

DISCUSSING COMPENSATION WITH RECRUITERS

In the interview process, the very first compensation conversation usually takes place during an initial interview with a recruiter. Even though it may seem too early to have this conversation, it is best to be prepared to discuss it because it can be a knockout question. This first conversation about compensation will set the stage for any future conversations about an offer.

Why this question so early in the process?

Recruiters generally must inquire about your salary expectations in their first call or interview with you. It can sound like a straightforward question, but it is tricky to answer.

Primarily, recruiters want to confirm if the role they have suits your expectations. They generally know what the salary range for the role is and don't want to waste your time, or that of the hiring team, interviewing someone who is looking for more money than they can offer. Recruiters have no control over the budget, but they can be an advocate for you in the interview and offer process. It is in your interest to develop a good relationship with the recruiter.

Think carefully before giving an answer because it can be a question that takes you out of the process if your goal is higher than their budget will allow. Or, if your target is lower than what they expect to pay, it could result in an offer that is too low. I suggest you practice some polite responses that will help you continue to build rapport with the recruiter without sharing too much detail.

You can ask questions too: you can politely avoid giving a concrete answer to that Salary Expectations question by saying something like:

"Thanks for bringing up this important topic. I would love to learn more about the range you have for this particular position. I always consider the total package: base pay, bonus structure, company culture, benefits, opportunity to grow, etc. Are you able to share the salary range for this role?"

The recruiter should share this information with you. If that range suits you, you can simply say: ***"That range works for me."***

If they don't share the range, you can share the compensation range you are targeting if you have done your research and know what range to target for this role in the appropriate location. If not, you can politely try to table this conversation for a later time:

"With regard to compensation, I would love to learn more about the scope of the role in the course of the interview process and we can come back to that discussion at a later time."

You do not have to disclose your current compensation, nor should you. It is illegal in some states to ask about current compensation, see the full list here

If they ask, try to redirect the question back to what the role entails:

"Regarding compensation, it would help me to better understand the range for this kind of role in your company. Is that something you can tell me more about?"

Most recruiters just want to confirm your alignment with the role, regarding skills, job search timeline, and compensation target. They also want to know what is important to you in a new role, like opportunities for growth, company culture and values, a chance to contribute, etc. This is a chance to invest in a partnership with a recruiter who will shepherd you through the interview and hiring process; it is also a chance to share what you value in general, not just regarding your compensation goal. Recruiters like to learn what motivates you and they will share that with the hiring team.