

Negotiating Compensation: How to Advocate for What You Want



HARVARD
T.H. CHAN

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Office for Alumni Affairs and
Career Advancement

Do your homework: Prepare a budget for yourself so you know your own financial needs and goals. Consider cost of living expenses, whether you have dependents, students loans, other expenses that impact your bottom line and influence how much you need to earn. Once you have a sense of what you need, you can begin to picture what you might want to earn. Also research the market so you have a reasonable sense of the salary range for the field, position, and geographic locations you are seeking. There are many online resources where you can see examples of salaries from various sectors and some are even listed by company. Check out Career Resources on the our [website](#) for links that contain salary information.

Timing the talk: Be prepared to talk salary upfront, but do not *expect* the conversation until the employer has clearly selected you as their desired candidate. Some employers will make contact early in the process to make sure candidates fall within the company's proposed range before scheduling interviews. Here are a few questions and appropriate responses to those early salary screening questions:

"What are your salary expectations? Or, if you were to receive an offer from us, would you accept it?" Reiterate your strong and genuine interest in the employer, but say there are many details about the job and the employer you need to learn about and evaluate. You may say that there is a high probability that you could reach agreement on that basis. If you have other offers, you may want to let them that you will need time to analyze and compare a prospective offer. [From Harvard Kennedy School, Career Advancement](#)

"You have seen our advertised salary range. Are you willing to accept a salary within that range?" Again, reiterate that you applied for this job because of your strong interest in the work the organization does. You may say that you want to be paid fairly relative to the job market for this kind of work in this geographic area, and that you are sure you could reach agreement on that basis. [From Harvard Kennedy School, Career Advancement](#)

Congratulations! You've received a job offer!

Be sure to graciously thank the employer and ask for some time to consider it. An offer almost always consists of more than just salary, but a range of benefits including a percentage of health insurance, paid time off, and other perks. You can ask for the offer in writing so you have something to refer to while you are making your decision, especially if you are comparing multiple offers. Use this time to revisit the job description and really imagine yourself in that role, in that organization, and perhaps a new geographic area. Will you have opportunity for growth? Does the culture feel like a fit and can you see yourself building relationships with the team?

The Negotiation: Based on the information you have gathered about market salaries, your own budget, and your full understanding of the package they offered, you should ask if the offer is negotiable and request an increased salary and benefits package. Do not be shy about this request. The employer has already determined you are the most qualified candidate and you are asking for a reasonable amount given the market, geography, and the offer they initially made. Base the negotiation on your experience, be prepared to talk about what you offer to the position and organization. Emphasize your strengths and your sincere interest in the position and appeal to them to not lose sight of what a great fit you are and that you are sure you can both come to agreement on compensation. Know that some things may be negotiable, and some may not. Depending on the organization, they may have budgeted for a fixed amount or a small range, they may not offer signing bonus or relocation compensation. However, it doesn't hurt to ask (most employers expect it) and they will see that *you* value your talents!

If they push you for an immediate decision, you might say:
"You know that I have a strong interest in the job and your organization. I just feel that such an important decision should be made after careful consideration. I promise I won't hold you up beyond the agreed time, but I really would like to have that time to decide."

Understanding Compensation

Why a job offer is about more than the money...

Review all the aspects of compensation before entering into a compensation negotiation. Not all of these items are relevant and important in every case, but consider each item and make a list of those that are important to your particular circumstance.

Examples of Cash-value Items

Base salary: amount, timing of reviews, and potential for future increases.

Signing bonus: if you do not need the money immediately, negotiate for the sum to be applied to your base salary as future raises will be based on your initial compensation level.

Performance-based bonus: will depend on the financial performance of the organization and on your individual performance. *Keep in mind that in the U.S. bonus pay is taxed at a higher rate than base salary.*

Deferred compensation: employer contribution outright or match of your contributions.

Retirement plans: availability, employer/employee contribution ratio.

Severance protection: notice of severance; amount payable; terms (usually applicable only to higher management positions).

One-time expenses: Depending on your circumstances, employer coverage of certain one-time

expenses can be as important to you as a particular salary level. An up-front signing bonus can help upgrade your wardrobe, cover the down payment on a car, or reduce your student loan repayment burden.

Examples of Benefits

Insurance: medical, dental, vision, life, disability; dependent coverage; employer/employee contribution ratios.

Vacation, sick leave, family leave, maternity or paternity leave, bereavement leave; rate of accrual; waiting period before entitlement; credits transferred upon starting job.

Automobile allowance: mileage reimbursement, other travel expenses.

Cell phone/BlackBerry provided.

Professional training/conference attendance; education (tuition reimbursement plan).

Professional membership dues, subscriptions.



Other details that may make the difference

Work hours and flexibility:

Some employers offer flexible time policies, for instance allowing employees to complete 10 days work in 9 days, or to work remotely a certain number of hours a month. Such flexibility may have a cash and/or quality of life value to you.

Starting date: Want to go to your sister's wedding in Paris? If you need to start after a certain date, or if you need time off during your first months on the job before vacation has accrued, negotiate those needs up-front. It is much easier to ask and agree on special consideration during a negotiation than after you have started the job.

Consulting days and publishing rights: if you plan to provide consulting services, sit on a board of directors, or write about your field of expertise, get a written statement granting agreement on the parameters.

Adapted from Harvard Kennedy School of Government Office of Career Advancement