

Buncombe County Compensation Philosophy

Our community relies on county government to provide key mandated services that contribute to the health, safety and well-being of our community. Given our capital is our employees, we seek to attract, motivate, and retain high caliber professionals who work efficiently and provide superior service to our residents.

As an anchor institution for our community, Buncombe County supports the vision of a thriving community with a sustainable quality of life; understanding that a strong benefit and compensation package for county employees demonstrates our commitment to a sustainable wage and quality of life which in turn contributes to the prosperity of our community.

Our compensation philosophy is built on:

- base pay that contributes to economic security,
- access to affordable health insurance and wellness programs,
- contributions toward a sound retirement plan,
- benefits that reward longevity and the mastery of a position, and
- practices that support an effective and flexible workplace.

Base Pay

We seek to lead in compensation, recognizing that a highly qualified and experienced workforce saves money through efficiencies, higher quality of service, and decreased turnover. Given Buncombe County is the 7th largest county in NC, our comparison group is the “Big 10” Counties in NC rather than the counties who physically surround us but differ significantly in terms of population, economic and employment bases, public resources and capital, and service demands.

Health Insurance and Wellness

We offer a competitive health insurance program for all employees, demonstrating our commitment to a healthy workforce. To offset costs, we provide an employee clinic and access to a wide range of wellness programs. In addition, as an anchor institution, we recognize that a robust health and wellness package supports our local economy and WNC as a medical hub.

Retirement Plan

Not only is WNC a medical hub but it is also a retirement community. By providing a sound retirement plan we contribute to a sustainable future for our community and support the economic security of our employees in retirement. This is especially important given a large percentage of today’s workforce represents single mothers.

Retaining Employees

Since 2000, Buncombe County has committed to a flattened organization, committing limited resources to assure adequate front line staff to deliver quality services. This means that those in management positions must take on additional roles and responsibilities. This also means that for the majority of our workforce there are less opportunities for advancement. Given limited advancement opportunities and the fact that many positions in county government require specialized skill, we emphasize benefits that reward longevity and the mastery of a position. This is particularly important given the defined salary grades we work under for each position.

Effective and Flexible Workplace

We offer a work environment that supports the needs of our diverse workforce and community through practices that support an effective and flexible workplace through the appropriate use of flex work and flex place arrangements.

Over the last 20 years, changes have been made in our compensation and benefit structure to position the county as an attractive employer. These changes have been made, in part, due to changes in the economy (e.g., downturns) and hiring environment. When these changes have resulted in discrepancies in pay or benefits, these discrepancies have been addressed by responsibly phasing in and phasing out benefits judiciously when conditions permitted, with an eye toward creating a fair and responsive compensation package across employees.

In evaluating any potential adjustments, factors to be considered are:

- The demographics of our work and hiring environment – who are our competitors?
- The demographics and diverse needs of our workforce
- The financial health of our county
- Workforce Pressures – difficulty or ease of filling vacancies, retirements and the aging of the workforce, retaining employees, and, changing needs for workforce skills (e.g., increase use of technology, bi-lingual staff).

Historical Perspective on Salary and Compensation Package

Over the last decade, county governments across the nation were experiencing unprecedented turnover rates and grappling with an aging workforce and a pending bubble of retirements especially in management positions. County governments were competing with one another for a limited pool of skilled workers. Buncombe County addressed these pressures by adjusting the compensation and benefit structure to create a more competitive means to attract, hire and retain staff. Increases in pay and benefits dramatically improved our ability to attract a highly trained and experienced workforce and created a positive pressure to retain staff. This strategy resulted in significant reductions in costly turnover and a capable and motivated workforce. In addition, during this time, the county sought to address the tacit knowledge that would be lost by the pending bubble of key management positions by strategically flattening our organizational structure and training and cross-training staff as needed. Our success was recently underscored by our County upgrade to an “AAA” bond rating where the caliber of our workforce was mentioned as a factor.

For more information on this approach, see **Buncombe County Health and Human Services 2011-2012 Workforce Plan: Analysis of a Multifaceted Salary and Compensation Strategy, published January 4, 2012.**

Current Workforce and Hiring Environment – Comprehensive Study and Recommendations for Compensation and Reward Package

With the publication of the **Buncombe County Health and Human Services 2011- 2012 Workforce Plan**, a study was commissioned to research industry standards of best practice for employee compensation and reward, and examine our current economic and employment bases and workforce demographics in the context of our complete benefit plan. Each aspect of our pay and benefit plan is being examined so any adjustment made will be part of a well-crafted and thought out compensation and benefit plan. The results of this study, with recommendations, will be released for the August 7, 2012 Board of Commissioner’s meeting.