

Negotiating salary and benefits with a prospective employer can be intimidating and uncomfortable, especially if you do not feel adequately prepared. Job seekers either fear being perceived as too aggressive or not aggressive enough. They do not want to risk losing the opportunity for employment, but don't want to settle for a below average salary. You can overcome this fear, however, by becoming familiar with the appropriate time and methods for negotiating a complete compensation package.

Plan your Salary Discussion:

Before beginning the interview process with an organization, plan your salary discussion by completing a four-step salary assessment to determine your ideal salary range.

- Review all current bills and anticipated expenses to determine the minimum cash requirements to meet your financial needs.
- Clarify the "average market value" of your position in the current employment market as well as with the specific employer.
 - Research current salary trends for your type of job by asking friends, relatives, companies, placement services, and other knowledgeable sources.
 - Review salary surveys from professional journals, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, state labor offices, <http://jobsmart.org>, National Business Employment Weekly, and other resources. It may be wise to add 3-4% to the previous year's market salaries to allow for an increase in the cost of living.
 - Investigate how salaries and benefits of the prospective employer compare to its competitors.
 - Consider cost-of-living differences of major cities on these Web sites: www.homefare.com or www.virtualrelocation.com
- Determine a realistic "dream" figure. Select a salary that would cause you to celebrate, but that would not price you out of a job in your field.
- Establish your desired salary range. Place your average market value, as determined from your research, on the bottom end of your range and your realistic, "dream" salary on the top end of your range. Although this range may appear high because it is created from the top half of your personal salary assessment, realize that negotiating down is much easier than negotiating up.