



2025 Colorado

# **TALENT PIPELINE REPORT**



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## ➤ Letter from Governor Jared Polis

Colorado has had one of the strongest economies in the nation, outperforming peer states with our labor force participation rate, private sector growth, job creation, and wage growth for 15 years in the wake of the Great Recession. We benefited from having one of the quickest economic recoveries after the COVID pandemic of any state in the nation, and between 2020 and 2024, Colorado's economy saw record or near-record growth in state GDP, personal income, and consumer spending. Underpinning this growth was our ability to attract highly skilled, highly educated talent to fuel our expanding economy.

As more talent flocked to the state to take advantage of opportunities, we began feeling the challenges of our quick growth. Our already limited housing supply was further constrained by significant in-migration, and the private sector was growing faster than we could develop or import skilled talent.

In response to these new pressures, I pursued an aggressive agenda to deliver more housing Coloradans can afford to drive down the cost of living and to keep Colorado an attractive place to live and work. While this work doesn't take effect overnight, we continue pursuing housing reform to increase our supply of housing and it is now easier to get new housing built in Colorado.

In partnership with the General Assembly, Colorado has also made historic investments into workforce development. Through innovative programs like Care Forward Colorado, Career Advance Colorado, and Opportunity Now, we have expanded training and credentialing opportunities to over 26,000 Coloradans. We have also invested into growing registered apprenticeship opportunities and making it easier for employers to hire and develop talent. Finally, we made the first two years of college free for qualified students making under \$90,000. These have been important investments in cultivating local talent so that Coloradans are positioned to take advantage of economic opportunity.





While we're using every policy lever available to make it more affordable to live and work in Colorado, labor availability is being adversely impacted by federal immigration policy changes, declining birth rates, and an aging workforce. These realities are reflected in the 2025 Talent Pipeline Report, which shows that job growth and labor demand has started to cool despite our ongoing high performance on metrics like labor force participation and wage growth relative to the nation.

The migratory growth that helped to fuel our economy can no longer sustain the appetite for talent we have from Colorado businesses. We will need to double-down on supporting homegrown talent from our K-12 system and beyond to meet employer demand for a highly skilled workforce; we will need to continue investing in strategies that make Colorado an affordable and attractive place to live; and we will need to assess state and local regulations that can be a barrier to growth and prosperity.

I'm proud of what we've accomplished to strengthen Colorado's workforce and help people access skills to fill good-paying jobs, but there is more work ahead. While this report outlines the challenges our workforce is facing, we continue to work every day to support Colorado workers and our economy.



**Governor Jared Polis**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Colorado Talent Pipeline Report has been published annually by state agency partners since 2014. The report provides insights into Colorado's talent pipeline and strategies and recommendations to align demand for and supply of talent.

In 2025, labor force participation and wages are strengths for Colorado. Through the first eight months of 2025, Colorado's labor force participation rate averaged 67.6%, ranking 6th nationally. The median annual wage in Colorado in 2024 was \$58,210, which ranked 6th highest nationally.

However, uncertainty in Colorado and the national labor market has led to underperformance in 2025 compared to forecasts made in late 2024. Colorado's unemployment rate of 4.5% through the first eight months of 2025 is slightly higher than forecasted, while the nonfarm job growth rate of 0.4% falls below expected levels.

In 2024, Colorado's labor force exceeded 3.2 million people. The proportion of Coloradans 55 and older in the labor force has increased substantially since 2000. The state's demographic composition has become more diverse over the past quarter-century, with the labor force proportionally reflecting changes in the population. Colorado is also a highly educated state. In 2024, 52% of Colorado's 25 and older labor force had at least a bachelor's degree, trailing only Massachusetts.

The sectors with the four largest shares of industry employment in Colorado in 2024 were: health care and social assistance, professional and technical services, accommodation and food services, and retail trade. Registered nurse online job postings significantly led all other occupations in Colorado in the first eight months of 2025, with over 42,000 unique postings or 6.6% of total postings. Colorado's Office of Labor Market Information projects that the state will add around 432,000 industry jobs from 2024 to 2034, with professional and technical services and health care and social assistance representing nearly half of these gains.

Top Jobs are included annually in the Talent Pipeline Report and used to inform policy and legislation, education and career development, as well as industry and business. These occupations are in high demand, have above-average projected growth over the next 10 years, and are capable of providing a living wage. In 2025, there were 163 different Top Job occupations; these occupations are projected to make up 22% of the 4 million projected job openings in 2024-2034. Across all 2025 Top Jobs, 77% typically require the completion of a postsecondary credential for entry. The occupational groups with the most Colorado Top Jobs in 2025 are health care practitioners and technical; architecture and engineering; and construction and extraction.

Across all occupations, the nine occupations with the most projected annual openings between 2024 and 2034 (which does not include Top Jobs) combine to represent around 23% of total statewide projected openings during that period. These occupations typically do not require a postsecondary credential for entry, have a 2024 median annual wage below \$50,000, and include diverse jobs like food and drink services, sales/customer service, health care, and cleaning services.

## Strategies

Colorado utilizes both federal and state funds stemming from multiple pieces of legislation that support talent development, as well as plans at the federal, state, and local levels that inform work related to talent development. The Talent Pipeline Report includes information and progress from the last year on key plans and bodies of work supported through both federal and state funding, including:

- » Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan: Affordability, Quality, Equity, and Access
- » Skills-first talent management practices
- » Growth and impact of sector partnerships
- » Development of the Quality Career Pathways Framework
- » Modernizing Connecting Colorado, the state's labor exchange system
- » Development of an aligned talent development technology vision
- » Opportunity Now Regional Talent Summits and Tactical Workforce Plans
- » Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Programs passage and implementation
- » Work-based Learning Experiences in Higher Education
- » Ongoing development of the statewide longitudinal data system
- » Study workforce transitions to other industries
- » Colorado climate workforce study

## Potential Headwinds

Potential headwinds that could impact Colorado's talent pipeline include:

- » Colorado's comparatively subdued labor market and low net migration
- » Changing federal landscape, including tariff policy, cuts to federal government employment and funding, shifts to international migration policy, and impacts on Colorado's state and local government budgets
- » Elevated risk of recession
- » Artificial intelligence and emerging technology impacts to labor

## Policy Recommendations

**Using Data to Make Informed Decisions & Measure Impact:** The postsecondary education and training system should incorporate consistent, aligned, and collaborative data standards and definitions for providers delivering services. Rigorous methods for analyzing the impact of programs and practices should also be adopted for new and existing efforts so that the investment of public dollars can be made with strong confidence in the likelihood of success and a positive public return.

**Make the Postsecondary Talent Development System Easier to Navigate:** Colorado should re-evaluate what data would be necessary to collect for the state to have better visibility into how learners and earners move through education and training, and where they might get disconnected. This information would help the state have a more accurate, impactful, and holistic response to talent development.



# Introduction

In accordance with Colorado Revised Statute § 24-46.3-103 as amended by SB14-205, the Colorado Talent Pipeline Report has been published annually by state agency partners since 2014. The report provides insights on Colorado's talent pipeline and strategies to align supply and demand.

This is used to inform potential legislation, develop and implement programs, and align partners around the current talent landscape.

As detailed below, this year's report has sections on Colorado's past, present, and future labor market and economic landscape, workforce development strategies, and policy recommendations. There are also appendices containing additional details on topics discussed within the report.

## **Characteristics of Colorado's Labor Market**

This section highlights industry, occupational, and workforce demographic characteristics for Colorado over the past quarter century.

## **Trends and Conditions of Colorado's Labor Market**

This section analyzes, describes, and discusses key labor market data for Colorado, including unemployment, job growth, and job postings and openings.

## **Top Jobs and 2024-34 Employment Projections for Colorado**

This section looks forward to the future and highlights Top Jobs and key occupational and industry projections for Colorado.

## **Information on Skills and Qualifications**

This section discusses and highlights information on skills and qualifications needed in today's workforce.

## **Colorado Population Factors to Consider: Aging and Migration**

This section focuses on Colorado statistics on aging and migration, as population trends and projections play an essential role in assessing Colorado's future talent pipeline needs and challenges.

## **Strategies**

This section provides updates on how Colorado has addressed policy priorities identified in previous Talent Pipeline Reports and key updates related to statewide plans that connect to talent development.

## **Potential Headwinds**

This section highlights potential headwinds that could impact Colorado's talent pipeline over the short, medium, and long-term.

## **Policy Recommendations**

This section includes recommendations related to advancing talent pipeline development.



# Characteristics of Colorado's Labor Market

A crucial part of evaluating the talent pipeline in Colorado is to also understand the characteristics of the state's labor market. This section of the Talent Pipeline Report will highlight industry, occupational, and workforce demographic characteristics for Colorado over the past quarter century. Specifically, information for 2000, 2007, 2019, and 2024 (the most recent annual data available) will be presented throughout this section. The years 2000, 2007, and 2019 were selected for two reasons: 1) they serve as dispersed snapshots in time for Colorado, and 2) they represent prior [peaks of economic expansions](#), which provides a useful and relevant comparison of labor market activity for the state in 2024.

## Colorado Industry Characteristics

In 2024, the sectors with the four largest shares of industry employment in Colorado were: health care and social assistance (13.5%), professional and technical services (10.1%), accommodation and

food services (10.0%), and retail trade (9.5%). Retail remains among the top industries despite formerly being the top industry in 2000.

Educational services (8.3%) and construction (6.6%) were the other industry sectors in 2024 with employment shares that exceeded 6%. The two industries with the largest decreases in Colorado employment shares over the past quarter century are manufacturing (from 8.7% in 2000 to 5.2% in 2024) and information (from 5.0% in 2000 to 2.6% in 2024).

Three sectors have consistently ranked as Colorado industries with the four highest employment shares in 2000, 2007, 2019, and 2024: health care and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and retail trade. Manufacturing (2000), educational services (2007), and professional and technical services (2019 and 2024) are the other sectors to have top four employment shares during those select years.

The [North American Industry Classification System](#) (NAICS) is utilized by the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS), [Colorado's Labor Market Information](#) (LMI), and other statistical agencies to classify and report on industry data across the state and nation. The table below (Figure 1) shows how Colorado's employment was distributed by industry sector (2-digit NAICS) in 2000, 2007, 2019, and 2024. Total industry employment in Colorado in 2024 was approximately 2.9 million jobs.

**Figure 1**

### Share of Colorado's Industry Employment by Sector, for Select Years

[Accessible data for Figure 1](#)

Industry Sector	2000 Employment Share	2007 Employment Share	2019 Employment Share	2024 Employment Share
Health Care and Social Assistance	8.7%	10.4%	13.0%	13.5%
Professional and Technical Services	7.0%	7.6%	8.7%	10.1%
Accommodation and Food Services	9.4%	10.0%	10.5%	10.0%

## Characteristics of Colorado's Labor Market

Industry Sector	2000 Employment Share	2007 Employment Share	2019 Employment Share	2024 Employment Share
Retail Trade	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>10.0%</b>	<b>9.5%</b>
Educational Services	7.3%	<b>8.2%</b>	8.4%	8.3%
Construction	7.6%	7.6%	6.7%	6.6%
Public Administration	5.7%	4.9%	5.5%	5.7%
Administrative, Waste, and Temp Services	6.7%	6.6%	5.9%	5.3%
Manufacturing	<b>8.7%</b>	6.5%	5.5%	5.2%
Transportation and Warehousing	3.9%	3.5%	3.5%	4.1%
Wholesale Trade	4.5%	4.4%	4.0%	4.0%
Finance and Insurance	4.6%	4.8%	4.2%	3.9%
Other Services	3.0%	3.0%	3.1%	3.2%
Information	5.0%	3.5%	2.9%	2.6%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	2.0%	2.0%	2.2%	2.4%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	2.1%	2.2%	2.0%	2.0%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0.8%	1.2%	1.6%	1.6%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	0.5	1.1%	1.1%	0.7%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	0.7%	0.6%	0.7%	0.6%
Utilities	0.6%	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%
<b>Total Industry Employment</b>	<b>2,180,866</b>	<b>2,264,480</b>	<b>2,726,428</b>	<b>2,894,814</b>

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages). Notes: table is sorted in descending order by 2024 shares; government and private employment included within each sector; unclassified industries excluded as part of the share calculation; bolded cells within each year represent industries with a top four employment share for that year.

Figure 2 below displays how Colorado's shares of industry employment have changed, when evaluating different types of government (federal, state, and local) and the private sector. Since 2000, the vast majority of Colorado's industry employment has been concentrated within the private sector,

measuring at just over 84% in 2024. Local and state government made up the next largest employment shares in 2024, at 9.9% and 4.1%, respectively. Federal government employment shares in Colorado have fallen from 2.5% in 2000 to 2.0% in 2024.

**Figure 2**

**Share of Colorado's Industry Employment by Government or Private Sector Ownership, for Select Years**

[Accessible data for Figure 2](#)

Ownership Type	2000 Employment Share	2007 Employment Share	2019 Employment Share	2024 Employment Share
Federal Government	2.5%	2.3%	1.9%	2.0%
State Government	3.0%	3.1%	3.9%	4.1%
Local Government	9.1%	10.3%	9.8%	9.9%
Private Sector	85.4%	84.4%	84.4%	84.1%

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages). **Notes:** local and state government employment also include educational services (K-12 and public postsecondary school) and health services (hospital systems), in addition to personnel required to run and operate those governments.

Another way to evaluate industry employment shares for Colorado is to compare them to the U.S. through a metric called a [location quotient](#), which calculates whether an industry within any given area has a higher or lower share of total employment relative to the nation. In other words, this can be a valuable statistic to analyze comparative industry concentrations for Colorado. The next table (Figure 3) presents the 2024 location quotients for all 20 Colorado industry sectors – a location quotient above 1 means a higher employment concentra-

tion compared to the U.S. and a location quotient below 1 reflects a lower concentration. Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (1.97), professional and technical services (1.43), and information (1.34) have the highest location quotients, indicating higher concentration in those industries in Colorado relative to the U.S. as a whole, while transportation and warehousing (0.86), agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting (0.75), and manufacturing (0.62) have the lowest location quotients.

**Figure 3**

**Colorado 2024 Location Quotients by Industry Sector**

[Accessible data for Figure 3](#)

Industry Sector	2024 Location Quotient
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	1.97
Professional and Technical Services	1.43
Information	1.34
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	1.28
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	1.27
Construction	1.22
Public Administration	1.13
Accommodation and Food Services	1.09
Other Services	1.04
Wholesale Trade	1.02
Utilities	0.98
Educational Services	0.97
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0.96
Finance and Insurance	0.95
Retail Trade	0.94
Administrative, Waste, and Temp Services	0.89
Health Care and Social Assistance	0.86
Transportation and Warehousing	0.86
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	0.75
Manufacturing	0.62

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages). **Notes:** a location quotient above 1 = a higher employment concentration compared to the U.S., while a location quotient below 1 = a lower concentration; the location quotient for each industry calculated using government and private sector employment within the respective sector.



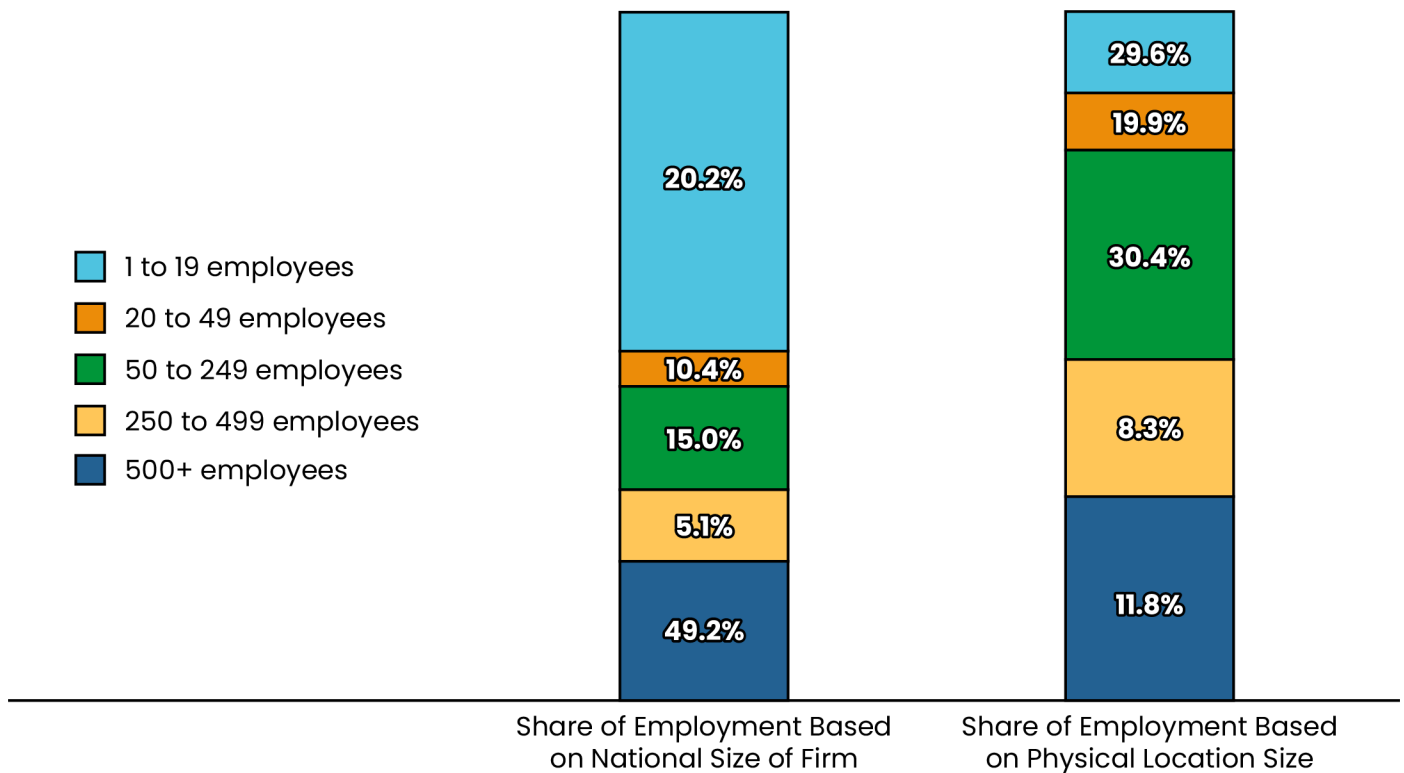
Along with distributions of employment by industry, it is also possible to assess those shares by the size of an employer. Figure 4 looks at the share of Colorado's private sector employment based on two different measures of business size. On the left-hand side of the chart is the distribution of employment according to the national size of the firm (i.e. number of U.S. employees), while the right-hand side of the chart reflects the employment count at physical locations within Colorado.

The shares within the chart are split into five categories: 1 to 19 employees (light blue bar), 20 to 49 employees (orange bar), 50 to 249 employees (green bar), 250 to 499 employees (yellow bar), and 500 or more employees (dark blue bar). Nearly half of Colorado's private sector employment is concentrated in employers with at least 500 employees nationwide; however, that distribution falls to under 12% when analyzed by physical location size. Approximately 80% of Colorado private jobs are worked at physical locations with less than 250 employees (note: this would also include remote workers).

**Figure 4**

**Share of Colorado Private Employment Based on Different Measures of Business Size**

[Accessible data for Figure 4](#)



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau (Quarterly Workforce Indicators) for national size of firm data; Colorado LMI Office (Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages) for physical location size data. **Notes:** shares based on data available from third quarter 2023 to second quarter 2024.

The industry data referenced in the first part of this *Characteristics of Colorado's Labor Market* section, as well as throughout this document, generally reflect traditional payroll employment. However, the labor market is rapidly evolving and includes other forms of paid work like freelance, contract, gig, and self-employment. Annually, the [U.S. Census Bureau publishes "nonemployer" statistics](#) that attempt to capture these alternate forms of employment. Provided are links that will direct the reader to 2023 employment data for Colorado that breaks out [nonemployer statistics by industry](#) and by [industries that typically contain gig employment](#).

Recently, the [Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade's](#) Global Business Development Division conducted analysis and research to update and reclassify Colorado's strategic industry clusters for the purposes of their proactive business attraction outreach. While this information utilizes NAICS as a building block, these industry groups differ from what has been presented above. More details on these key industries can be viewed within that Spotlight section, starting on [page 27](#).

## Colorado Occupational Characteristics

In 2024, the major occupational groups with the largest shares of occupational employment in Colorado were: office and administrative support (10.7%), sales and related (10.6%), and food preparation and serving related (10.0%). In 2000, business and financial operations only had a 3.8% share of employment, but by 2024 that proportion increased to over 9%. Transportation and material moving (7.6%) was the other major occupational group in 2024 with an employment share that exceeded 7%.

Despite having the largest share in 2024, office and administrative support has also experienced the most notable decrease in employment share over the past quarter century, declining from 17.5% in 2000. Some of that drop is due to a [classification change in 2018 that shifted stock clerks and order fillers into the transportation and material moving occupational group](#). There are also technological changes (e.g. the rise of computer use within office settings) that are likely factors in the reduction of that share over time. Further discussion on technology's impact on labor can be viewed in the [Potential Headwinds section](#). The other two major occupational groups with meaningful decreases in Colorado employment shares over the past 25 years are construction and extraction (from 6.5% in 2000 to 4.8% in 2024) and production (from 6.1% in 2000 to 3.2% in 2024).

Similar to industry designations, the [Standard Occupational Classification](#) (SOC) system is utilized by the BLS, Colorado's LMI, and other statistical agencies to classify and report on occupational data across the state and nation. Workers are classified into over 850 detailed occupations, which can be aggregated into 22 major occupational groups. It is important to distinguish that an occupation can span across many different industries and that occupational data are not interchangeable with industry data. Figure 5 shows how Colorado's employment was distributed by major occupational group (2-digit SOC) in 2000, 2007, 2019, and 2024. Total occupational employment in Colorado in 2024 was approximately 2.9 million jobs, compared to 2.2 million jobs in 2000.

**Figure 5**
**Share of Colorado's Occupational Employment by Major Occupational Group, for Select Years**
[Accessible data for Figure 5](#)

Major Occupational Group	2000 Employment Share	2007 Employment Share	2019 Employment Share	2024 Employment Share
Office and Administrative Support	17.5%	16.9%	12.1%	10.7%
Sales and Related	11.2%	11.5%	10.7%	10.6%
Food Preparation and Serving Related	8.5%	9.0%	9.7%	9.5%
Business and Financial Operations	3.8%	5.4%	7.7%	9.3%
Transportation and Material Moving	6.5%	6.1%	7.3%	7.6%
Management	6.4%	4.6%	4.4%	5.5%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	3.8%	4.6%	5.4%	5.5%
Educational Instruction and Library	5.0%	5.6%	5.4%	5.4%
Construction and Extraction	6.5%	6.5%	5.4%	4.8%
Computer and Mathematical	4.2%	3.6%	4.6%	4.7%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	4.2%	4.0%	3.9%	3.8%
Healthcare Support	1.8%	2.0%	3.6%	3.5%
Production	6.1%	4.5%	3.9%	3.2%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	3.4%	3.4%	3.1%	3.0%
Architecture and Engineering	2.4%	2.5%	2.4%	2.5%
Personal Care and Service	2.2%	2.7%	2.6%	2.5%

Characteristics of Colorado’s Labor Market

Major Occupational Group	2000 Employment Share	2007 Employment Share	2019 Employment Share	2024 Employment Share
Protective Service	2.1%	2.1%	2.2%	2.2%
Community and Social Service	1.1%	1.2%	1.5%	1.9%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	1.3%	1.7%	1.6%	1.5%
Life, Physical, and Social Science	1.1%	1.3%	1.2%	1.3%
Legal	0.7%	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%
Total Occupational Employment	2,202,840	2,258,240	2,678,490	2,891,210

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics). **Notes:** table is sorted in descending order by 2024 shares; bolded cells within each year represent occupational groups with a top four employment share for that year.

Like with industry sectors on [Page 16](#), the next table (Figure 6) presents the 2024 location quotients for Colorado’s major occupational groups. Architecture and engineering (1.51), computer and mathematical (1.40), and business and financial operations (1.39) have the highest location quotients, while health care support (0.72), farming, fishing, and forestry (0.67), and production (0.57) have the lowest location quotients.

**Figure 6**  
**Colorado 2024 Location Quotients by Major Occupational Group**  
[Accessible data for Figure 6](#)

Major Occupational Group	2024 Location Quotient
Architecture and Engineering	1.51
Computer and Mathematical	1.40
Business and Financial Operations	1.39
Life, Physical, and Social Science	1.34



Major Occupational Group	2024 Location Quotient
Personal Care and Service	1.24
Sales and Related	1.22
Construction and Extraction	1.16
Community and Social Service	1.14
Legal	1.12
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	1.08
Food Preparation and Serving Related	1.07
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	1.05
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	0.97
Educational Instruction and Library	0.92
Protective Service	0.92
Office and Administrative Support	0.90
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	0.88
Transportation and Material Moving	0.85
Management	0.78
Healthcare Support	0.72
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	0.67
Production	0.57

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics). **Notes:** a location quotient above 1 = a higher employment concentration compared to the U.S., while a location quotient below 1 = a lower concentration.

# Colorado Workforce Demographics

The final portion of this section focuses on 2000, 2007, 2019, and 2024 distributional statistics on select Colorado workforce demographics: age groups, levels of educational attainment, sex, and race and ethnicity.

Colorado’s labor force exceeded 3.2 million people in 2024, compared to 2.3 million in 2000.

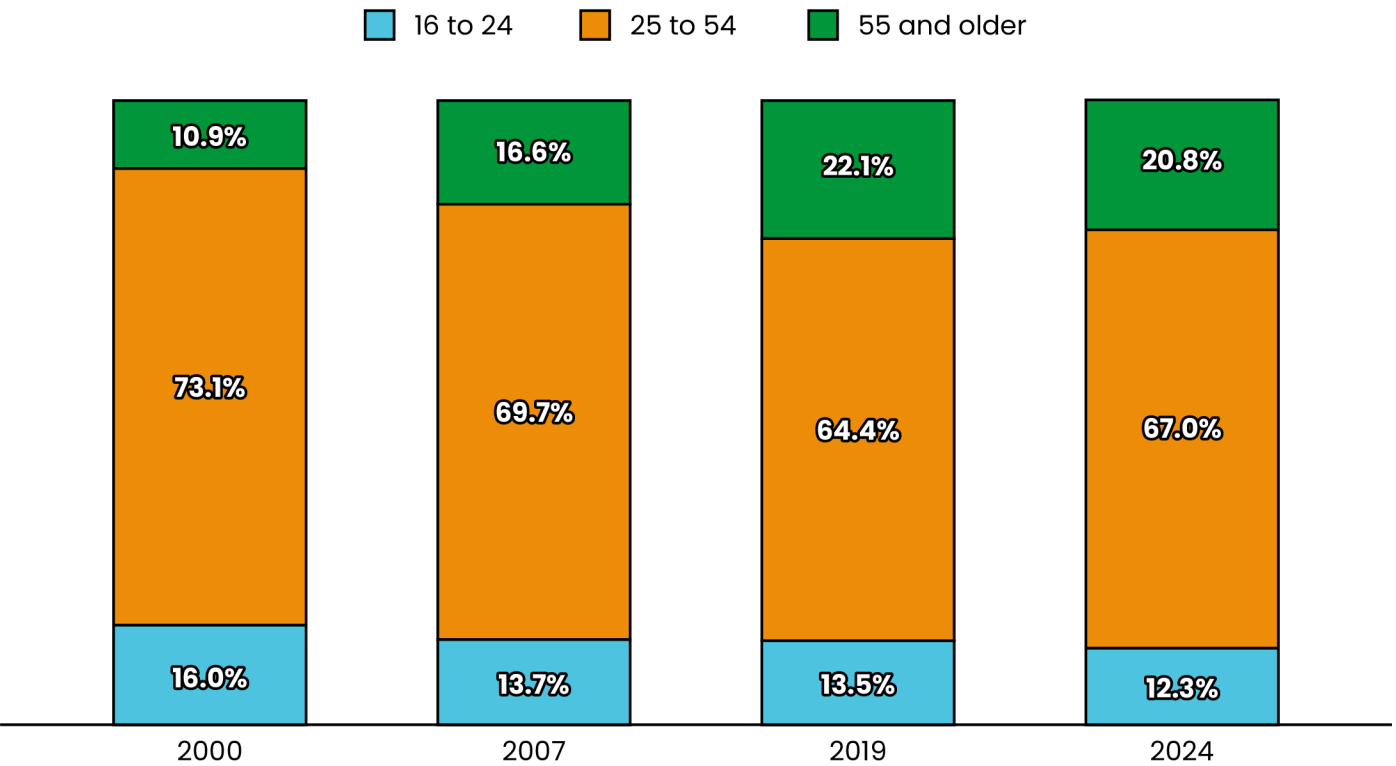
In 2024, the 25 to 54 age group made up 67.0% of Colorado’s labor force, followed by the 55 and older cohort (20.8%), and those aged 16 to 24 (12.3%). Due to an aging population, the proportion of Colora-

ans 55 and older in the labor force has increased substantially since 2000, when the share was under 11%. Further information on Colorado’s aging population can be viewed in the section titled *Colorado Population Factors to Consider: Aging and Migration* starting on [page 77](#).

Figure 7 displays the distribution of Colorado’s 16 and older [labor force](#) by three broad age groups: 16 to 24 (light blue bar), 25 to 54 (orange bar), and 55 and older (green bar). For clarity, to be considered as part of the labor force, an individual must either be employed, or unemployed but able, available, and actively seeking work. Unlike the industry and occupational data presented above, labor force estimates include the self-employed and others not attached to traditional payroll employers.

Figure 7

Distribution of Colorado’s Labor Force by Broad Age Group, for Select Years  
[Accessible data for Figure 7](#)



Source: Colorado LMI Office (Current Population Survey).

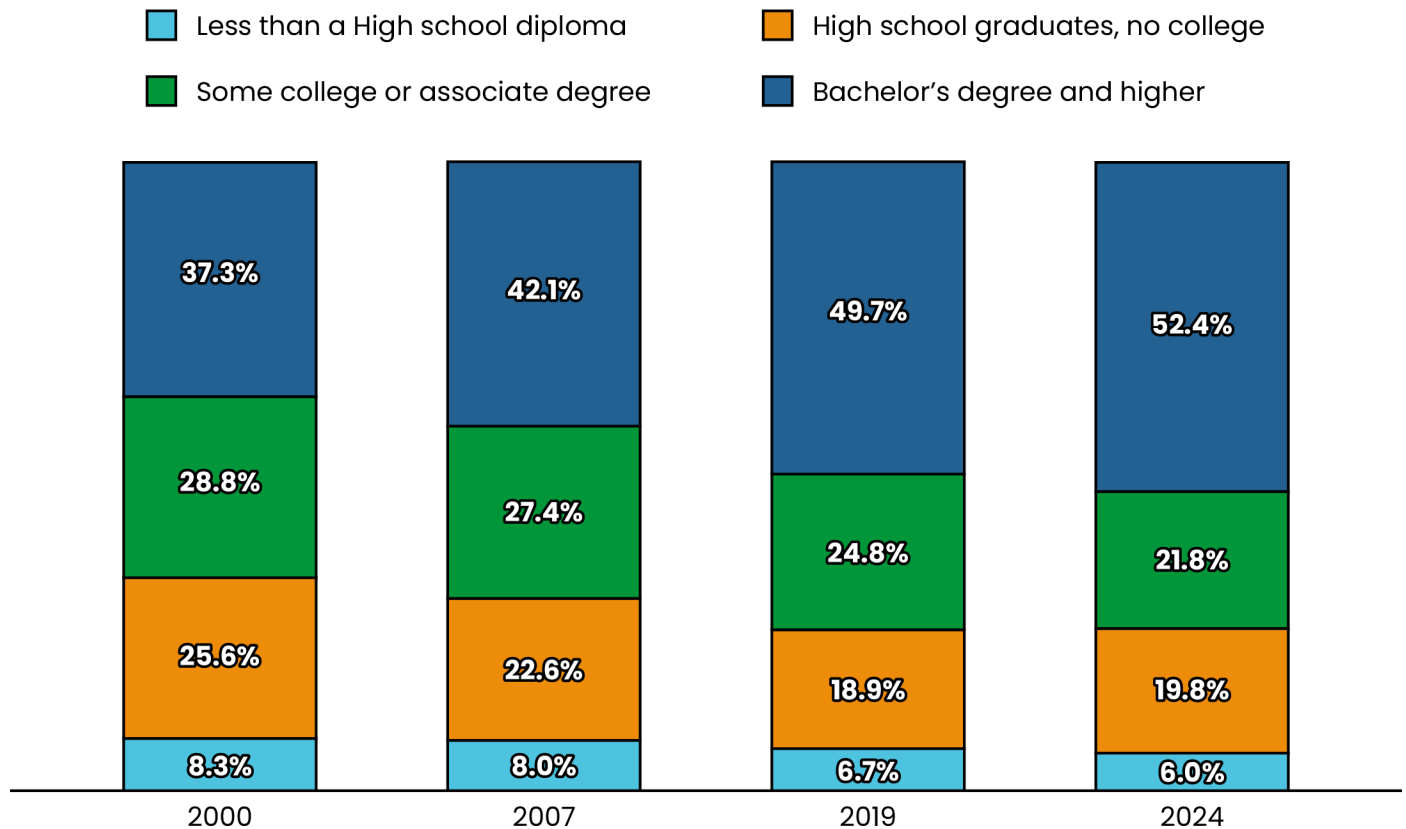
The next chart (Figure 8) breaks out the distribution of Colorado's 25 years and older labor force by four levels of educational attainment: less than a high school diploma (light blue bar), high school graduates with no college (orange bar), some college or associate degree (green bar), and a bachelor's degree or higher (dark blue bar). In 2000, only 37% of Colorado's 25 and older labor force had at least a bachelor's degree, while in 2024 that share

surpassed 52%. Subsequently, every other educational attainment group has experienced declines in their relative labor force shares over the past quarter century. Colorado is a highly educated state, trailing only Massachusetts with the share of its 25 and older population having a bachelor's degree or higher (based on an analysis of [2023 data from the U.S. Census Bureau](#)).

**Figure 8**

**Distribution of Colorado's 25 Years and Older Labor Force by Level of Educational Attainment, for Select Years**

[Accessible data for Figure 8](#)



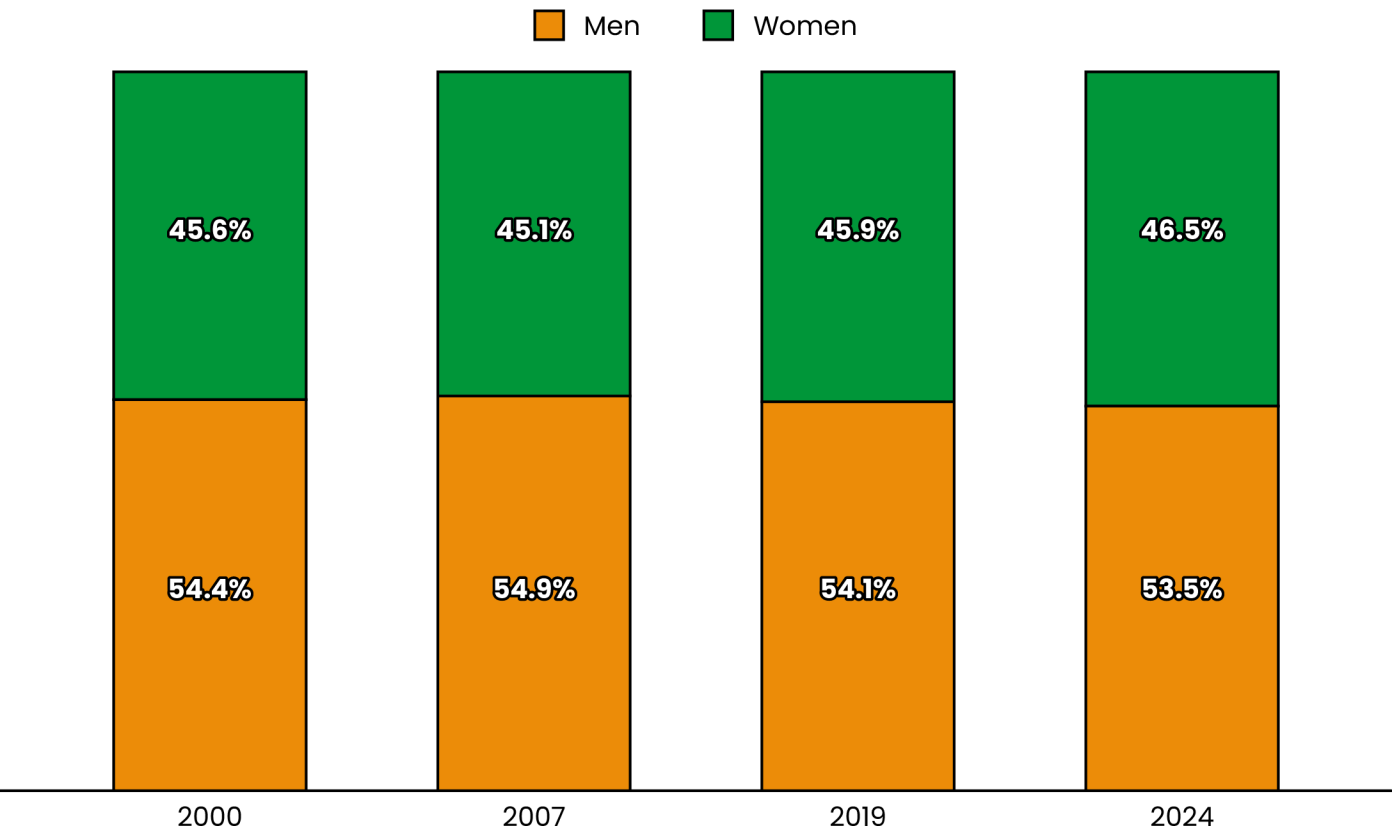
**Source:** Colorado LMI Office (Current Population Survey).

The distribution of Colorado’s labor force by gender has not changed substantially over the past 25 years, as presented in Figure 9 on the next page. From 2000 and 2024, men (orange bar) have represented between 53% and 55% of Colorado’s labor

force, with the rate peaking in 2007, prior to the Great Recession. Conversely, the labor force shares for Colorado women (green bar) have ranged between 45% and 47% during that same period, showing steady gains compared to the early 2000s.

Figure 9

Distribution of Colorado’s Labor Force by Gender, for Select Years  
[Accessible data for Figure 9](#)



Source: Colorado LMI Office (Current Population Survey).



Finally, while there are some [labor force statistics available by race](#), those data can be fairly limited in scope. However, there are [employment data available from the U.S. Census Bureau](#) that provides relatively detailed breakouts by race: White, Black or African American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Two or More Race Groups. The following table (Figure 10) shows how Colorado's employment has been distributed among these racial groups. The state's

demographic composition has become more diverse over the past quarter century, as the overall share of employment has shifted from 90.0% white in 2000 to 85.6% white in 2024. Over the same period, the Black or African American share has increased from 4.2% to 5.4%, the Asian proportion has risen from 2.6% to 4.4%, and Two or More Race Groups now make up nearly 3% of Colorado's employment, versus 1.6% in 2000.

**Figure 10**

**Share of Colorado's Employment by Race, for Select Years**

[Accessible data for Figure 10](#)

Race	2000 Employment Share	2007 Employment Share	2019 Employment Share	2024 Employment Share
White	90.0%	89.3%	87.0%	85.6%
Black or African American	4.2%	4.3%	5.0%	5.4%
Asian	2.6%	3.0%	3.8%	4.4%
Two or More Race Groups	1.6%	1.9%	2.5%	2.9%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%

**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau (Quarterly Workforce Indicators). **Notes:** table is sorted in descending order by 2024 shares.

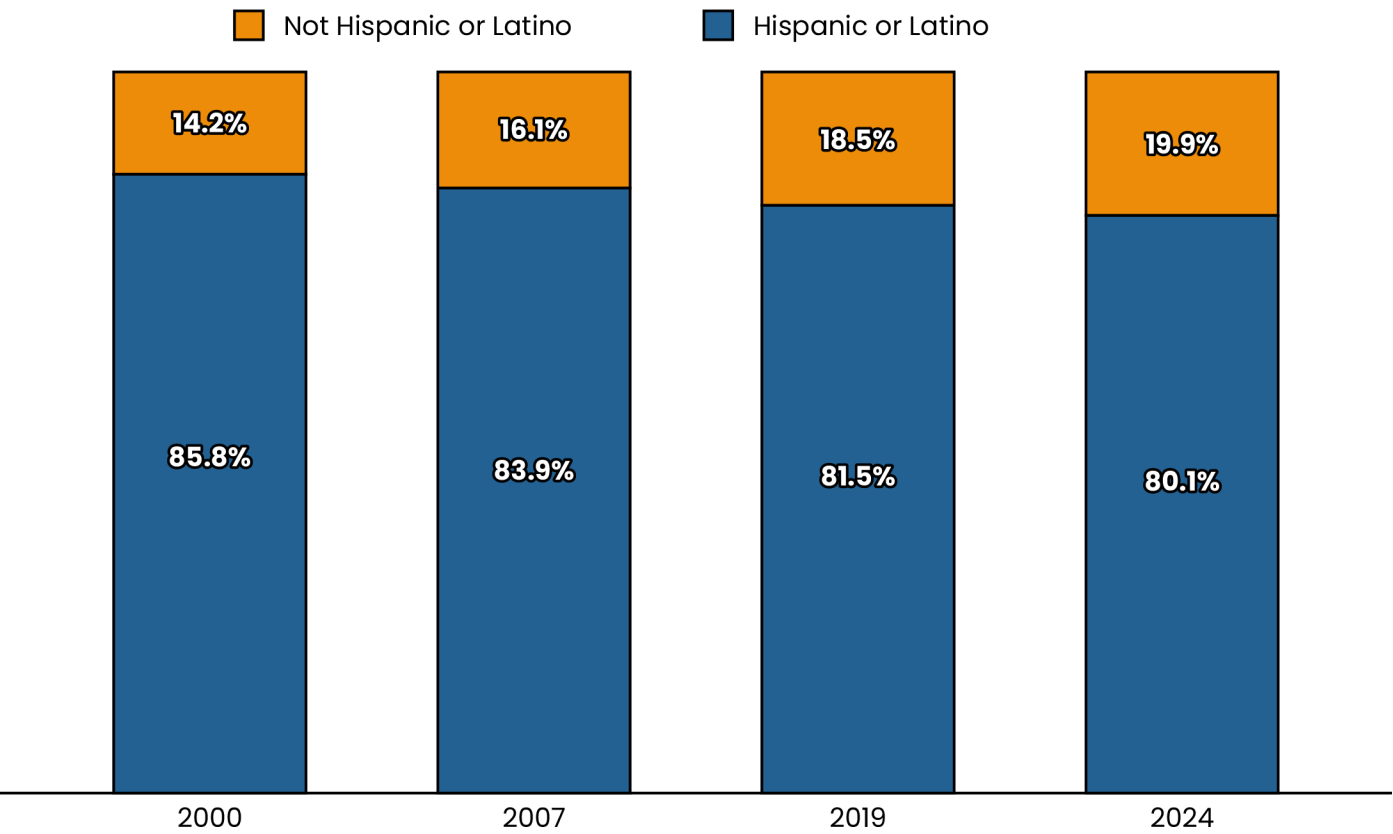
Similar to the previous table, the chart below (Figure 11) looks at the share of Colorado’s employment by ethnicity: either Hispanic or Latino or Not Hispanic or Latino (note: any race can identify as a Hispanic or Latino ethnicity). Hispanic or Latino’s share of total Colorado employment has steadily increased

over the past 25 years, moving from around 14% in 2000 to just under 20% in 2024. The shifts in Colorado’s employment shares by race and ethnicity since 2000 proportionally reflect changes in the population, as the state has become more diverse over time.

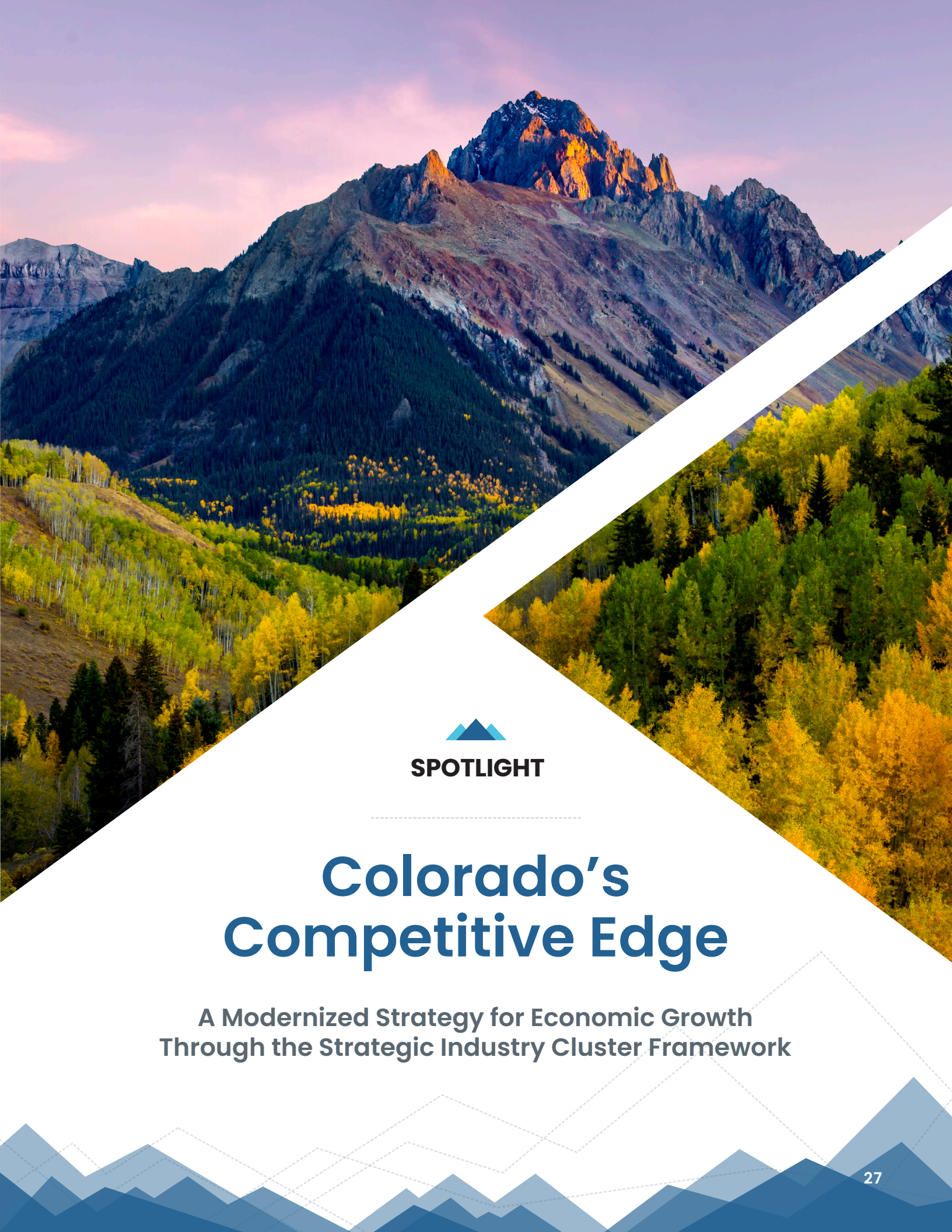
**Figure 11**

**Share of Colorado’s Employment by Ethnicity, for Select Years**

[Accessible data for Figure 11](#)



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau (Quarterly Workforce Indicators).



**SPOTLIGHT**

# Colorado's Competitive Edge

A Modernized Strategy for Economic Growth  
Through the Strategic Industry Cluster Framework



Spotlight: Colorado’s Competitive Edge

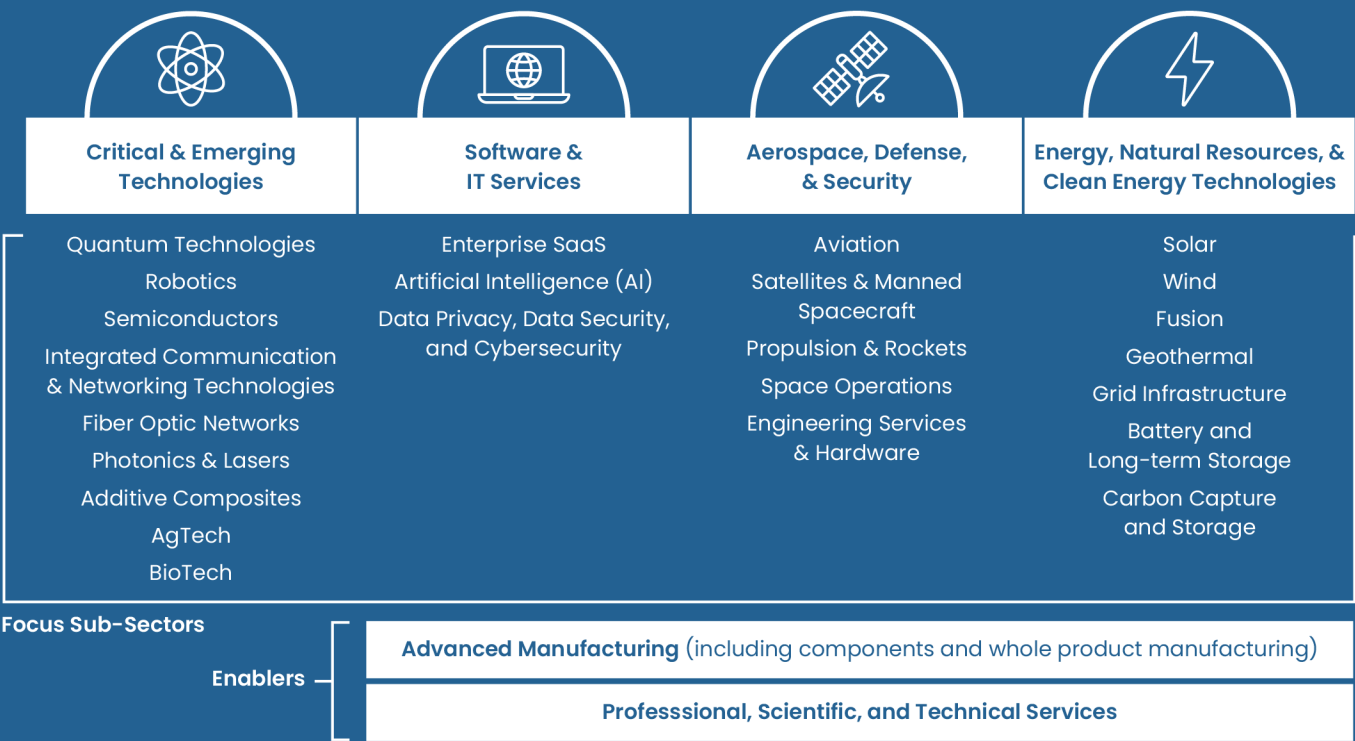
To maintain and enhance Colorado’s competitive advantage in a rapidly evolving global economy, the Global Business Development division within Colorado’s Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) reviewed the 14 Key Industries framework in 2025 and introduced a new Strategic Industry Cluster framework to inform target activities for the next five years.

This strategic pivot was initiated to better reflect the state’s technological and business landscape, ensuring that economic development efforts are focused on the highest-potential opportunities for

investment, job creation, and sustainable growth. The result is a streamlined focus on four Strategic Industry Clusters, with two key enablers, that represent the future of Colorado’s economy. Industries that fall outside of these clusters still maintain critical importance to Colorado’s economy, as they are foundational to community development such as health care and education, or cornerstones of our lifestyle economy such as arts, entertainment and recreation. These industries are captured through other economic development activities at OEDIT outside of Global Business Development.

Colorado’s Economic Future

Global Business Development’s Strategic Industry Cluster/Sub-Cluster Framework



This Strategic Industry Cluster framework consolidates the state’s proactive outreach into four high-impact ecosystems. These clusters were not chosen arbitrarily; they are the result of a comprehensive economic review, selected based on their significant economic impact, clear comparative advantage for Colorado, and strategic alignment

with state and federal initiatives. The cluster framework is also a re-positioning from the prior 14 key industries. By design, some key industries show up in more than one cluster. For example, software engineers are in both Software & IT and Aerospace, Defense & Security. This cluster approach helps us view the entire ecosystem.

- 1. Critical & Emerging Technologies:** This cluster is the engine of future innovation, encompassing high-growth sub-sectors like **Quantum, Photonics, Semiconductors, and Robotics**. It leverages Colorado's dense engineering talent and world-class research institutions to capture venture capital and federal funding.
- 2. Software & IT Services:** Building on Colorado's established strength, this cluster focuses on high-value areas such as **Enterprise SaaS, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Cybersecurity**. It represents a significant portion of the state's high-wage, high-growth jobs.
- 3. Aerospace, Defense, & Security:** This cluster capitalizes on Colorado's unique assets, including a major Air Force presence and a dense ecosystem of private aerospace companies. It covers everything from **aviation and satellites to space operations and advanced hardware**.
- 4. Energy, Natural Resources, & CleanTech:** This cluster positions Colorado as a leader in the global energy transition. It includes traditional resources but places a strong emphasis on future-facing technologies like **solar, wind, fusion, nuclear, geothermal, and carbon capture utilization and sequestration**.

Critical to ensuring the successful development of these industry clusters, are two important enablers of Advanced Manufacturing and Professional, Technical, and Scientific Services.

## The Business Case: A Focus on Return on Investment (ROI)

This strategic realignment is designed to maximize the return on the state's economic development investments. The data demonstrate why these four clusters are the right focus:

- » **Exceptional Growth:** Each cluster has a historical employment growth rate that significantly outpaces both the Colorado and U.S. averages. The Software & IT Services cluster, for example, has grown at a rate of **6.3% annually**, compared to the state average of 1.9%.
- » **High-Wage Jobs:** The average annual wages in these clusters are substantially higher than the state average, with Software & IT Services leading at **\$164K**. This creates economic prosperity and attracts top-tier talent.
- » **Strong Multiplier Effect:** For every job created in these clusters, several additional jobs are created in the broader economy. The Critical & Emerging Technologies cluster has the highest multiplier effect at **4.9x**, meaning it is a powerful engine for statewide job growth.
- » **National Leadership:** Colorado ranks in the **top 10 nationally** for its concentration of employment (location quotient) in all four clusters, demonstrating a true competitive advantage.

**Note:** The data above were calculated during a study commissioned by OEDIT. Multiplier effects are for total indirect jobs and were calculated using a weighted average of cluster employment by the multiplier effect for each 2-digit NAICS code. Data Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2023 Annual Averages by Area, Economic Policy Institute for employment multipliers for the U.S. economy, Lightcast.

By focusing its resources on these four strategic clusters, Global Business Development in Colorado is making a clear statement to the global business community: we are investing in the industries of the future, we have the talent and infrastructure to support them, and we are committed to being a top destination for innovation and growth.



# Trends and Conditions of Colorado's Labor Market

Another crucial part of evaluating the talent pipeline in Colorado is to also assess the trends and conditions of the state's labor market. This section will analyze, describe, and discuss key labor market data for Colorado, including unemployment, job growth, and job postings and openings. In 2025, Colorado faced a rapidly cooling labor market relative to the U.S., following years of strong economic recovery after the pandemic. Unemployment has been higher than forecasted in 2024, while job growth, especially in the private sector, has been slower. However, the state has also seen higher labor force participation and wage growth relative to the nation. The data used in this report were the most recent at the time of writing. Due to the development and review process of the Talent Pipeline Report as well as the cadence and schedule of when different data are published, there are limitations. Additionally, information on factors possibly impacting Colorado's labor market and talent pipeline in the short, medium, and long-term are highlighted in the *Potential Headwinds* section, starting on [page 107](#).

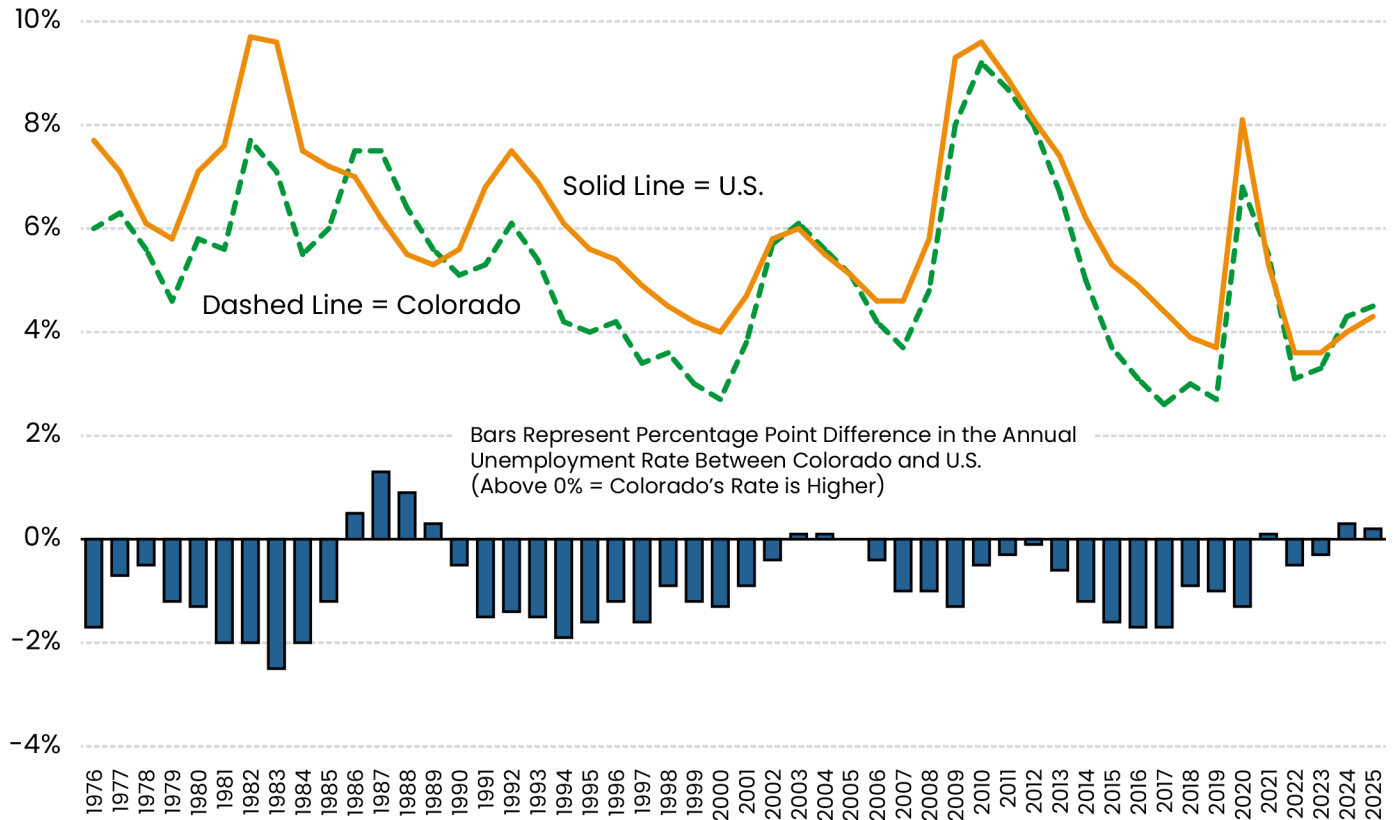
## Colorado Unemployment Rate

One important labor market metric is the unemployment rate. This statistic measures the share of an area's labor force that is unemployed (able, available, and actively seeking work). Unemployment is also [more broadly defined than just those receiving unemployment insurance benefits](#). Every month, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and Labor Market Information (LMI) offices across the U.S., calculate and publish national, state-level, and substate (e.g. counties and metro areas) unemployment rates.

On an annualized basis, Colorado's unemployment rate was 4.3% in 2024 and 4.5% through the first eight months of 2025, which is up from 3.1% in 2022 and 3.3% in 2023 when the state's economy was rapidly recovering from the pandemic. As shown in the following chart (Figure 12A), Colorado's recent unemployment rates are relatively low on a historical basis. Most recently, in 2024, the annualized rate exceeded the U.S. rate, with Colorado's unemployment at 4.3% and national unemployment at 4.0%, which is an atypical occurrence over the past 35 years. A slowdown in Colorado business hiring and employment growth over the past couple of years is a likely factor driving the upward shift in the state's unemployment rate over time and compared to the U.S. Discussion on jobs data can be viewed starting on [page 34](#) in this section. Economic and revenue forecasts from the [Colorado Office of State Planning and Budgeting](#) and [Colorado Legislative Council Staff](#) also analyze the state's unemployment rate and broader labor market. Additionally, an [October 2025 report](#) from the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City assessed possible drivers behind Colorado's relatively higher unemployment rate compared to the nation.

Figure 12A

## Colorado and U.S. Unemployment Rates, 1976 to 2025

[Accessible data for Figure 12A](#)

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Local Area Unemployment Statistics); author calculations. **Notes:** 2025 rates based on annualized data from January to August; data not seasonally adjusted; unemployment rates for each year can be viewed within the spreadsheet linked above.

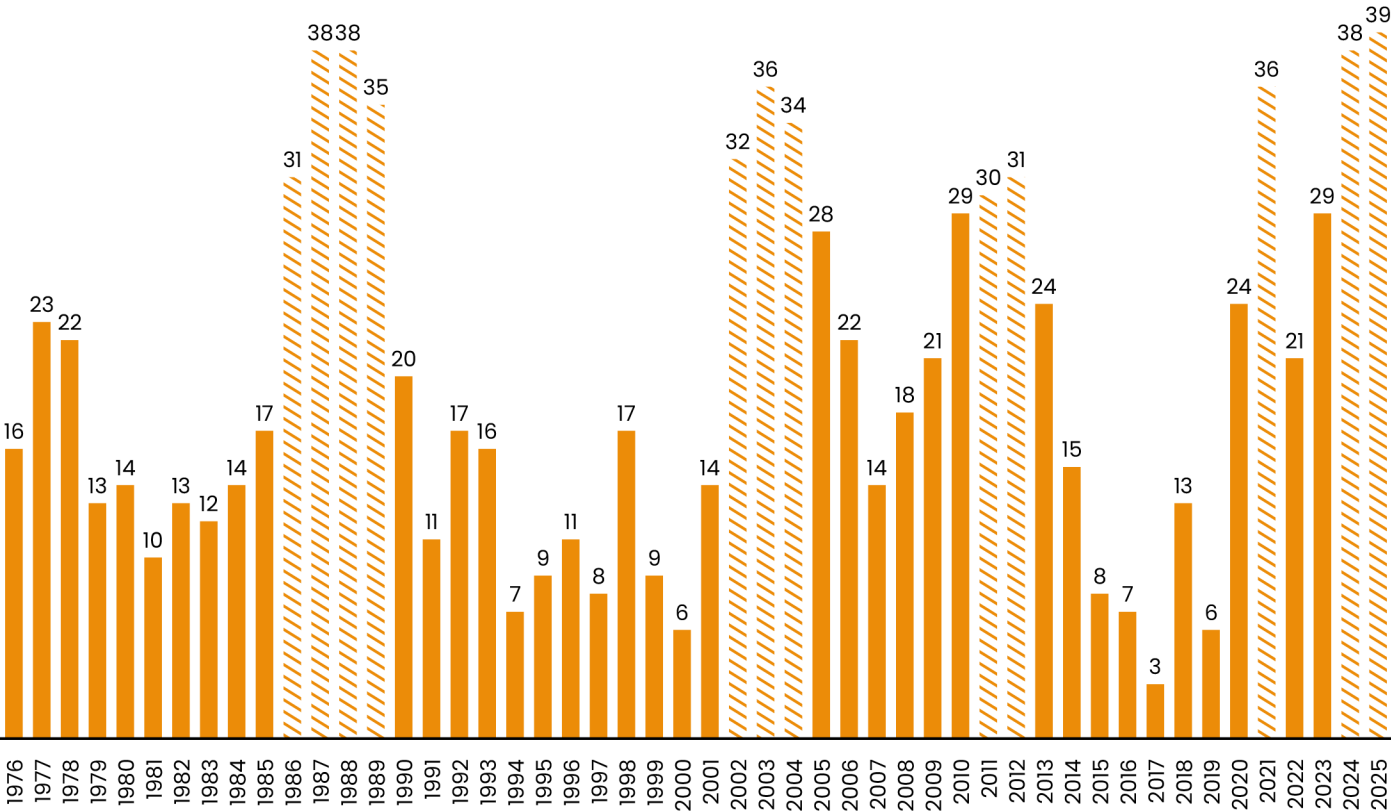
Compared to other states, Colorado's unemployment rates in 2024 and 2025 ranked 38<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> nationally, respectively. Figure 12B on the following page displays how Colorado's annual unemployment rate has ranked nationally going back to 1976 (when comparable data was first available). Solid orange bars in the chart represent years in which the state's unemployment rate has ranked 29<sup>th</sup> or better, while the striped orange bars reflect years

with a ranking between 30<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup>. Over the past 50 years, Colorado's annual unemployment rate has ranked 30<sup>th</sup> or higher 12 times, which spans over five distinct periods: 1986 to 1989 (overlapping a regional downturn); 2002 to 2004 (coinciding with 2001 national recession and recovery); 2011 to 2012 (coinciding with the Great Recession and recovery); 2021 (coinciding with the pandemic and first year of recovery); and 2024 and 2025 (the past two years).

Figure 12B

Colorado's Annual Unemployment Rate National Ranking, 1976 to 2025

[Accessible data for Figure 12B](#)



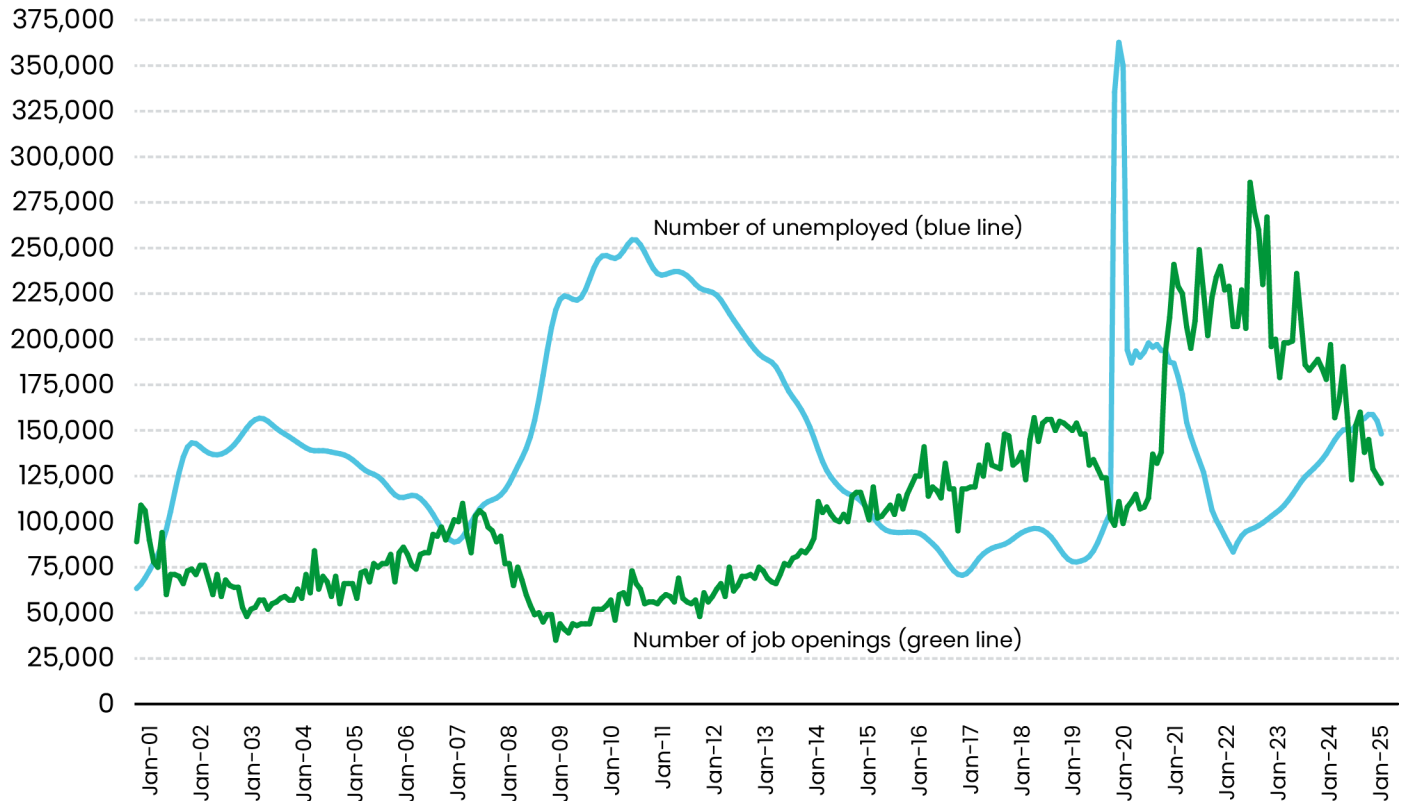
**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Local Area Unemployment Statistics); author calculations. **Notes:** 2025 ranking based on annualized data from January to August; national rankings based on unrounded calculations; District of Columbia is not included in the national rankings; data not seasonally adjusted; unemployment rates for each year, along with the ranks, can be viewed within the spreadsheet linked above.

## Colorado Unemployment and Job Openings

Historically, there has been a fairly steady relationship between unemployment and job openings – as unemployment falls, job openings rise, and as unemployment increases, job openings decline. This connection was very evident after 2020, as post-pandemic labor market disruptions resulted in employers posting a record number of job openings and unemployment rapidly decreasing from

historically high levels. While prior Talent Pipeline Reports have discussed this labor market relationship, enough meaningful shifts have occurred over the past several years to warrant an update.

Figure 13 shows the number of monthly job openings (green line) and unemployed persons (blue line) in Colorado from 2001 to mid-2025 (note: this job openings data is derived from a monthly BLS survey, rather than from online postings, which are discussed on [page 41](#)).

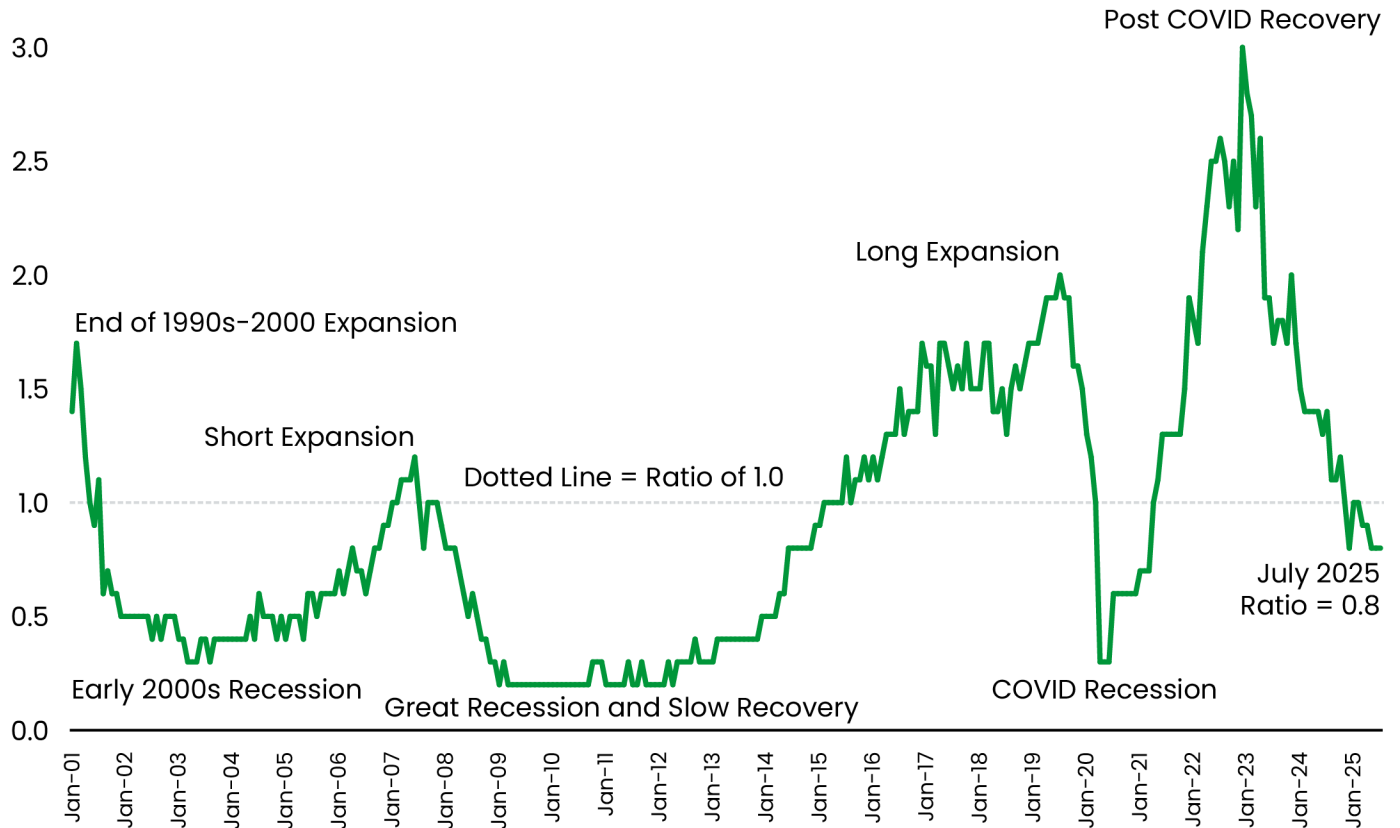
**Figure 13****Relationship Between the Number of Job Openings and Unemployment in Colorado**[Accessible data for Figure 13](#)

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Local Area Unemployment Statistics; Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey). **Notes:** data seasonally adjusted; data through July 2025.

Following the pandemic, unemployment fell quickly in Colorado, dropping from over 350,000 people in April 2020 to below 100,000 individuals by mid-2022. Conversely, job openings climbed from around 100,000 during the height of the pandemic to a record level exceeding 250,000 in early 2023. Since that point, Colorado job openings have declined to under 125,000 per month, while unemployment has increased to around 150,000 persons, as of July 2025.

The information from the previous chart can be converted into a single ratio, referred to as the number of job openings per unemployed person (Figure 14). The data is useful to consolidate the relationship between openings and the unemployed into a single metric and can mirror the business cycle.

Generally, a high ratio aligns with economic expansions, while lower ratios tend to reflect recessionary periods (as noted in the chart below). Additionally, a higher ratio tends to favor job seekers, as openings are abundant and employers have to compete for talent. Based on recent data, Colorado's job openings per unemployed person ratio is now below 1.0, representing a significant change from 2022 and 2023 when the metric consistently exceeded 1.5. Despite the value in the ratio, it is important to recognize that it gives an incomplete picture of all potential job seekers (employed individuals who may also be looking are not included) and it does not capture industry trends at a state level.

**Figure 14****Number of Job Openings Per Unemployed Person in Colorado**[Accessible data for Figure 14](#)

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Local Area Unemployment Statistics; Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey). **Notes:** data seasonally adjusted; data through July 2025.

## Colorado Total Nonfarm Job Growth

Like the unemployment rate, another important labor market indicator is job growth, which measures the change in payroll employment over time. On a monthly basis, the BLS and LMI offices across the nation, produce and publish job statistics, which can be broken out for the [U.S.](#), as well as by [state](#), metro area, and industry. Total nonfarm, which includes both the private sector and government, is the top-level jobs employment estimate for states and the U.S. Presently, total nonfarm employment in Colorado is around 3 million jobs.

Mirroring the concept of Figure 12B, the following chart (Figure 15) displays how Colorado's total nonfarm job growth rate has ranked from 1976 to 2025. In this instance, the growth rate is simply measuring the percent change in the number of Colorado total nonfarm jobs in one year compared to the prior year. For example, in 2019, total nonfarm employment in Colorado was 2,790,100, an increase of 62,800 jobs, or 2.3%, compared to the 2018 total of 2,727,300. Colorado's total nonfarm growth rate of 2.3% in 2019 ranked 6<sup>th</sup> nationally when compared to other states. Similarly, through the first eight months of 2025 (the most recent data available), Colorado's average total nonfarm employment was 2,978,300, an increase of 13,100 jobs, or 0.4%, compared to the same span of months in 2024, ranking 41<sup>st</sup> nationally. Utilizing a growth rate and relative national ranking enables comparisons over time for Colorado.



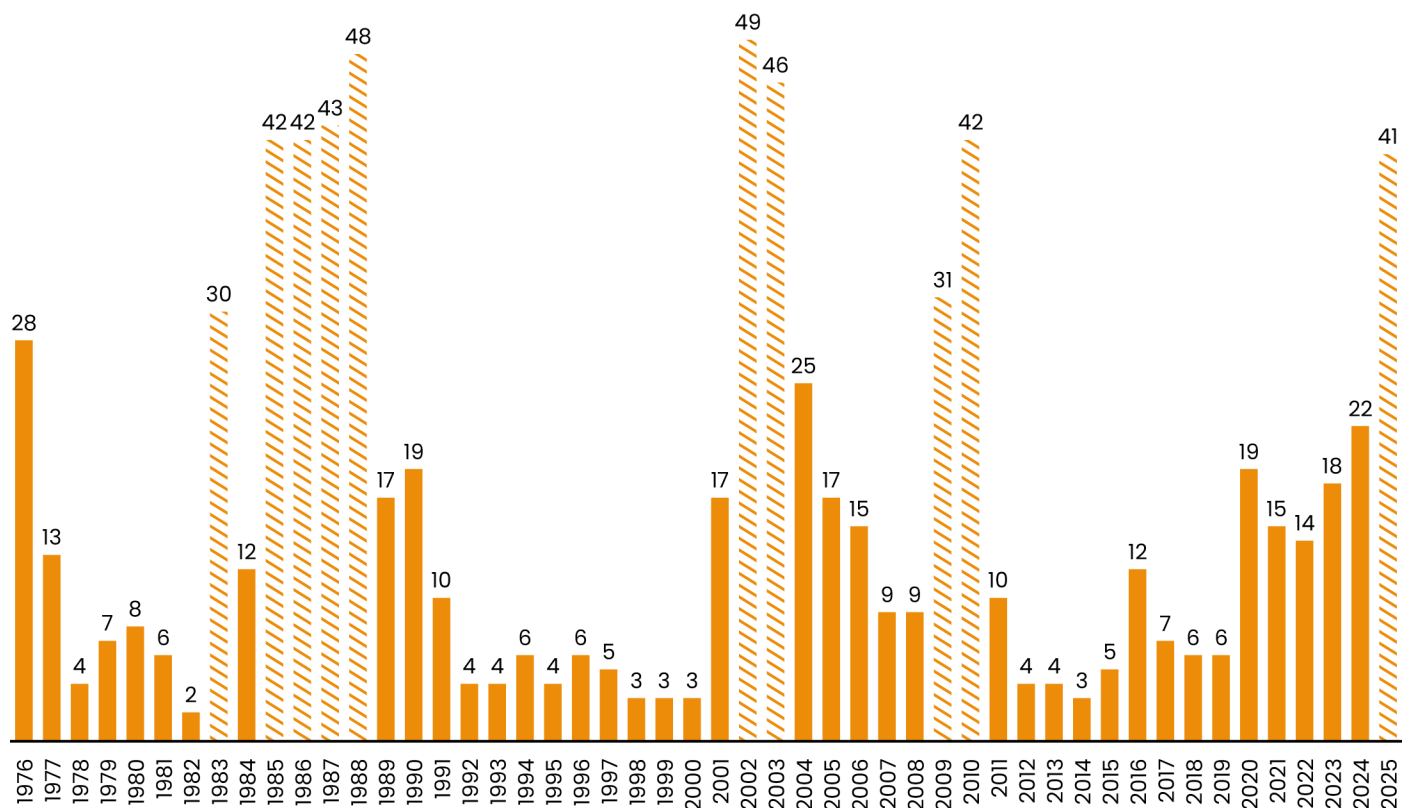
As with the unemployment rate, Colorado's relative national standing in total nonfarm job growth has diminished in 2025 compared to the past half century and years following the Great Recession. Based on the most recent data available, 2025 is only the tenth time since 1976 in which Colorado's annual total nonfarm job growth rate has

ranked between 30<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> nationally (denoted by the striped orange bars). Although a bottom 10 ranking in total nonfarm job growth is not unprecedented for Colorado, it historically coincides with regional or national recessions (1985–1988, 2002–2003, and 2010).

**Figure 15**

### Colorado's Annual Total Nonfarm Job Growth Rate National Ranking, 1976 to 2025

[Accessible data for Figure 15](#)



**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Local Area Unemployment Statistics); author calculations. **Notes:** 2025 ranking based on annualized data from January to August; national rankings based on unrounded calculations; District of Columbia is not included in the national rankings; data not seasonally adjusted; unemployment rates for each year, along with the ranks, can be viewed within the spreadsheet linked above.

When looking at the primary, broad components of total nonfarm employment (private sector and government), growth weakness for Colorado over the past couple years has been driven by the private

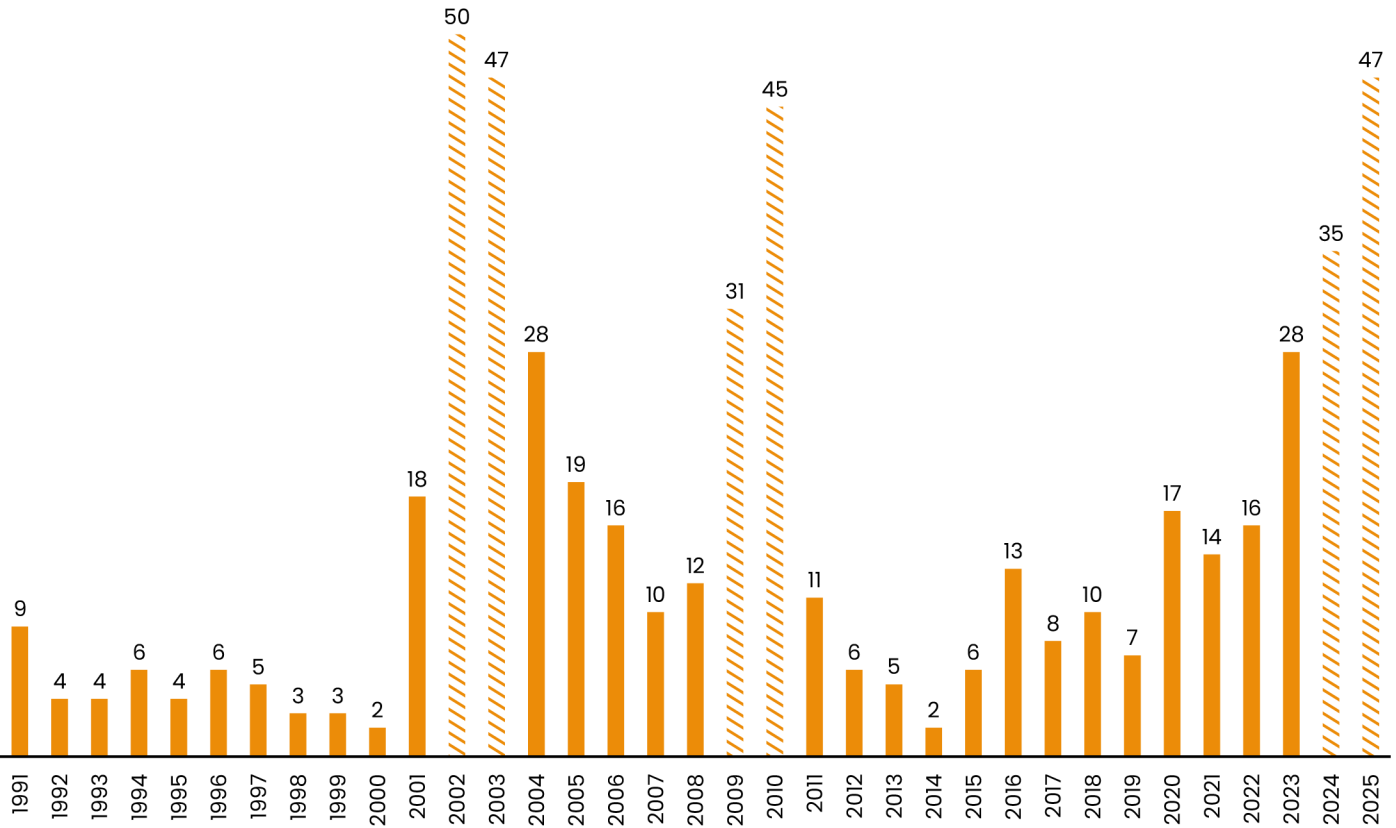
sector and partially offset by gains in state and local government. The next part of the *Trends and Conditions of Colorado's Labor Market* section will focus on analysis of the state's private sector employment.

# Colorado Private Sector Job Growth

The private sector has been instrumental for job creation in Colorado. For example, between 2000 and 2024 the state added over 750,000 total nonfarm payroll jobs, with the private sector comprising 80% of those long-term employment gains. Like with the previous chart, Figure 16 compares how Colorado's private sector growth compares to other states via a ranking measurement (private sector growth rate data is only available back to 1991). When comparing

private sector employment in the first eight months of 2025 to the first eight months of 2024, Colorado has added fewer than 1,400 jobs, which translates to an annualized growth rate of 0.1%. That private sector growth rate of 0.1% ranks 47<sup>th</sup> nationally, representing only the third time over the past 35 years with a ranking that low for the state (2002 and 2003 the other occurrences). Additionally, Colorado's private sector job growth in 2023 and 2024 ranked 28<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup>, respectively. For comparison, Colorado's annual job growth in the private sector ranked top 20 nationally in 27 of the past 35 years.

**Figure 16**  
**Colorado's Annual Private Sector Job Growth Rate National Ranking, 1991 to 2025**  
[Accessible data for Figure 16](#)



**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Local Area Unemployment Statistics); author calculations. **Notes:** 2025 ranking based on annualized data from January to August; national rankings based on unrounded calculations; District of Columbia is not included in the national rankings; data not seasonally adjusted; unemployment rates for each year, along with the ranks, can be viewed within the spreadsheet linked above.

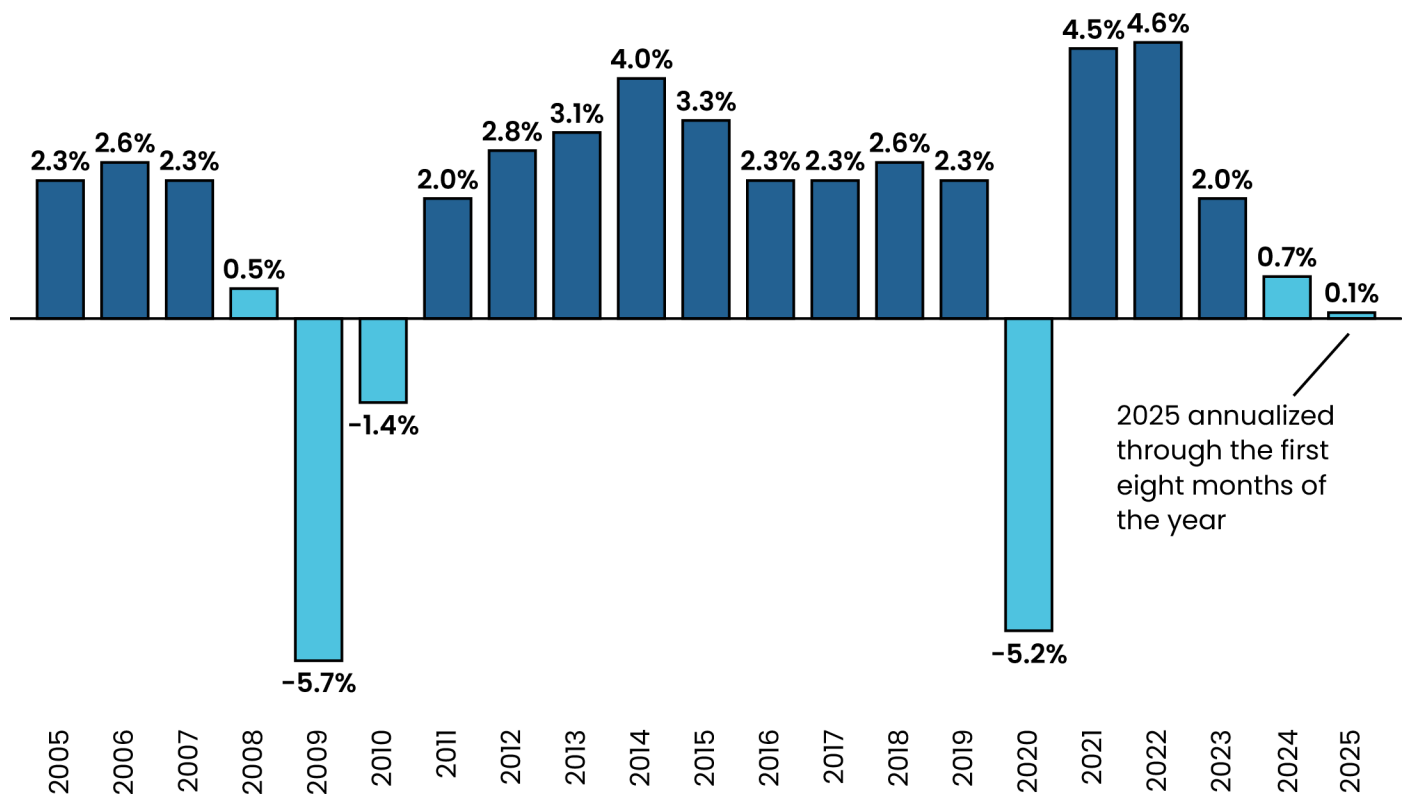
To provide additional context to Colorado's recent private sector job growth, the next chart (Figure 17) displays the state's rate of private sector job growth from 2005 to 2025. Bars shown in dark blue reflect a growth rate of at least 2.0%, while the lighter bars represent years with lower growth rates. Over

the period of years presented in the chart, 15 had private sector growth rates equal to or greater than 2.0%, while six failed to reach that threshold: 2008 to 2010 (leading into and overlapping the Great Recession), 2020 (the height of the pandemic), and the past two years.

**Figure 17**

### Colorado's Private Sector Job Growth Rate (2005 to 2025)

[Accessible data for Figure 17](#)



**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Current Employment Statistics). **Notes:** data not seasonally adjusted.

As previously mentioned, the BLS and LMI offices produce and publish monthly jobs data at the industry level. This information can be utilized to analyze and assess how jobs in Colorado have been gained or lost over time by industry. The charts on the next page highlight and compare those Colorado industry trends for distinct two-year periods: the change in jobs from August 2023 to August 2025 (Figure 18A: the most recent two-year period available) and

the change in jobs from August 2017 to August 2019 (Figure 18B: a similar two-year period during the last economic expansion). While the industry breakouts below have some differences compared to what was presented in the *Characteristics of Colorado's Labor Market* section, they are helpful in evaluating growth trends, particularly by the type of private sector industry or government.

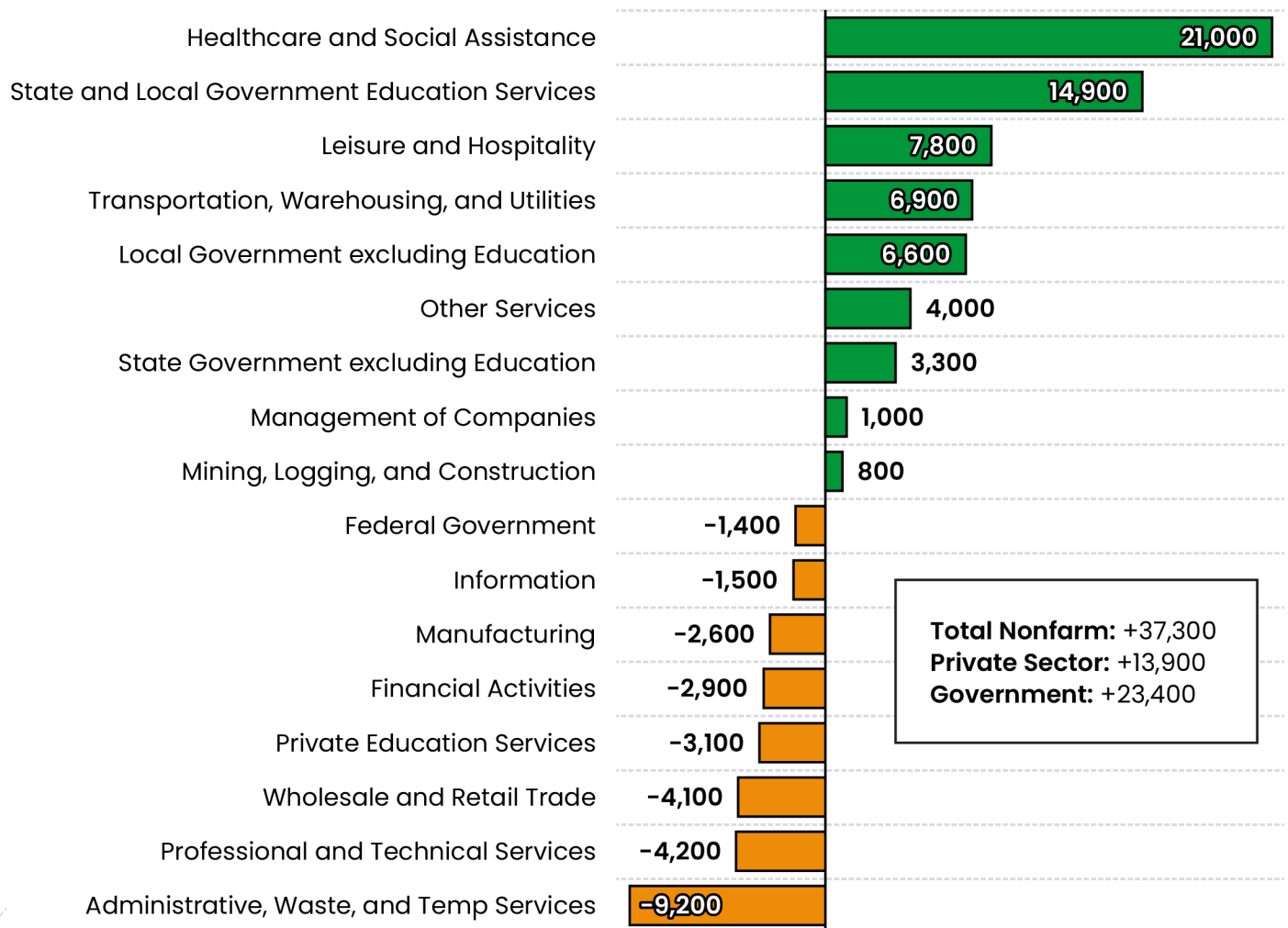
Out of the 17 industry groups presented in Figure 18A, eight lost jobs between August 2023 and August 2025. Two industries have gained at least 10,000 jobs over that period: health care and social assistance (+21,000) and state and local education services (+14,900, mainly due to a continued recovery in jobs lost during the pandemic). Comparatively, no industries shed payroll employment from August 2017 to August 2019, while six industry groups

added at least 10,000 jobs. Notably, professional and technical services, a crucial industry for Colorado, had the largest growth in 2017-19 (+21,300 jobs), but the second largest decline in 2023-25 (-4,200 jobs). Colorado's private sector grew by around 119,000 jobs between August 2017 and August 2019, but experienced gains under 14,000 jobs between August 2023 and August 2025.

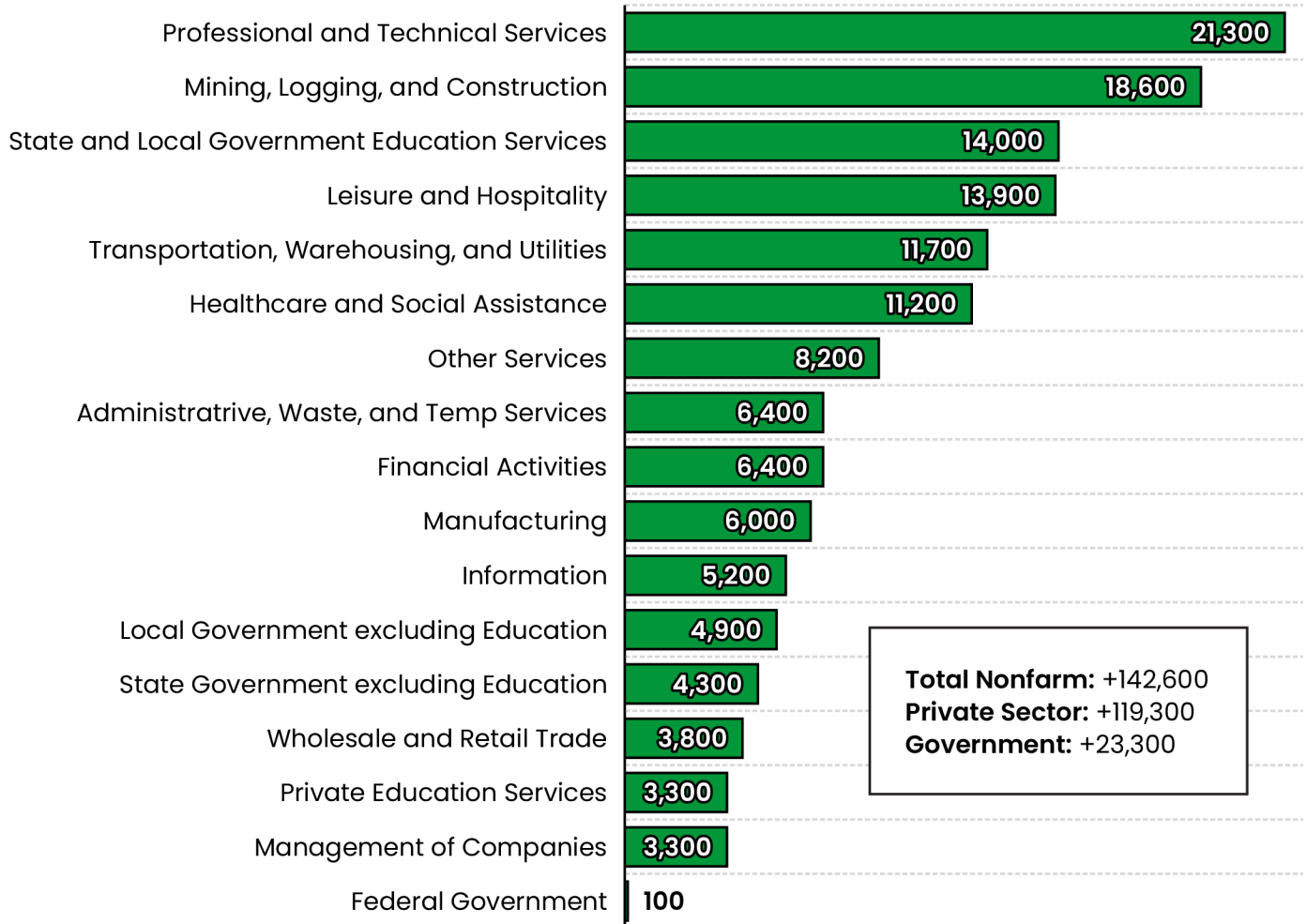
**Figure 18A**

### Change in Colorado Jobs, by Industry (August 2023 to August 2025)

[Accessible data for Figure 18A](#)



**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Current Employment Statistics); author calculations. **Notes:** data not seasonally adjusted.

**Figure 18B****Change in Colorado Jobs, by Industry (August 2017 to August 2019)**[Accessible data for Figure 18B](#)

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Current Employment Statistics); author calculations. **Notes:** data not seasonally adjusted.



# Uncertainty in Colorado and National Labor Market Leads to Underperformance in 2025 Compared to Forecasts Made in Late 2024

There are a few government entities in Colorado that routinely forecast labor market indicators, like the unemployment rate and job growth. [Colorado Legislative Council Staff \(LCS\)](#) and the [Colorado Office of State Planning and Budgeting \(OSPB\)](#) provide forecasts for the unemployment rate and job growth on a quarterly basis, as part of their respective economic and revenue forecasts. The University of Colorado’s (CU) Leeds School of Business generates forecasts on an annual basis, with the release of their [Economic Outlook](#) each December.

Generally, the December 2024 forecasts were fairly close together, which is unsurprising given that they were for the following year. The unemployment rate forecasts ranged between 4.1% and 4.3%, while the job growth rate was predicted to be around 1.1% to 1.2%. Compared to those forecasts, actual results for the state’s broadest labor market indicators have underperformed. Colorado’s unemployment rate of 4.5% through the first eight months of 2025 is slightly higher than forecasted, while the nonfarm job growth rate of 0.4% falls well below expected levels.

Figure 19 provides December 2024 forecasts published by LCS, OSPB, and the CU Leeds School of Business on Colorado’s unemployment rate and total nonfarm job growth rate in 2025.

**Figure 19**  
**Comparing State Expert Forecasts to Actual 2025 Results for Colorado Total Nonfarm Job Growth Rate and Unemployment Rate**  
[Accessible data for Figure 19](#)

Entity	Colorado 2025 Total Nonfarm Job Growth Rate	Colorado 2025 Unemployment Rate	Note
Colorado Legislative Council Staff	1.2%	4.1%	December 2024 Forecast
Colorado Office of State Planning and Budgeting	1.1%	4.3%	December 2024 Forecast
University of Colorado Leeds School of Business	1.2%	4.3%	December 2024 Forecast
Actual Results	0.4%	4.5%	2025 Annualized Rates (Jan–Aug)

**Source:** Colorado Legislative Council Staff, Colorado Office of State Planning and Budgeting, and University of Colorado Leeds School of Business forecasts published in December 2024; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Colorado LMI Office (Current Employment Statistics; Local Area Unemployment Statistics). **Notes:** data not seasonally adjusted.

Along with labor market data for Colorado, OSPB and LCS also provide forecasts for the U.S. unemployment rate and job growth rate. The December 2024 forecasts for 2025 were identical for the rate of U.S. job growth (0.9%), with some differences for the unemployment rate (LCS: 4.1%; OSPB: 4.4%). So far, those forecasts are fairly accurate compared to the current U.S. figures in 2025: an annualized unemployment rate of 4.3% and a total nonfarm job growth rate of 1.1% through the first eight months of the year.

## Labor Force Participation Rate and Wages Remain Bright Spots for Colorado

Highlighted below are a couple of labor market metrics that remain bright spots for the state.

### Labor Force Participation Rate

The first indicator is Colorado's labor force participation rate and related ranking. The labor force participation rate is [measured](#) as the share of the state or nation's 16 and older population that is in the labor force. Through the first eight months of 2025, Colorado's labor force participation rate averages to 67.6%, ranking 6<sup>th</sup> nationally. For comparison, North Dakota has the highest labor force participation rate at 69.7%, while West Virginia lags all states with a rate of 54.3%. Colorado has historically been a state with relatively high labor force participation, having ranked 13<sup>th</sup> or better nationally every year going back to 1976.

### Wages

The second indicator is for wages in Colorado. Compared to other states, earnings in Colorado tend to be higher due to a number of factors like industry mix, demographic characteristics, and cost of living. According to data from the [Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program within the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), the median annual wage in Colorado in 2024 was \$58,210. That median wage

ranked 6<sup>th</sup> highest compared to the other 49 states, trailing only Massachusetts (\$62,270), Washington (\$61,590), Alaska (\$59,400), New York (\$58,560), and Connecticut (\$58,400). Additionally, 2024 marked the first time Colorado has reached a top six ranking for median wage, based on comparable data going back to 2001. From 2001 to 2023 the state had a fairly narrow range for a national rank in median wage, spanning between 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. And notably, Colorado also had the fastest increase in annual median wage from 2019 to 2024, with a growth rate of 31.5% just surpassing Idaho (31.4%), South Dakota (31.3%), Florida (30.7%), and Montana (30.0%).

## Colorado Online Job Postings Data and Trends

The final portion of the *Trends and Conditions of Colorado's Labor Market* section will shift to data and trends for online job postings in the state. This information comes from [Lightcast](#), which is a private company that specializes in labor market statistics, including job postings. Like other entities that collect this type of data, [Lightcast scrapes information from job postings available online across hundreds of thousands of websites worldwide](#), including company career sites, national and local job boards, and job posting aggregators. Lightcast also implements procedures in an attempt to deduplicate job postings, so that a job posting that is listed within numerous sources is only counted once – these are referred to as unique postings. Additionally, Lightcast pulls a substantial amount of useful data from job postings, many of which will be discussed in this report, including industry and occupational statistics within this section and skills, qualifications, and educational requirements further in the document, starting on [page 63](#). For clarity, job postings are not synonymous with the jobs data highlighted previously. Job postings data simply reflect that an employer has an opening that they are attempting to fill. The following table (Figure 20) displays the number and distribution of unique Colorado online jobs postings through the first eight months of 2025, by industry sector.

**Figure 20****Number and Distribution of Unique Colorado Online Job Postings by Industry Sector in 2025  
(January to August)**[Accessible data for Figure 20](#)

Industry Sector	Number of Unique Colorado Online Job Postings, Based on Lightcast Data (2025: January to August)	Distribution of Unique Colorado Online Job Postings with an Identifiable Industry
Health Care and Social Assistance	94,106	18.2%
Administrative, Waste, and Temp Services	84,131	16.3%
Professional and Technical Services	51,199	9.9%
Retail Trade	50,699	9.8%
Manufacturing	41,350	8.0%
Accommodation and Food Services	30,781	6.0%
Educational Services	29,307	5.7%
Finance and Insurance	21,282	4.1%
Construction	20,106	3.9%
Wholesale Trade	17,699	3.4%
Information	12,768	2.5%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	12,568	2.4%
Other Services	12,161	2.4%
Transportation and Warehousing	11,340	2.2%
Public Administration	9,741	1.9%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	8,707	1.7%
Utilities	3,090	0.6%

Industry Sector	Number of Unique Colorado Online Job Postings, Based on Lightcast Data (2025: January to August)	Distribution of Unique Colorado Online Job Postings with an Identifiable Industry
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	2,424	0.5%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	1,329	0.3%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	1,038	0.2%
<b>Total Postings (with an Identifiable Industry)</b>	<b>515,826</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Source:** Lightcast.

Health care and social assistance and administrative, waste, and temp services had the most online postings in Colorado from January to August 2025, combining for over 178,000 postings, or 34.5% of 515,826 total postings with an identifiable industry. On average, around 80% of posting data from Lightcast are classified with an industry for the employer, while the remaining 20% are unclassified – for the purposes of this analysis those unclassified postings are not included. Professional and technical services, retail trade, and manufacturing were the other industry sectors that have each represented at least 8% of job postings so far in 2025.

While the previous table showed the number and distribution of unique Colorado online job postings from January to August 2025, Figure 21 looks at how the volume of state-level postings have changed over time. Specifically, the table below shows the percent change in Colorado online postings by industry through the first eight months of 2025 compared to the same periods in 2019, 2022, and 2024. Cells with a green fill represent an increase in the number of online job postings in 2025 relative to the comparison year, while cells with a gold fill indicate a decline in postings.

**Figure 21**

**Percent Change in Unique Colorado Online Job Postings by Industry Sector in the First Eight Months of 2025 Compared to the Same Periods in 2019, 2022, and 2024**

[Accessible data for Figure 21](#)

Industry Sector	Percent Change: 2025 vs. 2019	Percent Change: 2025 vs. 2022	Percent Change: 2025 vs. 2024
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	-4.1%	-25.9%	35.1%
Administrative, Waste, and Temp Services	-11.8%	-31.0%	20.1%
Transportation and Warehousing	-11.7%	-42.6%	13.4%

## Trends and Conditions of Colorado's Labor Market

Industry Sector	Percent Change: 2025 vs. 2019	Percent Change: 2025 vs. 2022	Percent Change: 2025 vs. 2024
Management of Companies and Enterprises	-47.6%	-35.4%	10.4%
Information	-34.5%	-54.3%	10.2%
Health Care and Social Assistance	31.1%	-29.0%	7.2%
Manufacturing	10.5%	-35.8%	7.1%
Wholesale Trade	1.6%	-35.3%	4.8%
Finance and Insurance	-17.0%	-42.4%	4.3%
Professional and Technical Services	-17.8%	-41.8%	1.7%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	-10.9%	-32.1%	1.2%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	-7.3%	-33.0%	-0.3%
Retail Trade	8.1%	-22.3%	-1.5%
Construction	12.1%	-26.0%	-2.7%
Accommodation and Food Services	-13.4%	-43.3%	-6.4%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	-25.4%	-41.9%	-6.8%
Educational Services	23.6%	-32.6%	-10.9%
Other Services	8.1%	-35.5%	-11.2%
Utilities	6.7%	-35.5%	-11.4%
Public Administration	-23.3%	-41.9%	-15.5%

**Source:** Lightcast. **Notes:** table is sorted in descending order by the percent change in 2025 compared to 2024.



Out of the 20 industry sectors shown, 11 have had increases in job postings in 2025 compared to 2024, ranging from 1.2% for agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting to 35.1% for arts, entertainment, and recreation. Public administration (-15.5%) has the largest decline. Job postings in 2025 have declined significantly in every industry sector compared to 2022, during the height of the post-pandemic hiring surge, which mirrors the trend presented in Figure 14 on [page 34](#). Those decreases span from -22.3% (retail trade) to -54.3% (information). The changes in 2025 postings compared to 2019 are mixed, with eight industry sectors experiencing relative gains and 12 sectors with declines. The industry sectors with the largest percent increases in postings compared to six years ago are: health care and social assistance (31.1%), educational services (23.6%), construction (12.1%), and manufacturing (10.5%). Management of companies and enterprises (-47.6%), information (-34.5%), mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (-25.4%), and public administration

(-23.3%) postings have decreased the most in 2025 compared to 2019.

Shifting from industry data, Figure 22 highlights the detailed occupations with the most Colorado online job postings through the first eight months of 2025. Registered nurses significantly lead all other occupations in Colorado, with over 42,000 unique postings, representing 6.6% of total postings. The remaining top 10 list shown features a diverse mix of retail and customer service occupations (salespersons, supervisors of retail sales workers, customer service representatives, and wholesale/manufacturing sales representatives), computer occupations (all other computer occupations and software developers), trade occupations (truck drivers and maintenance and repair workers), and health care (medical and health services managers). Combined, these 10 detailed occupations make up over one-fifth of all Colorado online job postings from January to August 2025.

**Figure 22**

**Detailed Occupations with the Most Colorado Online Job Postings in 2025 (January to August)**

[Accessible data for Figure 22](#)

Detailed Occupation	Number of Unique Colorado Online Job Postings from January 2025 to August 2025	Share of Total Unique Colorado Online Job Postings from January 2025 to August 2025
Registered Nurses	42,061	6.6%
Retail Salespersons	16,868	2.6%
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	12,289	1.9%
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	10,408	1.6%
Computer Occupations, All Other	10,110	1.6%
Software Developers	9,869	1.5%
Customer Service Representatives	8,886	1.4%

Detailed Occupation	Number of Unique Colorado Online Job Postings from January 2025 to August 2025	Share of Total Unique Colorado Online Job Postings from January 2025 to August 2025
Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing	8,127	1.3%
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	7,627	1.2%
Medical and Health Services Managers	7,211	1.1%

Source: Lightcast.

The last table (Figure 23) in the *Trends and Conditions of Colorado’s Labor Market* section of the Talent Pipeline Report displays the detailed occupations with the largest change in the number of online job postings in the first eight months of 2025 compared to the same period a year prior. The 11 occupations shown each have gains of at least 900 Colorado online postings in 2025 relative to 2024. Postings for registered nurses have increased by more than 9,400, illustrating the high level of demand for that

occupation. Many of the occupations with large changes in postings are also tied to health care: radiologic technologists and technicians, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, magnetic resonance imaging technologists, respiratory therapists, and nurse practitioners. The other three occupations shown below (truck drivers, all other computer occupations, and wholesale/manufacturing sales representatives) were also present in the previous figure.

Figure 23

Detailed Occupations with the Largest Change in the Number of Colorado Online Jobs Postings in 2025 (January to August) Compared to Same Period in 2024

[Accessible data for Figure 23](#)

Detailed Occupation	Number of Unique Colorado Online Job Postings from January 2025 to August 2025	Number of Unique Colorado Online Job Postings from January 2024 to August 2024	Change in Unique Online Job Postings
Registered Nurses	42,061	32,649	9,412
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	12,289	9,834	2,455
Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	5,670	3,441	2,229

Detailed Occupation	Number of Unique Colorado Online Job Postings from January 2025 to August 2025	Number of Unique Colorado Online Job Postings from January 2024 to August 2024	Change in Unique Online Job Postings
Physical Therapists	4,660	2,701	1,959
Occupational Therapists	3,406	1,605	1,801
Speech-Language Pathologists	4,146	2,351	1,795
Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing	8,127	6,872	1,255
Respiratory Therapists	1,915	728	1,187
Magnetic Resonance Imaging Technologists	2,233	1,123	1,110
Computer Occupations, All Other	10,110	9,115	995
Nurse Practitioners	3,065	2,136	929

**Source:** Lightcast. **Notes:** table is sorted in descending order by the change in unique online job postings.

# Top Jobs & 2024–34 Employment Projections for Colorado

Shifting from past and current labor market characteristics, trends, and conditions, this section looks forward to the future and highlights Top Jobs and key occupational and industry projections for Colorado.

## Introduction to Colorado's 2025 Top Jobs

Since 2014, the Talent Pipeline Report has defined and identified Top Jobs in Colorado based on annual data. This list helps to inform job seekers, educate program creators, and guide employers to create quality work environments. These occupations are in high demand, have above average projected growth over the next 10 years, and are capable of providing a living wage.

Examples of some  
ways Top Jobs are used:

### Policy and Legislation

- » Information on Top Jobs can be used to drive policy and legislation. When advocating for funding or policy changes, the Top Jobs data provides evidence-based justification for investments in specific educational pathways or equity initiatives for government, grants, and institutions of higher education.
- » Top Jobs are referenced within four Colorado state statutes: CRS 8-15.7-201 (State Apprenticeship Agency), CRS 24-46.3-104 (Career Pathways), CRS 24-48.5-502 (Universal High School Scholarship Program), and CRS 22-54-138 (Career Development Success Program).

### Education and Career Development

- » Top Jobs can assist students in making career and academic decisions, as the information can help them understand jobs in the state that pay well and will be in demand in the future.
- » Institutions of higher education may utilize the Top Jobs list to help understand why types of academic programs should be developed or sustained.
- » Top Jobs were used to [identify which stackable credential pathways the Colorado Department of Higher Education should create](#).
- » Top Jobs are used to inform the development of in-demand industry career pathways in Colorado.

### Industry and Business

- » Industry partners (e.g. trade associations, individual businesses, sector partnerships) leverage the Top Jobs list as they advocate for focused efforts to enhance specific training and education programs. Industry partners want to ensure they are concentrating on the right occupations that need to be filled.

In 2025, Colorado Top Jobs are occupations that are able to meet or surpass the following criteria:

- » The first two criteria are determined by the 2024 to 2034 [occupational projections produced by the Colorado Office of Labor Market Information \(LMI\)](#). A more detailed discussion on projections data can be found later in this section, starting on [page 52](#).
  - Total projected annual openings equal to or greater than 40 per year.
  - A 10-year growth rate that exceeds 14.3%, which is the projected statewide average growth rate for all occupations. The growth rate is specifically tied to industry projections and related occupational staffing patterns within those industries.
- » The third criterion utilizes livable wage thresholds, as defined by the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology \(MIT\) living wage calculator](#), and matches that up to 2024 Colorado statewide annual median wages by detailed occupation that are published by LMI and the Bureau of Labor Statistics and produced through the [Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics \(OEWS\)](#) program. This wage criterion splits Top Jobs into two tiers.
  - Tier 1 jobs: these are benchmarked by an income that can support a family of three in Colorado, with two adults—one working—and one child. This year, MIT defines this amount as at least \$86,320 per year.
  - Tier 2 jobs: these are benchmarked by an income that can support one adult in Colorado. This year, MIT defines this amount at \$52,978 per year. Therefore, Tier 2 Top Jobs have an annual wage range between \$52,978 and \$86,319.

» Two exclusionary criteria are also used as part of the Top Jobs determination process.

- Management occupations ([those in the 11-0000 major occupational SOC group](#)) are not included in the list of Top Jobs.
- Residual occupations, [also known as “all other,” “miscellaneous,” or “catch-all” occupations](#), are not included in the list of Top Jobs.

Based on the information detailed above, the number of 2025 Top Jobs in Colorado total to 163 different occupations. Of this total, 60 occupations qualify as Tier 1 jobs, while the remaining 103 occupations are classified as Tier 2 jobs. The table on the following page (Figure 24) shows the distribution of Colorado’s Top Jobs by major occupational group. The occupational groups with the most Colorado Top Jobs are: health care practitioners and technical (24), architecture and engineering (19), and construction and extraction (17). The Computer and mathematical and health care practitioners and technical occupational groups have the most Tier 1 Top Jobs, at 13 each. The construction and extraction (16) and educational instruction and library (14) occupational groups have the most Tier 2 Top Jobs. Out of 21 major occupational groups, there are 11 that contain at least five Top Jobs, while three have no Top Jobs (protective service, building and grounds cleaning and maintenance, and farming, fishing, and forestry).



**Figure 24****Distribution of Colorado Tier 1 and Tier 2 Top Jobs by Major Occupational Group**[Accessible data for Figure 24](#)

Major Occupational Group	Number of Tier 1 Top Jobs	Number of Tier 2 Top Jobs	Total Top Jobs	Share of Total Top Jobs
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	13	11	24	14.7%
Architecture and Engineering	11	8	19	11.7%
Construction and Extraction	1	16	17	10.4%
Educational Instruction and Library	2	14	16	9.8%
Business and Financial Operations	7	8	15	9.2%
Computer and Mathematical	13	2	15	9.2%
Life, Physical, and Social Science	6	7	13	8.0%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	0	11	11	6.7%
Community and Social Service	0	8	8	4.9%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	2	5	7	4.3%
Transportation and Material Moving	2	3	5	3.1%
Legal	1	2	3	1.8%
Healthcare Support	0	3	3	1.8%
Sales and Related	2	1	3	1.8%
Food Preparation and Serving Related	0	1	1	0.6%
Personal Care and Service	0	1	1	0.6%
Office and Administrative Support	0	1	1	0.6%

Major Occupational Group	Number of Tier 1 Top Jobs	Number of Tier 2 Top Jobs	Total Top Jobs	Share of Total Top Jobs
Production	0	1	1	0.6%
Protective Service	0	0	0	0.0%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	0	0	0	0.0%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	0	0	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Source:** Author calculations based on MIT living wage thresholds, wage data from the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program, and long-term occupational projections from Colorado LMI Office. Notes: table is sorted in descending order by the share of total top jobs.

Colorado has diverse regions, and the cost of living can also vary greatly by county. Regional information on living wages can be seen using the [MIT living wage calculator](#), while lists of Top Jobs based on regional data can be viewed within Appendix B. The full list of statewide Top Jobs by tier can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Of the 163 Top Jobs, there were nine occupations that had either suppressed 2024 wage or employment estimates by the OEWS program. Due to this suppression, 2024 data were not available to compare same-year data against other occupations. However, rather than excluding these occupations from the 2024 Top Jobs list, occupational data from 2023 was used in substitution. Prior year occupational data did meet the 2024 standards for a Top Job, and therefore these occupations were included in this year's report. The nine occupations are: web developers; civil engineers; mining and geological

engineers; biochemists and biophysicists; environmental engineering technologists and technicians; environmental science and protection technicians; community health workers; writers and authors; and dieticians and nutritionists. Those occupations are also identified within the dataset available through [Appendix A](#).

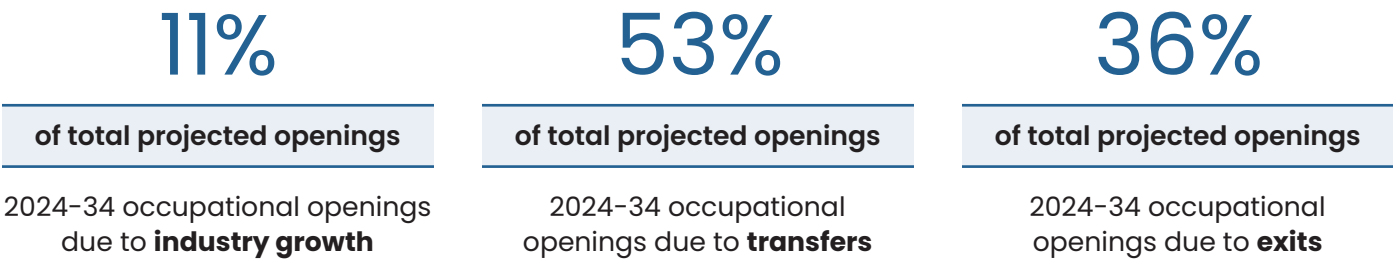
The list of Colorado Top Jobs is not static and changes year to year due to a number of factors. There were 42 occupations that were included as Top Jobs in the 2024 Talent Pipeline Report that are not included on this year's list, which can also be viewed within [Appendix A](#). The majority of those occupations failed to qualify as Top Jobs in 2025 due to the 10-year growth rate criteria. This represents a shift compared to the past few years, when wages were the biggest determinant for an occupation not remaining on the Top Jobs list due to rapid inflation.

# Top Jobs with the Most Projected Openings (2024–2034)

Total projected annual occupational openings, which is one of the criteria used to determine Top Jobs each year, are split into three components. The first component is job openings due to industry growth. An occupation can be present within one or many industries and the projected change

in employment in those industries over the next ten years will influence growth for that occupation. The other two components are related to [job openings due to separations](#), or labor churn. Simply, separations are divided into openings due to transfers (e.g. individuals switching or changing jobs) and openings due to exits (e.g. individuals retiring from the workforce). As shown below, the vast majority of the over 4 million projected Colorado occupational openings from 2024 to 2034 are due to separations (89%). Readers are also encouraged to [view and analyze these data on LMI’s website](#).

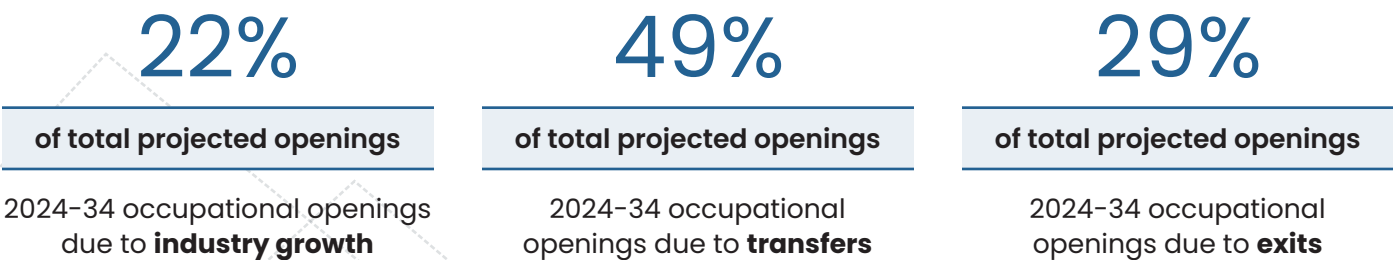
Share of Colorado 2024–34 Total Projected Openings for All Occupations, by Component Type



In comparison, the distribution of total projected openings for Colorado’s 163 Top Jobs has a higher concentration of openings due to industry growth (below), mainly due to the criteria that those occupations have a 10-year growth rate that exceeds the projected statewide average of 14.3% for all occu-

pations. From 2024 to 2034 there are approximately 877,000 total projected openings in the Top Jobs identified in this year’s Talent Pipeline Report, which accounts for 22% of the statewide total of 4 million projected openings previously mentioned.

Share of Colorado 2024–34 Total Projected Openings for Top Jobs, by Component Type



The next table (Figure 25) displays Colorado’s Tier 1 Top Jobs with the most projected annual openings from 2024 to 2034. Additionally, the far right column in the table shows the share of openings due to industry growth for each respective occupation. The Tier 1 Top Jobs with the most projected annual openings are software developers and registered nurses. More than one-third of total projected openings for software developers are due to indus-

try growth, while that measure exceeds one-quarter for registered nurses. The other occupations listed cover diverse types of jobs, including business and financial specialists (accountants and auditors, project management specialists, and management analysts), STEM fields (civil engineers and network architects) and others (lawyers, postsecondary health specialist teachers, and airline pilots).

**Figure 25**

**Colorado Tier 1 Top Jobs with the Most Projected Annual Openings, 2024 to 2034**

[Accessible data for Figure 25](#)

Detailed Occupation	Projected Annual Total Openings, 2024 to 2034	Share of Openings Due to Industry Growth
Software Developers	4,583	36%
Registered Nurses	4,226	26%
Accountants and Auditors	3,793	18%
Project Management Specialists	3,201	23%
Management Analysts	1,969	21%
Civil Engineers	1,214	26%
Lawyers	1,169	33%
Computer Network Architects	1,139	33%
Health Specialties Teachers, Postsecondary	913	29%
Airline Pilots, Copilots, and Flight Engineers	890	17%

**Source:** Author calculations based on MIT living wage thresholds, wage data from the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program, and long-term occupational projections from Colorado LMI Office.

Similarly, Figure 26 presents Colorado’s Tier 2 Top Jobs with the most projected annual openings from 2024 to 2034. Sales representatives of services and market research analysts are the Tier 2 Top Jobs with the most projected annual openings, both surpassing 3,500 per year. Generally, these listed Tier 2 Top Jobs have a lower share of openings due to industry

growth than the Tier 1 Top Jobs shown above, meaning a relatively greater proportion of openings will be due to transfers and exits. The remaining occupations range across many different broad occupational groups including construction, transportation, mental health services, and others.

Figure 26

Colorado Tier 2 Top Jobs with the Most Projected Annual Openings, 2024 to 2034

[Accessible data for Figure 26](#)

Detailed Occupation	Projected Annual Total Openings, 2024 to 2034	Share of Openings Due to Industry Growth
Sales Representatives of Services	4,827	15%
Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	3,705	18%
First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	2,390	20%
Electricians	2,380	23%
Human Resources Specialists	2,318	17%
Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors	1,956	26%
Carpenters	1,878	19%
First-Line Supervisors of Transportation & Material Moving Workers	1,506	13%
Flight Attendants	1,408	17%
Computer User Support Specialists	1,404	21%

**Source:** Author calculations based on MIT living wage thresholds, wage data from the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program, and long-term occupational projections from Colorado LMI Office.



## Top Jobs and Levels of Education Typically Required for Entry

The level of education typically required to enter an occupation, or job, is also a critical piece of information when evaluating current or projected employment trends. The [Bureau of Labor Statistics \(and LMI offices across the U.S.\) uses a system to assign categories of entry-level education as part of the occupational projection process](#). Occupations are categorized by one of eight levels of education typically required for entry: no formal educational credential; high school diploma or equivalent; some college, no

degree; postsecondary nondegree award; associate degree; bachelor's degree; master's degree; and doctoral or professional degree ([detailed definitions can also be viewed on the BLS website](#)).

This information on education can be utilized to show how Colorado's occupational employment is distributed by the eight levels of typical education needed for entry, as provided in Figure 27. Additionally, the following table gives examples of detailed occupations that fall into each educational category, to help provide context. The projections data published by Colorado's LMI office include these educational designations for each occupation, which can also be viewed and filtered within the [Occupational Outlook Handbook through the BLS website](#).

**Figure 27**

### Colorado's Distribution of Total Occupational Employment in 2024 by Typical Education Needed for Entry

[Accessible data for Figure 27](#)

Typical Level of Education Required for Entry Into Occupation	Share of 2024 Colorado Occupational Employment by Typical Level of Education Required for Entry Into Occupation	Examples of Detailed Occupations That Fall Into This Category
No Formal Educational Credential	22.3%	Fast food and counter workers; retail salespersons; cashiers; food servers
High School Diploma or Equivalent	34.6%	Stockers and order fillers; customer service reps; home health and personal care aides
Some College, No Degree	2.4%	Bookkeepers and computer user support specialists
Postsecondary Nondegree Award	5.4%	Truck drivers; nursing assistants; auto mechanics
Associate Degree	2.1%	Preschool teachers; paralegals and legal assistants; dental hygienists

Typical Level of Education Required for Entry Into Occupation	Share of 2024 Colorado Occupational Employment by Typical Level of Education Required for Entry Into Occupation	Examples of Detailed Occupations That Fall Into This Category
Bachelor's Degree	28.1%	Registered nurses; software developers; accountants and auditors
Master's Degree	2.3%	Mental health counselors; career counselors and advisors; speech therapists
Doctoral or Professional Degree	2.7%	Lawyers; postsecondary teachers; doctors

**Source:** Author calculations based on Bureau of Labor Statistics occupational-level determinations of typical education needed for entry and 2024 Colorado employment data from the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program.

Nearly 57% of Colorado’s occupational employment total of 2.9 million jobs in 2024 were concentrated within occupations that typically require either no formal educational credential or a high school diploma or equivalent for entry. Some examples of these occupations include: retail salespersons, cashiers, fast food and counter workers, restaurant servers, customer service representatives, home health and personal care aides, and stockers and fillers.

The remaining 43% of Colorado occupational employment total is distributed between various levels of postsecondary education typically required for entry. The largest share belongs to bachelor’s degrees, with 28.1% of Colorado’s 2024 occupa-

tional employment grouped into jobs that typically require that level of education for entry. Some examples of these occupations include: registered nurses, software developers, and accountants. The second largest share (5.4%) is within the postsecondary nondegree award group, which also reflects certificate awards. Some examples of these occupations include: truck drivers, nursing assistants, and computer user support specialists. High levels of postsecondary education (master’s and doctoral or professional degree) made up a combined 5% of Colorado’s occupational employment in 2024. Some examples of these occupations include: mental health counselors, speech therapists, lawyers, postsecondary teachers, and doctors.

Colorado’s 163 Top Jobs within this year’s report can also be distributed by levels of education typically required for entry. The table below (Figure 28) displays the number of Tier 1 and Tier 2 Top Jobs by

these entry-level education requirements. Additionally, the list of Top Jobs available in Appendix A provides the level of education typically required for entry for each Top Job.

**Figure 28**

**Distribution of Colorado Tier 1 and Tier 2 Top Jobs by Typical Level of Education Required for Entry Into Occupation**

[Accessible data for Figure 28](#)

Typical Level of Education Required for Entry Into Occupation	Number of Tier 1 Top Jobs	Number of Tier 2 Top Jobs	Total Top Jobs	Share of Total Top Jobs
No Formal Educational Credential	0	5	5	3.2%
High School Diploma or Equivalent	1	30	31	19.0%
Some College, No Degree	0	1	1	0.6%
Postsecondary Nondegree Award	1	8	9	5.5%
Associate Degree	3	14	17	10.4%
Bachelor's Degree	39	22	61	37.4%
Master's Degree	6	9	15	9.2%
Doctoral or Professional Degree	10	14	24	14.7%
<i>Typically Requires Completion of a Postsecondary Credential for Entry</i>	<b>59</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>77.3%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Source:** Author calculations based on MIT living wage thresholds, wage data from the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program, long-term occupational projections from Colorado LMI Office, and Bureau of Labor Statistics occupational-level determinations of typical education needed for entry.

All but one of Colorado's 60 Tier 1 Top Jobs ([full list available in Appendix A](#)) typically requires the completion of a postsecondary credential for entry. The majority of these jobs (39) typically require a bachelor's degree, while an additional 16 require either a master's (6) or professional degree (10). The remaining jobs typically require an associate degree (3), postsecondary nondegree award (1), or a high school diploma (1).

The distribution is more diverse for Colorado's 103 Tier 2 Top Jobs, with 67 occupations typically requiring the completion of a postsecondary credential and 36 typically requiring either a high school diploma, no formal educational credential, or some college, but no degree for entry. A high school diploma requirement is the most prevalent for Tier 2 Top Jobs (30), followed by a bachelor's degree (22). A total of 14 Tier 2 Top Jobs typically require an associate degree, with most of those occupations falling into either health care or STEM professions. There are also 14 Tier 2 Top Jobs that typically require a doctoral or professional degree – 12 of those occupations are different types of postsecondary teachers. The remaining jobs typically require a master's degree (9), postsecondary nondegree award (8), no formal education credential (5), or some college, no degree (1).

In total, out of the 163 combined Tier 1 and Tier 2 Top Jobs, 126 (77%) typically require the completion of a postsecondary credential for entry, highlighting the importance of postsecondary education and credentials.

## Select Non-top Jobs with the Most Projected Openings (2024–2034)

In addition to looking at long-term projections and other statistics for Colorado's 163 Top Jobs, it is also important to evaluate occupations that do not qualify as Top Jobs. As noted on [page 52](#), Top Jobs identified in this year's Talent Pipeline Report only account for 22% of the statewide total of 4 million projected openings mentioned. That means the remaining 78% of Colorado's projected occupational openings over the next ten years, or nearly 3.2 million jobs, are not classified as Top Jobs.

Figure 29 on the following page displays nine non-Top Job occupations that have the most projected annual openings between 2024 and 2034. Combined, these occupations represent around 23% of total statewide projected openings during that 10-year period, which is a slightly larger share than all 163 Top Jobs put together. A commonality between these occupations is that they typically do not require a postsecondary credential for entry and they are relatively low paying (all have 2024 median annual wages below \$50,000). The following table shows the projected total of annual openings from 2024 to 2034 for each occupation and the share of those openings that are due to transfers and exits, which range between 84% and 100% due to high levels of labor churn and turnover. These nine occupations are diverse and provide crucial roles for Colorado's labor market and economy, including food and drink services, sales or customer service, health care, cleaning services, or inventory and stocking duties.

**Figure 29****Colorado Non-Top Jobs That Typically Don't Require a Postsecondary Credential for Entry with the Most Projected Annual Openings, 2024 to 2034**[Accessible data for Figure 29](#)

Detailed Occupation	Projected Annual Total Openings, 2024 to 2034	Share of Openings Due to Transfers and Exits
Fast Food and Counter Workers	21,025	94%
Retail Salespersons	12,115	95%
Stockers and Order Fillers	10,926	89%
Cashiers	10,451	100%
Waiters and Waitresses	9,618	96%
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	8,513	84%
Cooks, Restaurant	6,748	86%
Customer Service Representatives	6,386	99%
Janitors and Cleaners	5,964	94%

**Source:** Long-term occupational projections from Colorado LMI Office.

Complementary to the previous table, Figure 30 presents Colorado non-Top Jobs that typically require a postsecondary credential or some college for entry and that have at least 1,000 projected annual openings from 2024 to 2034. The following table shows the projected total of annual openings from 2024 to 2034 for each occupation as well as the typical level of education required for entry into that occupation. The entry-level educational requirements for this list of occupations are diverse, including: some college, no degree; postsecondary nondegree award; and bachelor's degrees. Nursing assistants,

heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers, bookkeepers, and teaching assistants all have more than 3,000 projected annual openings. Also included in this list are elementary, middle school, and high school (secondary) teachers, which did not qualify as Top Jobs due to the 10-year growth rate criteria. The remaining occupations range across many different broad groups including health care (medical and dental assistants), personal service (hairstylists and hairdressers), business specialists (buyers and purchasing agents), and automotive services.



**Figure 30****Colorado Non-Top Jobs That Typically Require a Postsecondary Credential or Some College for Entry with at Least 1,000 Projected Annual Openings, 2024 to 2034**[Accessible data for Figure 30](#)

Detailed Occupation	Projected Annual Total Openings, 2024 to 2034	Typical Level of Education Required for Entry Into Occupation
Nursing Assistants	3,683	Postsecondary non-degree award
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	3,573	Postsecondary non-degree award
Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	3,215	Some college, no degree
Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	3,010	Some college, no degree
Medical Assistants	2,241	Postsecondary non-degree award
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	2,076	Bachelor's degree
Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	1,739	Postsecondary non-degree award
Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	1,417	Bachelor's degree
Buyers and Purchasing Agents	1,346	Bachelor's degree
Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	1,320	Postsecondary non-degree award
Dental Assistants	1,241	Postsecondary non-degree award
Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	1,143	Bachelor's degree

**Source:** Long-term occupational projections from Colorado LMI Office. Notes: management and residual occupations excluded from this list.

## Colorado Industry Sector Projections (2024–2034)

The final portion of this section will briefly highlight industry sector projections for Colorado between 2024 and 2034. As mentioned earlier, industry growth is a component of job openings and as a criterion for determining which occupations qualify as Top Jobs. These projections are also useful to gauge which industries are expected to add the most jobs or grow the fastest over the long-term horizon. The table below (Figure 31) shows the projected 10-year change in employment for Colorado's 20 industry

sectors. Readers are also encouraged to [view and analyze these data on LMI's website](#).

Colorado's Office of Labor Market Information projects that the state will add around 432,000 industry jobs from 2024 to 2034. Professional and technical services (25.7%) and health care and social assistance (19.5%) represent nearly half of these gains. Accommodation and food services and construction are the other two industry sectors projected to add at least 40,000 jobs over the next ten years. Government is projected to shed nearly 6,500 jobs between 2024 and 2034, while manufacturing, agriculture, and utilities may also experience declines.

**Figure 31**

### Projected Change in Employment for Colorado Industry Sectors, 2024 to 2034

[Accessible data for Figure 31](#)

Industry Sector	Projected Change in Employment, 2024 to 2034	Share of Total Projected Change in Employment, 2024 to 2034
Professional and Technical Services	110,962	25.7%
Health Care and Social Assistance	84,135	19.5%
Construction	42,919	9.9%
Accommodation and Food Services	42,123	9.7%
Educational Services	36,829	8.5%
Transportation and Warehousing	22,811	5.3%
Wholesale Trade	21,004	4.9%
Retail Trade	20,695	4.8%
Other Services	13,890	3.2%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	11,181	2.6%

## Top Jobs & 2024–34 Employment Projections for Colorado

Industry Sector	Projected Change in Employment, 2024 to 2034	Share of Total Projected Change in Employment, 2024 to 2034
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	9,558	2.2%
Administrative, Waste, and Temp Services	7,368	1.7%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	7,208	1.7%
Finance and Insurance	7,199	1.7%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	1,934	0.4%
Information	324	0.1%
Utilities	-407	-0.1%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	-421	-0.1%
Manufacturing	-657	-0.2%
Government	-6,525	-1.5%
<b>Total Industries</b>	<b>432,130</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Source:** Long-term industry projections from Colorado LMI Office. Notes: Government in this industry projections table excludes education and hospitals, which are placed within educational services and health care and social assistance, respectively.

# Information on Skills and Qualifications

Colorado's talent pipeline features an intricate relationship between job seekers, workers, employers, and educators. A critical element of establishing success in that relationship is ensuring there is alignment with the skills and qualifications needed for all of the different jobs distributed throughout the state's economy and labor market. This section of the report will discuss and highlight information on skills and qualifications needed in today's workforce.

Like with the Colorado online job postings trends detailed on [pages 41-47](#), these skills and qualifications information come from [Lightcast](#). As a reminder, Lightcast collects a wide range of data from online jobs postings, [scraping the information from hundreds of thousands of websites worldwide](#), including company career sites, national and local job boards, and job posting aggregators. In addition to job postings, Lightcast also scrapes publicly available information from individual profiles around the world (e.g. online professional networking sites), which will be discussed further in this *Information on Skills and Qualifications* section. Lightcast utilizes a [taxonomy](#) in order to classify and distinguish skills or qualifications, either from online job postings or individual profiles, which they broadly define as "competencies at specific tasks or familiarity with specific subjects and tools acquired through education or experience." Detailed on the right are the [four broadest skills and qualifications categories available within Lightcast datasets](#). Discussion of these broadest skills and qualifications categories, with the exception of "specialized skills," will continue in the following pages of this report.

## Definitions

### Common (essential) skills:

Skills that are prevalent across many different occupations and industries, including both personal attributes and learned skills. Also known as soft skills, human skills, and competencies. These have been referred to in Colorado as foundational or essential skills, and will be referred to as "essential skills" through the remainder of the report.

### Certifications:

Recognizable qualification standards assigned by industry or education bodies.

### Specialized skills:

Skills that are primarily required within a subset of occupations or equip one to perform a specific task. Also known as technical skills or hard skills.

### Software skills:

Any software tool or programming component used to help with a job.

# Most Prevalent Essential Skills through Colorado Online Job Postings (January 2024–June 2025)

In order to measure and highlight the most prevalent essential skills through Colorado online job postings, an analysis was conducted of recent statewide data collected by Lightcast between January 2024 and June 2025. This analysis spanned Colorado job postings in all 22 major occupational groups and quantified which essential skills were most frequently mentioned by employers within those online job postings. Figure 32 displays the top 15 essential skills identified within Colorado online job postings across all major occupational groups. These are the human skills and competencies most valued by Colorado employers when they are looking to fill a position.

The top essential skill identified was communication, followed by management and customer service. Operations, detail oriented, leadership, and problem solving were the next most frequent essential skills mentioned within Colorado online job postings in 2024 and 2025. The remaining top essential skills are diverse and include broad abilities, such as oral and written communication (writing, English language, and interpersonal communication); critical thinking (planning and coordinating); working with people (sales and professionalism); and physical strength (lifting ability). While this list is in no way exhaustive in presenting the type of essential skills employers seek in their prospective employees, it shows the consistencies observed throughout a wide array of online job postings.

Figure 32

**Top 15 Essential Skills Identified Within Colorado Online Jobs Postings Across All Major Occupational Groups, January 2024 to June 2025**  
[Accessible data for Figure 32](#)

Rank	Essential Skill
1	Communication
2	Management
3	Customer Service
4	Operations
5	Detail Oriented
6	Leadership
7	Problem Solving
8	Lifting Ability
9	Writing
10	Sales
11	English Language
12	Planning
13	Interpersonal Communications
14	Coordinating
15	Professionalism

**Source:** Lightcast; author calculations and analysis.



## Comparing Similarities in Essential Skills Between Colorado Online Job Postings and Individual Profiles

As mentioned on [page 63](#), [Lightcast also scrapes publicly available information from individual profiles](#) around the world (e.g. online professional networking sites). This portion of the Information on Skills and Qualifications section of the report will compare similarities in essential skills between Colorado online job postings and individual profiles identified within the state. When comparing and contrasting skills information from online job postings and individual profiles, it is important to consider that those two platforms serve different purposes. Employers use job postings to fill a vacancy within their organization and language

in the job announcement may reflect industry or institutional nomenclature, vocabulary, or jargon. Individual profiles, on the other hand, could include information from resumes or work history, which may have dissimilar objectives and focuses compared to a job posting.

However, as shown below in Figure 33, it is possible to assess similarities in essential skills in job postings and individual profiles by grouping them into broad abilities: critical thinking, oral and written communication, leading people, and working with people. Similar to the approach taken in the prior page, an analysis was conducted to quantify the essential skills most frequently mentioned within Colorado individual profiles since 2018. These were then compared to the top essential skills mentioned within employer job postings between January 2024 and June 2025. While differences exist in essential skills terminology, there is clear overlap between information available within job postings and individual profiles.

**Figure 33**

### Comparing Similarities in Essential Skills Between Online Job Postings and Individual Profiles

[Accessible data for Figure 33](#)

Broad Ability	Online Job Postings	Individual Profiles
Critical Thinking	Detail Oriented; <b>Planning</b> ; Problem Solving; <b>Research</b> ; <b>Troubleshooting</b>	<b>Planning</b> ; <b>Research</b> ; Strategic Planning; Time Management; <b>Troubleshooting</b>
Oral and Written Communication	<b>Communication</b> ; English Language; Interpersonal Communications; Writing	<b>Communication</b> ; Public Speaking
Leading People	<b>Leadership</b> ; <b>Management</b>	<b>Leadership</b> ; <b>Management</b> ; Teaching; Team Building; Team Leadership
Working With People	<b>Customer Service</b> ; Professionalism; <b>Sales</b>	<b>Customer Service</b> ; <b>Sales</b> ; Teamwork

**Source:** Lightcast; author analysis. Notes: bolded words represent exact matches between online job postings and individual profiles.

## Comparing and Contrasting Qualifications Between Colorado Online Job Postings and Individual Profiles

This analysis shifts to comparing and contrasting qualifications (or certifications) between Colorado online job postings and individual profiles. Qualifications were categorized into broad groups: the ability to drive or operate a vehicle; the ability to provide medical care; security clearance; and other. As with essential skills, the top qualifications for Colorado online job postings and individual profiles were compared to each other and are viewable on the following page.

While individual profiles only mention a commercial driver's license (CDL) as a top qualification for driving and operating a vehicle, job postings specify multiple types of CDLs (Class A and B), along with forklift certification. Using this method, it is unknown whether potential jobseekers are actually lacking Class A and B CDLs and forklift certifications, or if employers are just more likely to specify those needs within a job posting. Additionally, the top overall qualification specified by employers within Colorado online job postings is a valid driver's license. This high level of prevalence is likely due to most

job postings requesting driver's license information as part of the application process and not an actual requirement for the job. However, this does call attention to some potential limitations in evaluating skill and qualifications within online job postings and individual profiles – a gap may not exist when one seems apparent.

The ability to provide medical care contains a wide range of acronyms within job postings and profiles. Notably, individual profiles have more medical care qualifications mentioned and overlap with all top qualifications mentioned for job postings. However, these listed qualifications may not necessarily line up with the diverse number of educational certifications related to jobs that provide medical care within Colorado.

The need for security clearance is spread throughout many occupations and industries. Job postings and individual profiles both have security clearance (or variations of security clearance) as top mentions of qualifications. This highlights the importance of obtaining security clearance if a job seeker is interested in work that requires that kind of qualification for entry.

Finally, the other category lists top qualifications for job postings and individual profiles that did not fit in with what was mentioned above. These various qualifications can span across many different types of industries and occupations.



## Comparing and Contrasting Similarities in Online Job Postings and Profile Qualifications

### Ability to Drive or Operate a Vehicle:

- » **Postings:** commercial driver's license (CDL); CDL Class A license; CDL Class B license; forklift certification; valid driver's license
- » **Profiles:** commercial driver's license (CDL)

### Ability to Provide Medical Care:

- » **Postings:** automated external defibrillator (AED) certification; basic life support certification; cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification; first aid certification; registered nurse (RN)
- » **Profiles:** advanced cardiovascular life support (ACLS) certification; American Red Cross (ARC) certification; automated external defibrillator (AED); basic life support certification; cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification; certified nursing assistant (CNA); emergency medical technician (EMT); first aid certification; registered nurse (RN); wilderness first responder (WFR)

### Security Clearance:

- » **Postings:** secret clearance; security clearance; top secret clearance; top secret-sensitive compartmented information (TS/SCI clearance)
- » **Profiles:** security clearance; top secret-sensitive compartmented information (TS/SCI clearance)

### Other:

- » **Postings:** 10-hour OSHA general industry card; board certified/board eligible; certified public accountant; food handler's card; Master of Business Administration (MBA); ServSafe certification
- » **Profiles:** 10-hour OSHA general industry card; 30-hour OSHA general industry card; CompTIA A+; CompTIA security+; FINRA Series 7 (general securities representative); project management professional certification; ServSafe certification

## Highlighting Top Technology Skills Required for Jobs Within Colorado's Strategic Industry Clusters

Detailed elsewhere in this report, the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) has identified strategic industry clusters in Colorado. These strategic industry clusters are listed below.

- » **Critical and emerging technologies** (quantum technologies; robotics; semiconductors; integrated communication and networking technologies; fiber optic networks; photonics and lasers; additive composites; agtech; and biotech)
- » **Software and IT services** (enterprise SaaS; artificial intelligence (AI); and data privacy, data security, and cybersecurity)
- » **Aerospace, defense, and security** (aviation; satellites and manned spacecraft; propulsion and rocket; space operations; and engineering services and hardware)
- » **Energy, natural resources, and clean energy technologies** (solar, wind, fusion, geothermal, grid infrastructure, battery and long-term storage, and carbon capture and storage)

Utilizing January 2024 to June 2025 job postings data from Lightcast on "software skills" and the underlying industries used by OEDIT to define Colorado's strategic industry clusters, an analysis was conducted to assess similar technology skills required by employers within those strategic industry clusters. While jobs within Colorado's strategic industry clusters are varied and range between multiple types of professional expertise, this aggregated information is useful to identify technology skills valued by employers.

The broad technology skills shown below are split into six categories: Microsoft Office, programming languages and related, cloud technologies, operating systems, project management tools, and other. Listed within each category are the top technology skills identified within online job postings for Colorado's strategic industry clusters.

## Top Technology Skills Identified in Online Job Postings Within Colorado's Strategic Industry Clusters

### Microsoft Office:

- » Excel, Word, PowerPoint, Access, Outlook

### Programming Language and Related:

- » Python, Java, C++, SQL

### Cloud Technologies:

- » Amazon Web Services, Salesforce, Microsoft Azure

### Operating System:

- » Linux

### Project Management Tool:

- » Jira

### Other:

- » Application Programming Interface, SAP Applications



## Trends over time for Mentions of Various Levels of Education Within Colorado Online Job Postings

The final portion of this section shifts to evaluating trends over time for mentions of various levels of education within Colorado online job postings. These data on levels of education in job postings also come from Lightcast and reflect [“any mention of an education level listed within the job postings; it may be preferred, required, or negotiable.”](#) Three periods were chosen to highlight these Colorado job posting trends over time: 2010 to 2012, which coincides with the slow recovery following the Great Recession; 2017 to 2019, which reflects the end of a long economic expansion and a tight labor market; and 2023 to 2025 (through June), the most recent data available. As displayed below and on the following

pages, broad occupational groups were selected to illustrate these trends for Colorado. Specifically, the next eight tables look at the share of total online job postings for these broad occupational groups that mention a range of different levels of postsecondary education, including associate, bachelor’s, master’s, and professional degrees, as well as no reference to education within the posting. Importantly, multiple levels of education can be mentioned within the same job posting (e.g. a bachelor’s degree is required, but a master’s degree is preferred).

Figures 34A and 34B look at trends over time for Colorado’s 2025 Tier 1 and Tier 2 Top Jobs, respectively.

The aggregated group of 60 Tier 1 Top Jobs has experienced a downward trend in the share of job postings that mention a bachelor’s degree when comparing the 2017–19 period to the most recent available (48.2% to 43.8%). Mentions of a master’s degree have only modestly grown over time.

**Figure 34A**

### 2025 Tier 1 Top Jobs and Mentions of Various Levels of Education Within Colorado Online Jobs Postings, for Select Periods

[Accessible data for Figure 34A](#)

Degree Type	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2010 to 2012	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2017 to 2019	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2023 to 2025
Master’s Degree	13.1%	13.1%	14.8%
Bachelor’s Degree	46.5%	48.2%	43.8%
Associate Degree	6.3%	6.6%	8.0%
No Education Listed	43.3%	42.8%	44.6%

**Source:** Lightcast; author calculations and analysis.



Comparatively, mentions of a bachelor’s degree within Colorado job postings covering the aggregated group of 103 Tier 2 Top Jobs have notably declined since the post-Great Recession period, moving from a share of 31.5% to 24.2%. This decrease reflects a shift away from employers requiring or preferring a bachelor’s degree for these types of jobs. That said, mentions of a master’s degree are now more likely to be present within a job posting for a Tier 2 Top Job today compared to prior periods.

Figure 34B

2025 Tier 2 Top Jobs and Mentions of Various Levels of Education Within Colorado Online Jobs Postings, for Select Periods

[Accessible data for Figure 34B](#)

Degree Type	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2010 to 2012	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2017 to 2019	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2023 to 2025
Master's Degree	8.7%	8.7%	11.6%
Bachelor's Degree	31.5%	29.8%	24.2%
Associate Degree	8.7%	8.8%	8.5%
No Education Listed	45.6%	44.1%	46.9%

Source: Lightcast; author calculations and analysis.

The Tier 1 and Tier 2 Top Job groups identified above had relatively low rates (less than 10%) of mentions of associate degrees within job postings across the select periods.

The next batch of tables analyze trends over time for mentions of various levels of education within Colorado online job postings for select broad occupational groups. Figure 35A focuses on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) occupations; Figure 35B discusses shares for trade occupations; Figure 35C looks at trends within services occupations; and Figure 35D highlights office and administrative support occupations.

**Figure 35A****STEM Occupations and Mentions of Various Levels of Education Within Colorado Online Jobs Postings, for Select Periods**[Accessible data for Figure 35A](#)

Degree Type	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2010 to 2012	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2017 to 2019	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2023 to 2025
Master's Degree	13.4%	15.2%	22.0%
Bachelor's Degree	52.6%	53.9%	56.6%
Associate Degree	5.5%	5.6%	5.9%
No Education Listed	39.1%	36.4%	31.3%

**Source:** Lightcast; author calculations and analysis. **Notes:** STEM includes occupations within the following major occupational groups: computer and mathematical; architecture and engineering; and life, physical, and social science.

Between 2010 and 2012, nearly 53% of Colorado job postings for STEM occupations mentioned a bachelor's degree, while that share has slightly increased to around 57% based on the most recent period available. However, during that same span of time, the mentions of a master's degree within job postings for STEM occupations rose from 13.4% to 22.0%, indicating these employers are now placing a greater emphasis on that relatively higher level of education. A mention of an associate degree within a Colorado job posting for STEM occupations is uncommon, occurring less than 6% of the time.

Colorado postings for openings within trade occupations, which include jobs in construction and extraction; installation, maintenance, and repair; production; and transportation and material moving, historically have low rates of mentioning a bachelor's degree. That share has been reduced by half between 2010-12 and 2023-25, dropping from 8.4% to 4.0%. Mentions of an associate degree are even rarer, spanning between 3.3% and 5.3% during the select periods. More than 60% of Colorado online jobs postings for trade occupations do not list any educational requirements or preferences.

Figure 35B

Trade Occupations and Mentions of Various Levels of Education Within Colorado Online Jobs Postings, for Select Periods  
[Accessible data for Figure 35B](#)

Degree Type	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2010 to 2012	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2017 to 2019	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2023 to 2025
Bachelor's Degree	8.4%	4.3%	4.0%
Associate Degree	5.3%	3.3%	3.3%
No Education Listed	63.0%	62.5%	63.2%

**Source:** Lightcast; author calculations and analysis. **Notes:** Trade includes occupations within the following major occupational groups: construction and extraction; installation, maintenance, and repair; production; and transportation and material moving.

The services occupational group, which includes a wide range of jobs related to either food, cleaning, personal care, or sales, has also experienced a measurable decrease in the share of job postings that mention a bachelor’s degree since Colorado was recovering from the Great Recession. That share has declined from nearly 21% between 2010 and 2012 to 11% based on the most recent data available. Like

with trade occupations, mentions of an associate degree within service occupation job postings are nearly non-existent, measuring at a rate of less than 3% during the 2023–25 period. The share of Colorado online jobs postings for service occupations that do not list any educational requirements or preferences has increased slightly over time.

**Figure 35C****Services Occupations and Mentions of Various Levels of Education Within Colorado Online Jobs Postings, for Select Periods**[Accessible data for Figure 35C](#)

Degree Type	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2010 to 2012	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2017 to 2019	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2023 to 2025
Bachelor's Degree	20.8%	14.1%	11.0%
Associate Degree	4.1%	3.4%	2.7%
No Education Listed	57.2%	59.8%	62.4%

**Source:** Lightcast; author calculations and analysis. **Notes:** Services includes occupations within the following major occupational groups: food preparation and serving related; building and grounds cleaning and maintenance; personal care and service; and sales and related.

The final table in this collection of occupational groups shows that the share of office and administrative support job postings that mention a bachelor's degree have changed little over the past 13 to 15 years, decreasing from 18.2% to 16.3%. This represents a relative level of stability for mentions of a bachelor's degree within job postings compared to the

trends discussed within the other five occupational groups above. Similarly, mentions of an associate degree within office and administrative support job postings also have limited variation during the select periods, ranging between share of 8.3% and 9.2%.

Figure 35D

Office and Administrative Support Occupations and Mentions of Various Levels of Education Within Colorado Online Jobs Postings, for Select Periods

[Accessible data for Figure 35D](#)

Degree Type	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2010 to 2012	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2017 to 2019	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2023 to 2025
Bachelor's Degree	18.2%	16.8%	16.3%
Associate Degree	8.7%	9.2%	8.3%
No Education Listed	48.9%	46.4%	45.7%

**Source:** Lightcast; author calculations and analysis. **Notes:** Office and administrative support includes occupations within the office and administrative support major occupational group.

The last two tables compare mentions of various levels of education within Colorado job postings for two groups of educational occupations: postsecondary teachers (Figure 36A) and K-12 teachers (Figure 36B). As previously referenced in this report, there are several postsecondary teaching occupations that made the list of Colorado Tier 1 and Tier 2 Top Jobs in 2025. Additionally, many K-12 teaching occupations are projected to have a large number of annual openings, but did not qualify as Top Jobs due to the 10-year growth rate criteria.

Unsurprisingly, job postings for postsecondary teachers have relatively high rates of mentions of a bachelor's degree and higher. Over 40% of Colorado job postings for postsecondary teachers mentioned

a professional degree during the measured periods, with essentially no change in shares between 2017-19 and 2023-25. Both the rates of mentions of master's and bachelor's degrees within postings for postsecondary teachers have notably increased over the past 13 to 15 years. Mentions of a master's degree has risen from approximately 43% between 2010 and 2012, to over 53% based on the most recent data available, while the rate for a bachelor's degree steadily grew from 22.8% to 30.5% during that same span of time. Any mention of an associate degree within jobs postings for postsecondary teachers is relatively rare, occurring at a rate of less than 10%; however, the share has risen since 2010-12, from 3.9% to 9.6%.



**Figure 36A**

**Postsecondary Teacher Occupations and Mentions of Various Levels of Education Within Colorado Online Jobs Postings, for Select Periods**

[Accessible data for Figure 36A](#)

Degree Type	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2010 to 2012	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2017 to 2019	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2023 to 2025
Professional Degree	47.1%	42.4%	42.0%
Master's Degree	42.7%	50.9%	53.1%
Bachelor's Degree	22.8%	26.9%	30.5%
Associate Degree	3.9%	5.7%	9.6%

**Source:** Lightcast; author calculations and analysis. **Notes:** Postsecondary teachers include more than 30 different occupations.

Finally, the composition of levels of education mentioned within Colorado job postings for K-12 teachers looks different compared to postsecondary teachers. Professional degrees are rarely mentioned in K-12 teacher postings, falling from 7.0% in 2010-12 to 1.5% based on recent data. Shares of mentions of a master's degree within K-12 teacher job postings have ranged between 15% and 22%,

significantly lower than the rates for postsecondary teacher postings. The probability of a bachelor's degree being mentioned within K-12 teacher job postings in Colorado has sharply increased, from around 31% in 2010-12 to approximately 50% by 2017-19. Interestingly, mentions of an associate degree in K-12 teacher postings are much less likely to occur compared to postsecondary teacher postings.

Figure 36B

K-12 Teacher Occupations and Mentions of Various Levels of Education Within Colorado Online Jobs Postings, for Select Periods

[Accessible data for Figure 36B](#)

Degree Type	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2010 to 2012	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2017 to 2019	Share of Online Job Postings That Mentions Degree Type, 2023 to 2025
Professional Degree	7.0%	2.4%	1.5%
Master's Degree	21.6%	15.2%	22.2%
Bachelor's Degree	30.7%	49.6%	50.8%
Associate Degree	2.3%	3.2%	4.4%

**Source:** Lightcast; author calculations and analysis. **Notes:** K-12 teachers include nine different occupations, spanning from kindergarten to high school.

Additional data on mentions of various levels of education within Colorado online job postings can be viewed in [Appendix C](#), which provides recent distributions for 427 detailed occupations.



## Colorado Population Factors to Consider: Aging and Migration

The next section of this report moves to a focus on Colorado population factors to consider, specifically aging and migration. Population trends and projections play an essential role in assessing Colorado's future talent pipeline needs and challenges.

## Information on Age Characteristics in Colorado and Relationship to the Labor Market

According to [forecasts from the State Demography Office \(SDO\)](#), Colorado's population is expected to increase from 5.92 million in 2024 to 6.60 million in 2034, a gain of approximately 684,000 people. During that 10-year span, Colorado's 75 and older population is projected to grow by around 234,000 individuals, or 34% of the total gain, reflecting an aging population. Specifically, those that were between the ages of 65 and 74 in 2024 (or those born between 1950 and 1959) will have all transitioned into the 75 and older cohort by 2034. An additional 52% of Colorado's population growth from 2024 to 2034 will come from the 25 to 54 cohort, which is expected to add over 355,000 individuals during that period. Only 3% of the state's population growth from 2024 to 2034 is forecasted to stem from those under 16 years old, due to [steadily declining birth rates over time](#). Figure 37 shows Colorado's estimated population levels by age group in 2024 and 2034 and the change during that 10-year period.

**Figure 37**

**Colorado's Estimated Population Levels for 2024 and 2034, by Age Group**

[Accessible data for Figure 37](#)

Age Group	Colorado's Population in 2024	Colorado's Population in 2034	Change in Colorado's Population, 2024 to 2034	Share of Change
Under 16	1,086,452	1,107,356	20,904	3.1%
16 to 24	699,970	726,593	26,623	3.9%
25 to 34	881,037	992,057	111,020	16.2%
35 to 44	860,113	953,112	92,999	13.6%
45 to 54	718,949	870,597	151,648	22.2%
55 to 64	677,860	701,147	23,287	3.4%
65 to 74	596,988	619,951	22,963	3.4%
75 and older	397,797	631,920	234,123	34.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,919,166</b>	<b>6,602,733</b>	<b>683,567</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Source:** Colorado State Demography Office. **Notes:** totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

As mentioned on [page 52](#) in the *Top Jobs and 2024–34 Employment Projections for Colorado* section, 36% of total projected job openings through 2034 will be due to exits from the labor market, which can be viewed as a proxy for people retiring from the workforce. Additionally, slowing birth rates over the past two decades – births as a proportion of Colorado's population have fallen from 1.5% in 2005 to 1.0% in 2025 – will limit the share of younger individuals entering the state's labor market compared to previous periods in time.

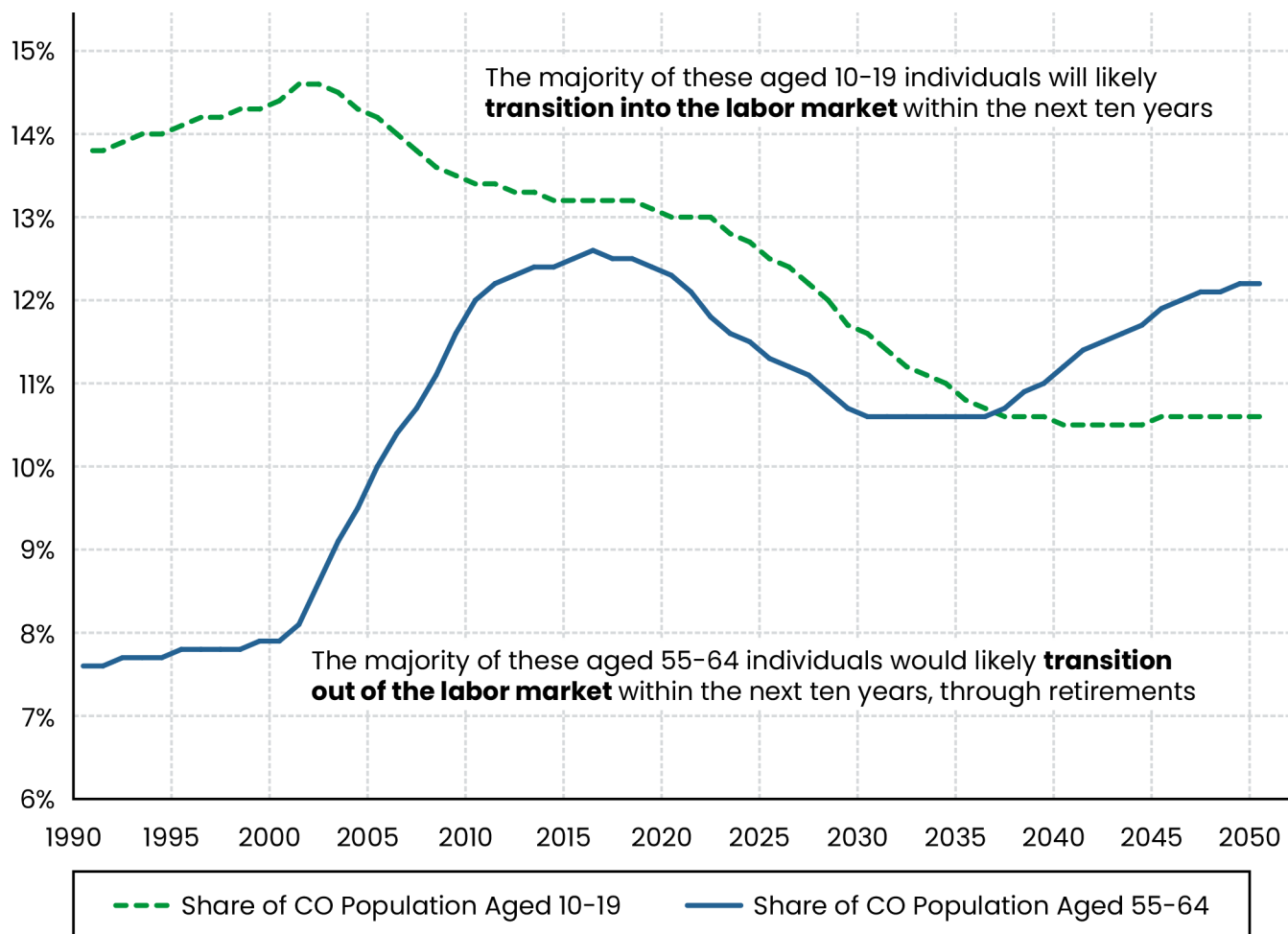
To help illustrate the relationship of younger and older workers transitioning in and out of Colorado's labor market, Figure 38 looks at the share of the state's population that is either between the ages of

10 and 19 or 55 and 64, based on SDO estimates and forecasts. The dashed green line displays the share of Colorado's population aged 10 to 19 for a given year. The majority of this group will likely transition into the labor market within the following ten years, when they will be between 20 and 29 years old. This cohort, as a share of Colorado's population, peaked above 14% in the early 2000s, and is projected to decline to 10.5% by the late 2030s. The 55 to 64 age group are those who may transition out of the labor market within the following ten years, when they will be between 65 and 74 years old. This cohort represented around 8% of the state's population in the early 2000s, with that share rising to over 12% by 2011, and expected to range between 10.5% to 12% from 2025 to 2050.

Figure 38

### Estimated Share of Colorado's Population Moving Into and Out of the Labor Force Within the Next Ten Years, 1990 to 2050

[Accessible data for Figure 38](#)



**Source:** Colorado State Demography Office; author calculations.

Notably, the share of Colorado's population aged 55 to 64 is projected to exceed the proportion of those between the ages of 10 and 19 by 2037. While the gap in population shares between the two age groups has narrowed substantially since the 1990s and early 2000s, this reversal in trend represents a meaningful shift for the state. This changing dynamic also [highlights the importance of older workers in Colorado](#) and using their skills and experience to fill openings and needed positions.

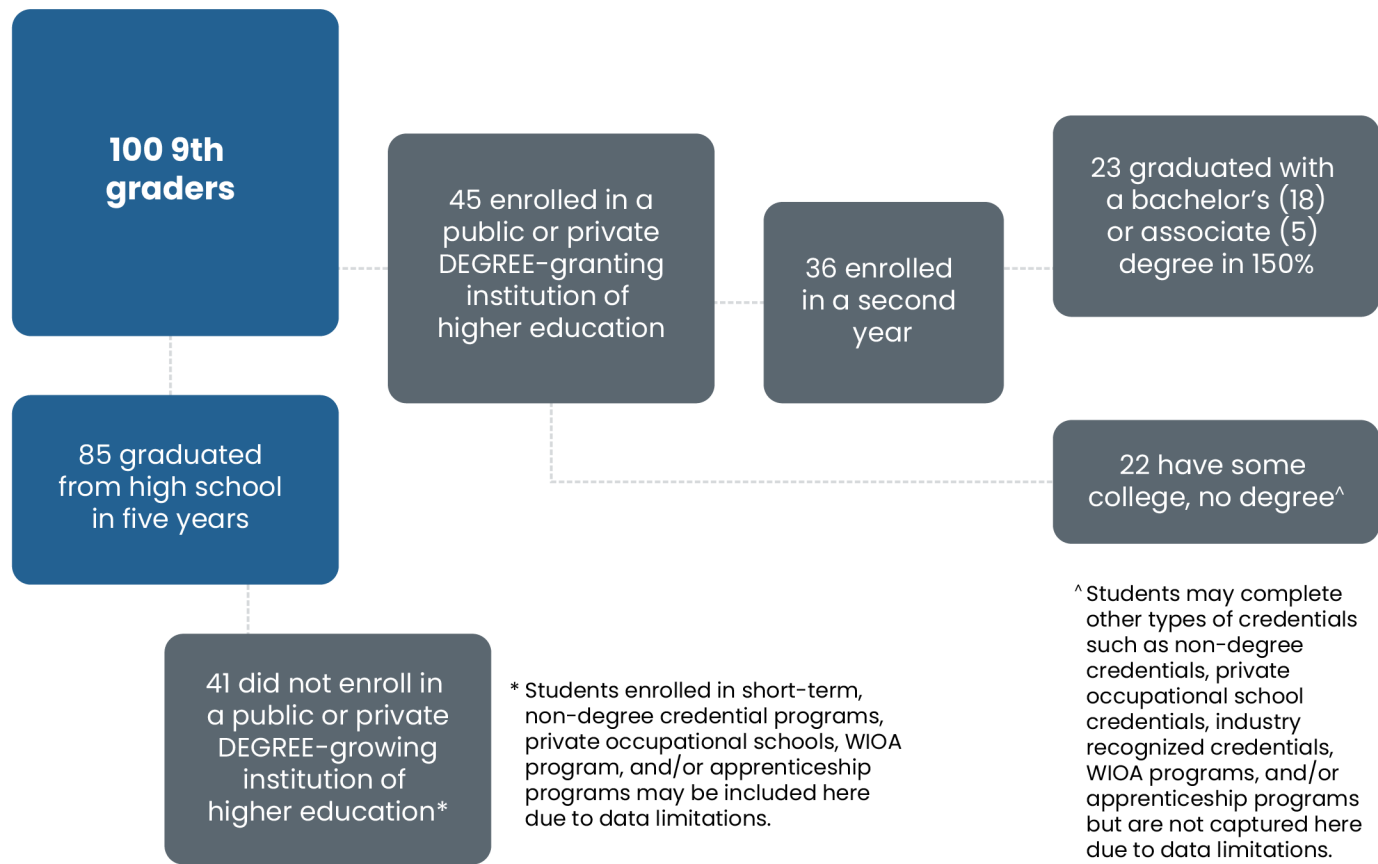
Figure 39 on the following page shows the likely paths for 100 hypothetical Colorado 9th graders based on current data. Of the hypothetical 100 students, 41 never enrolled in a postsecondary program and 45 enrolled in a public or private degree-granting institution of higher education. Of the 45 who enrolled, 22 have some college and no degree, and only 23 will complete a program to earn a postsecondary degree. For the students who never make it to the degree, 41 are employed but lack a credential, fewer than 1 are in an apprenticeship program, and 29 are not in the labor force at all.



Figure 39

Progression of 100 Hypothetical 9th Graders in Colorado Through the Postsecondary System

[Accessible information for Figure 39](#)



**Source:** Estimates utilize many sources of data, including the Colorado Department of Education, the Colorado Department of Higher Education, and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

It's important to note that we do not have information for students who enroll in or complete private occupational school credentials, industry-recognized credentials, or WIOA programs, and obtaining wage outcomes for students who do not enter postsecondary education requires linking data across three state agencies. While additional analyses, ideally from the State's Longitudinal Data System can reveal the real wage impacts of this matriculation pattern, the data in this report lay out that many high-wage, high-demand jobs require some form of postsecondary credential.

The data above show that **77** out of 100 students need access to high quality postsecondary training opportunities that exist outside of the traditional college experience. While some of these 77 might find themselves in a private occupational school, or a registered apprenticeship program, it is likely that many of these Coloradans do not have access to the postsecondary credential or training opportunity they need to compete in our economy. While we need more and better data to tell the full story of the postsecondary experiences that students navigate; if Colorado only cultivates and promotes traditional 2- or 4- year pathways, a large share of Colorado's K-12 students will be underserved.

The following table (Figure 40) displays how employment within each Colorado industry sector was distributed by age in 2024, based on [data from the U.S. Census Bureau](#). Similar to Figure 7 on [page 22](#), age was split into three broad groups: under 25, 25 to 54, and 55 and older. The table is sorted by the share of respective sector employment that is 55

and older, to highlight which industries may skew towards an older workforce demographic. In 2024, 22.4% of all industry employment in Colorado was concentrated in individuals aged 55 and older, while the shares for the under 25 and 25 to 54 groups were 12.5% and 65.1%, respectively.

**Figure 40**

**Share of Colorado's Industry Sector Employment in 2024, by Age Group**

[Accessible data for Figure 40](#)

Industry Sector	Share of Employment Under 25	Share of Employment 25 to 54	Share of Employment 55 and Older
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	10.7%	60.8%	28.4%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	8.2%	65.7%	26.1%
Manufacturing	7.5%	66.8%	25.8%
Utilities	3.8%	70.4%	25.7%
Public Administration	9.1%	65.5%	25.4%
Wholesale Trade	6.2%	69.2%	24.6%
Educational Services	7.6%	67.9%	24.5%
Transportation and Warehousing	12.5%	63.3%	24.3%
Administrative, Waste, and Temp Services	10.5%	65.7%	23.8%
Finance and Insurance	4.5%	71.7%	23.8%
Retail Trade	23.1%	53.8%	23.1%
Construction	10.9%	66.3%	22.8%

## Colorado Population Factors to Consider: Aging and Migration

Industry Sector	Share of Employment Under 25	Share of Employment 25 to 54	Share of Employment 55 and Older
<b>All Industries</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>65.1%</b>	<b>22.4%</b>
Health Care and Social Assistance	9.6%	68.1%	22.3%
Other Services	14.4%	63.5%	22.1%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	7.4%	70.8%	21.7%
Professional and Technical Services	5.0%	73.7%	21.3%
Information	4.7%	74.2%	21.1%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	6.2%	74.1%	19.7%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	24.8%	56.0%	19.2%
Accommodation and Food Services	30.8%	53.4%	15.8%

**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau (Quarterly Workforce Indicators); author calculations. **Notes:** table is sorted in descending order by the share of employment 55 and older; totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Eight industry sectors fell below the statewide figure of 22.4%, with the lowest shares belonging to accommodation and food services (15.8%); arts, entertainment, and recreation (19.2%); and mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (19.7%). The Colorado industry sectors with at least a quarter of employment aged 55 and older were: agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting (28.4%); real estate and rental and leasing (26.1%); manufacturing (25.8%); utilities (25.7%); and public administration (25.4%).

Conversely, the industries that rely on a relatively younger workforce (under 25) were: accommodation and food services (30.8% share of employment); arts, entertainment, and recreation (24.8%); and retail trade (23.1%).

Colorado's distribution of industry employment by workers between the ages of 25 and 54, also known as the [prime-age](#) labor force, varies greatly by sector. Unsurprisingly, accommodation and food services have the lowest share of workers aged 25 to 54, at only 53.4%. Retail trade also has a relatively low concentration (53.8%), due to high shares at the younger (under 25) and older (55+) age spectrums. Four industry sectors had 2024 employment shares that exceeded 71% for workers between 25 and 54: information (74.2%); mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (74.1%); professional and technical services (73.7%); and finance and insurance (71.7%).

While Figure 40 showed shares of industry employment by age group, the next table (Figure 41) displays the three industry sectors that made up the largest shares of employment within each broad age group in 2024. Over half of Colorado's employment concentrated within the under 25 age group is distributed between only three industry sectors. Accommodation and food services accounted for 25.2% of the state's under 25 employment total. Retail trade represented the next largest share at nearly 18%, while approximately 10% of Colorado's under 25 employment was distributed within the health care and social assistance industry sector.

The industry sector representing the largest share of employment for Colorado's 25 to 54 workforce

in 2024 was health care and social assistance, with a concentration of almost 14%. Professional and technical services (12.0%) and accommodation and food service (8.4%) were the sectors with the second and third largest shares of employment for the 25 to 54 group.

Similar to the 25 to 54 cohort, employment for Colorado's 55 and older age group is most distributed within health care and social assistance (13.2%), followed by professional and technical services (10.1%). Nearly 10% of the state's employment for those 55 and older is concentrated within retail trade, representing the third largest industry share for that age group.

**Figure 41**

**Top Three Industry Sectors as a Share of Total Industry Employment in 2024, by Age Group**

[Accessible data for Figure 41](#)

Age Group	Industry Sector with the Largest Share of Employment	Industry Sector with the Second Largest Share of Employment	Industry Sector with the Third Largest Share of Employment
Under 25	Accommodation and Food Services: <b>25.2%</b>	Retail Trade: <b>17.7%</b>	Health Care and Social Assistance: <b>10.2%</b>
25 to 54	Health Care and Social Assistance: <b>13.9%</b>	Professional and Technical Services: <b>12.0%</b>	Accommodation and Food Services: <b>8.4%</b>
55 and Older	Health Care and Social Assistance: <b>13.2%</b>	Professional and Technical Services: <b>10.1%</b>	Retail Trade: <b>9.8%</b>

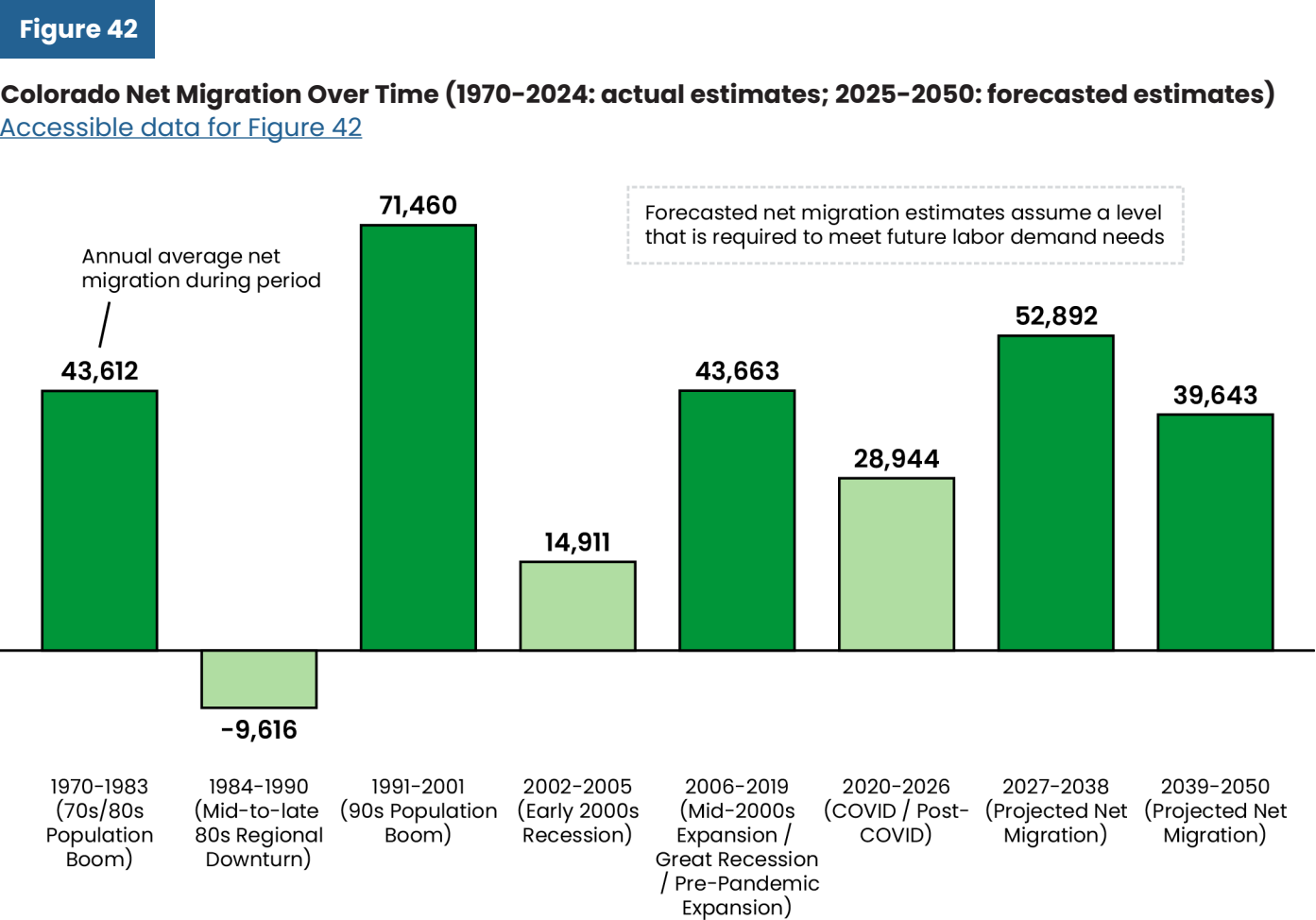
**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau (Quarterly Workforce Indicators); author calculations.

# Information on Migration in Colorado and Relationship to the Labor Market

Along with aging, another important population factor to consider for Colorado’s talent pipeline is migration, otherwise known as the movement of population to and from the state. Net migration, which is the difference of people moving into Colorado (in-migration) to moving out of Colorado (out-migration), has been historically important to the state for filling labor needs, attracting talent, and growing its economy. The chart below (Figure 42) displays actual and forecasted Colorado net migration levels from the State Demography Office (SDO) over time and for select periods: 1970–1983; 1984–

1990; 1991–2001; 2002–2005; 2006–2019; 2020–2026; 2027–2038; and 2039–2050. The annual average net migration for Colorado is shown for each group of years, with higher averages presented in a solid green bar, and lower or negative averages reflected within the lighter green bars.

From 1970 to 1983, Colorado’s net migration averaged a gain of 43,612 per year, meaning the state’s population grew by nearly 44,000 individuals annually based on the difference of people moving into the state versus out of the state. Responding to a period of economic downturn and net migration loss (–9,616 per year) from the mid-to-late 1980s, Colorado experienced another population surge in the 1990s, when annual net migration exceeded 71,000 people.



Source: Colorado State Demography Office; author calculations.

This 11-year stretch from 1991 to 2001 of strong net migration for the state came to an end when Colorado was notably impacted by the early 2000s national recession (for example, in 2002 Colorado's job growth ranked 49th nationally). While net migration for Colorado did not decline like it did in the mid-1980s, annual levels dropped below 15,000 from 2002 to 2005. Surprisingly, annual net migration for Colorado between 2006 and 2019 was fairly stable, considering that period spanned two economic expansions as well as the Great Recession. During this fourteen-year duration, Colorado's annual average net migration was 43,663, with 2015 as the only notable outlier (net migration exceeded 68,000 that year, which coincided with the peak of the oil and gas fracking boom in the state).

The pandemic in 2020 ended the long economic expansion that followed the Great Recession, and reductions in Colorado's net migration gains followed. In 2021 Colorado's net migration total was only around +11,000 individuals, the lowest single year figure since 2003. While the state's net migration has improved since 2021 (+23,800 in 2022, +33,400 in 2023, and +38,900 in 2024), this pandemic/post-pandemic period represents another shift in migration trends for Colorado. The SDO forecasts that Colorado's net migration totals for 2025 and 2026 will fall below 35,000, as the rebound in 2023 and 2024 was driven by international populations and not likely to repeat for this year and next (for more information on that topic, go to the *Headwinds* section starting on [page 108](#)).

While SDO's forecasts show a resurgence in Colorado's net migration starting in 2027, it is important to note that these projections do not reflect what may happen, but instead the estimated levels that are needed to meet future labor demand needs. This is a critical distinction to consider, as any gaps created with lower actual net migration in the future may exacerbate challenges for employers to fill positions.

Distributions of [Colorado's estimated net migration by age are available from SDO](#) on a per decade basis, rather than annually. Figure 43 below shows that nearly half of the state's net migration gains came from the 25 to 34 age group last decade, while those 35 to 49 contributed an additional 20%. The 50 and older cohort resulted in a slight net migration loss for Colorado.

**Figure 43**

**Share of Colorado's Net Migration Totals Between 2010 and 2020, by Age Group**

[Accessible data for Figure 43](#)

Age Group	Share of Total Net Migration, 2010 to 2020
Under 20	19.2%
20 to 24	12.5%
25 to 34	48.3%
35 to 49	20.3%
50 and older	-0.3%

**Source:** Colorado State Demography Office; author calculations.



Another way to evaluate how Colorado relies on migration is to analyze recent data on movers into the state. The U.S. Census Bureau collects a vast array of information from their annual [American Community Survey](#) and one dataset [estimates geographic mobility](#), specifically how many people within a state have moved from a different state or from another country over the past year. The following table (Figure 44) displays the states that have the highest proportions of their 25 to 54 population that have moved from either another state or abroad within the past year, from 2019 to 2023. During this period, Colorado had the 5th highest share nationally, with 5.3% of the state’s 25 to 54 population having moved from another state or country over the past year. The four states with higher shares than Colorado are either heavily dependent on natural resources and mining (Wyoming and Alaska) or tourism (Hawaii and Nevada).

Figure 44

States with the Highest Shares of Their 25 to 54 Population That Have Moved From Another State or Abroad Within the Past Year, 2019 to 2023  
[Accessible data for Figure 44](#)

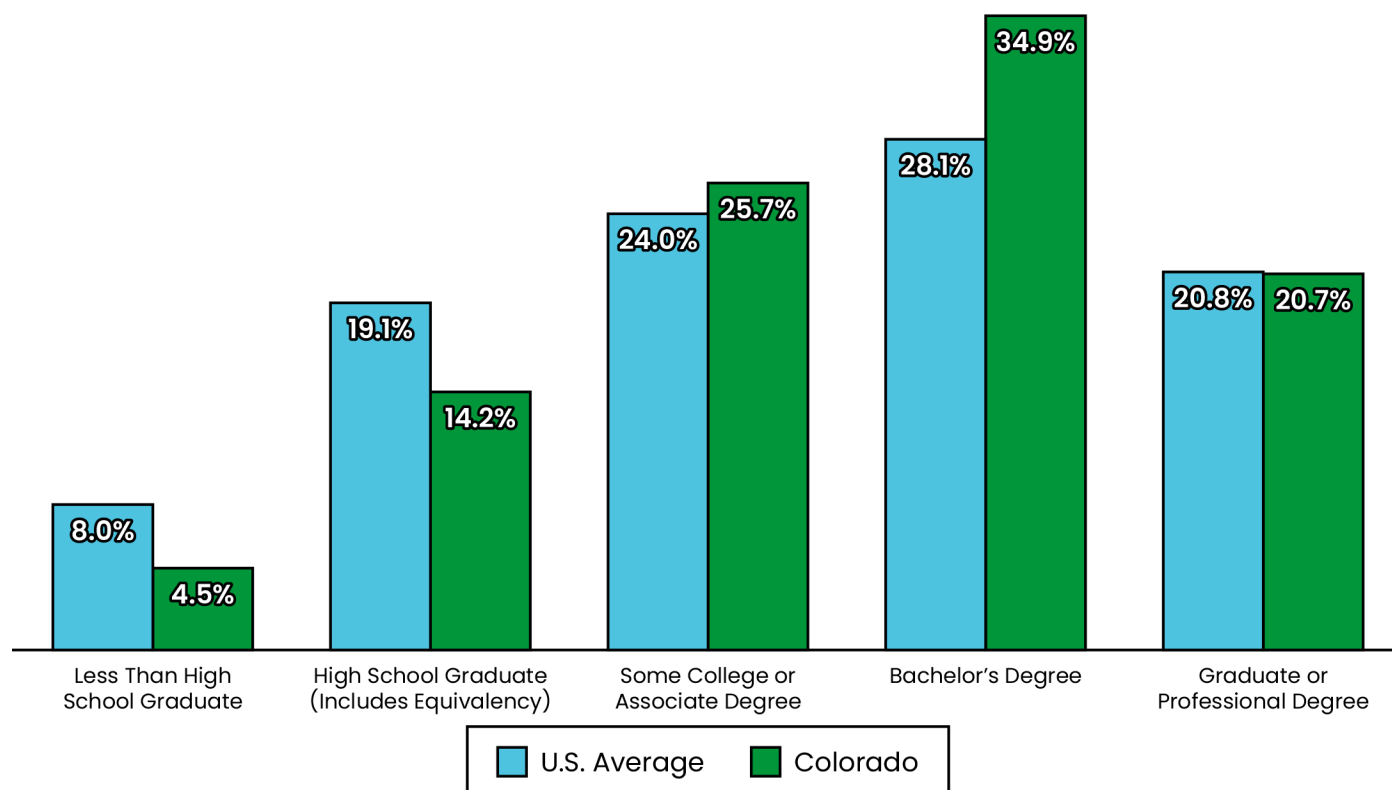
Rank	State	Estimated Share of a State's 25 to 54 Population That Has Moved From Another State or Abroad Over the Past Year
1	Wyoming	6.0%
2	Hawaii	5.8%
3	Alaska	5.5%
4	Nevada	5.4%
5	Colorado	5.3%

Rank	State	Estimated Share of a State's 25 to 54 Population That Has Moved From Another State or Abroad Over the Past Year
6	Idaho	5.1%
7	Rhode Island	5.0%
8	New Hampshire	5.0%
9	Delaware	4.7%
10	Montana	4.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (Quarterly Workforce Indicators); author calculations.

The American Community Survey also provides estimates on those who have moved to a state within the past year from either another state or abroad within the past year by [their level of educational attainment](#): less than a high school degree; high school graduate (or equivalent); some college or associate degree; bachelor’s degree; and graduate or professional degree.

The chart on the next page (Figure 45) shows how educational attainment was distributed for individuals 25 years and older who moved from another state or country, between 2019 and 2023. The light blue bar displays the average distribution for the U.S., while the green bar reflects shares for Colorado. Approximately 81% of movers to Colorado from another state or abroad during this period had some kind of postsecondary education, compared to 73% for the U.S. Between the five levels of educational attainment shown, the highest shares of movers for both Colorado and the U.S. were in the bachelor’s degree group, at 34.9% and 28.1%, respectively.

**Figure 45****Share of Individuals Who Moved to State Within the Past Year From Another State or Abroad, by Level of Educational Attainment (2019 to 2023: 25 Years and Older Population)**[Accessible data for Figure 45](#)

**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau (American Community Survey, 5-year 2019–23 estimates); author calculations.

The final set of data provided within this section of the report focuses on a resource that can be used to analyze the movement of employed individuals to and from Colorado over time. These statistics from the [U.S. Census Bureau on “job flows”](#) concentrate on a certain segment of the working population – those individuals who switch employers, with no or limited nonemployment spells (therefore excluding those with long unemployment durations, breaks from the labor force, or that did not work for a traditional payroll employer). This cohort of job-changing workers can be separated into four groups: 1) those that stay in the same state and remain in the same industry; 2) those that stay in the same state, but change industries; 3) those that move to a new

state and remain in the same industry; and 4) those that move to a new state, but change industries. Figure 46 on the following page combines groups 3 and 4, which narrows the scope to workers that relocate to a different state, regardless of industry. Using this subset of data provides the ability to measure workers who move to and from a state (inflow and outflow), and how the net difference (net flow) for Colorado changes over time. Another way to think about this dataset is as a useful proxy for tracking the exchange of labor between Colorado and other states, which can also act as a complement to the net migration data previously discussed in this section.

## Colorado Population Factors to Consider: Aging and Migration

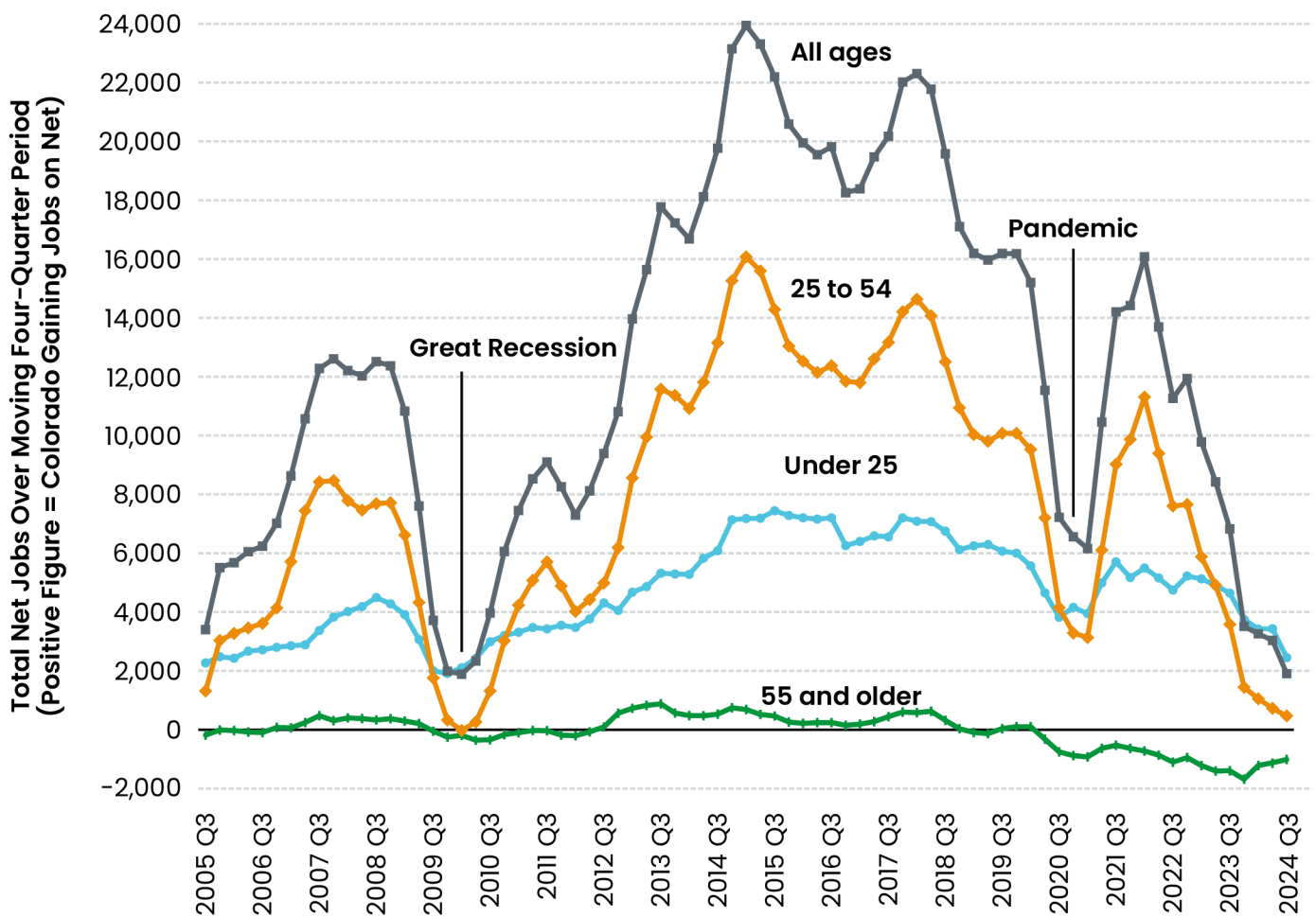
As shown below, Colorado net job flows can be distributed by broad age groups: under 25 (light blue line); 25 to 54 (orange line); 55 and older (green line); and all ages (gray line). Additionally, this chart spans between the third quarter of 2005 to the third quarter of 2024 (the most recent data available). Notably, recent Colorado net job flows for all ages

have fallen rapidly over the past couple years, from a level exceeding +16,000 in early 2022 to less than +2,000 by late 2024. The 25 to 54 age group is the largest driver of the recent slowdown for Colorado, declining below +500 net job flows for the first time since the Great Recession.

**Figure 46**

### Colorado Net Job Flows by Broad Age Group

[Accessible data for Figure 46](#)



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau (Job-to-Job Flows); author calculations. **Notes:** in order to remove seasonal volatility and to aid in observing long-term trends, a rolling four-quarter total is utilized in this chart; the following states are excluded from this analysis due to incomplete data during the measured time frame: Alaska, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, and the District of Columbia.



## Strategies

Colorado utilizes both federal and state funds stemming from multiple pieces of legislation that support talent development, as well as plans at the federal, state, and local levels that inform work related to talent development. Before we can productively examine new bodies of work or suggest new state policies to tackle future talent needs, it is critical to understand the progress that has been made through prior actions of the Colorado legislature, state agencies, and private partners. Therefore we have included in this section below information and progress reports on key plans and bodies of work.

The work discussed in this section has also been selected because of its connection to one of last year's Talent Pipeline Report policy recommendations: 1) Strengthen support for employers' talent development; 2) Increase the availability of career-connected learning opportunities, and 3) Ensure the design of Colorado's talent development ecosystem is optimized for innovation, governance, and results.

## Affordability, Quality, Equity, Access: Colorado's WIOA State Plan

### Partners:

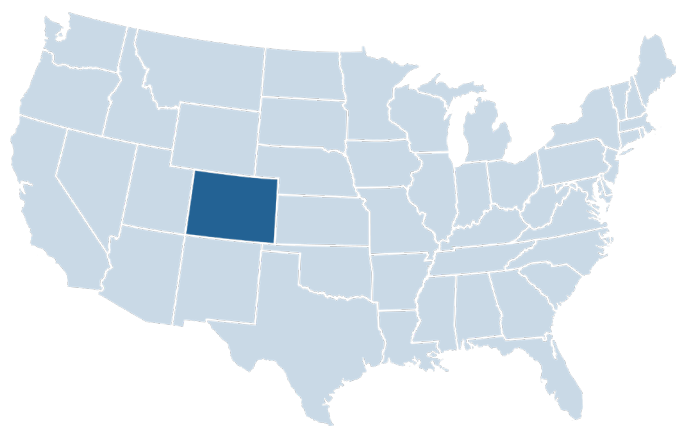
- Colorado Community College System, incl. Career & Technical Education
- Colorado Department of Education, incl. Adult Education Initiatives, Office of Postsecondary Workforce Readiness
- Colorado Department of Higher Education
- Colorado Department of Human Services, incl. State Unit on Aging
- Colorado Department of Labor & Employment, incl. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Employment & Training, Office of the Future of Work, State Apprenticeship Agency, Office of New Americans, Unemployment Insurance, Colorado Disability Opportunity Office
- Colorado Department of Local Affairs, incl. Community Services Block Grant Program
- Colorado Energy Office
- Office of Economic Development & International Trade – incl. Rural Opportunity Office
- Workforce Colorado (the state's public workforce system)

### Summary:

Colorado's four-year plan for talent development activities under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was approved in July 2024. While that act does not govern all of the publicly-funded education and workforce programs in Colorado, the vision outlined by [Colorado's WIOA State Plan](#) harmonizes many lanes of effort. Colorado has made progress toward that vision by pursuing workforce development strategies that advance Affordability, Equity, Quality, and Access goals. Key aspects of the WIOA State Plan implemented in the previous program year are highlighted below, but this is just a small portion of work happening. For more details, Colorado publishes a [WIOA Annual Report](#) each December; the most recent can be found in [Appendix D](#).



## By the Numbers: Colorado's Public Workforce System Impact



# 60,196

in-person services through our statewide network of workforce centers, such as resume assistance and interview skills in PY2024



# 212,458

Job seekers utilized the public workforce system in PY2024



# 13,656

Businesses were served by the public workforce system in PY2024



# 6,885

individuals were enrolled in more extensive training programs in PY2024



# 512,952

jobs posted



# 59%

employment rate for individuals enrolled in the WIOA Wagner-Peyser program in PY24

If you are interested in learning more about the comprehensive services offered in local workforce centers, [find the workforce center closest to you.](#)



## Skills-first Talent Management Practices

### Partners:

- ▶ Colorado Community College System
- ▶ Colorado Department of Higher Education
- ▶ Colorado Department of Labor & Employment
- ▶ Colorado Workforce Development Council
- ▶ Education and Training Providers, Employers, Funders, Intermediaries, L/Earners, Navigators, Policy Makers
- ▶ Workforce Colorado (the state's public workforce system)

### Summary:

Advancing a skills-first approach is an important lever toward building a strong and dynamic workforce that meets the needs of Colorado's economy. Skills-first talent management involves hiring, training, and promoting based on skills – what job seekers can do – and not just relying on proxies for skills such as degrees, former job titles, or years of experience. It is about focusing on real-world abilities, potential, and alignment with business needs. This approach doesn't dismiss the value of education or experience. Instead, it ensures these are not the only factors considered when making talent decisions. Skills-first talent management has proven benefits for businesses, including accessing larger talent pools, improving retention and reducing costs, and building internal talent pipelines.

To support the adoption of skills-first practices, the CWDC has tested and aligned skills-first messages, hosted a skills-first challenge for local workforce boards, and developed a number of resources, including:

- » Overview clarifying what skills-first practices are and their value to employers and learners and earners
- » A skills-first toolkit to get started
- » Case studies sharing how Colorado companies across different industries are already leveraging skills-first talent management
- » Guides to auditing job descriptions, updating interview processes, implementing skills-based assessments, and building and development systems, and tracking and analyzing results
- » Connections to additional national resources

The State of Colorado does not just advocate for skills-first practices, but has worked to incorporate them into recruiting, hiring, and retention, with Governor Polis issuing executive orders on [skills-first hiring](#) in 2022 and [work-based learning](#) in 2023.

# Growing Sector Partnerships in Colorado

## Partners:

- ▶ Colorado Department of Labor & Employment
- ▶ Colorado Workforce Development Council
- ▶ Employers, Community Colleges, Economic Developers, Industry Associations, Chambers of Commerce, K12 Education
- ▶ Workforce Colorado (the state's public workforce system)

## Summary:

Colorado has been launching and growing sector partnerships since 2005 through a framework that fosters industry-driven alignment across economic development, workforce development, and education. The state has invested in regional, public-private partnerships targeting key industries that are vital to our regional economies. As of 2025, there are 27 active sector partnerships across the state. These partnerships exist in nine of the 14 economic development regions and in diverse industries such as retail, health care, aerospace, tech, construction, and more.

Annually, the CWDC releases the Sector Partnerships Business Impact Survey to better understand how regional sector partnerships advance the goals of businesses, the workforce, and the wider community. Key findings from the 2025 survey include:

- » 72.97% noticed increased recognition or visibility within their community.
- » 60% of partnerships surveyed supported worker upskilling or career advancement opportunities, while 55% promoted skills first practices & developed or enhanced training and education programs.
- » 50% implemented workbased learning programs such as apprenticeships, internships, and job shadowing opportunities.

Find the full details of the 2025 Sector Partnership Business Impact Survey in [Appendix E](#).

The work happening in Colorado's many active sector partnerships across the state is complementary to the Opportunity Now Regional Talent Summits, which will be discussed later in this report. Through the summits, some regions identified sector partnerships as vehicles to move work forward. In addition, seeing sector partnership engagement with the summits has sparked interest in launching additional sector partnerships.

# Quality Career Pathways Framework

## Partners:

- › Colorado Community College System
- › Colorado Department of Education
- › Colorado Department of Higher Education
- › Colorado Department of Labor & Employment
- › Colorado Workforce Development Council
- › Office of Economic Development & International Trade

## Relevant State Legislation:

- › HB15-1274 Creation of Career Pathways for Students for Critical Occupations in Growing Industries

## Summary:

The Quality Career Pathways Framework is the state's official blueprint for building career pathways. This new framework is built with extensive feedback to serve as a unified approach designed to connect all of the dots in building quality career pathways, ensuring that the skills being taught in the classroom are the exact skills needed for great careers in Colorado. Four components are essential to supporting the framework:

- › **Employer Needs & Skills Alignment:** This means starting with the destination in mind. This includes creating formal ways for businesses to tell public partners exactly what skills they need, so training programs are perfectly aligned with real-world jobs and are not guessing about what employers want.
- › **High-Quality Education & Training:** This ensures programs have experienced instructors, resources and tools, and the comprehensive support services learners and earners need to succeed.
- › **Clear Pathways & Navigation:** A path isn't useful if you can't see it. This pillar is all about making career options easy to find and understand. This includes clear visual maps, transparent information about wages and opportunities, and user-friendly online tools like [My Colorado Journey](#).
- › **Quality Jobs & Positive Outcomes:** The goal isn't just to get you a job; it's to connect you to a **great job** with a sustainable wage, benefits, and a real future. This includes tracking the long-term success of these pathways for all students, ensuring they create equitable opportunities for everyone.

This framework is guided by the following core values.

- › **Employer-driven** and centered on **the learner**.
- › Built on **collaboration and partnerships**.
- › Focused on **universal access**.
- › Using **real data** to make the smartest decisions for our state.

Learn more about career pathways development in Colorado in [Appendix F](#).

# Connecting Colorado: Modernizing Colorado's Labor Exchange System

## Partners:

- Colorado Department of Labor & Employment
- Office of Information Technology
- Workforce Colorado (the state's public workforce system)

## Summary:

Colorado is required to have a labor exchange system by the Wagner-Peyser Act. In 2025, led by the work of the Employment and Training Division at the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Workforce Colorado, the state's public workforce system, collaborated to modernize the [Connecting Colorado](#) labor exchange and case management technology platform. Connecting Colorado has been upgraded to provide a smoother, more efficient experience for all users. The platform offers improved tools to help job seekers connect with career opportunities and support employers in finding skilled talent.

Job seekers will benefit from powerful new features, including career planning tools to track progress and set goals, a targeted resume builder to create tailored resumes, and job matching functionality to discover opportunities aligned with their individual skills and experience. The platform also provides access to training programs that help close skill gaps, as well as match scoring to show how well users align with specific job openings and identify areas for improvement.

For employers, Connecting Colorado makes it easier than ever to post job openings and attract qualified candidates. The new features streamline the talent identification process, helping businesses reduce time-to-fill and keep operations moving efficiently. Employers are also able to proactively search for job seekers who meet their needs and generate instant, stack-ranked lists of qualified candidates to support faster, more informed hiring decisions.

As suggested by the technology vision referenced later in the Strategies section, state agencies are now examining how similar tools can be retired and directed to the functionality within this powerful new system to streamline the user experience.

## Aligned Talent Development Technology Vision

### Partners:

- › Colorado Department of Education
- › Colorado Department of Higher Education
- › Colorado Department of Labor & Employment
- › Colorado Workforce Development Council
- › Office of Economic Development & International Trade

### Summary:

State agency partners collaborated to create a [collaborative technology vision](#) that focuses talent development-focused on technology being:

- » User-centered
- » Interoperable
- » Accessible, and
- » Expandable.

The Colorado Workforce Development Council Executive Committee, comprised of multiple state agency leaders and private sector leaders, approved the technology vision. Projects underway are working to embed these principles into their efforts in order to provide improved user experiences for Coloradans within and across digital tools managed by the state and reduced redundancy.

# Opportunity Now Regional Talent Summits and Tactical Workforce Plans

## Partners:

- › Chambers of Commerce, Local Economic Developers, Nonprofit Intermediaries
- › Colorado Workforce Development Council
- › Office of Economic Development & International Trade
- › Workforce Colorado (the state's public workforce system)

## Relevant State Legislation:

- › HB 24-1365

## Summary:

Colorado's economic competitiveness in a rapidly evolving global landscape is directly linked to the strength and readiness of its workforce. To address critical talent shortages, the Opportunity Now Regional Talent Summits mobilized more than 500 industry leaders, educators, and public partners. This initiative, as directed by HB 24-1365, moved beyond discussion to produce actionable, industry-driven tactical plans designed to reimagine Colorado's talent development system. This summary outlines the strategic investment opportunities identified across all regions.

Insight from these summits has merged with statewide strategies and research to yield four foundational investment pillars that are critical for securing Colorado's economic future:

- 1. Igniting the Future Talent Pipeline:** We must formalize how we expose the next generation to high-demand career pathways, prioritizing early, in-person career experiences. This requires more than career fairs; it demands early, immersive experiences and expanded access to workforce readiness programs within the K-12 system. The result is a larger, more engaged, and better-prepared pool of future workers, reducing long-term recruitment costs for businesses.
- 2. Energizing a Skills-Based Economy:** The market demands a shift from traditional timelines to agile, responsive training. The key is scaling skills-first practices, including innovative work-based learning, growing registered apprenticeships, and industry-recognized stackable credentials. A tighter, more dynamic alignment between our training providers and industry needs will produce workers with immediately applicable skills, accelerating productivity, innovation, and return on investment. Success will require new strategies from training providers and new behaviors from businesses to reach more Coloradans.



**3. Architecting High-Impact Partnerships:** Disparate efforts lead to the inefficient use of resources, unclear entry points, and employer fatigue. A recommended solution is to build industry-specific state-wide strategies for business-led, high-impact public-private collaborations. This includes establishing centralized resource hubs that streamline engagement and create a unified, coordinated force for talent development, bridging the gaps between training and industry, and tight collaboration with regional structures. As this effort is pursued, a thoughtful approach will be needed to determine what is not working so that low-impact engagement efforts can be reduced or eliminated. The return is greater efficiency, reduced duplication, and a more potent collective impact that empower existing local and regional structures.

**4. Removing Talent Barriers:** Colorado's economic engine relies on our talented people. Yet foundational issues exist that negatively impact the workforce and increase challenges for business in hiring. As a state, Colorado must leverage existing and transformational proactive solutions to tackle socioeconomic challenges—specifically the cost of housing, transportation, and childcare, as well as competitive wages. Addressing these foundational issues is paramount for both attracting and retaining the talent Colorado needs to thrive.

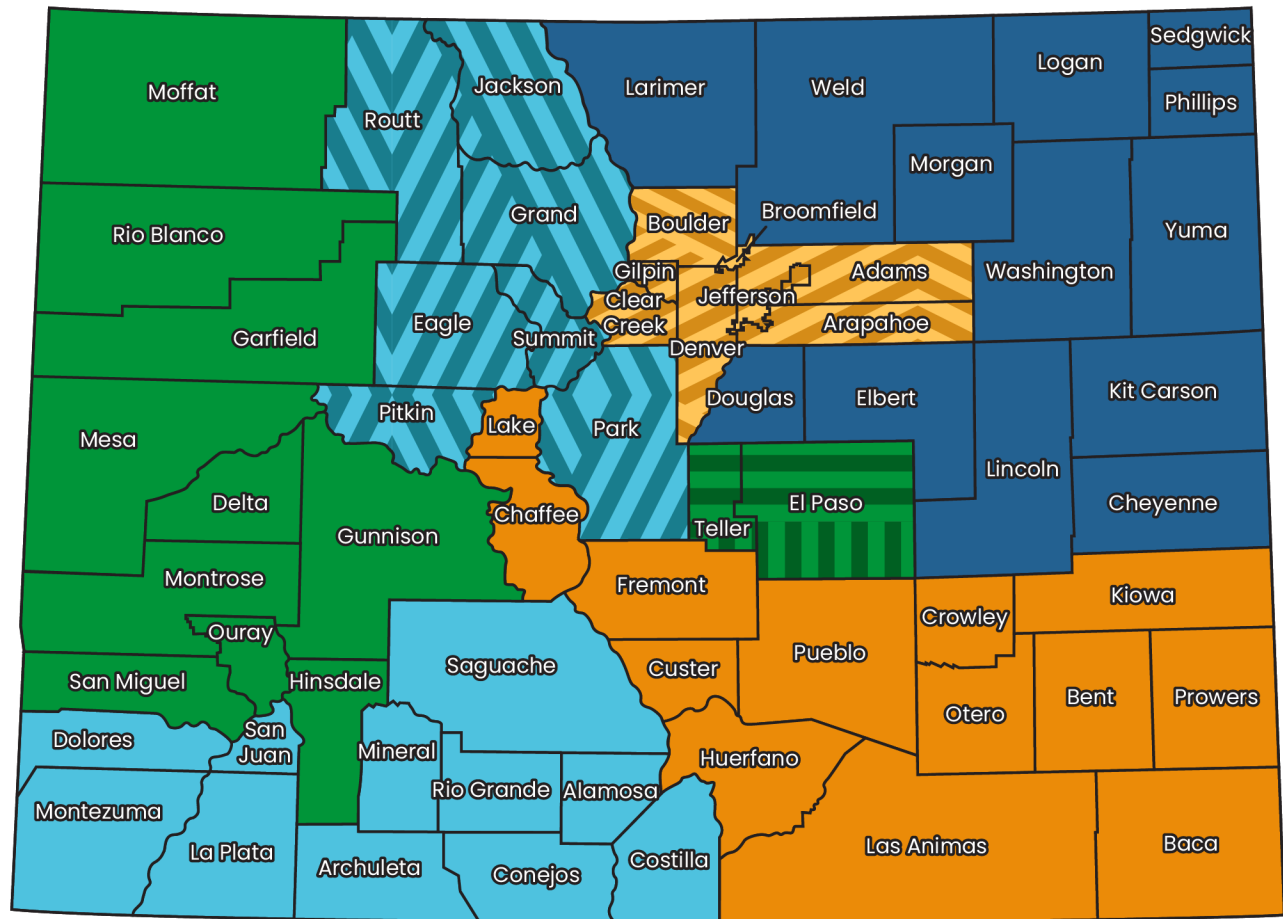
## Action and Accountability

The Regional Talent Summits Act (HB 24-1365) provided a clear direction: convene state and regional stakeholders to build industry-driven solutions to Colorado's workforce shortages. In alignment with a statewide vision to build a more coordinated talent development system and ensure all Coloradans are ready for success in a rapidly evolving economy, seven summits were held across the state between February and June 2025.

These summits engaged more than 500 regional stakeholders. The result is a series of regional tactical plans for nine key sectors, which can be found in [Appendix J](#). Local workforce development boards, in collaboration with regional partners, will spearhead the implementation of these plans, turning this strategic blueprint into tangible economic impact. The CWDC is tasked with coordinating with local entities and across state agencies to support regional goals. The accountability to implement the regional action plans will flow through local workforce boards with the support of statewide partners and intermediaries, several of whom are engaging in complementary efforts.

## OEDIT Opportunity Now Summit Map

[Accessible Summit Map content](#)



### Denver Summit



### Northeast Summit



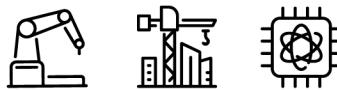
### Northwest Summit



### South Central Summit



### Southern Summit



### Pikes Peak Summit



### Western Summit



### Icon Key

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Aerospace & Defense
- Agriculture
- Construction
- Early Childhood Education
- Healthcare
- Renewables & Clean Energy
- Technology
- Tourism

## Investment Synopsis by Industry

While the four strategic pillars apply universally, each key industry identified specific, high-yield opportunities where targeted collaboration can unlock significant growth.

- » **Advanced Manufacturing:** Industry leaders see a critical opportunity to integrate automation and digital literacy into all training programs. The goal is twofold: attract a younger, tech-savvy generation and upskill the current workforce to modernize production. This requires recruiting instructors with recent industry experience to ensure training is relevant and immediately applicable.
- » **Aerospace & Defense:** According to industry, the primary bottleneck to growth is the federal security clearance process. This strategy could leverage Colorado's talent pool of military veterans and K-12 pipeline for students prepared to meet clearance requirements, directly addressing a major industry pain point, including early pathways.
- » **Construction & Agriculture:** These sectors require a new approach to talent development that modernizes trades education in high schools and the mechanisms for reskilling adults. Industry leaders are ready to partner with educators to co-design programs that address specific skill gaps, from construction professionals trained on the latest technologies to ag-tech specialists and skilled meat cutters.
- » **Early Childhood Education (ECE):** The ECE sector emphasized sustainable resources as the most critical factor for stability and growth. Industry representatives are developing unified messaging to advocate for predictable funding, highlighting the direct link between a stable ECE sector and the ability of the broader workforce to participate in the economy.
- » **Health Care:** Leaders cite a hiring bottleneck due to a lack of clinical training availability. The industry seeks to partner on expanding work-based learning programs that offer clinical experience. Leveraging health care professionals to deliver training without leaving their existing positions would increase the capacity of training programs and directly address the shortage of qualified health care professionals to expand clinical opportunities.
- » **Renewables & Clean Energy:** These sectors face unique talent needs that can be met through skill-based pathways and talent exchanges. The renewables sector requires clear pathways that attract talent from adjacent industries by valuing transferable skills.
- » **Technology:** Industry representatives see an opportunity to ensure digital literacy and technology skills are integrated into hands-on trades programs, and to recruit instructors with industry experience.
- » **Tourism:** Industry representatives see an opportunity to develop a system for coordinating seasonal talent exchanges. This would be supported by the adoption of shared forms and processes, shared benefits platforms, and opt-in databases.

# Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness Programs Passage and Implementation

## Partners:

- Colorado Career and Technical Education – Colorado Community College System
- Colorado Department of Education
- Colorado Department of Higher Education
- Colorado Department of Labor & Employment
- Colorado Workforce Development Council
- K-12 Districts and Schools

## Relevant State Legislation:

- SB25-315 Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness Programs

## Summary:

During Colorado’s 2025 legislative session, [SB25-315 Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness Programs](#) passed and became law. This legislation updated the postsecondary and workforce readiness funding model to include three types of funding: Start-up funding, innovation grant funding, and sustain funding.

With the passage of this bill, there will be significant changes to postsecondary and workforce readiness (PWR) options to support access to career pathways for all students in Colorado. The Office of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness in the Colorado Department of Education hosted fall trainings around the state to support districts and schools in understanding the new postsecondary workforce readiness updates, including new funding information, “The Big Three” outcomes (college credit, industry-recognized credentials, and quality work-based learning), and accountability changes to the PWR sub-indicator on the performance framework.

## Work-based Learning Experiences in Higher Education

### Partners:

- › Colorado Department of Higher Education
- › Institutions of Higher Education

### Relevant State Legislation:

- › HB25-1186 Work-Based Learning Experiences in Higher Education

### Summary:

Also during the 2025 legislative session, the passage of HB25-1186 Work-Based Learning Experiences in Higher Education created a work-based learning (WBL) consortium to support institutions of higher education and their faculty to embed project-based learning into the curriculum. The consortium will be funded through grants, gifts, and donations and will serve as many institutions of higher education and faculty as funding allows. The bill requires the Colorado Commission on Higher Education to recommend a list of terms used by institutions of higher education related to work-based learning. The bill asks the Colorado Department of Higher Education to collaborate with institutions of higher education to identify which work-based learning activities are measurable and how to best report work-based learning activities to the department. Unspent work-study funds will be able to be used to cover the costs of required work-based learning credits.

# Statewide Longitudinal Data System

## Partners:

- › Colorado Department of Early Childhood
- › Colorado Department of Education
- › Colorado Department of Higher Education
- › Colorado Department of Labor & Employment
- › Colorado Workforce Development Council
- › Office of Information Technology

## Relevant State Legislation:

- › HB24-1364 Education-Based Workforce Readiness

## Summary:

In the 2024 legislative session, HB24-1364 Education-Based Workforce Readiness passed requiring the creation of a statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS). The purpose of the SLDS is to provide more robust data to inform state investments and policy decisions as well as provide further information to Coloradans when they are making academic and career decisions.

The Governor's Office of Information Technology is leading the [development of this system](#) and collaborating with representatives from multiple agencies via two advisory groups and the SLDS Governing Board. At present, the SLDS program has established the legal framework for sharing data across agencies, approved the initial use cases, received appropriate data from each state agency, and initiated the system build with an external vendor. Additionally, the SLDS Governing Board has worked to establish a branded name for the data system, CO Data Connects, and is developing a long-term research framework and future roadmap. The first annual report derived from the SLDS data system and required by the state statute will be public in early fall of 2026.



## Study Workforce Transitions to Other Industries

### Partners:

- › Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, including the Office of the Future of Work
- › Colorado Energy Office
- › Office of Economic Development & International Trade

### Relevant State Legislation:

- › HB23-1074 – Study Workforce Transitions to Other Industries

### Summary:

In late 2024, the Office of the Future of Work and the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment published two reports focused on workforce transitions as required by HB23-1074. The reports include key findings and recommendations from data analysis and stakeholder engagement.

- » [Assessment of the Oil and Gas Workforce and Emerging Opportunities](#) – focused on Colorado’s oil and gas workforce and the impacts from an evolving energy economy.
- » [Colorado 2024: Automation & the World of Work](#) – focused on workers in occupations across Colorado that are facing the most disruption due to automation.

# Colorado Climate Workforce Study

## Partners:

- › Colorado Department of Transportation
- › Colorado Energy Office
- › Colorado Workforce Development Council

## Summary:

In fall 2025, the Colorado Energy Office published a [Colorado Climate Workforce Study](#) to define, size, and project the climate workforce in Colorado, and provide recommendations on building out training pathways in the state. The study differentiates baseline Colorado employment projections from incremental demand driven in part by climate goals set by the legislature and implementation strategy outlined in the [Greenhouse Gas Reduction Roadmap 2.0](#). The quantitative analysis projects employment based on climate action implementation, and the analysis then distributes these jobs across specific occupations using existing data or cross-referencing. This includes a list of “Climate Critical Occupations” and the corresponding demand for them, given Colorado’s climate actions and broader industry demand.

## Complementary Plans

Talent development does not happen in isolation. It happens through collaboration across workforce development, economic development, education and training, and community-based services and with businesses, job seekers, and learners and earners.

As we close out the Strategies section of this report, it is worth noting other key plans also being implemented that connect to talent development.

### Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

#### Summary:

In 2025, OEDIT developed a statewide [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\)](#) report to update the state's economic development strategy. Colorado's new statewide CEDS, titled Elevating Colorado 2025, will facilitate future applications to grant programs supported by the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) to advance statewide goals for key industries.

### Career and Technical Education Strategic Plan

#### Summary:

Colorado Career and Technical Education (CTE) published an updated five-year plan in late 2024. The [Colorado CTE 2024-2028 Strategic Plan](#) provides the vision and plan for career and technical education that considers the state's unique landscape and current opportunities. The plan will help ensure Colorado CTE is providing learners access to quality CTE programs aligned to industry demand and leading to high-wage, high-skilled, and in-demand employment.

# POTENTIAL HEADWINDS

This section highlights potential headwinds that could impact Colorado's talent pipeline over the short, medium, and long-term.

## Potential Headwind #1:

### Colorado's Comparatively Subdued Labor Market and Low Net Migration

Two sections within this report identified potentially concerning data points for Colorado that represent reversals of longstanding trends. *Trends and Conditions of Colorado's Labor Market* showed that the state's unemployment rate and job growth in 2024 and 2025 rank low compared to other states, which is atypical for Colorado, especially during non-recessionary periods. Colorado's private sector, historically a driver of job gains for the state, has experienced almost no employment growth in 2025. *Colorado Population Factors to Consider: Aging and Migration* detailed relatively low net migration totals for the state during the pandemic/post-pandemic period, which could be meaningful given how net migration has been historically important to the state for filling labor needs, attracting talent, and growing its economy.

## Potential Headwind #2:

### Impacts of a Changing Federal Landscape

With a new administration in the White House starting in 2025, there have been notable changes to the federal landscape and U.S. policy. These changes could have immediate and long-term impacts on Colorado's talent pipeline.

## Tariff Policy and Related Impacts

Per analysis from the Budget Lab at Yale, the [overall average effective tariff rate in early September 2025 was 17.4%](#), which acts as a tax on selected goods imported into the U.S. This represents the highest average effective tariff rate for the U.S. since the mid-1930s, and a substantial increase from January 2025, when the rate was below 3%. In order to evaluate the potential impacts of tariffs on Colorado, Governor Polis enacted [Executive Order D 2025 008](#), which required the Office of State Planning and Budgeting (OSPB) to produce a "report estimating the impact of Colorado's tariff burden" within 45 days of the Executive Order. The [report](#), which was released in September 2025, covers a significant amount of information spanning nearly 100 pages. Starting on page 34 of the report, OSPB provides various tariff scenario forecasts on the U.S. and Colorado labor markets, specifically the unemployment rate and job growth. In scenarios that assume either the current tariff environment (as of August 2025) or escalating conditions, Colorado experiences an increase in the unemployment rate and weaker job growth in 2026 compared to 2025.

The report also highlights that impacts to the labor market through tariffs "are generally indirect and come as a result of businesses making decisions to offset higher costs of tariffs by cutting costs in other areas ... for most businesses, labor is the largest and most variable cost, so in any higher tariff scenario, job losses are likely as businesses seek to cut costs, which is more desirable since raising prices risks losing customers."

## Cuts to Federal Government Employment and Funding

Since January 2025, there have been concerted efforts by the current presidential administration to reduce levels of federal government employment and alter how federal funds are allocated. From a labor market perspective, these changes could have direct (those employed within the federal government) and indirect (public and private entities that rely on federal funds) impacts. As a reminder and shown in Figure 2 on [page 15](#), 2% of Colorado's industry employment in 2024 was concentrated within the federal government, which translates to around 57,000 jobs. However, there are likely significantly more jobs in Colorado that depend on federal funding, both within public and private sectors. Based on data from the Current Employment Statistics program, from January 2025 to August 2025, federal government employment in Colorado has declined by 3,000 jobs on a seasonally adjusted basis, while U.S. employment has decreased by nearly 100,000 jobs.

A few resources to better understand the impacts on Colorado due to changes in federal government employment and funding are provided below.

- » State of Colorado [dashboard](#) of federal funding cuts to Colorado.
- » An [interactive tool](#) from The Impact Project that "collects, synthesizes, and visualizes timely data—as it becomes available—on federal changes and their localized effects."
- » A [research tool](#) from the Economic Policy Institute that provides state-level estimates of the number of federal government employees, by congressional district, county, and metro area.

## Shifts in International Migration Policy

While U.S. policy and enforcement on international migration (either legal or unauthorized) have fluctuated over their history, the current presidential administration has taken a restrictive approach, through elevated levels of deportations and the introduction of new regulations on different forms of legal migration. This shift in policy can be viewed as an immediate supply shock to the labor market and talent pipeline, with uncertain impacts for the medium and long-term horizon.

As mentioned on [page 85](#), the recent improvement in Colorado's net migration figures in 2023 and 2024 was driven by international populations. Additionally, based on data from the American Community Survey between 2019 and 2023, 0.6% of Colorado's 25 to 54 population had moved from another country over the past year, ranking as the 16th highest share nationally. While a limited number of sub-national impacts are currently available, the Economic Policy Institute published a [report](#) in July 2025 that attempted to estimate impacts to state-level employment, including Colorado, based on assumptions on the number of U.S. deportations over the next four years. It is also important to note that several industries traditionally rely more on an immigrant labor pool, including agriculture, construction, manufacturing, tech, hotels, restaurants, building and landscaping services, and home health care. An [analysis](#) from September 2025 of U.S. data shows that job growth has recently slowed in those kinds of industries relative to other private sector industries. A few other resources on this topic are provided below.

- » August 2025 [report](#) from Pew Research featuring data and trends on immigrants in the U.S.
- » September 2025 [article](#) from Colorado Public Radio on the recent decrease in international students attending University of Colorado campuses.
- » July 2025 [report](#) from Brookings that analyzes the impact of a reduced number of international students, including state-level estimates.
- » October 2025 [article](#) from Colorado Public Radio on how shifts in visa policy could impact Colorado schools' ability to hire international teachers.

# Impacts to Colorado State and Local Government Budgets

Due to a number of factors, Colorado state and local government budgets have been impacted, which may limit the ability for those entities to hire or expand their workforce in the short and medium term. Some examples of these impacts are provided below.

- » A [special session](#) was called in late August 2025 to address how federal policy will adversely impact Colorado’s state budget.
- » A [hiring freeze for Colorado state agencies](#) effective between Aug. 27, 2025, and Dec. 31, 2025.
- » The City of Denver [laid off 171 employees in August 2025](#).
- » Under the [American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\)](#) State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF) program in early 2021, over \$350 billion dollars in emergency funding were distributed to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments throughout the nation. Colorado received approximately \$5.8 billion of

that total, which was [allocated](#) between the State of Colorado (\$3.8 billion), Colorado counties (\$1.1 billion), Colorado major metro areas (\$551 million), and miscellaneous (\$265 million). ARPA required that while state and local areas have until Dec. 31, 2026, to complete spending of SLFRF, [any funds uncommitted by Dec. 31, 2024, were owed back to the U.S. Treasury](#). Essentially, the expiration of SLFRF represents a substantial shift in available funds for state and local areas, and while the deadline was known and anticipated, this change will likely reduce additional demand for programs, services, and staff compared to prior years. As a reminder and shown in Figure 18A on [page 38](#), Colorado state and local government, excluding education, added 3,300 and 6,600 jobs, respectively, between August 2023 and August 2025. That combined total of 9,900 jobs made up 27% of the 37,300 jobs added in Colorado over that two-year period.

Given the potential impacts to government jobs noted above, the following table (Figure 47) shows Colorado Top Jobs with relatively high shares of employment concentrated within federal, state, or local government.

**Figure 47**  
**Colorado Top Jobs with Relatively High Shares of Total Employment Concentrated within Federal, State, or Local Government**  
[Accessible data for Figure 47](#)

Detailed Occupation	Estimated Employment Level in 2024	Estimated Share of 2024 Employment in Federal, State, or Local Government
Forensic Science Technicians	430	100.0%
Epidemiologists	620	67.7%
Urban and Regional Planners	1,260	67.5%
Child, Family, and School Social Workers	7,840	32.9%



## Potential Headwinds

Detailed Occupation	Estimated Employment Level in 2024	Estimated Share of 2024 Employment in Federal, State, or Local Government
Statisticians	920	30.4%
Cartographers and Photogrammetrists	1,380	26.8%
First-Line Supervisors of Entertainment and Recreation Workers, Except Gambling Services	3,490	26.1%
Occupational Health and Safety Technicians	470	25.5%
Civil Engineering Technologists and Technicians	1,350	25.2%
Curators	340	23.5%
Paramedics	2,350	22.6%
Chemists	1,820	22.0%
Paralegals and Legal Assistants	5,430	21.0%
Environmental Engineers	1,660	20.5%
Lawyers	17,160	20.5%
Environmental Science and Protection Technicians, Including Health	850	20.0%

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics (research estimates by state and industry from the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program: [www.bls.gov/oes/oessrcres.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/oessrcres.htm)); author calculations. **Notes:** Top Jobs concentrated within state or local government education or hospitals are excluded from this table, as industry-level staffing patterns for those occupations are placed within educational services and health care and social assistance, respectively.

## Potential Headwind #3:

## Elevated Risk of Recession

Based on many of the headwinds previously mentioned, there is an elevated risk of a national recession and economic downturn. In their late September 2025 revenue forecast presentations to the Joint Budget Committee, both the [Colorado Office of State Planning and Budgeting](#) (OSPB) and [Colorado Legislative Council Staff](#) (LCS) mentioned the possibility of a recession within the short-term horizon. OSPB's presentation stated, "a chance of a recession in the next 12 months remains at 50% with elevated downside risk." LCS shared "the economic outlook has weakened and a near-term recession is possible," as a takeaway in their presentation.

The U.S. labor market has shown signs of slowing, with [June 2025 marking the first time the nation has shed jobs](#) on an over-the-month basis since December 2020. [Data released in the second week of September 2025](#) also indicates that U.S. job growth is likely much weaker than previously reported earlier in the year. Notably, the labor market and employment prospects have softened for unemployed job seekers. Results from the [Federal Reserve Bank of New York's Survey of Consumer Expectations](#) showed a substantial decline in August 2025 in the expectations that someone would be able to find a job within three months if their job was lost today. Additional research from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York highlights that the [unemployment rate for recent college graduates](#) is climbing and is historically high relative to the unemployment rate for all workers.

Finally, there is also evidence that business confidence is waning. According to [information released by the University of Colorado's Leeds School of Business at the end of September 2025](#), business confidence remains at historically low levels. This decline in confidence, which is based on survey responses provided by Colorado business leaders, can be most tied to "politics, tariffs, and uncer-

tainty." Respondents to the survey also noted that "the most common ways [business risks] are being addressed are cost cutting, proceeding with caution, and making changes to their workforce."

## Potential Headwind #4:

## Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technology Impacts to Labor

In the *Characteristics of Colorado's Labor Market* section of this report ([page 18](#)), it was noted that the share of Colorado's total employment concentrated within the office and administrative support major occupational group had declined from 17.5% in 2000 to 10.7% in 2024. A further analysis shows there are several detailed occupations in the office and administrative support group that have experienced employment declines in Colorado of at least 5,000 jobs over the past quarter century: office clerks, general (-21,730); executive secretaries and executive administrative assistants (-14,220); receptionists and information clerks (-7,720); bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks (-7,020); switchboard operators, including answering service (-6,090); bill and account collectors (-5,389); and data entry keyers (-5,390). While many factors are likely responsible for the employment changes in those occupations over time, technological shifts may be a key driver. For example, the cost of computers and other similar devices have [greatly decreased](#) since the late 1990s/early 2000s, which coincided with the accelerated use of those technologies (and software tools) within the office and administrative support setting. Over time, some of the duties and responsibilities of the occupations mentioned above have been, and are likely to continue to be further, automated and replaced by technology, therefore reducing the demand for humans to fulfill those tasks.

## Potential Headwinds

Another fairly recent and visible example of technological disruption in the labor market can be viewed through impacts to the retail sector. As shown on [page 14](#) in the *Characteristics of Colorado's Labor Market* section, the share of Colorado's total industry employment within retail trade dropped from 11.3% in 2007 (the highest share compared to all 20 sectors) to 9.5% in 2024 (the fourth highest share). This 17-year period overlaps with two important technological shifts that have impacted retail employment over time: 1) the large-scale adoption of self-checkout kiosks and 2) the rapid increase in online shopping, made easier and more convenient for the consumer with the development of the smartphone. The first technological shift – self-checkout kiosks – can be observed most frequently in grocery stores and supermarkets, but are also becoming more commonplace within other forms of retail establishments, as well as other industries, like food service. This is an obvious example of technology reducing the demand for certain retail occupations like cashiers. The second technological shift – online shopping – represented a change in consumer behavior, which accelerated during the pandemic, and reallocated some demand for employment from brick-and-mortar retail establishments to fulfillment and distribution centers. For reference, the first Amazon warehouse in Colorado opened in 2018, and expanded to more than 15 total facilities in the state by late 2025.

With these examples of prior technological shifts and impacts in mind, it is important to look toward potential new disruptions to the labor market that may stem from changes in technology. At present, artificial intelligence (AI) is the most probable emerging technology that fits this criterion. There are [two primary types of AI](#): generative and agentic. Generative AI, which has significantly increased in scale and public awareness/adoption over the past three to five years, can “create original content—such as text, images, video, audio, or software code—in response to a user’s prompt or request.” Some commercially available examples of generative AI tools include: ChatGPT, Claude, Canva, Gemini, and DALL-E. Agentic AI, on the other hand, utilizes “large language models, machine learning, and natural language processing to perform autonomous tasks on behalf of the user or another system.” Examples

of agentic AI include: self-driving vehicles, personal assistants (Siri, Alexa, etc.), virtual assistants (typically chatbots and helpdesk agents), and productivity tools like Microsoft 365 Copilot.

While the potential timesaving and efficiency benefits of AI have been promoted, there is also research available that has evaluated the potential impacts to workers due to this emerging technology. As there is much uncertainty surrounding this topic and the future relationship of AI and the labor market, examples of recent related reports, research, and analysis have been selected and provided on the following page.

- » March 2024 research from the U.S. Census Bureau: [“Tracking Firm Use of AI in Real Time: A Snapshot From the Business Trends and Outlook Survey”](#)
- » February 2025 research from Anthropic: [“The Anthropic Economic Index”](#) [note: Anthropic owns the generative AI tool, Claude]
- » Early 2025 report from Lightcast: [“The Speed of Skill Change”](#)
- » April 2025 report from Stanford University: [“The 2025 AI Index Report”](#)
- » May 2025 research paper through the National Bureau of Economic Research: [“Large Language Models, Small Labor Market Effects”](#) [note: this paper looks at data within Denmark, not the U.S.]
- » August 2025 economic blog from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis: [“Is AI Contributing to Rising Unemployment? Evidence from Occupational Variation”](#)
- » August 2025 research paper from Stanford University: [“Canaries in the Coal Mine? Six Facts about the Recent Employment Effects of Artificial Intelligence”](#) and an [article from SFGate](#) highlighting the results of that research paper
- » October 2025 report from the Budget Lab at Yale: [“Evaluating the Impact of AI on the Labor Market: Current State of Affairs”](#)

# Policy Recommendations

## Using Data to Make Informed Decisions & Measure Impact

### Recommendation:

The postsecondary education and training system should incorporate consistent, aligned, and collaborative data standards and definitions for providers delivering services. Rigorous methods for analyzing the impact of programs and practices should also be adopted for new and existing efforts so that the investment of public dollars can be made with strong confidence in the likelihood of success and a positive public return.

Colorado receives over \$129 million in federal funds for postsecondary education and training annually, and most of these dollars are distributed to local implementers.<sup>1</sup> With changes in federal laws and current budget climates, it is likely these numbers may decrease. With fewer federal dollars to spend on workforce programs,<sup>2</sup> it is critical for the state to understand how to best spend public dollars.

Colorado has been anticipating this need. Work that has already happened or is in progress includes:

- » The state **continues to build a Statewide Longitudinal Data System**, which will provide valuable insights when launched. Until then, it is important to continue to publicly share data on program outcomes and ensure that the approaches for calculating the impacts are sound. This will help the state better invest in programs and practices that have a track record of helping prepare Coloradans for jobs where they will earn more money.

- » Colorado **already assesses a number of programs for their outcomes**. For example, the Return on Investment report from the Colorado Department of Higher Education publishes wage outcomes by institution and program, along with many other impact metrics.<sup>3</sup>
- » CDHE and the Commission on Higher Education have also created the [Minimum Value Threshold framework to analyze whether the opportunity cost and real costs of pursuing a post-secondary credential](#)<sup>4</sup> would be recovered by a learner in wages compared to learners without the same credential. These data are provided to institutions of higher education so that they can analyze low-return programs and create strategies to improve the economic mobility of students in the programs.<sup>5</sup>

» The Workforce Intelligence Data Experts (WIDE) group, a group of workforce data analysts from Workforce Colorado local workforce centers, **calculates outcomes for public workforce programs** by comparing the wage of a participant at program entry with the aggregated wages of the same participant up to four years after exiting the program. The WIDE group provides analysis beyond the scope of reporting required by WIOA. This has been an essential contribution for advancing our local and state work around assessing the public workforce system and its critical services to job seekers and businesses. While this information provides insight into the impact of public workforce system services for job seekers, an additional analysis that compares wages at least two quarters prior to program entry with wages two quarters after program exit is beneficial<sup>6</sup>.

This work is foundational for Colorado's data landscape. And Colorado must also continue to invest in, align, and improve data systems, data collection, and data analysis. A rigorous and transparent culture around data will be essential to help policymakers answer questions: Are Coloradans financially better off by virtue of participating in a program? Are certain programs higher performers? Why are those programs higher performers and what can we learn from them? How do we increase the value of programs and careers that have a high social impact and a low earnings potential? Where could state investment be transformational for participants and industries?

## Make the Postsecondary Talent Development System Easier to Navigate

### Recommendation:

Colorado should re-evaluate what data would be necessary to collect for the state to have better visibility into how learners and earners move through education and training, and where they might get disconnected. This information would help the state have a more accurate, impactful, and holistic response to talent development.

[Executive Order 2025-006](#) directed the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, the Colorado Department of Higher Education, the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies, and the Office of Economic Development and International Trade work with the Governor's Office and the Colorado Department of Education to evaluate the operations of the State's current postsecondary talent

development system and identify where State activities could be better coordinated, streamlined, or strengthened to close the identified gaps between K-12, Higher Education, and workforce development in Colorado. This analysis and related recommendations will be important for addressing the structural barriers in Colorado's talent development work.



The state's ability to connect students to postsecondary education and training -- meaning a degree, an apprenticeship completion certificate, or one of the other types of postsecondary credentials -- impacts workers' ability to find and keep jobs and long-term economic mobility. As discussed earlier on [page 80](#), of 100 hypothetical ninth graders, only 23 of those students will complete a program to earn a postsecondary degree. At the same time, the projected demand from employers for workers with postsecondary credentials is increasing.<sup>7</sup> As this report also notes, credential attainment is not only valuable to employers and the economy, it is also becoming increasingly necessary to land a Top Job-- all but one of Colorado's Tier 1 Top Jobs typically require the completion of a postsecondary credential for entry.

This highlights gaps in our understanding of where students go in their journey across education, training, and work, as well as which pathways are serving them effectively. The current postsecondary education and training system struggles to track and report aggregate outcomes for Coloradans. Additionally, there are also challenges to retain, train, and launch homegrown talent at scale.<sup>8 9</sup>

Skills-based practices are an essential strategy because they create more points of entry for capable workers to enter the workforce and gain additional skills on the job. This is necessary but not sufficient for meeting projected changes in the labor market. In addition to employer flexibility and creativity in recognizing workers' skills, Colorado must also promote more learners and workers earning postsecondary credentials of value.

The state has made a series of efforts to promote access, affordability, quality, and equity so that more Coloradans can access postsecondary credentials and pathways. Notable strategies include:

- » Growing registered apprenticeship programs
- » Funding in-demand, short-term credentials
- » Reimbursing the cost of postsecondary credentials and degrees
- » Developing credential pathways that stack
- » Creating equivalencies across modes of learning so that learners have greater mobility across systems
- » Improving the transfer of credits across providers
- » Awarding credentials to non-completers who have accumulated enough credits to earn something for their time
- » Mapping the costs and benefits of postsecondary credentials
- » Creating more work-based learning opportunities
- » Increasing access to postsecondary and workforce readiness for learners
- » Developing quality frameworks for non-degree credentials
- » Developing career advisor trainings and tools
- » Building career pathways

The common thread across each initiative is that they provide more diverse opportunities for more people to be competitive in the economy.



So why do Coloradans still struggle to move from high school into postsecondary credential opportunities and gain economic mobility? While every learner's situation is unique, we know that there are silos and bureaucratic barriers across the system at key transition points that create obstacles for learners and earners trying to move to their next opportunity. A few notable examples of these structural barriers include:

» **Governance** – Each element of the talent development system is organized by a different state-wide actor– the State Board of Education (K-12), the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (Higher Education), and the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC)-- all of which have different compositions, levels of authority, and access to data. Funding streams can also have different governance.<sup>10</sup> At the local level, elected school boards, locally-appointed local workforce development boards, and elected and gubernatorially-appointed higher education governing boards all have distinct authorities over implementation. These governing structures add complexity to the system by way of rules, regulations, policies, and data, and are not required to develop and advance coordinated strategic initiatives. Many of these governing models provide essential public engagement and accountability. Additionally, many of the rules, regulations, policies, and data are necessary for governing entities to respond to their unique conditions. However, it adds complexity to the system and makes it difficult to create alignment horizontally across state actors and vertically between the state and local implementers.

» **Performance Metrics** – [Each entity, program, and credential that exists within the talent development ecosystem is subject to different performance indicators](#) and collects data siloed within its ecosystem. While these performance metrics

are a mixture of federal and state priorities, they demonstrate how each part of the system is incentivized to deliver a specific, but not always coordinated, outcome.

» **Either/Or Thinking** – Colorado must develop a narrative and a culture that recognizes the value in both a liberal arts education and traditional postsecondary pathways and workforce development, livable-wage outcomes, and skills-based opportunities. Every college graduate will eventually need a job and many students are interested in postsecondary opportunities *because* they want to be competitive in the labor market.<sup>11</sup> Despite their interest, many students don't find a strong footing in a traditional college setting. We also know that 48% of Colorado's 9th graders do not enroll in a degree-granting postsecondary program. The boundaries that divide higher education and workforce development, as well as the belief that academic growth and wage outcomes are mutually exclusive goals, do not serve or center learners and earners.

» **Career Navigation** – Career navigation services across K-12, higher education, and workforce centers are distinct. We lack consistent career navigation tools, information systems, employer connections, or coaching practices. Additionally, K-12, higher education, and workforce centers use different language when discussing career opportunities and navigation. The [1215 Task Force Final Report](#) highlights the inefficiency of Colorado's career navigation tools and suggests that we should consider collaborating across the system on "shared career navigator positions" and "developing and utilizing a co-advising model." The state must move forward on strategies to reduce the inefficiencies in career navigation while also promoting a model that exposes learners and earners to the variety of opportunities available.

» **Credit Transfer** – Credit transfer and credit for prior learning are key levers for expanding education and learner mobility across systems and career stages. Colorado can lead by designing a system where learning builds continuously, from technical certificates to advanced degrees. The state’s 4-year accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), has affirmed no accreditation requirements are a barrier to the seamless transfer of credits from institutions not accredited by HLC. As a result, more focus should be given toward students who wish to bring credits earned from occupational education to an academic program of study. Barriers arise as technical programs have a fundamentally different curriculum design than academic programs. The curriculum and course requirements for many technical programs are designed in partnership with the relevant industry and are meant to position the student to enter the trade after credential completion – the design of the program is not focused on transfer. More focus is needed on creating intentional on-ramps for students who, for example, complete a carpentry program at an area technical college and then decide they need additional skills for their career and are interested in a BS in Construction Management at a four-year institution. Deep collaboration between Area Technical Colleges, the Colorado Community College System, and four-year institutions is critical to reduce credit loss for students who decide to transfer their technical credentials to academic degrees. Likewise, earn-and-learn models should be seamlessly integrated into academic spaces to improve the value of a given degree program. Resources dedicated to the work of articulating non-credit or occupational experiences to for-credit opportunities should continue.

Over the last several years, legislatively created task forces have argued that Coloradans would be better served if the silos that separate these specific service populations were blurred.

“Streamlining the administration, accountability and reporting requirements, and funding of the separate and distinct PWR programs, is an essential step toward achieving a more unified, universal, and understandable statewide approach to improving postsecondary and workforce readiness of learners. However, these alignment efforts do not—in and of themselves—represent the realization of the “Big Blur” vision. Additional systems change is needed to erase the boundaries between high school, college, and work.”

“We encourage thinking beyond existing programs and envisioning a streamlined system that serves learners in all of their education and workforce readiness training, and is easy to navigate for all those who support them.”

### [1215 Final Report](#)

“The lack of a single postsecondary system in Colorado has historically led to competition among institutions over limited resources and defensive posturing. But the real problem is not distributed governance in a diverse system. What we need is a strong state vision where postsecondary institutions, other education and training providers, governing bodies, policy makers, and philanthropic, business, and civic leaders all understand their unique place in the postsecondary ecosystem and work collaboratively to move the state’s economic prosperity and equity goals forward.”

### [1330 Final Report](#)

## Policy Recommendations

This argument for reform is not new to Colorado. In fact, it has been a feature of our policy landscape since the 1990s, when a report found:

“In order to maintain and improve its residents’ standard of living, Colorado must develop an internationally competitive work force for the 21st century. To achieve this goal, a fully integrated, improved, and updated work force development system must be established. This system will require an ongoing partnership among business and industry, labor, government, and education... The new system should be market

driven, efficient, flexible, accessible, performance-based, aligned with the economic development needs of the state, and a catalyst to encourage lifelong learning for all Coloradans.”

[Workforce Council Report from 1995](#)

The Governor’s [Executive Order](#) on Reimagining the Future of the Postsecondary Talent Development System in Colorado modernizes this charge and pushes agencies involved in talent development to develop recommendations to navigate these structural barriers.

# Endnotes

1. [These funds are from the Perkins Act, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, DRV, and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act](#). Due to recent federal changes and the countercyclical nature of certain funding streams, the federal funds for workforce development in Colorado are under increasing strain. Perkins Act funding to Colorado was modestly reduced from FY 24 to FY 25 by 0.003%. However, reductions to WIOA programs ranged between 1.01% and 10.2%.
2. The [Trump Administration's "skinny budget" would eliminate the Job Corps program and funding for Adult Education \(WIOA Title II\)](#) while consolidating workforce programs under the Make America Skilled Again (MASA) grant, streamlining administrative requirements of current grants while also reducing the total investment. The [House Appropriations Committee 2026 appropriations bill](#), which advanced on Sept. 9, 2025, reduces Adult Basic Education, Youth, Re-entry, and Senior Employment initiatives (WIOA Title I) by 63%; [it eliminates a number of programs](#), including WIOA Adult Job Training, Youth Job training, funding for reintegration of ex-offenders, the Job Corps, funding for English Language Acquisition, funding for adult education, and reduces funding for Career and Technical Education by \$706M. While these budgets are not yet law, they signal a new and more austere environment for federal workforce funding at a time when the state's own fiscal constraints mean Colorado cannot afford to offset these reductions.

Recent federal law has changed funding available for higher education. H.R. 1 is set to go into effect during the 2026–2027 academic year and limits federal student loan use to those programs of study whose graduates earn equal to or greater than the median earnings of an adult without the same level of degree. That is, earning outcomes for graduates from associate and bachelor degree programs would

be compared to the earnings of similarly aged adults with a high school diploma or equivalent -- [the statewide average for which is \\$42,000 in Colorado](#). If programs do not help graduates earn greater than that amount, borrowers will not be able to use federal loans to help fund their education.

While the U.S. Department of Education has yet to determine the exact data standards for calculating wage outcomes, a [research center publication shows likely impacts for Colorado's postsecondary programs](#), estimating that 33 degree-granting programs will fail the accountability measure, including 21 programs at public institutions. The largest impact will be for associate's programs, where 8% of students were enrolled in impacted programs (compared to 0.6% of students in bachelor's programs, 2.8% of students in master's programs, and no doctoral or professional programs).

3. Other metrics tracked in the CDHE ROI report include: average time to completion, cost to completion, student loan debt, employment rate, and annual earnings one, five, and 10 years after graduation or completion. Some of these measures can also be disaggregated by gender or ethnicity.
4. Inclusive of some certificate data but complete for AA/AS, BA/BS.
5. Unlike the ROI metric, this method considers all program participants rather than just completers; focuses on minimum returns rather than median wages; and analyzes wage data for 15 years post-enrollment.
6. This is due to a [phenomenon in workforce research referred to as the Aschenfelter Dip](#). This phenomenon occurs because most participants in services are unemployed at program entry, their wages are either much lower or zero; therefore, earnings two quarters before entry provide a more stable baseline for measuring the impact of training programs and workforce services on participants' outcomes

7. [Estimated that by 2031, 73% of all job openings in Colorado will be for workers with some type of post-secondary credential.](#) Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce's Job Projections Report
8. [In 2024, public institutions retained 77.4% of their first-time, full-time students, and only 41% of their first-time, part-time students.](#) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System
9. 38.8% of first-time, full-time students graduated from a public institution on time, and 52.5% graduated within 150% of time (three years for an associate degree, six years for a bachelor's degree). About half (50.7%) of Coloradans have a post-high school credential and are earning at least 15% more than the national median salary of a high-school graduate. While Colorado is the fourth-highest state in the nation on this measure, there is more work to do to ensure all Coloradans have access to the skills and training they need to succeed in the workplace. [Lumina Foundation. A Stronger Nation: Credentials of Value.](#)
10. Perkins funding is overseen by the State Board of Community Colleges and Occupational Education, the Colorado Scholarship Initiative is overseen by the COSI Board, and Opportunity Now is overseen by a steering committee.
11. Just over half (51 percent) of students say they enrolled in higher education for higher earning potential, 45 percent are looking to access better job benefits, and 40 percent say their field of study requires a degree. ["The Students' Perspective: Valuable Insights for University Leaders," via Inside Higher Education.](#)

# Appendices

**Appendix A:**

[2025 Top Jobs](#)

**Appendix B:**

[2025 Top Jobs by Region](#)

**Appendix C:**

[Educational Type within  
Job Postings](#)

**Appendix D:**

[PY24 Workforce Innovation and  
Opportunity Act Annual Report](#)

**Appendix E:**

[2025 Sector Strategies Update](#)

**Appendix F:**

[2025 Career Pathways Annual  
Report – HB15-1274](#)

**Appendix G:**

[2025 My Colorado Journey  
Progress Report](#)

**Appendix H:**

[2025 Postsecondary and  
Workforce Readiness \(PWR\)  
Coordinator Update – HB15-1170](#)

**Appendix I:**

[List of Qualified Credentials  
\(formerly CDIP\)](#)

**Appendix J:**

[2025 Opportunity Now Talent  
Summit Reports – HB24-1365](#)

**Appendix K:**

[2025 Update on Reskilling,  
Upskilling, and Next-skilling  
\(RUN\) – HB21-1264](#)



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## **2025 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report**

Produced by the Colorado Workforce Development Council

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