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a step-by-step guide to survey **participation**

A Step-By-Step Guide to Survey Participation

As an HR professional, you can't just rely on hearsay, anecdotal information, or internet postings to create an effective workforce strategy. To attract and retain top talent, you must offer competitive salaries, allowances, benefits, work hours, and so on, regardless of your industry. The most reliable way to accomplish this is by referencing market data and insights contained in annual compensation survey results, which provide a wealth of data on the factors that drive pay, including geographic factors, job levels and responsibilities, and much more. This invaluable insight allows you to better allocate your annual budget and predict how your strategy will affect your payroll, your employees, and your entire organization.

Even so, participating in these salary surveys might be viewed as a burden to busy HR departments. Reluctance to participate could be due to any number of reasons: lack of time, an inability to gather the appropriate data, and, perhaps, not knowing how to participate. Fortunately, however, participation is actually much simpler than many initially believe, and the benefits that go along with participation are bountiful. Here, you'll find a detailed overview of the entire compensation survey participation process, including a step-by-step overview of everything from pre-survey considerations to post-survey expectations.

Evaluating Survey Participants

The first step toward participating in a survey is simply determining which one (or which ones) will give you the most value. You can help make this crucial decision by evaluating the companies that have traditionally participated in the survey. Ask yourself: Does this compensation survey contain data from companies that you consider a part of your peer group? Are they competitors for your services and/or labor? Are they relevant to your industry and/or market as a whole? If you notice a lack of direct peers or competitors among the participants, then you may already have an indication that this is not the right survey for your organization to participate in. However, you should also consider whether the survey includes a broader market that may be relevant to benchmark certain jobs, such as blue collar or non-exempt jobs.

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A dependable data vendor should be very transparent about the companies that participate in their surveys. However, some vendors will only provide these details when called, emailed, or contacted in some other way. Participants must always take the time to carefully consider what organizations have participated in the past to determine whether or not there is an adequate amount of data reported in the survey. If the survey doesn't have the right companies or a good representation of them, then it may not provide a good representation of the industry as a whole. As such, robustness is a factor to consider in assessing the quality of the survey results.

Matching Job Titles & Job Descriptions

You also want to evaluate if the positions in the survey are a close match between your company's jobs and the various job descriptions contained in the survey. After all, not every organization is structured the same way and not every organization uses the same uniform job titles. For example, an IT Project Manager at one company might have a different set of responsibilities than similar jobs at another company, even within the same industry. That's why you must carefully evaluate the surveyed job descriptions to make sure they are indeed aligned with your organization's actual jobs. It is not expected that your descriptions will match a survey description completely, but a good match level is if your job matches at least 75% of the survey job responsibilities. While job title can provide a good starting point to review the matching between your job and the survey job, you should not rely on job titles alone.

As more and more jobs and labor markets are crossing industries, reviewing the descriptions can give you an idea of whether or not the data is applicable for your benchmarking activities. For example, a growing number of HR professionals from a variety of industries are starting to rely on compensation data from IT and/or tech-specific surveys to inform their own strategy, even if they're not in the IT and/or tech industries themselves. After all, virtually every modern industry, from healthcare to retail to manufacturing, has a growing need for IT positions, so it only makes sense to expand your competitive market.

As the definition of a job begins to change and we continue to detach work from particular roles, you may find that you need to understand the market value of particular skills. Perhaps those skills are typically found in jobs outside those traditionally found in your industry. In order to understand the true market value of the job you may need to look at specialty industry surveys, such as a tech-specific survey and then create a hybrid job to encompass this skills you need in your organization.

In addition to the previously mentioned factors, you should also consider the following before selecting a compensation survey to participate in:

The scope of the survey

Preferably, you want compensation survey data that spans industries, jobs, pay elements, and geographic regions that are relevant to your own.

The number of participants in the survey

You also want to ensure that there are enough participants represented in the compensation survey to accurately reflect your industry as a whole with statistical relevance.

The effective date, participation deadline data, and delivery date of the salary

In many instances, there are clearly defined “open” and “close” dates for participation, so you must submit data within the designated window to partake and be included in the cumulative results. Meanwhile, you should always reference the delivery date to determine the impacts to your internal timelines.

Prepare To Obtain The Information You Need To Participate

Now that you've selected the right survey to participate in, you'll need full access to your company's job descriptions before and during the survey-completion process. New participants often wonder how long the survey-completion process usually takes. In truth, these durations vary quite drastically depending on the nature and complexity of the surveys, the industries they pertain to, the size of the companies within them, how compensation data is stored, etc. Just as each and every organization's internal job hierarchy is unique, so is the data that is expected for each survey. Preparing prior to actual submission can reduce the overall amount of time it takes to submit data.

1. Understand how your jobs "fit" with the survey job model, including how levels are determined.
2. Review and understand the definitions for the various fields collected for the survey.
3. Determine if supplemental information is collected (e.g., policy information, company demographics, etc.).
4. Consider line managers you may want to speak with to gain more insight into the jobs in your organization.
5. Determine your source for obtaining your data (e.g., stock option information may be housed in a different location than base pay).
6. Understand the format requested for each field collected.

Despite the fact that data requirements vary by industry, most survey participants are still surprised to find how easy gathering the information is. For example, professionals in the IT industry can often access their data through their internal HRIS systems. This makes information easy to extract, export, and ultimately import into the survey questionnaire. However, there are still some pieces of information that participants may need to dig a bit deeper for, which ties back into the importance of being prepared beforehand. For example, things like general policy information aren't likely to be stored in a standard HRIS system, so you may need to consult HR professionals familiar with how the company's policies are structured. It is common for participants to identify and assemble a team of individuals who have the necessary knowledge and assign them deadlines to provide the specific data that only they can access.

Completing & Submitting the Surveys

When the time arrives for participation, salary surveys are typically received, completed by one or more members of the participating organization, and finally sent back to the vendors to be compiled with the rest of the data. In many ways, salary surveys are actually more like "submissions" than "surveys;" clients take the required information out of their systems, put it into a file, then return it to the vendor. In most organizations, it is the compensation analyst(s) who will gather this information and submit the file using whatever resources are at their disposal.

To continue producing surveys with high-quality data , participating organizations are expected to:

- Submit accurate data according to the survey schedule.
- Provide information for all compensation items required, including base salary, guaranteed payments, short-term incentives, long-term incentives, benefits, and so on.
- Report all policies applicable to the incumbents included in the survey.
- Report a representative sample of all jobs and job families within the organization, from the executive to the para-professional levels.
- Provide an accurate "job match" for the data they submit to the survey. This job match is often quantified as a certain percentage. For example, there may be a minimum 75% match between the client's jobs and the survey's benchmark descriptions for the data to be accepted.
- Report remuneration information by incumbent.

Additionally, participants in Mercer surveys must complete questions included in the survey questionnaire, which typically comes in the form of an Excel spreadsheet-based questionnaire. Included are specific instructions and definitions of key terms so that completing the survey is as simple as possible. In many cases, completing the survey is a multi-step process, with the first step requiring the client to provide specific information, such as individual incumbent information for the job holders within their company that match the survey job descriptions. This will help determine whether the particular employee matches job A or job B so that their data can be categorized accordingly. However, with so much variation among job titles and responsibilities across different organizations, matching is not always a straightforward process. For example, what is considered "journey level" for an accountant within one organization might be considered something else entirely within another, as they may have a different number of levels within the accounting hierarchy.

Survey Data Validation & Analysis

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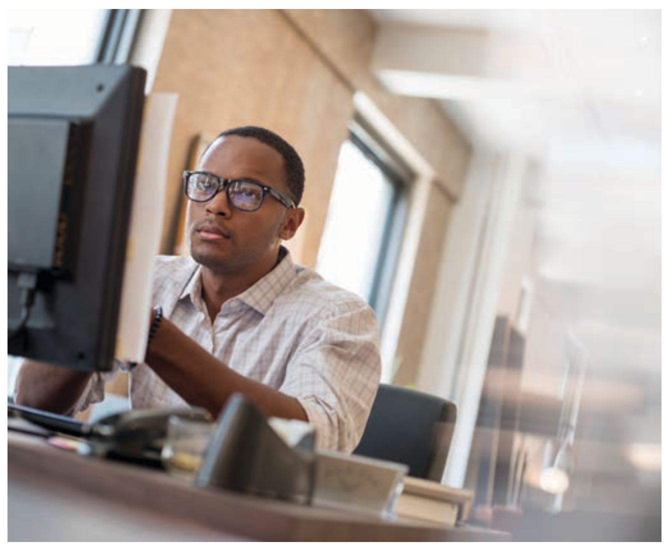
After submission to Mercer, an organization's data goes through a number of automated validation checks to look for missing or incorrect values. After the data has been assessed, the participating organization might be asked to correct the data or simply clarify why/how it is different. This can happen real-time within the survey or as follow up by a Mercer representative.



For example, if a particular employee receives a higher-than-normal salary for his or her position, the client may be asked the reason for this disparity. If the answer is that this particular employee has been with the company for a particularly long time, then the decision to retain that data or exclude it for not being representative of the market is determined. The same could be done if a salary seems too low for a position, with the reason being that the position is being held by a young and inexperienced new hire who only recently graduated college.

Survey Participation: Tips for Success

As participation in Compensation and Benefits surveys becomes more intuitive and therefore simpler, there are also ways to streamline the survey process for you and your company. Become a participation veteran with these simple tips:

1 **Select The Appropriate Survey(s)**

Based on your data needs, determine which survey(s) will provide your organization with the most value.

- Competitors and Peers—Evaluate participating companies to understand if the results will provide you with a proper and accurate benchmark.
- Jobs—If you are looking for specific positions, make sure to select a survey that has the appropriate job matches.
- Scope—Select a survey that has a scope relevant to your industry, jobs, pay elements, and geographic locations.
- Number of Participants—Ensure that there are enough participants represented in the survey to accurately reflect your industry as a whole with statistical significance.
- Know the Dates—Understand the specific dates and deadlines to participate, including survey open dates, deadlines for submission, and when the results will be ready. Ensure the schedule works for your internal timelines.

2 Collecting The Data

Preparation prior to the actual submission can reduce the overall amount of time it takes to submit your data.

- Know Your HRIS—Have an understanding of how to extrapolate that data from your company's HRIS.
- Assemble a Participation Team—To minimize last minute collection of data that's not readily available to you (i.e., executive compensation, benefits, and policies), identify those who will need to assist you in the data collection process and give them appropriate notice and instruction.
- Allow Ample Time—For most companies, the entire submission process is a multi-week project but varies depending on the nature and complexity of the survey, the size of the company, and more. Therefore, it's important to allocate the time needed to fully gather, complete, and submit the questionnaire.

3 Submitting The Data

Each survey has specific requirements and unique data requests. Before submitting, make sure you followed the rules and requirements for participation. Generally, you will need to report all compensation items requested and all policies applicable to the incumbents included for a representative sample of all jobs and job families within the organization.

4 Considering Custom Data

If you are unable to find a survey with the specific data you need, contact your HR data vendor to see if you are eligible to participate in, or retrieve results from, custom surveys. If you are not able to acquire the data you need, Mercer can help you with a custom survey designed specifically to meet your needs.

The Mercer Survey Methodology

Throughout the entire participation process, Mercer is available to answer questions and provide any assistance necessary. If you need help understanding how job matching works, how your data should be submitted, or any number of other considerations, then help should always be readily available. After all, the more accurate and comprehensive the data you submit is, the more valuable the salary survey data ends up being.

In addition, there are a number of other services that can help you throughout every step of the submission process. These services include everything from instructional webcasts to one-on-one email correspondence to in-person meetings in cities across the world. Mercer has long offered a dynamic range of services, including everything from simple phone calls to manual guidance through the complete participation process. Contact us today if you have any additional questions about compensation survey participation.

To see Mercer surveys that are currently open or opening soon for participation, please visit the **Participation Station**. Here you will also find links to survey submission forms, invitations to participation webcasts, and more.

Mercer believes in building brighter futures by redefining the world of work, reshaping retirement and investment outcomes, and unlocking real health and well-being. Mercer's more than 25,000 employees are based in 44 countries and the firm operates in over 130 countries. Mercer is a business of Marsh & McLennan (NYSE: MMC), the world's leading professional services firm in the areas of risk, strategy and people, with 76,000 colleagues and annual revenue of $17 billion. Through its market-leading businesses including **Marsh**, **Guy Carpenter** and **Oliver Wyman**, Marsh & McLennan helps clients navigate an increasingly dynamic and complex environment. For more information, visit **www.mercer.com**. Follow Mercer on Twitter **@Mercer**.

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