

Salary Survey

The latest research on television and radio salaries shows modest increases ahead of inflation.

By Bob Papper

Salaries in both television and radio rose modestly in the past year, according to the RTNDA/Ball State University Annual Survey. Television salaries rose by 3.6 percent and radio salaries grew 3.2 percent. As usual, not everyone shared equally in the increases. In television, the biggest gains were among news managers and other off-air positions. On-air positions were largely unchanged. With inflation at 2.7 percent, television news employees saw a growth in real wages of almost 1 percent, and radio news employees saw about half that.

Television News Salaries

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
News Director	\$84,400	\$73,000	\$13,000	\$300,000
Assistant News Director	69,000	60,000	12,000	180,000
Managing Editor	63,800	55,000	25,000	150,000
Executive Producer	52,000	50,000	20,000	125,000
News Anchor	71,100	55,500	9,000	300,000
Weathercaster	61,100	50,000	10,000	300,000
Sports Anchor	53,900	40,000	10,000	250,000
News Reporter	35,000	30,000	12,000	150,000
Sports Reporter	31,600	28,000	13,000	130,000
Assignment Editor	35,500	32,500	15,300	195,800
News Producer	31,600	30,000	15,600	90,000
News Writer	30,500	27,000	18,400	75,000
News Assistant	25,000	25,000	6,000	40,000
Photographer	29,200	27,000	12,000	80,000
Tape Editor	27,600	25,000	6,000	78,000
Graphics Specialist	33,800	31,000	18,500	80,000
Internet Specialist	37,800	37,500	16,000	80,000

In television, most salaries rose, although some positions did better than others. Newsroom managers did well with a 4.8 percent overall increase from a year ago. Other off-air positions fared even better, with a 6.6 percent rise. On-air positions, overall, fell by 1 percent. News anchor salaries tend to fluctuate in the survey more than most other positions, depending on how many news directors provide the salaries of main anchors—especially in the largest markets. There are no consistent salary patterns by network affiliation; all stations affiliated with the four major networks pay similarly. The only pattern is that those affiliates pay noticeably more than commercial stations not affiliated with one of those networks, and all commercial stations pay considerably more than the relatively few PBS affiliates that run local news. There is no consistent pattern of salaries by region, although stations in the Northeast tend to pay a little more than stations in other parts of the country. In one of the most hopeful signs for smaller market television employees, minimum salaries rose 6.1 percent from last year.

Radio News Salaries

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
News Director	\$35,900	\$33,000	\$6,000	\$110,000
News Reporter	24,900	24,500	8,000	48,000
News Anchor	27,800	26,000	16,000	45,000
News Producer	35,800	38,000	13,000	55,000
Sports Anchor	29,800	27,000	20,000	45,000
Sports Reporter	21,400	25,500	5,000	30,000

Salaries were both up and down in radio from a year ago, although there were no big, consistent winners. At a modest 3.2 percent overall increase, radio salaries rose half a percent above inflation. The minimum salaries in radio did not change in any meaningful way from a year ago.

Median TV News Salaries by Market Size

	1-25	26-50	51-100	101-150	150+
News Director	\$115,000	\$120,000	\$83,500	\$60,000	\$51,000
Assistant News Director	100,000	80,000	52,500	48,000	30,000
Managing Editor	80,000	60,000	50,000	42,900	42,500
Executive Producer	70,000	60,000	50,000	35,000	35,000
News Anchor	110,000	100,000	60,000	42,000	32,000
Weathercaster	92,500	96,000	50,000	41,000	32,000
Sports Anchor	90,000	77,500	40,000	35,000	25,000
News Reporter	57,500	45,000	30,000	22,000	20,000
Sports Reporter	46,000	40,000	28,000	24,000	20,000
Assignment Editor	45,000	38,000	33,000	30,000	24,000
News Producer	47,300	40,000	30,000	23,000	20,000
News Writer	35,000	24,000	23,500	27,500	*
News Assistant	28,300	31,500	22,000	15,000	18,000
Photographer	44,000	32,500	27,000	20,000	18,000
Tape Editor	34,000	28,000	23,000	17,500	15,800
Graphics Specialist	50,000	35,000	27,000	26,000	25,000
Internet Specialist	45,000	49,000	35,000	24,000	23,500

As usual, the larger the market, the larger the salary. There are exceptions, of course, and the most common ones are in the largest markets. That's because the biggest markets include both the biggest and highest-paying stations—along with a disproportionately high number of smaller, lower-paying independent stations. The biggest percentage growth took place in the smallest markets (just over 6 percent), with markets 1-50 showing modest increases (just over 2 percent) and markets 51-150 virtually unchanged.

*Insufficient data

Median TV News Salaries by Full-Time Staff Size

	51+	31-50	21-30	11-20	1-10
News Director	\$122,500	\$83,500	\$62,500	\$55,800	\$48,000
Assistant News Director	80,000	52,500	48,000	30,000	20,500
Managing Editor	68,000	50,000	40,000	40,000	51,500
Executive Producer	65,000	50,000	35,000	43,500	35,500
News Anchor	142,500	65,000	45,000	33,300	23,000
Weathercaster	85,000	55,000	42,000	31,000	33,000
Sports Anchor	90,000	43,000	35,000	25,000	24,000
News Reporter	50,000	30,000	24,000	21,500	22,000
Sports Reporter	40,000	30,000	23,500	20,000	23,000
Assignment Editor	41,500	33,000	30,000	25,000	24,500
News Producer	42,000	30,000	23,000	22,000	26,500
News Writer	26,000	23,300	27,000	45,000	*
News Assistant	31,000	22,000	15,000	20,000	23,000
Photographer	40,000	26,300	22,000	20,000	19,000
Tape Editor	28,000	23,000	18,000	25,000	24,500
Graphics Specialist	50,000	32,000	23,000	25,000	*
Internet Specialist	45,000	35,000	23,000	27,500	16,000

In contrast to market size, there are extremely few exceptions to the pattern that the largest stations pay the most money. Here, the exceptions are most likely to be among the smallest newsrooms because that's where we find a disproportionately high percentage of small, larger market independents.

*Insufficient data

Median Radio News Salaries by Market Size

	Major	Large	Medium	Small
News Director	\$53,000	\$40,000	\$30,000	\$25,000
News Reporter	32,500	27,000	20,000	19,000
News Anchor	35,000	35,000	23,000	23,500
News Producer	40,000	45,000	*	13,000
Sports Anchor	27,500	31,000	25,500	20,000
Sports Reporter	30,000	*	21,000	17,300

As usual, the larger the market, generally, the higher the salary. Overall, major and large markets show small gains from a year ago, while medium and small markets were flat or even down. Major markets are those with 1 million or more listeners. Large markets are those from 250,000 to 1 million; medium markets are from 50,000 to 250,000; and small markets have fewer than 50,000 listeners.

*Insufficient data

Median Radio News Salaries by Full-Time Staff Size

	One	Two	Three or Four	Five or More
News Director	\$27,500	\$26,500	\$30,000	\$47,500
News Reporter	*	21,000	22,500	27,000
News Anchor	*	18,500	26,000	31,000
News Producer	*	*	25,000	40,000
Sports Anchor	*	25,500	26,000	30,000
Sports Reporter	*	30,000	*	25,500

In the past, when stations had three or more full-time staff members, salaries rose. This year, it takes five or more staffers before we see a meaningful salary difference.

*Insufficient data

Median Radio News Salaries by Ownership

	Group-Owned	Independent
News Director	\$33,000	\$32,500
News Reporter	22,000	29,000
News Anchor	26,000	26,000
News Producer	37,500	34,000
Sports Anchor	27,000	*
Sports Reporter	21,000	30,000

Every year in the past, radio news salaries were higher at independent stations than at group-owned. Not this year. This year, there's really no consistent pattern to salaries based on ownership.

*Insufficient data

Median Radio News Salaries by Number of Stations Served/Supervised

	One	Two	Three or More
News Director	\$28,000	\$35,000	\$33,000
News Reporter	25,000	23,500	20,000
News Anchor	27,500	25,500	28,000
News Producer	34,000	*	37,500
Sports Anchor	35,500	28,500	25,000
Sports Reporter	*	30,000	*

Last year, news directors who supervised three or more stations made more money than those who supervised fewer stations. This year, there's no discernible pattern.

*Insufficient data

Median TV News Salary Comparisons Over Time

	2005	2000	5-Year Percentage Change	1995	10-Year Percentage Change
INFLATION			+ 13.4%		+ 25.7%
News Director	\$73,000	\$59,000	+23.7	\$45,600	+60.1
Assistant News Director	60,000	54,000	+11.1	40,600	+47.8
Managing Editor	55,000	50,000	+10.0	37,500	+46.7
Executive Producer	50,000	49,000	+2.0	34,800	+43.7
News Anchor	55,500	45,000	+23.3	43,600	+27.3
Weathercaster	50,000	40,000	+25.0	37,500	+33.3
Sports Anchor	40,000	35,000	+14.3	33,700	+18.7
News Reporter	30,000	24,000	+25.0	20,400	+47.1
Sports Reporter	28,000	23,000	+21.7	NA	NA
Assignment Editor	32,500	30,000	+8.3	25,700	+26.5
News Producer	30,000	25,000	+20.0	21,200	+41.5
News Writer	27,000	30,000	-10.0	NA	NA
News Assistant	25,000	21,000	+19.0	NA	NA
Photographer	27,000	23,000	+17.4	19,300	+39.9
Tape Editor	25,000	24,000	+4.2	NA	NA
Graphics Specialist	31,000	30,000	+3.3	NA	NA
Internet Specialist	37,500	30,000	+25.0	NA	NA

Inflation has grown by 13.4 percent in the past five years and 25.7 percent in the past decade. Growth (or loss) in real wages in those periods is the difference between inflation and the change in salary percentage. For the past five years, most positions rose beyond inflation, led by Internet specialist, news reporter, weathercaster, news director, news anchor, sports reporter, news producer, news assistant and photographer (in that order). Sports anchor came in just above inflation. Close, but under the rate of inflation: assistant news director and managing editor. Well behind: assignment editor, tape editor, graphics specialist and executive producer. News writers actually lost ground in the past five years, but that could be the result of an increase in the number of news writers now working in small and medium markets. Five years ago, news writers were almost all in the largest markets. In the past 10 years, most positions that we can compare rose well ahead of inflation, with news directors easily at the top of the list. News anchors and assignment editors barely exceeded inflation, and sports anchor was the one position that fell below that mark.

Median Radio News Salary Comparisons Over Time

	2005	2000	5-Year Percentage Change	1995	10-Year Percentage Change
INFLATION			+ 13.4%		+ 25.7%
News Director	\$33,000	\$24,000	+37.5	\$21,800	+51.4
News Reporter	24,500	20,000	+22.5	16,500	+48.5
News Anchor	26,000	28,000	-7.1	22,200	+17.1
News Producer	38,000	26,000	+46.2	NA	NA
Sports Anchor	27,000	25,000	+8.0	NA	NA
Sports Reporter	25,500	NA	NA	NA	NA

The radio news employees still standing have done reasonably well over the past five to 10 years. But consolidation makes the comparison tricky for some positions. News directors and news reporters offer a clean comparison, and both are up about two to three times the rate of inflation for the past five years and double the rate of inflation over the past decade. Other comparisons are not as simple because there are fewer news and sports anchors and news producers, and consolidation has led to a shift in where they're located.

TV Newspeople Under Contract and Non-Competes

	Under Contract	Under Non-Compete
News Director	40.6%	73.2%
Assistant News Director	41.7	67.4
Managing Editor	32.4	75.0
Executive Producer	52.1	74.7
News Anchor	84.0	81.4
Weathercaster	83.2	82.0
Sports Anchor	80.7	80.7
News Reporter	71.5	81.7
Sports Reporter	58.7	79.7
Assignment Editor	27.4	71.7
News Producer	59.5	82.8
News Writer	10.3	100.0
News Assistant	4.4	100.0
Photographer	13.1	71.4
Tape Editor	8.1	81.8
Graphics Specialist	9.8	80.0
Internet Specialist	5.1	100.0

Until two years ago, the percentage of television newsroom employees under contract rose steadily each year. Then it stabilized. Last year it rose again, although not by much. This year, it's stable to down—except for a big jump among news directors, which rose from last year's 33.0 percent to 40.6 percent. Most of the non-compete percentages are down slightly, which is probably the result of changes in some state laws eliminating non-competes.

About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2004 among all 1,624 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 1,509 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,223 television stations (75.3 percent) and 103 radio news directors and general managers representing 417 radio stations. Bob Papper is professor of telecommunications at Ball State University and has worked extensively in radio and TV news. Data entry and tabulation were done by the Bureau of Business Research at Ball State. This research was supported by the Department of Telecommunications at Ball State University and the Radio-Television News Directors Association.

Radio Newspeople Under Contract and Non-Competes

	Under Contract	Under Non-Compete
News Director	33.8%	84.6%
News Reporter	21.1	62.5
News Anchor	38.2	85.7
News Producer	50.0	75.0
Sports Anchor	50.0	44.4
Sports Reporter	14.3	100.0

Unlike television, most radio newspeople are not under contract, but for the second straight year, the percentage under contract is clearly moving up. As with TV, news directors had the biggest jump, moving from 21.1 percent to 33.8 percent.