

# **COMPENSATION** POLICY

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# COMPENSATION POLICY

We strive to be anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, anti-ableist, and anti-capitalist in our compensation philosophy, while acknowledging our lived realities in a racist, patriarchal, ableist, and capitalist system.

## Our Compensation Philosophy

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- To combat structural pay inequities, we practice transparency around our pay scale and practice negotiation-free salary processes with individual candidates and staff members.
- We pay highly competitive wages, benchmarking our salaries to some of the most highly-compensated markets in the country and striving to pay in the top 25th percentile or better for all roles at MediaJustice.
  - For Associate-level positions that are often under-valued in a capitalist labor market, we strive to exceed the top 25th percentile for all roles.
- We compensate new and existing staff for their experience, and set salaries to reflect the same-level work experience that people bring to their role.
- We provide annual raises - with an aim of 2% whenever feasible - equally to all MediaJustice staff, and adjust the salary framework accordingly.
- We are making a conscious choice to separate performance from compensation. Your pay will grow as your experience in your role grows. This is a departure from a “pay for performance” model that can be affected by bias on the part of supervisors and incentivizes people to produce more work in order to justify an increase to pay.
- Salary is only one component of compensation that we care about. And so we strive to also provide excellent and inclusive benefits to staff that support our individual needs and collective values.
- We commit that the difference in salaries between our lowest-paid staff and our highest-paid staff will be no more than 3 times.

# The Salary Framework

NEW FY26 Salaries (July 1, 2025)				
	Tier 1 (1-2 yrs)	Tier 2 (3+ yrs; 3-5 yrs)	Tier 3 (6+ yrs; 6-11 yrs)	Tier 4 (12+ yrs)
Associate	\$68,641	\$71,747		
Senior Associate	\$73,817	\$76,923	\$80,029	
Specialist	\$82,617	\$87,276	\$94,523	
Senior Specialist	\$96,594	\$100,735	\$105,912	\$111,991
Director	\$115,229	\$121,441	\$127,653	\$132,829
Senior Director	\$135,935	\$143,182	\$149,394	\$156,641
Executive * (Not ED)	\$164,924	\$167,000	\$169,000	\$172,000
Executive Director * (salary set by board)	\$173,000			

## Levels and Tiers

**Levels** are where each job falls based on the job's roles and responsibilities. Every job has an associated level (*see the chart on the next page*).

For example, some levels (Director) typically involve managing staff, and others typically do **not** (Associate and Specialist). The higher the level, the greater ownership and responsibility one has over the work; the more complex and higher-profile projects one takes on; and the more responsibility one has for longer-term strategic thinking and holding organization-wide strategy in mind.

Employees are expected to embody competencies in different ways at higher levels.

Based on team and org-need, a hiring manager can decide to post a job at any level. They are not only for internal promotions and are not based on years of experience.

## Levels Chart

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MediaJustice Job Levels	
Associate	Associates are typically primarily doing administration, logistical and coordination work - doing the essential tasks needed to keep MediaJustice running and collaborating smoothly.
Senior Associate	
Specialist	Specialists typically bring their experience to run projects and perform specialized work. Team Leads - a parallel role to a Senior Specialist - additionally manage small teams to achieve MJ goals.
Senior Specialist / Team Leads	
Director	Directors and Sr. Directors are typically bringing their experience to think of a longer-term strategy for MJ, manage departments and other managers, and hold a higher level of accountability for the sustainability and reputation of the organization. Executive-Level staff hold Org Strategy, Programmatic and Internal direction and high-risk decision making. They hold strategic relationships and responsibilities around Org fundraising.
Senior Director	
Executive	

**Tiers** determine your salary within a job level. Tiers within a level are solely based on years of same-level experience - external and internal. They **do not** indicate a different job description or additional responsibility, although it is sometimes true that with greater experience, one will be able to carry out work with more thoughtfulness and efficiency.

## Tiers Chart

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MediaJustice Tiers of Experience	
Tier One	0-2 years of same-level experience in a similar role.
Tier Two	3-5 years of same-level experience in a similar role.
Tier Three	6-11 years of same-level experience in a similar role.
Tier Four	12 or more years of same-level experience in a similar role.

## Moving Tiers

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When a new employee joins MediaJustice, their years of same-level experience, and therefore their initial salary tier, will be calculated based on their past work. Once you are employed at MediaJustice, every year that you are in the same role, you will gain one more year of same-level experience. When you reach a new Tier, HR will automatically make this change to your salary.

If you get promoted to a new Level, you will automatically be at Tier 1 because you do not yet have any experience in that new level. You will move up in Tiers within this new role over time. **The two exceptions are:** 1) if you already had experience in that higher level prior to coming to MediaJustice; (2) if you are in Tier 4 as a Senior Specialist or Director, then you will automatically jump to Tier 2 when you are promoted, to reflect the over 12 years experience in your current role.

See the FAQ for more information about calculating years of same-level experience.

## Promotions - aka Changing Levels

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A promotion involves moving from one Level to the next Level and can happen *regardless* of Tier. This would happen based on organizational need, capacity, your performance and competencies. Someone can be a Tier 1 Specialist, and get promoted to a Director. Promotions are not guaranteed, unlike tiers.

## Raises

MediaJustice does not agree with raises solely as a percentage of one's salary. In this model, the highest paid people get a higher dollar amount than lower paid people. This widens the absolute gap between the lowest and highest paid, and exacerbates inequality since inflation of groceries, gas, and some other essentials impacts everyone equally.

MediaJustice does annual raises as a hybrid model - a small bump as a percentage of one's salary, plus an additional flat dollar amount evenly distributed across the organization. In a typical year, instead of a 2% raise for everyone, everyone would get a 1% raise plus we would figure out the total pot of money if everyone got another 1% raise, and then redistribute the pot equally across all staff regardless of their salary.

### An example if we had 3 staff....

		STEP ONE	STEP TWO	STEP THREE	
	Current Salary	1% of Salary	Evenly divide \$600 (the total if we gave everyone an additional 1%) = \$200 each	Add step one and step two together to find each person's raise	New Salary
EMP 1	\$10,000	\$100	\$200	\$300 = 3%	\$10,300
EMP 2	\$20,000	\$200	\$200	\$400 = 2%	\$20,400
EMP 3	\$30,000	\$300	\$200	\$500 = 1.6%	\$30,500

## Core Competencies

As part of our new salary framework process, we also defined the competencies expected for all MediaJustice employees: Core Competencies. These core competencies will be used in our performance management process.

### Core Competencies - Summary:

1. Collaboration
2. Learning and Growing
3. Anticipatory Thinking
4. Self-Management
5. Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

*Read our Core Competencies document to learn more about them.*



# Frequently Asked Questions

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## Background Research

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### **1. Labor markets are bullshit, so why are we benchmarking to them at all? Why keep a hierarchical model?**

We explored different models, and the experiences of other movement organizations, and made a decision to balance our values with the need to bring in and retain talented staff. To balance these two things, especially valuing transparency instead of ED and supervisor discretion, we had to benchmark against the labor market and its hierarchical model.

Although, in this FAQ, we share a few ways we pushed back against biases in the labor market including benchmarking the Associate-level positions at a higher rate, and not differentiating between certain roles like Technology and Finance vs Programs.

### **2. How did we benchmark?**

For benchmarking we looked at paid and free reports benchmarking compensation and benefits for non-profit organizations across three urban regions, for similar sized organizations, for 2021. The cities we compared to were New York City, the Bay Area, and DC. We compared to other non-profits with budgets from \$2.5m - \$5m.

When benchmarking, matching positions is an art and not a science. We obtained the data for the following positions that we felt represented a range of Associate, Specialist, and Director salaries: Program Admin; Field / Digital Organizer; HR Manager; Campaign Director; Development Director.

Lastly, we did in-depth surveys with 5 similar-sized, and 1 larger, movement organizations.

### **3. How often will we revisit the bands and benchmarking?**

We will re-benchmark and assess the bands at least once every 5 years, or earlier if we find a need. Since all bands will be raised each year based on org-wide raises, we do not anticipate needing to revisit benchmarking as often as is typically done (e.g. every 3 years).

#### **4. Who influenced this framework?**

We worked closely with the consultants from Building for Mission to shape our framework and philosophy. We were inspired by the National Young Farmers Coalition's publicly available compensation framework.

### **Rationale**

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#### **5. Why is experience the factor we're using?**

In surveying staff and talking to Directors, experience came up as a factor that many people felt was a priority.

Ultimately, we made the choice to focus on experience because we wanted to ensure that our energies were spent uplifting our staff, helping them do their best work, to make mistakes and take risks. We also considered this instead of lived experience, need, and performance, because it was a less subjective and biased factor to consider.

#### **6. How will we communicate about this philosophy to potential candidates?**

We believe this salary framework will resonate with potential job applicants that are values aligned with MediaJustice. This entire salary framework will be publicly available, and linked to with all our job postings. We hope the transparency of the framework, our guiding principles, and the FAQ will answer most people's questions.

We also intend to publish blogs, social media, and speak on panels about the work that went into our salary framework (including benefits) and where we landed, as well as being transparent in the future about what worked, didn't work, and changes we make.  
biased factor to consider.

#### **7. What if it hurts me later in my career if I don't negotiate and practice the skill of negotiation now?**

We believe that paying highly competitive salaries (See #2 in Compensation Philosophy) positions staff really well in their careers. While we are designing our internal policies, including Compensation Philosophy, to incentivize staff to grow within MediaJustice, we also recognize that staff may leave. We believe that a stronger variable in determining future pay with another job is the earning power you've accumulated in your career.

At MediaJustice you have the peace of mind to know that your salary will grow as experience in your role grows. We believe that paying staff well is a better contribution for MJ to make towards your career than teaching you how to negotiate your salary.

In addition, more and more organizations are shifting towards a negotiation-free model. As a BIPOC-led organization, we intend on being transparent in our approach with other organizations because we believe that a compensation philosophy oriented around merit-based increases rewards competitive behavior that is a disadvantage if you are Black, a person of color, an immigrant, Trans and gender non-conforming, queer, and disabled.

## **8. Why aren't we paying based on where someone lives?**

We have decided that rather than pay someone less for living in an area with a low cost of living, we will pay everyone at a highly competitive rate by benchmarking against the most expensive markets in the United States. Some specific reasons we are not paying less based on geography include that:

- Geography is one small aspect of need-based-income. Many other factors including generational wealth and debt, financially supporting other family members and community, health needs, etc, have a large impact as well. A simple geographic decision wouldn't reflect the realities of each individual's different needs.
- As our staff moves, we did not want to be in a position of having to raise and lower their salaries as a result of moves that are often beyond their control.

## **9. Where does performance fit into salary and raises?**

We reject the notion that someone's productivity at any given moment should be rewarded monetarily, and so we do not include performance anywhere in our compensation structure. We believe that everyone does the best they can when set-up for success and choose to find ways to nurture, coach, and uplift our staff. We want our staff to feel able to take risks, name and learn from their mistakes, and know that their salary is not at stake.

We are also aware that performance-based compensation leads to a lot of subjectivity, opaqueness, and, often, bias in salary structures.

To be clear, we believe a culture of performance and feedback is important to the well being of all our staff and the organization as a whole. Separately from compensation, we will be implementing a deep and thoughtful performance management process and a continuous culture of feedback.

## **10. How will you ensure we can retain people if we cannot reward people based on their performance?**

We understand that for most of us we have been taught to value work and labor through raises and bonuses. We hope that employees of MediaJustice will appreciate this opportunity to value ourselves and each other for what we bring to the table, in non-monetary ways, while still ensuring everyone has fair compensation. We have made this choice to try to push the capitalist status quo and hope that we find it works. That is why we are stretching ourselves to pay salaries that are in the top 25th percentile, benchmarked to highly-compensated markets, across all levels, and in particular doing better for levels that are traditionally underpaid in the non-profit sector. Beyond compensation, we reward our staff by investing in the growth of their leadership through professional development and providing benefits that meet their needs and support work-life balance. Some people will find this is not a good fit for them. And ultimately, we will assess how successful the salary framework is and will make tweaks as needed.

## **11. Why are we collapsing all roles into one Level, instead of differentiating by type of role (e.g. Ops Director, Programs Director, etc)?**

Although we want to benchmark to the 75th percentile by role and are not doing away with hierarchical compensation completely, we chose to push back against the labor market's over-compensation of certain roles (roles traditionally held by White men such as Technology, Finance, and Law) and its under compensation of other roles (such as Programs, HR, Education), by collapsing Director salaries, Specialist salaries, etc, across roles. After averaging out the benchmarked salaries for various roles at a given level, we then ensured our salaries were at least the 75th percentile of the average for that Level.

If we discover that it is difficult to recruit for a specialized position at the salary we're offering, we would not change our framework in a reactive way. We remain committed to trying this model and believe it will attract people consistent with our values. We also commit to reviewing this model at the end of every year, assessing its success, and to thoughtfully think through changes if needed.

## **12. Why is the jump between some Levels and some Tiers so small?**

For the Associate and Specialist Levels, the salary jump between Tier 3 in one Level to Tier 1 in the next Level is relatively small.

The reason is that for the Associate level, we wanted to pay better than the 75th percentile as we felt these positions were not being paid fairly based on our benchmarking. In order to pay those salaries at a higher level, we had to compress the salary ranges which gave us less room for major jumps.

We also decided to make the difference in salaries between the lowest Tiers in any Level (e.g. Tier 1 and Tier 2) smaller than the difference in salaries to Tier 3, or in some cases Tier 4. This is because in the top Tier you will not get any more Tier jumps in that Level, so we wanted to ensure the compensation was fair for the long-term.

### **13. Why aren't we being completely transparent with salaries?**

To move to 100% transparency - where everyone can see everyone else's salary - we would want to do it with all staff involved and participating equally every step of the way. At this point we focused our energy on the salary framework itself, so did not want to layer more decisions on. We are open to revisiting this in the future.

## **Raises, Promotions and Negotiations**

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### **14. Do we give annual cost of living (COLA) raises?**

While we do annual raises, we are not strictly doing raises benchmarked to federal (or local) COLA, because the variability of inflation (across different cities, years, etc) makes it difficult to budget. Instead, we commit to providing at least 2% raises each year, as long as we are in a position to do so financially. The raises will be applied uniformly to **all staff**, and not based on performance, need, or any other traditionally biased and opaque methods. These raises will also be applied to the **entire salary framework**.

2% is selected as a raise that many other non-profits offer, and is consistent with the 30-year average inflation for the United States.

### **15. How do annual raises impact the salary framework? Is there a "cap" to raises?**

We have decided to experiment with raising the **entire salary framework** by the same percentage as the overall annual raise. So if you are a Tier 1 Associate, you will get a 2% raise, and so will the salary for **all** Tier 1 Associates (existing or new hires).

We are doing this because:

- Raising the whole framework means that someone's starting "same level years of experience" does not put them on a lower or higher salary path than someone else.
- If we did **not** raise the salary framework, then an individual who is in the top Tier of their level, will end up having to stop getting raises once their salary bumps up against the Tier 1 of the next Level. We did not want this situation.
- Raises are an attempt to keep up with the increased cost of living each year. This increased cost of living impacts new staff coming into the organization as much as it impacts existing staff.

**16. So if I'm hiring someone, I literally can't offer them a higher wage if they negotiate?**

Nope. We will be setting the expectations for this on the front-end along with our job postings and our interview process, so candidates know ahead of time that we're a negotiation-free workplace.

Research shows that only about 50% of people actually try to negotiate higher wages - typically cis, White men. Our anecdotal research shows that most people value a negotiation-free, transparent compensation process, but are used to existing in a capitalist framework where a negotiation-game is expected.

**17. What do I do if someone on my staff wants a higher wage?**

If they are not yet at the highest tier for their level, they will move up a tier when they reach that many years of experience. If it seems appropriate based on organizational need, their performance, and their competencies, they could get promoted to a higher level. They will also continue to get annual raises.

**18. How do I get a Tier-based raise?**

With our new framework, every employee will automatically get Tier-based raises when their years of experience bump into the new Tier. You will not have to negotiate, make a case, cajole or beg your way into getting a higher salary. Every year that you are in the same role, your years of same-level experience will automatically go up. When you reach a new Tier, you will automatically get a new salary based on the new Tier.

## **19. When do I get into a new Tier? What if I'm between Tiers?**

You move into the next Tier either the January 1 or July 1 when you meet the defined years of experience. For example, you would be in Tier 2 after you move into your 3rd year of experience. This is similar to birthdays - you are 30 years old until you enter your 31st year of life.

## **20. When will my Tier get adjusted?**

When your initial same-level years of experience are calculated, we round you up to the nearest half year or full year of experience and start the “clock” on July 1, or January 1, after your hire date. Each July 1 and January 1, we will add on a year of experience to people who have stayed in the same role at MediaJustice. When those years bump you into a new Tier based on the salary framework, you will get the salary adjustment that July 1 or January 1.

For example, if you start on April 1, 2022, and we calculate that you will have 2.5 years of same-level experience starting July 1, 2022 then on January 1, 2023 you will automatically have 3 years of same-level experience. On January 1, 2023, you will switch to Tier 2, and get the salary adjustment accordingly. In future years, when you are in this role, you will always get bumped into a new Tier on January 1.

If you start on April 1, 2022 and we calculate that you will have 2 years of same-level experience starting July 1, 2022, then you will have 3 years of same-level experience the following July 1, 2023. On July 1, 2023, you will switch to Tier 3 and get the salary adjustment accordingly. In the future years, when you are in this role, you will always get bumped into a new Tier on July 1. (For existing staff: See question #21 where we describe how years of experience are calculated during initial roll out.)

## **Years of same-level experience**

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### **21. How are the initial same-level years of experience calculated (during initial roll-out or hiring)?**

To figure out your initial Tier, we calculate your years of same-level experience in a similar role.

This is not about what experience helped you get where you are today - we know, and highly value, the experience that led to you being hired, promoted, and in your job today!



The tiers are specifically about doing this same work, at this same level. If you grow hierarchically in your career at MediaJustice, your tiers of experience will go up and down again as you get into new roles.

To calculate same-level years of experience, Supervisors and HR will:

- Determine the top 5-6 responsibilities for the role to compare against the employee's past experience
- Determine any criteria when assessing years of experience, and weight it accordingly (e.g. a national role vs a regional role might be weighted differently; a paid vs unpaid role might be weighted differently)
- Use the employee's resume to assess same-level years of experience, considering the primary responsibilities not the job titles, and the weighted-criteria
- Meet with each staff member and supervisor to discuss and collectively decide on the final same-level years of experience

Lastly, to make Tier adjustments simpler going forward, we will calculate your years of same-level experience as of the upcoming July 1 or January 1 - whichever is sooner. We'll add on the additional months of work you will get at MediaJustice. Then we will round up to the nearest whole or half number. If it's February 1 and we calculate that you'll have 2 years of experience, we'll add on the extra 5 months you will have once it is July 1, and then round up.

## **22. How are the initial same-level years of experience calculated if you get promoted from within MediaJustice?**

If you have never worked in that role previously, you will automatically be at 0 years of experience in your new level. The exceptions would be (1) if you did that job at the same level prior to joining MediaJustice, or (2) if you are in Tier 4 as a Senior Specialist or Director and get promoted to the next level where you would go into Tier 2.

## **23. Won't my initial tier impact my future salary path because of the 2% raises?**

Nope! In question *"How do annual raises impact the salary framework? Is there a "cap" to raises?"* you will see that annual raises will apply to the entire salary framework.



What this means is that if you are currently in Tier 1, and after a year you move to Tier 2, since the Tier 2 salary has **also** been getting raised every year, your new salary will now be the exact same as every other Tier 2 person in your role.

*Example:*

In the below example, assume that one is currently a Tier 1 Associate. In FY22 the person’s salary would be \$62,000.

If there is a 2% raise in FY23 for all employees, then the staff’s salary would increase to \$63,240. So would the salary for *\*all\** current and future Tier 1 Associates, and the salary for *\*all\** current and future Tier 2 Associates.

If there is another 2% raise in FY24, and this person now has enough same-level years of experience to move up to Tier 2, they will now get a new salary which will be the Tier 2 Associate salary, which has been raised every year at 2%. Their initial tier had no bearing on their new salary, **and** they are now earning the same as every other Tier 2 Associate-level employee.

FY22		FY23		FY24	
ASSOCIATE TIER 1	ASSOCIATE TIER 2	ASSOCIATE TIER 1	ASSOCIATE TIER 2	ASSOCIATE TIER 2	ASSOCIATE TIER 2
\$62,000	\$65,000	\$63,240	\$66,300	\$64,505	\$67,626

**24. How does education impact my salary?**

We recognize there are many different skills, life experience, and formal and informal education that can go into salary decisions in the labor market - some that contribute to job success and some that reflect privilege. We have decided that generally we are valuing experience, not formal education, specifically when it comes to compensation.

There will be **very few** technical positions (HR, Finance, IT) where we will count a specific certification or degree as counting for a proxy for .5 - 2 years of experience.

These are roles that involve a high level of compliance responsibility where a specified formal training gives you information required for your job, and in some cases also comes with a legal obligation to adhere to a specific code of ethics/continuing education requirement. The exact certifications or degrees will be decided on by a supervisor prior to hiring.

## **25. Does my past supervision experience impact my same-level years of experience?**

The same-level years of experience is determined based on experience doing work with the same roles and responsibilities. If your role at MediaJustice includes supervising staff, then past supervision experience will likely contribute to your same-level years of experience. If your role at MediaJustice does not include supervising staff, then past supervision experience will not contribute to your same-level years of experience.

## **26. What if I disagree with how my initial same-level years of experience has been assessed?**

We hope that in the meeting with your supervisor, HR, and yourself, you will all be able to come to an agreement on your same-level years of experience that is in line with the information in this document.

If you are not able to come to an agreement and you strongly disagree, you would speak to the Director of Operations to escalate your concern and have the Director of Operations redo the calculation. In the event that the Director of Operations is the Supervisor in question, the Executive Director would step in to mitigate.

## **27. Are the “levels” related to years of experience?**

No and yes. Job levels are related to skills, competencies, and organizational need. However, it would be unlikely that someone with no work experience would be in a Specialist or Director role because they wouldn't be able to take on that responsibility.

However, someone doesn't need to get all the way to Tier 3 or Tier 4 to be able to get promoted to another level. It would be based on their skills, competencies, and the organizational need.

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## **What's the process for understanding how well this model is/isn't serving us?**

We will consider this model successful if:

- Our current staff feel taken care of and that there is clarity around what factors into their money and benefits
- Our current staff feel clarity around what is expected of them (through Core Competencies and other Competencies)
- We are able to hire people for open positions
- We impact other groups and help shape the field towards greater transparency and values-based salary models

Once a year we will look at data from the following, and decide if we are or aren't successful and if anything needs to be tweaked:

- Feedback from staff - through surveys, feedback to HR, and anecdotal conversations with colleagues and supervisors
- Feedback from candidates during the hiring process, and new staff
- Exit interviews from staff that transition
- Feedback from other organizations through presentations, blogs, informal conversations, or whether organizations reach out to us to learn more