



# The Society for the Study of Social Problems

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May 24, 2018

Dear Board of Directors:

At the August 11, 2017 meeting of the Board of Directors, the Board charged us with the task of exploring the possibility of the SSSP becoming independent, i.e., of severing our relationship with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) or any other institution, and reporting back to the Board with our recommendation. This exploration required us to consult with a human resources agency, regarding the future staffing of the Administrative Office. We (Michele) consulted with Bill Kelso, Audit & Advisory Shareholder, and Andrew Brittingham, Employment Partners Group, LBMC, regarding the following items.

1. Human Resource Policies – In the absence of falling under the University's policies for staff, the Society would need the assistance of an HR Consultant to design HR, payroll, and benefits policies, procedures and a handbook for SSSP employees. HR Consultants could provide these initial services for a fixed or hourly cost and could be placed on a retainer to effectively outsource our HR function.
2. Payroll processing – SSSP would likely outsource payroll and tax processing, and could do so with a number of local, national or even online providers. Rates vary widely based on services provided, number of employees, and frequency of pay. We have seen fees range from \$25 to \$200 per employee per month. Based on the low number of employees, the Society would likely find rates on the mid to higher end of the range.
3. Employee health benefits – Bill and Andrew reached out to Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) of Tennessee, United Health Partners, and other local providers that have been known to offer individual coverage.
  - a. BCBS of TN indicated that an employer would need a minimum of 5 eligible participants in order to participate in the LBMC Professional Employer Organization (PEO), or to receive a quote for plan coverage.

- b. United Health Partners indicated that they require a minimum of 3 eligible participants in order to receive a quote for coverage.
  - c. Local providers previously known to offer individual coverage are no longer quoting for individual coverage.
  - d. If a provider could be identified to provide a quote for SSSP, it likely would come with fewer options of benefit coverage.
  - e. Since SSSP is unlikely to meet any of those thresholds, SSSP would probably not be able to provide coverage.
  - f. One way to provide some form of health benefit to employees would be to offer a contribution/reimbursement for a percentage of the employee's coverage that they would obtain individually through the HealthCare Exchange. Cost of coverage under the Exchange would vary based on the participant's personal information, and coverage would likely vary from the current coverage through the University.
4. University provided access to other benefits – The Society could design policies and a plan to cover the vast majority of the benefits currently available to University employees. An HR consultant could work through these optional coverages with the Society to include/exclude these and other benefits into the design of our benefits package. The question comes down to the Society's desire and ability to offer a comparable benefit and the cost to administering for a small employee base, which, ideally, would include the following.
- a. Educational assistance, longevity pay, holidays, annual, sick and other forms of leave could all be designed to be included similarly to the current offering or modified as desired.
  - b. Workers' compensation coverage could be brokered by a local insurance agent. SSSP staff would likely fall in lower risk/cost classifications.
  - c. Dental and vision benefits and other non-health insurance benefits could be brokered by a local insurance agent, though pricing likely would be higher for the smaller plan or require modification of benefits and deductibles to be competitive.
5. Retirement benefits – With the limited number of participants it is unlikely that SSSP could match the existing benefits afforded to University employees.
- a. 401(k) – SSSP could administer a small plan, though cost per covered employee could be prohibitive. The SSSP would likely look to design a benefit to an IRA contribution or other form of compensation, if offered.
  - b. Defined Benefit Plans administered through the state – Over the past two decades, most large public employers have frozen these benefits as they have proven too costly. An organization the size of SSSP would find it virtually impossible to continue to provide this benefit separate from a University sponsored plan. Many employers that curtailed access to these plans to new employees generally increased the employer contribution to the 401k plan as an incentive to replace the pension.

Since the health coverage was unavailable to price because the number of our employees is lower than the minimums to get a quote, and it is unlikely they would make a move until our milestones were reached with the University, a detailed pricing analysis of the entire benefit plan package would have more guesstimates than reliable numbers. But even without more reliable numbers, it is clear that to us at least, that severing our ties with UTK does not make sense to the Society financially and having an affiliation with a Research One institution remains an attractive option for a professional academic organization like ours.

One of the issues driving all of this is our desire to replace the GRA & Webmaster position with a non-graduate student permanent part-time position. Based on these findings, we feel that a conversation should take place with Dr. Jon Shefner (Head of Sociology and SSSP Project Director) about moving from a GRA position to a permanent part-time position when Caitlin's contract ends on July 31, 2019. Rachel Cogburn, our IT Specialist, has expressed an interest in increasing her hours to 30, if this model was accepted by Dr. Shefner and UTK. Currently, we provide departmental compensation of \$11,602 and a stipend and fringe benefits for Dr. Shefner of \$2,625, in addition to the \$20,000 for the GRA. Perhaps we can persuade the department to go this route by increasing our contribution to the department, which it can use to support a graduate student. By replacing the GRA position with a permanent part-time position we are not in any way abandoning our commitment to graduate students. This position represents only a minimal portion of what the organization offers graduate students. In fact, some of us wonder whether this position is one that benefits a graduate student nearly as much as a teaching or research assistantship would. Meanwhile, we remain understaffed and Michele should not have to train a graduate student in addition to her other duties, especially without the option of replacing her or him if s/he cannot perform the duties required by the position. It should be noted that Michele has trained 15 GRAs since 1992.

If there is additional information that you need or wish to have, please let us know.

Most sincerely,



Héctor L. Delgado, Executive Officer

Cc: Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee