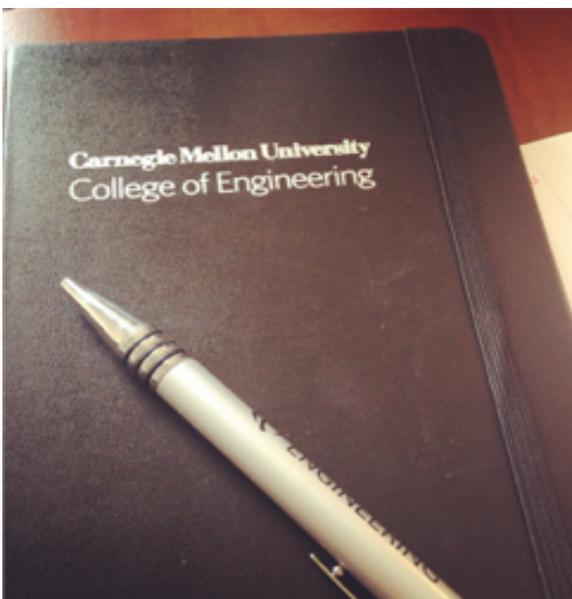




Individual Action Plan

evaluating, negotiating, accepting, and declining offers



The CMU-SV Individualized Action Plan is designed to help job or internship seekers establish a plan for success at any stage of their career. This guide takes an in depth look at one aspect of the IAP – the offer. Evaluating, negotiating, and eventually either accepting or declining an offer can be a daunting and often unsettling process. To navigate and handle this stage of the job search effectively and professionally, it's essential to take these appropriate steps and plan ahead.

Carnegie Mellon University
Silicon Valley

Individual Action Plan

Evaluating, negotiating, accepting, and declining offers

Leading up to the Offer

Step 1: Consider your needs

Well before an offer is made, you'll want to take a personal assessment of what aspects of the job are most important to you. Predetermining your criteria and job preferences will help you make good decisions later on. While salary is certainly important, you'll want to be sure the total package is right for you, so we recommend determining this by starting with the Personal Needs Assessment Activity below.

Personal Needs Assessment Activity

From 1-33, rank each of these criteria by how important they are to you, 1 being the most important, 33 being the least important. Put an **X** next to criteria that do not pertain to you.

Compensation	Bonus and profit sharing	Performance and salary review
General benefits	Signing bonuses	Product, people, or service
Health and dental care	Relocation reimbursement	Decision making ability
Fulfilling work	Maternity/paternity leave	Job title
Work-life balance	Low stress	Short commute
Geographical location	Intellectual stimulation	Physical space
Day care	Job perks (i.e. free lunch)	Prestige
Flextime	Teamwork	Stability
Retirement	Variety	
Vacations and holidays	Travel reimbursement	

Now that you've ranked each job preference by how important it is to you, list them in the proper order in the spaces below:

1.
2.
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33.

Step 2: Know the salary range for your desired position, company, and location preference

- Before being offered a position, research the salary ranges for your field and in your ideal geographic location by talking with peers, career services, mentors, or consulting other online resources.
- In addition to salary, you'll want to research industry standards for other benefits and job perks to determine if there is a norm.

- Early in the in the interview process, it’s not uncommon to be asked what your desired salary range is, which is why it’s important to do your due diligence ahead of time.
- If you are asked this question, it’s smart to let the employer answer the question first or to state that your salary range is negotiable. Here are some examples of what you might say in this instance:

“I’m thinking there may be a range already established for this position at (company) and wondering what the company has in mind.”

“Thank you for asking. At this stage of my career, I’m looking at a salary somewhere in the range of \$ _____ to \$ _____ but I’m open to negotiating. What does (company) have in mind?”

“Based on my professional background and education level, I’m interested in a salary somewhere between \$ _____ and \$ _____ but that range is negotiable. What do you have in mind?”

Salary Search Activity

- 1.) In the first column below, list your first, second, and third choice fields of interest or preferred job titles.
- 2.) In the second row of columns 2, 3, and 4, list your first, second, and third choice for where you’d like to live and work. If you are tied to a certain area, then you do not need to fill out all three columns.
- 3.) Using the resources below, research the average salary range (low to high) for each position or field of interest and each geographic location. List each salary range in the gray boxes below.
 - a. [Payscale](#)
 - b. [Glassdoor](#)
 - c. [Salary.com](#)
 - d. [Job Star Central](#)

Fields of interest or job titles	Location 1st choice	Location 2nd Choice	Location 3rd Choice
1.			
2.			
3.			

Step 3: Know your value

- Now that you’ve identified your job preferences & researched the average salary and industry standards for your desired positions and locations, your next step is to assess whether or not you feel you deserve higher than the market value. While you don’t know what the employer is going to offer, it’s helpful to assess ahead of time what range you think you should be in.
- If you feel you should be on the higher end for a certain position, then you need to be able to back this up with evidence.
- If it comes down to a situation where you need to negotiate for a higher compensation package, then your success relies on knowing whether or not you have the experience or expertise to warrant a higher salary.

- For each offer, you will need to reevaluate your market value based on the company, industry, etc.
- Below are some cases that may justify higher compensation than the average market rate. 1. *You have relevant work experience from past jobs, summer internships, etc. which increases your ability to perform well in the position.* 2. *You have a certain technical expertise that is in high demand.* 3. *You hold or will hold an advanced degree in a specific and sought-after discipline.* 4. *You have an offer from another company.*

Step 4: Get the offer

- A lot happens before being offered a position. By completing steps 1-3 in advance, you will be in a better position to evaluate an offer once it has been made.
- When an employer extends an offer, be sure to express enthusiasm for the position and thank the person.
- At this point, you should explain how important this decision is to you and that you'd like to take some time to think it over so that you can evaluate all aspects of the offer. If it is a verbal offer, then you may ask when you will receive the offer in writing.
- When you receive the offer, whether verbally or in writing, make sure you fully understand the expectations for the position, how your success will be evaluated, and other aspects of the package.
- It is highly recommended that you take time to think the offer over before accepting. You do not need to accept the offer right away.
- Under [CMU's hiring and offer policy](#), all offers that are made as a result of campus recruiting efforts should give students sufficient time to consider offers of employment. If the employer is not giving you enough time, then you should meet with someone in career services at CMU-SV to discuss your next steps.
- The offer will typically come from a HR representative like a recruiter, although sometimes a hiring manager will make the offer, but this usually depends on the size of the company.
- Here's an example of how this conversation might unfold:

You: *"Thank you again for the offer. I want to reiterate how interested I am in the position and (company). At this point, I'd like to take some time to think about all that we've discussed and evaluate the offer properly. When should I expect to receive the offer in writing?"*

HR Rep: *"You're welcome! We're excited too and hope you'll join us. Definitely take some time to decide. I'll get the written offer out to you later today. You should have it within the next couple of business days."*

You: *"Great! If any questions come up while I'm looking it over, to whom should I direct these to?"*

HR Rep: *"You're welcome to either call me or email me and I'll try to answer your question or direct it to someone who may know the answer if I don't. When do you think you'll know by?" (Note: your answer to this question will depend on many things—do you have other pending offers, do you have any upcoming interviews, is this within the guidelines of CMU's offer policy, etc.? Let's assume this offer came at the end of the fall semester. CMU's Hiring and Offer Policy states that for any offers made during fall on-campus recruiting, employers should give students until Nov. 15th or three (3) weeks (whichever is later) to respond. Let's say it's Nov. 1st, which means you should get a full 3 weeks.*

You: *"Well, at this point in the semester, I'm finishing up with a few other interviews and have a few other pending offers, so 3 weeks should be sufficient amount of time to make my decision, which would put us at (date). How does that sound?"*

HR Rep: *"That should work for us. If you decide sooner, please let us know as soon as possible. Also, if there's anything we can do to help make this decision easier for you, please don't hesitate to reach out."*

You: *"Thank you, (person's name). I will keep you updated and reach out if I have any questions. Have a great day!"*

- Use the data you collected on the industry, company, and your own personal value to make a case for each aspect of the offer that you are trying to negotiate. It isn't enough to state, for example, that your friend was offered a higher salary or that you think you could really make some improvements. Do your research and come prepared to talk about why what you are proposing makes sense.

Step 3: Start the conversation

- Now that you know what you are negotiating for and why, it's time to start the conversation. The negotiation process should not be done via email, except if you need to schedule a call or to follow up after a conversation.
- When you call the employer, be prepared to speak clearly and succinctly about your desired job package and be sure to listen carefully when the employer responds.

Here's an example of how the conversation might go. In this example, the job candidate is trying to negotiate for two things—a higher salary and for the employer to cover transportation fees or relocation costs:

Candidate: *"Hi, (name), it's (your full name) calling about the (position) at (company). Do you have a couple of minutes to talk?"*

HR Rep: *"Hi! I do have a few minutes to talk. What do you want to chat about?"*

Candidate: *"Well, for starters, thank you again for the offer to join (company). I have really enjoyed all of my conversations with the team and I like the work environment, so I want to say again how pleased and excited I am to have the opportunity to work there. At this point, I've had some time to think about the offer and I'd like to discuss a few things, the salary and commute specifically."*

HR Rep: *"Sure. We can discuss this. Are you displeased with the salary we offered? What did you have in mind?"*

Candidate: *"Well, I appreciate that the offer is in the median range for my field. That said, from the research I've done it seems the salary you are offering is more in line with what recent graduates with an undergraduate degree are paid, so it is less than what I expected. Since I have two years of professional experience as well as a MS degree in the exact field, I expected the salary to be somewhere on the higher range, between \$_____ and \$_____. It would be helpful for me to know how your organization structures salary ranges so that I can understand how this specific salary was determined. At the end of the day, my goal is to come to a mutual agreement and I want this to work for both of us."*

HR Rep: *"Thanks for bringing this up. We offer higher signing bonuses for candidates with a MS degree and the salary tends to fall in that median range for this reason."*

Candidate: *"I see. Yes, your signing bonus was very generous and I am pleased with it. Thank you. However, from the research I've done, the base salary for someone with my background and education level is much higher than what you are offering, so I'm wondering if we can work on getting closer to that range."*

HR Rep: *"Let me discuss this with my manager and I will get back to you. You also mentioned transportation?"*

Candidate: *"Thank you, (their name). I appreciate you looking into this. I'm really interested in this position and (company) so I'd love it if we could come to a mutual agreement. Regarding transportation, I live in Mountain View, which is about a 1.5 to 2 hour commute by train to San Francisco where, as you know, I'd be working. A few options for me at this point would be to move to the city, purchase a car and drive everyday, or buy a Cal Train pass for my commute. I'm wondering if the company can help offset the cost of one of these. Ideally, I'd like to live in Mountain View and was*

thinking of working from home one day a week and seeing if (company) could cover the cost of the commute. What do you think?

HR Rep: *“This shouldn’t be a problem. That makes sense to me. We don’t encourage people to work from home more than one day per week, but one day should be fine, and I think I’ll be able to get the cost of your commute covered. Let me take all of this back to my team and I’ll get back to you by the end of the week. Sound good?”*

You: *“Yes, that sounds great. Thanks for your time. I’m looking forward to hearing from you soon.*

HR Rep: *“Of course. I’ll be in touch. Bye.”*

Step 4: Come to a mutual agreement or decline the offer

- Once you and the employer have come to a mutually beneficial agreement, you should get the agreement in writing before officially accepting.
- If you are not able to come to a mutual agreement and you feel strongly that what you are asking for is fair and reasonable, then you may wish to decline. It is unacceptable to accept an offer and keep “shopping” around for something better. This can be a difficult decision to make, but if both parties are displeased, then it’s best to move on to other opportunities or keep interviewing with different companies.

Accepting and Declining Offers

Step 1: Accept an offer

- Make sure to read all paperwork, contracts, and the official offer letter before signing.
- When you are ready, sign the official offer letter, make a copy for your records, and either mail or scan and email (depending on the employer’s preference) a signed copy to the employer.
- Include a job acceptance letter or email reiterating your excitement, confirming your acceptance, and clarifying any next steps such as start dates, moving arrangements, etc.
- Accepting an offer, whether verbally or in writing, shows your commitment to joining the employing organization and the employer therefore assumes that you will honor the terms of the agreement.
- Once you accept an offer, you should respectfully decline other pending offers and cancel any upcoming interviews. It is **unacceptable** to keep job searching once you’ve accepted an offer, so if you aren’t prepared to accept, then you should ask for more time or decline.
- We expect all students to conduct themselves in a professional, ethical, and respectful manner. Reneging on an offer damages not only your reputation but also the relationship CMU has with the employing organization, so there will be negative consequences for students who renege on offers.
- If you feel you’ve made a mistake by accepting an offer, meet with a CMU-SV career consultant to weigh your options and determine next steps.

Step 2: Decline other offers

- Once you’ve accepted a position, or if you and the employer cannot come to a mutually beneficial agreement, then you should respectfully decline the offer or withdraw from the application process. This should be done in writing.
- Write a respectful email or letter thanking the employer for their time and explaining that you will **not** be accepting their offer.