

# FAIR PAY RATE GUIDE

*For Local Artists and Technical Crew in Montezuma County*

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This guide provides rate benchmarks for hiring local musicians, performing artists, and technical crew in Montezuma County. It is written to support the artists who already live here, practice here, and perform here year round. These are not maximums. They are minimums. Local artists may and should charge more based on experience, demand, and the nature of the event.

Paying local artists fairly keeps money circulating in the community and keeps talent rooted here. That is the point.

Tips: The rates in this guide are guaranteed minimums, a floor not a ceiling. Audiences should always be encouraged to tip on top of the artist's guaranteed fee. A visible tip jar, a QR code, or a simple shoutout from the host goes a long way toward building a tip culture that respects artists.

*The ZU Arts Initiative maintains a minimum standard of \$100/hour for all artists and technical crew. This guide reflects that commitment for the broader region.*

## ABOUT THESE RATES: KEEPING MONEY LOCAL

**These rates are written specifically for local and regional artists living and working in the Four Corners. This guide is about keeping money in the community by paying the people who are already here.**

Local artists are the backbone of Montezuma County's cultural life. They show up year round, not just for a weekend. They practice here, perform here, and spend what they earn here. This guide exists to make sure they are compensated fairly for that contribution.

### **What keeps rates in check here:**

- Smaller venue capacities limit the ticket and bar revenue available to share with artists
- A thinner local market means fewer venues competing for the same talent
- A lower regional cost of living can create a 'things are cheaper here' mentality from bookers. That logic does not apply to an artist's instrument costs, gear, or years of training

### **What makes local artists worth investing in:**

- Local artists spend what they earn locally. Paying them fairly keeps money circulating in Montezuma County

- They are available year round, know the venues, and are invested in the community they perform for

Sound engineers are especially scarce in this region. The few experienced engineers here are in genuine demand and their rates reflect that

Building a strong local music scene makes Cortez a more vibrant place to live and visit for everyone

*These rates are the local standard. What a Montezuma County artist playing a Montezuma County venue should earn at minimum. Paying local artists fairly keeps talent here, keeps money here, and keeps the community's cultural life strong.*

## 01 SOLO AND DUO: BACKGROUND AND AMBIENT MUSIC

*Typical setting: restaurant, wine bar, café, gallery opening, outdoor patio, retail event.*

Format	Performers	Suggested Range
Solo acoustic (1–2 hrs)	1 performer	\$150 – \$200
Solo acoustic (2–3 hrs)	1 performer	\$200 – \$300
Duo (2 hrs)	2 performers	\$250 – \$350
Duo (3 hrs)	2 performers	\$350 – \$500
Electronic / DJ background set	1 performer	\$150 – \$250 / 2 hrs

*Tips are a bonus on top of a guaranteed fee, never a substitute. Background music keeps your space lively and your customers longer. Put out a tip jar, mention the artist by name, and budget for their pay like you budget for décor.*

## 02 FULL BAND: TICKETED OR HEADLINED SHOW

*Typical setting: bar/venue with capacity crowd, ticketed event, festival main stage, concert series.*

Format	Performers	Suggested Range
3-piece band (45–60 min set)	3 performers	\$400 – \$600
4-piece band (45–60 min set)	4 performers	\$500 – \$800
5+ piece band / full production	5+ performers	\$700 – \$1,200+
Two-set night (full evening)	3–5 performers	\$600 – \$1,500
Touring/regional act (ticketed)	Varies	Negotiate / door split

*Door Split Option: A common arrangement for ticketed shows is 70/30 or 80/20 in favor of the artist after expenses.*

*A band of four playing a 60-minute set has collectively rehearsed hundreds of hours, maintained thousands of dollars in gear, and loaded in/out around your schedule. Their rate reflects all of it.*

### 03 PRIVATE EVENTS AND WEDDINGS

*Typical setting: wedding reception, corporate event, private party, fundraiser gala, celebration.*

Format	Performers	Suggested Range
Solo ceremony / cocktail hour (1 hr)	1 performer	\$200 – \$350
Solo full reception (3–4 hrs)	1 performer	\$400 – \$600
Duo, ceremony and reception	2 performers	\$500 – \$800
Live band (3 to 5 piece), 3 hrs	3–5 performers	\$1,000 – \$2,500
DJ (full event, 4–5 hrs)	1 DJ	\$400 – \$800

*Private events often require extra preparation, learning specific songs, and travel to non-standard venues. A deposit (25–50%) is standard and appropriate to request.*

### 04 FESTIVALS AND OUTDOOR EVENTS

*Typical setting: street fair, farmers market, outdoor festival, community celebration, block party.*

Format	Performers	Suggested Range
Solo or duo, market or street fair	1–2 performers	\$150 – \$300 / 2 hrs
Full band, community stage	3–5 performers	\$500 – \$1,000
Headlining act, festival main stage	Varies	\$1,000 – \$3,000+
Multi-day festival (per day)	Per performer	\$200 – \$400 / performer / day
Emcee / MC	1 person	\$150 – \$300 / event

*Grant-funded festivals and nonprofits: having a budget does not mean artists should work for less. If anything, it means fair pay should be built into the budget from day one, not treated as what is left over after every other expense.*

## 05 SOUND ENGINEERS AND TECHNICAL CREW

Sound engineers are not optional. They are the reason a show sounds good, a mic doesn't feed back, and a performer can hear themselves. They are skilled technical professionals who deserve the same guaranteed pay and respect as anyone on stage. In rural Southwest Colorado, experienced sound engineers are genuinely scarce, which means the good ones are in high demand and their rates reflect that reality.

Role	Crew	Suggested Range
Front-of-house engineer (small venue, PA provided)	1 engineer	\$75 – \$150
Front-of-house engineer (own equipment/full setup)	1 engineer	\$150 – \$300+
Monitor engineer (separate from FOH)	1 engineer	\$100 – \$200
Live recording engineer	1 engineer	\$200 – \$400
FOH + monitors (festival / full production)	1–2 engineers	\$300 – \$600 / day
PA system rental (engineer-operated)	1 engineer	\$200 – \$500 / event
Lighting technician	1 tech	\$75 – \$200 / event
Stage manager / production coordinator	1 person	\$100 – \$250 / event

*A sound engineer running front-of-house for a 3-hour show has often arrived 2–3 hours early for soundcheck, stayed through load-out, and carried hundreds of pounds of gear. Their rate reflects all of it, not just the hours the music was playing.*

*Tips for crew: Audiences rarely think to tip the person behind the soundboard. As a venue or event organizer, you can change that. Acknowledge your engineer from the stage, put their name on the bill, and make a tip jar visible for them too.*

### WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED IN THESE RATES

The following are separate expenses that should be negotiated in addition to the artist's

or crew member's base rate:

Sound engineer or PA rental: \$100 to \$300 or more depending on scale

Backline or instrument rental: at cost, by agreement

Rehearsal time for custom setlists: \$50 to \$100 per hour or flat fee by agreement

## GET IT IN WRITING

Every booking should include a simple written agreement covering:

Date, time, and location

Set length and any break expectations

Agreed fee and payment method — paid at the end of the night

Whether sound equipment is provided and by whom

Load-in time and parking

Cancellation policy — 50% of the agreed fee is owed if the booking is cancelled within 48 hours

On set length: if a venue asks an artist to play beyond the agreed time, that extension should be compensated at the same hourly rate. Agreeing to a two-hour set and being asked to play three is not a compliment. It is additional work.

On payment: end of the night means end of the night. Not next week. Not after the owner gets back. Not when the books are settled. If a venue cannot pay at the end of a performance, that should be communicated and agreed upon in writing before the first note is played.

On cancellations: if a booking is cancelled within 48 hours of the performance, the artist is owed 50% of the agreed fee. They have already turned down other opportunities, prepared their set, and arranged their schedule. Last-minute cancellations have a real cost.

*ZU Arts Initiative offers free performance and crew contract templates for artists, engineers, and venues. Contact us at [grow@cortezarts.org](mailto:grow@cortezarts.org).*

## SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Four situations come up regularly in small communities and deserve a direct answer.

### NONPROFIT ASKS FOR FREE OR DISCOUNTED RATES

Nonprofit status does not change what an artist's time and skill is worth. Nonprofits often have operating budgets, grant funding, and paid staff. Asking musicians to donate their labor by default while everyone else in the organization is compensated is not a values-aligned practice, it is an easy shortcut.

If a nonprofit genuinely cannot afford full rates, the honest path forward is to say so and negotiate transparently, apply for grants that include artist fees as a line item, or scale the event to fit the budget. What is not acceptable is making the artist the automatic donor simply because asking feels easier than planning for fair pay.

*The question to ask is not whether the cause is worthy. It is whether everyone else involved in the event is being paid. If the answer is yes, the artist should be paid too.*

## OPEN MICS

Open mics have two distinct roles and they should be treated differently. Rotating performers signing up for a slot are participating in a community format and are generally not paid per set. That is understood and accepted.

The person running the open mic is doing something else entirely. They are hosting, managing sound, keeping the night moving, welcoming new performers, and holding the room together for two or three hours. That is a professional service and should be compensated as one. A host or house musician running an open mic deserves a guaranteed fee just like any other working musician.

*The open mic host is the reason the night works. Pay them.*

## BENEFIT CONCERTS

Benefit concerts are the situation where musicians feel the most pressure to say yes for free, and where the ask is most often made without examining who else in the room is donating their labor. The venue still earns bar revenue. The organizers still receive goodwill and visibility. The artist is frequently the only person being asked to work for nothing.

A fair standard for benefit concerts looks like one of two things. Either the artist is paid the standard rate and a portion of ticket or bar proceeds goes to the cause. Or the artist genuinely chooses to donate their performance as an in-kind gift, and that donation is valued and acknowledged publicly the same way a cash donation would be, with a dollar amount attached and a thank you that names it for what it is.

What should stop is the quiet assumption that musicians will automatically play for free if the cause is good enough. Generosity is a choice. It should be honored as one, not expected as a default.

*If you would not ask the sound engineer to donate their PA or the bartender to donate their shift, do not ask the musician to donate their performance. If they choose to give it, celebrate that gift. Do not assume it.*

## FREE DRINKS AND HOSPITALITY

Offering performers a drink, a meal, or a parking spot is a warm and welcomed gesture. It is good hosting and it matters. It is not, however, compensation.

Free drinks have no consistent value, cannot pay rent, and put musicians in an uncomfortable position where declining feels ungrateful and accepting too much creates a different set of problems. A venue that offers hospitality and pays fairly is doing two good things. A venue that offers hospitality instead of fair pay is doing one good thing and one bad one.

*Drinks, meals, and parking are hospitality. They belong in the same category as a thank you and a genuine handshake at the end of the night. They do not belong in the fee conversation.*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The ZU Arts Initiative Fair Pay FAQ document covers the most common questions about this guide in full. A few of the most important ones are answered here.

### **Are these rates mandatory?**

No. The Rate Guide is a reference document, not a legal requirement. It names the regional standard so artists have something to point to and venues have something to aspire to.

### **Is ZAI trying to create a union?**

No. ZAI is building a community standard and a voluntary accountability system. The Pledge is an invitation, not a contract. The Rate Guide is a reference, not a mandated scale sheet. Nobody is being organized as an employee and no venue is being compelled to recognize anything.

### **What if a venue cannot afford the full rate?**

Be honest and negotiate in good faith. Scale the event to fit the budget. Apply for grants that include artist fees. What is not fair is making the artist absorb your budget constraint by default without a conversation.

### **When should an artist be paid?**

End of the night. Not next week. Not after the books are settled. If a genuine exception is needed, agree on it in writing before the performance.

*For the full FAQ visit [cortezarts.org](http://cortezarts.org) or email [grow@cortezarts.org](mailto:grow@cortezarts.org).*

*Questions? Want to partner with ZAI on fair pay initiatives?*

**[grow@cortezarts.org](mailto:grow@cortezarts.org) | [cortezarts.org](http://cortezarts.org)**

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