The American Library Association – Allied Professional Association’s (ALA-APA) Salaries and Status of Library Workers (SSLW) Committee had a webinar about salary negotiation on May 13, 2021.

In order to be paid what you are worth, and what the markets dictate, you need to know how salary decisions are made, what compensation packages consist of, and how to highlight your strengths. Join us for this session as we discuss these topics and talk real numbers. We will also discuss the difference and benefits of collective bargaining compared to individual salary negotiations, and how collective bargaining affects pay equity and equality. If you want to be prepared for your next job offer, or your next promotion, be sure to attend this interactive session.

Speakers:

**Jane Billinger** is a Labor Economist with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). In this role, Jane advocates for improved wages and workplace conditions for library and museum workers across the United States. Jane received her Master of Library Science and Certificate in Archival Studies at Emporia State University’s School of Library and Information Management.

**Shaureece Park** (she/her) has more than 20 years of experience in Human Resources in a variety of industries and across various HR functions including recruitment. She is the Director of Library Administrative Services at the University of North Texas Libraries. In this role she oversees all aspects of the employee lifecycle including efforts to create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace. As part of that she oversees the hiring process and handles job offers and salary negotiations. She received her MBA from the University of North Texas.

Below are the questions asked during the webinar. Though some were answered during the webinar, the speakers have provided responses to all in order for everyone to have them. Text in blue represents the actual questions as asked by the attendees.
Questions asked during webinar:

I worked in public libraries for five years and have been working in academic libraries for 21 years. I was offered a job in a public library in a location that I really want to move to. But the salary they are offering is only 60% of my current salary. They have a step system with 10 steps and their offer is at step 1. Even step 10 is less than what I make now! I'd like to be hired at step 10. What can I do to be hired at step 10?

- There are different kinds of step systems. So it depends on which type of system they use. In some, everyone starts at step 1 because the steps are related to that specific organization’s experience. In the other, it’s based relative to the person’s education and experience. It’s fine to go back and be honest about your situation and tell them something like “I am really excited to work here and I anticipated a cut in pay because of the change in roles. However, the current offer is about 60% of my current salary and I am concerned about my finances with such a large cut. Is there any way we can get closer to step 10.” Then share what you are bringing to the table. It’s helpful to do research on the front end in an attempt to figure out which type they have so you will have some insight no their limitations.

If we live in a state without public sector collective bargaining, what are ways that we can still use our collective power to achieve better pay and working conditions?

- “Meet and confer” mechanism – you met to discuss predetermined topics rather than collective bargaining. You still have a right to come together and use collective voice to express what works best for your people. There are states that limit what you can bargain over, but you have the right to advocate for yourselves in the workplace.

- In an organization that does not have collective bargaining, talk to your manager to share your concerns about what you are experiencing and share if you know others are experiencing it as well. “I’m experiencing...others are too...” Managers are typically interested in making employees feel engaged and addressing concerns that arise is one way to do that. You might suggest that others share their concerns as well. Management reacts differently when they know that the issue that is not contained to one person.

Shaureece said that you should always negotiate, and “the worst thing...they can say (is) no.” What happens if they then rescind the job offer? Also, is there a particular point in the job process when you should negotiate so that you can still be assured that you will get the job and not have the offer rescinded just because you asked for more money.

Follow up: Shaureece, above you said “I guess it is possible they could rescind the offer, but I have never heard of an organization that rescinded an offer solely because someone tried to negotiate. Now, if that person became belligerent in the discussion, that is a different situation.” I have both experienced having jobs rescinded because I asked for more money (no belligerence involved) and seen friends have that experience. So, I would like to restate Kevin's question: is there a particular point in the job process when you should negotiate so that you can still be assured that you will get the job and not have the offer rescinded just because you asked for more money?

- I do not know of any organizations who rescind the offer solely because they try to negotiate, but they are apparently out there. (Thank you to one of the attendees for sharing their experience in this). I believe that in all situations where you are job hunting you should know
the parameters of the salary and benefits (total compensation package) at which you would turn
down the offer in advance. That said, I would recommend doing as much homework as you can
on salary for this role. I recommend not actually negotiating salary until you get an offer.
However, if you are concerned about the possibility of an offer being rescinded due to
negotiating, you can ask early on in the process for a salary range even when they are asking to
set up the interview. Consider saying something like, “I am really excited about this position and
am really glad you have called. I am available for the phone screen at ____. Can you give me
some idea of the salary range or even the minimum salary for this position? I know everyone’s
time is at a premium these days and I want to be respectful of yours. I recognize it may depend
on my education and experience, but understanding the general ballpark for this position would
be very helpful.” This will give you the opportunity to self-select out of the process. This is not
a failsafe approach, nothing is, but this should help decrease the likelihood of a rescinded offer.

I’ve been told that I need to apply/negotiate for jobs “like a man.” Would be able to explain this?

• Some research I have seen indicates that women are more likely to and more skilled at
negotiating for others whereas men are skilled at negotiating for themselves. Negotiating like a
man means (to me) you should utilize the amazing negotiation skills you typically use for
others...for yourself.

What are your thoughts on asking for a salary range if one isn’t posted in the job ad (after you have been
contacted for an interview)?

• Start with doing the research on the organizations website to get a general feel for their
compensation approach and possibly their pay plan. You can also reach out to your network if
you know someone who works there or previously worked there. If you are not sure what the
salary is, when they call for the interview consider saying something like, “I am really excited
about this position and am really glad you have called. I am available for the phone screen at
____. Can you give me some idea of the salary range or even the minimum salary for this
position? I know everyone’s time is at a premium these days and I want to be respectful of yours. I recognize it may depend
on my education and experience, but understanding the general ballpark for this position would
be very helpful.”

When calculating years of experience for wages, do employers tend to include years of general library
experience (as an aide, assistant, etc.) or years of experience as a librarian?

• It depends on the specifics of what job description says in relation to qualifications for the job
and the organization. If the qualification is a Master’s degree and 2 years of professional level
library experience then no, I would not consider experience in a paraprofessional role. If the
qualifications are a Master’s degree and 2 years of related experience then yes, I would consider
experience in a paraprofessional role as years of experience. Employers may “discount” that
time based on how they value it in determining salary. For example, they might consider each
year of paraprofessional experience as half of what they consider for professional experience.
Some employers have very nuanced approaches in determining their salaries. Not everyone uses the fairly black and white approach I described in the webinar.

I’m curious on your thoughts/experience on what constitutes “experience”. Library work? *Professional* librarian work? I came up against this (working in libraries for years, but not as a professional librarian) and am not sure how I could have maneuvered around it.

- It depends on the specifics of what job description says in relation to qualifications for the job and the organization. If the qualification is a Master’s degree and 2 years of professional level library experience then no, I would not consider experience in a paraprofessional role. If the qualifications are a Master’s degree and 2 years of related experience then yes, I would consider experience in a paraprofessional role as years of experience.
- Job description is big indicator of what counts for definition of experience.

What are some strategies for leveraging the scarcity of BIPOC library workers that BIPOC applicants or current BIPOC employees can use while negotiating, particularly if recruiting/retaining diverse employees is a stated mission of the institution?

- Hold the employer accountable. Use collective voice to ask for statistics and hard data of what they are doing.
- Use the same negotiation techniques we discussed in the session and focus on the things that you are bringing to the table. I might say “I am really excited about this role but was hoping for $55k. I believe that I would bring a new/different perspective/voice to the team. My experience working with diverse communities will be very helpful to the patrons we serve. I know this library/organization values diversity and inclusion and I think my experience in this area aligns with those values and will help this library on that path.”

What is the state of unions in public libraries? How widespread are they, are there ongoing organizing efforts, and how can we get plugged in?

- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, professionals working in education, training and library occupations have the highest unionization rate of any professional occupation group at 33.1%. For librarians, 20.8% are union members. Overall union membership is higher in the public sector than it is for the private sector.
- AFSCME represents over 25,000 library workers in over 300 libraries across the United States. Union-represented libraries are more likely to have higher rates of pay and have access to insurance and retirement plans.
- Library workers are actively organizing right now throughout the country! To learn more about some campaigns, check out Cultural Workers United on Facebook and at @cwuaafscme on Instagram and Twitter. You can also learn more about how to organize at your library at www.culturalworkersunited.org
After many years in software development, I’ll be switching careers to entry-level librarianship, so I am anticipating a pay cut of about 70% -- which I am perfectly fine with, because I am in the extremely fortunate position to have enough savings to retire. As long as the benefits are good and the salary is within range for the position, I’ll be okay. How can I get people to take me seriously / not think I’m expecting a programmer’s salary / not think I’m desperate / not think I’ll leave for more money elsewhere?

- I would first try to avoid providing salaries in your application materials. I also recommend addressing this in your cover letter. Share that you are making a career change and why (because you LOVE libraries) you are making the change. You could also contrast the less desirable aspects of software development to the more desirable aspects of librarianship (work environment, long workday to meet development deadlines etc.) Make sure it does not sound like you are disparaging your previous employer. Focus on the work. Communicate that you fully understand the salaries are vastly different and you expect a librarian’s salary. This will decrease the likelihood that they will dismiss your application as overqualified. However, be mindful that there may be individuals with more direct library experience in the candidate pool.

Is it appropriate for an established employee to ask about a salary increase after completing a higher degree program?

- Yes. It is perfectly appropriate to ask, but it does not not mean it’s possible. Some organizations have a mechanism to increase pay for new degrees, skills and certifications while others do not. You can do some research on your organization’s website or intranet to see if you can find information on salary adjustments or increases. You can also ask your manager and/or your HR team to find out what the options are.

Who tends to excluded from the [collective] bargaining unit? (i.e. Library Directors, anyone who can hire or fire, etc.)

- Administration, top level are almost always excluded. Private sector – there are legal limitations of who can be in the bargaining unit. Public sector – depends on state rules. Some allow branch managers.

Can AFSCME include library workers from a library that is part of the town offices rather than a separate entity?

- Yes! AFSCME represents library workers in libraries that are part of their local government’s structure as well as library workers in separate entities.

Shaureece has mentioned equity and equity reviews a few times. Isn’t there a concern that lack of negotiation could lead to an “equity” structure where EVERYONE is underpaid?

- It absolutely can lead to a structure where everyone is underpaid equitably especially where an employer does not do routine reviews and adjustments to their pay structure.
I receive my health insurance through a military retirement. Can I use that as leverage in a salary & benefits negotiation?

- You might be able to. There are definitely organizations that have a mechanism for that. Texas state Agencies allow for individuals to opt out and receive a credit towards dental or vision.

The union present at my library does not seek opinions or perspectives from different types staff and they have just started their collective bargaining. Is there anything that staff can do in this situation?

- Yes, as a union member you have the right to take part in membership meetings and share your concerns. Hold your bargaining team accountable by asking for bargaining updates. Once the team comes to an agreement with management, you will also get the chance to use your voice in the ratification vote to approve the contract.

- Moving forward, the best way to change your union for the better is to get involved. Look at your local’s constitution and bylaws and see what requirements are in place to prepare for bargaining. Propose ways to amend it to seek out more feedback from the membership. If you or another co-worker would be a fantastic steward or bargaining team member, volunteer! Your union will be at its strongest when everyone is involved and heard.