



# COMMUNICATING THE PROJECT TO THE EMPLOYEES



**PUBLIC  
SECTOR**

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**PERSONNEL  
CONSULTANTS**



CLASSIFICATION AND COMPENSATION PROJECT PROCEDURE GUIDE SERIES

# COMMUNICATING THE PROJECT TO THE EMPLOYEES

*The factor that is most important in the development and effective implementation of a new or updated position classification and/or compensation plan is not the technical process, or even the amount of salary increases. It is the extent to which employees understand the process by which the plan was developed, and their acceptance that it was a logical and fair process.*

*To assist you in determining and implementing the best systematic approach to the effective communication of the compensation plan for your organization, we have provided this booklet, parts of which are adaptations from the booklet: "COMMUNICATING COMPENSATION PROGRAMS- An Approach to Providing Information to Employees" from the American Compensation Association.*

*We have divided this section of the Guide into Pre-Project, Mid-Project and Post-Project segments.*

## A. PRE-PROJECT EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION

The maximum amount of information concerning the reasons for the project should be provided at the earliest possible date. There will already be a number of rumors floating around since some employees will have heard about the RFP preparation, consultant selection process, and project approval by the Council/Board.

Following are several pre-project communication activities which are essential to the successful conduct of a classification and/or compensation project.

### 1. Letter/Memo From the Chief Executive Officer

We suggest that every employee receive a letter or memo from the chief executive officer announcing the project (Figure 1), indicating the reasons for the project, its scope and process, the extent of employee participation, and a guarantee that no one's salary amount will be reduced as a consequence of the project.

### 2. Project Briefings by Our Consultants

We will conduct a briefing for every employee to explain the scope of the project, summarize the process we will utilize, explain their roles in the project, and respond to questions. A listing of the most frequently asked questions and our responses follows on page 5. At the completion of the Q and A period we will distribute the Position Description Questionnaire (PDQ) and provide an item-by-item explanation.

The briefings last 30 to 45 minutes, and can be scheduled at one-hour intervals. To ensure that attendance does not exceed the facility's capacity, and that the departments can send their employees in shifts, we suggest the following:

- Schedule a minimum of two sessions, and more depending upon the number of employees to be briefed and the facility's capacity.
- Control attendance by scheduling alphabetically by employees' last names such as A-E 9:00am-10:00am; F-J 10:00am-11:00am, etc.

### 3. Employee Opinion Survey on Salary Administration (OPTIONAL)

If you have requested it as a part of the total project, we will conduct our standard Confidential Employee Opinion Survey on Salary Administration which will provide the employees the opportunity to communicate to you their primary concerns and opinions regarding the current classification and/or compensation plan. Participation is voluntary.

The survey is a multiple-choice questionnaire with space for comments. To maintain confidentiality, we administer the questionnaire immediately after the PDQ explanation and receive the completed questionnaires directly from the employees. We will give you extra questionnaires and self-addressed return envelopes to our office for employees who want to participate but could not attend the briefings.

CITY OF \_\_\_\_\_  
Office of the City Manager

## Memorandum

**TO:** All City Employees, Supervisors, and Department Heads  
**FROM:** \_\_\_\_\_, City Manager **DATE:** 4/10/00  
**SUBJECT:** Position Classification and Compensation Study

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I am very pleased to inform you that the City has contracted with a highly qualified outside consultant firm, Public Sector Personnel Consultants (*PSPC*), to update our position classification and pay system to ensure that your position's classification reflects its duties and responsibilities, and that its salary range assignment is internally equitable and competitive within our employment markets.

*PSPC* consultants will conduct briefings on the project for all employees, supervisors and department heads on Monday, April 14. Attendance is mandatory, and you will be informed of the location and time for your briefings. The consultants will also distribute and explain a questionnaire to permit you to describe your duties and responsibilities in your own words. You will have one week to complete the questionnaire and return it to your supervisor.

*PSPC* consultants will be on-site during the later part of May to conduct individual job information interviews with representative incumbents of every job classification at their worksite, to provide you with an additional opportunity to explain the scope and complexity of your position. *PSPC* will provide recommendations as to the correct occupational job classification and title for every position, and update our job descriptions from the information you have provided on your questionnaire and during the worksite interview. **REMINDER:** It is the position that is being studied and classified, not the employee.

*PSPC* will also conduct a salary survey of the public and private employers in the local, regional, and national employment markets where we compete to obtain and retain high quality staff, and recommend a salary plan that is competitive with salaries paid for similar occupations in those employment markets. We cannot promise any salary increases, **however, no salary will be reduced as a consequence of this project.**

We anticipate that the project will be completed within approximately 120 days, and you will be notified of any actions affecting your position's classification and salary range as soon as the City Council has reviewed the recommendations and adopted the updated plans.

I am very pleased that the City Council has authorized this study to update the internal equity and external competitiveness of our position classification and salary plan. Please see the Human Resources staff if you have any questions.

(Figure 1) Memorandum from the chief executive officer announcing the project

Several important considerations if you have selected this service.

- *Extend the scheduling of the briefing sessions intervals from one hour to 1 ½ hours.*
- *Provide a facility that is set up in classroom style with tables, or chairs with writing arms, so that the employees can complete the questionnaires.*
- *Remind the employees to bring pencils or pens to the meeting, and provide these items for the employees who forget.*

An essential component of an employee opinion survey process is feedback of the survey results, to maintain positive employee relations. Since it is the nature of this type of survey to solicit negative comments, you should carefully consider whether your organization's culture is such that you can provide negative survey results feedback to the employees and the elected or appointed officials and Council/Board members.

We will provide a report summarizing the statistical and narrative results, including all of the employee comments verbatim. We will modify the written comments to maintain the confidentiality of the respondents and their departments, delete references to named individuals or their jobs titles, and remove offensive language.

The method and extent of distribution and dissemination of the opinion survey report will be up to you.

#### **4. Employee Communication Task Force**

You can leverage pre-project and progress communication through a committee or task force of employees representing the various departments, occupational groups, and/or employee associations. We can provide more intensive and detailed briefings for these individuals, whose role it will be to disseminate this information to their respective departments and employee groups.

This task force can also be utilized for suggestions regarding procedural aspects of the project, such as determination of the employers to be included in the external compensation survey, and serving as the job evaluation task force if a point-factor

method is to be developed and/or used to establish the internal job worth ranking of your various job classifications.

## **B. MID-PROJECT EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION**

We suggest a minimum of a monthly communication to the employees on the status of the project. There will be a normal level of anxiety among the employees which is to be expected when outsiders are making recommendations regarding job titles and pay ranges. Mid-project communications will reinforce each employee's importance to the organization, emphasize the positive nature of the project, and lessen unwarranted anxieties and concerns.

Following are several mid-project communication activities that will contribute to the successful conduct and implementation of the classification and/or compensation project.

### **1. Employee Newsletter Articles**

If you have an established printed or video employee newsletter, we will provide you with information for articles that indicate the project activities completed to date, and the anticipated activities for the following month.

### **2. Project Information Bulletins**

As an alternative to or supplement for newsletter articles, we suggest a special monthly or occasional bulletin to inform the employees of project activities completed to date, and the anticipated activities for the following month. Such a bulletin should be distributed to all employees, perhaps as a payroll stuffer, posted on bulletin boards, and disseminated by internal e-mail.

### **3. Employee Communication Task Force**

This group should receive a monthly briefing on the project status, and be given the opportunity to ask questions about project issues that concern them or the employees. This dialogue will provide the employees with the latest and correct information, and provide important feedback to the project consultants which may be useful

in increasing the project's quality and acceptance of the results.

#### **4. Progress Reports for the Council/Board**

We recommend that you provide a monthly summary of the project's progress to the Council or Board, so that they remain informed and committed, and to assure them that they will make final decisions regarding compensation policy and financial expenditures.

#### **5. Project Inquiry "Hot-Line"**

There may be occasions where this technique will be helpful in providing information, dispelling rumors, and obtaining additional information on employee concerns about the project. These "hot lines" take the form of a specific dedicated phone number, or an e-mail address, for the duration of the project, which may be answered by a Human Resources representative during working hours and an answering machine during other times, or an answering machine or e-mail address which is periodically checked for messages and responses provided to the callers.

## **C. POST-PROJECT EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION**

Once the recommended position classification and/or compensation plan has been adopted by the Council/Board, you will be able to provide a large amount of information to the employees, in a variety of formats. Not all of the following activities will be appropriate, or affordable, for all circumstances. They are provided for you to select, or develop, the communication activities which are best suited to your organization.

### **1. Copies or Extracts From the Final Report**

We suggest that you prepare for employee perusal a number of copies of our final report on the recommended classification and/or compensation plan, after its adoption by the Council/Board. They could be made available for review in the Human Resources and/or line departments' offices. You will probably receive a request for a copy of the report from the media.

The report's table with the employee names and their actual salary amounts should be removed. Some of the material is technical and could be misinterpreted, such as market comparisons, and salary grade/range allocations by multiple salary policy formulae if you utilize a point-factor job evaluation method, and you may want to consider publishing only the new salary grade/range-per job class listings.

## 2. Workshop for Supervisors

We recommend that you conduct a workshop for supervisors on all aspects of the new position classification and/or compensation plan, for the purpose of preparing them to explain the new plan and respond to questions will be a major factor in the employees' positive attitude towards the new plans. Supervisors should then conduct employee meetings to explain the new plan and answer questions concerning its scope and effect.

This workshop is especially important if the new plan contains a new salary schedule, with or without in-grade steps, and/or the method of salary administration is to be changed from longevity to pay-for-performance. The approach selected for the initial year's implementation must be thoroughly explained and understood. The extent to which the supervisors understand and support the new plan will be the essential factor to its successful implementation.

## 3. Classification and Compensation Plan Pamphlet

We recommend that you prepare an distribute to all employees, supervisors and managers, a pamphlet explaining the new position classification and/or compensation plan. The employees will obtain a greater depth of understanding, and retain the information for a longer period, from such written material.

The pamphlet can be used in the supervisory workshops, post-project employee briefings, and new employee orientation sessions. If a new performance evaluation system was a component of your project, a description of that system's linkage to the pay plan should be included in the pamphlet. A separate pamphlet should be prepared explaining the scope and process

of the new performance evaluation plan.

## 4. Employee Briefings

Briefings for all employees, conducted by the Human Resources staff, is one of the best methods to ensure that everyone obtains accurate information about the new plans, and obtains answers to questions from an expert source. We recommend a series of small group meetings to establish the best atmosphere for communication and understanding.

These meetings provide an excellent opportunity to distribute materials describing the new plans, such as a classification and compensation pamphlet, updated employee handbook, and updated personnel policy manual pages. If a video describing the new plans has been produced, that would be the introductory part of these briefings.

## 5. Salary Administration Video

A professionally produced video is not always necessary or affordable for very organization. It is however a very powerful tool for communicating the scope and components of the new plan in modern media which ascribes a high degree of state-of-the-art quality to the new plan. It is also included in new employee orientations. We have provided you with a sample copy of such a video.

The salary administration video is best suited for organizations with employees at many locations and on varying shifts, who can be shown the video at times that are convenient to their work hours. This video need not be costly if your organization has an internal video production capability or access to an educational institution or television station who might produce video as a public service.

## 6. Update Employee Handbook and Personnel Policy Manual

We recommend that you update the sections of your Employee Handbook and Personnel Policy Manual that describe the position classification and compensation plan to reflect any changes required by the new plan. Those updated pages are excellent handouts at the supervisory workshop and employee briefings.

## 7. Individual Salary Plan Implementation Statements

The employees need to be informed of the impact of the new plan on their base salary amount and salary opportunity. We recommend that each employee be provided with a personalized statement including the following information.

- *Effective date of the new plan, and date of salary change if different*
- *Job class title of their position*
- *Salary grade/range number to which their position's job class is allocated*
- *Minimum, Midpoint, and Maximum amounts of the salary grade/range.*
- *Salary amount prior to the effective date of the new plan*
- *Amount of increase to Minimum of the new grade/range, if applicable*
- *New salary amount according to the initial implementation protocol*
- *Relationship of new salary to the Midpoint of the grade/range (comparatio)*
- *Merit increase opportunity at various levels of future job performance*
- *Amount of supplemental pay, such as for longevity, assignments, certifications*
- *FLSA status and hourly rate for overtime*

## THE QUESTIONS MOST COMMONLY ASKED BY EMPLOYEES

Following are the questions that employees most frequently ask us during the employee project briefing meetings, and our responses.

**Q:** 1. *Who are we going to be compared to for salaries?*

**A:** If the client has made this determination prior to the briefing meetings, we provide the names and locations of the employers to the employees. We also indicate that not all jobs will be surveyed at all of the comparator employers, and that

some may be compared only to local employers, while other jobs may be compared on a regional or national basis.

If the client has not yet determined who the comparator employers will be, we tell the employees that the process of identifying the employers to be surveyed depends to a great extent on where the client is currently obtaining the majority of its employees and for which occupations. A second factor is the identification of employers to whom the client regularly loses current employees.

**Q:** 2. *What will the Council/Board do with your report?*

**A:** We uniformly respond that we do not know what the client's Council/Board will do with our report. We tell the employees that in the over 1,000 times that we have provided compensation services that we have experienced 98% implementation, and we have no indication that this project will be an exception.

We credit our 98% implementation record to the fact that, in our experience, employers do not plan projects, retain consultants, raise employee expectations, and expend funds, with the intention of doing nothing. The only modification we are sometimes requested to make to our original recommendations is the option for a multi-year implementation plan if the cost to where the client wishes to place its salary policy exceeds the available funds.

**Q:** 3. *Will we get to see a copy of the report, and when?*

**A:** Yes. We recommend that when the final report has been adopted by the Council/Board that it be made public and that extra copies be made available for perusal by the employees and department heads. The reports may not contain the tables with specific salary amounts recommended for each employee, as that is confidential, but it will include the tables indicating the salary range dollars recommended for each job classification.

**Q:** 4. *When will the study be completed?*

**A:** We provide this information in general terms, such as: "within ninety days."

**Q:** 5. *Will you make recommendations regarding (longevity, cost-of-living, benefits, etc.)*

**A:** We tell employees if a benefits analysis and which salary administration items are included in the scope of the project.

**Q:** 6. *How much are you being paid for this study, and wouldn't it be better if that money was given to the employees?*

**A:** We anticipate this question by dividing the total project cost by the number of employees and providing the employees with a per-employee amount.

For example, if a project costs \$45,000 for 450 employees, the per employee cost would be \$100. We tell the employees that if the client distributed the project cost to them, each employee would receive a one-time payment of \$100, minus taxes, instead of a possible raise from the study, which might be more substantial, and which would be paid every year.

**Q:** 7. *What will happen if the survey shows that a job classification is priced over the market rate?*

**A:** The job classification will be allocated to the salary range that most closely matches the prevailing rate at the salary competitiveness policy selected by the employer, which may be lower (or the same, or higher) than the current salary range/grade. This will not impact the salary amount paid to an incumbent if that amount is within or above the new salary range for his/her position's job class.

**Q:** 8. *What will happen if an employee's salary amount exceeds the Maximum of the new salary range/grade for their position's job class?*

**A:** No one's salary will be reduced as a direct consequence of this project. There may be a few employees whose current base salary exceeds the Maximum of the new salary range/grade recommended for their position's job classification. In such instances, the employee's base salary amount will be not be reduced, but the amount will be frozen until such time as their position's job class is re-allocated to a higher salary range/grade whose Maximum exceeds their current base salary amount.

**Q:** 9. *Will salaries be increased?*

**A:** That is a determination to be made by the Council/Board on the basis of their compensation philosophy, competitiveness policy, and the organization's financial resources. We merely make recommendations. The final decisions are 100% within the authority of the Council/Board. There is no guarantee that any salaries will be increased.

Depending upon the Council/Board's final policy determination, a new salary plan may result in uneven increases during the initial implementation year, resulting from the need to bring the salaries of all individuals to the Minimum of the salary range/grade, take into account each individual's current position in the new salary range and possibly their varying length of service.

**Q:** 10. *Who will be selected for the job information interviews, and how is the selection made?*

**A:** Unless every employee is to receive a job information interview at their work site, the minimum number of interviews is one representative incumbent of each occupational job classification. We

will make the interview selection at random. If an employee is the only incumbent of a job class, that person will be scheduled for an interview.

**Q:** 11. *What if my supervisor does not agree with what I wrote on the Position Description Questionnaire (PDQ)?*

**A:** Supervisors are not permitted to change anything that an employee has written on their PDQ. The purpose of the supervisory review of the PDQ is to ensure that its content accurately reflects the duties and responsibilities performed by the incumbent, to the extent that the consultants can readily determine its occupational classification. If the supervisors do not agree with any part of the PDQ content, they may comment and indicate their opinions.

In virtually all of the instances where we see supervisory comments (approx. 2% - 5% of the PDQs) they indicate that the employee has forgotten to mention an important item, or they may differ on the percentages of the position the employee has allocated to its major functions. No one is an expert in completing a PDQ about their position, and it is quite common to forget an essential item.

We will communicate with both the employee and supervisor in the rare instances of significant difference of opinion regarding a position's job content, and form an independent opinion.

**Q:** 12. *Will there be changes in job titles and classifications?*

**A:** That is a distinct possibility. Our task is to make sure that each position's job classification and the job class titles reflect current duties and responsibilities. It is possible that some positions may be re-allocated to a different job classification if their duties and responsibilities are now more commensurate with another than their current job class.

We may recommend that some job class titles be changed to more accurately reflect their occupations, to account for more or less job classes within a sequential group, or to recognize new occupational assignments.

**Q:** 13. *What if I do not agree with your classification of my position?*

**A:** Our response will depend on whether the client's rules and/or the scope of the project permit employee appeals to their position's recommended classification. If they do not, we will indicate that every position's classification will be reviewed with the respective department head for errors and that changes may be made in our initial recommendations.

If appeals are permitted, we inform the employees that they will be notified by their employer of our initial occupational job classification recommendation for their position, after the quality control reviews with the department heads. If they feel that we have made an error and that significant job content information has been overlooked, they may complete a form and request that we conduct a second review and notify the client of our final recommendation for each appealed position.

NOTE: We stress to the employees that the appeal process relates only to the occupational job classification and titles of positions, not salary range/grade assignments.



**P U B L I C   S E C T O R   P E R S O N N E L   C O N S U L T A N T S**

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