

Branching Streams Teacher Support and Financial Summary Report

August 8, 2024

In May of 2024, the Director of Branching Streams for San Francisco Zen Center and the Branching Streams Advisory Group designed and sent out a survey to Branching Streams guiding teachers to follow up on a topic explored at the 2023 Branching Streams Gathering in Santa Cruz - how teachers are supported by their sanghas financially or in other tangible ways. Anecdotally, we know there are many factors that affect teacher support, including size, location, and resources of the sangha; how long the Center or sangha has been together; needs of the teacher (e.g some have other work, or are supported by pensions; others are serving their center or sangha full-time), whether there is paid staff, and more!

The survey was created to learn more about teacher support to encourage Branching Streams teachers and boards to explore this topic. We're sharing the results of the survey to foster more communication both within and across Branching Streams Centers. This may be helpful to new sanghas, sanghas who are looking for teachers, as well as for established zen centers that are thinking about teacher transitions, including retirement.

This report is based on 37 survey responses from Branching Streams sanghas, representing a survey response rate of 45%. Of those responses, we have extracted quantitative data which is about 75% complete, with some missing values in specific fields. Because our questions in the survey were very open ended, we have utilized a number of tools to extract, clean and analyze the data, including spreadsheets and ChatGPT, with extensive cross-checking and verification of the data.

These findings are meant to summarize some initial insights into the support structures for teachers and staff at Branching Streams sanghas, as well as a very rough sketch of some of the wide variety of financial standing.

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Key Findings

Roles and Number of Teaching Roles

- The most common role is "Guiding Teacher," present in multiple centers.
- On average, each center has about 1.7 roles related to teaching, with a range from 1 to 5 roles.

This list provides a consolidated snapshot of the roles within the Zen centers based on the survey responses and different descriptions. We have standardized the responses somewhat for clarity, this is not a comprehensive list of what was submitted, but rather an indicative count.

1. **Guiding Teacher:** 20
2. **Dharma Teacher:** 7
3. **Tanto:** 5
4. **Head Teacher:** 3
5. **Abbot:** 3
6. **Teacher:** 2
7. **Ino:** 2
8. **Lay Teachers:** 3
9. **Resident Priest:** 2
10. **Vice-Abess:** 1
11. **Multiple Roles:** 1
12. **Practice Leaders:** 1

Full-time and Part-time Teaching Positions

- Among the respondents, about 35% reported having full-time teaching roles, with the number of full-time roles ranging from 0 to 2.
- Part-time teaching roles are more common, with an average of 0.91 part-time roles per center, and the number of part-time roles ranging from 0 to 3.

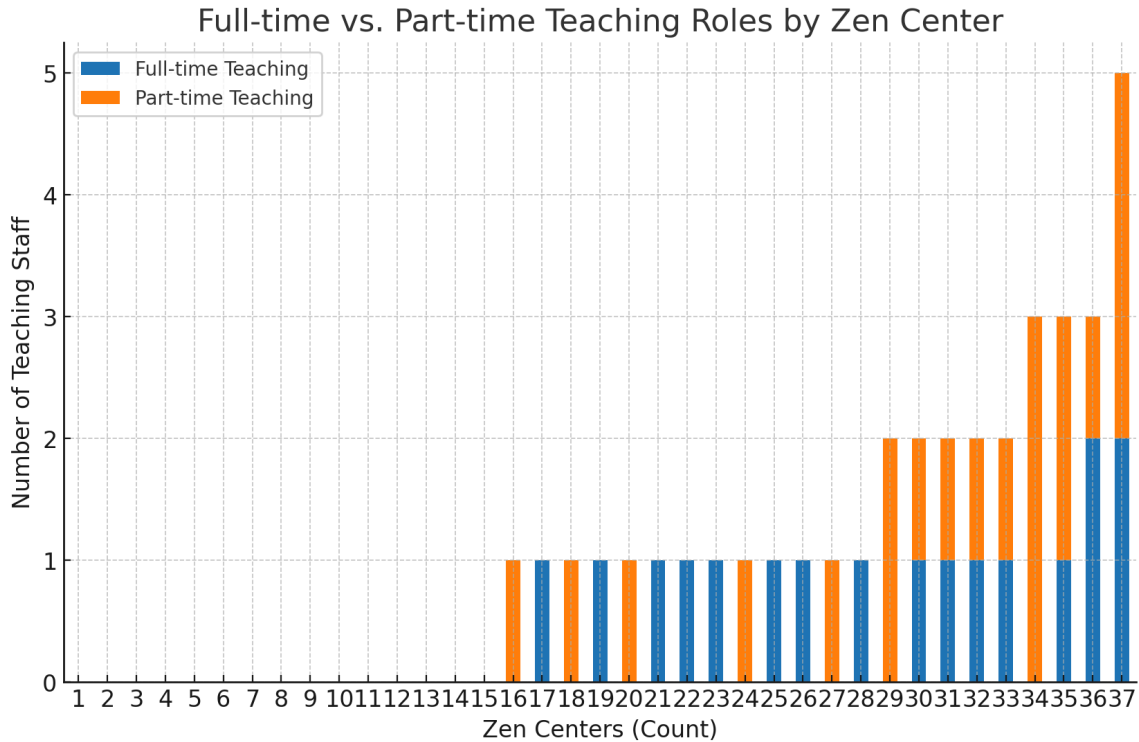


Fig 1. This chart shows the number of full-time and part-time teaching roles. The chart is ordered from least to greatest, with numbers on the horizontal axis for clarity.

Longevity and Retention of Teachers

- Teachers and priests have varying lengths of tenure at their respective centers, ranging from 1-30 years, with an average of 11 years.

Compensation Types

- The most frequently reported types of compensation are stipends, housing allowances and dana (donations). A relatively small number of sanghas offer salary or benefits.
- The annual compensation for teaching roles varies widely, with amounts ranging from \$1,000 to \$48,000. The average compensation is approximately \$13,676.

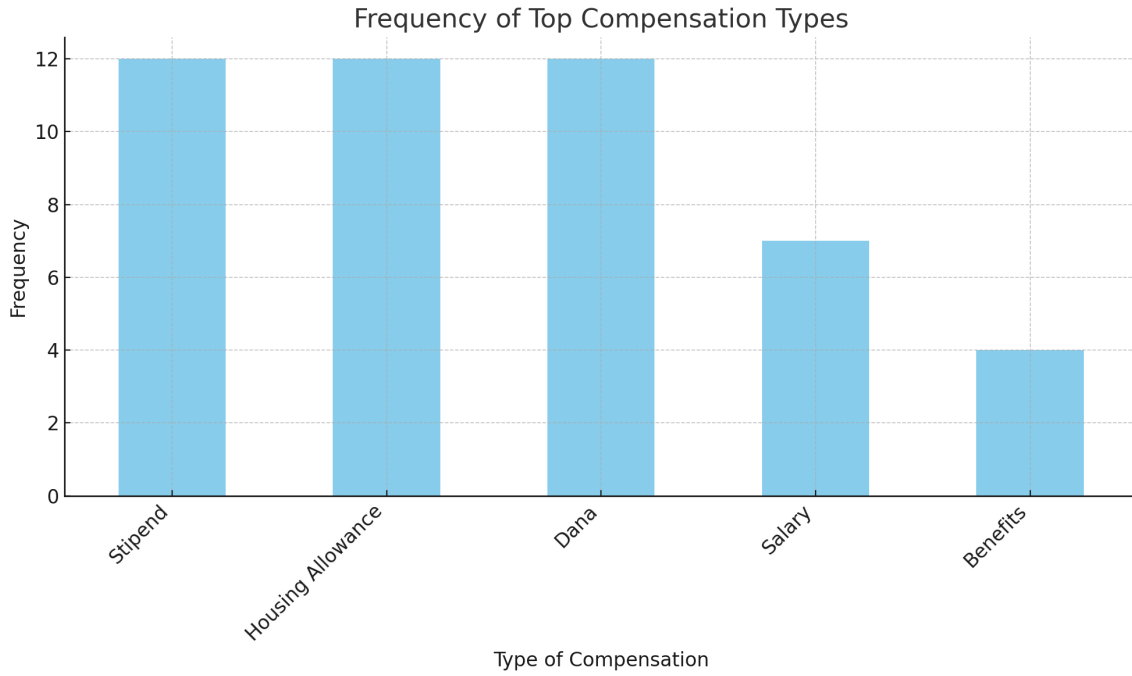


Fig 2. This chart shows the distribution of different types of compensation provided to teachers and staff

Administrative Roles

- Less than half of the sanghas report having full-time, part-time, and/or volunteer administrative staff.
- We have very little data about payment of administrative staff, with only 4 centers reporting the amounts of their highest paid staff, and it ranges from \$4,800 to \$70,000/yr.

The following is a list of some of the admin roles and the frequency with which they appeared in the data:

1. **Treasurer:** 5
2. **Secretary:** 4
3. **Web/IT:** 3
4. **President:** 3
5. **Director:** 3
6. **Administrator:** 2
7. **PR (Public Relations):** 2
8. **Office Assistant:** 2
9. **Manager:** 2
10. **Coordinator:** 1
11. **Assistant:** 1
12. **Office Management:** 1

Admin Role Type	Number of Centers	Percentage of Centers
Full Time	11	29.73%
Part Time	15	40.54%
Volunteer	14	37.84%
More than 1 Full Time	3	8.11%
More than 0 Part Time	15	40.54%
More than 0 Volunteers	14	37.84%
More than 1 Part Time	8	21.62%

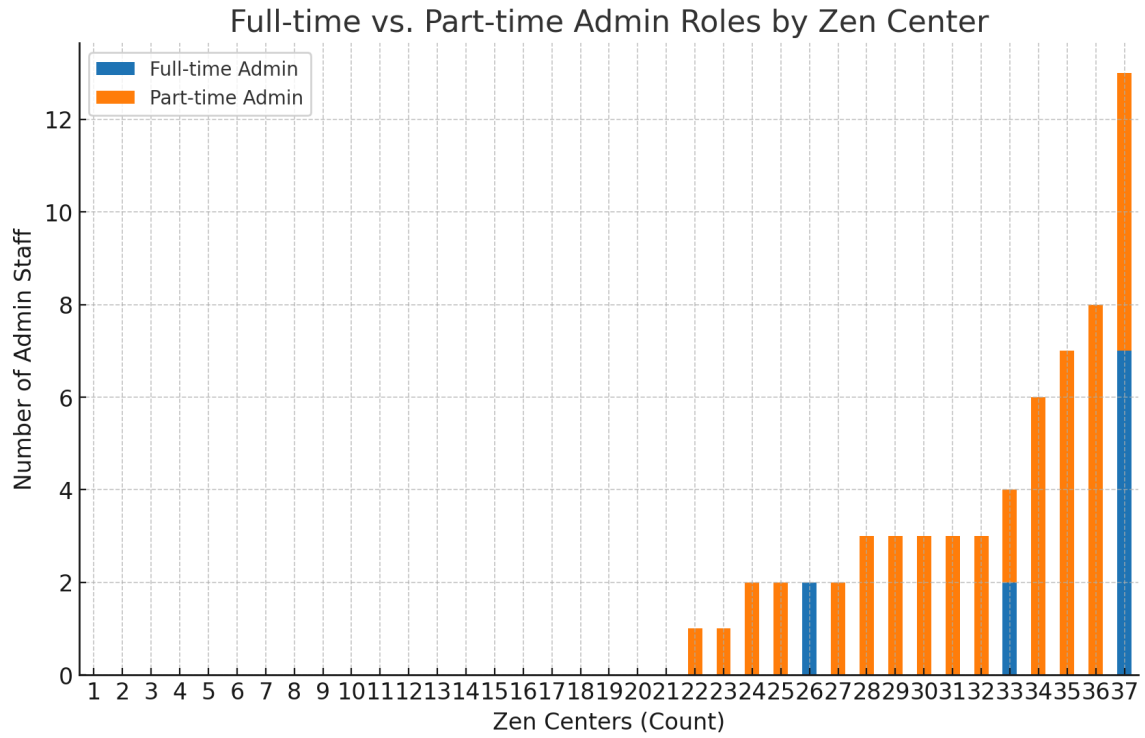


Fig 3. This chart shows the number of full-time and part-time admin roles. The chart is ordered from least to greatest, with numbers on the horizontal axis for clarity.

Financial Overview of Branching Stream Sanghas

While the survey was primarily asking about teacher support, we also included some questions that give us a bit more insight about the financial overview of Branching Streams sanghas. The following statistics provide a snapshot of the sanghas who have responded to this survey, which we believe are largely indicative of the total number of sanghas. Here's what the stats tell us about the range and distribution of these centers:

Total Annual Income

- **Range:** \$0 to \$536,721.15
- **Mean (Average):** \$68,337.67
- **Median (50th Percentile):** \$18,000
- **Distribution:**
 - The wide range indicates significant variability in income among Branching Stream sanghas.
 - The median is much lower than the mean, suggesting that a few centers with very high incomes are skewing the average.
 - 25% of the centers earn \$2,500 or less annually, and 75% earn \$90,100 or less, showing that most centers operate on modest incomes.

Total Annual Expenses

- **Range:** \$0 to \$536,721.15
- **Mean (Average):** \$65,288.14
- **Median (50th Percentile):** \$17,000
- **Distribution:**
 - Similar to income, the expenses also show significant variability.
 - The median is lower than the mean, indicating that a few centers with very high expenses skew the average.
 - 25% of the centers spend \$1,500 or less annually, and 75% spend \$75,000 or less, reflecting that many centers manage their operations with relatively low expenses.

Net Income

- **Range:** -\$2,658 to \$23,624.58
- **Mean (Average):** \$3,049.53
- **Median (50th Percentile):** \$0
- **Distribution:**
 - The mean net income is positive, but the standard deviation is high, indicating wide variability.
 - The median net income is \$0, suggesting that many centers are either breaking even or not generating surplus income.

- 25% of the centers have zero or negative net income, while 75% have net incomes up to \$5,000, highlighting the financial constraints many centers face.

Insights

1. **Financial Diversity:** There is significant financial diversity among Zen centers, with some managing substantial incomes and expenses while others operate on minimal budgets.
2. **Financial Stability:** The positive mean net income suggests overall financial stability, but the median net income of \$0 indicates that many centers may struggle to generate surplus funds.
3. **Outliers:** A few centers with exceptionally high incomes and expenses significantly impact the averages, masking the financial realities of most centers.
4. **Operational Scale:** The lower quartiles for income and expenses suggest that many centers operate on a small scale, possibly relying on volunteer efforts and minimal paid staff.

The following charts provide a more visual overview of the financial status of the Zen centers, including their total annual income and expenses:

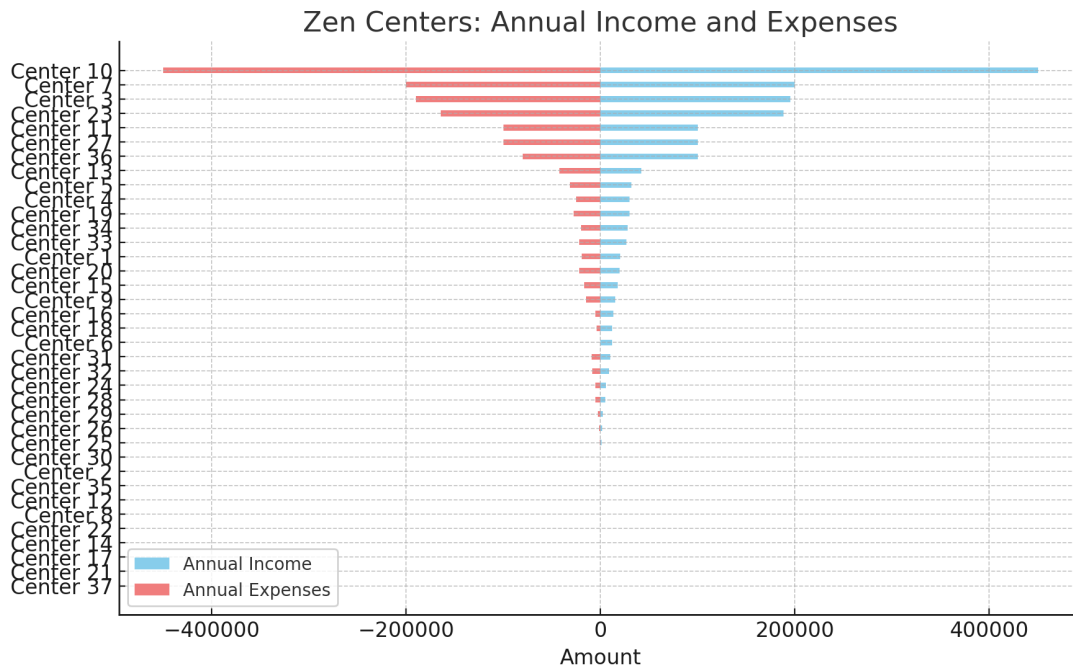


Fig 2. All respondents with annual income and expenses shown..

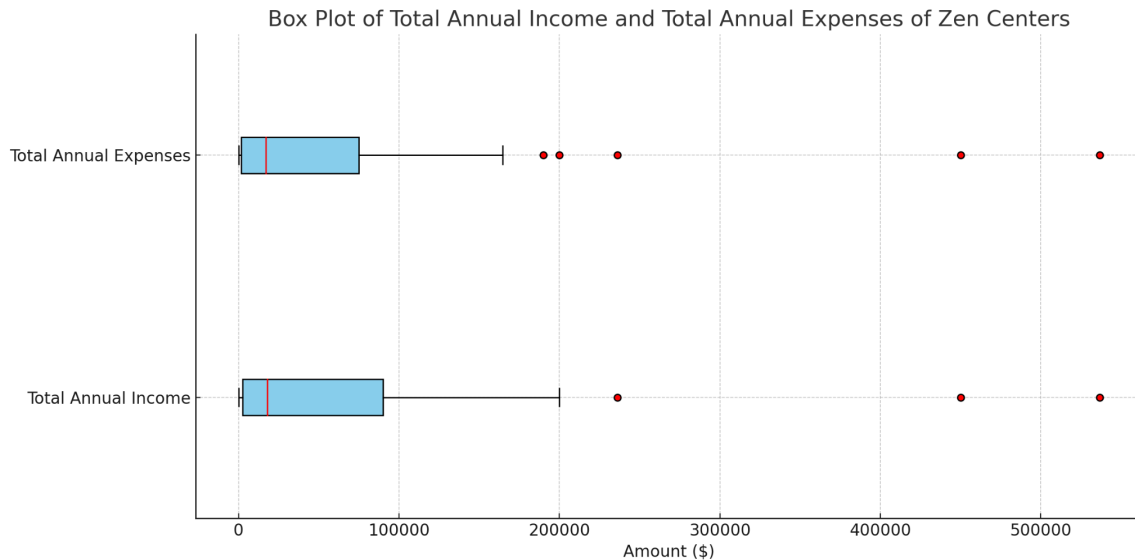


Fig 3. Box plot illustrating the statistical spread of the total annual income and expenses of the Zen centers.

Interpretation of the Box Plot for Income and Expenses

The box plot is a visual illustration of the distribution of total annual income and total annual expenses among Zen centers:

- **Boxes (Interquartile Range - IQR):** The boxes represent the middle 50% of the data (the interquartile range, IQR). The left and right edges of each box indicate the first (Q1) and third quartiles (Q3), respectively.
- **Median (Red Line):** The red line inside each box represents the median income and expenses, dividing the data into two equal halves.
- **Whiskers:** The whiskers extend from the boxes to the smallest and largest values within 1.5 times the IQR from Q1 and Q3, showing the range of most data points.
- **Outliers (Red Dots):** The red dots outside the whiskers represent outliers, values that fall outside 1.5 times the IQR from Q1 and Q3. These outliers indicate Zen centers with significantly higher incomes and expenses.

Insights

1. **Total Annual Income:**
 - The middle 50% of the centers have annual incomes between approximately \$2,500 and \$90,100.
 - The median annual income is about \$18,000, indicating that half of the centers earn less than this amount.

- There are significant outliers with incomes exceeding \$90,100, indicating that a few centers have substantially higher incomes.

2. Total Annual Expenses:

- The middle 50% of the centers have annual expenses between approximately \$1,500 and \$75,000.
- The median annual expense is about \$17,000, indicating that half of the centers spend less than this amount.
- Similar to income, there are significant outliers with expenses exceeding \$75,000, reflecting that some centers incur much higher costs.

Visualized another way, below, clearly the majority of respondents have annual income of less than \$30,000.

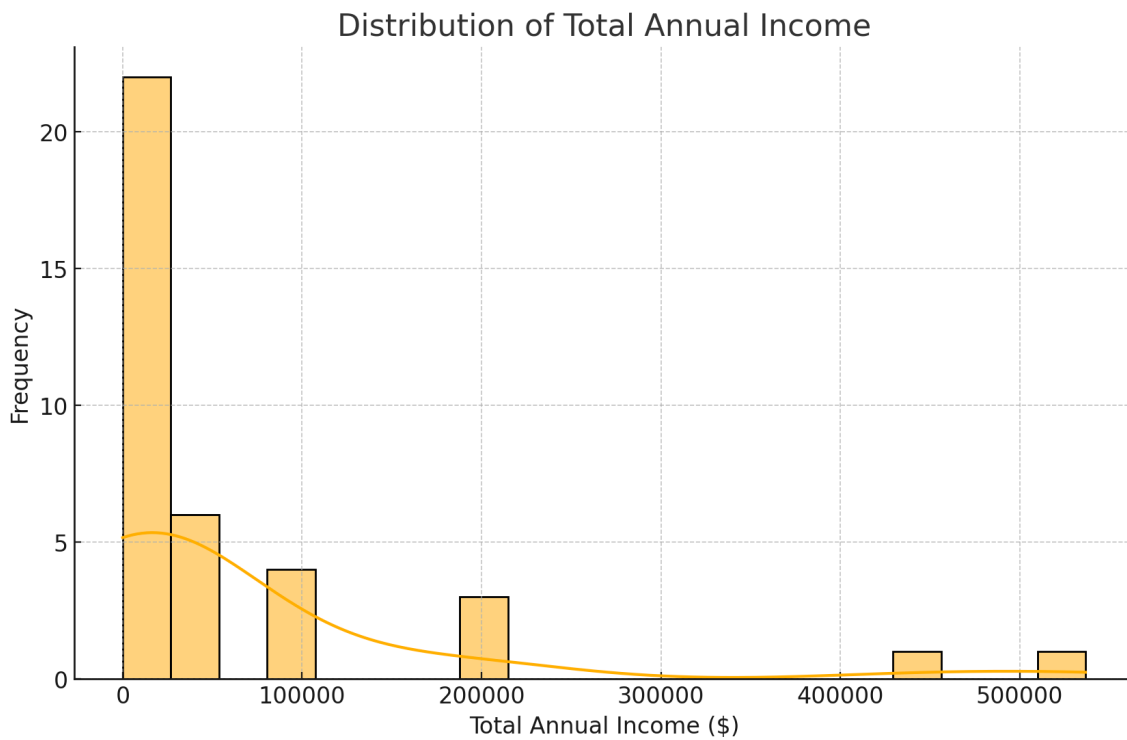


Fig 4. Distribution of total annual income of reporting Zen centers. The histogram shows the frequency of different income levels, and the KDE (kernel density estimate) line provides a smoothed view of the distribution.

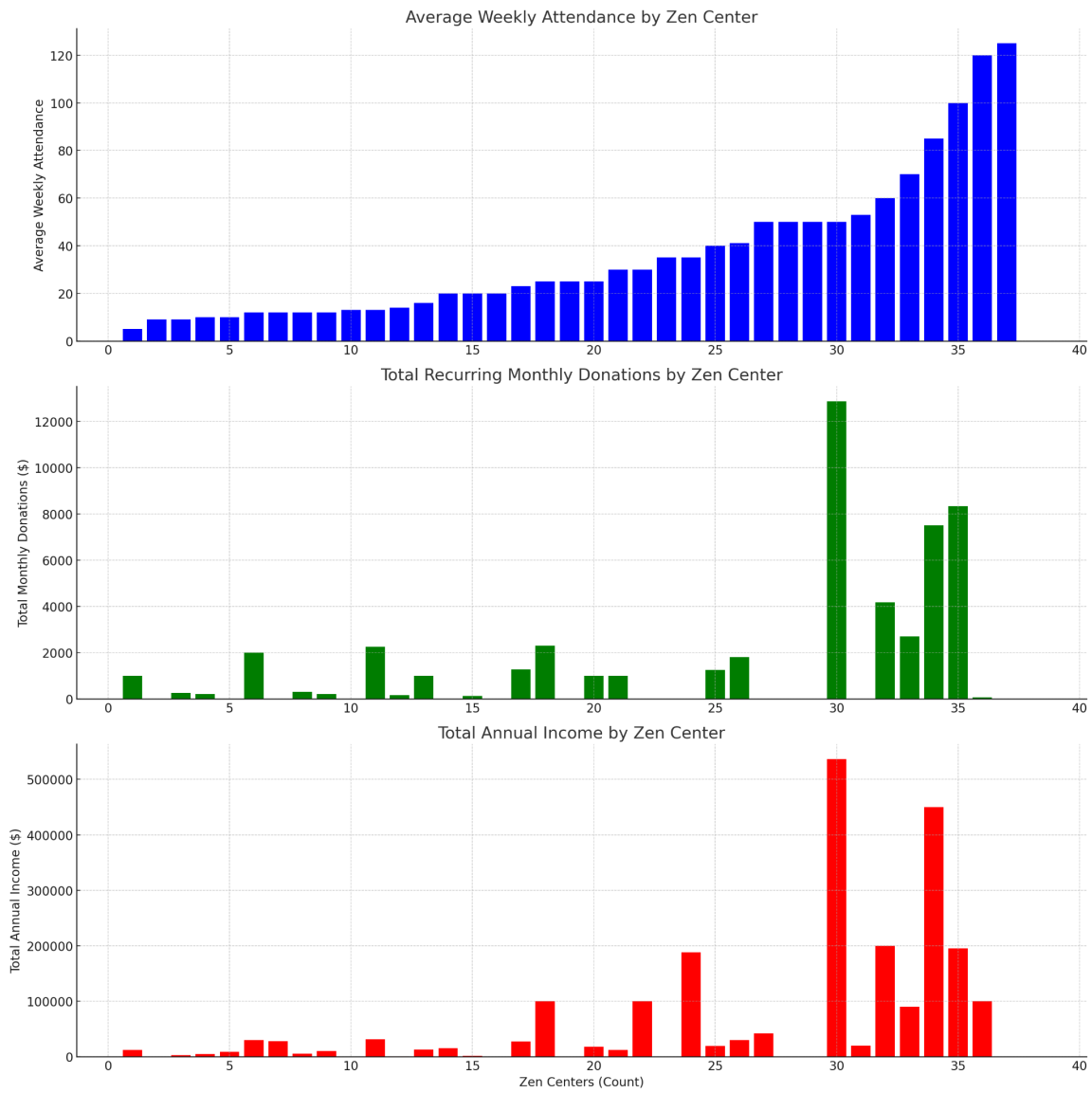


Fig 5. Chart showing all reporting Zen centers by average weekly attendance, total recurring monthly donations, and total annual income.

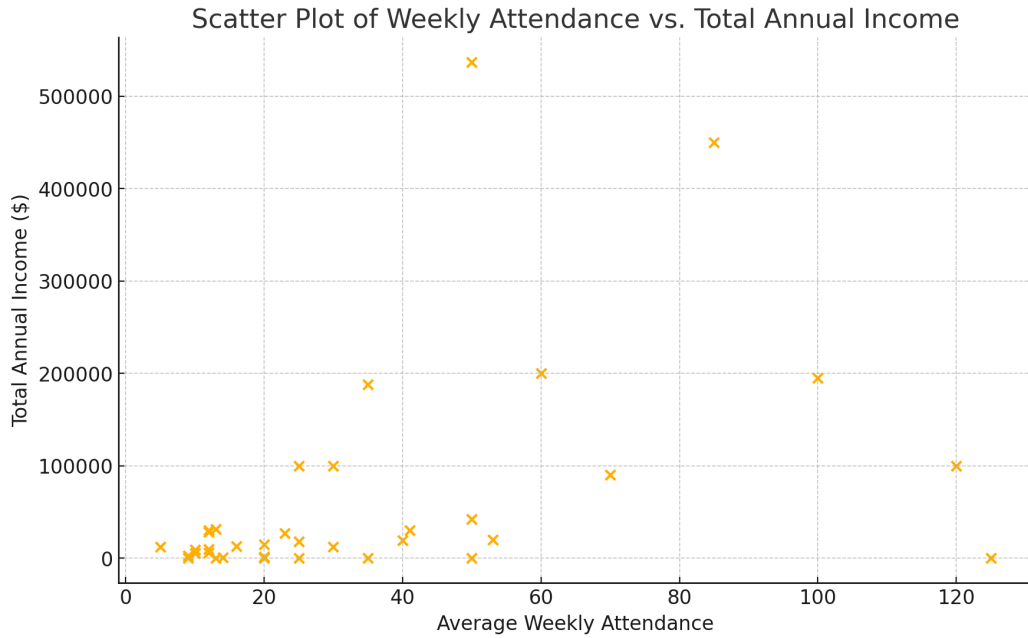


Fig 6. Scatter plot of Average Weekly Attendance versus Total Annual Income

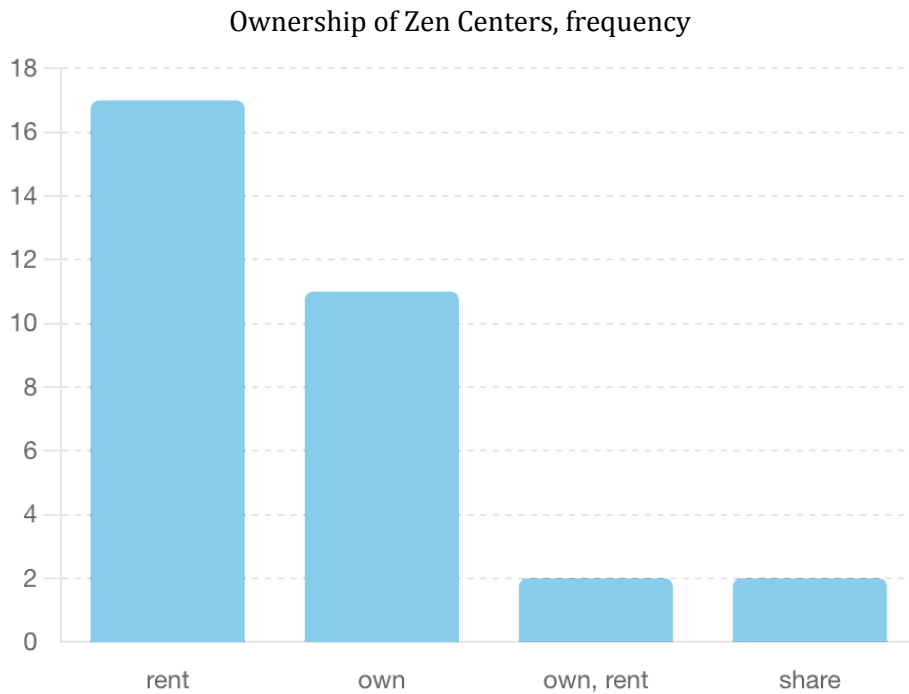


Fig 7. Frequency of building ownership for Zen centers.

Completeness of Data

Based on the analysis of the survey data, the overall completeness of our quantitative data is approximately 75.30%. This means that, on average, about 75% of the data fields across all columns are filled in.

Here is a summary of the completeness for key columns:

- Roles: 91.89%
- Number of roles: 97.30%
- Number of full-time staff: 59.46%
- Number of part-time staff: 59.46%
- Longest time there: 91.89%
- Type of compensation: 86.49%
- Amount/value of highest annual compensation: 43.24%
- Admin roles: 62.16%
- Number of admin roles: 94.59%
- Number of full-time admin: 83.78%
- Number of part-time admin: 83.78%

Certain fields, such as the number of full-time and part-time staff, have lower completeness (around 59%), while other fields like roles and the number of roles are more complete (above 90%).

Overall, while we have a good amount of data filled in for most fields, there are some areas with significant missing data that might need attention for a more comprehensive analysis.

Appendix A: Survey Questions

Here's the link to the survey: <https://bit.ly/branchingstreamsteachersupportsurvey>. The list of questions included:

1. Your Name
2. Name and location of your Center/Sangha
3. Your title or role
4. List all Teaching Positions within the sangha (Guiding Teacher, Co-Guiding Teacher, Assistant Teacher, Teacher Emeritus, etc.) In addition, please state if each position is full-time or part-time.
5. How long has each person been in their position?
6. Please describe their financial compensation (Salary, housing allowance, other)
7. Please describe other benefits provided including Medical and Dental Insurance, Life Insurance, Disability Insurance, Retirement Plan
8. Please describe the following: Are the teachers retired from a prior career, receiving retirement benefits or SSI?
9. Other Employment: Does the teacher have other paid employment? If yes, please describe briefly.
10. Does the teacher support dependents?
11. Does the sangha/board of directors have periodic conversations with the teacher(s) about what their needs are and whether they are being met?
12. Has the sangha committed to support the teacher(s) following retirement? If so, please describe.
13. List Owned Building(s)
14. List Dedicated Rental(s)
15. List Part-Time Rental Facilities
16. Annual Mortgage Payment
17. Annual Rent Paid
18. Number of Pledging Members
19. Average Weekly Attendance
20. Total Recurring Donations
21. Other Donations
22. Other Income (e.g., renting space to other groups)
23. Total Annual Income and Total Annual Expenses
24. Please list the title of all the administrative positions that support the sangha and also whether they are full-time or part-time.
25. Are people that have administrative positions retired from their prior careers? Are they receiving Social Security, retirement benefits, Medicare, or other benefits? Please describe.

26. How is each admin position compensated? Include details about salary, housing allowance, or other means.
27. Please detail any benefits provided to employees. Including medical and dental insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, or retirement plan.
28. Does administrative staff have other forms of paid employment? If so, please describe what kind.
29. Do the members of administration have dependents that they support?
30. Does the sangha/board of directors have periodic conversations with the administrator(s) about what their needs are and whether they are being met?
31. Does the sangha provide any post retirement support? If so, please describe.
32. Has the sangha committed to support the administrator(s) following retirement? If so, please describe.
33. Please let us know if you have any additional thoughts, comments or questions pertaining to teacher support.