

Salary Review Report Research Assistant

August 15, 2007

**Local 154
AFSCME
DC 37**

Research Assistant, Code # 60910

New York City Amalgamated Professional Employees



Affiliated with DISTRICT COUNCIL 37, AFSCME, AFL-CIO, 125 Barclay Street, New York, N.Y. 10007-2179 (212) 815-1040

September 24, 2007

Salary Review Panel

Dear Members of the Panel:

On behalf of the members of Local 154, I have the pleasure of presenting for your consideration the Salary Review Report for the title of Research Assistant. This report shows that the title of Research Assistant meets several of the Salary Review criteria described in the Memorandum of Economic Understanding between District Council 37 and the City of New York, subscribed in August 2006.

Local 154 is proud to present a report with a balanced and objective analysis of its members' salary and wage conditions. We hope that the Salary Review Panel will provide a positive response to the career and salary recommendations that we include in this report. In providing such a response, you will fulfill our members' aspirations of working for the City with dignity and in a safer economic environment.

I will be glad to answer any questions or to provide additional information or documentation at the panel's request.

Sincerely,

Juan Fernandez
President Local 154

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Introduction

There are approximately 450 Research Assistants serving New York City. They perform their work at 25 agencies or departments including the Board of Education, Sanitation Department, Department of Transportation, Comptroller's Office and Department of Health, among many others. The title does not have a career ladder and all workers serve at the same level.

The Research Assistant duties include data analysis, research and report writing. Nevertheless, due to the broad definitions of their duties, Research Assistants perform duties ranging from productivity analysis to recording and reporting on taxes, summons and fees to financial analysis of costs and budgets.

Research Assistants work with a variety of instruments and tools. Most of them are proficient with spreadsheets and word processing programs. Others have developed skills to handle sophisticated statistical software. Many of them have mastered specific applications to measure and report on the data gathered at their individual agencies.

Summary

- The Research Assistant (RA) title meets three of the salary review criteria listed in the Appendix A of the 2005 Memorandum of Economic Agreement. The Research Assistant workers perform important revenue producing and cost containment functions; the title has evolved to require substantial additional skills and/or responsibilities; and their salaries and compensation benefits do not compare favorably to employees in other public sector and private sector jurisdictions.
- Research Assistants serve the City of New York in as many as 20 agencies and departments. They serve at the Board of Education, the Comptrollers Office, DEP, DOT, Sanitation, Parks Department, Department of Health, Consumer Affairs, DORIS and HPD, to name a few. Research Assistants are involved in the analysis of several types of data, including productivity, fiscal and of water quality, among others.
- Research Assistants make important contributions in the generation of savings and development of cost containment measures. They analyze data to identify delinquent payments of bills or fines and provide regular statistical reports on payment compliance, issuance of housing vouchers and waivers. For example, during 2006 Research Assistants at the Department of Transportation (DOT) brought in an additional \$250,000 by identifying companies that had not paid construction permits fees throughout New York City. At the NYCHA, Research Assistants have been instrumental in identifying the issuance of excessive vouchers and in helping to recover such money.
- The Research Assistant title duties have evolved to encompass substantial additional skills such as the use of statistical and spreadsheet software. In some cases, Research Assistants are called upon to develop

expertise in the use of in-house software applications that allow the production of reports and analysis specific to their departments

- Research Assistant salaries, including benefits, for new hires incumbents are 27% lower than their counterpart's wages and benefits in the State of New York. After seven years, the difference is 32%.
- Research Assistant salaries, including benefits, for new hires incumbents are 59% below the median salary of new hires in the private industry.
- Research Assistant title has little job recognition and promotional opportunities. Research Assistants do not have a natural career ladder. In order to move to a higher salary level, they must resort to abandoning the title. Experience and knowledge are not converted into career development. Since there is no recognition of experience and seniority in the title, staff with adequate experience is often not available to train new comers.
- Local 154 recommends the creation of an effective system of career development and worker's recognition that will include:
 1. Creation of a Salary Step Plan;
 2. Creation of a Research Associate Title Level I and Level II;
 3. Maturation of the Research Assistant into Research Associate Level I;
 4. Maturation of the Research Associate Level I into Level II;
 5. Increase the amounts of money assigned to existing Service Increment;
 6. Creation of a 7 and a 10 years Service Increment;
 7. Creation of a differential for education credits and/or training.

Revenue Producing And Cost Containment Functions

The Research Assistant's work helps generate an estimated hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. They also play an important role in containing cost levels for the City. In the agencies or department such as Department of Transportation, DDC and Department of Finances, where the public or contractors pay construction fees, summons, or taxes, the Research Assistant analyzes data to identify delays in tax payment, non-payment, and delinquent accounts. They provide regular statistical reports on payment compliance and they are able to pinpoint customers who have circumvented proper payments.

At other agencies such as NYCHA, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the Agency for Children Services (ACS), which handle State or Federal moneys, Research Assistants analyze the issuance of housing vouchers and waivers, and the proper allocation of the funds.

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Comparison of Salaries and Compensation Benefits

1. Research Assistant Salary

Table I shows the salary ranges for Research Assistant as of February 1, 2007. Fringe benefits account for an approximate value of 33% the listed salary. Service increments to the base salary only add a very modest 2% to 4% above the salary (see Table II).

Table I		
Research Assistant Salary		
(Effective 2/1/07)		
	Hiring Rate	Incumbent Rate
Research Assistant	\$35,413	\$40,725

Table II	
Research Assistant	
Total Service Increment	
(Effective 2/1/07)	
After 3 year	\$809
After 5 years	\$1,623

Using the base salary as a point of departure, a hypothetical Research Assistant making the incumbent salary of \$40,725 and eligible for the three years longevity increment would be earning a gross salary of \$41,534. A Research Assistant earning the base salary and eligible for the five-year longevity would be earning \$42,348. Another \$800 would be added after fifteen years of City Service, since this title is eligible for Citywide longevity.

2. Salary Survey

The information used for this section was obtained from the New York State Department of Civil Service website and from Salary.com, a job placement company that surveyed thousands of Human Resources departments at employers of all sizes, in all industries in the New York City area. The New York State Department of Civil Service website includes descriptions of the title

Program Research Specialist 2 which is the counterpart to the Title of Research Assistant. Salary.com provided us with the job descriptions of Research Associate, which has duties comparable to those of New York City's Research Assistant title.

i. State and City Comparison

Table III shows the Title and Salary comparison between the NYS Department of Civil Service Program Research Specialist 2 and the NYC DCAS Research Assistant title (Job Descriptions and Grades in Appendix A.) It shows that the New York State title has a higher base salary than the base salary of the New York City Research Assistant title. In addition, the New York State title has a seven-year step plan that leads to almost \$11,000 increase in salary at the end of seven years. In comparison, NYC Research Assistants are most likely to see a maximum of only \$1,623 Service Increment, which is applied after 5 years on the job. In addition, State workers receive a location differential in the amount of \$1,302. After seven years on the job, a State worker in the title of Program Research Specialist 2 could expect to receive a total salary of \$55,954 or \$57,256, if a location differential is added. A Research Assistant would most likely be earning \$42,348 after 7 years on the job.

In term of benefits, the most obvious difference between the State and City workers is the health insurance coverage. City workers do not pay for their basic health coverage. On the other hand, State workers pay for a portion of their health insurance. Currently, the cost for a State worker is approximately \$1,000 a year for a single individual and \$4,600 for a family. These amounts do not have a major impact in diminishing the difference of nearly \$13,000 for a Research Assistant with seven years on the job.

Table III Title and Salary Comparison (As of 4/1/2007)					
NYS Department of Civil Service Titles	Base Salary	Grade	Title Examiner Series Equivalency	Claim Specialist Base Salary	
				Hiring Rate	Incumbent Rate
Program Research Specialist 2	\$45,113	18	Research Assistant	\$35,413	\$40,725

Table IV NY State Titles Step Plan (seven year plan) Yearly Amount (Effective 4/1/07)		
	Yearly Step	Total Salary After Seven Years
Program Research Specialist 2	\$1,549	\$55,954

ii. Private Sector and City Comparison

The Entry Level Research Associate, with equivalent duties to a Research Assistant in City Service, and with 0-3 years of experience, will be paid a median salary of \$56,498, plus benefits in the 27% range. A Research Assistant, with 0-2 years of experience would be earning \$35,413; with three years of experience, this worker would be making \$41,534, including a Service Increment of \$809.

Table V Comparison Salary & Benefits Source: Salary.com				
Survey Title	Median Salary	City Title	Hiring Rate	Incumbent Rate
Entry Level Research Associate - Academics	\$56,498	Research Assistant	\$35,413	\$40,725

The City of New York entry-level salary for a Research Assistant with 0-2 of years of experience is 60% below the median salary of a newly hired Research Associate in the private sector. A Research Assistant (City) with over three years of experience earning the incumbent rate would be making 39% below an Entry Level Research Associate with 0-3 years of experience.

These huge disparities between the Research Assistant's salary and the entry-level counterpart in the private sector is an indication of the lack of incentive to retain workers with experience and provide them with advancement opportunities in the City.

Evolution of the Title to Include Additional Skills and/or Responsibilities

The Research Assistant title functions and job activities have evolved to include learning computer tools supporting advanced data analysis and statistics. Research Assistants are continually required to update their knowledge and understanding of specialized computer applications designed to produce and compile specific types of reports and data. Research Assistants are under constant pressure to keep abreast of new computer applications to make assessments and analysis of data. Sophisticated use of spreadsheets, statistical software and report writing applications are skills frequently required in the day-to-day work of a Research Assistant. These technical skills are necessary to understand the high volume of data output and analysis in City agencies. The participation of Research Assistant is essential for agencies and department to run seamless and effective operations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Research Assistant workers perform important revenue and cost containment activities in a variety of work environments. The professional skills of the people in this title help make a difference in the analysis of productivity and revenue indicators at many different City agencies. In many places, they have become indispensable for their capacity to interpret data and produce quality reports on agency activities. The Research Assistants' understanding of the agency work, together with their analytical capabilities, has made them able to identify new sources of revenues that in the past went untapped. Successful projects designed to identify delinquent payments or excessive expenditures confirm this assessment.

Nevertheless, Research Assistant workers are consistently underpaid when compared to similar titles in state government and private sectors and they lack promotional opportunities and career ladders in their own title.

Local 154 strongly recommends upgrading the salaries of all Research Assistants in recognition of their contributions. This Local recommends creating a salary step plan; the creation of a Research Associate Level I and II titles in order to open the venues to promotion and to recognize experience and dedication. Research Assistants would be promoted to the next level through title maturation. We recommend increasing the amounts in the Service Increment differentials in order to make them significant indicators of seniority and experience. We recommend the creation of a 7 and 10 years salary differential. Last, we recommend the establishment of differentials for those who obtain additional training or education.