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Maximizing Your Membership

Let's Talk Salary

We know it's tough to talk salary with organizations that are often on shoestring budgets. But when social workers are unable to meet financial goals, workplace productivity suffers. While NASW Ohio is working to educate agencies on the value of social workers and increase reimbursement rates, you can review these negotiation tips to secure a higher salary in your next interview.

You shouldn't negotiate until you're offered the position, though you could request the salary range in the second interview (if it wasn't included in the posting). It's exciting to receive an offer, but avoid accepting the opportunity on-the-spot. Most employers don't expect their first offer to be their final offer so they usually lowball it. Plus, your initial compensation will drive future raises. You need to assess the offer in the context of all life's variables before accepting. So here's what you could say when offered a position:

"Thank you for the offer. I appreciate your confidence in me and am excited about the possibility of joining your organization. I'd like to have a chance to review the offer in writing before making my final decision. Can I give you my decision in two weeks?"

Then you can ask to schedule time to discuss the terms of the offer. It's best to avoid negotiating over email; instead, ask to meet in-person or over the phone.

In the meantime, you've got homework. You need to define your own salary range. (Note: By identifying salary in terms of range, rather than one specific number, you're setting helpful wiggle room when it comes time to negotiate.)

First, determine a minimum, acceptable salary. What's your livable wage? If you're unsure how to approach this, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) developed a living wage calculator, searchable by state and/or county - <http://livingwage.mit.edu>. You'll find living wages based on household size with estimates of typical expenses. If you're considering having children (or having more children), use this chart to determine your future needs. You'll note that their estimates of typical expenses don't include student loan payments – factor at least an additional 10% of your salary for those.

Now that you've set your minimum, what's the average salary for social workers in similar positions? The NASW Salary Calculator uses data from PayScale to determine base average salaries and also calculate salaries for specific years of experience - workforce.socialworkers.org/calc.asp. You can get other points of reference from the U.S. Bureau of

Labor Statistics, salarycalculator.org, or salary.com.

Ultimately, you should settle on the range you need to feel valued as an employee. This requires an honest self-appraisal of your competencies, including your work with specific populations and practice modalities; expertise in engagement, crisis intervention, group facilitation, grant writing, evaluation; familiarity with documentation, technologies, community resources, cultural competency, etc. Your NASW membership is another asset to an organization – you can offer an extended professional network in which to recruit new employees and connect to statewide practice and advocacy resources.

Finally, before walking into a negotiation, investigate the financial health of the organization by reviewing their IRS Form 990. To see if they're operating in the black, check that their assets (listed under Part I) are more than their liabilities. It's also helpful to see the executive director's salary, which is listed under Part VII.

So you've done your research and you've appraised your value. It's time to meet. Approach the negotiation with gratitude for the offer and enthusiasm for the work. This conversation is really to ensure you can fully commit to the organization. You could start by asking the hiring manager what's been budgeted for the position or what they would consider fair. In either case, you're encouraging them to make the first move. Now, here's when your homework comes in handy. Base your response on what you've researched for comparable positions.

"From my understanding of the current market, my experience in... warrants a starting range of ___ to ___. I'm willing to negotiate though because I really want to work for this organization."

If the employer comes back with a range lower than your proposal, you should counter by using their top figure as your bottom figure. For example, they offer 32,000-37,000, you propose 37,000-42,000. Remember, you're advocating to earn what you're worth. This is when you outline how your skills and abilities will directly translate to outcomes. You're looking for a win-win solution, so focus on how you'll meet their needs, not the other way around. That being said, prepare a response in

What are social workers earning in Ohio?

These are average salaries in Ohio pulled from NASW's Salary Calculator. Please note that these calculations don't account for years of experience.

Median Salary Ranges – Social Worker		Median Salary Ranges – Mental Health Supervisor	
Akron	\$31,601 – \$47,263	Akron	\$37,353 – \$50,059
Canton	\$32,852 – \$49,319	Canton	\$36,206 – \$48,685
Chillicothe	\$33,898 – \$52,250	Chillicothe	\$37,560 – \$51,616
Cincinnati	\$34,889 – \$51,889	Cincinnati	\$40,908 – \$54,550
Cleveland	\$33,398 – \$49,871	Cleveland	\$40,460 – \$54,232
Columbus	\$34,221 – \$51,142	Columbus	\$40,356 – \$54,019
Dayton	\$34,515 – \$52,135	Dayton	\$38,256 – \$51,448
Lima	\$33,548 – \$51,666	Lima	\$35,588 – \$48,558
Toledo	\$31,371 – \$47,678	Toledo	\$37,517 – \$50,722
Youngstown	\$31,890 – \$48,359	Youngstown	\$35,034 – \$47,696



case they refuse. They might say you're overqualified or insist a certain figure is all they can offer.

"Even though the salary isn't as high as I'd anticipated based on my research, I'm still interested. Can we re-visit the package and see if there's anything here that's negotiable..."

When salary is inflexible, consider the total compensation package they're offering. They may offer child care or tuition reimbursement; in which case, negotiating a higher salary might not be as essential. You could negotiate more vacation days or flexible hours. Do they provide supervision toward independent licensure? If not, ask that they cover the cost of completing those hours outside the agency. What about funding for professional development or your NASW membership? Are CEUs offered in-house? How do they handle travel expenses? Will you have access to an Employee Assistance Program? At the very least, you could negotiate your start date. Another option is to accept their offer but request a performance evaluation every six months to re-assess your compensation.

Have questions about the process, suggestions for your colleagues, or a negotiating story to share? Please email me at info@naswoh.org.



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Practice Advocacy Update



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Gateways or Gatekeepers?

Social work is not for the weak-willed. We are tasked with providing high quality, ethical, value-driven services under policies and within systems that are often limiting and dysfunctional. Tough. This year we will acknowledge the 20th anniversary of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a landmark policy that has drastically limited the safety net resources available for many of the clients we serve as social workers. In Ohio, access to Medicaid is often threatened, SNAP benefits are vulnerable to cuts, and stagnant reimbursement rates and pushback from payer sources have limited our practice.

With ever restrictive funding and growing need for social services, who becomes the face of the flawed system in Ohio? In many cases, social workers. Gatekeeping directly contradicts social work professional values. In social services, gatekeeping refers to the power to ration resources such as counseling sessions, food stamps, bus passes, etc. While social workers may not always determine eligibility criteria or resource caps, we are often the go-between or the one who delivers the news that client A has no more access to resource B.

In the last few months, this concept of gatekeeping has continued to resurface in conversations I have had with social workers in different areas of the field.

This April, I attended a training in New Orleans on Undoing Racism. The workshop was provided by People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, which notably has its roots in Yellow Springs, Ohio, but no longer has a presence in the state. The focus of the workshop was on building anti-racist practices, starting with our own internalized biases, exploring a fuller understanding of systemic racism today and historically, and some discussion on transforming organizations to practice anti-racism structurally. We talked extensively about gatekeeping as a factor in institutional racism.

Then, in May, I began meeting with other professional associations to look into common issues with billing insurance companies. Later in the month, with a group of private practitioners, we discussed ethics in billing and the benefits and limitations of taking insurance. In both of these discussions, it was clear that in the world of mental health social workers have also become gatekeepers, having to strike the difficult balance between making a living wage ourselves and accommodating clients who can't always afford to pay for services, despite their high need.

I write this article not to accuse social workers, but to draw attention to the current reality in many of our jobs. While social workers strive to be accountable to the people they serve, more and more we are accountable to the institutions that pay us or credential us. How many of you reading relate to an unwilling gatekeeper who feels trapped and conflicted?

So how can social workers remain effective and consistent with our values when we are put in the position of gatekeeping? How do we, as professionals, prioritize and sustain ourselves, while respecting self-determination and striving for social justice? I continue to believe that the social workers with training on individual and systemic challenges are the best equipped to intervene. While limited resources are squeezing many of us into unpleasant gatekeeper roles, if we continue to organize ourselves through groups like NASW, we can turn gatekeeping into gateways. NASW Ohio is here for you, as a support, and a hub for our collective power to transform these frustrating systems into systems that work well to support both our clients and ourselves.

