Press release
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ACEVO Pay & Equalities 2026 survey highlights continued pressures facing charity leaders

The 2026 ACEVO Pay and Equalities Survey, based on responses from **629 charity CEOs** across the UK, found that the **median annual basic salary has risen from £59,850 last year to £66,000 this year**. However, this figure needs to be understood in context. The survey received a larger proportion of responses from medium-sized charities this year, as well as more respondents aged 45-64 and therefore in mid to advanced career stage and from London and the South East, where salaries are generally higher than in other areas of the UK. **For the first time, the salary data has been weighted by organisational income to make comparisons with previous years more reliable.** While the increase is above inflation over the last 12 months, **CEO salaries have grown extremely slowly over the last decade, and the median remains significantly behind inflation over that period**.

The survey found some positive changes in how CEO pay is managed. **82% of CEOs said they had received a salary increase in their current role**, up from 76% last year, while **56% of organisations now use external salary scales**, compared with 48% last year. However, **one in three CEOs still do not have a formal, regular salary review**.

80% of respondents felt clear about their role and the direction set by their board. However, this does not seem to translate into transparent processes, with only 46% having a current performance appraisal, 42% having current objectives and 47% having a statement of delegated authorities. The situation is more critical at smaller organisations

The **gender pay gap has widened from 10.6% last year to 11.7% this year**, with a **median salary of £72,500 for male CEOs compared with £64,000 for female CEOs**. Women also continue to be more likely to lead smaller charities, with **60% of female respondents leading organisations with an income below £1 million, compared with 43% of male respondents**.

The findings also highlight the pressures charity leaders are facing. For the first time, the survey asked CEOs about burnout, with **42% saying they were close to or already experiencing burnout**. This rose to **48% among CEOs of small charities**.

Despite the pressures, **75% of CEOs said they were satisfied with their jobs** and **82% remain satisfied with how empowered they feel to make important decisions without being second-guessed**. However, wellbeing and work-life balance continue to show a more mixed picture. Just **49% were satisfied with their work-life balance**, down from 53% last year, while **42% were satisfied with the degree to which their board ensures their wellbeing**, down from 49%.

New questions on CEO-board relationships revealed that **77% of CEOs said their board was effective in supporting them to lead through uncertainty and change**. However, **74% said challenging board dynamics, such as conflict, power imbalances or dominant individuals, impacted the speed of decision-making**, while **63% saw these dynamics impacting CEO autonomy** and **57% thought they affected decisions related to pay and equality**.

The survey once again found that **progress on diversity remains uneven**. The **proportion of CEOs with a disability, learning difference, impairment or health condition was 24%, returning to the level seen in 2023**. However, **representation of CEOs from Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic backgrounds remained static at 6%**. Satisfaction with board diversity

also remains low in some areas, with **32% of CEOs satisfied with the ethnic diversity of their boards and 28% satisfied with the representation of disability**.

This year's survey highlights that supporting charity leaders means looking beyond pay. Fairness, diversity, good governance, opportunities to develop and the ability to protect their wellbeing all play a part in creating the conditions in which leaders can thrive.

Jane Ide, chief executive, ACEVO said:

"Charity leaders are working in increasingly demanding circumstances, and what stands out to me from this year's findings is the gap between the commitment of our leaders and the conditions in which they are being asked to lead. It is encouraging to see some progress in how CEO pay is managed, but the findings also show that too many leaders are spending the majority of their time responding to immediate problems, while having less time for strategic thinking and planning. The fact that 42% of CEOs say they are close to or already experiencing burnout should make us stop and think about what is being asked of people in these roles.

Boards have a particularly important role to play. Supporting a CEO is not just about governance and oversight; it is also about creating the trust, space and support they need to lead effectively. That includes having open conversations about pay, performance, wellbeing and the challenges facing the organisation.

For me, the question is not simply how we attract people into charity leadership, but how we create an environment where they can succeed and sustain themselves in these roles. Charity leaders give a huge amount to their organisations and the communities they serve. We need to make sure they have the support, space and opportunity to do their best work."

Richard Litchfield, CEO of Eastside People, main sponsors of the report, said:

"At Eastside People, we believe that well-led organisations are better equipped to deliver meaningful change. Effective leadership is at the heart of every successful charity, making the recruitment, development and retention of skilled and experienced CEOs more important than ever.

That is why the findings of this report matter. They highlight the significant challenges facing charity CEOs while also identifying opportunities to improve diversity, address pay inequality and tackle the growing risk of burnout across the sector. Getting this right is critical to every charity's ability to deliver services and create positive impact for the people and communities they support."

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About ACEVO

ACEVO's vision is to see civil society leaders making the biggest possible impact. Together with our network, we inspire and support civil society leaders by providing connections, advocacy and skills. We offer our members exclusive access to leadership development opportunities and mentoring; peer-to-peer networking and learning events; helplines for

immediate expert advice; discounted professional services delivered by our partners and advice and support when it is needed most. Through our advocacy and influencing work, we represent our members' interests in key areas of importance to civil society and our members' work. Membership is open to charity and social enterprise chief executives and senior leaders.

Find out more at www.acevo.org.uk or by emailing info@acevo.org.uk

About Eastside People

Eastside People is an award-winning consultancy and recruiter dedicated to strengthening the charity and wider not-for-profit sector.

They provide flexible leadership resources on a permanent, interim, board and consultancy basis. Dedicated to supporting charities and social enterprises, they connect organisations with the best people at a senior level, thereby strengthening leadership teams and enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of the social sector.

Eastside People is proud to have:

- Delivered over 3,200 projects that strengthen organisations and drive positive change
- Supported more than 1,250 charities and not-for-profits with advice and expertise
- Successfully delivered over 630 recruitment projects for leadership roles
- Achieved an outstanding 9.2 out of 10 client recommendation rating

www.eastsidepeople.org

Notes to editor

- The annual Pay and Equalities Survey 2026 is sponsored by Eastside People.
- The survey is delivered with CAF, Charity Leadership Scotland and CO3 and ran from 11 May until 5 June 2026, and received responses from 629 charity CEOs.
- The annual pay survey, a valuable benchmarking tool for salaries across the sector, covers England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- The Pay and Equalities Survey is the only survey that looks at the pay, benefits, diversity, leadership and governance of CEOs of charities of all sizes across the UK.
- The volume of responses from CEOs in Scotland and Northern Ireland were too low this year to be able to produce separate reports.
- The publication will be available from 16 November 2026 on https://www.acevo.org.uk/publications/pay-and-equalities-survey-2026/.
- The publication costs £45 for ACEVO members and £75 for non-members. Everyone who responded to the survey will receive a free copy.