Salary negotiating is particularly important for social workers for a number of reasons. The first reason is that your initial professional salary influences subsequent wages. Social work earnings lag behind other professionals, primarily because it can take years to earn a competitive salary (NASW Center for Workforce Studies, 2010). A good first salary can help social workers “leapfrog” to better salaries more quickly. A second reason that supports salary negotiation for social workers is that the majority of social workers are women. Women are often reluctant to negotiate their salaries; this reluctance “costs women more than a half a million dollars over the course of their respective careers” (Dugan Jr d L, Fairbanks [2011]).

We asked experienced social workers for their best salary negotiating advice. These tips can help you enter into a salary negotiation prepared to succeed.

» DO YOUR RESEARCH

It is your responsibility to understand the financial environment of the organization before your interview. Are you interviewing for a struggling local nonprofit on a modest budget, a large, national organization, or a for-profit organization? Your salary expectations should be informed not only by the job you would be asked to perform, but also by the type of agency, their financial position, and their level of external funding.

Congratulations! You’ve secured a job offer. Now you need to secure the salary that you want and deserve. For some people, negotiating a salary can be a frightening proposition, but it doesn’t have to be. Think of salary negotiation as an opportunity to let your new employer know that you are talented and savvy. A good negotiation can also let the employer know how interested you are in joining, as well as making a commitment to, your new organization.

We asked experienced social workers for their best salary negotiating advice. These tips can help you enter into a salary negotiation prepared to succeed.

» DO YOUR RESEARCH

It is your responsibility to understand the financial environment of the organization before your interview. Are you interviewing for a struggling local nonprofit on a modest budget, a large, national organization, or a for-profit organization? Your salary expectations should be informed not only by the job you would be asked to perform, but also by the type of agency, their financial position, and their level of external funding.
**EXPECT FAIR COMPENSATION**

Organizations hire the people they need to accomplish their mission. Organizational leaders make decisions about the “worth” of a job or position and set salaries accordingly. As a professional social worker, you bring considerable value to the table:

- Value your training, education and experience. Define the specific skill set you have that entitles you to a higher salary.
- Make the case for the value of your work, not your worth. The work is important, but it is not their “worth.” The work exists within the organization.
- Consider your expenses as part of the package, including how much you will be paying for health insurance, commuting costs, etc. These factors can affect how much money you take home in your paycheck.
- Make sure each job you accept has the capacity to enhance your practice in skill, knowledge and/or responsibility and that the increase in duties or responsibility is proportionate to the salary increase.
- Ask if bonus and merit opportunities exist within the organization.
- Don’t feel pressured. It is reasonable to take several days to decide if you are accepting an offer. Accepting a job is an important decision and should not be taken lightly.

**ALWAYS NEGOTIATE**

Don’t assume the first offer is the final offer. Employers usually expect negotiation. They may actually offer a “low-ball” amount because they expect the prospective employee to reject that initial offer. Rejecting the initial offer should not be a negative exchange, but rather a starting point for the salary conversation.

- Always ask for more than you expect.
- Consider the entire package, including benefits such as flexible time, health/dental benefits, paid leave, tuition reimbursement, fringe benefits, access to social work supervision and support for licensing and/or professional development.
- Stay current on research, treatment strategies, and other developments in your specialty.
- Make sure you have a sense of the top salaries in the sector, in roles, and in specialties similar to the job you seek.
- Always ask for more than you expect, and be prepared to walk away if your minimum salary cannot be met. Do not sell yourself short.
- Determine what other benefits you might be interested in, in lieu of a higher salary.
- Be confident.
- Be clear about your “bottom line.” Before the interview, think about your financial goals and how this job helps you meet them. The work is important, but social workers may tend to focus on their “work” and not their “worth.” The work may be initially satisfying, but the satisfaction will fade if you’re unable to meet your financial obligations or goals.

**BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR “BOTTOM LINE”**

Before the interview, think about your financial goals and how this job helps you meet them. The work is important, but social workers may tend to focus on their “work” and not their “worth.” The work may be initially satisfying, but the satisfaction will fade if you’re unable to meet your financial obligations or goals.

- Decide, in advance, on a minimum, acceptable salary.
- Know the amount that you can live on comfortably as well as the amount you need to feel valued as an employee.
- Value your training, education and experience. Define the specific skill set you have that entitles you to a higher salary.
- Make the case for the value of your work, not your needs.
- Anticipate the questions that you will be asked and be prepared with thorough answers.
- Invest in salary negotiation seminars or workshops to boost your negotiating skills.
- Realize when the employer has made their best, final offer. Further attempts to negotiate after this point can result in the job offer being rescinded.

**COMPLAINT THE ENTIRE OFFER**

Consider the entire package, including benefits such as flexible time, health/dental benefits, paid leave, tuition reimbursement, fringe benefits, access to social work supervision and support for licensing and/or professional development.

Don’t assume the first offer is the final offer. Employers usually expect negotiation.
ABOUT YOUR "BOTTOM LINE"

The work is important, but the organization’s financial situation also matters. Use sites such as salary.com, Payscale.com, and Glassdoor.com to research salaries for social workers in geographic areas and in roles, and specialty areas similar to your work.

• **COMPENSATION**
  - There’s no free lunch—people make decisions worth it of a job or position according to their needs.
  - Define the specific skill base that entitles you to a salary.
  - Consider your expenses as part of the total cost of living.
  - Understand that the rate of compensation will drive future raises, cost of living increases, etc.
  - Be prepared to walk away if your minimum salary cannot be met. Do not sell yourself short.
  - Determine if any other benefits you might be interested in, in lieu of a higher salary.

• **ALWAYS NEGOTIATE**
  - Don’t assume the first offer is the final offer. Employers usually expect negotiation. They may actually offer a "lowball" amount because they expect the prospective employee to reject that initial offer. Receiving the initial offer should not be a negative exchange, but rather a starting point for the salary conversation.
  - Evaluate the first offer and negotiate as appropriate.
  - Inquire about the salary range and how the position is set to progress to the ceiling of that range.
  - Always ask for more than you expect, to leave room for negotiation.
  - Practice negotiating with colleagues, mentors, or coaches to increase your skill and confidence in salary negotiation.
  - Invest in a salary negotiation seminar or workshop to boost your negotiating skills.
  - Realize when the employer has made their best, final offer. Further attempts to negotiate after this point can result in the job offer being rescinded.

• **CONTEMPLATE THE ENTIRE OFFER**
  - Consider the entire package, including benefits such as flexible time, health/dental benefits, paid leave, tuition reimbursement, fringe benefits, access to social work supervision, and support for licensing and/or professional development.
  - Consider your expenses as part of the package, including how much you will be paying for health insurance, commuting costs, etc. These factors can affect how much money you take home in your paycheck.
  - Make sure each job you accept has the capacity to enhance your practice in skill, knowledge, and/or responsibility and that the increase in duties or responsibility is proportionate to the salary increase.
  - Ask if bonus and merit opportunities exist within the organization.
  - Don’t feel pressured. It is reasonable to take several days to decide if you are accepting an offer. Accepting a job is an important decision and should not be taken lightly.

• **FOR النساء**
  - Don’t assume the first offer is the final offer. Employers usually expect negotiation. They may actually offer a "lowball" amount because they expect the prospective employee to reject that initial offer. Receiving the initial offer should not be a negative exchange, but rather a starting point for the salary conversation.
  - Evaluate the first offer and negotiate as appropriate.
  - Inquire about the salary range and how the position is set to progress to the ceiling of that range.
  - Always ask for more than you expect, to leave room for negotiation.
  - Practice negotiating with colleagues, mentors, or coaches to increase your skill and confidence in salary negotiation.
  - Invest in a salary negotiation seminar or workshop to boost your negotiating skills.
  - Realize when the employer has made their best, final offer. Further attempts to negotiate after this point can result in the job offer being rescinded.

• **CONTEMPLATE THE ENTIRE OFFER**
  - Consider the entire package, including benefits such as flexible time, health/dental benefits, paid leave, tuition reimbursement, fringe benefits, access to social work supervision, and support for licensing and/or professional development.
  - Consider your expenses as part of the package, including how much you will be paying for health insurance, commuting costs, etc. These factors can affect how much money you take home in your paycheck.
  - Make sure each job you accept has the capacity to enhance your practice in skill, knowledge, and/or responsibility and that the increase in duties or responsibility is proportionate to the salary increase.
  - Ask if bonus and merit opportunities exist within the organization.
  - Don’t feel pressured. It is reasonable to take several days to decide if you are accepting an offer. Accepting a job is an important decision and should not be taken lightly.

REFERENCES


©2012 National Association of Social Workers. All Rights Reserved.