



2023 Comics Worker Survey

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Foreword

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The Cartoonist Cooperative ran its first **Comics Worker Survey** in June 2023 and received more than 100 USian respondents working in mainstream publishing and self publishing. Participation was open to anyone making income in any capacity from comics. Why are income and rate transparency important? It decreases the range of inequities in pay and sets expectations for workers and employers. The Cartoonist Cooperative intends to gather extensive data annually through these surveys to provide insight into the economic realities of comics workers today. We hope this data also serves as a rallying cry to motivate those working in the industry to collectively demand livable and sustainable pay.

Disclaimer: As an organization, The Cartoonist Cooperative neither sets rates nor advises members on what rates or rate structures they should choose. Individual members' rates vary significantly depending on the nature of the work, the time frame of the assignment, the degree of special expertise required, the member's experience, and other variables.



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100+
Respondents

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Background

Methodology

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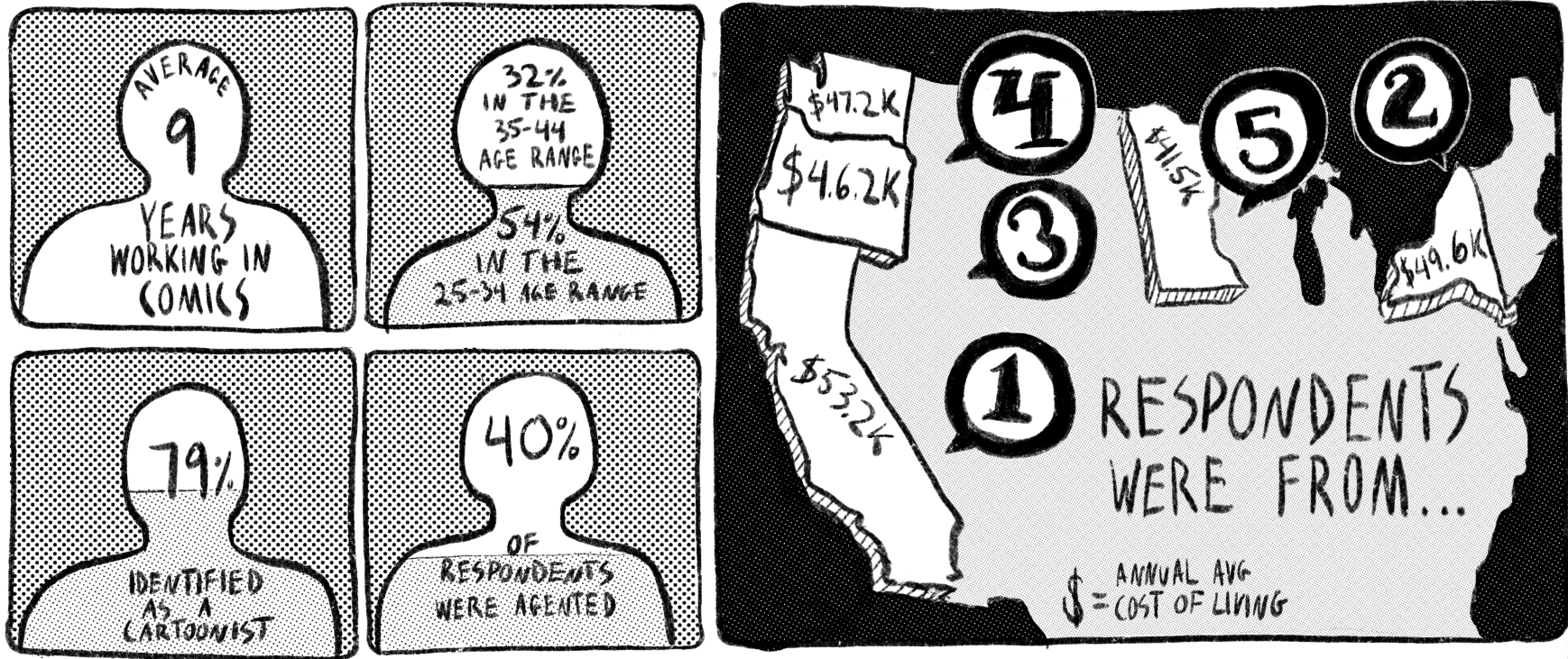
To collect info about the working conditions of cartoon workers who had income from comics in 2022, the Cartoonist Co-op administered an online survey from June 14, 2023 until the end of July 2023. This survey asked questions about pay rates, royalties, and time spent on different tasks among other questions (Appendix I). The survey had 100 respondents. However, some respondents' or some of their answers were excluded from analysis. Responses about hours worked were capped at 60 . If respondents answered greater than 60 their response was excluded for that question. As well, any responses for monthly income that would allow them to live comfortably over \$10k were assumed to be annual numbers and divided by 12 to get a monthly value so they could be included with the other responses.

To estimate average values for numeric questions, mean values were calculated using survey responses. To summarize questions with categorical responses, proportions of response with that answer were calculated.

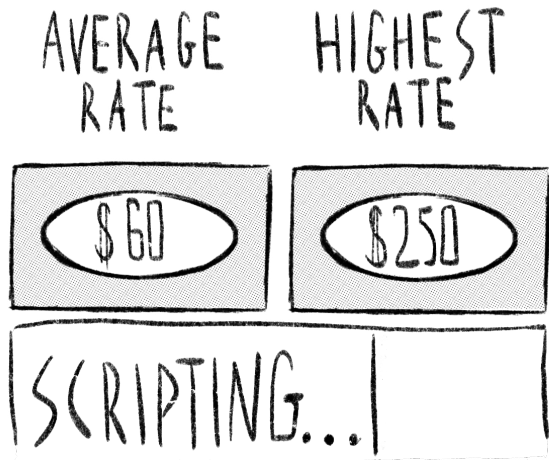
Sample and margins of error: To estimate uncertainty in summary values, margin of error (MOE) or maximum percent MOE were calculated at the 95% confidence level (for numerical and categorical questions respectively). For any given question at a given sample size, 95% of the time you repeat the survey with the same number of respondents the estimated value (mean or proportion) would fall within the range created by adding or subtracting the MOE. A smaller sample size (i.e. less respondents for a question) means a larger MOE. The sample size will be smaller for questions which were not asked of all respondents or not all respondents answered, and for analyses of subsets of respondents. Where this is the case, the margin of error will also be larger.

Findings

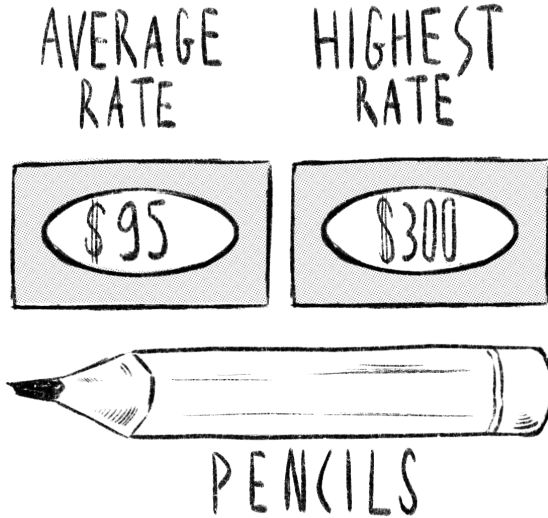
Respondent Demographics



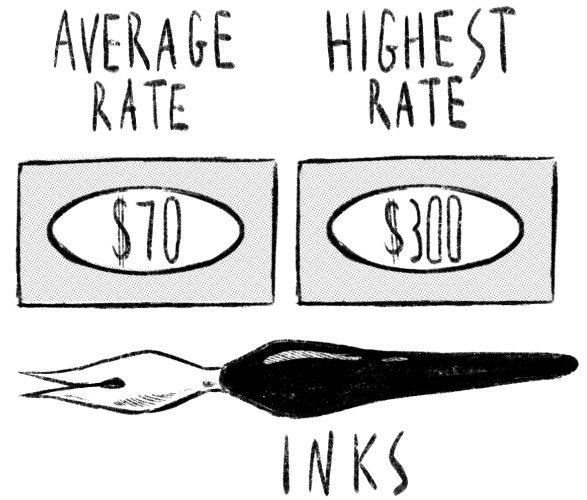
Page Rates



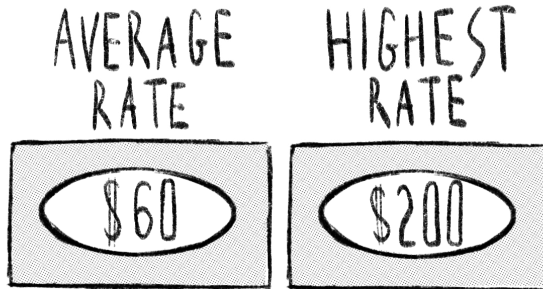
The average scripting rate per page of comics was \$60 with the highest rate recorded being \$250.



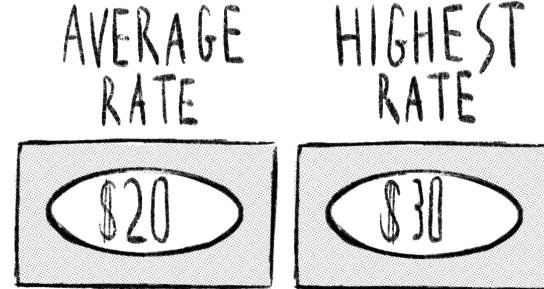
The average rate per page of pencils was \$95 with the highest rate recorded being \$300.



The average rate per page of inks was \$70 with the highest rate recorded being \$300.

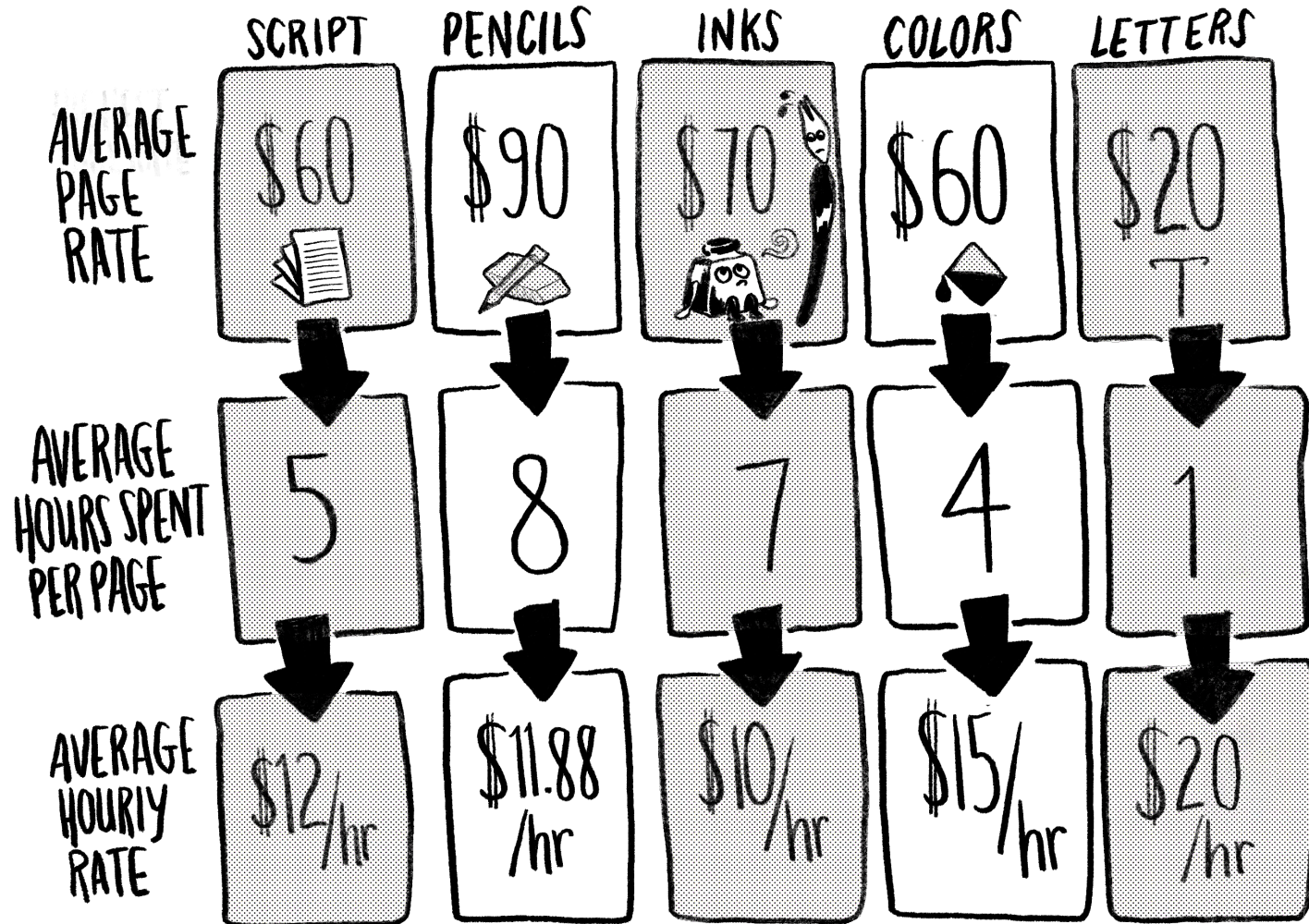


The average rate per page of colors was \$60 with the highest rate recorded being \$200.



The average rate per page of letters was \$20 with the highest rate recorded being \$30.

Page Rates

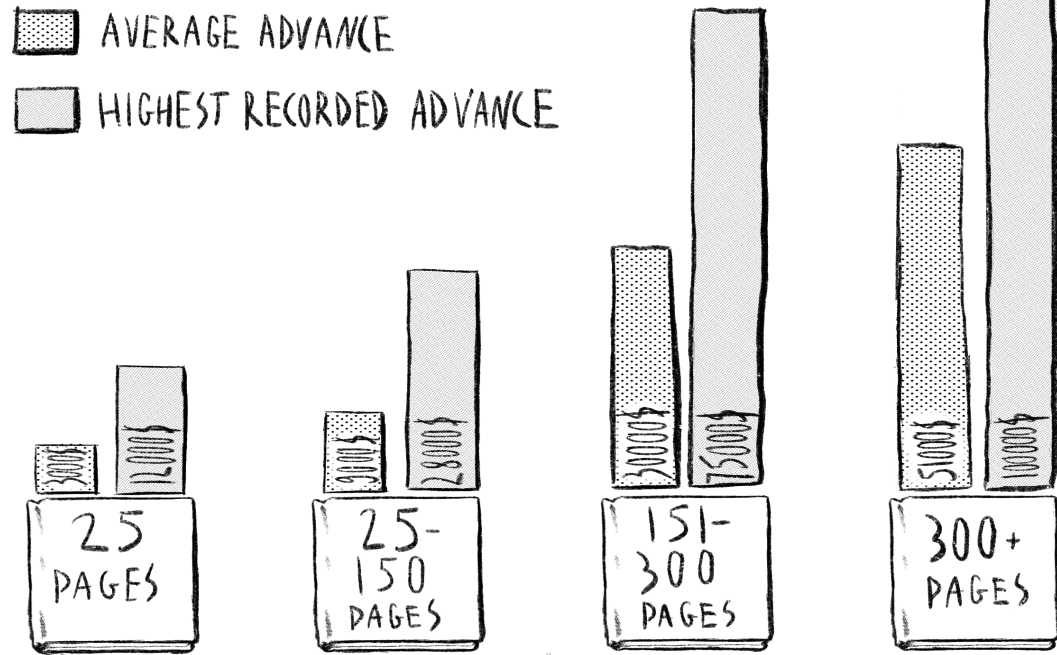


*Wages were rounded up to the nearest cent when necessary.

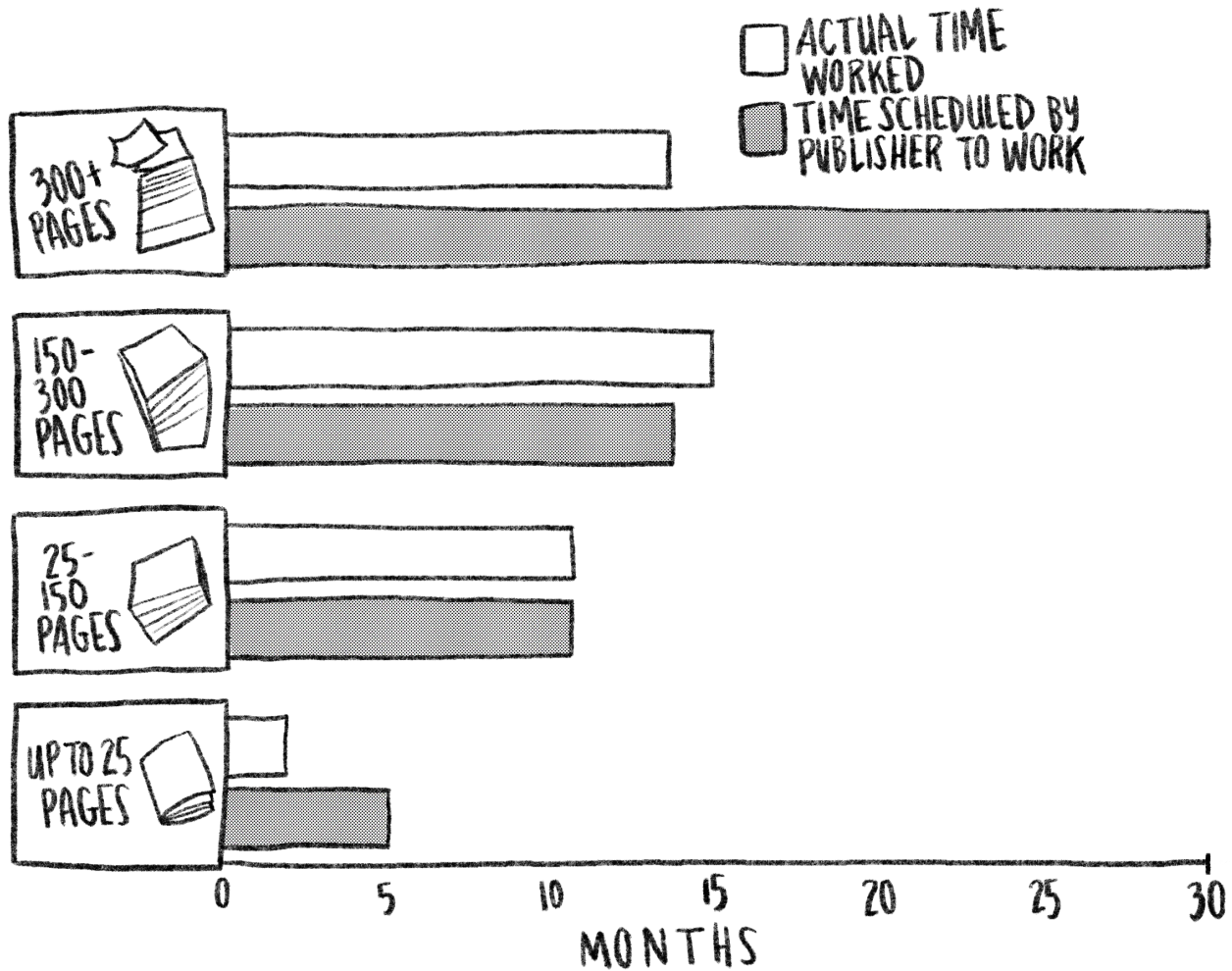
FINDINGS

Advances

When a publisher acquires a book from an author or creative team, they are typically offered an advance against the book's royalty earnings to support the creator's work, commonly referred to as just an **advance**. These advance payments are often cut into installments based on certain milestones, with the initial advance commonly referred to as a signing advance and the final payment being the delivery advance.

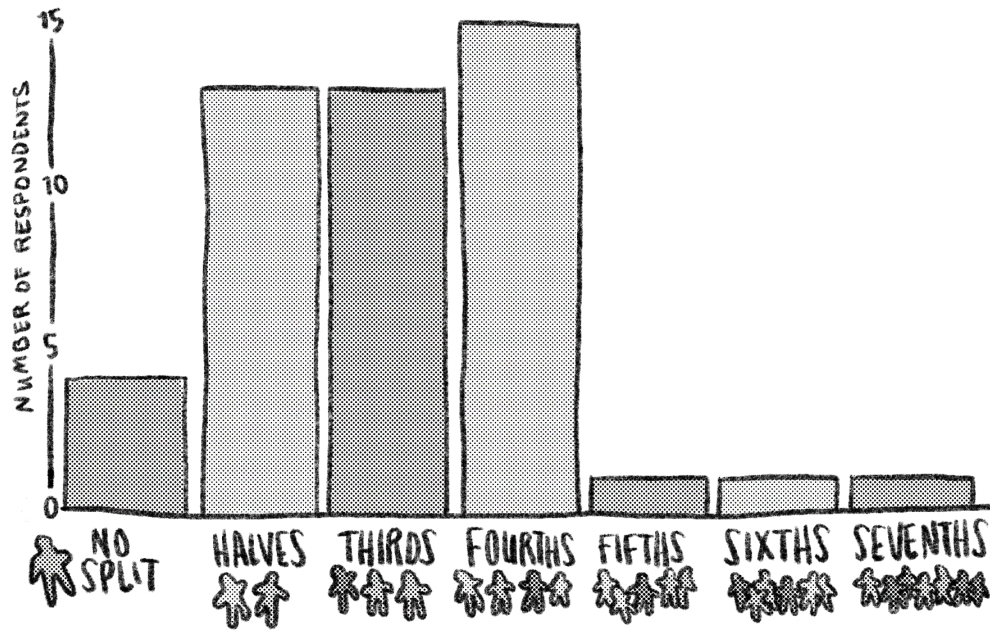


Advances

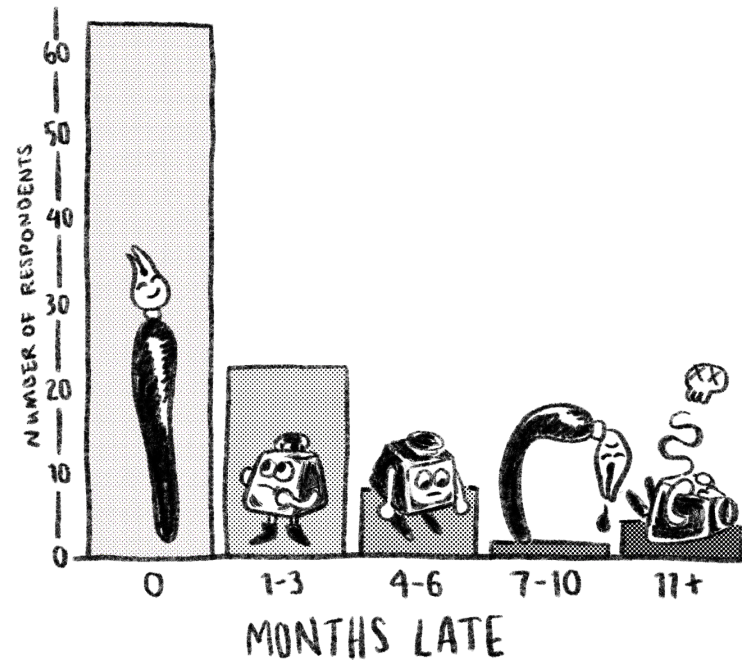


Advances

ADVANCE PAYMENT SPLIT

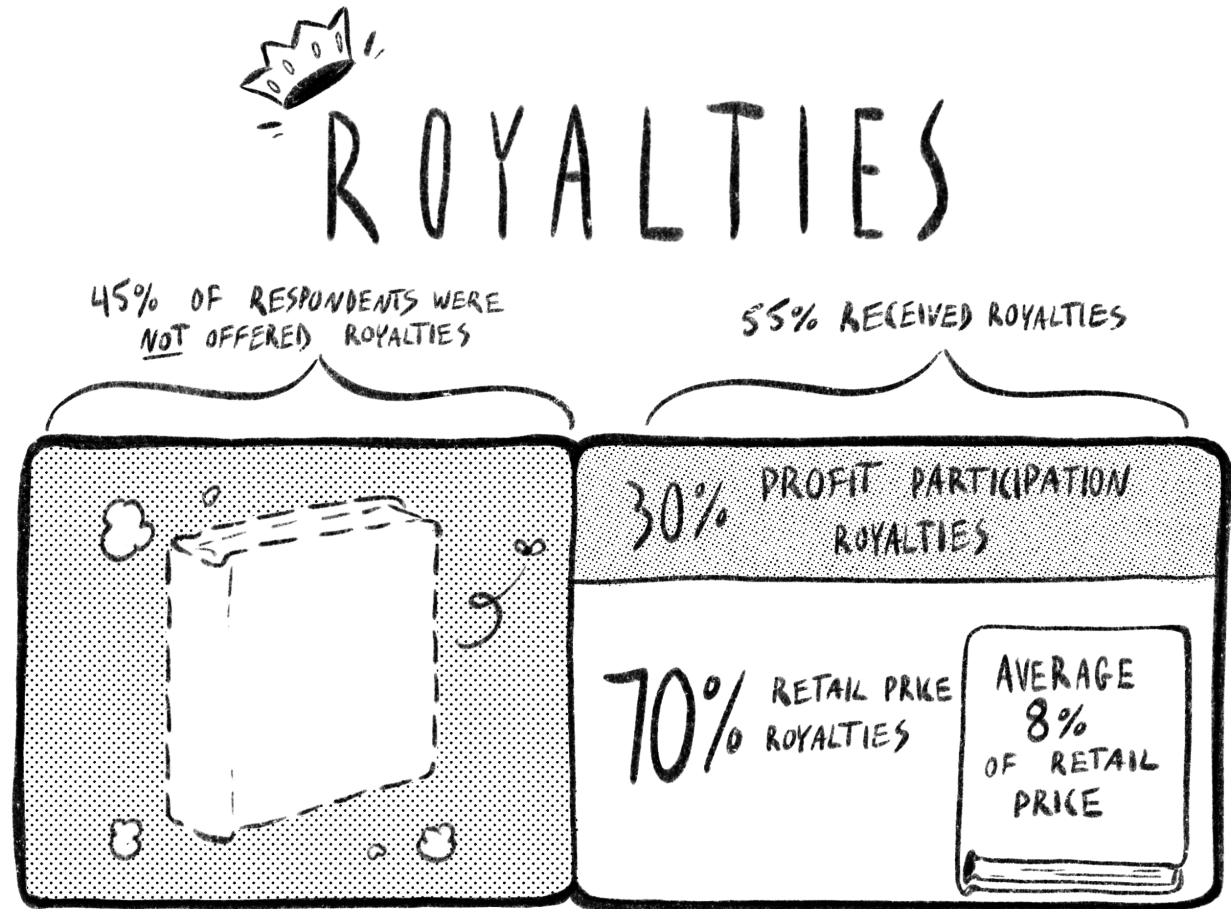


PAYMENT TARDINESS



Royalties

A royalty is an amount of money the publisher pays to an author from the sale of each book. A **retail price royalty** refers to the percentage the author gets for every copy sold, based on the book's retail price. A **profit participation royalty** (sometimes called backend) is when an author is paid a percentage of the book's net profits.



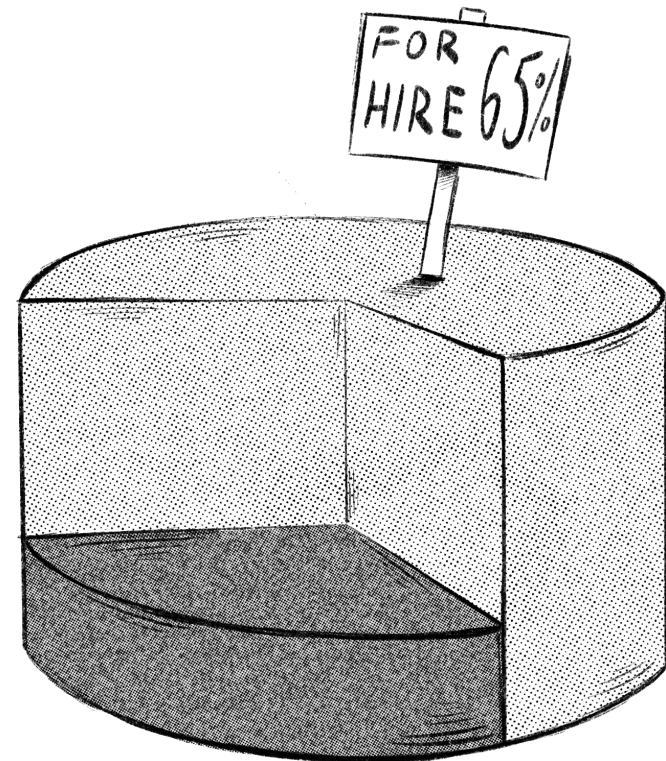
FINDINGS

Royalties

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According to Cornell Law School: “A work for hire, or work made for hire, refers to works whose ownership belongs to a third party rather than the creator. Under general copyright principals, a copyright becomes the property of the author who created the work. However, work for hire is an exception to this principle, and can be established through contract before a particular work is created.”

This high percentage means a majority of respondents do not see any further income for their work from royalties, licensing, merchandising or derivative works.



Conclusions

Key Findings

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From our survey data, we see that the USian comics worker made an **average of \$21,000** through their comics work with a median of **\$10,000 overall**. Comics work income includes advances, royalties, and fees from licensing and subsidiary rights. Across the United States, the average minimum income necessary for a single comics worker to cover their living expenses and stay above the poverty line, without outside assistance from friends, family, or the government is **\$60,000**. This means the majority of comics workers cannot survive on comics work alone nor are they making above federal minimum wage of just \$7.25/hour from their comics work.



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Key Findings

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To illustrate the average cartoonist's work year, let's take the data from those working on 150-300 page comics. Average advances for comics that length are \$30000 but are separated into quarters, usually ¼ on signing, a ¼ at the completed pencils stage, a ¼ at the completed inks stage and finally ¼ either upon completion or at publication. This means for the first year working on a longform comic, **the cartoonist will only see \$15000 of their advance and may take up to a year or two more to see the rest of the advance.** To put this in context, the 2023 federal poverty level (FPL) in the US was \$14,580. It's clear to see that the overwhelming majority of cartoonists need to be working on multiple projects or have other jobs to support their comic work.



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need to be working on multiple projects or have other jobs to support their comic work.

Closing Notes

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At the time this is being written, industries across the United States and the world over are seeing more momentum on strikes and labor stoppages, with almost 400 strikes in the US alone and more work stoppages involving over 1000 people than we've seen in over a decade. And unionizing workers are seeing better wages across the board from their contracts, proving that collective action is working in improving people's lives under oppressive working conditions.

Comic workers are no exception here. We need more collective action to demand better pay by any means necessary, which we continue to rally for under the banner of the Cartoonist Cooperative. **Making comics as a career is not sustainable with our current rates, but we can make our living wages a reality together.**



Appendix

Survey Copy

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Introduction

NOTE: Questions without bulleted points were custom text fields.

- This is for US comics workers only.
- Please answer relevant fields with your earnings from 2022 only.
- Please put your self-published and crowdfunded comics income as well!
- Leave BLANK if field is non-applicable, do not put 0.

Introductory Questions

Q1. Name

Q2. Age

Q3. E-mail

Q4. State

Q5. Roles

- Cartoonist (you do it all)
- Inker
- Penciller
- Writer
- Letterer
- Colorist

Survey Copy

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Q6. As of 2022, how many years have you worked in comics?

Q7. How much income did you earn off comics roles in 2022?

Q8. What monthly income lets you live comfortably without outside assistance from friends, family, or the government? Monthly income, NOT annual income!

Q9. In 2022, how many hours per calendar week do you do comics work?

Page Rates

If you were paid one time for multiple stages of the comic (eg. you did pencils, inks, and color), take your rate and divide it among the stages.

Q10. Highest rate paid per page for script in 2022?

Q11. Highest rate paid per page for pencils in 2022?

Q12. Highest rate paid per page for inking in 2022?

Q13. Highest rate paid per page for coloring in 2022?

Q14. Highest rate paid per page for lettering in 2022?

Advances

Q15. Advance per comic up to 25 pages in 2022.

This is the total advance you signed for, even if its not fully paid out.

Q16. Advance per comic up to 26-150 pages in 2022.

This is the total advance you signed for, even if its not fully paid out.

Survey Copy

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Q17. Advance per comic up to 150-300 pages in 2022.

This is the total advance you signed for, even if its not fully paid out.

Q18. Advance per comic up to 300+ pages in 2022.

This is the total advance you signed for, even if its not fully paid out.

Contracts

Q19. Were you offered royalty on any of your comic work in 2022?

- Yes
- No

Q20. Percentage of your comic work that is Work-For-Hire in 2022.

Work made for hire means the employer or the commissioning party are considered the authors of the work, not the comics worker. Example - Spider-Man, My Little Pony, Godzilla, etc.

Q21. If you were paid an advance for a book (not a page-rate) how many payouts was the total amount split up into?

How was your advance broken down? eg. on signing, upon deliverable of script, pencils, inks, colors, etc.

- One payment
- Two payments
- Three payments
- Four payments
- Five payments
- Six payments
- Seven payments

Survey Copy

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Q22. Longest past-due payment as of 2022?

- None
- 1-3 months
- 4-6 months
- 7-9 months
- 10-12 months
- 13+ months

Q23. Do you have an agent?

- Yes
- No

Q24. Additional Comments

Contacts

For additional information please visit us at cartoonist.coop
or email us at hello@cartoonist.coop!

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