

NCLA's Pay Equity Project: It's About More than Loving to be a Librarian!

by Beverley Gass

The North Carolina Library Association recently completed an ambitious undertaking – a salary survey of every public and academic library in the state. The impetus behind the project was to assess pay equity of library positions in the state, and the survey also included every local government and institute of higher education in North Carolina. The result of this large-scale project is an impressive set of searchable and customizable databases of all survey findings, available to each and every participating organization, most likely including *your* library! As you'll see from the statistics provided in this article, pay equity of library positions remains a problem in North Carolina. Findings from this project can help your library more effectively seek out funding for salaries.

Introduction

In 2005, during her term as president of NCLA, Pauletta Bracy organized a Task Force on Pay Equity to investigate issues of pay equity for library personnel in North Carolina. "Conventional wisdom," she stated, "tells us that professions composed mainly of women have been compensated at a lower level than professions composed mainly of men."

An initial literature search revealed that the salary information available for North Carolina library personnel was dated and that the topic warranted further study. The Task Force's charge became educating librarians, library staff and library customers regarding the role and value of library staff so that they may be compensated fairly.

The then NCLA President, Dr. Robert Burgin, and Pay Equity Project Chair, Dr. Beverley Gass, obtained an LSTA grant and retained The Singer Group, Inc. to guide the process of project planning and implementation. The goal of the project was to conduct a statewide pay equity study of public library/local government and academic library/institutions of higher education.

A web-based survey designed to collect a broad variety of salary-related information was piloted and then released statewide. The survey was issued to all public library systems, local governments, and higher education institutions (including community colleges) in the state. The outcome of

this phase of the project was a set of comprehensive and interactive databases providing salary data for all of the organizations responding to the survey. Data was grouped into two databases – one reflecting public library and local government jobs; the other offering access to jobs in higher education (academic libraries and the institutions as a whole). The databases are searchable and customizable – in other words you can focus only on the data you need or want to see. Web-based educational tools also enable library staff to advocate for improved compensation and pay equity. These products are easily accessible on NCLA's website, and they are adaptable to individual and/or library needs. Members of the Pay Equity Committee formed during the project are even available to train NCLA members on their use!

But First....What is Pay Equity?

The Equal Pay Act of 1964 prohibits paying different wages to men and women performing the same job. In other words, people performing equal work must receive equal pay. This legislation was enacted to remedy a serious problem of employment discrimination in private industry and applies to all employers and labor organizations. To prevail in an Equal Pay Act claim, an employee must prove that she receives a lower wage than a man working in the same establishment (or a man must prove the same in a claim involving a woman). The jobs in question must be essentially the same, and require substantially equal skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions.

Pay equity is defined by the National Committee on Pay Equity as evaluating and compensating jobs (even dissimilar jobs) based on their skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions, not on the people who hold the jobs (men or women). Pay equity is also known as comparable worth and equal pay for work of equal value and is a solution to eliminating wage discrimination and closing the wage gap.

Despite significant efforts to realize Equal Pay for Equal Work, the current status of the concept is that the work of women is still undervalued. On average, women employed full-time earn 75¢ to each \$1 earned by men. The gap between earnings is even larger for women of color. Because the earnings gap is typically career-long, it also affects pension

earnings, thus perpetuating the inequity into retirement. The gap reflects society's undervaluing of the work of women relative to traditional male work. With minor fluctuations, the earnings gap has remained steady since the late 1950s, when data was first compiled, through 2003 (the last year for which such data is available).

What the Project Tells Us and How This Data Can Be Used

The databases created during the project allow participants access to the full spectrum of information collected during the study. The databases are customizable, meaning you can compare your library's jobs with other jobs in public libraries and local government or academic libraries and institutions of higher education statewide. The data can be used for the following:

- Compensation and budget planning
- Updating salary plans and compensation systems
- HR planning, including recruiting, retention and succession planning efforts, and
- Assessing pay equity.

The project databases give libraries and library staff the data needed to help "*make a case*" to local officials and funders in the public sector and deans and officials in academia for fair and competitive pay.

The public library/local government survey was sent to all public libraries (79) and local governments (110) in the state. The response was very positive: 62 public libraries (78%) and 50 local governments (45%) chose to participate in the project. In addition, to bolster the data collected from participants, salary data was added for 11 non-responding libraries and 56 non-responding local governments from the UNC Institute for Government Services' (IGS) database.¹ A large variety of organizations are represented in the data, from libraries with two full-time employees to those with over 400. Operating budgets for these respondents range from approximately \$70,000 to near \$37 million. County and local governments reported these demographic data points as well. The survey included brief position descriptions for each job title, enabling participants to look beyond the position title and to determine whether

their positions were truly matches for the survey jobs. Before any data was included in the database, participants' responses were quality controlled by comparing jobs based on the similarity of education and experience requirements, job scope, level of effort, responsibility and working conditions in order to ensure that only matching positions were included.

Needless to say, a thorough breadth and depth of data was created. Libraries using the database can customize search criteria so that they can see only responses from organizations they choose, whether by budget size, number of employees, or geographic location.

The potential of the database is significant since it allows library jobs in one library to be compared with ones in surrounding local government or other libraries. The academic library database works in the same way, allowing one to compare library jobs to jobs in the wider institution or in other colleges or universities throughout the state. Using the education and experience requirements provided by each participant for each position, one can make appropriate comparisons for the jobs in his/her organization. So, for example, it is possible to compare an MLS librarian to other MLS librarians, or to master's degree-required positions in local government, such as engineers or

Table 2. Sample Statewide Data Comparison of Median Pay

librarian Median pay: \$36,951 80% of participants require MLS for this position	senior planner \$47,164 8% require MS	Difference -27.6%
	civil engineer \$52,937 0 require MS	Difference -43.3%
	zoning code enforcement officer \$36,327 45% require HS only	Difference +1.7%
	recreation program supervisor \$35,778	Difference +3.2%
	systems administrator \$48,393	Difference -31%

planners. Remember, pay equity is about the level of work and responsibility. The work itself does not have to be identical. Table 1 demonstrates some of the ways in which a select group of positions can be compared on a statewide basis.

Table 2 shows examples of showing the types of comprehensive comparisons that can be made at the local level. For purposes of this data, the minimum salary range represents the minimum amount a jurisdiction or library will pay an employee in the identified position; the maximum range is the highest amount (not including any longevity payments) an employee can be paid in the same position. Often, library systems and government jurisdictions define pay ranges by steps, so, for

example, in a 20-step scale, step 1 would be the minimum and step 20 the maximum.

Pay range comparisons can also be made. On average the minimum pay of a librarian is 19.6% or \$8,073 per year less than that of a senior planner; 22.2% or \$9,405 per year less than that of a civil engineer. On average the maximum pay for a librarian is 8.9% or \$5,037 less than that of a planner and 17.7% or \$10,988 less than a systems administrator.

Participants can also make comparisons based on specific geographic locations. For instance, in Durham County, the average librarian with an MLS degree earns \$20,837 less than a civil engineer (with a bachelor's degree) and \$19,908 less than a systems administrator (bachelor's). In Wake County, a librarian (MLS) earns \$1,954 less than a PC technician (associate's degree) and \$10,389 less than a senior planner (MS).

Interesting comparisons can also be made by looking at the same position in public libraries and local government. IT positions such as systems administrators or web developers often pay quite differently in the library versus the government of a given jurisdiction. For instance, a systems administrator working for a public library earns an average of 6.7% or \$3,293 less than a systems administrator working for a city/county government in North Carolina. Interestingly, approximately 25% of participating library systems require an MSL degree for the systems administrator position; no county or city reported an MS requirement for the same position.

Comparisons to K-12 Education

Public library systems often find themselves in competition for human capital with local public school systems. As an additional component of the project, pay for librarian positions was compared to that of teachers using the data reported on the NC Public School Salary Schedules, Fiscal Year 2006 – 2007.² Somewhat unsurprisingly, an analysis of this data showed that the median salary range for master's degreed certified teachers is higher than the salary range of MLS librarians. If a library system wishes to incorporate additional data when making a case to its local governing body for fair and additional pay, making comparisons to education

Table 1. Median Pay of Select Library Positions Compared to Government Positions

library director \$61,737	finance director \$67,650	Difference -9.6%
	public health director \$78,209	Difference -26.7%
	IT director \$63,572	Difference -3%
circulation supervisor \$33,469	recreation program supervisor \$35,778	Difference -6.9%
library branch manager \$38,331	senior planner \$47,164	Difference -23%
	civil engineer \$52,937	Difference -38.1%
library associate \$27,898	zoning code enforcement officer \$36,327	Difference -30.2%
	planner \$38,378	Difference -37.6%
circulation clerk \$22,548	tax clerk \$24,338	Difference -7.9%
	office clerk \$24,934	Difference -10.6%
bookmobile driver \$24,416	solid waste truck driver \$26,077	Difference -6.8%
	building maintenance worker \$24,097	Difference +1.3%
systems administrator (library) \$45,399	systems administrator (city/county) \$48,393	Difference -6.6%
PC technician (library) \$35,455	PC technician (city/county) \$39,466	Difference -11.3%

professionals in its own jurisdiction is an excellent idea. If this is done, systems should include supplemental and other add-on pay awarded to public school employees.

Is Pay Equitable?

Based on the project findings, there is a difference in pay and in pay ranges between jobs that are public library based as compared to those in local government, even for the same position, such as PC technician, systems administrator and web master. There is also a difference in pay for jobs that require similar education, experience, skill, effort and responsibility when comparing jobs that are predominately female versus those that are more often held by men. It becomes clear from the analysis that traditional “women’s work” (i.e., librarianship and working in a library) is undervalued starting at the first job on the career ladder. Yes, indeed, there is a difference in pay for jobs held primarily by women and those held by men.

Academic Libraries

An identical process was followed for the survey of academic libraries and institutions of higher education. The idea was to determine whether positions in the academic library are paid equitably with similar positions in the institution as a whole. The return for this survey was not as positive: 73 or 66% of academic libraries in the state provided their salary information and 26 (24%) of Human Resource directors for North Carolina’s higher education institutions submitted responses. The

data included in the database is still a valuable tool for participating organizations in developing personnel budgets and planning compensation for upcoming years.

A Final Word

Using the data mined during the pay equity project, public and academic libraries have evidence to present a strong case to local and school officials regarding funding for higher salaries. In addition to the salary databases, a PowerPoint tool kit with examples and talking points is available to libraries to assist them in these efforts. The databases provide full and detailed instructions in their use.

To help make the case for funding, libraries can and should be guided by the directives below:

- Ensure that job descriptions are well written and reflect actual duties.
- Have senior level library staff serve on local government compensation committees and ensure that local government HR personnel are fully aware of the scope and depth of library jobs.
- Ensure that members of the public fully understand the value of the role and contribution of public librarians and library personnel. Emphasize education and experience required of librarians, library associates and other staff. A much stronger, louder and more vociferous case needs to be made by public libraries for equity in salaries.

- Use the toolkit developed with this project to combat the “Male Premium” in public sector jobs when advocating for libraries with state and local elected and appointed officials.
- Pay Equity data and tools are available on the NCLA website at <http://www.nclaonline.org/payequity/index.html>.

References

¹UNC Chapel Hill. School of Government. “County Salaries in North Carolina, 2006,” (compiled by the MAPS Group for the Institute of Government), <http://www.sog.unc.edu/pubs/electronicversions/csalindex.htm> (accessed July 11, 2009)

²NC Board of Education. Dept. of Public Instruction. “Public School Salary Schedules, Fiscal Year 2006-07,” <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/finance/salary/> (accessed July 11, 2009).

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