The national annual median wage in May 2014 was roughly $35,500.

To adjust for variation in local costs, we lower the wage to $30,800 in the McAllen, TX metro, and raise the wage to $43,500 in the Bridgeport, CT metro.

Opportunity occupations are jobs that pay workers at least the national annual median wage, adjusted for differences in local consumption prices, and are generally accessible for a worker without a bachelor's degree.

This study focused on the 100 largest metropolitan economies in the U.S.

These 9 occupations rank in the top 15 opportunity occupations using three different measures of educational attainment.

Top Opportunity Occupations

Registered Nurses  Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers  Bookkeeping and Accounting Clerks  Retail Sales Supervisors  Maintenance and Repair Workers  Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers  Licensed Practical and Vocational Nurses  Secretaries and Administrative Assistants  Electricians

Top 10 & Bottom 10 Metros for Opportunity Occupations

Top 10
- Kansas City, MO-IL
- Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA
- Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, OH
- St. Louis, MO-IL
- Baton Rouge, LA
- Louisville-Jefferson County, KY-IN
- Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford, CT
- Springfield, MA-CT
- Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA
- Birmingham-Hoover, AL

Bottom 10
- Poughkeepsie-Newburgh-Middletown, NY
- North Port-Bradenton-Sarasota, FL
- Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA
- Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers, AR-MO
- Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL
- Honolulu, HI
- Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL
- Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL
- El Paso, TX
- McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX

Regional Educational Attainment Preferences

For a given occupation, employer preferences for educational attainment vary. This means that an occupation can represent real opportunity for a worker without a bachelor's degree in one metro but not in another.

Top 10
- Bookkeeping, and Accounting Clerks: 38%
- Computer User Support Specialists: 90%
- Executive Secretaries and Executive Admin. Assistants: 88%
- Retail Sales Supervisors: 78%
- Registered Nurses: 76%

Bottom 10
- Bookkeeping, and Accounting Clerks: 12.6%
- Computer User Support Specialists: 23%
- Executive Secretaries and Executive Admin. Assistants: 24%
- Retail Sales Supervisors: 31%
- Registered Nurses: 43%

* These percentages represent the share of online job ads requesting less than a bachelor's degree.

For more information, read Identifying Opportunity Occupations in the Nation’s Largest Metropolitan Economies, written by Keith Wardrip, Kyle Fee, Lisa Nelson, and Stuart Andreason and published by the Federal Reserve Banks of Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Atlanta, September 2015. You can find the report at www.philadelphiafed.org/community-development/publications/special-reports. The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia or the Federal Reserve System.