

# CAL POLY CAREER SERVICES | EVALUATING OFFERS

When evaluating an offer, don't just look at the salary. The benefits package is also important. Evaluate the factors below by researching the company, asking questions, and being observant during the interview process.

## THE POSITION

- Day-to-day tasks and responsibilities
- Degree of independence
- Opportunity to learn new skills
- Opportunity to apply academic preparation
- Access to mentors and professional role models
- Hours: both stated and expected
- Criteria used to evaluate you
- Personalities of supervisors/colleagues
- Opportunity for travel
- Pressure and pace of work
- Social significance of position
- Fit of position with long term goals
- Transferability of skills
- Work/life balance

## COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

- Base salary
- Signing bonus
- Annual bonuses
- Sales commissions
- Annual or performance-based increases
- Medical/dental/vision benefits
- Retirement plan
- Paid holidays/vacation/sick leave
- Life insurance
- Stock options
- Profit sharing
- Relocation expenses
- Professional development/educational benefits

## THE ORGANIZATION

- Quality of products and services
- Management style/quality
- Opportunity for advancement
- Reputation and image of company/profitability
- Support of professional development
- Importance of your division/team to the company as a whole
- Company/organization culture
- New hire training
- Integrity/ethics/company values
- Growth potential
- Stability (financial/market)
- Innovation and encouragement of new ideas
- Work environment (atmosphere/pace)
- Employee recognition
- How you are treated during the interview process
- How work is accomplished (team v. independent)
- How decisions are made (top-down v. collaborative, quick v. drawn out)

## LIFESTYLE

- Cost of living
- Proximity to family and friends
- Commuting distance/costs/traffic
- Recreational/cultural opportunities
- Employment opportunities for partner
- Proximity to graduate schools
- Weather

## WAYS TO LEARN ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION AND POSITION

- Obtain a written job description
- Speak with potential co-workers in the department
- Connect with alumni who work there
- Talk to faculty, classmates, and others in your network who may be familiar with the organization
- Ask to see the workspace assigned to the position
- linkedin.com – company and employee profiles
- glassdoor.com - company profiles and reviews

It's important to consider aspects of the compensation and benefits package, beyond monetary:

### NEAR-MONETARY

- Benefits
- Overtime pay
- Company car
- Cell phone/laptop/tablet
- Commuting expenses/parking
- Gym membership
- Relocation assistance
- Expense coverage (cell phone, mileage)
- Dental or optical insurance
- Training and education
- Childcare
- Discounts (to events, merchants, etc.)
- Freebies (event tickets, merchandise, etc.)

### NONMONETARY

- Title
- Flexible start date
- Promised review dates
- Travel assignments
- Extra vacation time
- Flexible schedule

**TIP:** *It is not ethical to accept a job offer while continuing your search for another job or waiting for another company to offer you a better position. If you need more time to make your decision, you can ask the employer for an extension. Your career counselor is available to provide guidance on how to handle delicate situations you may encounter during the offer and negotiation process. For more information on ethical conduct during the job search, please visit [careerservices.calpoly.edu/content/student/ethics](https://careerservices.calpoly.edu/content/student/ethics).*



**CAL POLY**  
Career Services

# NEGOTIATING COMPENSATION

## WHY NEGOTIATE?

Whether it is appropriate to negotiate salary for a given position depends on a number of factors: the size and culture of the organization, how well the candidate fits the employer's needs, how difficult the position is to fill, median salary for that position, and cost of living in that geographic region.

In the corporate sector, some companies expect potential employees to negotiate for salary and benefits and may be able to improve their offer. Others will not have the flexibility to negotiate, especially for entry-level positions. Be prepared for either situation.

In non-profit and government organizations, salaries and benefits are usually more standardized, and the employer may not be able to improve on the original offer. It is always appropriate to ask politely if there is flexibility in the offer.

## APPROACHING THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS

### DO:

- Come to the table with confidence
- Start the process with positive comments regarding the company and the position
- Know what you can deliver in tangible terms
- Understand your strengths and how you're unique
- Practice the negotiation session
- Demonstrate flexibility
- Gain an understanding of the company evaluation process and future salary increases
- During the process, hear what is being "communicated" not just what is being said.
- Be aware of body language and other subtle nonverbal signals, both yours and the employers'
- Be sensitive to the goals, needs, and risks of the employer
- Be realistic

## KNOW YOUR WORTH

It is your responsibility to articulate how and why you will contribute to the employer's goals and educate yourself on salary ranges for your target positions. Talk to peers, professors and people working in your field. Use multiple websites to benchmark salary ranges and determine your budget/bottom line.

**TIP:** *Some companies may not want to engage in negotiation, but you can still explore and possibly expand the offer by asking questions. Consider inquiring "Where did the number come from?" or "What did you count as my years of experience?" Be more specific than, "Is that number negotiable?"*

### USEFUL WEBSITES:

- [careerservices.calpoly.edu](http://careerservices.calpoly.edu) – Graduate Status Report data on Cal Poly graduates' starting salaries
- [wageproject.org](http://wageproject.org) – calculator to determine your job worth
- [salary.com](http://salary.com) - salary ranges by job title and geographic location
- [paycheckcity.com](http://paycheckcity.com) – tool to calculate your take-home pay
- [mappingyourfuture.com](http://mappingyourfuture.com) –tool to develop your baseline personal budget
- [payscale.com](http://payscale.com) - cost of living comparisons

### DON'T:

- Accept a job offer on the spot; it's acceptable to request a few days to respond to the offer
- Use commitment words: always, must have, deal breaker, never, won't consider
- Make it personal by discussing what you can or can't afford and lifestyle goals
- Push the process too far; negotiating should not be contentious
- Haggle
- Avoid negotiating because you are intimidated or you're "just grateful to have a job"

### CONSIDER:

- Current demand for your expertise in the job market
- Urgency of the company to fill the position
- Size and financial strength of the organization
- Company's internal flexibility to adjust salary

## WHEN TO NEGOTIATE

The best time to negotiate is after an offer is made but before you have accepted it. Ask for a summary of benefits so you have a full picture of your offer. Always wait for the interviewer/ employer to bring up the topic of compensation. Below are some useful phrases for navigating this process.

**Before an offer is made**, avoid being the first to state a salary:

*While I'm excited about the position, it depends on the offer. What does someone with my background and experience typically make in this position?*

**After an offer is made**, continue to avoid being the first to state a salary:

*I am seeking a salary that matches my experience.*

*Based on my research, someone with my education and experience in this location makes between x and x with a median salary of x.*

*I'll consider any reasonable offer.*

*What do you typically offer well-qualified candidates?*

**TIP:** *Make an appointment with your career counselor to practice the negotiation.*