

LABOR AVAILABILITY STUDY

ANNUAL REPORT FY 2025-2026

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NEBRASKA

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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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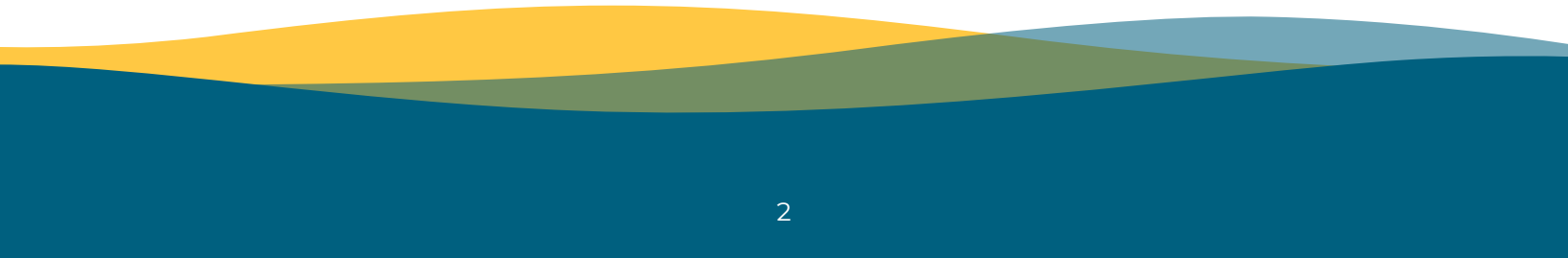
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Background and Purpose

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.

As of FY 2025–2026, the Sector Partnership Program was dissolved, and funding for the Labor Availability Study transitioned from the Nebraska Training and Support Cash Fund to other NDOL funding sources. This transition allows NDOL to continue conducting Labor Availability Studies and providing valuable workforce data to communities across Nebraska.

Building Nebraska's Future Workforce: A Statewide Landscape Assessment

LAS staff supported Building Nebraska's Future Workforce: A Statewide Landscape Assessment by developing the survey methodology, designing the statewide employer survey, and managing its implementation. The survey collected employer feedback on workforce needs, hiring challenges, Registered Apprenticeships, artificial intelligence (AI) adoption, and partnerships with education providers, providing a comprehensive view of Nebraska's workforce landscape. Together with labor market information, apprenticeship data, and workforce system data, the results help inform statewide workforce development strategies and future policy decisions. The full report can be found here: [Building Nebraska's Future Workforce: A Statewide Landscape Assessment](#)

Other NDOL Surveys

Rapid Response and Industry Insight Projects

LAS staff supported several quick-turnaround projects in 2025 and 2026. Unlike traditional Labor Availability Studies, these projects were conducted online and designed to support immediate workforce response or provide targeted industry insight.

Lexington Tyson Employee Survey: In spring 2026, LAS partnered with Reemployment Services and Tyson Foods to survey current and soon-to-be displaced workers. The survey identified workers needing reemployment assistance and the types of support they required. To better reach Tyson's diverse workforce, the survey was available in Arabic, English, Somali, and Vietnamese. Respondents requesting assistance were connected with Reemployment Services staff.

Meat Processor Employer Survey: LAS also collaborated with Reemployment Services, the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, and the U.S. Small Business Administration to contact approximately 120 smaller meat-processing businesses. The survey assessed employers' interest and ability to hire displaced Tyson workers, with interested businesses referred to Reemployment Services for follow-up.

Advanced Manufacturing Survey: At the request of the Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership, LAS conducted a statewide survey in August 2025 to gather information about advanced manufacturers and their workforce training needs.

Because these projects were conducted primarily to support workforce assistance and produced fewer responses than traditional Labor Availability Studies, the results were used internally and were not developed into formal published reports. Aggregations of the data were provided to outside stakeholders as needed and further analysis, research and outcomes are expected from these projects.

Geographic Survey Areas

During the 2025–2026 fiscal year, LAS planned and conducted business and household surveys for the Greater Omaha and Greater Lincoln areas.

For the Greater Omaha survey, questionnaires were distributed to households and business establishments with at least three employees located within the Greater Omaha survey area, which includes five counties in Nebraska and three counties in Iowa. Data collection was conducted between March and May 2026, resulting in responses from 1,107 businesses and 1,151 households. The findings were compiled into the Greater Omaha Labor Availability and Hiring Needs Report, which was completed in July 2026.

For the Greater Lincoln survey, household questionnaires were distributed in June 2026, followed by business questionnaires in July 2026. Survey responses are currently being compiled and analyzed, with the Greater Lincoln Labor Availability and Hiring Needs Report scheduled for publication in Fall 2026.

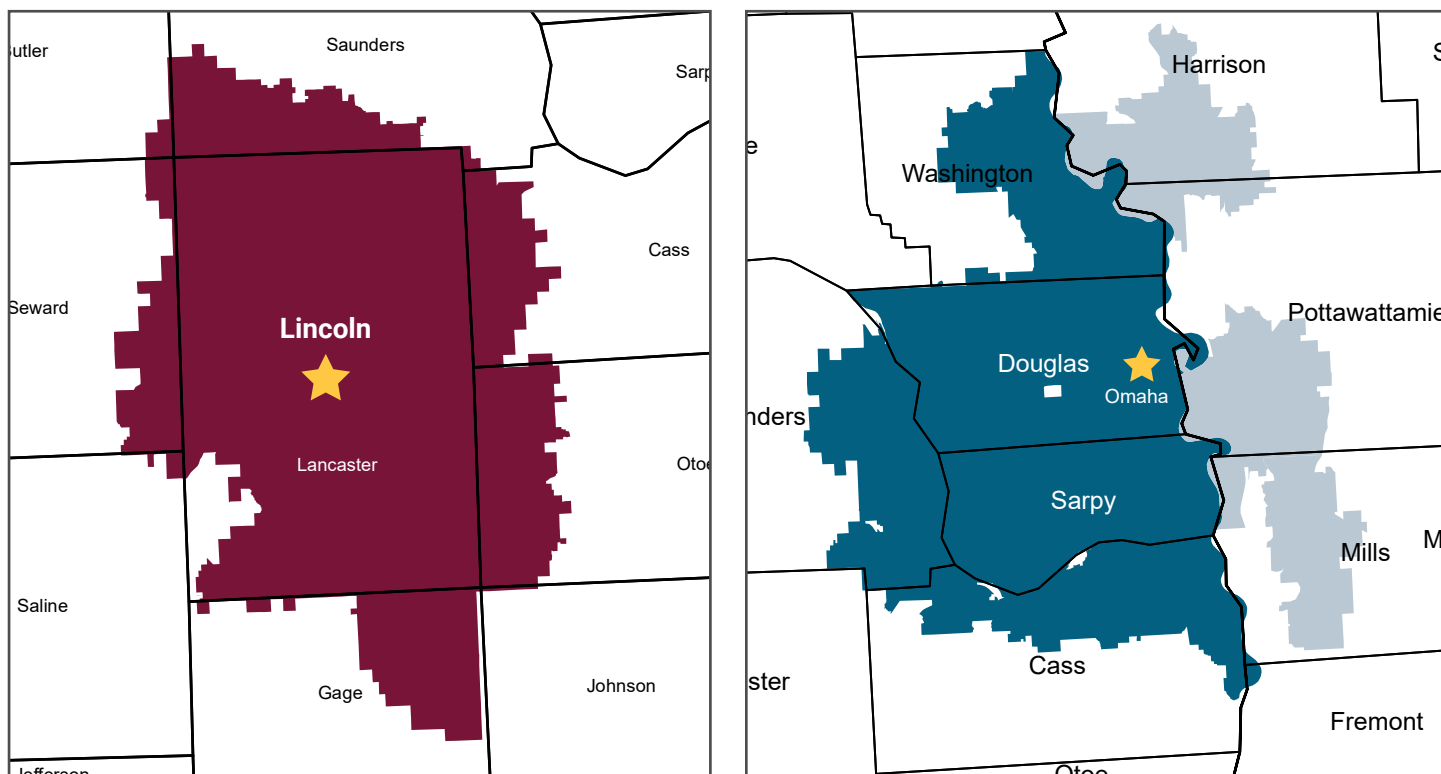
LAS reports can be found on the [NDOL Nebraska Labor Availability Study Publications page of NWorks](#).

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 typical in the survey area.

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.

Survey Areas



Labor Availability Study Results Overview

Greater Omaha Area Highlights

Top 3 Industries with Greatest Difficulty Hiring

Industries	Percentage of Respondents with Difficulty
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	67.3%
Health Care and Social Assistance	67.1%
Wholesale Trade	62.9%

Top 3 Occupation Groups with Greatest Difficulty Hiring

Occupations	Percentage of Respondents with Difficulty
Legal	81.7%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	77.8%
Healthcare Support	74.0%

Top 3 Reasons Given by Employers for Hiring Difficulty

Reasons	Percentage of Respondents with Difficulty
Not enough applicants	77.1%
Lack of work experience	70.0%
Poor work history	68.0%

Top Obstacles to Employment for Potential Job Seekers

- Inadequate pay offered at local area employers
- Work schedule flexibility
- Required relocation

Top Job Satisfaction Factors for Employed Potential Job Seekers

- Work schedule
- Use of existing skills
- Job security/stability
- Opportunities to learn new skills

Factors Most Important to Potential Job Seekers When Considering New Employment

- Salary
- Job security/stability
- Paid vacation
- Retirement benefits

Highest AI use occurs in technology and professional fields.

- Computer & Mathematical: **86.3% (highest overall)**
- Business & Financial Operations: **64.8%**
- Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media: **64.2%**
- Management: **62.8%**

Lowest AI use occurs in manual, skilled trades, and operational roles.

- Construction & Extraction: **4.8%**
- Installation, Maintenance, and Repair: **7.7%**
- Transportation & Material Moving: **13.1%**
- Production: **15.3%**

Comparison to Previous Studies

Reasons for Difficulty Finding Workers	2017	2021-2022	2026
Not enough applicants	48.4%	82.5%	77.1%
Lack of work experience	31.8%	56.3%	70.0%
Lack of occupation-specific skills	28.8%	51.6%	56.9%

Obstacles to Employment for Potential Job Seekers	2017	2021-2022	2026
Lack of job opportunities in local area	52.0%	45.6%	53.2%
Lack of job experience	12.8%	22.1%	14.9%

Important Factors for Potential Job Seekers when considering new jobs	2017	2021-2022	2026
Work from Home/Teleworking	25.3%	47.0%	40.7%
Learn new skills	68.5%	78.8%	77.7%

Greater Omaha 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 (39.7%), there were an estimated 271,524 potential job seekers 18 years old and over in Greater Omaha.

Important Factors for Potential Job Seekers

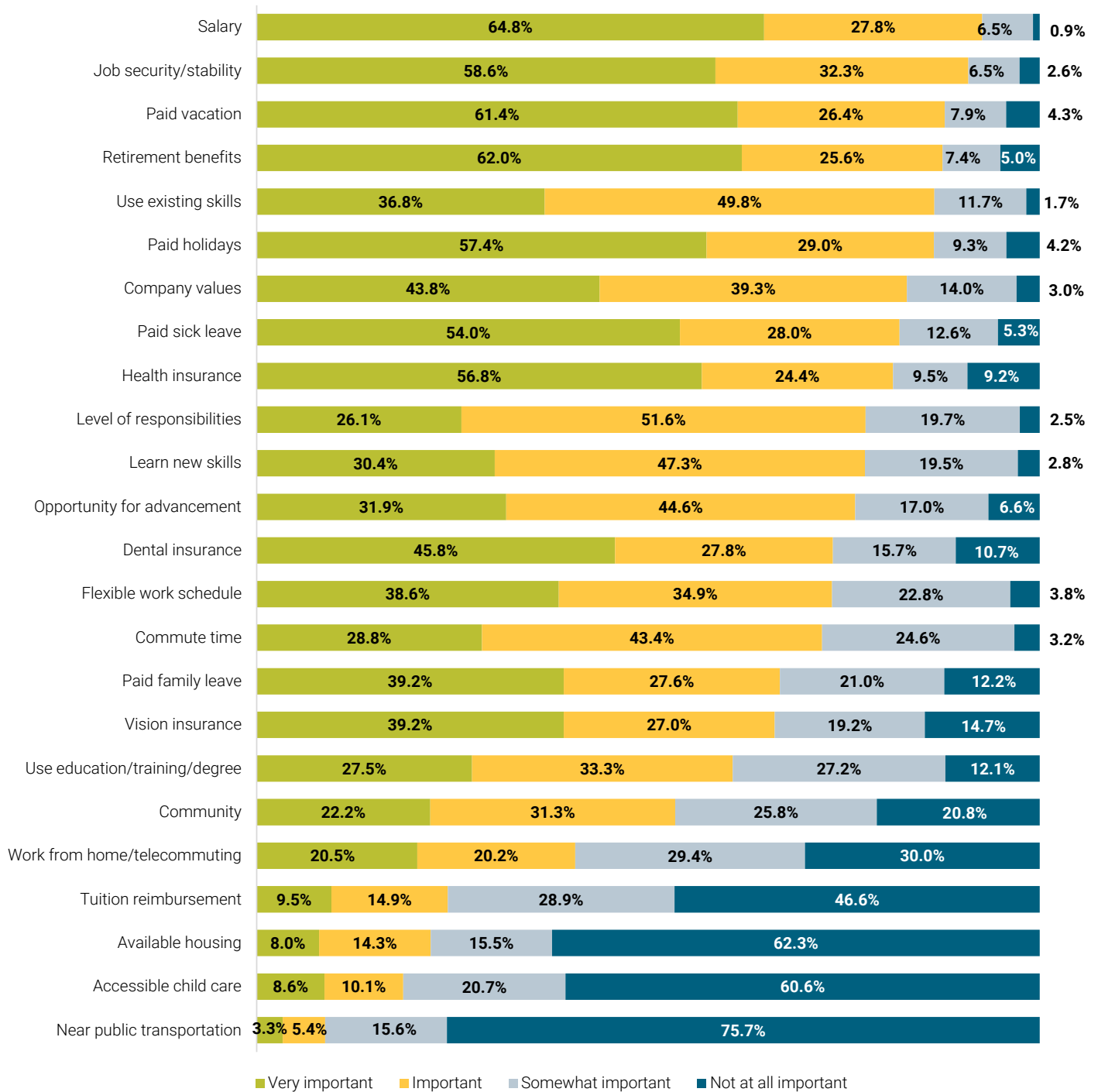
Potential job seekers were presented with a list of factors related to jobs and were asked to indicate how important each factor was to them when evaluating a new job opportunity.

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 tailoring job offers to meet the preferences and needs of job seekers in different industries, occupations, and regions, ultimately leading to better job-market matches and increased job satisfaction.

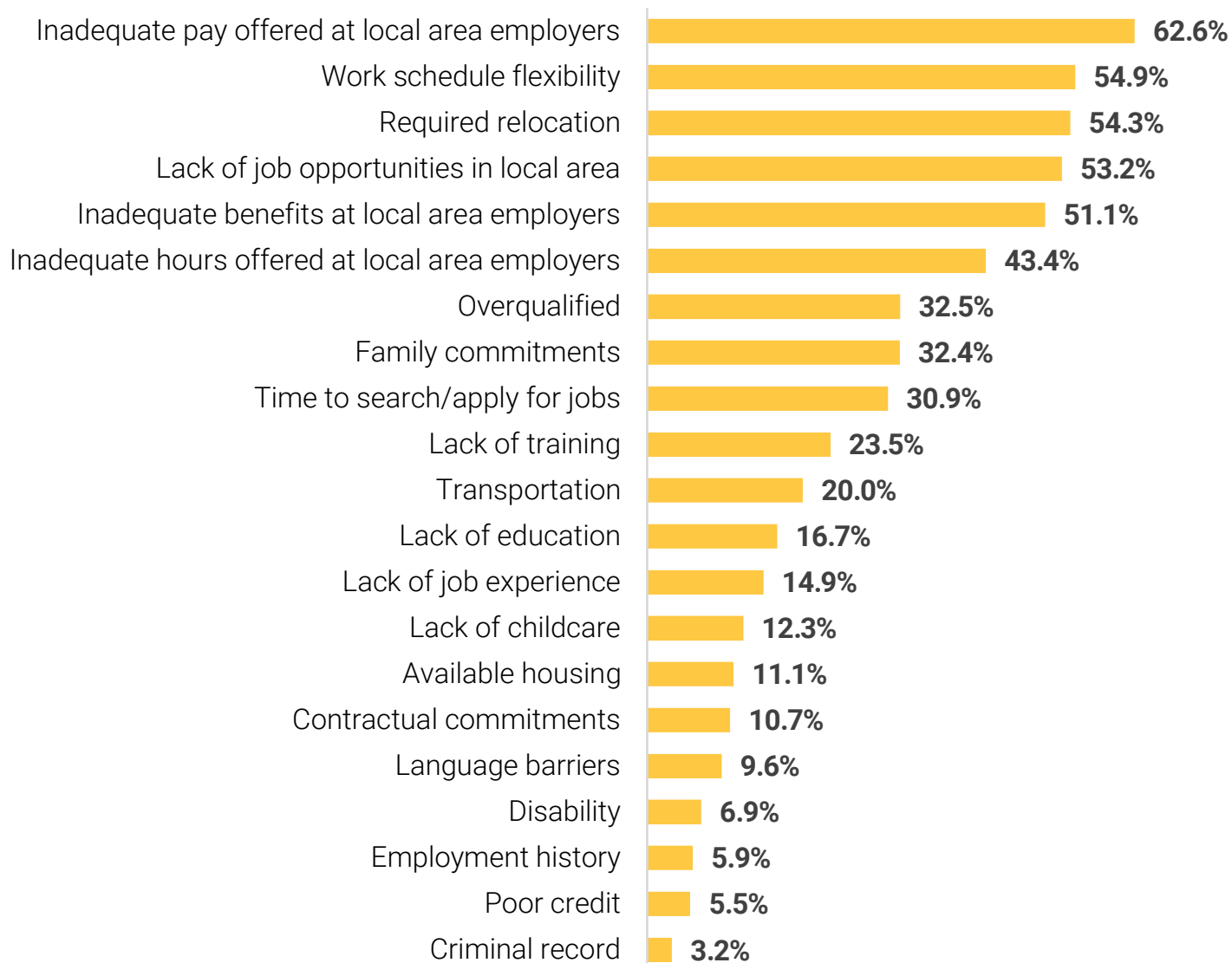
The table below shows the percentage of potential job seekers indicating a particular factor was "important" or "very important" when considering a job opportunity. Salary and job security/stability were the most cited important factors, while available housing, accessible child care, and public transportation 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 needing to relocate, being a parent, or being without regular transportation.

Important Factors for Potential Job Seekers



Obstacles to Employment for Potential Job Seekers

The following table shows the percentage of potential job seekers in the Greater Omaha area indicating various obstacles that may prevent them from changing jobs or reentering the workforce in the next year. Inadequate pay offered, work schedule flexibility, and required relocation were the most prevalent obstacles.



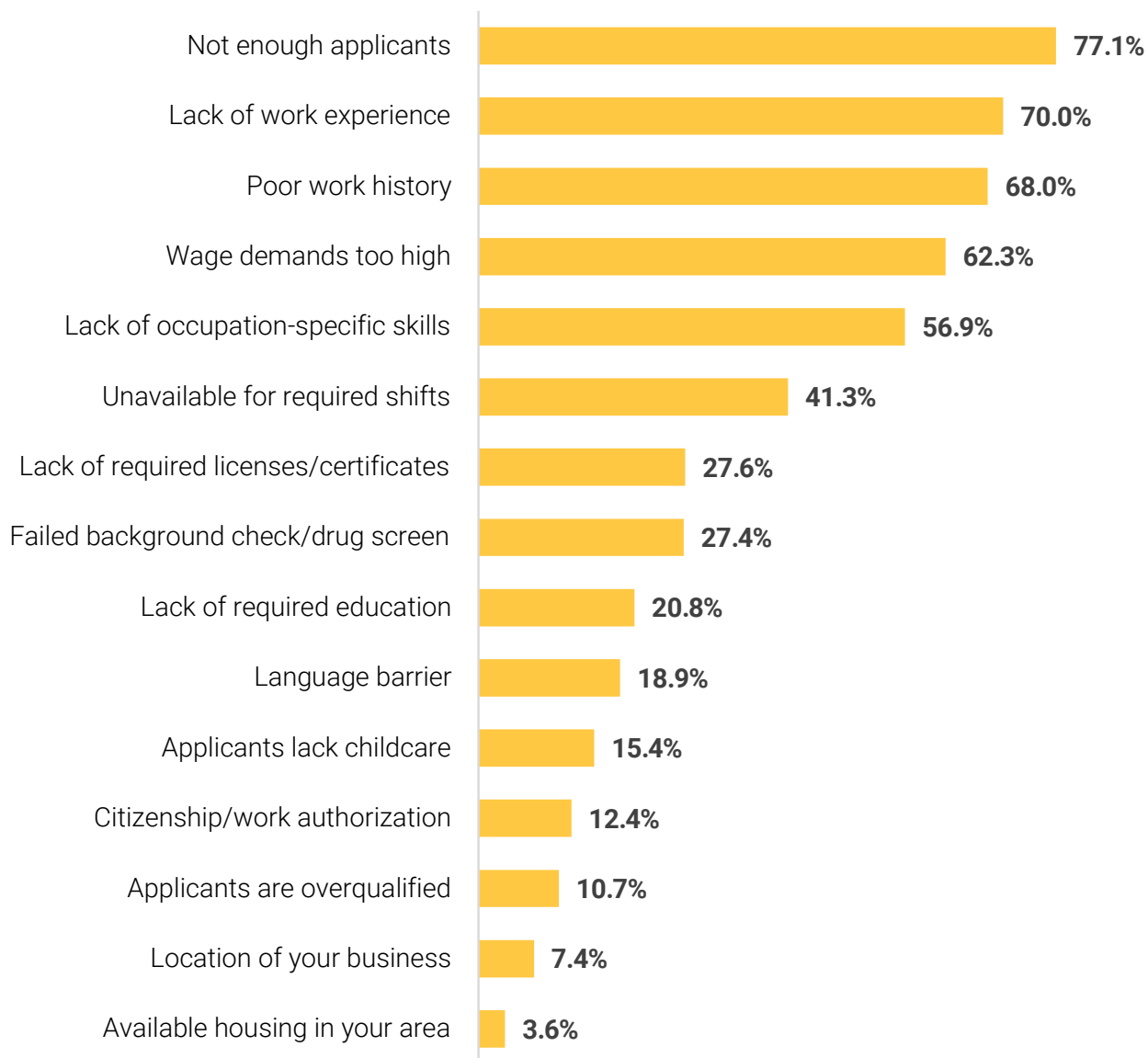
Hiring and Training Needs

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 were asked to name the top three occupations that were most frequently hired at their location and were asked to indicate whether it was difficult to find workers for those occupations. Additionally, employers were prompted with reasons why it might be difficult to find workers. The chart below displays the percentage of businesses reporting difficulty hiring and reasons for difficulty in the Greater Omaha area.

Employers' Most Cited Reasons for Difficulty Finding Workers





Community Partnerships and Engagement

In FY 2025–2026, the Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) strengthened its surveys through partnerships with the Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development (LPED) and the Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. These collaborations led to a comprehensive review and modernization of survey design, including updated question wording, improved survey methodology, and the addition of new topics reflecting today's business environment. New questions focused on areas such as business growth and expansion plans, workforce challenges, and the adoption and impact of artificial intelligence (AI).

In September 2025, NDOL delivered a full-day Labor Market Information (LMI) training for American Job Center staff and workforce partners. The session incorporated Labor Availability Study (LAS) data and other labor market resources to strengthen participants' ability to use labor market information in client services, including career planning, employer demand, occupational wages, education and training costs, and long-term employment projections.

In June 2026, LAS data was presented at the 2026 Nebraska Rural Health Conference in Kearney. "Vital Signs: What Labor Market Data Tells Us About Nebraska's Health Care Workforce" conference session showcased how LAS findings and other labor market information can help health care leaders understand workforce trends, anticipate future needs, and develop informed recruitment, retention, and training strategies.