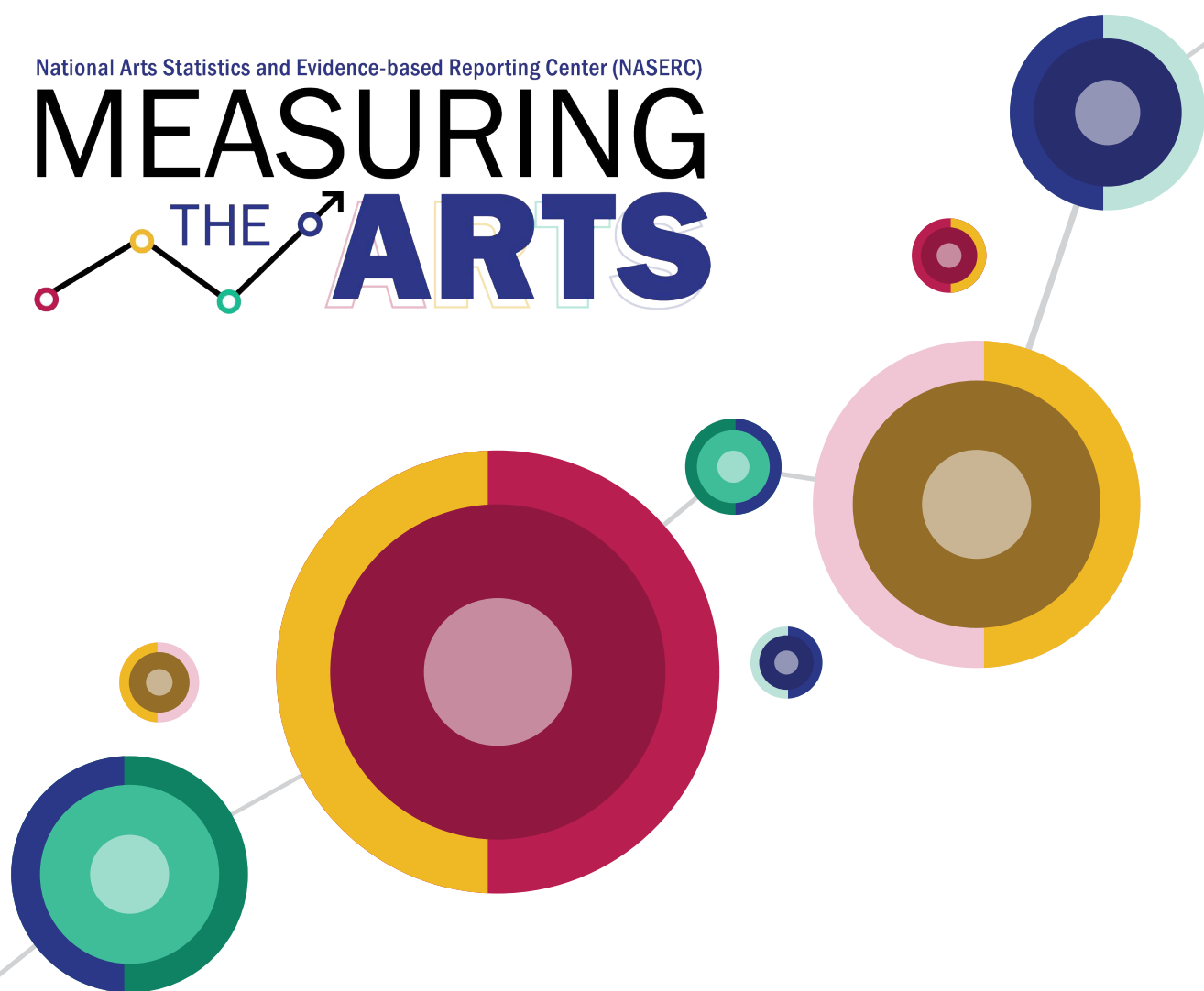


National Arts Statistics and Evidence-based Reporting Center (NASERC)

# MEASURING THE ARTS



Domain A

**Artists and Other Cultural Workers**



## Indicator A.7: **What Are the Earnings for Artists and Other Cultural Workers?**

## Key Findings

- Individuals reporting primary employment as an artist or other cultural worker were less likely to be working full time than are workers in general.
- Median annual earnings of artists employed full time increased from \$66,910 in 2015 to \$70,170 in 2023.
- At every level of college education, full-time employed artists earned more than non-artist cultural workers. However, while artists with some college or an associate's degree earned more than all workers with similar education, those with a bachelor's degree or higher earned less than the general workforce.
- Median annual earnings of employed artists in 2023 varied by occupation. Earnings for full-time employed artists ranged from \$39,230 for dancers to \$99,630 for architects.
- In 2023, median annual earnings for non-artist cultural workers employed full time ranged from \$35,200 for ushers and lobby attendants to \$81,070 for photographic process workers.

## Introduction

Indicator A.7 examines median annual earnings of employed artists and other (non-artist) cultural workers in the U.S. labor force compared to all employed workers. Artists and other cultural workers are categorized by full-time or part-time status and occupation.<sup>1,2,3</sup> This indicator captures earnings regardless of class of worker (private or wage-salary, government, or self-employed). In this and other indicators in the series, artists and other cultural workers are defined by their self-reported primary occupation.<sup>4</sup>

Indicator A.7 also tracks trends in the median earnings for full-time employed artists and other cultural workers. Additionally, the indicator reports the median annual household income of employed artists and other cultural workers compared to all employed workers. Future editions will explore household income trends for artists and other cultural workers. For more information on the definitions of earnings

and household income, see *Definitions of median earnings and household income*. **Indicator A.8: What Are the Labor Market Outcomes for Young Artists and Other Cultural Workers?** focuses on the labor market outcomes for young artists and other cultural workers aged 18–29 using similar measures. Detailed labor force status and employment characteristics of artists and other cultural workers are described in **Indicator A.5: What is the Labor Market Status of Artists and Other Cultural Workers?**

### Median annual earnings of artists and other cultural workers employed full time

Artists who were employed full time had higher median annual earnings than full-time employed non-artist cultural workers and full-time employed workers in general.<sup>5</sup> In 2023, full-time employed artists typically earned \$70,170, which was 25 percent higher than other (non-artist) cultural workers

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the definitions of artists and other cultural workers see **Indicator A.1: Who Are the Artists?** and **Indicator A.2: Who Are the Other Cultural Workers?**

<sup>2</sup> The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has developed a list of 11 specific artist occupations: architects (including landscape architects); fine artists, art directors, and animators; designers; actors; producers and directors; dancers and choreographers; musicians (including music directors and composers); entertainers; announcers; writers and authors; and photographers. These occupations have been used in this indicator, though some categories have been combined for reporting purposes. For more information, see the 2019 NEA publication *Artists and Other Cultural Workers: A Statistical Portrait*.

<sup>3</sup> Other cultural workers, also called non-artist cultural workers or simply cultural workers, are individuals whose primary occupation supports the arts but does not include artist-related occupations. Indicator A.7 uses 15 occupations that are included in the American Community Survey (ACS) to capture non-artist cultural workers: archivists, curators, and museum technicians; broadcast, sound, and lighting technicians; editors; etchers and engravers; jewelers and precious stone and metal workers; librarians; library technicians; models, demonstrators, and product promoters; motion picture projectionists; photographic process workers and processing machine operators; print binders and finishing workers; printing press operators; television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors; tour and travel guides; and ushers, lobby attendants, and ticket takers. These occupations are mostly consistent with those listed in the 2019 NEA publication *Artists and Other Cultural Workers: A Statistical Portrait*. Some cultural occupations have been combined in this indicator for reporting purposes. Estimates of non-artist cultural workers include all workers employed in these occupations, regardless of whether they are employed within an arts-related industry. However, the definition does not capture non-artists who work in arts and cultural industries.

<sup>4</sup> “Primary occupation” refers to the kind of work a person does for pay most of the time. The ACS—the data source for this indicator—asks only about the occupation corresponding to a respondent’s current or most recent job or, if they have two or more jobs, the job with the most usual hours worked. For more information, see [https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/tech\\_docs/subject\\_definitions/2023\\_ACSSubjectDefinitions.pdf](https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/tech_docs/subject_definitions/2023_ACSSubjectDefinitions.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> “Full time” is defined as working 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year.

(\$56,040) and 15 percent higher than all full-time employed workers (\$61,170; **Figure A7-1**).<sup>6</sup> The higher earnings of full-time employed artists may reflect their higher likelihood of having attained a bachelor's degree or higher compared to the total labor force (see **Indicator A.1: Who Are the Artists?** for more information on the educational attainment of artists compared to the total labor force).

Earnings for full-time employed artists have seen modest growth over the years, while non-artist cultural workers have experienced more variability. Between 2015 and 2023, the median annual earnings of full-time employed artists increased overall by 5 percent (from \$66,910 to \$70,170), while the median earnings for all full-time employed workers increased by 8 percent (from \$56,860 to \$61,170).<sup>7</sup> While there was no measurable change in the median earnings of full-time employed non-artist cultural workers during this period, their earnings overall increased 10 percent between 2015 and 2019, the last pre-pandemic year (from \$54,370 to \$59,760), and then declined 6 percent between 2019 and 2023 (from \$59,760 to \$56,040).

Artists employed part time<sup>8</sup> tended to earn more than part-time employed non-artist cultural workers, but their earnings were comparable to part-time employed workers in general. In 2023, artists employed part time typically earned 37 percent more than other (non-artist) cultural workers employed part time (\$20,380 and \$14,830, respectively). Part-time workers in general typically earned 30 percent more than non-artist cultural workers employed part time (\$19,330 and \$14,830, respectively). There were no measurable differences in earnings between part-time employed artists and all part-time workers in general. It is important to note that part-time workers often experience greater fluctuations in their earnings compared to full-time workers due to factors such as occupational differences and variable work schedules, which lead to fluctuations in weekly and monthly earnings. Given these factors, trends in part-time earnings data should be interpreted with caution due to the inherent variability and fluctuations in part-time work.

#### Definitions of median earnings and household income



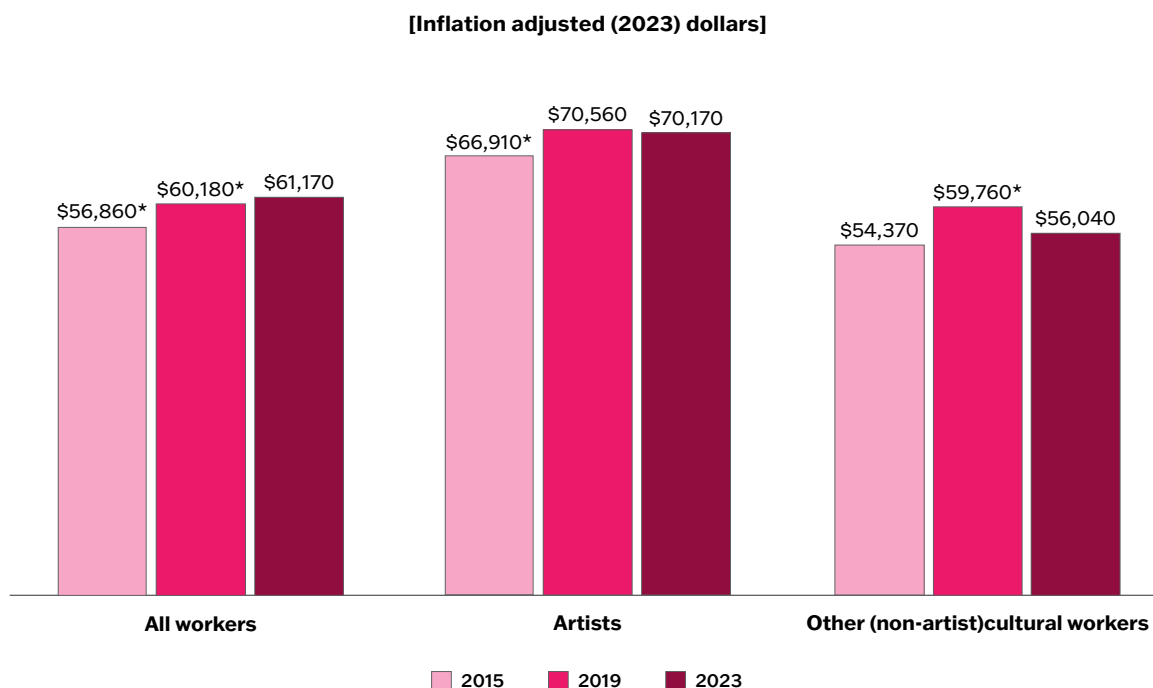
Earnings, as defined in the American Community Survey (ACS), include wage-salary income and net income from self-employment before deductions (e.g., personal income taxes, Social Security, Medicare). An individual with earnings has either wage/salary income, self-employment income, or both. This indicator uses median earnings from the past 12 months from all jobs to compare artists and other cultural workers aged 18 and over with all workers aged 18 and over. Median earnings split the income distribution into two equal groups, half with earnings above that amount and half with earnings below that amount. Unlike mean earnings, median earnings either do not change or change very little in response to extreme observations. Household income includes the income of the householder and all other individuals aged 15 and over in the household, regardless of their relationship to the householder. For more information, see the [ACS Technical Documentation](#).

<sup>6</sup> Differences between estimates (including trends over time) are stated only when they are statistically significant based on a 95 percent level of confidence. For more information, see [The Arts in the United States: Developing Key National Indicators of Arts Activity](#) technical report.

<sup>7</sup> All dollar amounts in this indicator are in inflation-adjusted (constant) 2023 dollars.

<sup>8</sup> "Part time" is defined as working less than 35 hours per week and/or less than 50 weeks in the year.

**Figure A7-1. Median annual earnings for all workers, artists, and other (non-artist) cultural workers employed full time: 2015, 2019, and 2023**



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2023.

NOTE: "Full time" is defined as working 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015, 2019, and 2023.

## Median annual earnings of artists and other cultural workers, by education level

Full-time employed artists with less than a high school education earned more than similarly educated full-time employed workers in general. In 2023, the median annual earnings of artists employed full time with less than a high school education was \$46,030 compared to \$38,720 for all full-time employed workers with a similar education (**Figure A7-2**). There were no other measurable differences in earnings among artists, other (non-artist) cultural workers, and all workers who were employed full time with a high school education or less.

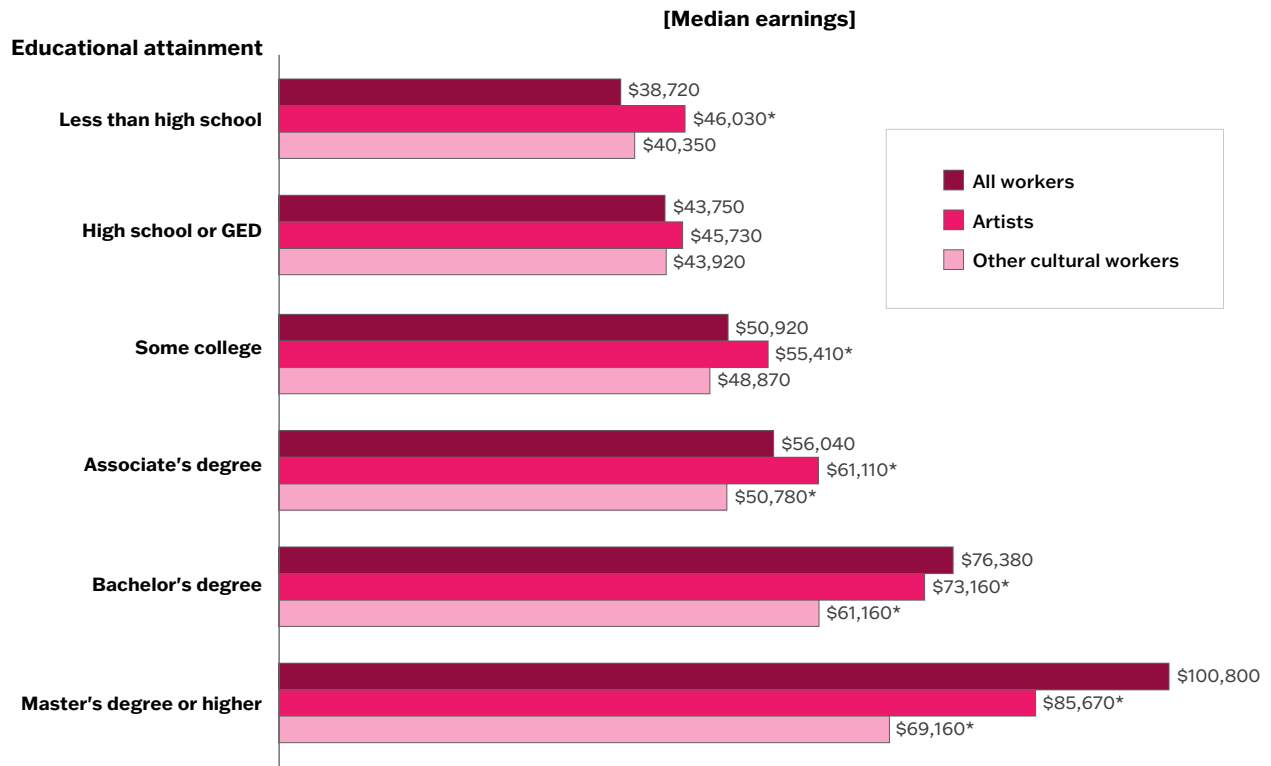
At every level of college education, full-time employed artists earned more than full-time employed non-artist cultural workers. For example, full-time employed artists with some college<sup>9</sup> education earned \$55,410 in 2023 compared to \$48,870 for full-time employed non-artist cultural workers with a similar

education. Among those with master's degrees or higher, full-time employed artists earned 24 percent more than full-time employed non-artist cultural workers (\$85,670 compared to \$69,160).

While full-time employed artists with some college education or an associate's degree earned more than all full-time employed workers with similar education, those with a bachelor's degree or higher earned less than the general full-time employed workforce with similar education levels. In 2023, full-time employed artists with some college education earned \$55,410, while all full-time employed workers with some college education earned \$50,920. Similarly, full-time employed artists with an associate's degree (\$61,110) earned more than all full-time employed workers (\$56,040) with an associate's degree. Conversely, full-time employed artists with a bachelor's degree earned \$73,160 in 2023, while all full-time employed workers earned \$76,380. Artists employed full time with a master's degree or higher (\$85,670) also earned less than all full-time employed workers with similar degrees (\$100,800).

<sup>9</sup> "Some college" includes individuals who attended college but did not receive a degree.

**Figure A7-2. Median annual earnings for all workers, artists, and other (non-artist) cultural workers employed full time, by educational attainment: 2023**



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from all workers.

NOTE: "Full time" is defined as working 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year. "Some college" includes individuals who attended college but did not receive a degree.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2023.

Artists employed part time with a high school degree, some college education, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree earned more than non-artist cultural workers employed part time with similar educational levels. Non-artist cultural workers employed part time earned less than all similarly educated part-time employed workers in general

at all educational levels. Substantial differences were also seen at the master's degree-or-higher level, where both part-time employed artists (\$28,400) and non-artist cultural workers (\$25,330) earned less than all part-time employed workers with similar degrees (\$40,770; **Figure A7-3**).

**Figure A7-3. Median annual earnings for all workers, artists, and other (non-artist) cultural workers employed part time, by educational attainment: 2023**



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from all workers.

NOTE: "Part time" is defined as working less than 35 hours per week and/or less than 50 weeks in the year. "Some college" includes individuals who attended college but did not receive a degree.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2023.

## Median annual earnings of employed artists, by occupation

Median annual earnings of employed artists varied by occupation.<sup>10</sup> In 2023, earnings for full-time employed artists ranged from \$39,230 for dancers to \$99,360 for architects (**Figure A7-4**). For part-time employed artists, earnings ranged from \$16,160 for fine artists to \$50,690 for producers.

Among artists employed full time, architects (\$99,360) and producers (\$77,250) earned more than the median for all artists (\$70,170). Conversely, designers (\$66,100), announcers (\$59,120), fine

artists (\$54,990), musicians (\$53,910), photographers (\$50,910), and entertainers (\$50,420) earned less than the median for all artists.

Among artists employed part time, architects (\$42,330) and producers (\$50,690) again had higher earnings than the median for all artists (\$20,380). Musicians (\$16,200) earned less than the median for all artists. For all other artist occupations, earnings were not measurably different from the medians for all artists employed full time or part time.

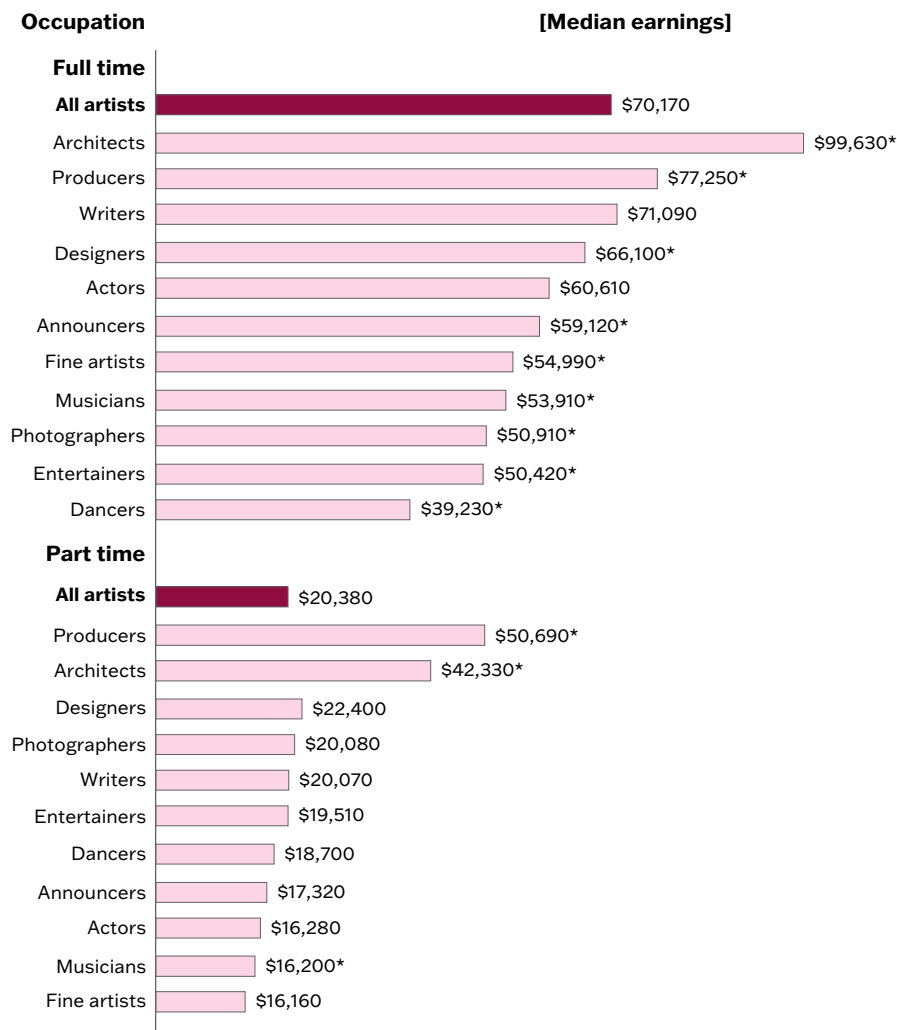
Between 2015 and 2019, no individual artist occupation saw measurable increases in earnings for full-time employed workers, but fine artists experienced a decrease from \$63,650 to \$58,050.

<sup>10</sup> "Architects" include architects and landscape architects. "Dancers" include dancers and choreographers. "Fine artists" include fine artists, art directors, and animators. "Musicians" include music directors, composers, and musicians. "Producers" include producers and directors. "Writers" include writers and authors.

The same overall pattern was observed between 2015 and 2023. There were no measurable differences in median earnings for artists employed full time between 2019 and 2023 overall or by artist occupation

except for actors, whose earnings increased from \$45,380 to \$60,610. Compared to 2022, the earnings for three artist occupations decreased in 2023: dancers, producers, and architects.

**Figure A7-4. Median annual earnings of employed artists, by occupation and employment status: 2023**



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from all artists.

NOTE: "Full time" is defined as working 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year. "Part time" is defined as working less than 35 hours per week and/or less than 50 weeks in the year. "Architects" include architects and landscape architects. "Dancers" include dancers and choreographers. "Fine artists" include fine artists, art directors, and animators. "Musicians" include music directors, composers, and musicians. "Producers" include producers and directors. "Writers" include writers and authors. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2023.



## Median annual earnings of employed non-artist cultural workers, by occupation

As with artists, median annual earnings of employed non-artist cultural workers in 2023 varied by occupation. Earnings for full-time employed non-artist cultural workers ranged from \$35,200 for ushers and lobby attendants to \$81,070 for photographic process workers (**Figure A7-5**). For part-time employed non-artist cultural workers, earnings ranged from \$6,400 for ushers and lobby attendants to \$26,000 for TV and video camera operators and editors.<sup>11</sup>

Among non-artist cultural workers employed full time, photographic process workers (\$81,070), editors (\$68,990), and TV and video camera operators and editors (\$65,700) earned more than the median for all non-artist cultural workers (\$56,040). Conversely, etchers and engravers (\$46,040), printing press operators (\$45,160), jewelers (\$42,190), print binders (\$40,480), tour and travel guides (\$37,660), and ushers and lobby attendants (\$35,200) earned less than the median for all non-artist cultural workers.

Among non-artist cultural workers employed part time, TV and video camera operators and editors (\$26,000); photographic process workers (\$25,770); broadcast, sound, and lighting technicians (\$24,850); and editors (\$19,060) earned more than the median for all non-artist cultural workers (\$14,830). Models and demonstrators (\$11,140), tour and travel guides (\$8,620), and ushers and lobby attendants (\$6,400) earned less than the median for all non-artist cultural workers. For all other cultural occupations, earnings were not measurably different from the medians all non-artist cultural workers employed full time or part time.

Between 2015 and 2019, four cultural occupations saw increases in median annual earnings for full-time workers: archivists and curators; photographic process workers; printing press operators; and TV and video camera operators and editors. No other cultural occupations saw decreases in earnings during this period. Photographic process workers

were the only cultural occupation whose earnings increased between 2019 to 2023 (from \$63,330 to \$81,070). During this period, earnings for archivists and curators, librarians, and printing press operators decreased. Between 2015 and 2023, earnings increased for photographic process workers and TV and video camera operators and editors, while earnings for librarians decreased. Compared to 2022, there were no measurable differences in the earnings of non-artist cultural workers employed full time for any cultural occupation in 2023.

## Median annual household income of artists and other cultural workers

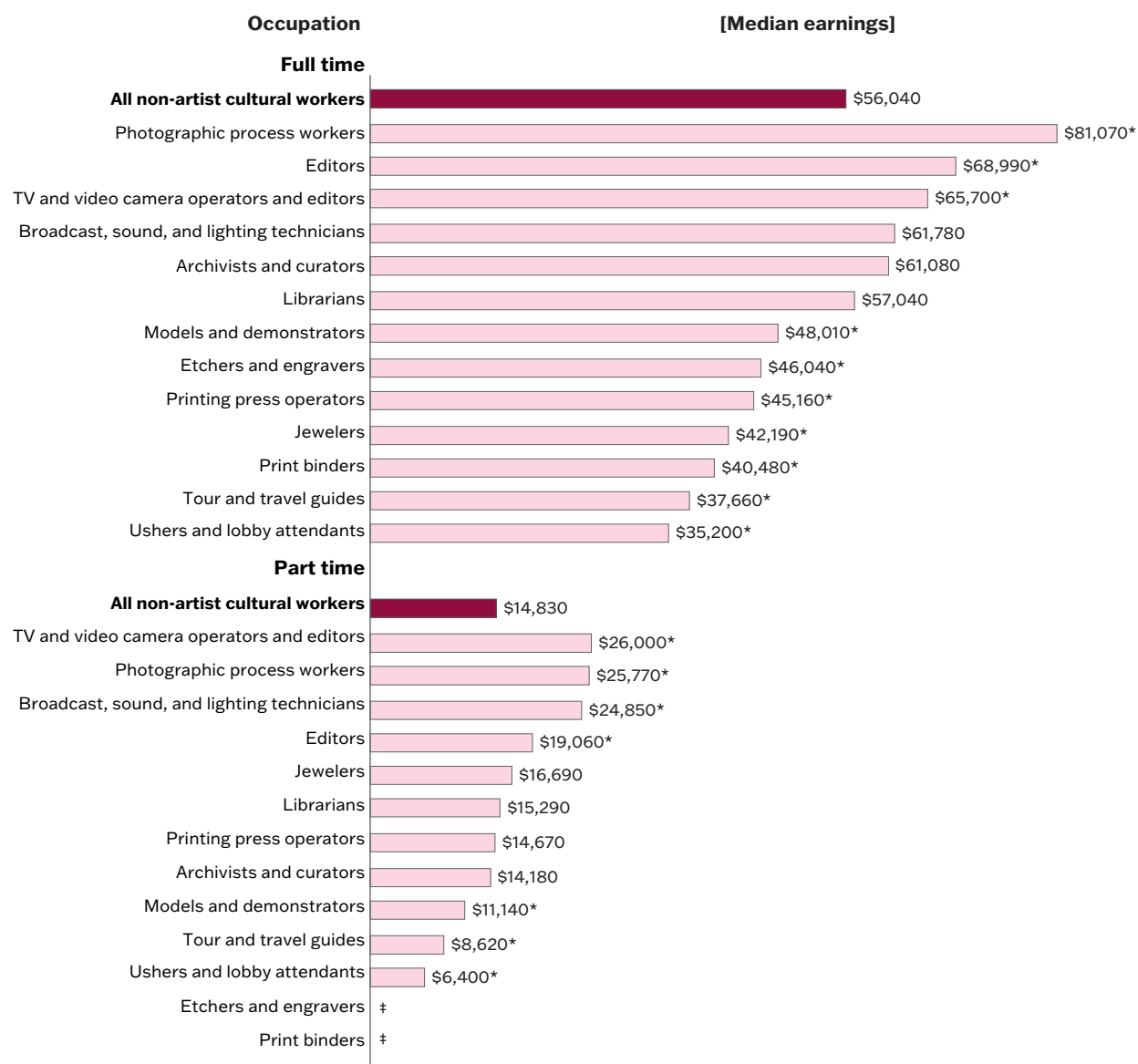
The median annual household incomes of artists and other (non-artist) cultural workers were also examined. Household income includes the income of the householder and all other individuals aged 15 and over, regardless of their relationship with the householder.

In 2023, the median household income for artists was \$122,550, or 15 percent greater than that of non-artist cultural workers (\$107,020) and 9 percent greater than for all workers (\$111,940; see **Table A7-1**). Considering workers by educational attainment, the median household income of all workers with a master's degree or higher (\$168,220) was 12 percent greater than for artists with similar degrees (\$150,610) and 34 percent greater than for non-artist cultural workers with similar degrees (\$125,270; **Figure A7-6**).

<sup>11</sup> “Archivists and curators” include archivists, curators, and museum technicians. “Jewelers” include jewelers and precious stone and metal workers. “Librarians” include librarians and library technicians. “Models and demonstrators” include models, demonstrators, and product promoters. “Photographic process workers” include photographic process workers and processing machine operators. “Print binders” include print binders and finishing workers. “TV and video camera operators and editors” include television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors. “Ushers and lobby attendants” include ushers, lobby attendants, and ticket takers.



**Figure A7-5. Median annual earnings of employed non-artist cultural workers, by occupation and employment status: 2023**



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from all artists.

‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the CV is 50 percent or greater.

NOTE: "Full time" is defined as working 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year. "Part time" is defined as working less than 35 hours per week and/or less than 50 weeks in the year. Archivists and curators" include archivists, curators, and museum technicians. "Jewelers" include jewelers and precious stone and metal workers. "Librarians" include librarians and library technicians. "Models and demonstrators" include models, demonstrators, and product promoters. "Photographic process workers" include photographic process workers and processing machine operators. "Print binders" include print binders and finishing workers. "TV and video camera operators and editors" include television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors. "Ushers and lobby attendants" include ushers, lobby attendants, and ticket takers.

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