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Top executive at Better Business Bureau's L.A. branch earns more than \$400,000 a year

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William Mitchell's salary exceeds that of the BBB's national president. The head of a watchdog organization for nonprofits calls such compensation 'much more than normal.'

November 24, 2010 | By Sharon Bernstein, Los Angeles Times

The executive who heads the organization's Los Angeles branch makes more than \$400,000 a year. His San Diego counterpart brings in \$206,000. The head of a smaller office in New York earns \$175,000.

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That's the compensation for local presidents of the nonprofit Better [Business](#) Bureaus, which issue letter ratings to businesses that are supposed to reflect how fairly they treat consumers.

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The organization's national president earned \$335,000 in 2008, according to the latest available documents from the Internal Revenue Service.

But that salary was eclipsed by William Mitchell, president of the Better Business Bureau of the Southland, which includes Los Angeles. He made \$409,490 that year, according to IRS documents.

"I can't remember any case where somebody running a local chapter is earning more than the person who is running the national organization," said Trent Stamp, former head of the watchdog organization Charity Navigator and now executive director of the Beverly Hills-based Eisner Foundation.

The Better Business Bureaus have come under a spotlight after disclosures that the organization gave better ratings to businesses that were paid members — and, in some cases, awarded A-grade ratings to phony companies that paid up.

Small businesses have long complained that many chapters of the Better Business Bureau used telemarketers armed with high-pressure tactics to get them to sign up for memberships that could cost \$400 or more.

In the wake of fresh news reports on its practices last week, Steve Cox, president of the national Council of Better Business Bureaus, said the organization would no longer boost ratings just on a basis of paid membership.

He also said the BBB would investigate activities at the Southland branch, which initiated the controversial grading system.

The salaries paid to the local chapter executives are set by local boards of directors, which have discretion to pay any amount that they feel is appropriate, said Alison Southwick, spokeswoman for the national office.

The national office does not set a specific formula or approach, she said.

Mitchell and other executives at the Southland branch did not return calls for comment on the salaries.

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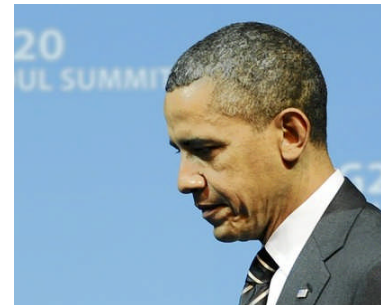
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