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Chief-Executive Turnover at Nonprofits: 8% of Organizations With a Paid Executive Director or CEO Changed Chief Executive From 2022 to 2023, and the Rate Stayed Between 7.5% and 8.3% From 2020 to 2023

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Of 70,439 nonprofits that report a paid executive director or CEO in both tax years 2022 and 2023, 8.1% changed their chief executive between the two years. Each pair of years from 2020 to 2023 sits between 7.5% and 8.3%, and the rate is broadly similar across budget sizes, from 7.3% under $500,000 to 9.6% at $50 million and over. The filings show no leadership exodus.

Legal background: Nonprofit executive compensation benchmarking — the CauseComp legal explainer.

Of 70,439 nonprofits that report a paid executive director or CEO in both tax years 2022 and 2023, 5,721, or 8.1%, changed their chief executive between the two years. The rate for each pair of years from 2020 to 2023 sits between 7.5% and 8.3%, and it is broadly similar across budget sizes, from 7.3% for organizations under $500,000 to 9.6% at $50 million and over. The filings show no leadership exodus.

Within one point through the pandemic years

Tax years	Organizations scored	Changed chief executive	Rate
2020 to 2021	63,854	4,781	7.5%
2021 to 2022	67,256	5,609	8.3%
2022 to 2023	70,439	5,721	8.1%

Each row compares an organization's return for one tax year with its return for the next. Across the pandemic years the rate stayed within a range of less than one point.

Pairs starting in 2017, 2018 and 2019 give 8.3%, 8.1% and 7.3%, but the corpus holds only part of those years' returns (31,743, 70,236 and 57,679 returns, against 115,310 to 133,846 a year for 2020 to 2023), so they are left out of the trend. The 2023 to 2024 pair is left out as well, because tax year 2024 is still missing late returns: of the organizations with a return for 2023, 84.2% have one for 2024 in the corpus, against 90.4% to 92.0% for each earlier pair of years from 2019 to 2023.

Broadly similar across budget sizes

Budget band (total revenue in the first year)	Organizations scored	Changed chief executive	Rate
Under $500,000	16,463	1,206	7.3%
$500,000 to under $1 million	10,237	869	8.5%
$1 million to under $2.5 million	13,736	1,147	8.4%
$2.5 million to under $10 million	16,505	1,331	8.1%
$10 million to under $50 million	9,911	821	8.3%

Budget band (total revenue in the first year)	Organizations scored	Changed chief executive	Rate
$50 million and over	3,571	344	9.6%

The smallest band is the lowest and the largest band the highest, but the four bands between them sit within 8.1% to 8.5%, and the rate does not rise or fall steadily with size.

Larger organizations more often list more than one person on the chief-executive line: 4.1% of organizations under $500,000 do, in either year, against 18.0% at $50 million and over. Counting any newly listed name as a change would put the overall rate at 9.3% and the $50 million and over band at 14.0%, largely because a co-director, or a division, facility or program executive director, was added or replaced while the organization's chief executive stayed. This page counts a change only when the highest-paid chief executive leaves the list (see Method and scope).

By sector

NTEE sector	Organizations scored	Rate
Crime & Legal	1,421	9.7%
Philanthropy & Foundations	2,030	9.3%
Arts, Culture & Humanities	5,020	9.0%
Environment	2,022	8.9%
Housing & Shelter	2,132	8.8%
Health (Hospitals & Medical)	5,010	8.6%
Education	6,484	8.3%
Community Improvement	3,680	8.0%
Recreation & Sports	1,429	8.0%
Animal Related	1,072	7.5%
Employment	1,081	7.5%
Human Services	10,454	7.5%
International	1,270	7.2%
Mental Health	2,128	7.2%
Youth Development	1,819	5.9%
Religion	1,685	4.8%

Most sectors shown sit between 7% and 9%. Religion (4.8%) and Youth Development (5.9%) are the lowest, and Crime & Legal (9.7%) the highest. Sectors with fewer than 1,000 organizations scored are not shown, and 16,904 organizations whose return carries no NTEE sector are left out of this table.

What the rate counts, and what it misses

The rate can be measured only where both years' returns name a paid chief executive. Of 117,237 organizations with a return for both 2022 and 2023, 70,439 (60.1%) do. The others include organizations led under another title, such as President, organizations whose chief executive's pay falls below the corpus's extraction floor, and organizations with no chief-executive row in one of the two years.

The rate leans low. A handover can leave the chief-executive row empty for a year, for example during a vacancy or when a successor's first-year pay falls below the floor, and a pair of years with an empty row is not scored. Where the middle year of three consecutive returns has no chief-executive row, the chief executive differs across the gap in 72.7% of cases (3,068 spans), against 15.3% when the middle year has one (117,830 spans), for spans starting in 2020 or 2021. The measured rate is closer to a floor than to a central estimate.

What this means for a board

A change of chief executive is an ordinary event in the sector, not a rare one, and it arrives at a broadly similar pace across budget sizes, somewhat more often at the largest organizations. Setting a successor's pay starts from comparable data and a record of how the decision was made; see executive compensation benchmarking and documenting an executive pay decision. CauseComp's comparables set, drawn from Form 990 filings, is part of the Professional plan; see plans and pricing.

Method and scope

Scope of every figure on this page: the CauseComp Form 990 corpus as refreshed on September 9, 2026. The page uses the corpus's officer rows as filed (Part VII, Form 990-EZ and Schedule J rows), not the model training rows CauseComp's benchmarks are built from and not its published salary tables. The headline uses tax years 2022 and 2023, and the trend uses tax years 2020 to 2023. Every cut shown has at least 1,000 organizations scored. The page reports counts and shares only, and no compensation figure.

- **Tax year:** the year in which the organization's fiscal year begins. Each organization contributes one return per tax year: where a period was filed more than once, the latest return is kept, and where two periods fall in one tax year, the later period is kept (605 returns set aside). That leaves 810,482 returns of the 814,558 in the corpus.
- **One row per person:** a return can carry the same person in Part VII and on Schedule J. Where a Part VII row and a Schedule J row on the same return show the same pay from the organization, to the dollar and at least $10,000 (Part VII column D against the sum of Schedule J columns B(i), B(ii) and B(iii)), the Part VII row is dropped: 28,506 rows on 6,459 returns, taking Part VII rows from 794,463 to 765,957. Rows from the same part of a return are never merged, since two people can be paid the same.
- **Chief executive:** a row in CauseComp's Executive Director / CEO role, its normalization of filed titles, whose title does not mark a former holder (such as former, past, previous, retired, or serving through or until a date) or a deputy, associate or assistant: 20,274 rows with a former holder's title and 7,016 with a deputy, associate or assistant title are set aside. Organizations led under a President title are outside this role and outside this page. An interim or acting chief executive counts as a chief executive, so a handover through an interim can count as two changes: one when the interim takes over and one when the permanent successor does. Paid means the row passed the corpus's extraction floors (caveat (b)); in a small share of pairs the chief executive's pay from the organization itself is zero or missing in one year, typically because a related organization pays it.
- **Same person:** names are compared, never titles. After case, punctuation, honorifics, suffixes and credentials are normalized, two names match when the first and last names agree, allowing for nicknames, initials, middle names, reordering, compound surnames and small spelling differences. A person listed twice on one return counts once.
- **Change of chief executive:** a pair of years counts as a change when the first year's highest-paid chief executive is not on the second year's chief-executive list, or when the second year's highest-paid chief executive is new and the first year's, still listed, was paid less than half as much as the year before. A co-director, or a division, facility or program executive director, added or replaced while the highest-paid chief executive stays is not a change. A handover spread over two returns is counted once, in the year the outgoing chief executive leaves the list.

- **Budget band:** the organization's total revenue on the first year's return: under $500,000; $500,000 to under $1 million; $1 million to under $2.5 million; $2.5 million to under $10 million; $10 million to under $50 million; and $50 million and over.
- **Sector:** the NTEE sector the corpus carries on the first year's return.

  (a) The filings record who held the chief-executive line, not why it changed, and a change is counted in the year the outgoing chief executive leaves the list, which can be a year after the successor first appears.

  (b) The corpus extracts Part VII and 990-EZ officer rows only where compensation is at least $10,000 and the return reports revenue of at least $25,000, and Part VII rows also need at least 20 hours a week; Schedule J rows are not subject to those floors.

  (c) Names are matched by rule, not reviewed pair by pair, so a small share of scored changes are the same person under a spelling or a changed surname the rule does not recognize, and a small share of matches are different people.

  (d) This analysis is research, not legal or tax advice; organizations should consult their advisors on their specific facts.

Frequently asked questions

Does this measure how long chief executives stay?

No. It measures how often the chief executive changes from one year's return to the next. Tenure would need each person's start date, which the Form 990 does not report.

Does a change mean the chief executive was dismissed?

No. The filings record who held the role, not why it changed. A retirement, a resignation, a dismissal, a death and an interim appointment all count the same.

Why not count every new name on the chief-executive line?

Because a new name is not always a new chief executive. Larger organizations often list a co-director, or a division, facility or program executive director, beside the organization's own chief executive. Counting those would overstate turnover, most of all at the largest organizations.

Why does the page say the rate leans low?

A handover can leave the chief-executive line empty for a year, and a pair of years with an empty line cannot be scored. Those pairs change far more often than the pairs that can be scored, so the published rate is closer to a floor than to a central estimate.

Free to cite with attribution. The Professional plan adds a §4958 comparables set drawn from Form 990 filings.

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