- **There is no official definition of full-time.** If a 35-hour week is full-time in your setting, consider using our ranges as posted for 35-hour employees and prorate based on that.

Cost of Wages and Cost of Living

UUA Recommended Salary Ranges are adjusted to reflect prevailing wage rates in communities where UU congregations are located. Wage data from the Economic Research Institute (ERI) is used to assign a Geo Index to each congregation. Geo Indices range from Geo Index 1 to Geo Index 7, with Geo Index 3 representing congregations in communities where the average wage paid falls close to the U.S. average. Find your congregation on our [Geo Index Listing](#). *If your congregation is in a different Geo Index from last year, consider a 2-year plan to move into the new range.*

Geo Indices Defined

Geo Index 1: Average wages in the community below 91 percent of the US average

Geo Index 2: Average wages between 91 and 96.9 percent of US average

Geo Index 3: Average wages between 97 and 102.9 percent of US average

Geo Index 4: Average wages between 103 and 108.9 percent of US average

Geo Index 5: Average wages between 109 and 114.9 percent of US average

Geo Index 6: Average wages between 115 and 120.9 percent of US average

Geo Index 7: Average wages equal to 121 percent or more of US average

Cost of Living

It is important to understand the difference between the cost of wages and the cost of living.

- The **cost of wages** (sometimes called the cost of labor) reflects wages paid by employers in a given location, relative to the U.S. average.
- The **cost of living** shows how expensive it is to live in a certain location, based on the prices of goods (including housing) and services relative to the U.S. Average.

While they typically point in the same direction (e.g., wages are higher in areas where the cost of living is high), this is not universally true. Moreover, they can differ greatly in terms of degree. For instance, wages might be somewhat above the U.S. average in a given area while the cost of living is dramatically above average. In keeping with compensation best practices, our Recommended Salary Ranges are based on the **cost of wages**.

We do not explicitly incorporate the **cost of living** into our recommendations. However, congregations in high cost-of-living areas should be prepared to increase salaries and/or moving expenses to ensure the competitiveness of their position openings and affordability for their staff, especially for those relocating from lower-cost areas. Likewise, professionals seeking to relocate should be aware of cost the of living and housing in their potential new location compared to their current area. So that your leaders (as well as applicants to positions in your area) are aware, we include each location's cost of living, as reported by the Economic Research Institute, on our [Geo Index Listing](#).

What about Offsite Staff?

Organizations take various approaches to pay for employees who live at a distance from their employers. Some pay all staff based on the location of the onsite workplace while others choose to

adjust for employee's locale. We do not make a particular recommendation. *Be sure to consult legal and/or tax professionals when hiring an employee to work from another jurisdiction as you will likely need to meet the employment-related obligations of that location.*

Congregational Size Profiles

In recent years, our salary recommendations were provided for six different size categories based on membership. We've always known that congregational size is about more than simply the number of people who have "signed the book." We're now taking a more nuanced approach to size by creating [Congregational Size Profiles](#) that begin with membership, but also take into account operating expenses and typical staffing.

We are also moving from six size categories down to four size profiles. The profiles are overlapping, meaning that in certain membership ranges, a congregation might fit into either of two adjacent size profiles. Use the budget and staffing information as a guide to determining the most appropriate size profile.

We're aware that this is a significant shift. Depending on your congregational size, you may find considerable differences between the '22-'23 and '23-24 recommendations for some positions. Please do not panic! We don't expect congregations to make substantial, abrupt adjustments to anyone's pay due to this one-time shift. While "on paper" it is an immediate change, you can think of it as a roadmap to follow over the next couple of budget cycles.

Notes on Congregational Size Profiles

Operating expenses are based on 2022 UUA certification data. (Percentile is % of congregations at or below the given budget level.)

Staffing information is based on a survey of 350 congregations in May 2022. Due to idiosyncrasies in the data, the #FTE staff **excludes** bookkeepers, custodial staff, childcare workers, and instrumentalists.

Job Levels

We are now listing salaries by job level (e.g., Director Level, Manager Level), rather than by individual job title. This approach advances equity by ensuring that jobs positioned similarly within the organizational structure are paid based on the same salary range. It also minimizes cultural biases inherent in the national wage data for positions traditionally held by women and members of marginalized communities. In addition, with more and more unique jobs being created in congregations, this is a more practical approach.

Job Characteristics

Each level in our [Job Level Rubric](#) is described based on these characteristics:

- **Qualifications Needed or Expected:** What required education or certifications, specialized knowledge and skills, and/or experience are expected for the *position*? To account for the relevant skills and experience of an *individual*, see the section on the Ruler Method.

- **Authority & Accountability:** What degree of authority and autonomy accompanies this role to make decisions and take actions? What is the breadth of accountability for the position?
- **Visibility & Impact:** To what degree are the behavior, decisions, and actions of someone in this position intended to influence the congregation and beyond?
- **Responsibilities, Hours, & Conditions:** This category includes aspects of the role such as staff supervision and volunteer coordination, budget oversight, schedule, and working conditions.

Determining the job level for each staff position is not an exact science. Look at the totality of the characteristics and determine which level best reflects the overall nature of the position. And, with an eye toward equity, pay attention to consistency across positions.

The Job, Not the Person

The job characteristics in our [Job Level Rubric](#) should be considered relative to the *role*. A staff member might have more education than required, for instance; this can be accounted for when deciding where the employee is placed within the recommended range. We encourage you to look to the job description for clues about the position itself and/or reflect on the job level characteristics with expectations of a new employee in mind. Be as objective as you can about assessing the job as distinct from the person filling it – and again, to ensure good internal alignment, be thoughtful about the job levels of staff members relative to each other.

We've included common job titles for each level, but no position definitively belongs at a given job level based on title alone. These are simply examples. The expectations of those with any particular job title tend to be highly variable across congregations, even congregations of similar size; some common job titles are thus listed at more than one job level.

Tiers

We have suggested two tiers for the top three job levels – one for ministers and one for program or administrative staff who may fill those roles. The slightly higher rates for ministers are due to the different process and limitations in place for them. Generally, there is a higher cost of entry and “cost of exit” for a transitioning minister and their congregation – a set timetable, a more rigorous transitional process, often more constraints on local employment options, etc. For these reasons, we feel it is reasonable to pay ministers a bit more for comparable work.

The differences between the tiers are smaller, on the whole, than the previous gaps between pay for ministers and non-ministers in similar-level roles. Your congregation will need to decide whether the tiered philosophy makes sense for your higher-level staff.

For Size A Congregations

Higher-level positions in small congregations are often more limited in scope and they may share power with other leaders differently from those in larger systems. We have included notes for Size A congregations and part-time positions at certain job levels to ensure that their level of work is appropriately recognized within their context.

Reminder about Community-Based Positions

As explained in the Salary Alignment section, our Recommended Salary Ranges and related resources have been created largely for those in UU career path positions. For your community-based staff, prevailing wages for comparable work in your area are also important to consider – potentially more important than UUA Recommended Salary Ranges for certain roles.

Ruler Method (Placement Within Range)

The Ruler Method is a suggested approach to placing staff within the range for their position.

Our Recommended Salary Ranges are universally framed as follows:

- **Expected minimum:** 90% of midpoint
- **Midpoint:** 100%
- **Expected maximum:** 110% of midpoint
- **Special situations:** 114% of midpoint

Imagine the range for any position being superimposed on a ruler, with the expected midpoint at 5 inches. Each inch represents 2% of the midpoint. This puts the expected minimum and maximum at 0" and 10" respectively, with special situations at 12".



In our suggested process, new employees are placed on the ruler based on relevant experience and training. We expect a competently performing employee to reach the midpoint within five years.

Progress is made along the ruler each year to reflect an increase in experience, with the potential for additional advancement for certain applicable professional development achievements or exceptional leadership as described below.

As our ranges get adjusted (which happens most years), the inches along the ruler change in value. Moving one inch to the right along the ruler in a given year reflects a 2% increase *plus* any structural adjustment.

Suggested Application of the Ruler Method

New Hires

We suggest offering starting salaries between 0" (expected minimum) and 5" (midpoint), depending on relevant work experience and learning credentials. This is consistent with the common practice of setting the hiring range in the lower half of the overall range for a job grade or level.

In general, we rely on your judgment in deciding how to value experience and credentials relative to job qualifications. If someone just meets or does not quite meet the minimum qualifications, you'll

likely hire them near the expected minimum of the recommended range (0"). But if they exceed many of the stated qualifications (credentials, years of experience, competency), especially in ways that you predict will allow them to more quickly get up to speed and make strong contributions, that suggests hiring closer to the midpoint (5") – potentially beyond midpoint for those with substantial relevant experience. Be sure to:

- Appropriately account for lived experience, volunteer work, and unconventional paths.
- Strive for a consistent philosophy across new hires.
- Adjust as needed for community-based staff, i.e., where local wage norms need to be considered

Annual Salary Adjustments

Keeping in mind economic justice and prioritizing those at the lower end of the pay range, we suggest the following:

- Advance each staff member 1 inch each year up to 5". An employee hired at the expected minimum of the recommended range for their position will thus reach the midpoint in 5 years.
- Once a staff member reaches the midpoint, advance them 0.5" each year up to 10 inches.
- For staff members who are at 10" (expected maximum) on the ruler, you might keep them at 10" and allow their pay to increase along with the changes in our recommended ranges – or you can make use of the top of end of the ruler (10" to 12") for special situations where additional advancement is warranted due to outstanding contributions, a competitive job market, or other factors.

Professional Development Milestones

Just as you will consider relevant credentials for new hires, your congregation will also need to assess the value of professional degrees and certifications achieved in the context of one's employment. Especially if a staff member completes a program with direct applicability to their role, recognizing their accomplishment with a pay bump or bonus may be appropriate.

The matter of whether and, if so, how much to reward attainment of degrees and certifications is up to you in most cases. However, we do offer specific guidance on how to compensate staff for completion of our UUA in-house professional development programs (beyond the suggested annual progression along the ruler):

Religious Education Credentialing Program

In year of completion:

- Associate Level: advance an extra 0.5 inches
- Credentialed Level: advance an extra 1 inch
- Master Level: advance an extra 1.5 inches

If levels are completed at different times, advance 0.5 inches per successive level.

Music Leadership Certification Program: advance an extra 1 inch in year of completion

Important! If a staff member is pursuing any significant relevant degree or certification, they should talk with their supervisor early in the process to ensure common understandings (for pay and/or other recognition) upon completion. Assumptions sometimes get made by employees that result in hard feelings when not met.

Exceptional Service

At the discretion of the supervisor or congregational leadership, an employee can be advanced an extra 0.5" to 1.5" along the ruler in a given year to recognize exceptional service. (Some organizations with similar policies consider compensation for exceptional service only after at least a given number of years of employment.)

Instructive, Not Prescriptive

The Ruler Method is a suggested process and a customizable one. The point is to be intentional and consistent in how you make decisions about annual pay adjustments and pay for new hires. And do keep in mind that for your community-based staff, local wage norms may necessitate additional adjustments.

Transitioning to the New Program

Focus On Process

Given the shift from job titles to job levels, along with the changes to the size categories, it may take you some time to adjust to the new recommended ranges. Give yourselves some grace – and, we can't say it enough, remember that process is primary. How can you demonstrate the values of equity, transparency, and economic justice in your approach to staff pay during this transitional period?

This is a transitional period. Give yourselves some time and grace to adjust. Focus on process and values.

Set Priorities

Especially in the short-term, you might not be able to bring all staff up to our recommendations or up to what you wish you could pay. We suggest setting priorities. For instance, you might choose to give precedence to one of the following:

- Ensuring that all workers earn at least the [living wage for your community](#)
- Providing a cost-of-living adjustment for all staff that helps them maintain their purchasing power to the greatest extent possible in this inflationary time
- Remedying a specific pay discrepancy between employees in similar-level positions with similar experience

If Pay is Higher than Recommendations

It is possible that you are already paying all or some of your staff more than is suggested by our new recommendations. This might be appropriate due to local job market factors, an especially high cost-of-living area, a budget that enables liberal compensation, and/or other unique situations. That's great and we thank you for taking good care of your staff!

But perhaps you've been following UUA salary recommendations pretty well, and the changes we've made in our salary structure lead you to conclude that certain staff are now paid "too much," relative to our recommendations. ***Please do not lower anyone's pay!*** Again, turn to process and values to guide you in adjusting over time from the previous recommendations to the new ones.

We're Here to Support You

Please reach out if we can be of help!

- UUA Compensation Team: comp@uua.org
- UUA Compensation Consultants: <https://www.uua.org/leaderlab/compensation-consultants>

This relaunch represents the first significant reworking of recommended salaries since the UUA introduced them in 1995. In the coming months, we are prepared to do some fine-tuning of this document and other materials based on user feedback. Please keep in touch with us!