

# How much could I be earning?



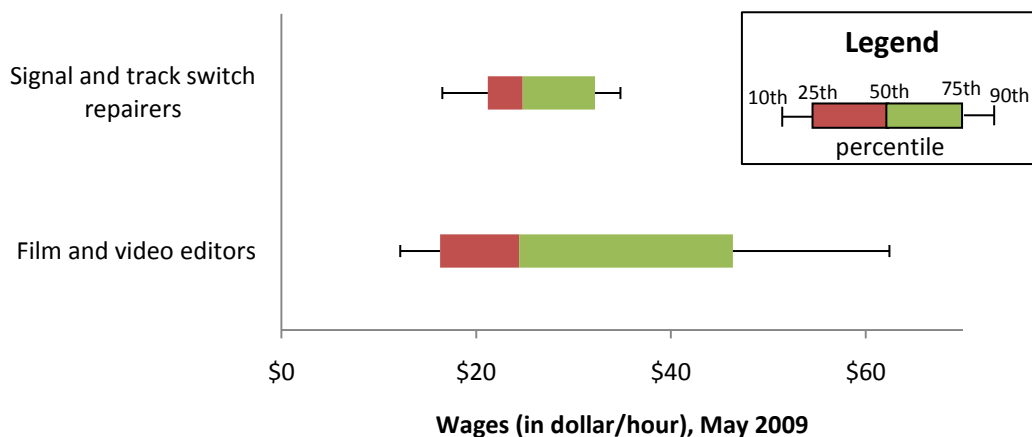
## Using Occupational Employment Statistics data during wage and salary negotiations

Understanding how wages and wage distributions vary by occupation, industry, and location is invaluable information whether you are negotiating a starting salary or requesting a raise at your current job. The Bureau of Labor Statistics produces data on annual wages and wage distributions for more than 800 occupations through its Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) program. This information could be beneficial in the salary negotiation process and is available online at <http://www.bls.gov/oes/>.

### A wage distribution as a tool

Median wages represent what the worker in the middle of a wage distribution receives, and mean wages show the average wage, but the entire distribution can show the scope of wages for workers in a particular occupation and can be used to determine a base or target wage. For example, in the chart below, switch repairers and film and video editors have similar median wages at just under \$25, but the range between the lowest 10<sup>th</sup> percentile and highest 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of workers differs significantly.

#### Percentile wages of occupations with similar median



In general, it is not easy to determine where an individual's wages should fall within a wage distribution. For example, someone entering a new field with little or no experience may expect wages near the 10<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, whereas those with more experience and education could expect wages near the 75<sup>th</sup> or 90<sup>th</sup> percentile for their area or industry.

### Industry affects wages

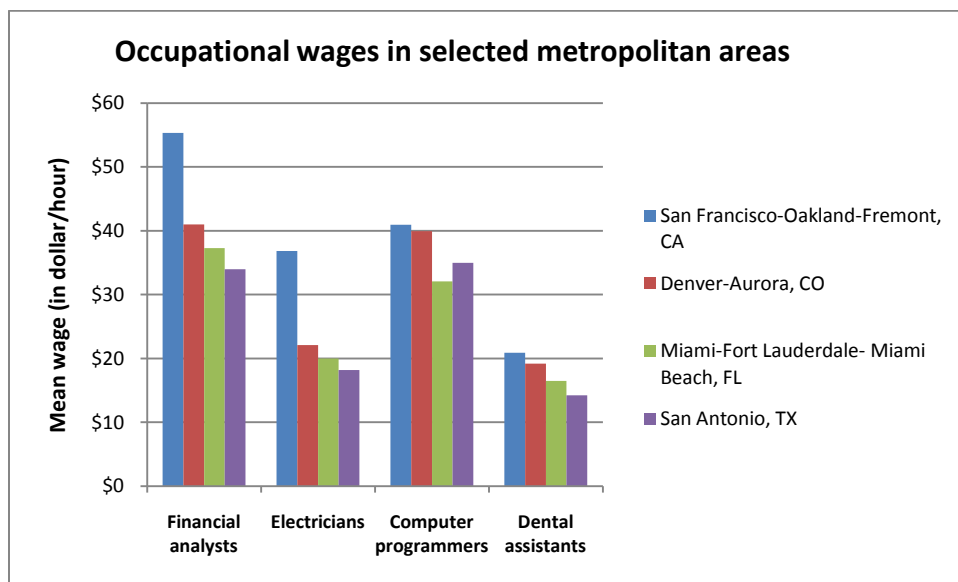
Wages for workers in the same occupations doing similar work can vary according to the industry. For example, wages for accountants and auditors differ considerably across industries with generally higher wages in securities and commodities contracts and lower wages in travel accommodations.

Researching wages by industry can be helpful in determining wages that are competitive. For example, the table below shows wages for accountants and auditors that vary from \$27,000 to \$126,000 depending on the industry.

<b>Annual wages for accountants and auditors, by industry May 2009</b>						
Industry	Mean	10th percentile	25th percentile	Median	75th percentile	90th percentile
Traveler accommodation	\$50,570	\$27,400	\$36,310	\$47,910	\$61,800	\$77,550
General medical and surgical hospitals	57,850	37,480	44,930	55,390	68,310	82,880
Accounting, tax preparation, bookkeeping, and payroll services	73,920	36,470	46,450	62,070	85,720	125,060
Securities and commodity contracts intermediation and brokerage	80,780	44,260	56,680	72,790	95,730	126,220

### Location affects wages too

The geographic location of employers affects wages as workers tend to have higher earnings in large metropolitan areas, where the high cost of living and other factors can drive wages higher for some occupations. For example, the average wages of electricians and financial analysts in San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA, are at least 25 percent higher than the wages of those in Denver-Aurora, CO, whereas average wages for dental assistants and computer programmers are much closer.



### Consider benefits

It is important to stress that not all compensation is in the form of wages and salaries. Benefits such as training opportunities, health insurance, retirement benefits, and paid timeoff are not included in an individual’s wages, but do add considerable value and should be considered along with wage compensation.

By using the wage distributions offered by the OES data, you can obtain a better understanding of how your current wage or salary requirement compares with the national average, the industry, and the geographical location in which you work.

To get started, visit: [http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_stru.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_stru.htm)