

# 2025 Salary Survey

## Report Summary



**AMERICAN CONFERENCE *of* CANTORS**

*Sacred music. Spiritual leadership. Jewish life.*

November 2025

Survey conducted and reported by:



[www.kees2success.com](http://www.kees2success.com)

KEES is honored to share the 2025 Salary Survey Final Report for the American Conference of Cantors (ACC) through this Report Summary. This project was a true collaboration. Our sincere thanks to the survey team: Rachel Roth, Chief Operating Officer, Cantor Erin Frankel, Director of Member Services, and Deb Greenswag, Operations and Administration, for their thoughtful guidance, steady partnership, and commitment to data quality throughout the process.

Compensation is more than a number on a paycheck; it is a strategic expression of an organization's values, culture, and priorities. For both employers and employees, compensation and the full package of benefits are central to decisions about recruitment, retention, advancement, and long-term engagement. In short, how we structure compensation directly influences the health of the institutions we serve and individual well-being and satisfaction.

The employment landscape continues to evolve quickly. Congregations and Jewish organizations, as employers, are balancing talent retention, the expectations of a multigenerational workforce, and the need to offer competitive, mission-aligned compensation. Clear, current benchmarks help everyone make informed choices:

1. **For employers:** Data supports equitable, competitive, and sustainable pay practices and benefit designs that attract and retain outstanding cantorial professionals, even in smaller settings with limited resources or lean staffing structures. In particular, Boards should examine internal ranges by role level, congregation size, and location as they set overall compensation policy at the congregation.
2. **For employees/ACC members:** Insights clarify market expectations and illuminate how communities value experience, professional growth, and long-term service.

Across sectors, and certainly within cantorial and synagogue music leadership, several elements consistently shape pay ranges and individual salaries:

- Organizational budget, size, and structure
- Local and regional cost considerations
- Market norms and the supply of qualified talent
- Role scope, complexity, and leadership expectations
- Education, training, and relevant experience

This survey marks an important step in advancing the ACC community's shared understanding of compensation for cantorial professionals. We are grateful for your participation and for your dedication to strengthening the field and ensuring that this calling remains a vibrant and sustainable career path.

Thank you for partnering with KEES on this important initiative.

With appreciation from the KEES team,

Heather Eddy, President & CEO  
Haley Becerril, Project Manager

This Report Summary highlights the most decision-relevant findings from the 2025 ACC Compensation & Benefits Survey, sent to 308 ACC members who are working in some capacity, with 223 responses (72.4% response rate); 215 were usable overall, and 209 included usable compensation. Respondents reported compensation as of July 1, 2025. The ACC supplied the final instrument; KEES programmed and tested it with only light, non-substantive formatting/logic adjustments. Findings are presented to support equitable, competitive decisions for hiring, retention, and contract renewal across a variety of congregational contexts.

### Snapshot of the Field

- **Roles & affiliation:** The cantorate represented in this report is predominantly URJ (Union for Reform Judaism)-affiliated (87%) and mainly full-time (87%). Most respondents identify as Senior/Solo Cantor (72%); “Other” write-ins typically clarified hybrid or dual-clergy constructs (e.g., Rabbi-Cantor, Co-Cantor).
- **Experience & tenure:** Median time since becoming a Cantor is 16 years. Median tenure at current congregation is 7 years; 46% are ≤5 years in seat and 23% are ≥15 years, indicating both fresh appointments and deep institutional knowledge.
- **Employment model:** About 82% are paid via base salary (including parsonage/housing allowance) plus specific benefits; 18% receive a total-package amount.

### Compensation at a Glance

All respondents (FT + PT), have an average base salary \$159,111; median \$148,000; IQR (the middle 50% of salaries) \$125,000–\$190,000; observed range \$22,000–\$550,000. Because part-time roles depress topline averages, full-time and part-time are analyzed separately throughout the report. In the charts below, Full-Time Employee and Part-Time Employee average base salaries are displayed separately.

| Average Base Salary as of July 1, 2025, for Full-Time Employees |            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Mean                                                            | \$ 173,167 |
| 1st Quartile                                                    | \$ 135,000 |
| Median                                                          | \$ 158,324 |
| 3rd Quartile                                                    | \$ 194,250 |

| Average Base Salary as of July 1, 2025, for Part-Time Employees |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Mean                                                            | \$ 60,160 |
| 1st Quartile                                                    | \$ 38,750 |
| Median                                                          | \$ 58,245 |
| 3rd Quartile                                                    | \$ 70,000 |

## What Strongly Drives Pay? Context Matters.

### **Congregational Size (Households)**

Compensation rises consistently with congregational size, reflecting the broader scope, leadership demands, and programmatic complexity associated with larger institutions. Median base salaries progress from approximately \$119,000 for cantors serving congregations with fewer than 250 households, to \$140,000 for those with 250–399 households, and \$148,425 among congregations with 400–699 households. Salaries continue to increase among mid- to large-sized congregations, reaching a median of \$172,602 for 700–1,199 households, \$218,907 for 1,200–1,799 households, and \$205,000 for 1,800+ households. Directionally, greater scale and complexity continue to command higher pay.

| Number of Households | Count | Q1        | Median    | Q3        | Mean      | Top 10%   |
|----------------------|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <250                 | 14    | \$104,062 | \$119,000 | \$137,250 | \$120,292 | \$154,179 |
| 250-399              | 27    | \$120,000 | \$140,000 | \$154,000 | \$138,622 | \$188,200 |
| 400-699              | 60    | \$134,750 | \$148,425 | \$169,250 | \$149,989 | \$192,100 |
| 700-1,199            | 39    | \$152,000 | \$172,602 | \$226,256 | \$191,338 | \$252,082 |
| 1,200-1,799          | 19    | \$166,154 | \$218,907 | \$230,500 | \$195,385 | \$256,000 |
| 1,800+               | 21    | \$154,500 | \$205,000 | \$285,448 | \$232,677 | \$329,300 |

### **Location Type**

Costs of living vary across regions, so results are summarized at a broad level using the four U.S. Census regions plus Canada and an International category. In the current dataset, respondents are distributed as follows: Northeast: 100 (46.5%), South: 46 (21.4%), West: 36 (16.7%), Midwest: 27 (12.6%), Canada: 5 (2.3%), International: 1 (0.5%).

### **Region groupings used in this report**

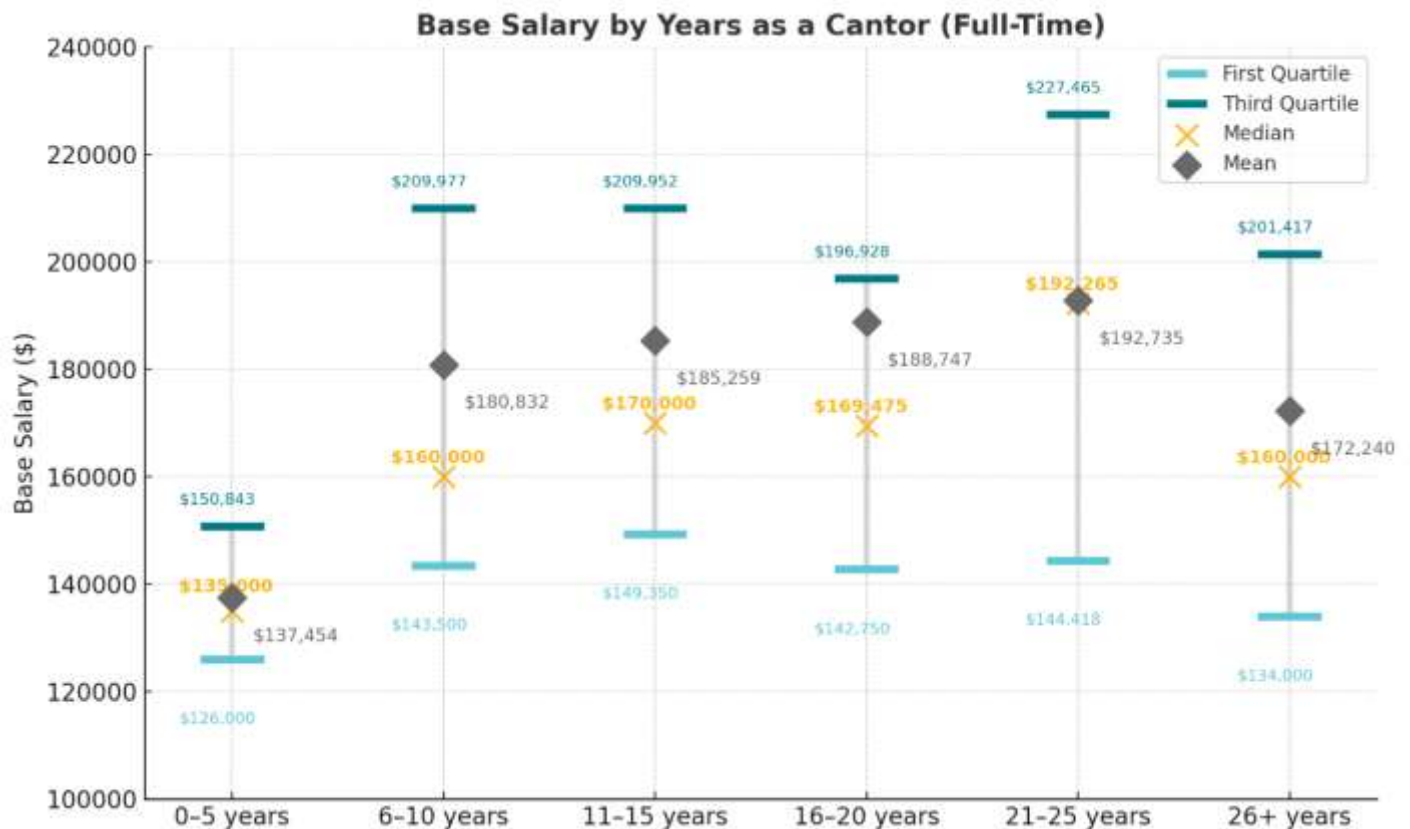
- **Northeast:** Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania
- **South:** North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Texas, Florida, District of Columbia
- **Midwest:** Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri
- **West:** Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, Hawaii

- **Canada:** All Canadian provinces and territories
- **International:** Locations outside the U.S. and Canada (one response in this dataset)

Urban settings report the highest full-time salaries, with a median of \$167,309 and a mean of \$190,931, reflecting both higher cost of living and competitive labor markets. Suburban settings follow, with a median of \$147,465 and a mean of \$157,119. Rural responses were too limited to draw reliable conclusions but suggest modestly lower pay levels.

### Experience (Years Since Becoming a Cantor)

Tenure remains a meaningful predictor of compensation. Median salaries for full-time cantors generally increase with years of experience, peaking at approximately \$192,000 for those with 21–25 years in the cantorate. Compensation dips slightly for respondents with 26 or more years of experience (median \$160,000), a pattern that may reflect pay compression, where long-serving roles remain stable over time while newer hires enter at recalibrated market rates.



## Equity Lens: Representation and Gender Gap

### **Representation**

Gender representation among respondents continues to reflect the evolving composition of the cantorate. Approximately two-thirds (66%) of respondents identify as female, while 22% identify as male. The remaining small groups, including non-binary, genderqueer, transgender, or those who preferred not to answer, represent too few responses for statistically reliable benchmarking.

### **Gender Pay Gap**

Pay differences persist across the field. The average base salary for female cantors is \$149,715, compared with \$188,811 for male cantors, meaning that on average, women earn approximately 79% of what men earn. The median gap—approximately \$19,800—similarly reflects this disparity. The charts below show a breakdown of salaries by gender and years as a cantor, and as we can see, earlier-career professionals are beginning to see a more level playing field. While these differences are influenced by factors such as congregation size, tenure, and location, they continue to signal the need for ongoing awareness and structural equity efforts across the profession.

#### **Female Full-Time Cantors:**

| <b>Tenure</b> | <b>Count</b> | <b>Q1</b> | <b>Median</b> | <b>Q3</b> | <b>Mean</b> |
|---------------|--------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| 0-5 years     | 26           | \$128,125 | \$135,000     | \$151,922 | \$137,806   |
| 6-10 years    | 21           | \$142,000 | \$149,358     | \$207,000 | \$177,826   |
| 11-15 years   | 21           | \$151,187 | \$176,000     | \$226,000 | \$193,104   |
| 16-20 years   | 23           | \$133,245 | \$164,000     | \$177,758 | \$156,313   |
| 21-25 years   | 7            | \$125,850 | \$156,300     | \$192,000 | \$167,714   |
| 26+ years     | 17           | \$137,000 | \$160,000     | \$193,000 | \$166,732   |

#### **Male Full-Time Cantors:**

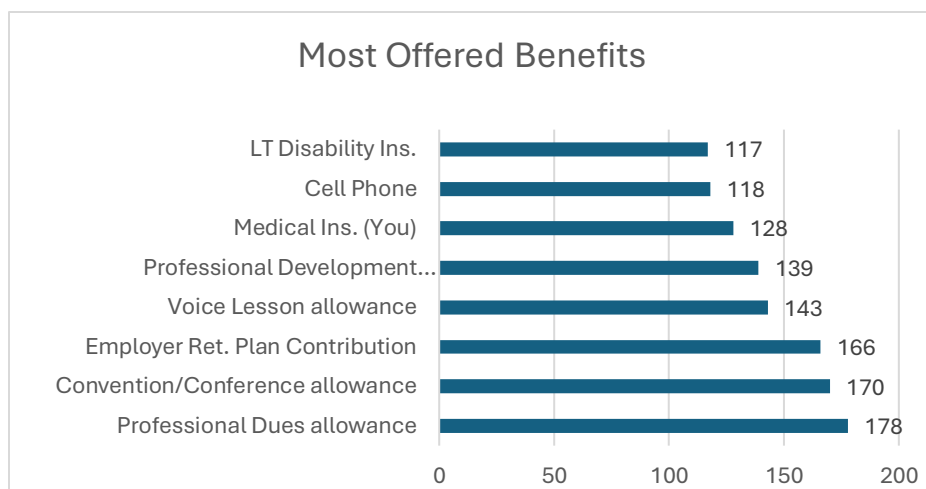
| <b>Tenure</b> | <b>Count</b> | <b>Q1</b> | <b>Median</b> | <b>Q3</b> | <b>Mean</b> |
|---------------|--------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| 0-5 years     | 11           | \$127,500 | \$140,000     | \$146,630 | \$141,032   |
| 6-10 years    | 7            | \$149,500 | \$185,300     | \$210,321 | \$189,849   |
| 11-15 years   | 8            | \$133,229 | \$164,700     | \$174,250 | \$164,667   |
| 16-20 years   | 10           | \$174,232 | \$211,356     | \$228,879 | \$206,970   |
| 21-25 years   | 7            | \$205,632 | \$222,524     | \$242,203 | \$224,370   |
| 26+ years     | 9            | \$135,644 | \$186,000     | \$252,408 | \$201,140   |

## Organizational Implications

Boards and executive committees are encouraged to examine internal compensation ranges by role level, congregation size, and geography; monitor gendered patterns during both hiring and contract renewal; and apply medians and quartiles to guide transparent and consistent pay bands. Regular review through an equity lens promotes accountability and helps ensure that compensation practices align with both organizational values and professional standards.

### Benefits and Time Off – Where Value Concentrates

The chart below displays the most commonly reported benefits among respondents. All other benefits were selected by fewer than 100 respondents and therefore are not shown here.



### **FICA (Federal Insurance Contributions Act)**

FICA policy remains a key determinant of take-home pay. Just over half (51%) of respondents report that their congregation reimburses the employer portion of FICA, while 46% pay both the employer and employee shares themselves. An additional 3% serve outside the United States, where different tax rules apply. This policy choice materially affects net income and should be considered an important component of total compensation strategy.

## **Health Coverage**

Health insurance benefits vary in structure and generosity. For individual coverage, 43% of respondents report full employer payment, 31% report partial employer contribution, and 26% receive no employer-provided coverage. On average, employers contribute 86% toward self-coverage (with a median near 100%).

Coverage for spouses/partners and families is less consistent: 51% of respondents receive no employer contribution for dependents. Among those who do receive support, employer contributions average 78% for spouses/partners and 77% for families (medians 88% and 81%, respectively). In short, self-coverage is widely supported, while dependent coverage shows greater variability across congregations.

## **Retirement and Core Benefits**

Employer-sponsored retirement plans are prevalent, with 77% of respondents receiving an employer contribution. Professional support is also strong: 83% of employers pay professional dues, 79% offer a conference allowance, 67% provide support for voice lessons, and 65% offer professional development opportunities beyond the annual convention. Additional supports include cell phone stipends (55%) and dental coverage (40%), illustrating a well-rounded suite of benefits that extends beyond base salary.

## **Time Away**

Paid time off (PTO) and vacation policies remain important components of total rewards. Combined PTO banks average 30 days annually (median 28). Where vacation is tracked separately, respondents report an average of 13 days and a median of 10 days.

## **Sabbatical**

Roughly one-third of respondents (70 of 208) report access to a sabbatical entitlement, while two-thirds do not (138). Where offered, sabbaticals are overwhelmingly paid, typically lasting around 12 weeks, with first eligibility most commonly after 7–10 years of service. Among those who have taken a sabbatical, average time served before taking it is 10.1 years (median 8 years). Sabbaticals remain a valuable retention and renewal tool within long-term employment relationships.

## **Parental and Family Leave**

Policies supporting family and caregiving responsibilities are increasingly common. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of respondents report an entitlement to parental leave, and among those, 95% are paid. The typical duration ranges from 6 to 12 weeks (median 8). Family leave, separate from parental leave, is available to 45% of respondents, with 91% of those policies paid, and durations similarly averaging 6–12 weeks.

## **Summary Perspective**

Total rewards for cantors extend well beyond base pay. Retirement contributions and professional development supports stand out as strengths across the field. In contrast, FICA reimbursement policies and dependent medical coverage represent high-leverage levers that can meaningfully affect overall compensation value and equity across institutions.

The 2025 ACC Salary Survey highlights both the strength and evolving needs of the cantorate. Compensation trends show meaningful progress and recognition of the vital role cantors play in leading, teaching, and inspiring their communities. At the same time, the data remind us that continued attention to fairness, transparency, and sustainability is essential. By using this information to guide decisions around hiring, budgeting, and renewal, congregations can better support the dedicated professionals who enrich Jewish life every day. KEES and the ACC are grateful to all who participated and remain committed to fostering equity, understanding, and respect across the field.

# Thank You ACC!



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**We appreciate your contributions to the cantorate and the essential role you play in enriching worship, education, and community life within your congregations.**

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