

Professional Perspectives



POB's annual salary and benefits study provides insights on current challenges and future opportunities.

How are surveying and mapping professionals faring in today's challenging economy, and what does the future hold for these professions? *POB's* annual research study on salary levels and benefits, developed in partnership with Clear Seas Research, provides some key insights.

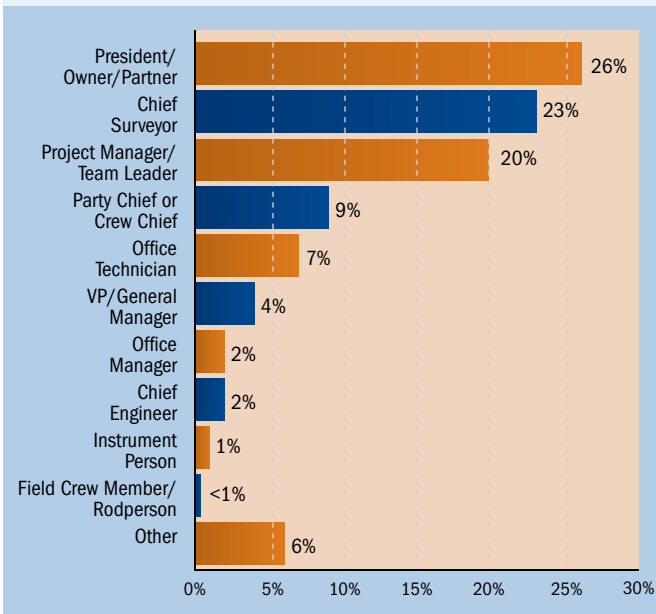
More than 700 individuals responded to our survey, which is on par with the number of responses we've received in past years. Of those queried, the majority identified themselves as president/owner/partner (26 percent), chief surveyor (23 percent) or project manager/team leader (20 percent). Most respondents (82 percent) are employed in the private sector, with 48 percent working for firms that handle both surveying and civil engineering and 27 percent focused primarily on surveying. These percentages are in line with those found in previous *POB* salary and benefit studies.

Also similar to previous years, the majority of respondents (86 percent) reported that their companies primarily perform boundary/cadastral/topographic survey work. However, there was an increase in the number of companies performing mortgage/title/ALTA surveys (up seven percent from 2008) and consulting work (up four percent from 2008). Other types of work performed remained about the same as in prior years.

As in previous years, three out of four respondents continued their education after high school with 36 percent (up three percent from 2008) reporting an associate degree, 34 percent (unchanged) reporting a bachelor's degree and six percent (unchanged) reporting a master's or doctorate degree. Three-fourths of all surveyed respondents have been working in the profession for 15 years or more. Twenty percent reported

JOB TITLE

The majority of respondents hold senior decision-making roles.



five to 14 years of experience, while the remaining five percent had less than five years of experience. The average age of the survey respondents was 48, which was in line with previous studies.

Also similar to previous years, seven out of 10 respondents hold a professional registration or licensure with most (90 percent) reporting an RPLS/PLS/RLS/LS or the like. More than half of all respondents (54 percent) received their license more than 15 years ago, which was higher than the 47 percent reporting 15 or more years of licensure in 2008. Among licensed respondents, the majority (48 percent) reported registration in one state, while 28 percent said that they were registered in two or more states. More than three-quarters of respondents reported an increase in their income as a result of achieving their registration or licensure, with an average increase of 28.7 percent reported.

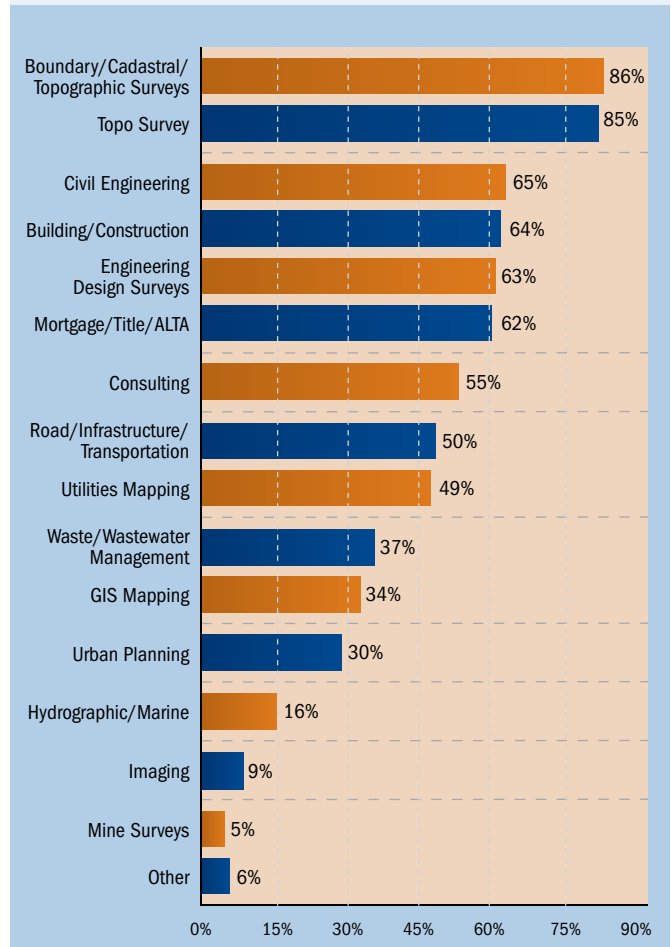
The Economic Impact

There was a significant increase in the number of individuals reporting that they work for small organizations. Thirty-five percent of respondents reported working for organizations with less than 10 full-time employees, compared to 26 percent in 2008 and 22 percent in 2007. However, this number is still lower than the high of 43 percent in 2001. Not surprisingly, one of every two respondents reported a slight to significant decrease in their organization's number of employees during 2008. While this decrease occurred across organizations of all sizes, individuals working for larger firms (those with 250 or more employees) were less likely to report a decrease. One-third of the respondents reported no change in employment, while 15 percent reported a slight to significant increase in their company's full-time employee base.

The average gross salaries reported by respondents have remained fairly consistent over the past several years, with the largest variation occurring based on the years of experience, public

2009 TYPE OF WORK PERFORMED BY COMPANY

The majority of respondents report their company is involved with boundary/cadastral/topographic surveying. Civil engineering, building/construction, engineering design surveys, and mortgage/title/ALTA are also frequently performed.



versus private sector work (the private sector generally pays more) and the population of the communities served. Interestingly, while 25 percent of all respondents reported that their salaries dropped in 2008 compared to the previous year, 45 percent said that their salaries remained the same or increased compared to 2007. These results might indicate that employers actively sought other ways of reducing expenses before cutting their employees' pay.

The reduction in benefits in 2008 seems to confirm this theory. While most respondents reported receiving paid vacation time, health insurance and paid sick leave, a decline was seen in all three categories. There was a substantial drop in the number of individuals receiving bonuses—only 35 percent of respondents reported receiving bonuses in 2008 compared with 50 percent in 2007. Other benefits—including use of company vehicles, retirement plans, continuing education, dental and vision insurance and life insurance—were also reduced as firms struggled to rein in expenses.

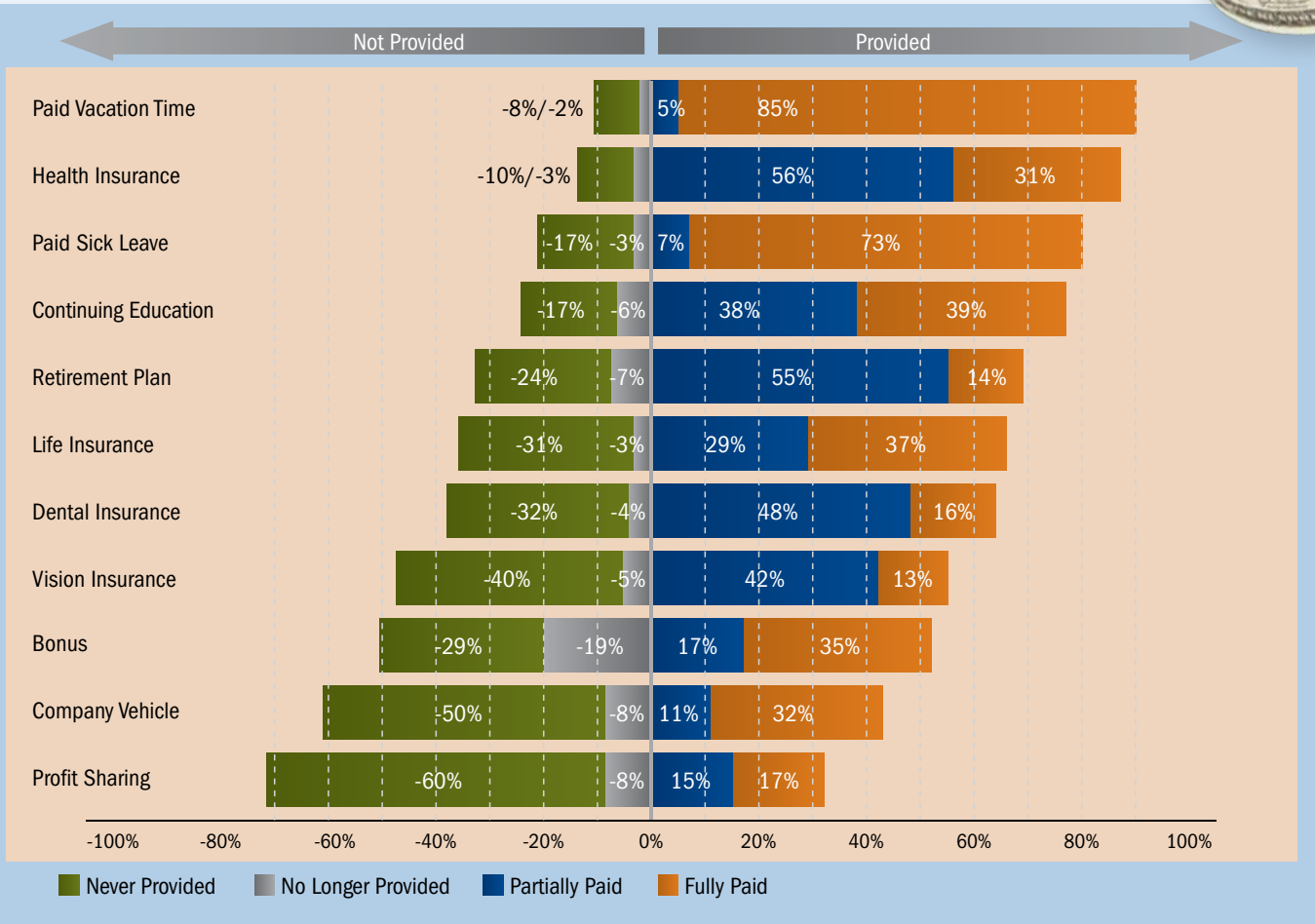
Behind the Numbers

Respondents who provided additional comments cited layoffs, hiring freezes, pay cuts and benefits reductions as the most



2009 PROVIDED BENEFIT SUMMARY

Paid vacation time, health insurance, and paid sick leave are the benefits provided to the majority of respondents. The No. 1 benefit received in the past that is no longer provided is a bonus.



common changes implemented by firms within the last six to 12 months specifically to address the difficult economic conditions. However, some individuals indicated that their firms have made no cutbacks and have even hired additional employees to handle an increased workload. Based on other trend information, it is likely that this latter group serves a diverse client base with high-tech capabilities. Other individuals noted that their firms have focused on technology upgrades as a way to increase efficiency and productivity.

When asked about the single biggest challenge their firm faces other than the economy, many respondents emphasized that the economic recession is and would continue to be their biggest challenge. However, another frequently mentioned challenge was finding qualified help—or, as one person put it, “finding experienced employees or even inexperienced employees that want to learn the business and are willing to give an honest day’s work.”

Other challenges mentioned included keeping up with technology and competing with lower-priced firms. As one respondent noted, “Competition from smaller, more flexible firms that can easily cut prices because of lower overhead is [an issue] that’s always there, but in this economy, it becomes even more problematic. It diminishes the strides we have taken in the past few years to impress upon the public at large the role of the profes-

sional surveyor and mapper in society and brings us back down to the level of just another trade. In the past six months, I have seen survey prices drop back down to levels from 15 years ago. When the economy returns, it will be a hard fight to get them back up to anywhere near the [previous] levels.” Other individuals commented that competing against larger firms with more diverse in-house resources was a significant challenge.

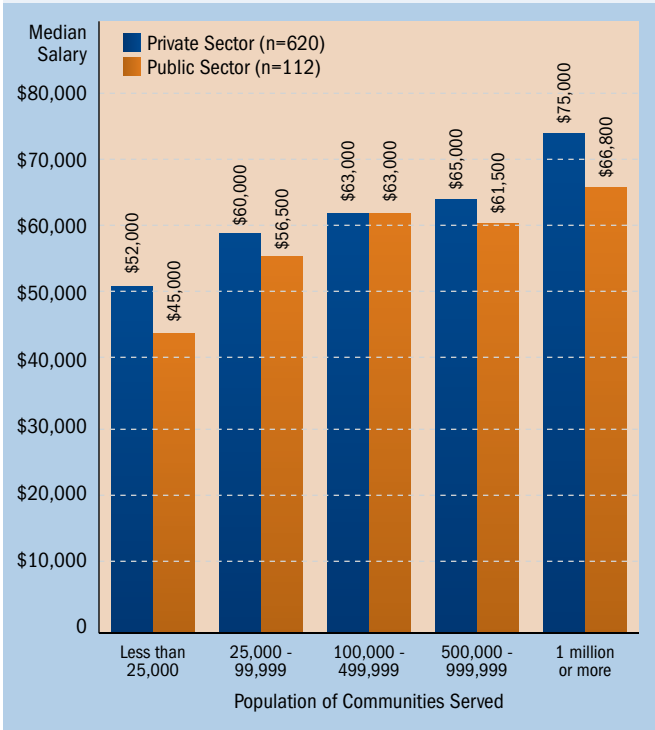
While firms that are positioned to take on infrastructure, energy and other projects through federal stimulus spending appear to be faring better than other companies in terms of the amount of work available, several respondents noted that bidding for these projects creates other challenges, such as the requirement to meet rushed deadlines while dealing with budget restrictions.

Future Opportunities

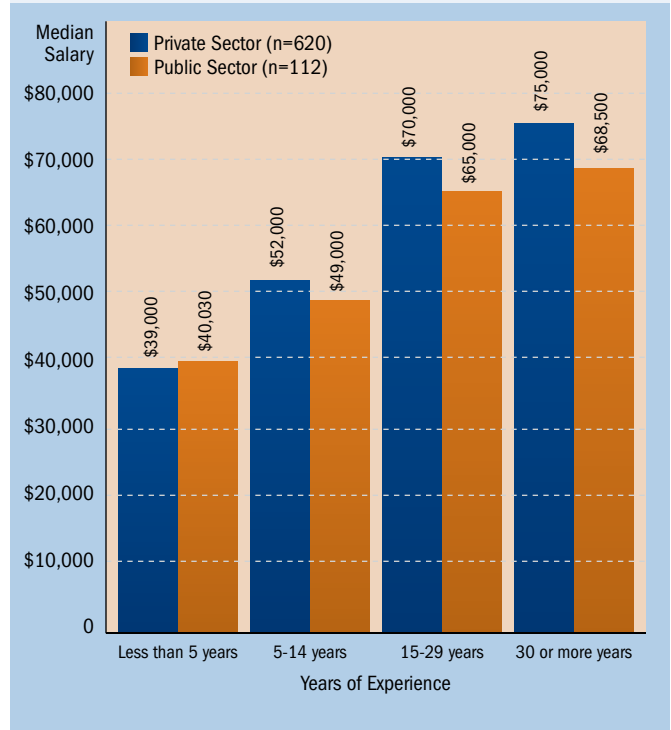
Looking ahead, several respondents noted that GPS and GIS integration will provide new opportunities for surveying and mapping professionals. Advanced technology is expected to continue to change the role of surveyors by enabling more work to be completed in less time with fewer people. As Joseph Dietrick, PE, PLS, director of engineering for The Markosky Engineering Group Inc., noted, “The advances made in recent years ... will continue to improve the surveyor’s information-



SALARY MEDIAN BY COMMUNITY POPULATION



SALARY MEDIAN BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE



gathering abilities. Likewise, more will be expected from the surveyor in terms of time to complete the job, cost of the job and accuracy of the job.”

A number of respondents pointed out that surveyors will need to focus more on education and become more creative in how they use advanced technology. “Even though [some] surveyors have grasped and used the technology from electronic total stations, GPS, robotics and, recently, laser scanners, we have not immersed ourselves in it or really looked for ways to exploit it to its fullest,” said Richard D. Pryce, vice president of surveying and GIS for Craven Thompson & Associates Inc. “We’ve only scratched the

surface and should be looking outside of the box we’ve built up around us. The push nationally on education and four-year and higher degrees in [geomatics] is where the real changes will come from, but we are still a long way from that goal.” Pryce also noted that GIS, airborne and terrestrial LiDAR and laser scanning, side-scan sonar, ground penetrating radar, equipment/machine control and 3D modeling “are the future of surveying if we want it, and education—either formal or on the job—is the key.”

Jennifer N., a photogrammetrist, said that she sees “a growing gulf between the well-educated and well-trained geospatial professionals and a sea of low-wage, poorly trained technical staff.” As James Jeffrey, PE, PLS, commented, “Generally, surveyors will need to expand their idea of what they do or someone else will leave us in their dust.”

Ultimately, the future for surveying and mapping professionals lies in the hands of those who care about the profession. “If we do not attract, improve and retain high-quality labor, how can we hope to maintain the quality of our industry? The field as a whole is growing, and we have a labor shortage even during a recession. If we want a good labor pool to pick from, we need to concentrate on finding, enticing and developing high-quality workers,” Jennifer N. said.

“We should be marketing and recruiting new talent and looking at technology for ways to use it to our advantage, not as crutch,” Pryce added.

About This Study

The 2009 Salary & Benefits Study reflects figures compiled from 2008 and is an estimated representation of the working surveying and mapping population. It does not represent exact figures. Surveys were sent to 5,951 active, qualified Point of Beginning subscribers, which provided a usable base of 5,771 individuals. The results are based on a total of 755 usable returns. Clear Seas Research, a division of BNP Media, conducted the study and compiled its findings.

For more information, contact Kelly Clinton at clintonk@clearseasresearch.com. Results from this study are copyright © 2009 by Clear Seas Research (www.clearseasresearch.com). All rights reserved.

Editor's note: The following pages contain select additional quotes and charts from the 2009 study. To obtain a complete copy of the study, please **CLICK HERE** and fill out the request form.

SELECT QUOTES FROM SURVEY RESPONDENTS

What changes has your firm made within the last 6-12 months specifically to address the difficult economic conditions?

- “We have totally revamped our organizational setup from a team concept to a client manager, project manager, technician concept. We have stopped hiring.” David L., PLS, Survey Party Chief
- “Layoffs of approx. 10% of staff, salary freeze for indefinite period, review of unused subscriptions (cellular/data) & equipment, removal of teams/departments not generating a profit, deferral of software upgrades, stronger attempts to bring accounts receivable past due average down.” T. Dawidowicz, Project Surveyor
- “Increased percent of retainer. Strengthened wording that the map will not be turned over until final payment is made in full.” W. Brannon, LS

Other than the economy, what is the single biggest challenge your firm faces?

- “Technology—keeping up and paying for it.” Stan, PLS
- “Hiring and retaining quality people. Keeping the work varied and interesting enough to challenge young employees.” Joseph D., PE, PLS
- “We have a lot of rush projects to obtain stimulus money, but with vacant positions, and spending restrictions, we are working at our limits.” James J., PE, PLS, Assistant Locating Engineer
- “Marketing for work when you are limited by your advertising ability.” Chris, Senior Registered Surveyor

How do you think the role of the surveyor will change over the next 5-10 years?

- “I think the way the national economy will get back to where it should be is through the economic stimulus plan. I think this will happen through public works and infrastructure. The majority of new work for surveyors will come from infrastructure construction, not housing and development as in times past.” Anonymous
- “[Surveyors will become] feeders of the ‘BIG GIS.’” Chris, Senior Registered Surveyor
- “I think technology will affect the role of the surveyor in the next 5-10 years. We recently added robotics to our toolbox. As these technologies become more affordable, they will be embraced more by the surveyor.” Scott G., Survey Manager

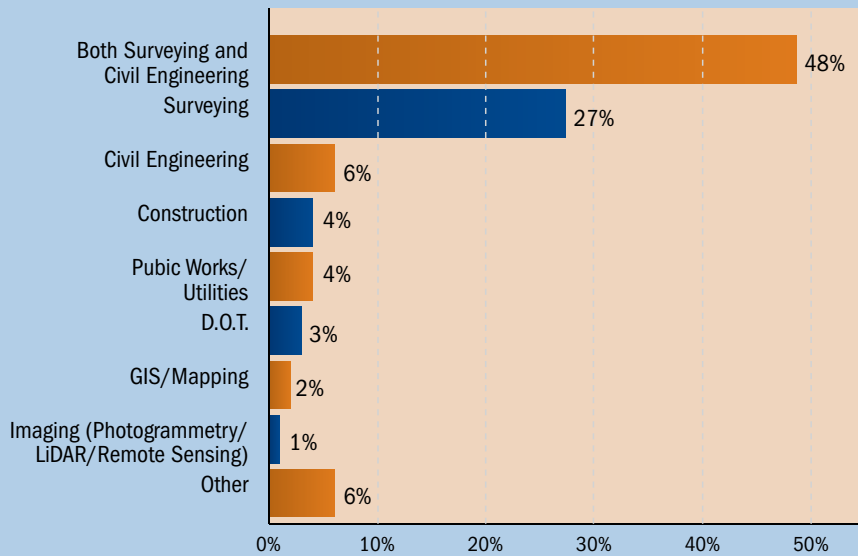
In your opinion, what steps can/should today's surveyors take to help safeguard the profession?

- “We need to build the best possible labor pool. Continuing education cannot be stressed enough. As technology changes, surveyors of every type must retool. Take geodesy as one example: Chains and links give way to EDM, which gives way to NavStar GPS, which is now joined by several other systems already in orbit (or on their way to it). How many surveyors know the first thing about the science behind GPS? There's more to GPS-based surveying than pushing a button on a robot. The same argument could be made for any number of other technologies, from GIS to soft-copy photogrammetry to web-based cartography. I think the most important thing we can do locally is to press our technical schools and community colleges to update and/or expand programs related to surveying and other civil engineering technologies. We also need to reach out to vastly under-represented demographics, especially women. Males make up an overwhelming majority of the professionals in this industry. Only 3% of land surveyors are women, and even in GIS—the most female-friendly subset of geospatial professions—women account for just under one in five. We're missing out on a lot of great talent because we are not attracting workers from all demographics. If we do not attract, improve and retain high-quality labor, how can we hope to maintain the quality of our industry? The field as a whole is growing, and we have a labor shortage even during a recession. If we want a good labor pool to pick from, we need to concentrate on finding, enticing and developing high-quality workers.” Jennifer N., Photogrammetrist
- “First, continue to insist that any land transaction deserves and requires a fresh survey. Second, be prepared to measure things that you have not measured in the past.” Mark B., RLS
- “Surveying education, both academic and on the job, needs to be a high priority. We won't be around forever, and we all need to take on some of the responsibility for training the next generation of surveyors.” James J., PE, PLS, Assistant Locating Engineer



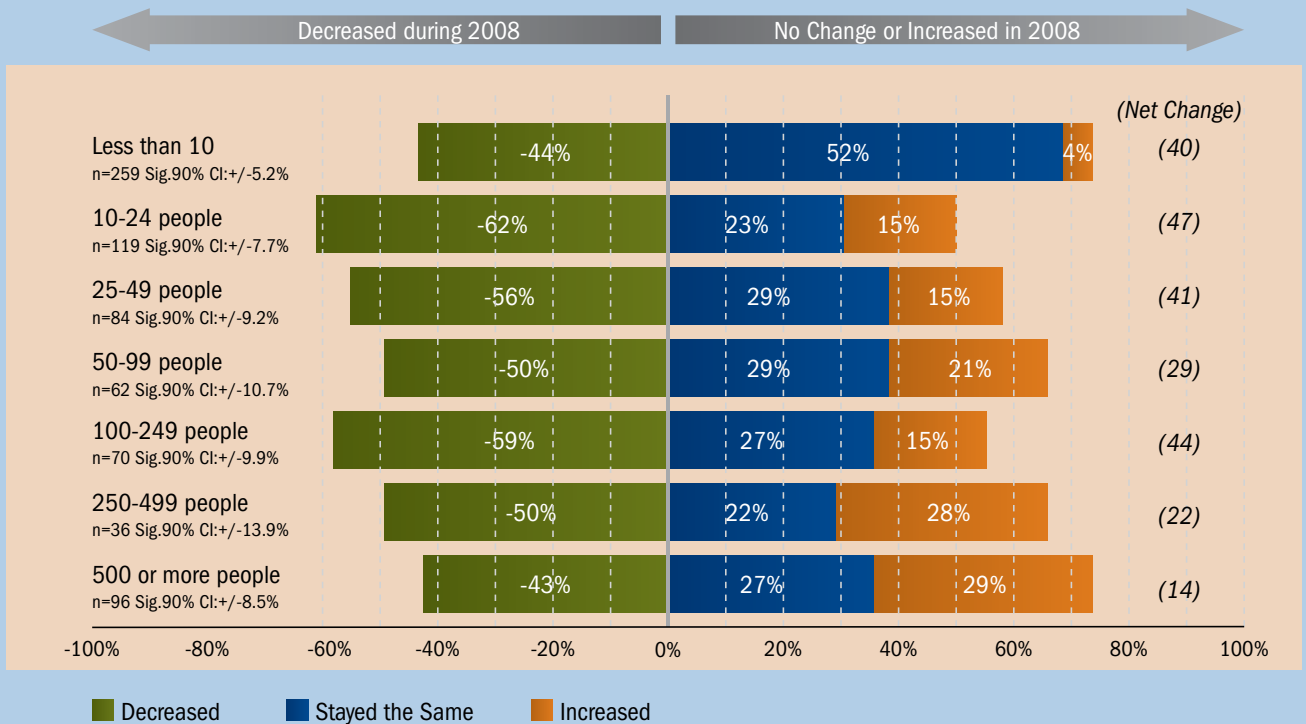
2009 ORGANIZATION/BUSINESS TYPE

Approximately one in two respondents work for an organization that performs both surveying and civil engineering; just over one-quarter work for an organization that is exclusive to surveying.



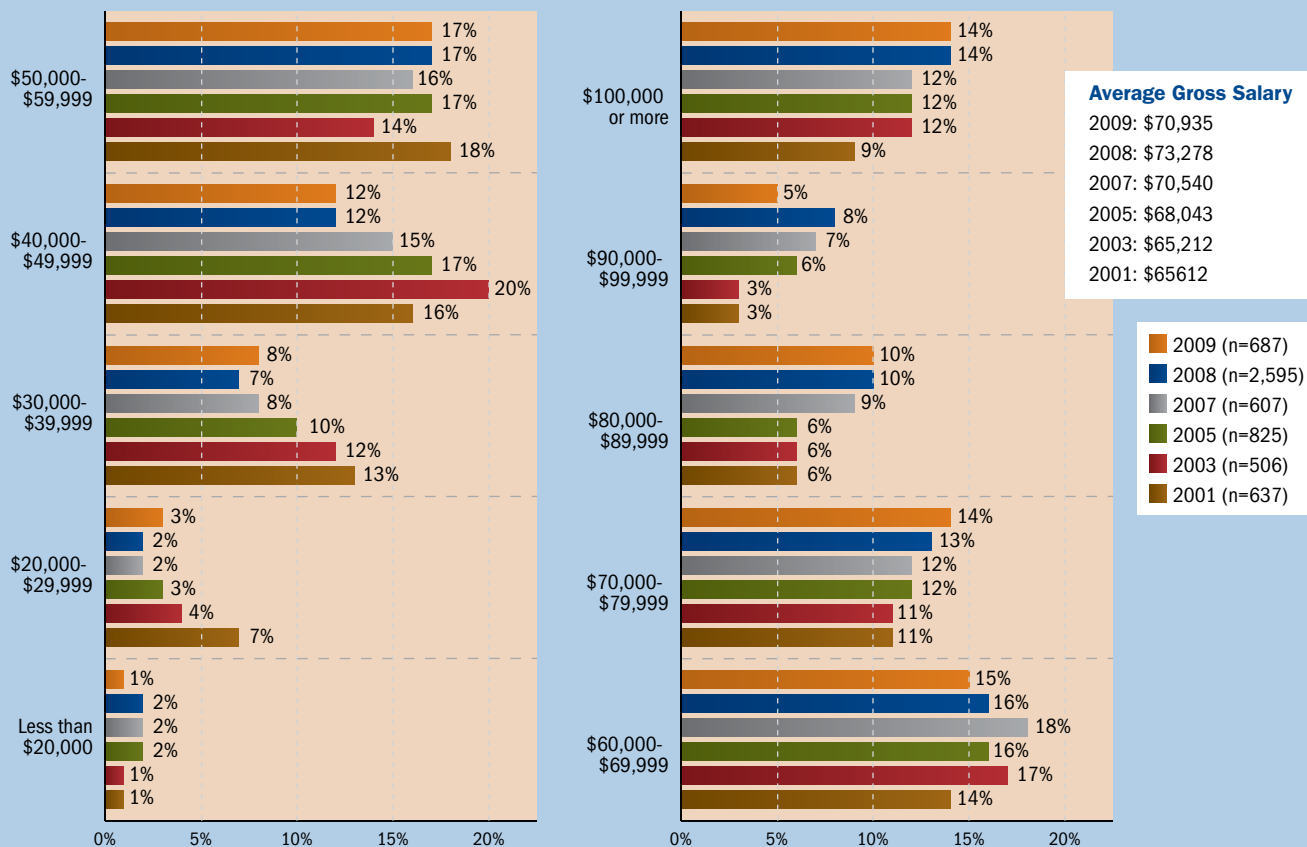
CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES DURING 2008

Organizations of all sizes experienced a decrease in the number of full-time employees during 2008. Larger companies, 250 or more employees, were less likely to experience a decrease in full-time employees in 2008.



ANNUAL GROSS SALARY

Reported average gross annual salaries have remained pretty consistent over the past year.



CHANGE IN ANNUAL GROSS SALARY

Overall the net change in reported gross annual salaries indicates a slight increase in compensation for industry professionals.

