INTRODUCTION
By Ruby Lopez Harper, Director of Local Arts Services, Americans for the Arts

On behalf of Americans for the Arts, we offer the research report 2018 Local Arts Agency Salaries. Building on previous surveys conducted in 2001, 2008, and 2013, this valuable tool provides benchmarks for local arts agency (LAA) professionals to understand the compensation levels of a full range of positions within the LAA field in America today—from CEOs to program and operations staff to support and administrative staff. As with prior reports, we hope this will be a resource for all LAA staff and boards to make informed and data-driven decisions when it comes to setting or pursuing compensation levels, providing benefits, and considering equitable representation.

Highlighted Trends
Local Arts Agencies continue to be the leading voice in support of arts and culture in communities around the country. In addition to supporting artists and arts and culture organizations, LAAs are instrumental in setting the pace for adoption of equitable policy, programs, and resource distribution. In this context, this report sheds light on certain disparities in representation. Despite the robust sample size of 1,117 respondents, participants self-selected to respond and, therefore, we cannot be certain the findings fully represent the LAA field. Even so, the aggregate results reflect our empirical observations about the nature of the field’s demographics and compensation—and reinforce the need for urgency and intentional action to improve compensation, diversity, and parity in the field.

Across the full slate of survey respondents representing all LAA positions, some of the topline findings remain consistent with previous studies, which is cause for concern:

- 82 percent of respondents identified as white only, similar to the 2013 findings.
- 78 percent of respondents identified as cisgender women—up from 72 percent in 2013.
- 91 percent of respondents have at least a bachelor’s degree, demonstrating that the LAA field is highly educated and suggests a share of LAA staff is carrying student loan debt. This should also give pause to reconsider how the arts field values education, experience and sets qualification requirements for LAA staff; and in what ways do these parameters advantage individuals over others. Related, if individuals entering the workforce are carrying student debt loads, which ones can and can’t afford to bring their knowledge to the LAA field vs. take jobs in other higher paying sectors to pay down student loans.
- Staff across all demographics are more likely to say that they are satisfied than dissatisfied with their total cash compensation and employment benefits package. That said, white staff and male staff are more likely to express such satisfaction than staff who are people of color or female.

1 Cisgender individuals identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.
One quarter (276) of the total survey responses were received from people who hold the executive director/president/CEO position at their LAA. Among just these executive director/president/CEO respondents:

- 91 percent identified as white only.
- In results that echo those of 2013, 77 percent are female.
  - Salaries for female executive directors average $11,000 less than their male counterparts.
- Average salaries have increased in each of the four studies, but have failed to keep pace with inflation:
  - 2001: $54,309
  - 2008: $69,159
  - 2013: $78,394
  - 2018: $81,476
  - According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, $69,159 in January 2008 has the same buying power as $82,315 in December 2018, indicating that the average CEO salary of $81,476 is slightly lower than it was prior to the Great Recession when adjusted for inflation.
- Looking at the pipeline of future executive directors, it’s important to note that 89 percent of the responding assistant/deputy directors identified themselves as white only, and 73 percent are female.

Field Turnover
Respondents were asked, “Do you anticipate that you will still be working in the arts industry five years from today?” In most positions, about half to two-thirds of respondents said they likely would still be working in the arts field in five years. People whose jobs are less tied to the arts—such as operational staff, special events/meetings, technology, development and communications—are the least likely to think they will still be in the arts field in five years. This turnover rate is both a challenge and an opportunity. How can those open positions become opportunities to attract new and diverse talent? And, once more diversity is achieved, how can we as a field improve our retention rate, encourage upward mobility, and shift our overall field demographics over time?

The survey also found that employees at smaller organizations are less likely to receive formal performance reviews and evaluations, and data from Americans for the Arts’ 2018 Profile of Local Arts Agencies demonstrates that access to employer subsidized professional development opportunities for entry-level staff at LAAs of all sizes is limited or non-existent. These and other factors can impact how individuals perceive their value and opportunities for advancement. Ensuring that the LAA field is competitive in compensation and benefits and that organizations are being thoughtful and intentional about professional development and growth opportunities is crucial to keeping people in the industry.
The Impact of Demographics on Career Trajectory

A new exploration in this report is the impact of demography on career advancement. A significant highlight is that most respondents in every category indicated their demographics have no impact on their ability to advance in their career. But when you look at specific categories, the following stand out:

- Of the respondents who indicated that they have a disability that cannot be seen, one-in-four feel their unseen disability has had a negative impact on their career.
- One-in-five individuals in the 45 to 64 age range indicated that they felt their age has had a negative impact on their career. This age group holds the largest number of executive director positions. Is it possible that this group is feeling the tension of younger generations looking to advance, and older generations not yet ready to retire? Ageism is a growing reality that should be considered as we build equitable workplace environments.
- One-in-five gay or lesbian respondents feel that their sexual orientation has had a negative impact on their career.
- Almost 40 percent of individuals identifying as non-binary/third gender/gender fluid indicated that they felt their gender identity has had a negative impact on their career.

Moving Forward

These datapoints paint a challenging picture. Americans for the Arts and others have made diversification of the field a priority at least since the founding of the Emerging Arts Leaders program 20 years ago, with the release our board policy (which we updated our Statement on Cultural Equity in June 2016), and continuing through our research, programming, and services. While 20 years is a relatively short period of time to see systemic change—and while we do see more diversity in the entry- and mid-level positions that hopefully will eventually feed into the leadership of the field—this survey data suggests that the field has made virtually no progress in these efforts.

And it should be noted that not all the news is troubling. There are positive findings, too:

- 80 percent of full-time LAA staff who responded to the survey receive access to medical insurance. In LAAs with budgets greater than $1 million, 92 percent receive access to medical insurance.
- 87 percent “feel fulfilled performing their work” and 94 percent are “proud to work at their LAA.”
- Almost 70 percent of LAA staff receive support for professional development.

The LAA field has a long way to go when it comes to equity, and this data highlights the extremely slow pace of the changes we talk about making, at least in terms of the individuals doing the work inside LAAs. For its part, Americans for the Arts continues to
focus on programming to support the work of LAAs in this transition. We have sustained and launched initiatives directly targeting equity including the expansion of the Diversity in Arts Leadership program, the Arts and Culture Leaders of Color Network, and the Arts & Cultural Equity Fellows program. In addition, we continue to support efforts internally to improve equitable practice and elevate the knowledge and ability of staff to engage in and activate in advancing this work in their role, the organization and the field.

Now is the time. The future is not set in stone. We can make a difference through our actions and choices, through our commitments and practices. Using this report as a starting point to inform decisions about employment policies such as qualifications for hiring and promoting, setting salaries and offering professional development. This is an opportunity for the LAA field to manifest change that has long been needed.

Special thanks to Ben Davidson, Graciela Kahn, and Randy Cohen in our research department who fielded this report, as well as the 1,117 individuals who took the time to respond to this survey, and the many people inside our office who helped edit and disseminate it. As always, Americans for the Arts is grateful to our members for your continued support of our shared mission and to the many businesses, foundations and individuals whose grants and donations help us help the arts sector move ever forward.