Montana Employment Projections:

Job Growth from 2024 to 2034

February 2026

Montana Department of LABOR & INDUSTRY

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State of Montana
Greg Gianforte, Governor

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Sarah Swanson, Commissioner

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Executive Summary

The state's economy is expected to expand steadily, adding an average of 3,130 jobs per year through 2034. After several years of rapid post-pandemic growth, employment gains are projected to moderate as Montana returns to a more sustainable pace of expansion. Continued in-migration will remain a key driver of labor force growth, helping to offset the effects of an aging population and declining labor force participation.
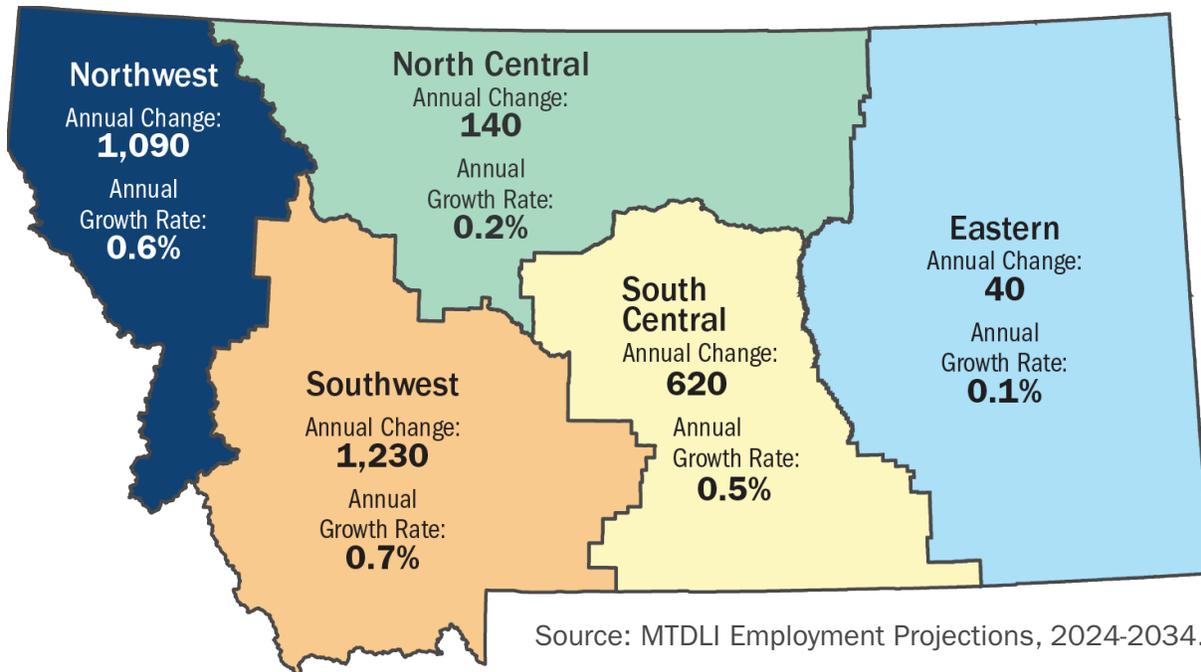
Employment growth will be concentrated in healthcare, construction, and professional and technical services, reflecting population growth and ongoing infrastructure investment. Regional trends will vary across the state. The Southwest, Northwest, and South-Central regions are projected to experience the fastest growth, while the Eastern and North-Central regions are expected to see slower but steady gains, particularly in education, healthcare, and agriculture.

Together, these demographic and regional shifts will shape where and how job demand emerges over the next decade. Understanding these dynamics is essential for aligning workforce development efforts and supporting both Montana workers and employers in an evolving labor market.

Highlights include:

- Montana's employment is expected to grow by 31,250 jobs over the next ten years.

- 66,530 job openings are projected annually, with 56% from occupational transfers, 39% from labor force exits, and 5% from new job growth.

- Healthcare and social assistance is Montana's largest and fastest-growing sector, adding 960 jobs annually.

- Construction, professional and technical services, and retail trade also contribute significantly to job creation.

- Bozeman (Southwest) and Kalispell/Missoula (Northwest) regions will lead in growth, at 0.7% and 0.6% annually, respectively.

- In-migration will be the main driver of labor force growth, offsetting losses from natural population decline.

- Labor force participation is projected to decline from 63.1% to 61.4% due to retirement and aging.

- Rural regions will experience modest but steady growth, with steady employment in healthcare, logistics, and education.

FIGURE 1: Montana Projection Regions with Average Annual Growth Rates

Northwest
Annual Change:
1,090
Annual
Growth Rate:
0.6%

North Central
Annual Change:
140
Annual
Growth Rate:
0.2%

Eastern
Annual Change:
40
Annual
Growth Rate:
0.1%

South
Central
Annual Change:
620
Annual
Growth Rate:
0.5%

Southwest
Annual Change:
1,230
Annual
Growth Rate:
0.7%

Source: MTDLI Employment Projections, 2024-2034.

Montana's labor market is projected to experience approximately 66,500 job openings annually through 2034. Most of these openings stem from workers exiting the labor force or changing careers. About 5% of job openings will result from new job creation. This outlook reflects a maturing labor force shaped by demographic shifts, modest population growth, and evolving industry needs.

These projections provide a roadmap for aligning education, training, and workforce strategies with economic needs. They show that many high-demand, high-wage jobs do not all require a four-year degree. Apprenticeships, certificates, and two-year programs offer efficient paths into stable careers, especially in trades, healthcare, and logistics. Some highlights from the occupational analysis of job openings include:

Occupational Demand Highlights

- Montana's projected job openings span a wide range of education levels and industries. Most openings require no more than a high school diploma, but postsecondary training or certifications significantly improve wage potential and long-term career stability.

- General Occupational Demand: Food preparation, office support, and sales are the largest sources of annual openings, due to both volume and turnover.

- Growth-Oriented Occupation Groups:

  - Healthcare Practitioners – 2,410 openings, $79,900 median wage.
  - Construction & Extraction – 3,600 openings, $59,200.
  - Architecture & Engineering – 750 openings, $79,000.
  - Community & Social Services – 1,130 openings, $47,900.
  - Management Occupations – 3,530 openings, $97,600.

- High-Turnover, Entry-Level Roles: Fast food workers (3,820 openings), cashiers (2,110), and retail salespeople (2,240) top the list, typically requiring no formal education and offering short-term training.

- Middle Wage Occupations ($45,000–$65,000): Strong demand for truck drivers (800), carpenters (470), computer support specialists (480), and bookkeeping clerks (880).

- Highest-Wage Occupations (>$65,000): General and operations managers lead with 1,050 annual openings. Other top earners include registered nurses (RNs), construction managers, electricians, and health services managers.

- Education-Level Highlights: 71% of job openings (47,500/year) require a high school diploma or less. 9,690 openings annually require a bachelor's degree, with average earnings over $85,000. Advanced degrees account for 1,840 openings/year and offer the highest average wages, often exceeding $100,000.

- Postsecondary/Non-Degree Opportunities: Strong job prospects in roles like nursing assistants, medical assistants, teaching assistants, and truck drivers, with wages above $40,000.

- No-Degree, High-Wage Roles: High school grads can earn $45,000+ in roles like construction supervisors, electricians, maintenance workers, and sales reps.

- Bachelor's & Advanced Degree Careers: High demand for RNs, accountants, construction managers, and substance abuse counselors. Top-paying jobs include nurse practitioners ($133,700) and pharmacists ($137,200).

- Healthcare Occupations: Home health and personal care aides (1,560), RNs (690), and medical assistants (410) drive healthcare hiring. Wages and opportunities span from entry-level aides to advanced clinical practitioners.

- STEM Occupations: Strong growth in software development, civil engineering, IT support, and healthcare management. Many STEM jobs offer above-average wages without requiring a four-year degree.

- Apprenticeship Pathways: Cooks, truck drivers, carpenters, and maintenance workers are top apprenticeable roles. Apprenticeships are expanding into healthcare and technology, but many high-potential occupations remain untapped.

The Montana Department of Labor and Industry (MTDLI) projects a promising yet measured growth environment for the state's job market over the next decade. Montana is well-positioned to continue its trend of robust employment growth. Despite challenges such as an aging population and worker shortages, the state's proactive measures and high in-migration rates help mitigate these issues. Significant opportunities will arise in healthcare, construction, and various high-demand occupations, presenting a diverse array of career paths for Montanans.

About Employment Projections

Every year, the Montana Department of Labor and Industry (MTDLI) produces employment projections in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Labor to be used by a variety of groups and individuals to help plan workforce development. Employment projections are produced over a ten-year time frame, by industry and occupation, as well as for the state and five substate regions. The five substate regions are shown in Figure 1.

Employment forecasts are an estimate of the future demand for workers based on historical employment data and the knowledge that is available at the time of the forecast. Because the economy is constantly changing, the forecasts are not going to be completely correct. Instead, projections should be viewed as the most likely employment growth outcome given the current knowledge and information about the economy. Additionally, projections focus on long-term employment growth, rather than short-term and temporary fluctuations in the business cycle. Therefore, employment forecasts are published as a linear average over a ten-year period, even though the underlying forecast may include variations from that trend.

This report provides a broad overview of this year's statewide and regional projections along with commonly requested tables of high-demand jobs by specific categories (such as jobs requiring a bachelor's degree, jobs that pay higher than $65,000, and apprenticeable jobs). For detailed information on methodology, see Appendix A. For information on past forecast accuracy, see Appendix B.

Overview of Montana's 2024-2034 Projections

Montana's labor force is expected to continue growing over the next decade. Montana's working-age population (ages 16 and older) is expected to reach nearly 1 million by 2034, an increase of roughly 75,500 from 2024 (Figure 2). However, demographic shifts in the state's population dampen long-term labor force growth prospects. Montana's labor force participation rate is forecast to decline slightly

FIGURE 2: Working Age Population, Labor Force, and Employment
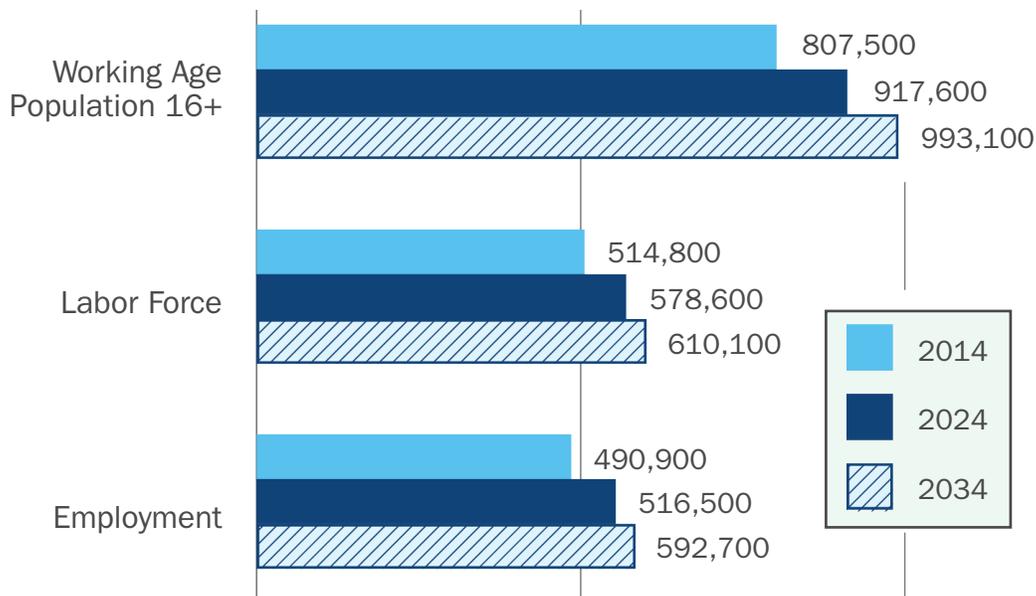
Source: LAUS & MTDLI Employment Forecasts 2024-2034

from 63.1% in 2024 to 61.4% in 2034 primarily due to the retirement of baby boomers. While these trends may seem modest, even a small decline in participation can create noticeable hiring strain for employers, especially in rural areas where the labor pool is already thin.

Employment is projected to reach 592,000 by 2034, growing by over 31,000 jobs over the next decade. Job growth is projected to moderate to a more sustainable rate over the next decade, following a period of rapid growth exiting the pandemic recession. Employment is estimated to grow by 0.5% per year through 2034. Job growth over the next decade remains dependent on continued in-migration to help alleviate the state's long-standing worker shortage.[1]

The Role of Migration

Migration is playing an increasingly important role in supporting Montana's workforce. Between 2020 and 2023, domestic net in-migration more than doubled – rising from 5,400 to 13,600 people (Figure 3). This rapid rise in in-migration helped support continued employment growth amid low unemployment and declining labor force participation rates. People who move to Montana are more likely to be engaged in the labor force than the existing population, helping to increase the size of the state's workforce. About 68% of in-movers participate in the labor force, which is higher than the labor force participation rate of existing residents.

FIGURE 3: Annual Net Migration in Montana
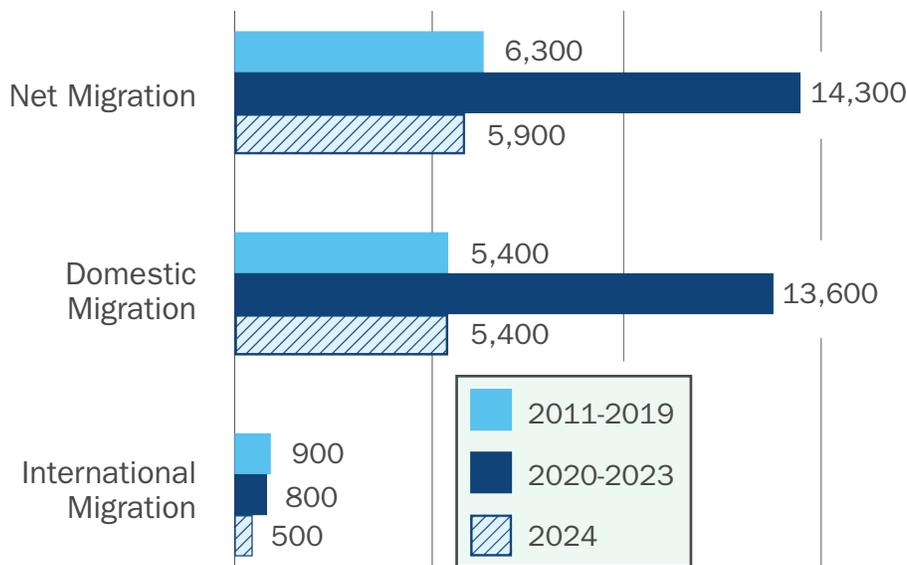
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Components of Population Change 2011-2024, Vintage 2024.

Domestic migration returned to pre-pandemic levels in 2024, with 5,400 more people moving to Montana than leaving the state. Total net migration fell below pre-pandemic levels in 2024 due to a drop in international immigration (Figure 3). Positive net migration is projected to continue over the next decade at a more modest rate similar to the pre-pandemic period. The western portion of the state and the larger population centers are projected to experience the highest rates of in-migration, consistent with historical trends. Migration is expected to be the main source of Montana's labor force growth over the next decade.

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1   ACS 2019-2023 5-Year estimates accessed via IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

Natural Population Change (Births-Deaths)

The natural change in Montana's population, defined as births minus deaths, has mirrored national trends. Since 2020, Montana has experienced a decline in natural population – with deaths exceeding births by an average of 700 people per year (Figure 4). The state's aging population has generated fewer births and more deaths in recent years, which has long-term implications for the workforce.

Prior to the pandemic, Montana had a positive natural increase in the population, with 2,500 more births than deaths each year (Figure 4). Deaths exceeded births during the pandemic period. In 2024, deaths remain higher than they were prior to the pandemic, and births remain lower, resulting in a near zero natural change in population. This is expected to continue due to the demographic composition of the population. An aging population will mean Montana will experience a higher rate of deaths and fewer births for the next decade.

FIGURE 4: Annual Average Natural Population Change in Montana
(Births Minus Deaths)
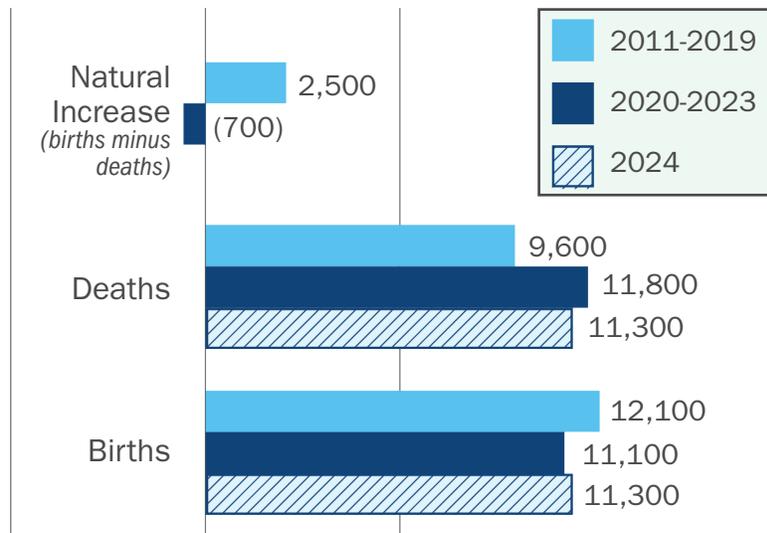
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Components of Population Change 2011-2024, Vintage 2024.

Workforce Implications

The main source of population growth is expected to come from migration, which will buoy Montana's labor force. Still, the dominant trend will be the aging of baby boomers which puts downward pressure on the labor supply nationwide. As labor supply tightens, Montana employers will need to adapt by:

• Investing in workforce retention and upskilling

• Expanding access to childcare and transportation

• Recruiting individuals from underrepresented talent pools, including older adults and people with disabilities

• Supporting pathways for recruitment of workers from out of state, enabling new residents to connect quickly with local employers
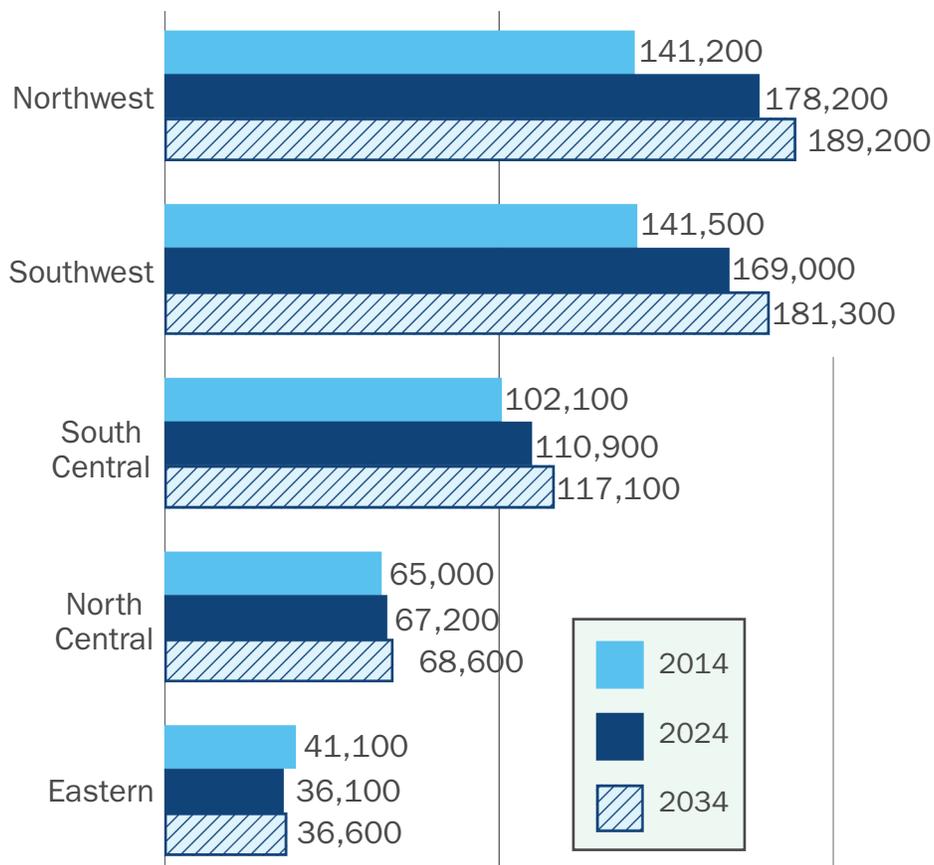
Despite headwinds, Montana's labor force outlook remains positive. With thoughtful policy and continued investment in talent pipelines, the state is well positioned to meet its economic potential.

Regional Employment Forecasts

Montana's employment is projected to grow steadily over the next decade, reaching 592,700 jobs by 2034, an increase of 31,200 from 2024 levels. However, this growth will not occur uniformly across the state. Differences in population trends, industry composition, and infrastructure investment will shape regional job opportunities in distinct ways.

All regions are projected to experience job gains over the next ten years. The Northwest and Southwest regions are expected to have the strongest job growth, fueled by population increases and expansion in various sectors such as construction, healthcare, manufacturing, and professional services. Employment growth in the South Central region is projected to stabilize after the recent loss of mining jobs — adding jobs in healthcare, manufacturing, construction, and agriculture. The North Central and Eastern regions are forecasted to have moderate job growth, limited by lower in-migration rates than the western regions.

FIGURE 5: Historic and Future Employment by Region

Region	2014	2024	2034
Northwest	141,200	178,200	189,200
Southwest	141,500	169,000	181,300
South Central	102,100	110,900	117,100
North Central	65,000	67,200	68,600
Eastern	41,100	36,100	36,600

Source: Laus & MTDLI Employment Forecasts 2024-2034

Northwest Region

The Northwest is expected to be one of Montana's fastest-growing regions, with employment rising from 178,200 to 189,200 by 2034 — an increase of 11,000 jobs (Figure 5). Continued in-migration, a robust tourism industry, and increasing healthcare demand are expected to drive average annual job growth of 0.6% (Figure 6). Key industries in this region include healthcare, construction, and manufacturing. The region is also strengthening its role as a center for higher education.

Southwest Region

Fueled by rapid population growth in Gallatin County, the Southwest is projected to experience some of the state's strongest job growth, about 0.7% annually. Employment is expected to reach 181,300 by 2034, adding 12,300 jobs over the decade. Bozeman continues to attract workers in high-tech manufacturing, construction, and professional services. Helena's role as the state capital and the presence of Montana State University in Bozeman create a stable foundation of public-sector employment.

North Central Region

The North-Central region is forecast to see slower, yet steady, employment growth of approximately 0.2% per year, reaching 68,600 jobs by 2034. Great Falls remains the economic anchor of the region, supported by stable employment in healthcare, education, agriculture, and military-related services.

South Central Region

The South-Central region is expected to grow at an annual rate of about 0.5%, with employment increasing from 110,900 to 117,100 by 2034. Employment growth in the South-Central region is projected to stabilize after the recent loss of mining jobs — adding jobs in healthcare, manufacturing, construction, and agriculture. Healthcare, energy, retail, and construction remain key sectors supporting growth in the region. Despite challenges facing coal and mining industries, Billings' position as a regional medical and commercial hub will help sustain job growth and economic vitality.

Eastern Region

Employment growth in Eastern Montana is expected to be more modest, averaging 0.1% annually over the next decade. The region is still adapting to fluctuations in the energy sector, including varying levels of energy production in Colstrip and in other extraction activities. Employment growth potential in the Eastern region is also limited by lower in-migration rates relative to the western regions. However, agriculture, transportation, construction, and healthcare continue to provide a foundation for stable employment.

FIGURE 6: Annual Employment Change and Growth Rate, 2024-2034
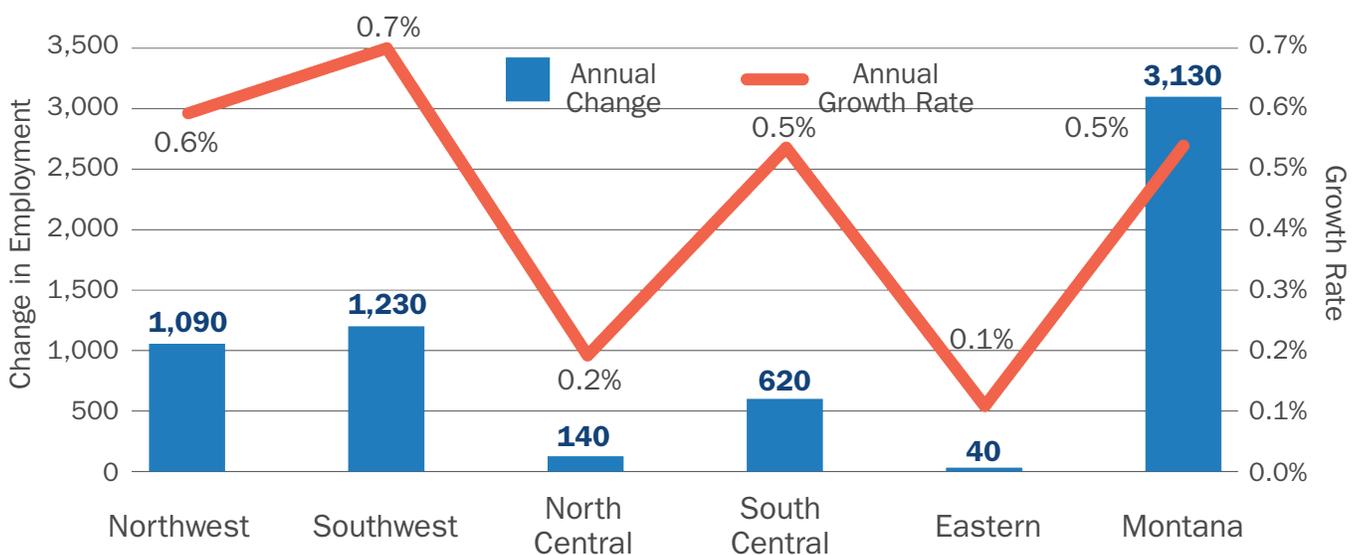
SOURCE: LAUS & MTDLI EMPLOYMENT FORECASTS, 2024-2034.

Industry Growth

Montana's economy is projected to continue expanding across nearly every major industry sector over the next decade. Figure 7 shows the historic and projected employment growth rate by industry. Industries projected to add the most jobs over the next decade are listed first. Two-thirds of employment growth over the next decade are projected to occur in one of five industries – healthcare, construction, professional services, retail trade, and accommodation and food service. Growth in these industries is driven by the state's aging population, continued in-migration, and the expansion of Montana's tech sector.

FIGURE 7: Montana Compounding Annual Employment Growth, Historic and Projected

Industry	2014-2024 Growth Rate	2024-2034 Growth Rate	2024-2034 Annual Job Growth
Healthcare	1.5%	1.2%	960
Construction	4.1%	0.9%	360
Professional & Technical	3.7%	1.0%	300
Retail Trade	0.9%	0.4%	260
Accommodation & Food	2.1%	0.4%	220
Manufacturing	1.3%	0.7%	160
Wholesale Trade	1.2%	0.6%	120
Other	1.5%	0.5%	110
Admin & Support Services	2.3%	0.5%	100
Education	0.3%	0.2%	100
Arts & Entertainment	1.5%	0.7%	90
Local Government	1.3%	0.4%	90
Transportation & Warehousing	0.9%	0.5%	80
Agriculture	3.3%	1.0%	70
Finance	1.2%	0.4%	60
Real Estate	2.4%	0.6%	40
State Government	0.3%	0.2%	20
Mining	-3.4%	0.1%	0
Utilities	-0.7%	0.1%	0
Management	2.0%	0.1%	0
Postal Service	-0.4%	0.0%	0
Federal Government	1.1%	-0.1%	-10
Information	-1.6%	-0.8%	-40
Payroll Employment	1.5%	0.6%	3,130
Total Employment	1.4%	0.5%	3,130

Source: MTDLI Industry Projections 2024-2034

Montana's job market is set for broad-based expansion, with steady growth anticipated across most industries. These projections reflect shifting demographics, increased infrastructure investment, and rising demand for specialized expertise. Aligning workforce development strategies with these evolving needs will be critical to supporting sustainable economic growth across the state.

Healthcare and Social Assistance

The healthcare industry is projected to add 960 new jobs per year through 2034 – the most of any industry. Healthcare employment growth is driven by an increased demand for services from Montana's growing and aging population. Projected employment growth in Montana's healthcare industry is concentrated in and around the state's urban centers, particularly in cities like Billings and Missoula where just over one-third of all healthcare jobs are found.

Over the next ten years healthcare employment is projected to grow by 1.2% per year, slightly below the long-run average. Most of the growth is expected to occur in ambulatory care and hospitals. Growth is also expected in nursing and residential care and social assistance, but at a slower rate.

Construction

The rapid growth in Montana's population and economy over the last few years has pushed construction demand to historic levels. The construction industry is projected to add 360 new jobs per year through 2034 – the second most of any industry in the state. Increased housing demand, infrastructure projects, and public investment are all fueling job creation.

Over the next ten years construction employment is projected to grow by 0.9% per year, slightly below the long-run average. Most of the growth is estimated to occur in building construction and specialty trade contracting, while heavy and civil engineering construction employment is projected to remain stable. Faster growth is projected in the near term driven by elevated migration rates. However, over the longer run construction employment growth is projected to slow but remain positive.

Professional and Technical Services

Professional services, including legal, accounting, scientific, and technology-related fields, are expected to add 300 jobs per year. Occupations in demand include software developers and computer support specialists, engineers and surveyors, accountants and legal assistants. These roles are common in urban centers, but remote work will allow this sector's growth to extend to rural areas as well.

Retail Trade

Retail trade employment in Montana is expected to grow steadily, supported by continued population growth, strong tourism activity, and ongoing in-migration to the state. About 260 new jobs will be added each year, with significant demand in occupations such as retail salespeople, customer service representatives, and first-line supervisors of retail workers.

Accommodation and Food Services

While subject to seasonal fluctuations, the accommodation and food services industry remains a major source of employment, particularly in Montana's tourism-driven regions. Approximately 220 new jobs are projected annually.

Occupational Demand

The Montana economy is projected to add approximately 3,000 jobs annually over the next decade. To realize this growth, workforce supply will need to meet this growth in demand. Workers will also be needed to fill openings generated by retirements and turnover. In total, the Montana economy is projected to have 66,500 job openings annually over the next decade.

Only 5% of projected job openings are new positions, most openings are generated as existing workers retire or change careers. Half (56%) of all job openings, roughly 37,250 openings, are due to workers transferring to a new job – leaving behind an open position. Another 39% of job openings are generated by workers exiting the labor force, for reasons such as retirement or enrolling in school.

The majority of Montana's job openings are projected to occur in occupations that employ a large number of people and have high turnover rates. Food preparation and serving-related occupations top the list with 10,750 annual openings. Office and administration support occupations rank second, with 7,140 annual job openings. Nearly all of these job openings are generated by turnover or labor force exits, as people move out of these low-wage occupations. Figure 8 shows total annual job openings and median wages by occupational category.

Sources of Job Openings

New Jobs refer to jobs from growth in employment.

Exits refer to people who leave their job and exit the labor force, such as to retire or to enroll in school.

Transfers are workers who leave one occupation for a different occupation, like a career change or promotion.

Certain occupation groups have a higher proportion of job openings due to growth rather than turnover, indicating increasing demand for relevant skills. These include:

- Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations: 19% of openings due to growth, with 2,410 annual openings and a median wage of $79,850.

- Architecture and Engineering Occupations: 11% of openings due to growth, with 750 annual openings and a median wage of $78,980.

- Construction and Extraction Occupations: 9% of openings due to growth, with 3,600 annual openings and a median wage of $59,200.

- Community and Social Service Occupations: 9% of openings due to growth, with 1,130 annual openings and a median wage of $47,860.

- Management Occupations: 8% of openings due to growth, with 3,530 annual openings and a median wage of $97,550.

FIGURE 8: Annual Projected Occupational Demand 2024-2034 by Occupation Group

Rank	Occupation Group	Annual Openings				MT Median Wage
		New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	Food Preparation & Serving Related	250	4,430	6,070	10,750	$29,960
2	Office & Administrative Support	-70	3,190	4,030	7,140	$44,120
3	Sales & Related	110	2,900	3,840	6,850	$37,230
4	Transportation & Material Moving	310	2,070	3,220	5,610	$44,880
5	Construction & Extraction	340	1,200	2,060	3,600	$59,200
6	Healthcare Support	300	1,470	1,810	3,580	$37,880
7	Management	300	1,220	2,010	3,530	$97,550
8	Building, Grounds, & Maintenance	100	1,420	1,780	3,300	$37,390
9	Personal Care & Service	100	980	1,690	2,770	$32,080
10	Educational Instruction & Library	60	1,160	1,340	2,570	$48,040
11	Business & Financial Operations	200	840	1,510	2,550	$70,620
12	Installation, Maintenance, & Repair	170	910	1,340	2,420	$55,610
13	Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	460	1,010	930	2,410	$79,850
14	Production	100	820	1,360	2,270	$46,910
15	Computer & Mathematical	30	430	720	1,180	$79,100
16	Community & Social Service	100	430	600	1,130	$47,860
17	Protective Service	20	420	590	1,040	$58,560
18	Arts, Design, Entertainment, & Media	40	370	550	970	$46,220
19	Farming, Fishing, & Forestry	30	370	540	950	$46,060
20	Life, Physical, & Social Science	60	150	680	890	$63,330
21	Architecture & Engineering	80	250	420	750	$78,980
22	Legal	20	120	160	300	$74,330
	Total	3,120	26,160	37,250	66,530	$47,360

Source: Montana Department of Labor and Industry Employment Projections. 2024-2034.

Montana's labor market is comprised of many occupations that typically require little formal education and can be learned through on-the-job training. As shown in Figure 9, the top nine jobs with the most projected openings from 2024 to 2034 do not require postsecondary education. These roles provide essential supports to the state's economy but often come with lower wages and higher turnover due to their minimal entry requirements.

The education and work experience listed is the minimum required to enter the profession as determined by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. For occupations without a clear path to entry, the BLS determines the typical path based on the current minimum qualifications of workers filling those positions. At these minimums, the worker will likely be earning less than the average wage for the industry.

FIGURE 9: Top Ten Detailed Occupations, 2024-2034

Rank	Minimum Requirements			Annual Openings				MT Median Wage
	Occupation	Educ	Work Exp	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	Fast Food & Counter Workers	<HSE	ST OJT	70	1,710	2,040	3,820	$29,280
2	Retail Salespersons	<HSE	ST OJT	50	960	1,240	2,240	$35,000
3	Cashiers	<HSE	ST OJT	-20	1,020	1,110	2,110	$30,620
4	Stockers & Order Fillers	HSE	ST OJT	130	610	1,040	1,780	$38,500
5	Waiters & Waitresses	<HSE	ST OJT	0	650	990	1,630	$22,630
6	Home Health & Personal Care Aides	HSE	ST OJT	140	760	660	1,560	$33,150
7	Office Clerks, General	HSE	ST OJT	-40	680	800	1,440	$44,100
8	Janitors and Cleaners	<HSE	ST OJT	40	600	680	1,320	$37,390
9	Cooks, Restaurant	<HSE	MT OJT	100	500	630	1,240	$36,830
10	General & Operations Managers	Bach	5+ yrs	80	270	700	1,050	$85,240

Source: Montana Department of Labor and Industry Employment Projections. 2024-2034. Notes: <HSE = less than high school diploma; HSE = High school diploma or equivalent; Bach = Bach degree; PhD or Prof = Doctoral or professional degree; ST OJT = short-term on-the-job training; MT OJT = medium-term on-the-job training; 5+ yrs = five or more years of experience.

Fast food and counter workers rank highest with 3,820 annual openings and a median wage of $29,280. This role requires less than a high school education and short-term on-the-job training. The high turnover in this occupation is indicative of the entry-level nature of the job and its lower pay. Retail salespeople and cashiers follow closely with a combined 4,350 annual openings. These occupations also require short-term on-the-job training, making it accessible to a broad demographic. The demand for cashiers remains high despite advancements in automated checkout technologies.

Stockers and order fillers account for 1,780 annual openings and have a median wage of $38,500. These workers are responsible for organizing, stocking, and retrieving merchandise in retail and warehouse environments. The role typically requires no formal education and involves short-term on-the-job training. Strong demand is driven by the continued growth of e-commerce and retail logistics, making this a stable entry point into the broader supply chain sector.

Waiters and waitresses rank fifth with 1,630 annual openings and the lowest median wage among the top ten at $22,630. This job is often a starting point for individuals entering the workforce, especially in the hospitality sector. Restaurant cooks also remain in steady demand and offer a median wage of $36,830.

Home health and personal care aides, who play a crucial role in supporting Montana's aging population, have 1,560 annual openings and a median wage of $33,150. This occupation requires a high school diploma and short-term on-the-job training, offering a pathway into the healthcare field. Other notable occupations include janitors and cleaners (1,320 openings, $37,390), and general office clerks (1,440 openings, $44,100). Rounding out the list are general and operations managers, who lead the top ten in median wage at $85,240 and account for 1,050 annual openings.

Exploring High-Demand, High-Wage Careers in Montana

Montanans preparing for their first career or considering a job change can benefit from exploring occupations that offer both strong wages and consistent demand. Figures 10 and 11 highlight the occupations projected to provide stable employment and competitive pay over the next decade, helping jobseekers identify viable pathways to long-term economic security.

Figure 10 presents occupations with median wages between $45,000 and $65,000. These roles frequently require technical training, work experience, or completion of an apprenticeship. Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks have the most projected openings, with 880 annual openings and a median wage of $45,600. These positions generally require some college coursework and moderate on-the-job training, making them accessible to individuals with administrative or financial aptitude.

Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers follow closely, with 800 annual openings and a median wage of $59,060. Light truck drivers, often employed in last-mile delivery or small freight operations, account for 440 openings annually with a median wage of $46,220. These roles require a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) and on-the-job training. Construction laborers, who often enter the workforce with less than a high school diploma and receive short-term training, are projected to have 570 openings annually and earn a median wage of $49,230. Carpenters, another key trade occupation, are projected to have 470 annual openings with a median wage of $58,110.

FIGURE 10: Top Ten Jobs Earning Between $45,000-$65,000, 2024-2034

Rank	Occupation	Minimum Requirements		Annual Openings				MT Median Wage
		Educ	Work Exp	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	SC AS	MT OJT	-20	470	430	880	$45,600
2	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	PS ND	ST OJT	50	300	450	800	$59,060
3	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	HSE	<5 yrs	0	230	400	640	$47,970
4	Construction Laborers	<HSE	ST OJT	70	180	310	570	$49,230
5	Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	HSE	MT OJT	40	240	270	550	$45,710
6	Computer User Support Specialists	SC AS	MT OJT	-40	190	320	480	$53,410
7	Carpenters	HSE	Appren	50	160	270	470	$58,110
8	Light Truck Drivers	HSE	ST OJT	40	160	240	440	$46,220
9	Sales Representatives, Wholesale & Manufacturing	HSE	MT OJT	20	140	250	410	$60,300
10	Medical Assistants	PS ND		50	120	230	410	$45,440

Source: Montana Department of Labor and Industry Employment Projections. 2024-2034. Notes: <HSE = less than high school diploma; HSE = High school diploma or equivalent; SC AS = Some college or Associate's; PS ND = Postsecondary no degree; Appren = Apprenticeship; ST OJT = short-term on-the-job training; MT OJT = medium-term on-the-job training; <5 yrs = less than five years of experience.

Computer user support specialists, a pathway into the tech sector, offer 480 annual openings and a median wage of $53,410, typically requiring an associate's degree or some college. First-line supervisors of retail sales workers are expected to generate 640 annual openings, and sales representatives in wholesale and manufacturing have 410 annual openings and a median wage of $60,300. Rounding out the list, medical assistants are expected to see 410 annual openings with a median wage of $45,440, often following completion of a postsecondary certificate program.

Figure 11 shifts the focus to occupations with median wages above $65,000. These high-wage jobs are concentrated in fields such as management, healthcare, skilled trades, and professional services. General and operations managers top the list with 1,050 annual openings and a median wage of $85,240. This role typically requires a bachelor's degree and five or more years of experience, reflecting its leadership responsibilities across industries.

Managers in health services, construction, and other various other roles are projected to have at least a couple hundred job openings per year. These management roles all report median wages over $100,000, making them some of the highest earning occupations in Figure 11. Also in demand are first-line supervisors of construction trades and extraction workers and first-line supervisors of mechanics, installers, and repairers. These positions generally require a high school diploma and substantial field experience, making them some of the highest-paying non-degree options.

FIGURE 11: Top Ten Jobs Earning Over $65,000, 2024-2034

Rank	Occupation	Minimum Requirements		Annual Openings				MT Median Wage
		Educ	Work Exp	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	General and Operations Managers	Bach	5+ yrs	80	270	700	1,050	$85,240
2	Registered Nurses	Bach		120	320	240	690	$81,560
3	First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	HSE	5+ yrs	50	170	260	490	$74,990
4	Accountants and Auditors	Bach		30	140	230	400	$74,400
5	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	Bach		20	120	230	370	$72,690
6	Electricians	HSE	Appren	50	100	200	350	$68,980
7	Managers, All Other	Bach	<5 yrs	20	110	180	310	$105,840
8	Medical and Health Services Managers	Bach	<5 yrs	90	70	130	290	$104,590
9	Construction Managers	Bach	MT OJT	30	60	140	240	$102,820
10	First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	HSE	<5 yrs	10	90	120	220	$75,960

Source: Montana Department of Labor and Industry Employment Projections. 2024-2034. Notes: <HSE = less than high school diploma; HSE = High school diploma or equivalent; Appren = Apprenticeship; Bach = Bach degree; MT OJT = medium-term on-the-job training; 5+ yrs = five or more years of experience; <5 yrs = less than five years of experience

Registered nurses are another critical high-wage occupation in high demand. MTDLI projects 690 annual openings for RNs each year through 2034. This role requires a bachelor's degree and plays a vital role in addressing Montana's healthcare needs, particularly in rural and aging communities. Accountants and auditors and business operations specialists are other essential positions that require a bachelor's degree. Electricians also appear in this high-wage tier with 350 annual openings and a median wage of $68,980, further highlighting the earnings potential of skilled trades.

These occupations reflect the wide range of opportunities available to Montanans seeking careers with strong wages and long-term demand. Whether through a trade apprenticeship, a college degree, or on-the-job training, Montana's workforce has multiple pathways to success in the decade ahead.

Occupational Demand – Education Level

Most of Montana's projected job openings over the next decade will be in occupations that do not require postsecondary education. These roles often come with lower wages and higher turnover, serving as entry points for new workers and as steppingstones toward more stable, longer-term careers. However, wage potential and job stability tend to increase with educational attainment, underscoring the value of continued skill development and training.

Minimum education requirements reflect the baseline qualifications needed to enter an occupation, not the education level of the existing workforce. Many Montanans possess higher credentials than the minimum requirement in their job, and employers increasingly expect additional skills and certifications to ensure workforce readiness.

As shown in Figure 12, approximately 71% of all projected annual job openings, about 47,500 positions each year, will be in occupations that require a high school diploma or less. Of these, around 22,620 openings will be in roles that require less than a high school diploma, with an average annual wage of $36,842. Another 24,880 openings per year will require a high school diploma, with average wages of $52,605. These occupations span a variety of sectors, including retail, hospitality, transportation, and basic maintenance roles, many of which rely heavily on short-term or informal training.

FIGURE 12: Job Openings by Minimum Education Level, 2024-2034

Minimum Education	Annual Openings				MT Average Annual Wage
	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
<HSE	540	9,570	12,500	22,620	$36,842
HSE	1,020	9,650	14,200	24,880	$52,605
PS ND	320	1,500	2,260	4,080	$53,635
SC AS	20	1,390	1,970	3,380	$52,626
Bach	880	3,290	5,520	9,690	$85,329
Master	180	390	530	1,110	$79,407
Phd or Prof	130	350	260	730	$130,371

Source: Montana Department of Labor and Industry Employment Projections. 2024-2034.

While only 18% of job openings are projected to require a bachelor's degree or higher, over a quarter (26%) of Montana's employment are in jobs requiring at least a bachelor's degree. These occupations make up a greater share of employment than job openings because they tend to have less turnover than occupations that do not require a bachelor's degree. Figure 13 shows total employment and total job openings by educational attainment.

FIGURE 13: Employment and Job Openings by Minimum Education

Legend: <HSE | HSE | PS ND | SC AS | Bach | Masters+

	<HSE	HSE	PS ND	SC AS	Bach	Masters+
2034 Employment	25%	38%	6%	6%	21%	5%
2024 Employment	25%	38%	6%	6%	21%	5%
Annual Openings	34%	37%	6%	5%	15%	3%
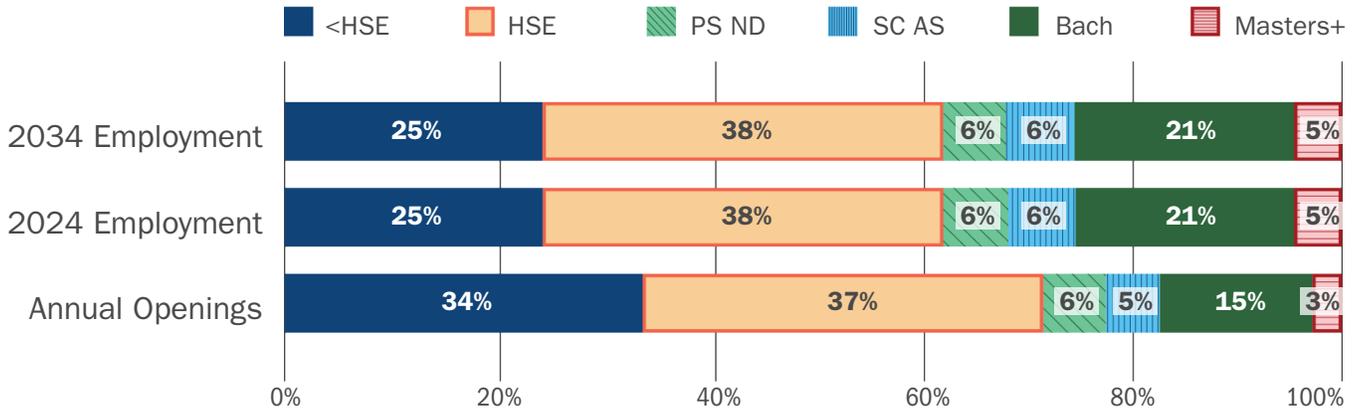
Source: MTDLI, Montana Employment Projections, 2024-2034

These projections reflect a continued need for a well-educated workforce capable of filling specialized roles in healthcare, education, business, and technical management. As Montana's economy grows and diversifies, the importance of aligning training programs, educational pipelines, and recruitment strategies with these demands will only increase.

Job Openings Requiring High School Diploma or Less

Many of Montana's most in-demand occupations require only a high school diploma or less and still offer strong wages and long-term career potential. While these positions may not require formal postsecondary education, they often involve structured on-the-job training, registered apprenticeships, or prior work experience to develop the necessary skills. Figure 14 highlights the top occupations projected to earn over $45,000 annually that require a high school education or less.

FIGURE 14: Top Ten Jobs Earning Over $45,000 that Require a High School Education or Less, 2024-2034

Rank	Occupation	Minimum Requirements		Annual Openings				MT Median Wage
		Educ	Work Exp	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	HSE	<5 yrs	0	230	400	640	$47,970
2	Construction Laborers	<HSE	ST OJT	70	180	310	570	$49,230
3	Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	HSE	MT OJT	40	240	270	550	$45,710
4	First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	HSE	5+ yrs	50	170	260	490	$74,990
5	Carpenters	HSE	Appren	50	160	270	470	$58,110
6	Light Truck Drivers	HSE	ST OJT	40	160	240	440	$46,220
7	Sales Representatives, Wholesale & Manufacturing	HSE	MT OJT	20	140	250	410	$60,300
8	First-Line Supervisors of Office and Admin Support Workers	HSE	<5 yrs	-10	140	230	360	$60,560
9	Electricians	HSE	Appren	50	100	200	350	$68,980
10	Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators	HSE	MT OJT	20	120	200	330	$60,130

Source: Montana Department of Labor and Industry Employment Projections. 2024-2034. Notes: <HSE = less than high school diploma; HSE = High school diploma or equivalent; Appren = Apprenticeship; Intern = Internship; ST OJT = short-term on-the-job training; MT OJT = medium-term on-the-job training; 5+ yrs = five or more years of experience; <5 yrs = less than five years of experience

First-line supervisors of retail sales workers rank highest in total demand, with 640 annual openings and a median wage of $47,970. These roles typically require less than five years of relevant experience and play a key role in managing sales teams and day-to-day retail operations across the state.

Construction laborers follow closely, with 570 openings each year and a median wage of $49,230. These jobs are widely accessible, often requiring less than a high school diploma and short-term on-the-job training, yet they offer solid earnings and consistent employment in Montana's growing construction sector. Maintenance and repair workers also feature prominently, with 550 annual openings and a median wage of $45,710. These generalist roles span multiple industries and require a high school diploma along with medium-term on-the-job training.

Supervisory and skilled trade occupations stand out for both their wages and stability. First-line supervisors of construction trades and extraction workers are projected to have 490 openings annually and earn a median wage of $74,990, the highest in this category. Carpenters, supported by Montana's registered apprenticeship programs, are expected to see 470 annual openings with a median wage of $58,110, reflecting the sustained demand for skilled trades in both residential and commercial construction.

Two additional high-paying roles that require hands-on technical skills are electricians and operating engineers. Electricians, trained through formal apprenticeships, will see 350 annual openings and earn a median wage of $68,980, while operating engineers and other construction equipment operators are projected to have 330 openings with a median wage of $60,130. Both are critical to Montana's infrastructure development and construction economy.

Transportation, sales, and administration also offer viable high-wage paths. Light truck drivers will see 440 openings per year with a median wage of $46,220. Sales representatives in wholesale and manufacturing (excluding technical and scientific products) are projected to have 410 annual openings and earn a median wage of $60,300, providing opportunities for workers with strong communication and customer service skills. With 360 annual openings and a median wage of $60,560, first-line supervisors of office and administrative support workers typically need some prior experience but are accessible workers with only a high school diploma.

Together, these occupations show that a high school diploma can provide access to high-paying, high-demand careers in Montana. With the right combination of experience, training, and skill development, workers can build long-term, rewarding careers across a variety of sectors, from skilled trades and logistics to retail and administrative supervision.

Job Openings Requiring Short-Term Postsecondary Training

Occupations that require some education beyond high school but less than a bachelor's degree are projected to account for about 7,460 annual openings. These roles may require a postsecondary non-degree credential, a certification, or an associate degree. Nursing assistants, truck drivers, electricians, bookkeepers, and computer user support specialists all fall within this educational category. These occupations provide important entry points into healthcare, technical services, and skilled trades. Figure 15 highlights the top occupations that require education beyond high school but less than a bachelor's degree.

FIGURE 15: Top Ten Jobs Requiring Postsecondary Education, But Less than A Bachelor's Degree, 2024-2034

Rank	Occupation	Minimum Requirements		Annual Openings				MT Median Wage
		Educ	Work Exp	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	SC AS	MT OJT	-20	470	430	880	$45,600
2	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	PS ND	ST OJT	50	300	450	800	$59,060
3	Nursing Assistants	PS ND		40	300	410	750	$39,300
4	Teaching Assistants, K-12	SC AS		0	240	300	530	$33,720
5	Computer User Support Specialists	SC AS	MT OJT	-40	190	320	480	$53,410
6	Medical Assistants	PS ND		50	120	230	410	$45,440
7	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	PS ND	ST OJT	10	90	150	250	$57,060
8	Dental Assistants	PS ND		20	80	140	250	$45,820
9	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	PS ND		10	80	120	220	$38,230
10	Forest and Conservation Technicians	SC AS		0	30	150	180	$54,310

Source: Montana Department of Labor and Industry Employment Projections. 2024-2034. Notes: SC AS = Some college or Associate's; PS ND = Postsecondary no degree; ST OJT = short-term on-the-job training; MT OJT = medium-term on-the-job training.

These occupations demonstrate that postsecondary training can open doors to steady employment and wages well above the state average in many cases. For students and workers seeking efficient pathways into the labor market, these roles represent high-opportunity career options aligned with Montana's long-term economic needs.

Job Openings Requiring a Bachelor's Degree or Higher

Approximately 9,690 job openings are projected to occur annually for occupations requiring a bachelor's degree. These careers offer substantially higher wages than those requiring less education – with an average annual salary of $85,329. Demand for workers with four-year degrees remains strong across a variety of fields, including business, education, healthcare, and management.

High-demand occupations requiring a bachelor's degree include key roles such as registered nurses (690 openings, $81,560), accountants and auditors (400 openings, $74,400), business operations specialists (370, $72,690), elementary school teachers (300 openings, $56,200), and human resources specialists (220 openings, $61,860). Figure 16 highlights the most in-demand occupations requiring a bachelor's degree or higher, offering a snapshot of where the state will need to cultivate advanced talent in the years ahead.

FIGURE 16: Top Ten Jobs Requiring a Bachelor's Degree, 2024-2034

Rank	Occupation	Minimum Requirements		Annual Openings				MT Median Wage
		Educ	Work Exp	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	General and Operations Managers	Bach	5+ yrs	80	270	700	1,050	$85,240
2	Registered Nurses	Bach		120	320	240	690	$81,560
3	Accountants and Auditors	Bach		30	140	230	400	$74,400
4	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	Bach		20	120	230	370	$72,690
5	Managers, All Other	Bach	<5 yrs	20	110	180	310	$105,840
6	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	Bach		0	140	160	300	$56,200
7	Medical and Health Services Managers	Bach	<5 yrs	90	70	130	290	$104,590
8	Construction Managers	Bach	MT OJT	30	60	140	240	$102,820
9	Human Resources Specialists	Bach		20	70	140	220	$61,860
10	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	Bach		0	100	120	220	$58,730

Source: Montana Department of Labor and Industry Employment Projections. 2024-2034. Notes: Bach = Bach degree; MT OJT = medium-term on-the-job training; 5+ yrs = five or more years of experience; <5 yrs = less than five years of experience

Only 3% of total openings, about 1,840 per year, are projected to be in occupations requiring a master's degree or higher. While these job openings make up a small percentage of the total, they offer the highest earning potential. Occupations requiring a master's degree will see 1,110 openings annually, with average wages of $79,407. Roles requiring a professional or doctoral degree will account for 730 openings each year, with an average wage of $130,371.

Pursuing an advanced degree, such as a master's, professional, or doctoral degree, can significantly expand career opportunities and lead to substantial wage gains. In Montana, these credentials are particularly valuable in healthcare, counseling, education, and legal occupations. Figure 17 highlights the top occupations projected to require an advanced degree between 2024 and 2034.

Most of the occupations shown in Figure 17 are in the healthcare field. Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors are expected to have the most annual openings among graduate degree occupations – with 230 projected each year and a median wage of $58,660. This role requires a master's degree and typically involves internship or supervised experience. Additional high-demand healthcare occupations include nurse practitioners, physical therapists, healthcare social workers, physician assistants, and pharmacists.

FIGURE 17: Top Ten Jobs Requiring an Advanced Degree, 2024-2034

Rank	Occupation	Minimum Requirements		Annual Openings				MT Median Wage
		Educ	Work Exp	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors	Master	Intern	40	80	110	230	$58,660
2	Lawyers	Phd or Prof		20	60	50	120	$100,750
3	Nurse Practitioners	Master		50	30	30	110	$133,640
4	Physical Therapists	Phd or Prof		30	30	20	80	$92,910
5	Healthcare Social Workers	Master	Intern	10	30	40	70	$58,760
6	Physician Assistants	Master		30	20	20	70	$132,980
7	Educational, Guidance, Career Counselors & Advisors	Master		0	20	40	60	$59,480
8	Instructional Coordinators	Master	5+ yrs	0	30	30	60	$59,230
9	Pharmacists	Phd or Prof		10	30	20	60	$137,230
10	Education Administrators, K-12	Master	5+ yrs	0	20	30	60	$97,380

Source: Montana Department of Labor and Industry Employment Projections. 2024-2034. Notes: Intern = Internship; Master = Master's degree; PhD or Prof = Doctoral or professional degree; 5+ yrs = five or more years of experience; <5 yrs = less than five years of experience

Nurse practitioners stand out for both high demand and high wages. With 110 annual openings and a median wage of $133,640, this role plays an increasingly central role in expanding access to healthcare, especially in rural or underserved areas. Nurse practitioners must complete a master's degree and meet rigorous clinical and licensure requirements. With similar median wages ($132,980) and 70 openings per year, physician assistants also play a key role in Montana's healthcare system and offer a strong return on investment for a master's degree.

Educators are also in high demand among occupations requiring a graduate degree. Educational, guidance, and career counselors, and instructional coordinators are projected to a combined 120 job openings per year. These occupations all report a median wage around $59,000. Education administrators in K–12 settings are projected to have 60 job openings per year but command a much higher median wage of $97,380, due to their leadership responsibilities and required experience.

Investing in an advanced degree can open the door to fulfilling, well-compensated careers in high-impact sectors. For individuals pursuing long-term career growth in healthcare, law, or education, these roles offer both economic opportunity and service to the public good.

Occupational Demand – Healthcare

Accounting for 15% of all payroll employment, healthcare and social assistance remains Montana's largest industry by workforce size and one of the fastest-growing sectors in the state. From 2024 to 2034, the industry is projected to add approximately 960 new jobs annually, driven by rising demand for healthcare services, an aging population, and expanding access to care across rural and urban areas. Figure 18 shows the top ten healthcare occupations with the most projected job openings.

FIGURE 18: Top 10 Healthcare Jobs, 2024-2034

Rank	Occupation	Minimum Requirements		Annual Openings				MT Median Wage
		Educ	Work Exp	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	Home Health and Personal Care Aides	HSE	ST OJT	140	760	660	1,560	$33,150
2	Nursing Assistants	PS ND		40	300	410	750	$39,300
3	Registered Nurses	Bach		120	320	240	690	$81,560
4	Medical Assistants	PS ND		50	120	230	410	$45,440
5	Dental Assistants	PS ND		20	80	140	250	$45,820
6	Licensed Practical and Vocational Nurses	PS ND		20	80	80	180	$59,750
7	Pharmacy Technicians	HSE	MT OJT	20	50	80	150	$46,980
8	Vet Assistants & Lab Animal Caretakers	HSE	ST OJT	10	30	90	140	$37,060
9	Massage Therapists	PS ND		10	50	50	120	$52,000
10	Nurse Practitioners	Master		50	30	30	110	$133,640

Source: MTDLI Employment Projections. 2024-2034. Notes: <HSE = less than high school diploma; HSE = High school diploma or equivalent; PS ND = Postsecondary no degree; Bach = Bach degree; Master = Master's degree; ST OJT = short-term on-the-job training; MT OJT = medium-term on-the-job training.

Home health and personal care aides job openings are project to reach 1,560 openings per year, which is the highest among all healthcare occupations (Figure 18). These roles are vital for supporting older adults and individuals with disabilities in their homes and communities. Although the median wage is relatively modest at $33,150, the occupation offers steady employment and growing demand statewide.

Nurses continue to serve as the clinical backbone of the healthcare system. With 690 projected openings each year and a median wage of $81,560, registered nursing offers one of the most stable and well-compensated opportunities for individuals pursuing a bachelor's degree in healthcare. Among the highest-paid healthcare roles is the nurse practitioner, a position that requires a master's degree

and advanced clinical training. With 110 annual openings and a median wage of $133,640, nurse practitioners are playing an increasingly central role in expanding access to primary and specialized care, particularly in rural Montana. Nursing assistants, who provide essential bedside support in hospitals and long-term care settings, are projected to see 750 annual openings, with a median wage of $39,300. These positions typically require a postsecondary credential but offer a direct path into the healthcare workforce with short-term training.

The demand for support staff remains strong across multiple healthcare settings. Medical assistants are expected to see 410 openings annually, earning a median wage of $45,440, and typically complete a two-year training program or postsecondary certificate. Dental assistants have 250 openings annually and a median wage of $45,820, while licensed practical nurses (LPNs) are projected to see 180 openings per year, earning $59,750. These roles support physicians and RNs in clinics, hospitals, and long-term care facilities, often serving as steppingstones for further advancement.

Other key support roles include pharmacy technicians (150 openings, $46,980) and veterinary assistants and laboratory animal caretakers (140 openings, $37,060). These occupations typically require a high school diploma and moderate or short-term on-the-job training, offering accessible entry points into the broader health and veterinary sectors. Also notable are massage therapists, who combine healthcare and wellness services. With 120 projected openings and a median wage of $52,000, this profession offers flexible opportunities for those with specialized postsecondary training.

Montana's healthcare and social assistance sector offers a wide array of opportunities for people with varied levels of education and experience. From entry-level roles to advanced clinical practice, the industry offers a range of pathways that support both economic mobility and the health of Montana's communities.

Occupational Demand – STEM

Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations are central to Montana's innovation-driven economy. These careers often require specialized education or technical training and offer wages well above the statewide average. STEM-related roles can be found across a wide range of industries from healthcare and natural resources to infrastructure, information technology, and advanced manufacturing. Figure 19 shows the STEM occupations with the most projected openings over the next decade.

Nursing occupations are some of the most in-demand jobs in the STEM field. Registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nurse practitioners are all considered high-demand STEM occupations – with between 110 and 690 annual openings. Pharmacy technicians are also a STEM-aligned healthcare occupation in high demand. The Montana labor market is projected to have 150 job openings for pharmacy technicians every year through 2034.

Medical and health services managers, who combine clinical expertise with administrative leadership, are expected to see 290 annual openings, commanding a median wage of $104,590. This occupation exemplifies the increasing convergence of technical knowledge and management skills in modern healthcare systems.

Several IT-related STEM occupations are also in high demand. Software developers remain a critical part of Montana's growing tech landscape, with 180 annual openings and one of the highest wages in STEM at $100,190. Support roles such as computer user support specialists and computer network support specialists are also in high demand. The Montana labor market is projected to have 480 and 130 job

openings per year for computer user and network support specialists, respectively. These roles typically require an associate degree or some college and medium-term on-the-job training, offering a valuable entry point into the technology sector.

FIGURE 19: Top STEM Occupations Montana, 2024-2034

Rank	Occupation	Minimum Requirements		Annual Openings				MT Median Wage
		Educ	Work Exp	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	Registered Nurses	Bach		120	320	240	690	$81,560
2	Computer User Support Specialists	SC AS	MT OJT	-40	190	320	480	$53,410
3	Medical and Health Services Managers	Bach	<5 yrs	90	70	130	290	$104,590
4	Forest and Conservation Techs	SC AS		0	30	150	180	$54,310
5	Licensed Practical and Vocational Nurses	PS ND		20	80	80	180	$59,750
6	Software Developers	Bach		40	40	90	180	$100,190
7	Pharmacy Technicians	HSE	MT OJT	20	50	80	150	$46,980
8	Computer Network Support Specialists	SC AS	MT OJT	-10	50	90	130	$57,500
9	Civil Engineers	Bach		10	40	70	120	$80,390
10	Nurse Practitioners	Master		50	30	30	110	$133,640

Source: MTDLI Employment Projections. 2024-2034. <HSE = less than high school diploma; HSE = High school diploma or equivalent; SC AS = Some college or Associate's; PS ND = Postsecondary no degree; Bach = Bach degree; Master = Master's degree; MT OJT = medium-term on-the-job training; <5 yrs = less than five years of experience.

Engineering remains a foundational STEM field, with civil engineers expected to generate 120 annual openings and a median wage of $80,390. These professionals are instrumental in Montana's infrastructure development, from road construction to water systems. In the natural resources sector, forest and conservation technicians provide important support to public land management and conservation efforts. With 180 annual openings and a median wage of $54,310, these roles support Montana's forestry, wildlife, and environmental programs and generally require an associate degree.

The Montana labor market boasts a diverse and robust STEM workforce. Although STEM occupations make up a small share of overall employment, they are projected to grow at a faster rate and offer greater economic resilience over time. Many of these positions are closely tied to long-term trends in health care delivery, digital infrastructure, environmental stewardship, and data management – areas where Montana continues to invest and expand.

Occupational Demand - Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship programs continue to serve as a practical bridge between education and employment in Montana. These programs allow individuals to earn a wage while learning on the job, combining hands-on experience with classroom instruction. For employers, apprenticeships offer a reliable pipeline for building a skilled workforce that is trained to meet specific industry needs.

Montana has made steady progress in expanding apprenticeship opportunities across sectors such as construction, healthcare, and transportation. Many of the state's most in-demand occupations are accessible through registered apprenticeship programs. Carpenters, for example, are projected to have 470 annual openings with a median wage of $58,110 (Figure 20).

Some of the most widely available apprenticeable occupations include restaurant cooks, who account for 1,240 annual openings and earn a median wage of $36,830. Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers have 800 projected openings each year with a median wage of $59,060. Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks represent another key occupation, offering 880 annual openings and a median wage of $45,600. These occupations typically require short- or medium-term on-the-job training and align well with apprenticeship-style models.

FIGURE 20: Montana's Apprenticeable Occupations with the Most Projected Job Openings, 2024-2034

| Rank | Occupation | Minimum Requirements | | Annual Openings | | | | MT Median Wage |
		Educ	Work Exp	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	Cooks, Restaurant	<HSE	MT OJT	100	500	630	1,240	$36,830
2	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	SC AS	MT OJT	-20	470	430	880	$45,600
3	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	PS ND	ST OJT	50	300	450	800	$59,060
4	Nursing Assistants	PS ND		40	300	410	750	$39,300
5	Registered Nurses	Bach		120	320	240	690	$81,560
6	Construction Laborers	<HSE	ST OJT	70	180	310	570	$49,230
7	Maintenance & Repair Workers	HSE	MT OJT	40	240	270	550	$45,710
8	Computer User Support Specialists	SC AS	MT OJT	-40	190	320	480	$53,410
9	Carpenters	HSE	Appren	50	160	270	470	$58,110
10	Medical Assistants	PS ND		50	120	230	410	$45,440

Source: MTDLI Employment Projections. 2024-2034. <HSE = less than high school diploma; HSE = High school diploma or equivalent; SC AS = Some college or Associate's; PS ND = Postsecondary no degree; Appren = Apprenticeship; ST OJT = short-term on-the-job training; MT OJT = medium-term on-the-job training;

In the healthcare field, Montana has added apprenticeships for medical assistants and nursing assistants. Nursing assistants account for 750 openings annually and earn a median wage of $39,300, while medical assistants are projected to see 410 annual openings with a median wage of $45,440. These programs help meet growing demand for healthcare workers.

Montana is expanding apprenticeships into technology and maintenance-related fields. Computer user support specialists are projected to have 480 annual openings with a median wage of $53,410. Maintenance and repair workers are expected to see 550 openings annually and earn $45,710. Each of these occupations offers a viable pathway to career advancement through earn-and-learn models that do not require a four-year degree.

Apprenticeship programs typically last between two and four years and culminate in industry-recognized credentials. Wages often increase as participants advance through each stage of the program, reflecting the value of their growing expertise. For workers, apprenticeships offer a practical alternative to traditional education, allowing them to gain marketable skills and avoid student debt while building a career. For employers, apprenticeships serve not only as a recruitment tool but also as a strategy for retention and long-term workforce development.

Despite progress, Montana has not yet taken full advantage of the potential for apprenticeships across all sectors. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, more than 1,000 occupations are recognized nationally as apprenticeable. In Montana, fewer than half of these occupations currently have active apprenticeship programs. This gap presents an opportunity to build new training pipelines that respond to emerging labor market needs. Figure 21 shows the occupations with the most openings that could become apprenticeship programs in Montana.

Several high-opportunity occupations that are not yet widely apprenticed in Montana – including general and operations managers, first-line supervisors of retail sales workers, and accountants and auditors (Figure 21). General and operations managers have 1,050 projected annual openings and a median wage of $85,240. First-line supervisors of retail sales workers are expected to have 640 annual openings with a median wage of $47,970. Accountants and auditors are projected to see 400 openings each year and earn a median wage of $74,400. While these positions traditionally require a college degree or experience-based advancement, they are increasingly well suited for structured apprenticeship programs that incorporate work-based learning and technical training.

FIGURE 21: U.S. Apprenticeable Occupations Not Yet Apprenticed in Montana, 2024-2034

Rank	Occupation	Minimum Requirements		Annual Openings				MT Median Wage
		Educ	Work Exp	New Jobs	Exits	Transfers	Total Openings	
1	General and Operations Managers	Bach	5+ yrs	80	270	700	1,050	$85,240
2	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	HSE	<5 yrs	0	230	400	640	$47,970
3	Accountants & Auditors	Bach		30	140	230	400	$74,400
4	Dental Assistants	PS ND		20	80	140	250	$45,820
5	HR Specialists	Bach		20	70	140	220	$61,860
6	First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, & Repairers	HSE	<5 yrs	10	90	120	220	$75,960
7	Market Research Analysts & Marketing Specialists	Bach		20	50	120	180	$66,840
8	Police Officers	HSE	MT OJT	10	50	120	180	$69,910
9	Project Management Specialists	Bach		20	50	110	180	$85,140
10	Software Developers	Bach		40	40	90	180	$100,190

Source: MTDLI Employment Projections. 2024-2034. HSE = High school diploma or equivalent; PS ND = Postsecondary no degree; Bach = Bach degree; MT OJT = medium-term on-the-job training; 5+ yrs = five or more years of experience; <5 yrs = less than five years of experience

Other roles with strong potential for future apprenticeship development include dental assistants, human resources specialists, first-line supervisors of mechanics and repairers, software developers, and project management specialists. Many of these occupations require highly specific skills and offer high wages, making them ideal candidates for earn-and-learn training models, especially in regions with limited access to higher education.

To meet the evolving needs of Montana's workforce, the state can encourage more employer participation in emerging apprenticeship areas, strengthen partnerships with industry groups and training providers, and offer incentives to help small businesses launch new programs. By broadening the range of careers supported by apprenticeship, Montana can expand access to quality employment and help build a more inclusive and future-ready workforce.

Conclusion

Montana's economy is expected to grow steadily over the next decade, with 66,500 job openings projected annually. Although job growth has moderated since the post-pandemic surge, employer demand remains strong, especially in healthcare, construction, transportation, and technical occupations. These sectors will continue to anchor job creation across both urban and rural communities.

At the same time, labor force challenges will persist over the next decade. Aging demographics, a projected decline in labor force participation, and uneven regional growth are reshaping the state's labor supply. While in-migration remains a critical driver of workforce growth, it will not fully offset the effects of natural population decline and retirements.

Meeting future demand will require a coordinated response from workforce, education, and economic development leaders. Many of Montana's most in-demand careers do not require a bachelor's degree, and can be accessed through apprenticeships, certificate programs, and two-year degrees. These training models offer fast, affordable pathways into high-demand, high-wage careers.

To broaden labor force participation, Montana must also invest in career readiness, childcare, transportation, and adult education. At the same time, employers play a vital role by supporting workforce retention, upskilling, and better hiring practices that tap into the state's full talent pool.

Montana's workforce future depends on how effectively it connects people to opportunity. With smart planning, collaborative investment, and continued innovation, the state can meet its economic needs while helping more Montanans succeed in a changing world of work.

Learn more at https://lmi.mt.gov/Projections.

Appendix A - Methodology

Montana's employment projections are developed by the Montana Department of Labor & Industry (MTDLI) as part of a contract with the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA). The methodology follows nationally recommended practices provided by the Projections Managing Partnership and ensures consistency with projections produced in other states. These forecasts are published at lmi.mt.gov and nationally at projectionscentral.com.

Data Sources and Framework

The projections are based on historical employment data from January 1990 to December 2024. The Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) serves as the primary source for industry employment, offering the most accurate count of payroll jobs reported to Unemployment Insurance. QCEW data is classified using the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) and used at the three-digit NAICS level for statewide forecasts and the two-digit NAICS level for regional forecasts.

Public and private employment are included in healthcare and education industries, consistent with federal guidelines. All other public jobs are captured in the government sector. Total employment is modeled using Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), which incorporates self-employment not captured in QCEW. The difference between LAUS and QCEW becomes the estimated self-employed workforce.

Step 1: Labor Force Estimation

Projections begin with modeling Montana's future labor force. The working-age population is projected by age group using trends in births, deaths, and net migration. These age-specific projections are combined with historical labor force participation rates to estimate the size and composition of the future workforce, which sets the upper limit on potential employment.

Step 2: Industry Employment Projections

Time-series models are used to project future employment in approximately 90 detailed industries. These models are chosen based on historical fit, trend stability, and analyst judgment. They are compared to forecasts from S&P Global to ensure external consistency.

Forecasts account for known economic events, including major investments and anticipated policy changes. While some industries like retail trade exhibit stable, predictable growth, others such as mining are influenced by global commodity prices and are inherently more volatile.

Step 3: Translating Industries into Occupations

Industry projections are translated into occupational employment using staffing patterns from the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) survey. These ratios, which link each industry to the occupations it employs, are adjusted using national BLS change factors to reflect evolving business practices and technological change. Where needed, Montana-specific modifications are applied.

For example, if registered nurses currently comprise 12% of healthcare employment but are expected to increase to 14%, the change factor gradually shifts that share over the ten-year horizon. Occupational staffing patterns for self-employment are developed using national and state data, with manual adjustments based on insights from the Current Population Survey.

Step 4: Estimating Annual Job Openings

Annual job openings are calculated by summing:

- New job growth (net increase in employment),

- Exits from the labor force (e.g., retirements),

- Transfers between occupations (e.g., someone changing careers but remaining employed).

This comprehensive measure captures both the need to fill new positions and to replace existing workers, helping educators and workforce planners understand long-term demand.

It is important to note that projections reflect expected future job openings, not current job vacancies. For example, if 500 welding jobs are currently unfilled and 60 new positions are expected next year, only the 60 future openings are included in the forecast.

Step 5: Assigning Education and Training Requirements

Each occupation is assigned a typical education level, prior work experience, and training pathway based on national BLS classifications and input from Montana employers and training providers. These designations help connect labor market projections with workforce development and education planning.

Forecast Uncertainty and Use

MTDLI does not produce formal error margins for projections. However, model selection prioritizes historical consistency and external benchmarking. Some industries, like retail trade, follow predictable growth paths, while others—such as mining or management—are subject to external shocks or classification shifts that increase uncertainty.

Importantly, while absolute job counts may vary, relative demand rankings across occupations tend to remain more stable. For example, forecasts may estimate 740 annual openings for registered nurses and 250 for dental assistants. Even if actual numbers change, the greater demand for nurses is likely to persist under most economic conditions.

These projections are intended as a planning tool and are updated annually to reflect the most current data and trends.

Appendix B – Accuracy of Past Forecasts

Montana's employment projections are updated annually as part of a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. Projections follow standardized, nationally recommended methodologies that promote consistency across states and over time.

On average, the Montana Department of Labor & Industry's (MTDLI) total employment forecasts deviate by approximately 2% after two years. Forecasts produced before the COVID-19 pandemic tended to slightly overestimate future employment levels. However, in the years following 2020, projections have generally underestimated actual employment, largely due to unexpected levels of in-migration and a faster-than-anticipated recovery from pandemic-related job losses.

In the most recent evaluation period, MTDLI's two-year projection overestimated total employment by just 0.6%, while the one-year forecast for 2024 differed by only 0.15%, demonstrating a high degree of accuracy as the economy returned to more stable growth patterns.

Industry-Level Forecast Performance

While overall projections have been highly accurate, forecast precision varies across industries. Sectors such as Accommodation and Food Services, Postal Service, and Healthcare were projected with exceptional accuracy. Conversely, industries like Mining, Management, and Transportation and Warehousing exhibited larger deviations due to economic volatility, global market shifts, or structural changes.

The table below summarizes the accuracy of 2023–2033 employment projections for the year 2024, sorted by absolute percent difference between projected and actual employment:

FIGURE 22: MTDLI Total Employment Error
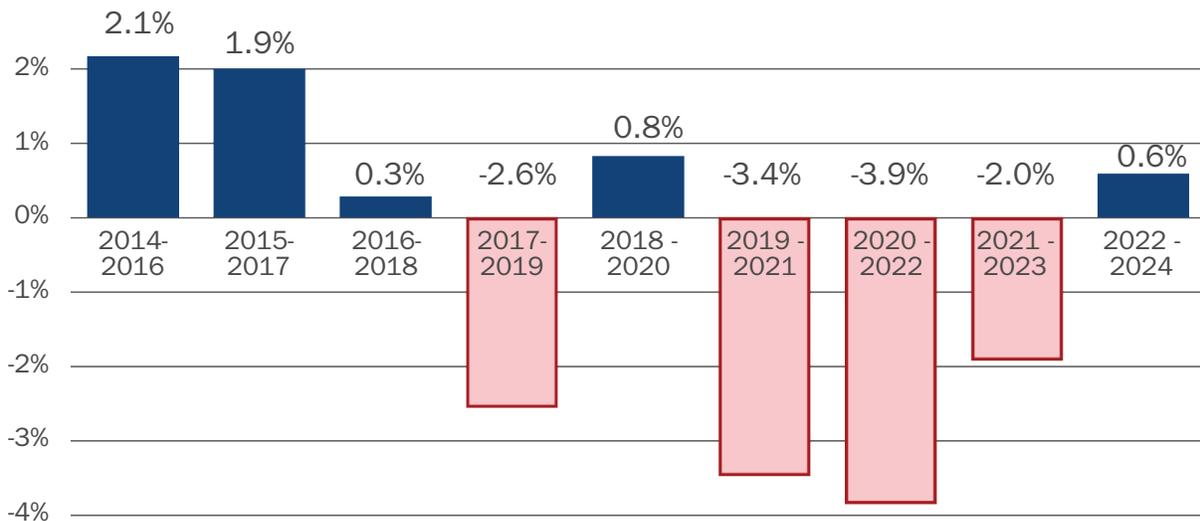
Source: MTDLI Two-year Projections 2014-2024

Montana's total employment projections have typically been off by less than 1% a year later. As the economy has returned to more stable growth post-pandemic, the total employment forecast for 2024 was off by just 0.15% (Figure 23). Over the last years, some industries were more accurately projected than others. The table below summarizes the industry projections from most to least accurate. Accommodation and Food, Postal Service, and Healthcare were among the most accurately forecasted industries in the first year of the previous iteration of forecasts. Industries that had the greatest overperformance in employment growth include mining, transportation and warehousing, real estate, manufacturing, and agriculture, while underperforming industries included management, arts, entertainment and recreation, state government, other services, and admin and support services.

FIGURE 23: Accuracy of 2023-2033 Industry Forecasts for 2024

Industry	2023-2033 Projection for 2024	Actual 2024	Projection Minus Actual	% Difference (Absolute Value)
Accommodation & Food	60,250	60,246	-4	0.01%
Postal Service	2,025	2,023	-2	0.10%
Healthcare	78,108	78,238	130	0.17%
Retail Trade	62,728	62,864	136	0.22%
Education	40,796	40,906	110	0.27%
Professional & Technical	28,820	28,704	-116	0.40%
Information	5,472	5,503	31	0.57%
Wholesale Trade	19,070	19,183	113	0.59%
Utilities	2,931	2,912	-19	0.65%
Construction	37,186	37,478	292	0.79%
Federal Government	10,274	10,176	-98	0.95%
Finance	16,972	17,140	168	0.99%
Local Government	22,158	21,869	-289	1.30%
Agriculture	6,939	7,047	108	1.56%
Admin & Support Services	21,503	21,094	-409	1.90%
Other Services	19,393	19,006	-387	2.00%
State Government	13,041	12,753	-288	2.21%
Manufacturing	21,398	21,876	478	2.23%
Arts & Entertainment	12,980	12,614	-366	2.82%
Real Estate	6,671	6,911	240	3.60%
Transportation & Warehousing	15,546	16,470	924	5.94%
Management	2,396	2,200	-196	8.18%
Mining	6,044	6,918	874	14.46%
Payroll Employment	514,915	515,959	1,044	0.20%
Total Employment	561,464	562,284	820	0.15%

Source: MTDLI QCEW and 2023-2033 Employment Projections