Evaluating Academic Job Offers & Negotiating Positions

Sharon L. Milgram, milgrams@od.nih.gov
Getting An Offer

- You will typically be asked to provide information regarding your needs before an offer is made.
- May be verbal first and then in writing.
- Occasionally from HR but typically from the department chair, etc.
- Is not a done-deal until it is put in writing, the papers are signed, and all of the paperwork is completed.
Your Deliberations Really Boil Down to Three Main Issues:

- Quality of the fit
  - Professional and personal
- Quality of the offer
- Other offers and options
  - If you are waiting to hear about other positions, email them with “the good news”
With Four Options

- BAD FIT - BAD OFFER
- BAD FIT - GREAT OFFER
- GREAT FIT - GREAT OFFER
- GREAT FIT - BAD OFFER
If You Are Not Interested in Pursuing the Offer

- Decline as soon as you decide that you are not interested in talking further
- Be respectful and keep explanations brief and general
  - I don’t believe there is a good fit for me
  - The balance of clinical duties and research is not what I was looking for
  - This is not a good move for me [and my family]
  - My partner was unable to find a suitable position
  - I have other offers that provide better opportunities
General Strategy for All Negotiations

- Prepare
- Act
- Respond
Factors To Consider (no special order)

- The nature of the job
- Support to establish your research, teaching, and/or clinical program
- Salary
- Benefits
- Your boss(es)
- Your co-workers
- Location & lifestyle
The Nature of the Job

- Is it what you want to do?
- Is it the right balance of teaching, research, clinical duties, and service?
- Will it help you achieve your career goals?
Support to Establish Your Research, Teaching, and/or Clinical Program

- Will you have access to the **right** resources?
  - Ample space to do your work
  - Appropriate office space
  - Access to critical equipment and core facilities

- Will you have access to **enough** resources?
  - Money
  - Students
  - Clinical samples
  - Teaching assistants and lab prep assistance

- Will you receive appropriate mentorship and guidance?
Considerations (I)

- Amount of office and research space
  - Will there be funds for renovations and furniture if needed?
  - Is the layout of the space appropriate?
  - Is your office close to your research group?
  - If wet lab, expect 600 – 1000 sq. ft. of lab space starting out

- Amount of start-up
  - Generally to cover equipment, supplies, staff, students, travel, computer support
  - Can be negotiated as a lump sum to use as you wish or with each category clearly defined
  - Often spread over 2 or three years
  - Expensive equipment may be negotiated separately
  - Your goal is to have enough resources (money, staff and equipment) to establish and run your program for two years
Considerations (II)

- Teaching, clinical and/or service responsibilities
  - Optimal if none at first and then increased over time (one year ramp-up is the norm)
  - How much input will you have as the exact duties are established?
  - For teaching positions: load, lab vs lecture, repeat classes or new, ways to “buy out” if research program expands
Understanding the Tenure Process

- Be clear on the expectations
  - Typically research, teaching, clinical practice and/or service

- Be clear on the timeline
  - Can you defer or go up early?

- Be clear on the process
  - First the department, then the School, and then the University
  - Know what they will be asking for
  - Listen to success stories and learn from prior problems

- Know what tenure means at that institution
When negotiating lead with…

- In order for me to be productive and do my research I need…..
- In order for me to be the best teacher/clinician possible, I need…
- And remember
  - Be clear about the difference between needs and wants
  - Knowledge is power
Salary

- Is it what you feel you are worth? Or close to it?
- Is it a 9 month or 12 month appointment?
  - Are you expected to work 12 months regardless?
  - Are there realistic ways to find support for the summer months?
- Is it a base + bonus system?
- How much will be you be expected to provide from grants and when?
  - What happens when faculty don’t meet these expectations?
  - If you provide more, will some funds be returned to you for other uses?
Knowing Your Value

- Find “real-world” data
  - Use more than one on-line database
  - AAMC salary survey for academic positions
  - Many state universities publish salaries of current faculty
  - Use your NIH and university networks

- Account for geographic area
  - Use two different cost-of-living calculators
  - Factor in personal needs

- Establish three important numbers:
  - “No go”
  - “Ideal”
  - “Acceptable”
Benefits (I)

- Health insurance
  - Types of plans
  - Percentage covered by the employer
  - Cost of adding spouse and family
  - Coverage for domestic partners
  - Availability of vision and/or dental plans

- Other types of insurance
  - Life insurance (basic often provided at no cost)
  - Disability (is often not sufficient)

- Retirement
  - You need to know the specific vehicles used
  - Time to vest varies
  - Percentage of employer match varies
  - Additional voluntary plans can supplement
Other Benefits (II)

- **Vacation and sick leave**
  - Starting amount and rate of increase
  - Paid or unpaid at end of service

- **Holidays**
  - Can be as many as 10 paid holidays per year

- **Help with relocation**
  - All expenses paid or a moving allowance?
  - Assistance with housing - finding it or paying for it?
  - Help with job for your spouse or partner?
Other Benefits (III)

- **Tuition assistance**
  - Specifics vary: job-related only, only at your university, limit to number per year
  - Some universities also include spouse, partners and children

- **Child care subsidies**
  - On or off-site
  - May have waiting lists and salary guidelines

- **Bonuses**
  - At signing, annual, on-the-spot, or a combination?
  - Much more common in government and private sector

- **Paid sabbaticals**
Multiple Offers

- Be clear and willing to share information with all parties
- Know timelines for each and appreciate that they may differ
- You can ask for more time to decide, but you may not get it
Three Responses to Any Offer

- **Stall**
  - Express enthusiasm; ask for time to carefully consider the offer
  - Factor in other “irons in the fire”
  - Take time to prepare for any negotiation you decide is important

- **Accept**
  - Not before you have an offer in writing; accept in writing
  - Address start dates or any previously planned commitments up-front
  - You must then reject other offers and withdraw other applications

- **Reject**
  - Respectfully - no need to burn bridges
  - Be prepared to explain why
Prepare

- Research what a typical offer looks like
  - Generally and at the specific institution
- Clearly distinguish your WANTS and your NEEDS
- Consider your reasons for asking for more money, space, resources, etc.
- Consider your boss’ perspective
- Consider possible questions and responses you may hear during the negotiation
- Practice; confirm that you sound professional and courteous (verbally or in writing)
  - Take advantage of IC and OITE resources
Act

- Start by conveying your enthusiasm for the position and summarize elements of the offer that you find acceptable
- Introduce the area you would like to negotiate about
- Listen carefully to the response; ask for clarification if needed
- Take notes; stress may make it difficult to remember what was said
- Restate positions and agreements
- End with a thank you and some indication of your level of enthusiasm
Respond

- Talking is often better than writing
- Start with a thank you for their consideration
- Get to the point quickly
  - Make a counter-offer
  - accept
  - reject
- Be gracious - in victory or defeat
- Finalize in writing
Negotiating Salary: Be prepared for these responses

- What salary are you willing to work for?
  - Best to put your optimal salary in the mid-range of the scale
- If I pay you what you are asking for, you will earn more than other recent hires
- I don’t have any flexibility in this regard - salary ranges are set by my boss, HR, the college, etc.
- We are offering all of our new hires the same non-negotiable salary