

# Mock Questions

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## The Scenario

Pam is a tenured professor at Bean University in Boston, whose accrediting agency is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Pam's area of expertise is financial analysis and her recent areas of research include small business success and management. She plans to take a sabbatical next year and has expressed interest in serving as an IPA appointee at the Department of Labor during her time away from the classroom. Labor is interested in bringing on an IPA with Pam's skill set. After some back-and-forth on the details of the opportunity, the agency asks Pam to provide her current salary so it can generate a tentative offer letter.

In addition to her role as a professor, Pam has regular speaking engagements with the local business incubator in her community, SmartStart. SmartStart pays Pam directly for her speaking engagements and Pam uses those funds to supplement the income she receives from Bean.

Below is a breakdown of Pam's total annual compensation:

- \$81,800 for Pam's university salary.
- \$17,350 for Pam's independent speaking engagements.
- \$14,888 for Pam's university health and retirement benefits.

Her total annual compensation is \$114,038. The job at Labor is in Washington, D.C.

## Things for Pam to Consider

**Q: DOES PAM DISCLOSE ALL OF HER CURRENT EMPLOYMENT AND PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENTS TO LABOR?**

A: **Yes.** Volunteer engagements, board memberships and private consulting can present conflicts of interest for a potential IPA engagement and must be disclosed.

**Q: DOES PAM HAVE TO DISCLOSE ALL OF HER INCOME IN RESPONSE TO THE REQUEST FOR HER CURRENT SALARY?**

A: **No.** After she passes her ethics check—which would identify work that she must discontinue before onboarding at Labor—Pam should only produce proof of income that she wants the government to “match” or “replace” in its tentative salary offer. If she plans to continue her side work with the agency's approval, she should not include that part of her income in what she shares with Labor. If she plans to pause her consulting to accept the IPA appointment, she should disclose that amount in her response.

**Q: DOES PAM PROVIDE THE TOTAL COMPENSATION NUMBER OF \$114,038 TO LABOR?**

A: This will vary by agency and circumstance but here are common answers:

- If Pam is either continuing her Bean University benefits or enrolling in federal ones, she would likely exclude the value of her benefits in the salary number she provides to Labor.
- If Pam is discontinuing her benefits entirely—for example by moving to a spouse’s plan when the IPA appointment begins—she would include the value of the “lost” benefit(s) in the salary number she provides to Labor.
- It is unusual for a federal agency to assign a dollar value to its benefits package, but in theory it could use such a number to determine a fair “total compensation” offer for Pam, in either direction.
- If Bean University will continue to pay Pam’s salary during the IPA period, Labor can either skip the salary offer altogether or make up any difference in compensation between the agency’s number and the university’s number. This arrangement would be worked out between Labor and the university as part of their memorandum of understanding, or MOU.

**Q: IF PAM’S CONSULTING WORK PRESENTS A CONFLICT OF INTEREST, CAN SHE RECUPERATE THE INCOME SHE’S LOSING?**

A: The intent and structure of the IPA program is to ensure that the participant does not lose anything in accepting a federal opportunity. Labor should be able to match or beat Pam’s current salary, but agencies might differ in how that works, exactly. If Pam is very highly compensated at Bean University, Labor can make the best possible salary offer consistent with its own policies and authorities. Pam can choose to accept or decline this offer.

**Q: IF PAM NEEDS TO RELOCATE TO WORK AT LABOR, WILL SHE BE REIMBURSED FOR MOVING EXPENSES?**

A: This is entirely dependent on the MOU signed by both employers and the federal agency’s policy on travel and relocation. Pam can certainly request that reimbursement be included in the agency’s tentative offer.

**Q: WHAT STEPS DOES LABOR TAKE ONCE IT RECEIVES PAM’S SUBSTANTIATED SALARY REQUEST?**

A: This is one example of an order of operations. Steps can vary significantly. 1). Match the salary ask with an appropriate grade level—GS-13—in its Boston office that will accommodate the request. 2). Make an offer at the GS-13 level in Washington, D.C., in accordance with its own pay setting policies if it were moving a GS-13 employee from Boston to the Beltway. This move will sometimes result in a small salary bump to accommodate the difference in location.

**Q: WHAT IF PAM’S UNIVERSITY JOB INCLUDED 25% OF WORK TIME DEVOTED TO DISCRETIONARY RESEARCH ACTIVITY?**

A: Labor could include that same provision in its offer. It could also offer a reasonable salary supplement to offset the discontinuation of this research during the IPA period, if appropriate, or



take no action at all. In addition, Bean could continue to pay 25% of Pam's university salary during the IPA period. This matter, like others, is negotiable between Pam and both employers. Pam can also decide that her 25% research time is too precious to surrender and not pursue the IPA opportunity further.