



RESEARCH REPORT

A Profession Under Pressure: 2025 Political Staff Salary Benchmark Report

The 2025 Political Salary Benchmark Survey, conducted by the Center for Campaign Innovation in partnership with Republican Jobs, paints a picture of a profession filled with purpose but struggling with sustainability. Campaign professionals are motivated by mission, yet wages, benefits, and stability lag far behind comparable industries. One veteran described the core challenge: *“It’s downright financially untenable for most people to get into this as more than a hobby. The next year will determine if I continue investing all this time, money and effort.”*

The findings underscore the tension at the heart of political work: campaigns are powered by passion, but without reforms to compensation and employment structures, the industry risks losing its most talented and experienced operatives.

Typical Role & Level

Survey respondents most often identified as political consultants (19%) or campaign staff (14%), though a significant share (40%) listed “Other” roles that reflect the ad hoc nature of campaign work. Job titles ranged from campaign managers and communications directors to field organizers, canvassers, and independent consultants.

This patchwork of roles reflects both opportunity and risk. Several respondents highlighted the need for clearer advancement: *“Room to grow and a clear career trajectory”* and *“opportunities for competent staff to advance as opposed to the ones who fail upwards”*

were both cited as conditions for staying in politics long-term. Others expressed frustration at nepotism, calling for “*more qualified people [to] be hired and not friends*”.

Experience

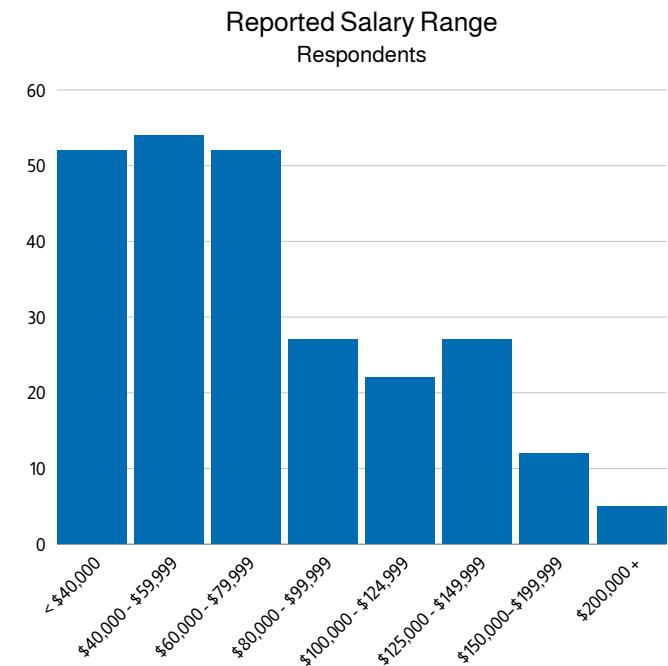
Nearly two-thirds (61%) reported four or more years of paid political or public affairs experience. But tenure does not always translate into advancement. One mid-career respondent lamented: “*Five years in, with moderate advancement, still not clearing \$60,000.*”

Others argued that merit is too often overshadowed by connections. “*Being judged on your experience and skill—not just by who you know*” was a common plea. Several also noted burnout without growth: “*I need opportunities for continuous growth. If my responsibility does not increase, I am stagnating.*”

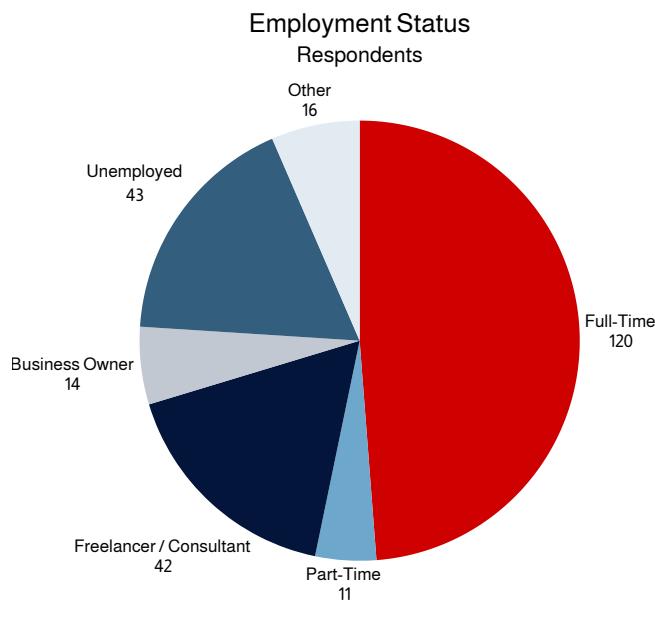
Salary

Salaries span a wide range, with the largest groups earning \$50,000–\$74,999 (28%) and \$75,000–\$99,999 (24%). About one in five earn above \$100,000. Yet the open-ended responses show persistent dissatisfaction.

Others pointed to the mismatch between campaign demands and compensation: “*Higher salary that can support a family. \$40K salary is nothing.*” Another added, “*Political consulting and campaign salaries are painfully low compared to public affairs...The combination makes it unsustainable.*” A different respondent was more direct: “*More compensation [commensurate] with similar private sector roles.*”



Employment Status



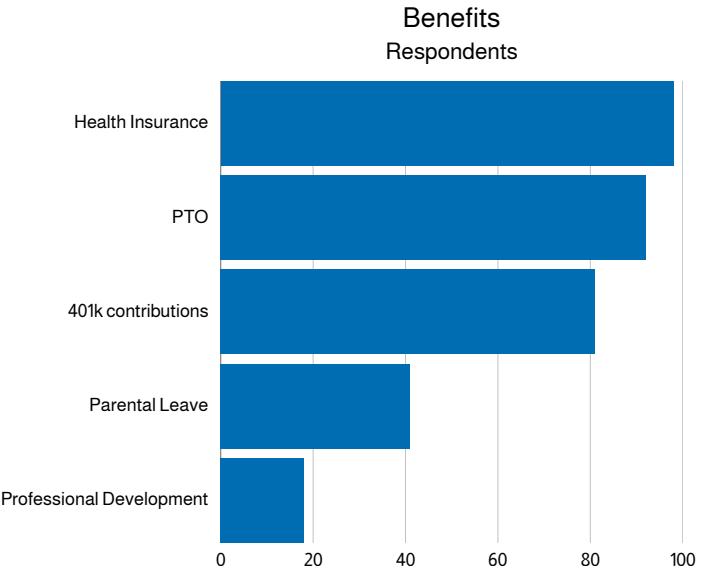
Just under half of respondents (49%) reported being full-time employees, while another 17% identified as freelancers or consultants, and 17% were unemployed but seeking work. Many described this instability as a defining feature of campaign employment.

One respondent was blunt: *“More full time employment, not just seasonal if even that.”* Another explained, *“Campaigning is mostly seasonal and legislative GOTV campaigns are unreliable. It makes it difficult.”* Some even saw this as career-ending: *“Freelancing work is very unstable, I would like to get back to having a steady paycheck at a consulting firm.”*

Benefits

Benefits coverage remains thin: 49% receive health insurance, 41% retirement contributions, and 44% paid time off—but 43% said they receive no benefits at all. Several emphasized how this erodes retention. *“Benefits + higher wage + full-time year round”* was the refrain of one response.

Others suggested systemic solutions, such as *“a private exchange for campaign operatives to be able to acquire portable health insurance.”* Even basic expectations like retirement savings were often unmet, with one noting they were *“scheduled to have a retirement account but haven’t implemented yet due to budgetary shortfalls”*.



Additional Compensation

Roughly one-third of respondents receive some form of additional pay, most often performance bonuses (31%), while 59% receive none. Some reported small extras like mileage reimbursement, housing allowances, or modest holiday bonuses.

Still, the demand for stronger incentives was clear. *“Primary and general election win bonuses”* and *“higher pay, per diem for travel and food”* were suggested as ways to make campaign work more equitable. Others tied incentives to recognition: *“Positive acknowledgment, bonuses, higher base pay.”*

Satisfaction

Only 42% of respondents said they were satisfied with their compensation, while nearly one-third were dissatisfied. Yet many remain committed to the mission. *“I actually love this field. Candidates that I am passionate about winning are the ones who keep me coming back.”*

But others voiced burnout and disillusionment. *“I left campaigns because of how low the compensation was,”* admitted one respondent. Another criticized the industry as *“full of under-qualified grifters...It was not emotionally or economically worth it to continue full-time.”* Others simply tied their frustrations to the workload: *“Better hours”* and *“shorter workdays”* were common asks.

Outlook

Despite the challenges, 70% plan to remain in politics long-term, though more than a quarter are unsure. Respondents framed the path forward clearly: *“Competitive, sustainable pay and benefits, along with consistent work opportunities between campaign cycles and clear pathways into senior leadership...would make me more likely to stay in this field long-term.”*

Still, pessimism was widespread. As one wrote, *“I’ve seen a lot of folks work one campaign and never return. What should be concerning is the experienced top 10% leaving out of frustration and inability to pay bills.”* Another was more pointed: *“Campaigns do not pay. Job hunting every cycle is unpredictable. Consulting firms overwork.”*

Recommendations

Expanding access to benefits is critical. Nearly half of respondents reported receiving no benefits, and campaigns and firms should explore pooled solutions to provide health insurance portability, retirement contributions, and paid time off across election cycles.

Creating clearer career ladders will help retain talent and prevent stagnation. Respondents consistently asked for upward mobility, recognition, and defined career trajectories instead of the “*failing upwards*” culture that discourages long-term commitment.

Movement-wide professional development programs would strengthen the talent pipeline. By investing in training, conferences, and certification opportunities, organizations can equip staff with the skills and confidence needed to grow in their careers.

Encouraging donor commitments for multi-year funding of advocacy groups would provide critical continuity. Year-round stability would allow organizations to maintain staff between cycles, reducing the boom-and-bust employment pattern that drives people out of the field. Recognizing contributions can improve morale and retention. Awards programs and consistent acknowledgment of performance give staff the trust, responsibility, and validation they say is often missing in campaign work.

Finally, leveraging technology and innovation will meet the expectations of younger staff and make campaign work more efficient. Increased use of AI, automation, and other modern tools can reduce drudgery, improve workflows, and signal that the industry is adapting to the future.

Methodology

The 2025 Political Salary Benchmark Survey was conducted online. A total of 246 respondents completed the survey in August and September 2025. All respondents consented to have their anonymized data used for benchmarking purposes.

Respondents included campaign staff, consultants, advocacy professionals, vendors, and party committee employees, with a wide range of roles and levels represented. The survey covered demographics, compensation, benefits, job titles, employment status, and outlook, along with open-ended questions about career development and retention.

Findings reflect self-reported data. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding or because respondents could select multiple answers for certain questions.