salarycube

The Open Benchmark Contributor Guide

How HR teams get survey-quality compensation benchmarks — built from employer-reported data

Executive Summary

The Compensation Data Problem

Every HR team needs market data to make pay decisions. Mid-market organizations often cannot justify $20,000+ per year on traditional salary surveys. Enterprise teams that already subscribe spend weeks on survey participation and still wait months for results. The common thread: getting defensible, timely compensation data is harder than it should be — regardless of company size.

Neither free salary websites nor slow annual surveys produce the kind of data that holds up when an employee asks, "Why am I paid what I'm paid?"

Open Benchmark exists to solve this problem. It is a contributor program where organizations submit anonymized compensation data and — after acceptance and meeting contribution thresholds — receive personalized market benchmarks in return, plus a Contributor Trial of the SalaryCube platform.

This guide covers:

- Why employer-reported data produces better benchmarks than any alternative
- Exactly what you contribute, what you receive, and how your data is protected
- The step-by-step process from signup to personalized reports
- How contributing improves the data for everyone — including you

Why Most Compensation Data Falls Short

Before explaining how Open Benchmark works, it helps to understand why so many HR teams struggle with the data they already have.

The Free Data Problem

Sites like Glassdoor, Payscale's free tier, and LinkedIn Salary Insights rely primarily on **self-reported data from employees**. This introduces three systematic issues:

1. **Selection bias.** People who voluntarily report their salary skew toward those who are either proud of what they earn or frustrated by it. The middle of the distribution — where most employees actually sit — is underrepresented.

2. **Accuracy issues.** Employees frequently confuse base salary with total cash compensation, misreport bonus amounts, or round to the nearest convenient number. There is no validation against payroll records.

3. **Stale titles.** An employee who reports their salary as a "Marketing Manager" might be doing the work of a director at a 50-person company or an individual contributor at a 5,000-person company. Title-only matching obscures more than it reveals.

The result: salary ranges so broad they are functionally useless for making real pay decisions.

The Traditional Survey Problem

Enterprise salary surveys from firms like WTW, Mercer, and Radford solve the accuracy problem — they collect employer-reported data validated against actual payroll. But they introduce a different set of challenges:

- **Cost.** Annual subscriptions typically run $15,000 to $50,000+ per survey, and most organizations participate in multiple surveys. For mid-market companies, that cost is hard to justify. For enterprise teams, the spend is significant even when the budget exists.

- **Time.** Survey participation consumes three to six weeks of analyst time per submission. Data is published months after collection, meaning it reflects market conditions that may have already shifted — a problem at any company size.

- **Participation burden.** The "give-to-get" model requires extensive data preparation, job matching to proprietary taxonomies, and ongoing maintenance of mapping files across multiple surveys.

For mid-market organizations where the comp analyst also handles HRIS administration, benefits questions, and pay equity reviews, this burden is disproportionate to the value. For enterprise teams, traditional surveys remain valuable — but the cycle time and analyst overhead leave room for a faster, lighter complement.

How Open Benchmark Works

Open Benchmark is built on a simple principle: **better data comes from more contributors**. Every organization that participates improves the dataset for everyone, and every participant receives personalized benchmarks for a selection of their matched roles.

The Value Exchange

What You Give	What You Get
Anonymized incumbent data: job titles, base pay, work location state, pay basis, effective date	Personalized salary benchmarks for a selection of your matched roles
Recommended: job level, internal job code	Market percentiles by geography, industry, and company size
Optional: bonus, commission, LTI, metro area, hours (required for hourly)	Contributor Trial of the SalaryCube platform (DataDive, Job Pricer, Bigfoot Live, and more)
15–30 minutes of your time	Access to 35,000+ employer-reported benchmark jobs
	Reports you can share with leadership immediately

No credit card required. No auto-billing. No sales call to participate.

The Three-Step Process

Step 1: Upload Your Data

Download our Excel template, paste in your compensation data, and upload. Required fields are **job title, work location state, pay basis (hourly or salary), base pay, and effective date**. If you have hourly employees, include scheduled weekly hours. No employee names or personal identifiers needed. The upload takes five minutes.

Step 2: Match Your Jobs

Our platform detects your unique job groups and presents a searchable catalog of 35,000+ benchmark jobs. For each of your roles, find the closest match by searching titles and reading full job descriptions. Most organizations complete matching in 15–30 minutes.

Step 3: Get Your Results

Submit your matched data. Validation happens automatically, and once your submission is accepted and meets the contribution thresholds, your personalized benchmark reports are generated and your Contributor Trial of the SalaryCube platform activates — typically within minutes.

What You Actually Receive

Here is what becomes available once your submission is accepted and meets the contribution thresholds.

Personalized Benchmark Reports

These are not generic salary ranges. They are market benchmarks **matched to your specific roles**, in your geographies, against employer-reported compensation data. The number of roles included in your reports depends on your trial tier. For each included role, you receive:

- **Market percentiles** (25th, 50th, 75th, 90th) for base salary and total cash compensation
- **Geographic comparisons** showing how pay varies by state and region
- **Industry cuts** so you can see how your roles compare within your specific sector
- **Company size segmentation** by headcount and revenue bands

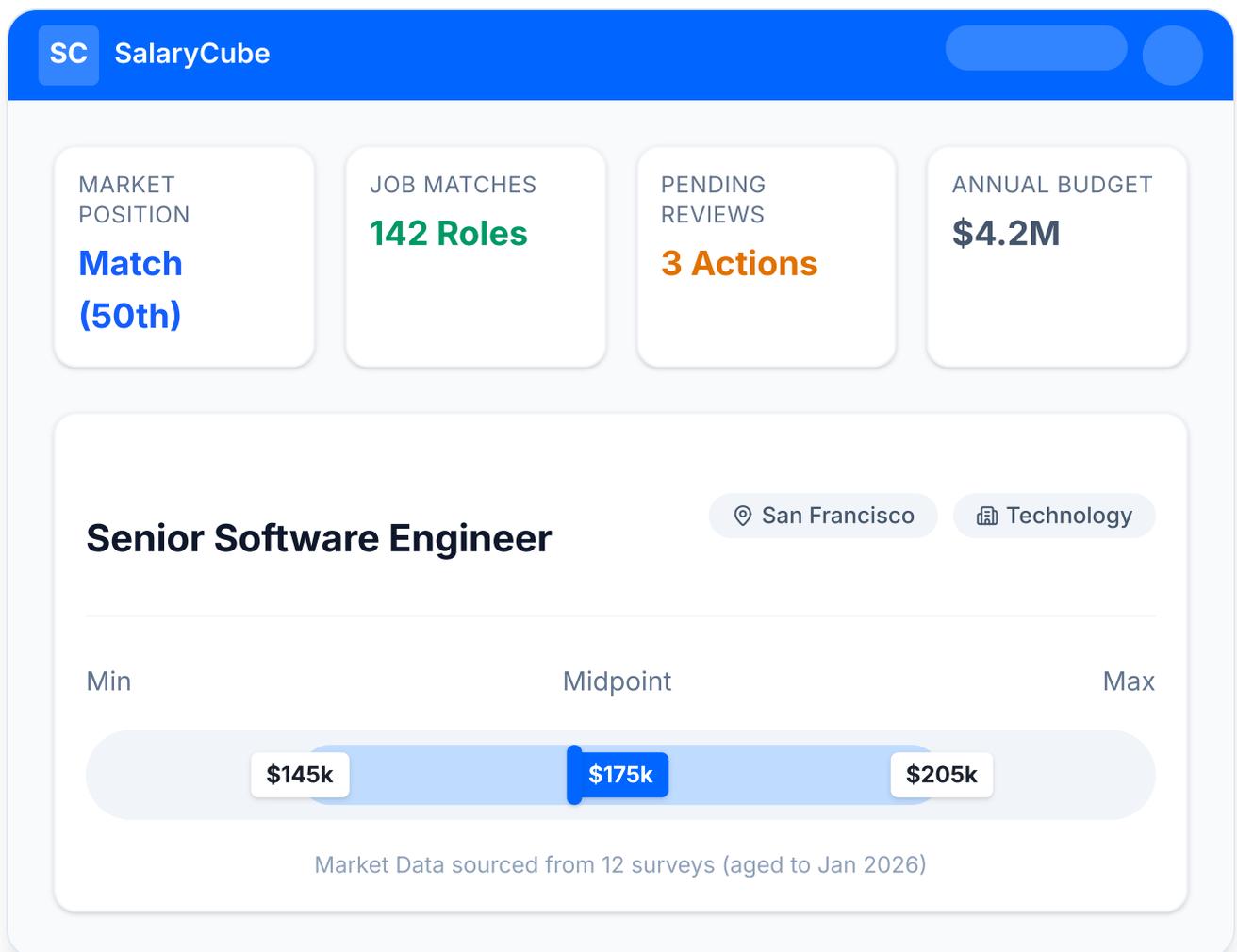## Contributor Trial of the SalaryCube Platform

After your submission is accepted and meets contribution thresholds, you unlock a Contributor Trial. The trial tier depends on the breadth and depth of your submission — organizations that contribute more matched jobs and incumbents receive a longer trial with fuller access.

During your trial, you have access to:

- **DataDive Pro** — Deep-dive compensation analytics across 35,000+ benchmark jobs with filters for geography, industry, company size, and revenue

- **Job Pricer** — Side-by-side compensation comparisons for any role, with exportable PDF reports for leadership presentations

- **Bigfoot Live** — Real-time salary data updated continuously from employer-reported sources

- **FLSA Analyzer** — Fair Labor Standards Act classification analysis

- **JD Studio** — Job description builder aligned to benchmark job families

Sample Benchmark Preview

Here is an example of the SalaryCube platform experience you will access during your Contributor Trial:

SC	SalaryCube		
MARKET POSITION **Match (50th)**	**JOB MATCHES** **142 Roles**	**PENDING REVIEWS** **3 Actions**	**ANNUAL BUDGET** **$4.2M**

Senior Software Engineer   ⊙ San Francisco   🏛 Technology

Min	Midpoint	Max
$145k	$175k	$205k

Market Data sourced from 12 surveys (aged to Jan 2026)

Your Contributor Snapshot report includes role-level percentile positioning, geographic comparisons, and coverage summaries for a selection of your matched jobs — ready to share

with leadership.

Data Security and Privacy

The most common question from prospective contributors is straightforward: **what happens to my data?**

This section answers it directly.

What We Collect

The required fields per incumbent are:

Field	Example	Why We Need It
Job Title	"Senior Financial Analyst"	To match against benchmark jobs
Work Location State	CO	For geographic market matching
Pay Basis	Salary	To determine annualization method
Base Pay	$95,000	Core compensation data point
Effective Date	2026-01-01	For data recency and aging
Scheduled Weekly Hours	40	Required for hourly employees (annualization)

Recommended fields that improve match quality: **Job Level** and **Internal Job Code**. You may also optionally include employee name, employee ID, bonus, commission, LTI, metro area, and FTE.

Optional Employee Identifiers

You may choose to include **employee name** and **employee ID** in your submission. These fields are entirely optional and are never used in aggregate benchmarking. When provided, they enable SalaryCube to deliver individual-level analytics back to your organization — such as employee-specific pay-range positioning and compa-ratio calculations. These identifiers

are visible only to your organization and are never shared with other participants or included in any aggregate output.

What We Never Collect

- Social Security numbers or government IDs

- Email addresses of individual employees

- Dates of birth

- Home addresses

- Any government-issued identifiers

If our system detects columns that appear to contain sensitive personal identifiers (SSNs, dates of birth, home addresses) during upload, it flags them automatically and excludes them from processing.

How Your Data Is Protected

Technical Safeguards

- All data encrypted in transit and at rest

- Individual company records are never exposed to other participants

- Only aggregated, anonymized benchmarks are ever produced

- Minimum observation thresholds prevent reverse-engineering of individual company data

- Access to raw submission data is restricted to authorized internal personnel

Operational Safeguards

- Your data is used exclusively to produce aggregate market benchmarks

- No company-level or employee-level data is shared with any third party

- You can request deletion of your submission at any time

- Submissions in draft, processing, or matching stages can be deleted directly from the dashboard

- Our security practices are documented at salarycube.com/security

Why Employer-Reported Data Matters

Not all compensation data is created equal. The distinction between employer-reported and employee-reported data is not a technicality — it fundamentally determines whether your benchmarks are trustworthy enough to base real decisions on.

Employer-Reported: What It Means

Employer-reported data comes directly from organizations' compensation records. When a company submits data to Open Benchmark, they are reporting actual pay figures for actual employees in defined roles. This data reflects what companies genuinely pay — not what individuals remember, estimate, or wish they earned.

Why It Produces Better Benchmarks

Factor	Employer-Reported (Open Benchmark)	Employee Self-Reported (Free Sites)
Source	HR/payroll records	Individual memory/estimation
Accuracy	Validated against actual compensation	Unverified, often rounded or inflated
Job Matching	Matched to standardized benchmark jobs	Title-only, no scope validation
Completeness	Base pay AND total cash captured separately	Often conflated or incomplete
Representativeness	Full workforce included	Self-selected (biased sample)
Recency	Submitted with effective date	Unknown age, possibly years old

Our Methodology

The Compound Effect of More Contributors

Every organization that joins Open Benchmark improves the data for everyone. More contributors means:

- **Deeper sample sizes** for niche and hybrid roles that traditional surveys often miss
- **Better geographic coverage** in secondary and tertiary markets where data is typically thin
- **More current data** as contributions flow in continuously rather than on annual survey cycles
- **Broader industry representation** reducing the need to rely on cross-industry averages

This is the fundamental advantage of a contributor model over both free salary sites (unreliable data) and traditional surveys (gated behind high costs and long timelines). Whether you are supplementing existing surveys or accessing employer-reported data for the first time, more contributors means better benchmarks for everyone.

Who Should Contribute

Open Benchmark is designed to be accessible regardless of organization size, industry, or compensation maturity. That said, some organizations extract more value than others.

Mid-Market Teams

- **Organizations (50–1,000 employees)** that need defensible comp data but cannot justify enterprise survey subscriptions
- **Growing companies** adding new roles and locations where they lack market intelligence
- **HR teams of one or two** who do not have the bandwidth for traditional survey participation
- **Organizations evaluating compensation tools** who want to test a platform with their own data before committing
- **Companies in competitive talent markets** where outdated or unreliable data directly costs them hires

Enterprise Teams

- **Organizations already participating in traditional surveys** who want a faster, lighter supplement with results in days instead of months

- **Existing SalaryCube subscribers** who want auto-configured DataDive reports and Job Pricer instances based on their current workforce

- **Multi-survey participants** looking to validate ranges or fill coverage gaps with an additional employer-reported source

- **Companies preparing for pay transparency compliance** who need defensible market data to support published salary ranges across multiple states

Submission and Trial Thresholds

There is no minimum to submit — any organization can upload data and match jobs. However, unlocking a Contributor Trial requires meeting contribution thresholds based on the number of matched jobs and incumbents in your submission. Organizations that contribute more breadth and depth receive longer trials with fuller platform access.

If your initial submission does not meet thresholds, you can add more data and resubmit. One Contributor Trial is available per company domain; resubmissions are always allowed.

Addressing Common Concerns

"I don't want to share our compensation data."

You are not sharing your data with other companies. Your individual records are never visible to any other participant. The data is used exclusively to produce aggregate benchmarks — the same model that traditional salary surveys have operated on for decades. No one can see what your company pays for any specific role.

"Our data is messy. Job titles are inconsistent."

That is normal, and the platform is built for it. The matching interface lets you search 35,000+ benchmark jobs by keyword and read full job descriptions to find the right match. You do not need clean, standardized titles to participate. Most organizations complete matching in 15–30 minutes regardless of how inconsistent their internal titling is.

"We only have a small number of employees."

You can submit regardless of size. Keep in mind that unlocking a Contributor Trial requires meeting contribution thresholds based on matched jobs and incumbents. Smaller organizations may need to include more of their workforce to reach the threshold — but every contribution improves the aggregate data for the roles and geographies you represent.

"What if I don't want to continue after the trial?"

Then you do not continue. There is no auto-billing, no cancellation process, and no pressure. Your benchmark reports are yours to keep. The trial simply expires, and you can return to Open Benchmark to submit updated data whenever you choose.

"How is this different from survey participation?"

Three ways. First, the time commitment is dramatically lower — 30 minutes versus three to six weeks. Second, the cost is zero. Third, results are delivered in days rather than months. The trade-off is that Open Benchmark is a newer dataset building depth over time, while established surveys have decades of historical data and broader participation in specific industries. For organizations benchmarking standard professional and operational roles, Open Benchmark provides strong coverage — and for enterprise teams already running surveys, it serves as a fast, complementary source.

"Is there an antitrust concern with sharing compensation data?"

Open Benchmark follows the same aggregation model used by traditional salary surveys for decades. We provide aggregated benchmarks with minimum observation thresholds — no company-level or individual-level data is ever exposed. If your organization has specific data-sharing or antitrust policies, we recommend consulting your legal counsel to confirm participation aligns with your requirements.

"Can multiple people at my company submit?"

One Contributor Trial per company domain. Multiple users from the same company can collaborate on a submission, but the trial entitlement is tied to the organization, not individual users. Resubmissions with updated data are always allowed.

HRIS Export Checklist

Use this reference when pulling data from your HRIS to populate the Open Benchmark template.

Field	Required?	Where to Find in HRIS	Notes
Job Title	**Required**	Position or job title field	Use the title that best reflects the role's scope and level
Work Location State	**Required**	Work address or location field	2-letter state code (e.g., CO, CA, NY)
Pay Basis	**Required**	Compensation type or FLSA field	"Hourly" or "Salary" — most HRIS systems track this
Base Pay	**Required**	Current salary or hourly rate	Annual salary for salaried; hourly rate for hourly employees
Effective Date	**Required**	Comp effective date or snapshot date	Date the pay data is accurate as of; can also set at submission level
Scheduled Weekly Hours	**Required if hourly**	Standard hours or schedule field	Needed to annualize hourly pay (rate x hours x 52)
Job Level	Recommended	Grade, band, or level field	Improves job grouping accuracy significantly
Internal Job Code	Recommended	Job code or position code field	Helps group incumbents into distinct job groups
Bonus (Actual Annual)	Optional	Bonus paid or variable comp field	Actual bonus paid, not target — improves total cash benchmarks
Commission (Actual Annual)	Optional	Commission or incentive field	Actual commission paid in the period
Employee Name	Optional	Employee name or preferred name field	Enables individual pay-range positioning and compa-ratio reports for your team
Employee ID	Optional	Employee number or ID field	Links records across submissions; never shared externally
FTE	Optional	FTE or hours ratio field	Defaults to 1.0 if not provided

Field	Required?	Where to Find in HRIS	Notes
Metro Area	Optional	Work city or MSA field	Enables more granular geographic matching

Getting Started: A Practical Checklist

Ready to contribute? Here is exactly what to do.

Step-by-Step

1. **Create your free account** at salarycube.com/open-benchmark/get-started. Use your work email. Takes 30 seconds.

2. **Download the Excel template** from the Open Benchmark dashboard. The template has pre-configured columns for the required fields (job title, work location state, pay basis, base pay, effective date) plus recommended and optional fields.

3. **Paste your data** into the template. No formatting required — just paste the values from your HRIS export. Remove any columns containing employee names or personal identifiers.

4. **Upload the file.** Drag and drop or browse to select. Set the data effective date (defaults to the first of the current month). The platform processes your file and detects columns automatically.

5. **Confirm column mappings.** The system auto-maps your columns to the required fields. Review the mappings, adjust if needed, and confirm. Takes two minutes.

6. **Match your jobs.** For each unique job group detected in your data, search the benchmark catalog and select the closest match. Read the full job description to confirm the scope aligns. Most organizations finish this step in 15–30 minutes.

7. **Review and submit.** Check your submission summary — number of incumbents, jobs matched, coverage percentage — and submit for quality review.

8. **Receive your results.** Validation happens automatically when you submit. Once your submission is accepted and meets the contribution thresholds, your personalized benchmark reports and Contributor Trial activate right away. You will receive an email confirmation.

Conclusion

Compensation decisions are too important to make with unreliable data — and too frequent to wait months for survey results. Open Benchmark offers a practical alternative for HR teams of every size: contribute your anonymized compensation data, and receive defensible market benchmarks built from employer-reported sources, plus a Contributor Trial of the SalaryCube platform.

The process takes 30 minutes. The results arrive in days. The cost is zero.

For mid-market teams, Open Benchmark delivers survey-quality data that was previously out of reach. For enterprise teams, it provides a faster complement to traditional surveys — with auto-configured reports ready in days, not months. Every organization that contributes makes the data better for everyone.

Your compensation data is valuable. Put it to work.

Tools to Automate the Workflow

📄 Explore SalaryCube

If you'd like to put this playbook into practice with real-time market pricing tools, here are a few SalaryCube products that support the workflow:

DataDive Pro (Market Pricing)   Bigfoot (Job Posting Salaries)

Benchmark jobs quickly with defensible market views by location, industry, revenue, and more.

See current salary ranges from real job postings and compare by company and city.

Hybrid Job Builder

Combine multiple roles into a hybrid benchmark to match "real" jobs that don't fit a single title.

JD Studio

Create, update, and standardize job descriptions to support consistent leveling and matching.

Connect With Us

Schedule a demo: salarycube.com/demo

Email: hello@salarycube.com

Learn more: salarycube.com

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Ready to Get Started?

Upload your anonymized comp data and get personalized market benchmarks — built from employer-reported sources.

Start Your Submission →

Prefer help? Book a 15-min walkthrough.