

NW Minnesota Workforce & Job Market – Key Highlights

Industry Demand & Hiring Pressures

- **Construction remains the region's top growth sector**, which also includes mining gravel and sand for construction needs.
- **Manufacturing**, despite below-average growth, is still the **second-largest industry** and continues to anchor the regional economy. (See table 1)
 - Manufacturing is critical for our region and local economy.
 - 16% of total wages come from the manufacturing industry
 - 13% of total jobs come from the manufacturing industry
- **Education and public administration** have shed jobs yet remain major employers; **teaching assistants** show especially high vacancy levels.
- **Professional and technical fields** show both high vacancies and high job losses—indicating **organizational restructuring rather than decline**.
- This tracks for East Grand Forks with **our major employers** being EGF Public Schools (education), American Crystal Sugar (manufacturing/ag), and RJ Zavoral & Sons (construction).

Vacancies & Labor Market Tightness

- Minnesota tracks roughly **800 occupations**; the top 15 represent the bulk of regional hiring pressure. (*see figure 1*)
- Vacancy rates show which occupations are under the greatest strain. High vacancy rates reflect **intense employer demand**, not just growth.
- The **Occupations in Demand (OID)** tool synthesizes wages, job postings, unemployment claims, and projections to identify the most critical roles. <https://mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/oid/>
- No OID data is available at the county level—**regional-only** surveys inform this dataset.

Wages & Post-Pandemic Shifts

- **Wages in NW Minnesota have increased faster than the statewide average**, largely because lower-wage occupations saw significant pay boosts during recovery.
- NW MN wages now outpace inflation.
- This helped the region **weather the pandemic more effectively** than other areas of Minnesota.
 - NW MN vs state wages gap is 11.2%, down from 23.5% twenty years ago
 - Lower wage roles increased in pay the most, by 25% including accounting for inflation
 - This signals regional success due to these wage increases.

Data source: <https://mn.gov/deed/data/locallook/northwest/northwest-blog.jsp?id=1045-710500>

Labor Force Trends

- After decades of stagnation (2000–2020), the region is now seeing a notable **increase in labor force participation**, although it's unclear how much is true growth versus recovery or just making up for past lost growth.
- **Future workforce pipeline:**
 - ~76,780 individuals are approaching workforce age in that 15–24-year-old bracket
 - ~6,517 older workers (55–64) are expected to exit due to retirement.

- Assuming no people moving in/out of the region.
 - See Figure 2 more the full graph.
- **Net migration is the most critical factor** for long-term labor force expansion. The region is gaining working-age residents at roughly **0.8% annually**.
- Expectation: **~1,000 additional workers per year**, assuming participation remains steady.

Demographic Shifts

- The workforce is becoming **more diverse**, with the strongest growth among **BIPOC populations**. (See figure 3)
 - Employers should factor this into both recruitment and retention strategies.
 - Growth is concentrated in the **youngest and oldest** age brackets.
- **Women's labor force participation has dropped**, tied to rising caregiving responsibilities—flexibility will be key for employers wanting to rebuild the female workforce pipeline.

Current Labor Market Conditions

- The market is **loosening slightly** (meaning: easier to find candidates | harder for job seekers to land a job), with two recent quarters showing lower employment—but still above 2019 levels.
- The number of unemployed individuals struggling to find jobs is now **higher than pre-2019**, suggesting a more complex market instead of a simple “labor shortage.”

AI Exposure & Workforce Implications

- **High-wage, high-education occupations** show the **highest exposure** to AI, meaning, many aspects of their job will be impacted by AI in some capacity.
 - **Teachers should equip students with AI skills to ensure they're competitive in the future workforce.**
- AI is expected to **augment, not eliminate**, many jobs. Manual labor or tactile roles are less affected in the near term.
- Over the long run, AI integration into machines and robotics will likely touch **construction, wholesale trade, and manufacturing**.
- The real risk:
 - *“Someone who can use AI will take your job.”*
 - Task-level automation is more likely than full job replacement.
- Historical parallel: The IT era, 2002-2006 gradually reshaped sales & office occupations—AI is expected to **reshape modern occupations in a similarly slow, cumulative way** that becomes more apparent after a couple decades.

Top Regional Industries to Watch

- **Construction** (clear #1)
- **Agriculture**
- **Healthcare**
- **Social Assistance**

Employers can find the salary survey data on <https://mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/oes/> Pro-tip it is critical to get the correct occupation. Location plays a part but not as much as the occupation. 2024 data shows that median wages are \$22.74 per hour and require H.S. diploma or associates degree with training requirements averaging moderate-term on-the-job-training. Wages in demand industry jobs range from \$47,379/yr to \$63,220/yr.

Table 1: Selected Northwest Minnesota Occupations in Demand Found in the Manufacturing Industry

SOC Code	Job Title	Median Wage	Education Requirements	Training Requirements
41-4012	Sales Representatives, Wholesale & Manufacturing, Exc. Technical and Scientific Products	\$63,220/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Moderate-term on-the-job training
51-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Production & Operating Workers	\$72,611/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Moderate-term on-the-job training
51-4121	Welders, Cutters, Solderers & Brazers	\$51,974/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Moderate-term on-the-job training
51-4041	Machinists	\$51,108/yr	Postsecondary non-degree award	Long-term on-the-job training
51-9061	Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers & Weighers	\$52,622/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Moderate-term on-the-job training
51-9124	Coating, Painting, & Spraying Machine Setters, Operators & Tenders	\$55,137/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Moderate-term on-the-job training
51-9023	Mixing & Blending Machine Setters, Operators & Tenders	\$50,228/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Moderate-term on-the-job training
51-4031	Cutting, Punching, & Press Machine Setters, Operators & Tenders	\$51,511/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Moderate-term on-the-job training
51-9161	Computer Numerically Controlled Tool Operators	\$50,099/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Moderate-term on-the-job training
43-5061	Production, Planning & Expediting Clerks	\$60,868/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Moderate-term on-the-job training
49-9041	Industrial Machinery Mechanics	\$62,013/yr	Postsecondary non-degree award	Long-term on-the-job training
17-3026	Industrial Engineering Technologists & Technicians	\$61,026/yr	Associate's degree	None
53-7051	Industrial Truck & Tractor Ops	\$47,379/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Short-term on-the-job training
49-9043	Maintenance Workers, Machinery	\$64,819/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Long-term on-the-job training
45-2041	Graders & Sorters, Agricultural Products	\$53,293/yr	H.S. diploma or equiv	Short-term on-the-job training

Data source: <https://mn.gov/deed/data/locallook/northwest/northwest-blog.jsp#/detail/appId/1/id/706955>

Top 15 Occupations By Number of Job Vacancies

Occupation Title	Number of Job Vacancies	Regional Employment	Job Vacancy Rate
Retail Salespersons	760	5,460	13.9%
Fast Food & Counter Workers	620	5,410	11.5%
Nursing Assistants	589	2,960	19.9%
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	436	2,190	19.9%
Cooks, Restaurant	403	2,460	16.4%
Cashiers	384	7,250	5.3%
Waiters & Waitresses	342	3,340	10.2%
Maids & Housekeeping Cleaners	340	1,750	19.4%
Food Preparation Workers	321	2,240	14.3%
Registered Nurses	298	4,600	6.5%
Personal Care Aides	295	#N/A	#N/A
First-Line Supervisors of Food Prep & Serving Workers	293	1,840	15.9%
Licensed Practical & Vocational Nurses	218	1,630	13.4%
Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	217	3,830	5.7%
Teaching Assistants	217	4,490	4.8%

Schaffhauser, Anthony (DEED)

Figure 1 Occupations in Highest Demand

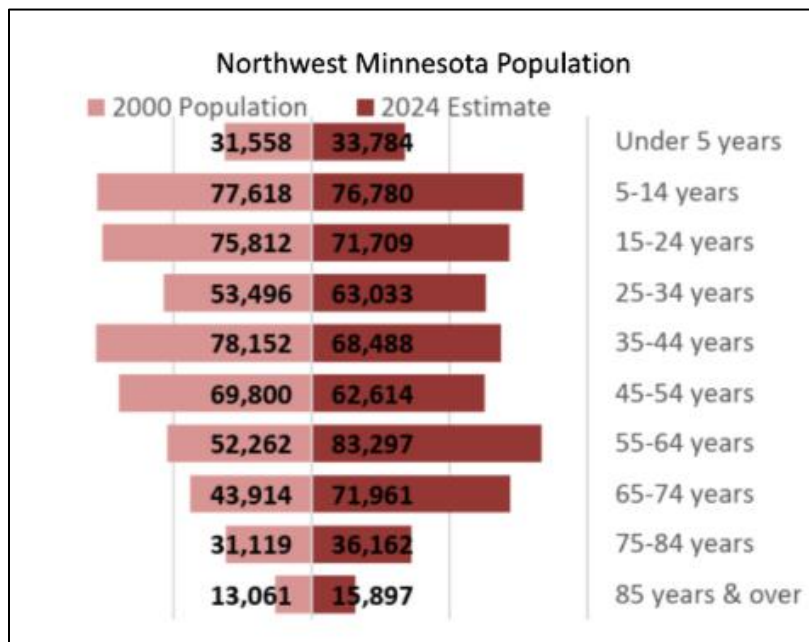


Figure 2 Workforce Availability into the Future

Demographics of the Growing Workforce

	Year		Change 2019 to 2024	
	2019	2024	Number	Percent
White Alone	201,047	201,882	835	0.4%
Black or African American Alone	3,290	4,298	1,008	30.6%
American Indian or Alaska Native Alone	6,648	6,281	-367	-5.5%
Asian Alone	2,320	2,790	471	20.3%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Alone	124	148	24	19.1%
Two or More Race Groups	3,391	3,972	581	17.1%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	7,737	10,108	2,372	30.7%
Total, All	224,555	229,478	4,923	2.2%

Most of the workforce growth was from BIPOC groups: 4,088 of the 4,923 additional workers.

Figure 3 Demographics of the Growing Workforce

SOC Code	Job Title	Current Demand Rank	Current Demand Indicator	25th Percentile Wage	Median Wage	Projected 10-year Growth Rate	Projected 10-year Openings	Education Requirements	On-the-job Training Requirements
	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
311120	Home Health and Personal Care Aides	1	★★★★★	\$34,088/yr	\$36,814/yr	13.9%	194,236	High school diploma or equivalent	None
412031	Retail Salespersons	2	★★★★★	\$30,472/yr	\$35,687/yr	-0.3%	98,323	High school diploma or equivalent	Short term on the job training
353023	Fast Food and Counter Workers	3	★★★★★	\$29,980/yr	\$32,492/yr	4.2%	132,910	High school diploma or equivalent	None
412011	Cashiers	5	★★★★★	\$29,451/yr	\$32,917/yr	-6.8%	104,277	High school diploma or equivalent	None
351012	First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	7	★★★★★	\$39,010/yr	\$46,119/yr	7.2%	28,297	High school diploma or equivalent	None
537065	Stockers and Order Fillers	8	★★★★★	\$35,474/yr	\$38,200/yr	8.1%	75,050	High school diploma or equivalent	Short term on the job training
353031	Waiters and Waitresses	10	★★★★★	\$23,502/yr	\$24,885/yr	0.1%	78,105	High school diploma or equivalent	None
259045	Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	11	★★★★★	\$36,085/yr	\$38,702/yr	3.5%	42,230	High school diploma or equivalent	Short term on the job training
372011	Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	13	★★★★★	\$35,654/yr	\$38,969/yr	3.8%	67,176	High school diploma or equivalent	Short term on the job training
352021	Food Preparation Workers	14	★★★★★	\$30,041/yr	\$35,410/yr	-6.3%	31,928	High school diploma or equivalent	None

Figure 4 Statewide Occupations in Demand

Sources: <https://mn.gov/deed/data/regional-lmi/lmi-training.jsp> | <https://mn.gov/deed/data/locallook/northwest/northwest-blog.jsp#/detail/appld/1/id/710500> | <https://mn.gov/deed/data/locallook/northwest/northwest-blog.jsp#/detail/appld/1/id/706955>