LABOR AVAILABILITY STUDY

ANNUAL REPORT FY 2024-2025

NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Connections.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Contents

Submitted: July 2025

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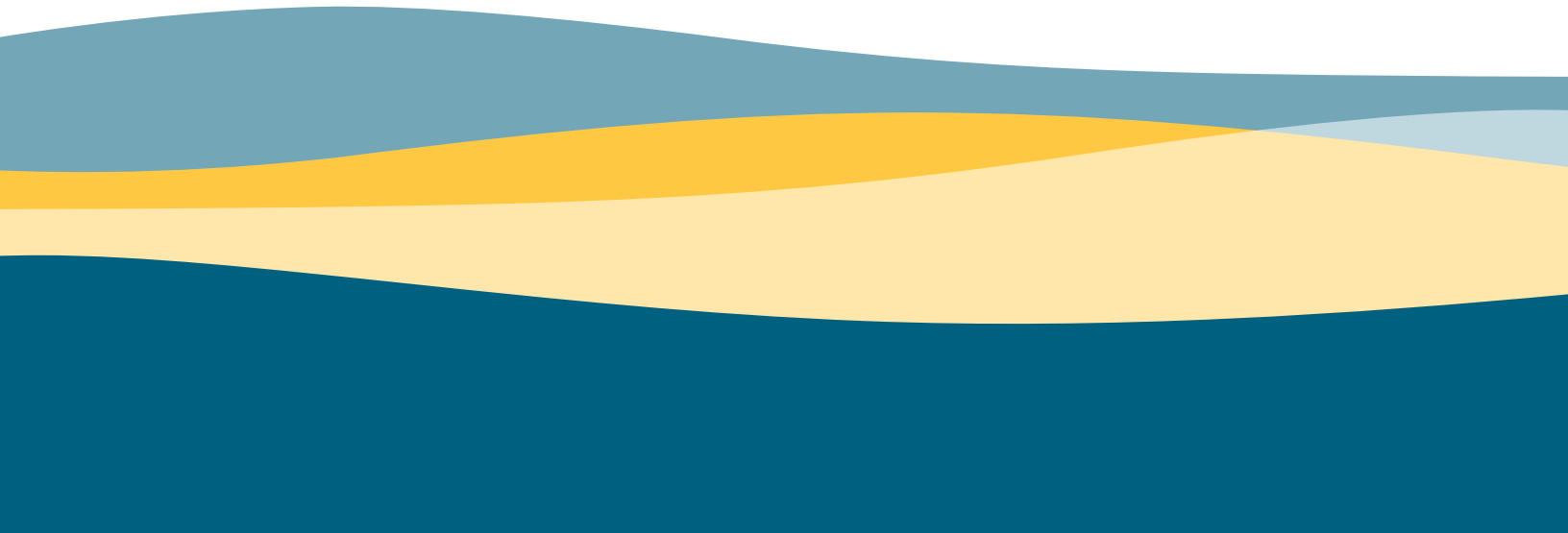
Background and Purpose

In 2016, Neb. Rev. Stat. §48-3401 to 48-3407 created the Sector Partnership Program, which allowed the Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) and the Department of Economic Development (DED) to continue collaborating on the research project known as the Labor Availability Study (LAS). The goal of the research project is to conduct labor availability, employer needs, and skills gap studies for selected communities in Nebraska. Neb. Rev. Stat. §48-3401 to 48-3407 states that an annual report shall be provided to the Governor and the Business and Labor Committee detailing the process and results of the labor availability, hiring needs, and skills gap studies.

LAS funding began with a federal grant, and the first pilot studies were funded through the Department of Economic Development's Manufacturing Extension Program. As part of the Sector Partnership Program, the Departments of Labor and Economic Development each initially transferred $250,000 from the Job Training Cash Fund and $250,000 from the Nebraska Training and Support Cash Fund. Beginning July 1, 2017, the Nebraska Department of Labor has continued to fund these important surveys through the use of the Nebraska Training and Support Cash Fund.
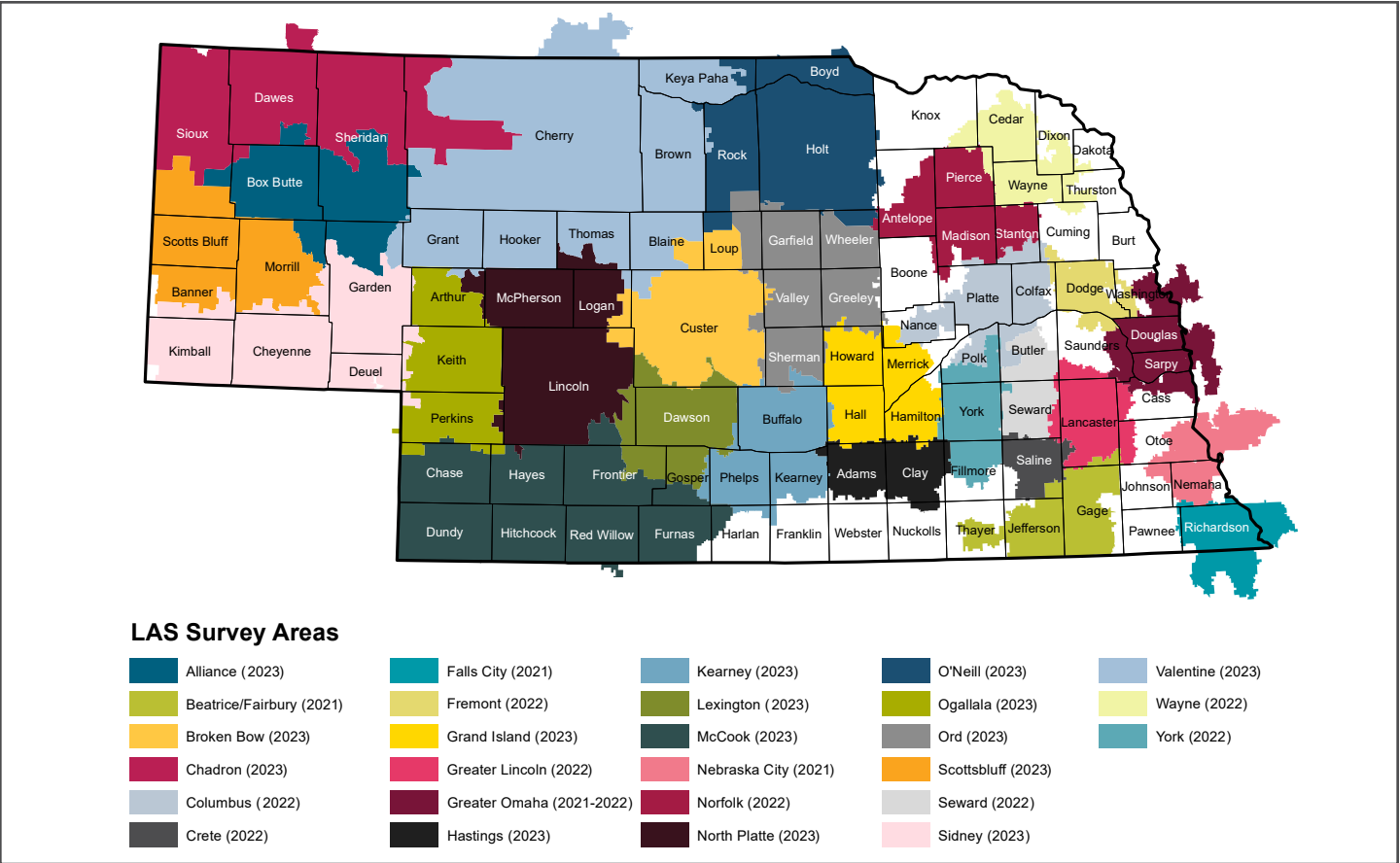
NDOL Hiring and Training Needs surveys were first conducted in 2014 for the Omaha and Lincoln metropolitan areas in partnership with the Bureau of Business Research at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln. Since 2016, the surveys have been conducted by the Nebraska Department of Labor's Labor Market Information unit.

Pilot projects began in Northeast Nebraska in 2013 and were published by NDOL and DED staff in the fall of 2014 with the release of the Northeast Nebraska Labor Availability Reports.

Survey Areas

During FY 2024-2025, NDOL published local area reports from the Sandhills and Mid-Plains regions and a statewide report comprised of data collected from surveys conducted from 2021-2023.

2021-2023 Survey Areas

LAS Survey Areas

■ Alliance (2023)	■ Falls City (2021)	■ Kearney (2023)	■ O'Neill (2023)	■ Valentine (2023)
■ Beatrice/Fairbury (2021)	■ Fremont (2022)	■ Lexington (2023)	■ Ogallala (2023)	■ Wayne (2022)
■ Broken Bow (2023)	■ Grand Island (2023)	■ McCook (2023)	■ Ord (2023)	■ York (2022)
■ Chadron (2023)	■ Greater Lincoln (2022)	■ Nebraska City (2021)	■ Scottsbluff (2023)	
■ Columbus (2022)	■ Greater Omaha (2021-2022)	■ Norfolk (2022)	■ Seward (2022)	
■ Crete (2022)	■ Hastings (2023)	■ North Platte (2023)	■ Sidney (2023)	

Reports for Broken Bow, McCook, North Platte, Ogallala, O'Neill, Ord, and Valentine, as well as Skills Gap reports for the Panhandle, Sandhills, and Mid Plains economic regions of the state were published in August and September of 2024. These reports can be found on the Nebraska Labor Availability Study Publications page of NEworks.

Preparations for FY 2025-2026 began in early 2025, with plans to re-evaluate existing questionnaires and methodologies for the next phase of multi-year surveys.

Methodology

Survey samples are created using the most recent Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Enhanced Quarterly Unemployment Insurance (EQUI) files. Privately owned businesses with an average employment of three employees or more are selected for the final sample. The sample is designed to include establishments representing the range of industries and employment levels typically in the survey area. From 2021-2023 NDOL sent Hiring and Training Needs questionnaires to businesses in 27 different areas in Nebraska, with 7,138 businesses responding.

NDOL collaborates with the Bureau of Sociological Research (BOSR) at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln. Each survey area is determined by analyzing commuting patterns in and out of each city and consists of a random sample of households in the area. Data collection and survey processing is handled by BOSR, and NDOL analyzes the results and produces the final reports. From 2021-2023 BOSR sent surveys to households in 27 different areas in Nebraska, with 9,968 households responding.

Report Findings

Labor Availability

Labor availability describes how many people within a given area are available and willing to take a new job. While there are some datasets available that count certain types of job seekers, such as unemployed individuals or active job seekers, a few key segments of the labor pool, such as people who are currently employed but may change jobs given the right opportunity, or those who are not working but may reenter the labor force, are often unaccounted for in estimates of labor availability.

NDOL's labor availability study is primarily focused on the specific groups of people defined as potential job seekers and active job seekers in an area. A potential job seeker is an employed person who answered either "yes" or "maybe" to the question "Are you likely to change jobs in the next year if a suitable job is available?" A potential job seeker is also a non-employed person who answered "yes" or "maybe" to the question "Are you likely to reenter the workforce in the next year if a suitable job is available?" The potential job seekers group includes all individuals who indicated that they may accept a new job within the next year, given that a suitable job is available. Active job seekers are a subset of potential job seekers who answered "yes" to the question "Are you actively seeking a new job?"

Potential Job Seekers

Based on the percentage of respondents identifying as potential job seekers (36.3%), there were an estimated 537,667 potential job seekers 18 years old and over in the areas surveyed across the state.

Important Factors for Potential Job Seekers

Potential job seekers were presented with a list of factors related to jobs and were asked to indicate how important each factor was to them when evaluating a new job opportunity.

The factors included in the survey cover a wide range of factors that could influence a job seeker's decision. These factors include traditional elements such as salary, job security, paid vacation, retirement benefits, and health insurance, as well as work-related considerations, such as the opportunity to use existing skills, learn new skills, level of responsibilities, and flexible work schedules. The survey also includes factors related to the local community, including commute time, availability of housing, access to public transportation, and accessible child care.

By covering a comprehensive range of factors, the survey aims to provide a more complete picture of what potential job seekers value when considering job opportunities. The data collected from the survey can be valuable for employers and policymakers in meeting the preferences and needs of job seekers in different industries, occupations, and regions, ultimately leading to better job-market matches and increased job satisfaction.

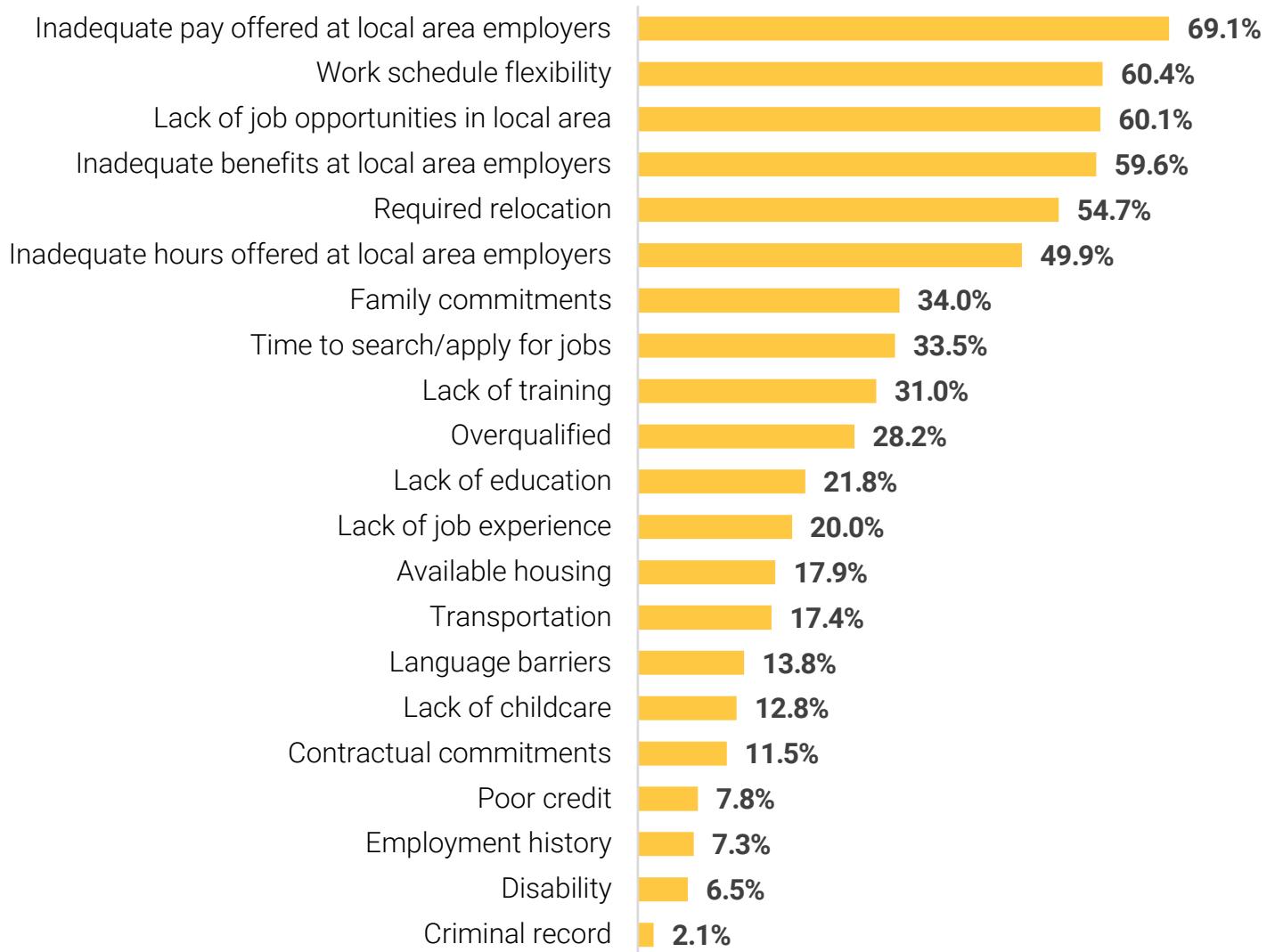The chart below shows the percentage of potential job seekers indicating a particular factor was "important" or "very important" when considering a job opportunity. Salary and job security/stability were the most cited important factors across survey areas, but other highly ranked factors varied considerably on an area-by-area basis. Factors including tuition reimbursement, accessible child care, and public transportation ranked among the lowest considerations when potential job seekers evaluate job opportunities. However, these factors can hold increased significance for individuals who find themselves in specific situations, such as being a student, a parent, or without regular transportation.

Factor	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not at all important
Salary	58.9%	31.1%	9.1%	0.8%
Job security/stability	50.1%	37.4%	8.3%	4.2%
Paid vacation	55.5%	31.2%	9.1%	4.2%
Paid holidays	52.3%	32.8%	10.5%	4.4%
Retirement benefits	54.9%	28.2%	10.6%	6.3%
Paid sick leave	48.6%	33.4%	13.0%	5.0%
Use existing skills	32.3%	48.6%	16.3%	2.9%
Health insurance	52.1%	27.9%	10.6%	9.5%
Level of responsibilities	21.2%	55.2%	19.7%	3.8%
Flexible work schedule	37.6%	38.1%	20.6%	3.7%
Learn new skills	28.4%	46.8%	20.0%	4.8%
Dental insurance	42.4%	32.3%	15.3%	10.0%
Opportunity for advancement	32.2%	41.6%	20.1%	6.2%
Paid family leave	37.1%	31.6%	19.8%	11.6%
Vision insurance	37.2%	30.7%	19.5%	12.7%
Commute time	24.2%	41.8%	29.8%	4.3%
Use education/training/degree	24.2%	35.1%	25.5%	15.1%
Community	23.5%	33.0%	22.8%	20.8%
Work from home/telecommuting	14.5%	20.9%	28.4%	36.2%
Available housing	12.1%	16.9%	15.3%	55.8%
Tuition reimbursement	9.8%	17.0%	32.0%	41.2%
Accessible child care	9.0%	12.8%	19.6%	58.5%
Near public transportation	3.8%	5.6%	15.6%	75.1%

■ Very important ■ Important ■ Somewhat important ■ Not at all important

Obstacles to Employment for Potential Job Seekers

The following chart shows the percentage of potential job seekers across the statewide survey areas who indicated various obstacles that may prevent them from changing jobs or reentering the workforce in the next year. While inadequate pay offered, work schedule flexibility, and lack of job opportunities were the most prevalent obstacles cited statewide, each area reported its own unique ranking of top five obstacles.

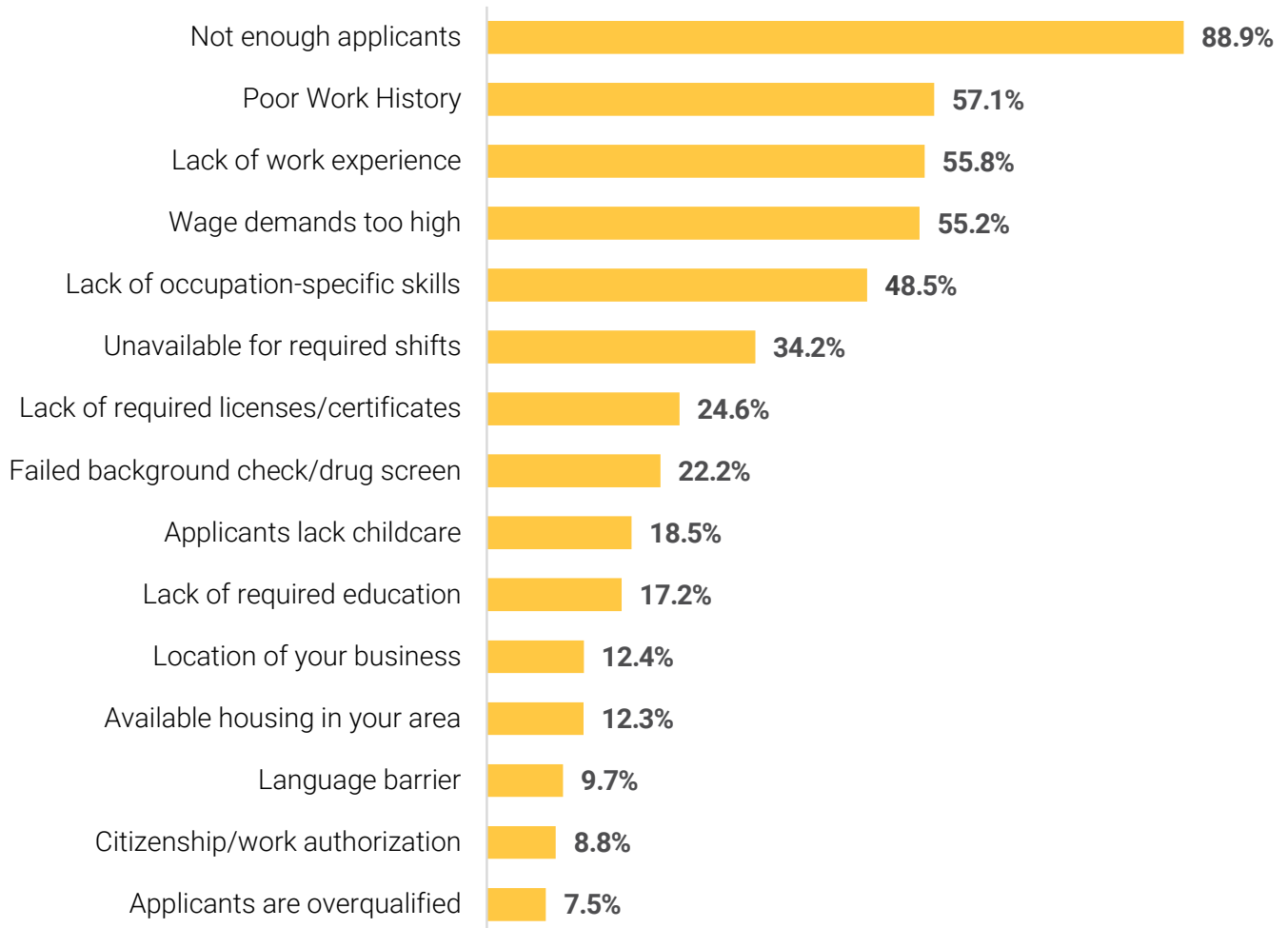| Obstacle	Percentage
Inadequate pay offered at local area employers	69.1%
Work schedule flexibility	60.4%
Lack of job opportunities in local area	60.1%
Inadequate benefits at local area employers	59.6%
Required relocation	54.7%
Inadequate hours offered at local area employers	49.9%
Family commitments	34.0%
Time to search/apply for jobs	33.5%
Lack of training	31.0%
Overqualified	28.2%
Lack of education	21.8%
Lack of job experience	20.0%
Available housing	17.9%
Transportation	17.4%
Language barriers	13.8%
Lack of childcare	12.8%
Contractual commitments	11.5%
Poor credit	7.8%
Employment history	7.3%
Disability	6.5%
Criminal record	2.1%

Hiring and Training Needs

The aim of the Survey of Hiring and Training Needs is to collect information related to the local business landscape and labor issues within a specific area. These surveys aim to understand the workforce needs of local businesses by gathering data from employers about the specific occupations they are actively hiring for, including educational qualifications, certifications, and skillsets required for these positions. Additionally, the surveys explore various aspects of the workforce, such as the types of training provided by businesses to their employees, challenges faced in hiring suitable candidates, benefits offered to employees, concerns related to retiring employees, obstacles to expansion, the skill levels of current employees, and the prevalence of teleworking. The data obtained from these surveys can be utilized to inform workforce development, address skill gaps, and support local businesses in fostering a skilled and competitive workforce.
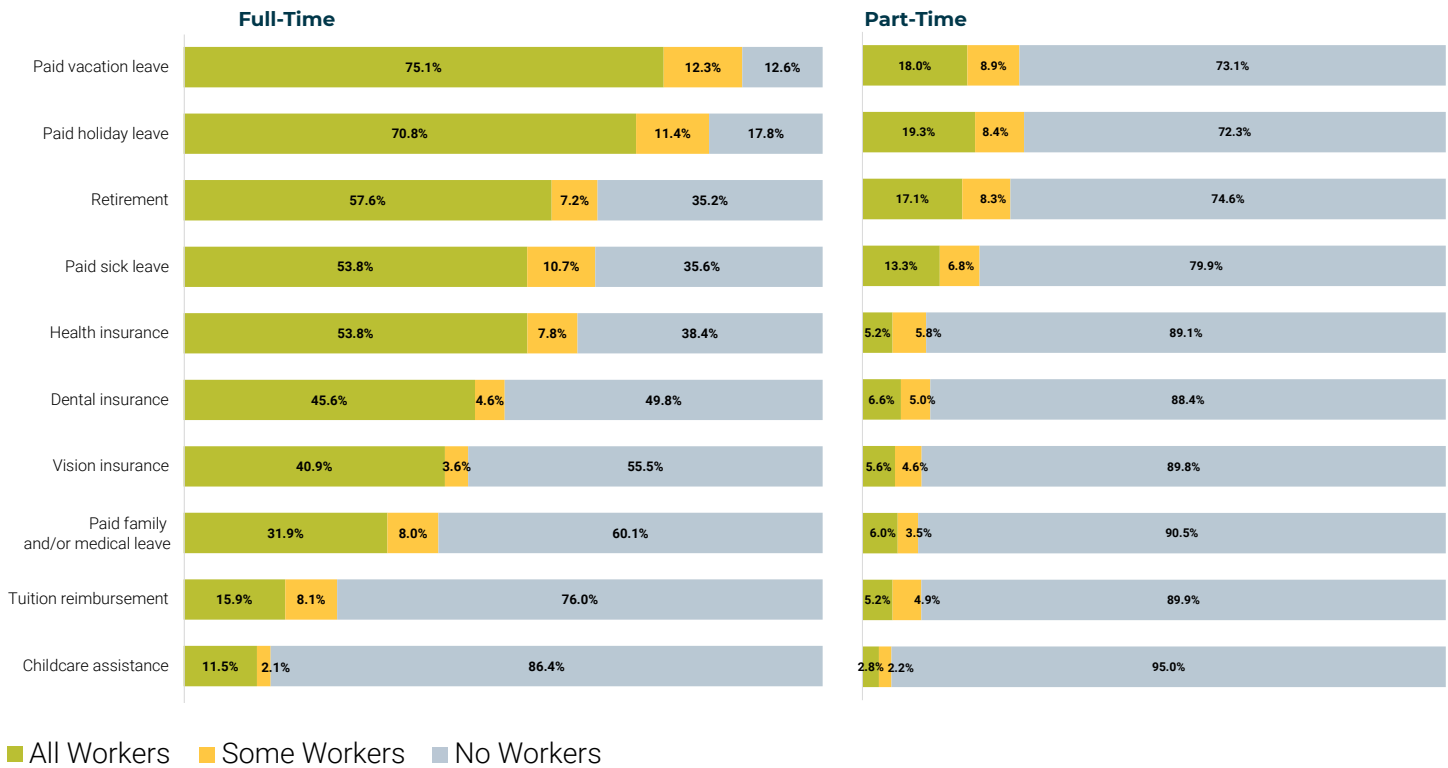
Difficulty Hiring

Employers across the state were asked to name the top two occupations that were most frequently hired at their location and were asked to indicate whether it was difficult to find workers for those occupations. The chart below displays the percentage of businesses reporting difficulty hiring and reasons for difficulty statewide.

Employers' Most Cited Reasons for Difficulty Finding Workers

Reason	Percentage
Not enough applicants	88.9%
Poor Work History	57.1%
Lack of work experience	55.8%
Wage demands too high	55.2%
Lack of occupation-specific skills	48.5%
Unavailable for required shifts	34.2%
Lack of required licenses/certificates	24.6%
Failed background check/drug screen	22.2%
Applicants lack childcare	18.5%
Lack of required education	17.2%
Location of your business	12.4%
Available housing in your area	12.3%
Language barrier	9.7%
Citizenship/work authorization	8.8%
Applicants are overqualified	7.5%

Percentage of Employers Offering Benefits to Some or All Full-Time Workers

Businesses were asked whether they offered a variety of benefits to all, some, or none of their full-time employees. Paid vacation leave and paid holiday leave were ranked first and second, respectively, across all survey areas, while childcare assistance and tuition reimbursement ranked lowest.

Full-Time

Benefit	All Workers	Some Workers	No Workers
Paid vacation leave	75.1%	12.3%	12.6%
Paid holiday leave	70.8%	11.4%	17.8%
Retirement	57.6%	7.2%	35.2%
Paid sick leave	53.8%	10.7%	35.6%
Health insurance	53.8%	7.8%	38.4%
Dental insurance	45.6%	4.6%	49.8%
Vision insurance	40.9%	3.6%	55.5%
Paid family and/or medical leave	31.9%	8.0%	60.1%
Tuition reimbursement	15.9%	8.1%	76.0%
Childcare assistance	11.5%	2.1%	86.4%

Part-Time

Benefit	All Workers	Some Workers	No Workers
Paid vacation leave	18.0%	8.9%	73.1%
Paid holiday leave	19.3%	8.4%	72.3%
Retirement	17.1%	8.3%	74.6%
Paid sick leave	13.3%	6.8%	79.9%
Health insurance	5.2%	5.8%	89.1%
Dental insurance	6.6%	5.0%	88.4%
Vision insurance	5.6%	4.6%	89.8%
Paid family and/or medical leave	6.0%	3.5%	90.5%
Tuition reimbursement	5.2%	4.9%	89.9%
Childcare assistance	2.8%	2.2%	95.0%

■ All Workers   ■ Some Workers   ■ No Workers

Skills Gaps

The primary objectives of a skills gap study are to identify and assess the disparities between the skills and qualifications possessed by the current workforce and those required by employers in a specific industry or region. These studies aim to analyze the existing skill sets of employees, pinpoint the areas where there is a shortage of necessary skills, and determine the potential implications for productivity, economic growth, and overall competitiveness. By understanding these gaps, policymakers, businesses, and educational institutions can develop targeted strategies and initiatives to bridge the divide, ensure a well-equipped workforce, and foster sustainable economic development.

Traditionally, skills gaps in these reports have been assessed based on the supply of workers compared to the demand for those workers. As seen during COVID-19 and following, many occupations with minimal skill or education requirements lacked workers, as workers sought other employment arrangements that more met their most important factors.

In FY 2015-2016, NDOL began commissioning regional skills gap reports from the Bureau of Business Research at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln. In FY 2022-2023, NDOL began producing its own skills gap reports, the first one being the **Greater Lincoln Skills Gap Report**. Three skills gap reports were published in August 2024 for the Panhandle, Sandhills, and Mid Plains economic regions of the state. These reports can be found on the **Nebraska Labor Availability Study Publications page of NEworks**.

Workforce Education vs Demand

For FY 2024-2025, NDOL produced an education supply and demand analysis for the entire state, with breakouts by economic development region, based on our combined statewide dataset for FY2021-2023. The analysis was published in **Nebraska Workforce Trends in May of 2025** (1).

The charts below show the occupational supply and demand based on their education tier. There is a notable mismatch between required education of the frequently hired jobs and of people in the area. In general, the education of Nebraska's labor force exceeds the occupational demand. There is some variance by region, and also variance by education and wage tier. For further analysis and background, please see the **analysis published in Trends**.

Factors influencing the statistics shown include: the types of businesses that responded to the surveys, the occupations they frequently hire, and where businesses have set their educational requirement bar in the face of regional/local supply and business need. The economics of the area and the general makeup of industries and occupations in the area are also factors.

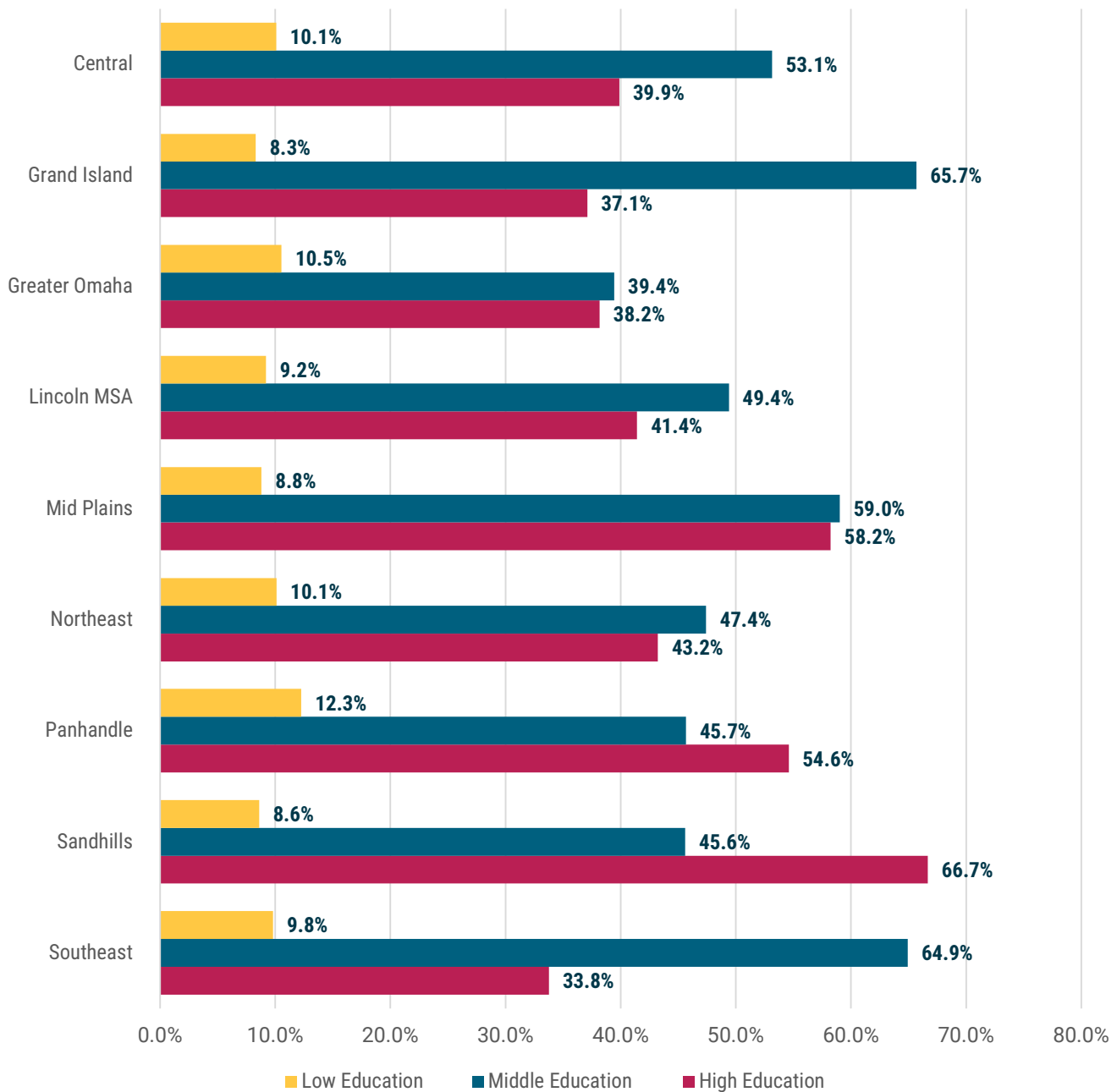## Frequently Hired Occupations in Labor Availability Study

- Low Education
- Middle Education
- High Education

7.3%
13.2%
79.5%
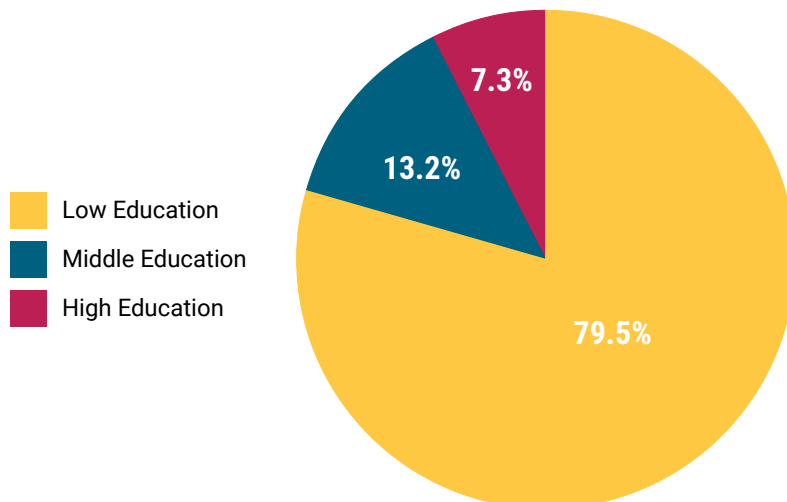
Source: Nebraska Department of Labor. Nebraska Labor Availability Study Survey Data

Labor force in Nebraska, Age 25-64

25.5%
41.8%
32.7%
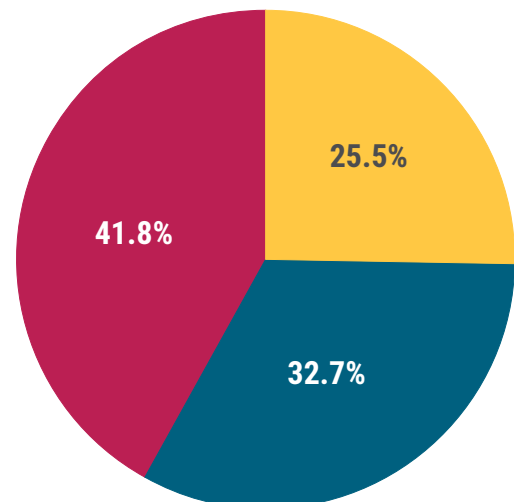
Source: US Census. Educational Attainment. Table S1501, Nebraska, 2023 ACS 5-Year. [Online] https://data.census.gov/

Lack of Education as a Hiring Difficulty by Economic Region

Central
- Low Education: 10.1%
- Middle Education: 53.1%
- High Education: 39.9%

Grand Island
- Low Education: 8.3%
- Middle Education: 65.7%
- High Education: 37.1%

Greater Omaha
- Low Education: 10.5%
- Middle Education: 39.4%
- High Education: 38.2%

Lincoln MSA
- Low Education: 9.2%
- Middle Education: 49.4%
- High Education: 41.4%

Mid Plains
- Low Education: 8.8%
- Middle Education: 59.0%
- High Education: 58.2%

Northeast
- Low Education: 10.1%
- Middle Education: 47.4%
- High Education: 43.2%

Panhandle
- Low Education: 12.3%
- Middle Education: 45.7%
- High Education: 54.6%

Sandhills
- Low Education: 8.6%
- Middle Education: 45.6%
- High Education: 66.7%

Southeast
- Low Education: 9.8%
- Middle Education: 64.9%
- High Education: 33.8%

Axis: 0.0% – 10.0% – 20.0% – 30.0% – 40.0% – 50.0% – 60.0% – 70.0% – 80.0%

Legend: Low Education | Middle Education | High Education

Percentage of Jobs with Hiring Difficulty Due to Lack of Education or Occupation-Specific Skills

Employer Wages	Reasons for Hiring Difficulty	
	Lack of required education	Lack of occupation-specific skills
Low Education		
Under $15/hr	8.3%	27.0%
$15 - $19.99	9.4%	47.8%
$20 - $24.99	12.3%	68.1%
$25 - $29.99	13.4%	**70.8%**
$30 - $39.99	**18.6%**	65.6%
$40+	15.2%	65.3%
Middle Education		
Under $15/hr	49.9%	70.9%
$15 - $19.99	**54.5%**	63.0%
$20 - $24.99	48.0%	**73.2%**
$25 - $29.99	47.9%	67.5%
$30 - $39.99	38.3%	49.4%
$40+	25.2%	34.8%
High Education		
Under $15/hr	Not Available	Not Available
$15 - $19.99	41.1%	**63.9%**
$20 - $24.99	**62.5%**	56.7%
$25 - $29.99	47.0%	54.5%
$30 - $39.99	34.5%	53.8%
$40+	32.2%	43.8%

Source: Nebraska Department of Labor. Nebraska Labor Availability Study Survey Data

Image by dragoscondrea from 123rf

Community Partnerships and Engagement

In FY 2024-2025, NDOL worked to enhance the value of localized surveys by collaborating with the following local community stakeholders:

Survey Collaborations

City of Sidney Nebraska

Box Butte Development Corp.

Keith County Area Development

McCook Economic Development

Northwest Nebraska Development Corp.

Valentine Economic Development/Chamber of Commerce

Community organizations may request to collaborate on custom changes to questionnaires or reports. For example, during FY 2022-2023, NDOL collaborated with the Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development on an enhanced survey of the Greater Lincoln area, which added additional questions about hiring strategies and benefits. As a result of this collaboration, the questionnaire improvements made were then incorporated into all survey areas for FY 2023-2024.