

Routesetting Industry Data Survey: Why You Should Contribute

December 6, 2024

Posted By: [Foxman McCarthy-James](#) in [CWA Blog](#)



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Do you work in a climbing gym?

Do you want to help inform the decisions of routesetting departments nationwide?

Vortex Routesetting has relaunched our Routesetting Industry Data Survey, and we are now in the final stretch before presenting our findings. We need your help!

“We” are Foxman McCarthy-James and Justin Wright, founders of Vortex Routesetting. We formally collected routesetting industry data in 2019 while traveling for competitions and guest setting. We realized that wherever where we went, routesetters were having the same conversations:

“How many boulders are you setting each day? Do you have a lift? Who washes the holds? Does your gym provide your equipment? How much are you being paid? Do you have healthcare?” **At a certain point, we decided to start writing it down.**

If everybody was asking the same questions, building a platform to provide answers would seem only logical.

We were certainly not the first to conduct a routesetting survey. Cody Grodzki debuted his Tick

Tape Tighten Survey in 2016 with an update in 2018, examining various factors that influenced the compensation routesetters were seeking in different parts of the U.S. Vertical Life's Routesetter Magazine launched surveys that focused on routesetting team demographics. As the industry expanded, these surveys sparked a public conversation about the direction professional routesetting was headed, and where we wanted it to go.

When building our Routesetting Industry Data Survey, our goal was to build a dataset with **broad layers that provide insight into the forces influencing the structure of routesetting programs.** While compensation is certainly a piece of the puzzle, it doesn't provide a complete picture of any workplace environment.

Our survey looks at the broader picture of workload and team structure about the size and member traffic of gyms, as well as safety practices. We ask about pay and benefits, but also wellness programs and professional development policies. We want to understand how routesetting programs are structured within the greater context of each gym. The needs of different gyms vary greatly, and without context, individual data points lose their meaning.

After three years of research and interviews, we presented our initial findings at the Climbing Wall Association Summit in 2022 (still available to view on our website at www.vortexroutesetting.com).

While our initial method of in-person interviews allowed us to adjust rapidly to the feedback we received from respondents, it wasn't scalable moving forward. As we moved to update our existing data and expand the project, it became imperative to find a solution that allowed the Routesetting Industry Data project to grow with the industry.

Which brings us to now!

Vortex has updated our survey, moving it onto a digital platform and making it accessible remotely to anyone with the link or QR code. By putting our survey online, we're able to get continuously updated data from gyms all over the country.

The survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete, is fully anonymized, and is easy to access from both mobile devices and PCs.

Respondents can expect questions centered around:

- The approximate square footage of the gyms and the height of the walls
- Number of people on the routesetting team and the number of days routesetting takes per week
- How many boulders and rope routes are set on average per setter per day
- Required routesetting safety practices
- Available pay bands and benefits

- Wellness program offerings and professional development policies

Anyone can fill it out, and the resulting data benefits everyone. Routesetters can better understand what job opportunities are available, and owners and managers can stay competitive and build programs that meet the needs of their community.

As the industry continues to grow, help us stay abreast of changing routesetting programming trends and standards. Contribute to the Routesetting Industry Data Survey and stay tuned!

As a thought leader for the indoor climbing industry, the CWA is excited to support and promote good data gathering that make all of us stronger. Consider helping the industry by taking 15 minutes to share your anonymous feedback.

About Vortex Routesetting



Foxman McCarthy-James is a freelance routesetter with over a decade of commercial and competition-setting experience. She has brought her background in education into her routesetting career, serving as the Routesetting Education Consultant for the Climbing Wall Association and contributing routesetting educational content for the Climbing Business Journal. She is passionate about continuing the conversation on how we can make our industry more welcoming and inclusive.



Justin Wright is a USAC L4 setter with experience developing routesetting teams in gyms across the country. Serving on the CWA's Routesetting and Work at Height committees, Justin is committed to helping move the climbing industry forward by developing routesetter education pathways and recommending best practices for volunteer Work at Height Standards.



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