Salary and Estimated Cost of Living

One very important decision you need to consider when weighing your job offer is determining whether or not the offered salary is going to be competitive with the cost of living for your geographic area. 

For example: $35,000 in Washington D.C. is much different than $35,000 in Farmville, VA.

To help you determine what your expected expenses will be, we strongly encourage you to consult a cost of living calculator. You might try salary.com or glassdoor.com.

Negotiating Your Salary & Benefits Package

Once an offer has been made, you may begin your salary negotiation. A conversation about salary is not appropriate until there is a sense of commitment on the employers’ side. The salary negotiation is a very acceptable and expected practice that happens either verbally or in written format. As you negotiate, factor in your qualifications, education, related experience, specialized skills, and training; do not negotiate your salary based on your wants and needs, which would translate to your potential employer, “I have really large student loans and need the money.”

Tips for Negotiating Your Salary

- **Don’t over-ask:** Do your research to make an educated guess as to how much the employer will be able to pay you—ask other employees working at the company or try looking online (salary.com or glassdoor.com).

- **Salary Range vs. Salary Target:** You should always give a salary range, which offers room for discussion and shows that you are flexible. Ranges also give you a cushion in case your asking salary is too high. Most companies will meet you in your range when they want you, as long as the range is reasonable.

- **Counter-offer, but only once:** You will always be expected to counter-offer, as no company wants a pushover. Don’t give a counter-offer more than once, however, as it becomes drawn-out and annoying for the employer.

- **Don’t be too excited:** Remain positive and excited, but appearing too excited makes you look desperate. Play it cool, but showing you’re excited does make you more appealing to the company.