

Designing a Defensible Municipal Compensation Study

The decision

Commission a comparison that can distinguish external pay position, internal job relationships, and the cost of implementation. Define the jobs, pay concept, comparator category, and effective date before asking whether an adjustment is warranted.

What this package establishes

This is an operational methods paper aligned with WIL-CBM-1.0. No municipality participated, no peer survey was completed, and no municipal pay gap or salary recommendation is reported. The templates support a future study; they contain no client findings.

A verified public-source example illustrates the measurement boundary: Florida private construction had average annual pay of **\$70,262 in 2024**. This BLS QCEW industry average combines occupations and is neither a municipal salary-range midpoint nor a benefit-inclusive compensation benchmark [B1].

Conditions for a defensible comparison

WIL-CBM-1.0 requires **10 participating entities per surveyed category** and **70% or greater duty overlap** for a reported job match [M1]. Invitations do not count as participation. Category participation does not guarantee adequate observations for every job.

Select peers on service mix, scale, operational complexity, recruitment overlap, governance, and geography. Separate materially different job families. Match duties and responsibility before examining pay; flag blended matches and keep below-threshold comparisons out of the primary benchmark.

Retain original schedules, effective dates, hours, pay frequency, and benefit definitions. Compare the same pay concept across peers. Preserve nonresponse, unavailable values, suppression, and unresolved observations as distinct states; never fill missing pay with zero.

Actions for the study sponsor

Approve a written scope and comparator-selection rationale. Identify the policy decision and budget horizon. Require a participation register, job-duty crosswalk, collection workbook, exclusion register, and costed decision table as deliverables.

Have the methods reviewer and municipal compensation practitioner check the matching and harmonization rules before collection. Any weighting or aging rule needs an explicit rationale and sensitivity check. Keep original and adjusted values side by side.

How to interpret the eventual results

External pay position compares the employer's defined measure with the same comparator measure. Compa-ratio compares incumbent base pay with the employer's range midpoint. Neither independently establishes fairness or a required salary adjustment.

Separate filled and vacant positions in costing. Show recurring employer costs, partial-year implementation, and transition expense separately. Recruitment or retention explanations require staffing evidence beyond a wage difference.

Stop conditions and next evidence

If participation is below the governing category threshold, duties are unresolved, or units cannot be aligned, retain the gap explicitly and continue collection or obtain a documented methodological disposition. Do not report a compliant municipal benchmark from incomplete evidence.

Use the collection, participation, duty-match, and decision templates. Their first use should be to document the actual employer's scope and data permissions, not to populate a predetermined recommendation.

Evidence basis

[B1] BLS QCEW, 2024 annual Florida file; NAICS 23, private ownership, annual average pay in nominal dollars.
<https://data.bls.gov/cew/data/api/2024/a/area/12000.csv>

[M1] WIL, Public-Source Compensation Benchmarking: A Method Note, WIL-CBM-1.0.
<https://wilinstitute.org/library/p/public-source-compensation-benchmarking-method>

See the full methods paper, supporting tables, and reproducible analysis for definitions and provenance. Prepared 24 September 2026.