



National Survey of History Practitioners

Introduction

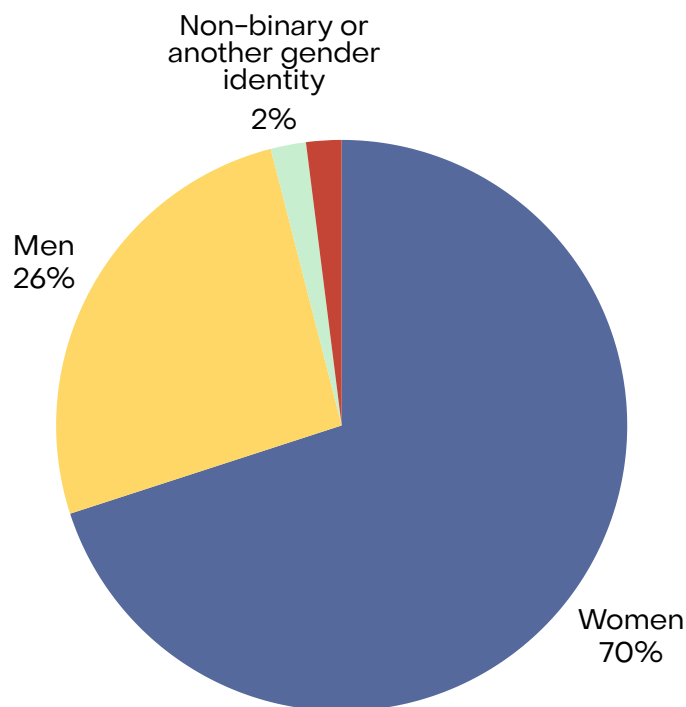
In spring 2025, AASLH conducted the National Survey of History Practitioners. The survey gathered information from nearly 3,700 practitioners working in museums, historic sites, historical societies, archives, preservation organizations, and related institutions in the United States. The resulting data provide the most comprehensive, up-to-date picture of the public history workforce ever developed, establishing a critical baseline for understanding who works in the history field, how they are compensated, and how they feel about their work.

Analysis of this data reveals a workforce that is deeply committed to its mission and motivated by the meaning of its work—but one that is also strained by low compensation, inequitable workplace experiences, limited advancement opportunities, and growing burnout. These tensions pose serious risks to equity, sustainability, and the long-term strength in the history field.

Key takeaways

#1: The public history workforce is predominantly women, but women are underrepresented in some of the field's most prominent, best compensated positions.

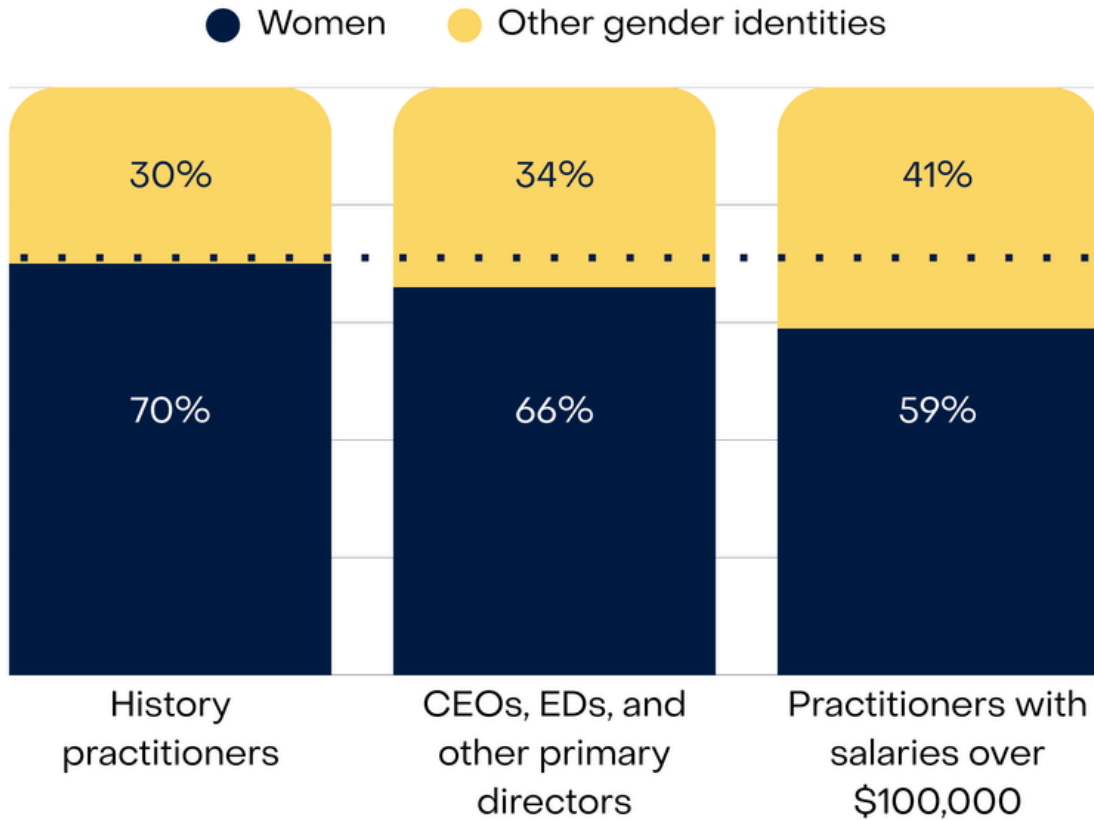
Nearly three-quarters of history practitioners identify as women.



Our research revealed that over two-thirds (70 percent) of practitioners identify as women, one-quarter (26 percent) identify as men, 2 percent identified as non-binary or another gender identity, and a final 2 percent identified another way or declined to answer. This gender breakdown is similar to recent findings for art museum practitioners (66 percent women) and archivists (71 percent women).

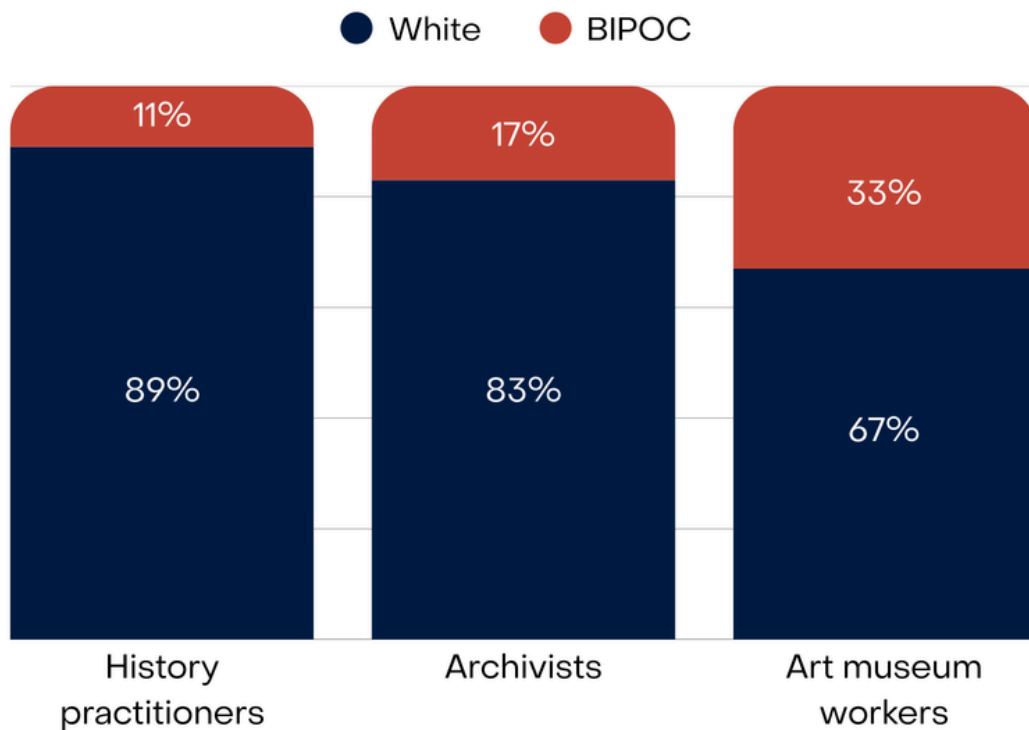
Yet women are underrepresented in the field's highest paying and executive leadership roles.

Women make up 66 percent of CEOs/Executive Directors and 59 percent of practitioners with annual salaries over \$100,000.



#2: Racial and ethnic diversity is lower among history practitioners than similar fields—and it's not just a pipeline issue.

Respondents to the National Survey of History Practitioners overwhelmingly identify as white.



Our research revealed that 89 percent of history practitioners identify as white, while 11 percent reported other racial or ethnic identities.

This lack of diversity isn't just a talent pipeline issue. Practitioners of color are more likely to experience discrimination and harassment in the workplace, more likely to carry student loan debt, and more likely to consider leaving the field because of low pay.

#3: History practitioners are passionate about the field and find deep meaning in their work. They also report feelings of worry and frustration.

History practitioners agree:

- **90%:** “I believe what I do here is **meaningful**”
- **86%:** “**I am excited** by the work that I do.”

But history practitioners’ positive feelings about their work are joined by worry and frustration. The emotions they most frequently associate with their work are:

- **Worried (45%)**
- **Frustrated (42%)**
- **Inspired (41%)**
- **Connected to others (40%)**
- **Hopeful (33%)**

Among their primary concerns are low pay, burnout, and lack of opportunities for growth and advancement.

#4: History practitioners are highly educated, but their pay remains low.

More than two-thirds of history practitioners (70%) have either a master's or doctoral degree.

Nationally, the **median salary** for workers across sectors with a master's degree is **\$95,000**. In the public history field, **most practitioners (63%) earn between \$40,000 and \$80,000** per year.

Among our respondents, **34% agree they are paid fairly** for what they do.

More than a third report that their pay is never (11%), rarely (10%), or sometimes (15%) enough to cover their essential living expenses.

#5: LGBTQ+ practitioners face vast challenges.

Survey respondents who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community report higher levels of burnout, negative effects on their well-being, and limited support at their organization.

LGBTQ+ practitioners are:

MORE LIKELY to:

- Feel burned out
- Feel like they don't have a voice in decision making
- Feel like their workplace negatively affects their mental/physical health
- Feel that they have to hide some of who they are at their workplace
- Believe that diversity and inclusion are not celebrated at their workplace

LESS LIKELY to:

- Recommend their workplace to friends/family
- Agree that people in their organization are held accountable for discrimination/harassment
- Feel valued by their employer
- Feel satisfied with their career
- Feel satisfied with their compensation/salary

Conclusion

History practitioners are deeply committed to their work and motivated by a strong sense of purpose. Overwhelmingly, **the people who work in this field report that they love what they do. At the same time, however, many are navigating low pay, uneven workplace cultures, burnout, and structural barriers** that may present challenges for both individual well-being and the long-term sustainability of the field.

We hope you'll view this report as an invitation to engage with the data, reflect thoughtfully on what it reveals (and what it doesn't), and participate in conversations about how we can use it to shape the future of the field.

The strength of our organizations rests in the people who make them run. Ensuring those people are supported, valued, and able to thrive is essential to the work ahead.