

What are Attendance, Experience, Education, and Location Worth?

SBC Compensation Study 2026:
Analysis of full-time senior pastor
compensation and vacation

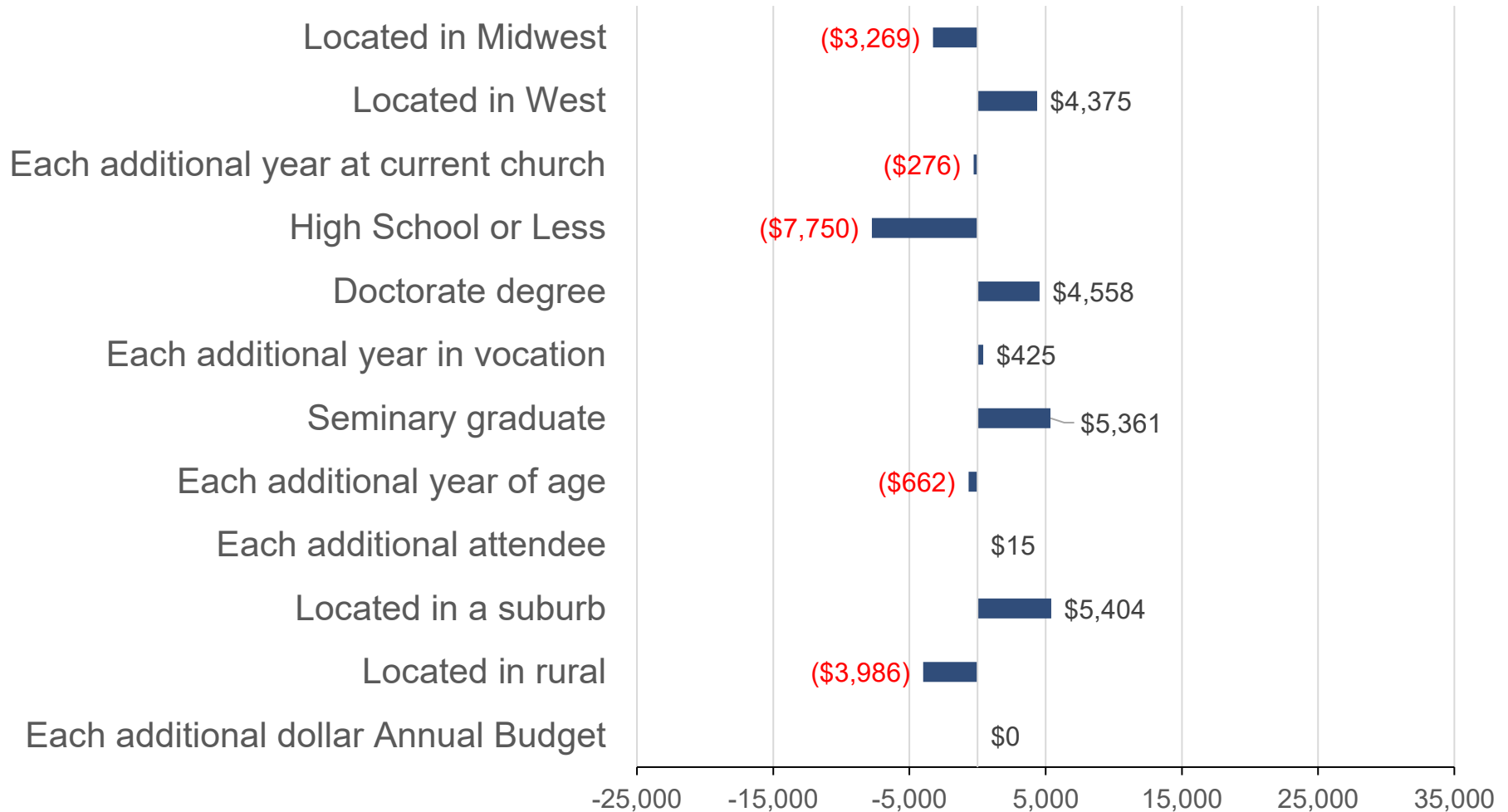
Lifeway Research

Methodology

- The 2026 Southern Baptist Church Compensation Study was conducted by Baptist state conventions along with GuideStone Financial Resources and Lifeway Research
- The study was conducted between April 29 and June 29, 2026
- Data acquired by the study can be accessed at LifewayResearch.com/compensation-data
- Responses from 2,155 full-time senior pastors were used for the analysis shown in this report

What are attendance, experience, and location worth in compensation?

Among full-time senior pastors



Lifeway Research

Results of regression analysis. Dependent variable: Total compensation

How to View Differences in Total Compensation

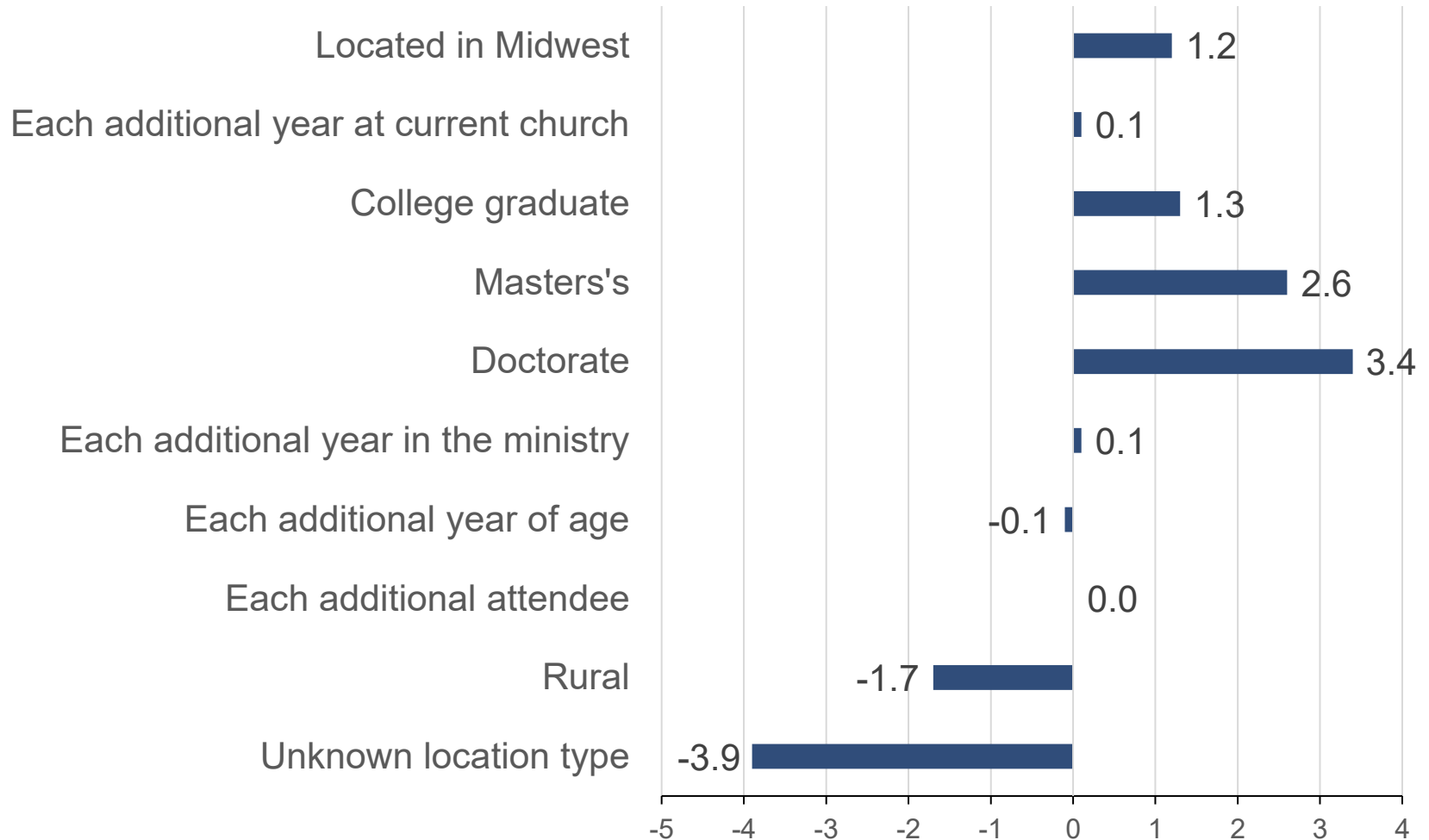
- Independent variables tested (region, years at current church, education, years in ministry, resident membership, annual budget, seminary, age, average weekly attendance, community location) account for 50% of the variance in total compensation (R-Square of the model), so other factors that were not measured or not measurable also can impact pastor compensation.
- The model begins with a constant compensation of \$78,988. The impact of each independent variable moves this up or down.
- The variables have relationships and cannot always be straightforwardly interpreted in isolation. It may appear that being an additional year at current church has a negative impact of \$275.83, but this is probably compensated by years in church vocation adding \$425.32.

What's It Worth in Total Compensation?

- Each additional **year** of pastor age does have a negative impact of \$512, but this could be related to where these individuals pastor serve and the size of their churches.
- **Larger churches** have a positive impact on pastor pay. For every additional 100 attendees, pastors' compensation is on average \$1,460 higher.
- Pastors who are located in a **Suburb** have an average higher pay of \$5,404 compared to those in other types of communities. Those in **Rural Areas** tend to have compensation that is \$3,986 lower.
- Pastors whose highest level of education is an Associate's, Bachelor's, or Master's degree see no impact on their salary from these accomplishments.

Change in days of vacation for location, attendance, education, & experience

Among full-time senior pastors



Lifeway Research

Results of regression analysis. Dependent variable: Number of days of vacation

How to View Differences in Total Vacation

- Independent variables tested (region, years at current church, education, years in ministry, resident membership, seminary, age, average weekly attendance, community location) account for 11% of the variance in days of vacation (R square of the model), so other factors that were not measured or not measurable also can impact pastor vacation time.
- The model begins with a constant of 13.0 days of vacation; the impact of each independent variable moves this up or down.
- Pastors in the **Midwest** tend to receive 1.2 more days of vacation than those in other regions.

What's It Worth in Vacation Time?

- Each **year** the pastor ages, a year gains more experience, and adds a year at the current church, the total expected vacation impact is +0.096. Therefore, it takes about 10.4 years to add a day of vacation.
- **Larger churches** tend to give their pastors slightly more vacation. For every 174 attendees pastors get 1 more vacation day on average.
- Churches in **rural areas** on average give pastors 1.7 less days of vacation
- Vacation varies by **education**. Those who are college graduates, Master's, or Doctorate receive on average 1.3, 2.6, and 3.4 more days of vacation, respectively.

Full-time senior pastor average years in ministry and at current church

	Mean	Median
Years in a church vocation	22	21
Years at current church	10	7

What are Attendance, Experience, Education, and Location Worth?

SBC Compensation Study 2026:
Analysis of full-time senior pastor
compensation and vacation

Lifeway Research