

MAY 2014

NEBRASKA
LABOR
AVAILABILITY
STUDY

COLUMBUS

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NEBRASKA
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INTRODUCTION

“Labor availability” describes how many people within a given area are available and willing to take on a new job. Labor availability has two components, geographical and human. In most cases, the availability of people for work depends upon how many people are in proximity to the workplace and their ability to travel to the workplace. The human component of labor availability depends upon the characteristics of the potential workforce in the area. People take, keep, and change jobs for a variety of reasons. Compensation—salary and benefits—are important, but other factors, including convenience, security, family obligations, personal fulfillment, age, sex, education, and training, contribute to workers’ employment decisions. These motivations and demographic characteristics within a region determine labor availability.

In the fall of 2013, the Nebraska Departments of Economic Development and Labor collaborated in a pilot project designed to measure labor availability in

selected regions of Nebraska. The first round of surveys and data collection focused on six communities: Columbus, Fremont, Norfolk, South Sioux City, West Point, and Wayne. The Nebraska Department of Labor Office of Labor Market Information (NDOL LMI) collects many types of data about Nebraska workers for the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The BLS measures how many people work in different industries and occupations. BLS also measures how many people work or do not work. While the BLS and NDOL LMI produce a rich data catalog, neither agency measures the reasons why workers choose to work where they do, or choose not to work. This study aims to supplement BLS data with information about those motivations. Understanding why people take a job helps us understand how an employer might attract new workers. In addition, understanding the characteristics of the current labor force and the incentives required for residents to change jobs could shed light on how communities might improve the local labor force.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A survey of Columbus, Nebraska and the surrounding commuting area discovered an estimated 35,544 potential job seekers in the region. The majority of these people are employed; others may be out of work or seeking to reenter the workforce from time spent in retirement or homemaking.

These potential job seekers indicated that they would be willing to take new work in the next year if a suitable job were to present itself. The median wage sought by this group was a minimum of \$31,200 annually, or \$15 an hour for full-time year-round work. Four out of five potential job seekers are willing to commute 15 minutes or more each way for suitable work. The median tenure of employed potential job seekers at their current job is

over 4.6 years. Half of these people have an associate's degree or higher education. In general, those who were less likely to reenter the workforce or change jobs earned more and had been with their employers longer if they were employed.

Potential job seekers identified salary, use of skills they already possessed, and a schedule that fit their needs as the most important factors in improving their employment situation. They named lack of job opportunities in the area, inadequate pay offered by area employers, and inadequate hours offered by area employers as the most common barriers to improving their employment situation.



3 THE METHODOLOGY

For each community chosen by the Department of Economic Development (DED) for the study, a central ZIP code was chosen, and Local Employment Dynamic (LED) data for each ZIP code was obtained from the US Census Bureau (Census). The LED data contained the number of commuters from each ZIP code in the US. The selected central ZIP code for each community was matched with ZIP codes representing most of the employers for the community. Additional ZIP codes were added to make the selected areas contiguous, ensuring that the study area for each community captured likely commuting patterns. Once each community's study area was defined, the individual areas were combined into one large survey area, and further ZIP codes were added or deleted to ensure a contiguous survey area. The resulting area represents an area from which each community draws the majority of its workforce. The survey area was then sampled as a whole. Note also that the survey area contains areas in Iowa and South Dakota, as some of the communities draw commuters from outside Nebraska.

DED and NDOL LMI contracted with the University of Nebraska's Bureau of Sociological Research (BOSR) to assist in designing the survey questionnaire, drawing the survey sample, and administering the survey. BOSR

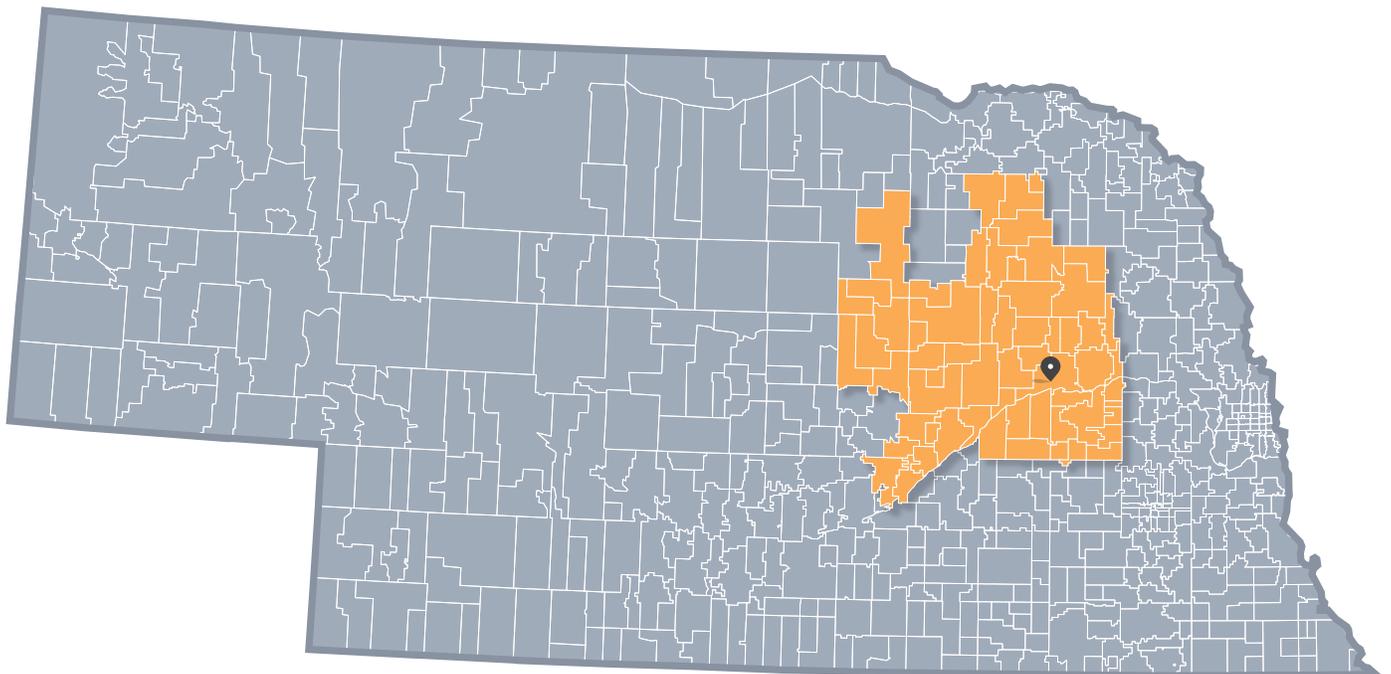
mailed surveys to 12,000 households in the study area. Before BOSR mailed the questionnaire, they mailed a letter to each household in the sample about the survey. The survey requested a response from the person 19 or older living at the address. If there was more than one person 19 or over living at the address, the person who had the next birthday was asked to complete the survey. The first surveys were mailed in October 2013. The last results came back in January 2014. In that time there were three additional mailings to those who had not returned the survey.

Of the 12,000 households sampled, 3,164 completed the survey. BOSR staff entered the survey responses electronically and provided the initial data cleaning, fixing obvious respondent errors, and creating weights for the collected survey data. BOSR sent the survey data to NDOL LMI in February 2014. During February and March 2014, NDOL LMI further cleaned and examined the survey data. Using the weights developed by BOSR, NDOL LMI combined survey data with information from the US Census Bureau to adjust for differences between respondents and the actual population in the survey area. Finally, NDOL LMI used BLS data combined with the weighted population data to create this report.

4 AREA OVERVIEW

An estimated 178,151 people live in the area sampled for Columbus, Nebraska, the shaded area in the map below. While only 22,110 people live in the city of Columbus, it was important to sample an area from which Columbus draws most of its workforce. Many people commute, and other people would be willing to commute for the right job. Estimates for Columbus labor availability come from 992 surveys completed by people living in this area.

Of the people living in the sample area, an estimated 131,473 are age 18 and older. It is not uncommon for people younger than 18 to work, and this is especially true in non-metropolitan Nebraska. This survey did not sample people under 19, and no respondents were under the age of 20.



POPULATION BY GENDER

Female



Male



Census Estimates



Survey Responses



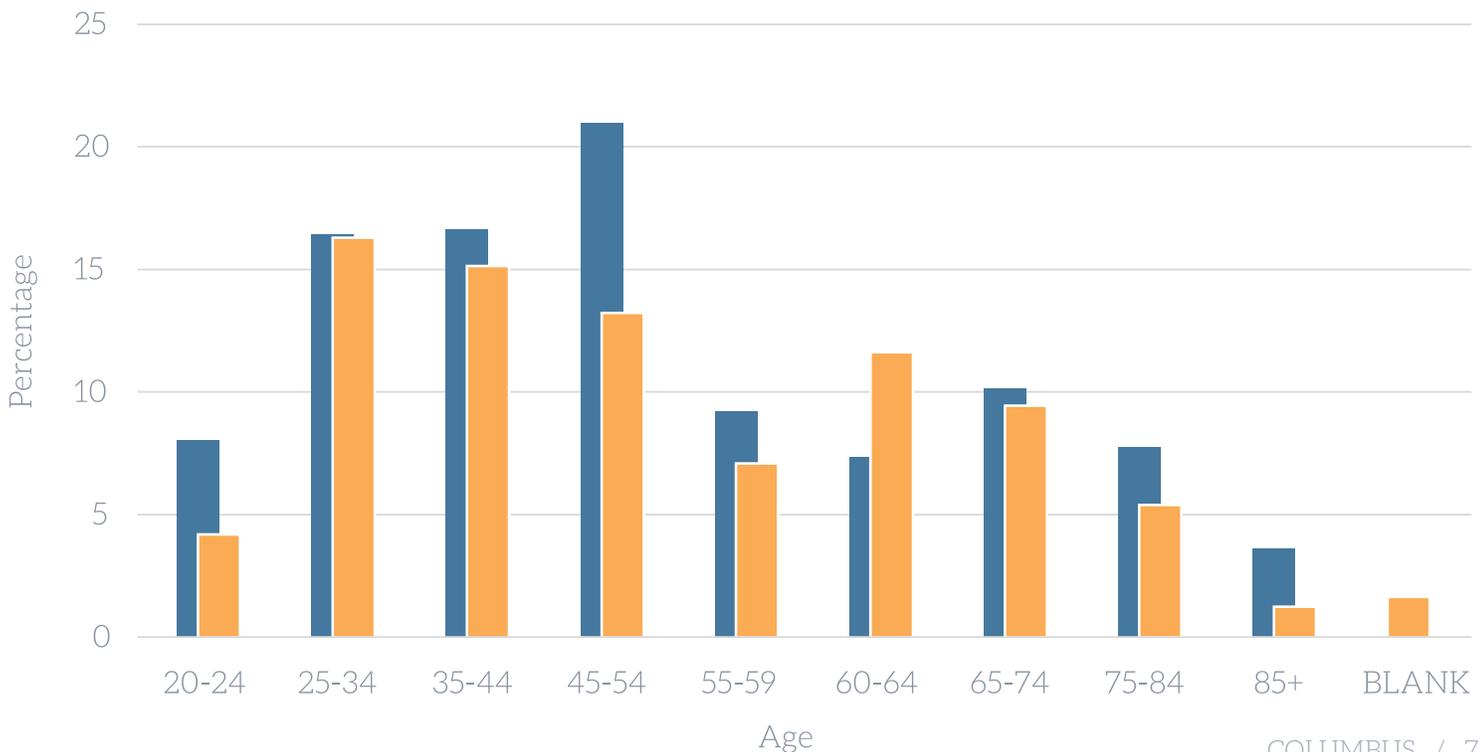
1.07% left blank

The Census Bureau estimates that 95.3% of the civilian labor force in the sampled area is employed and 4.7% is unemployed. These figures include people 16 and older. The Census estimate is useful but limited, as the Census counts as unemployed only those people who are looking for work and applying for jobs. This study took a more expansive approach. Respondents were asked to classify themselves as employed, unemployed, retired, or a homemaker. Anyone not identified as employed answered a survey question about how likely they were to return to employment if a suitable job was available. This method allowed the researchers to describe the untapped labor force for Columbus.

The demographic qualities of respondents for the most part matched Census estimates. This is encouraging, as it means the sample shares many properties with the target population. The authors of this report have taken pains to ensure that disparities between survey findings and Census estimates are made clear where they may be influencing other results.

POPULATION BY AGE RANGE AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION 20 & OLDER

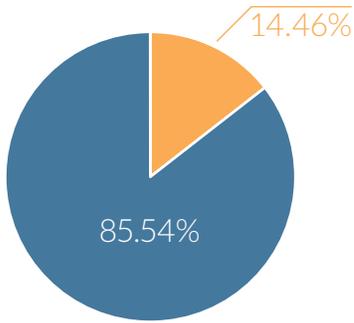
■ Census Estimates ■ Survey Responses



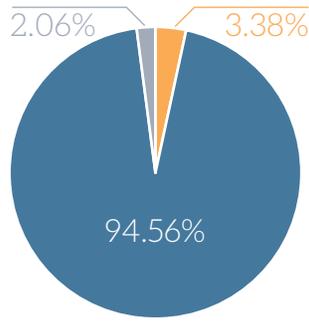
POPULATION BY ETHNICITY

Hispanic Non-Hispanic BLANK

Census Survey



Survey Responses



POPULATION BY EDUCATION

Highest Level of Education	Census Estimates	Survey Results
Less than 9th grade	6.90%	-
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	6.65%	-
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	34.63%	29.47%
Some college, no degree	24.32%	16.46%
Technical or vocational degree	-	6.86%
Associate's degree	10.83%	18.16%
Bachelor's degree	11.69%	18.12%
Graduate or professional degree	4.99%	10.94%
BLANK	-	5.16%

- Indicates data not recorded by Census/survey

POPULATION BY RACE

Census Estimates

Survey Responses

One Race: American Indian or Alaska Native

0.76%

0.05%

One Race: Black or African American

1.09%

0.09%

One Race: Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

0.04%

0.27%

One Race: Some Other Race

2.27%

0.90%

One Race: White (Caucasian)

93.76%

95.66%

Two or more Races

1.51%

1.57%

1.45% of survey responses left blank

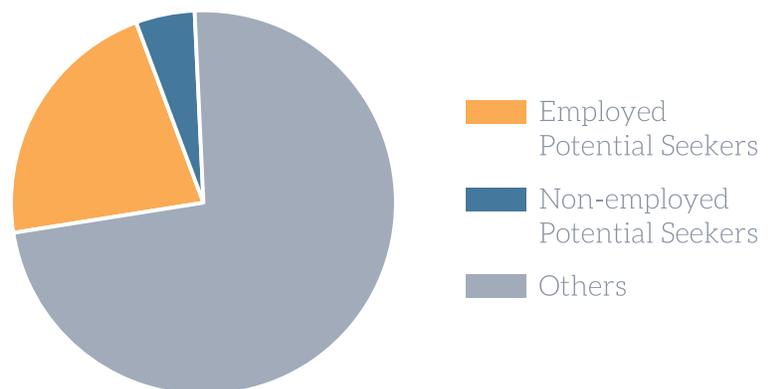
The estimates for gender derived from the survey results were within 1% of Census figures, with just over 1% not responding to the question. Age distribution varied somewhat from Census estimates, with fewer respondents between 45 and 54 compared to the Census figures, and more between 60 and 64.

Most racial and ethnic groups were within one or two percentage points of Census figures. However, respondents identified themselves as Hispanic at a rate about 10 percentage points lower than the Census. While the survey did not employ the same education categories as the Census, most of the distribution was similar.

5 POTENTIAL JOB SEEKERS

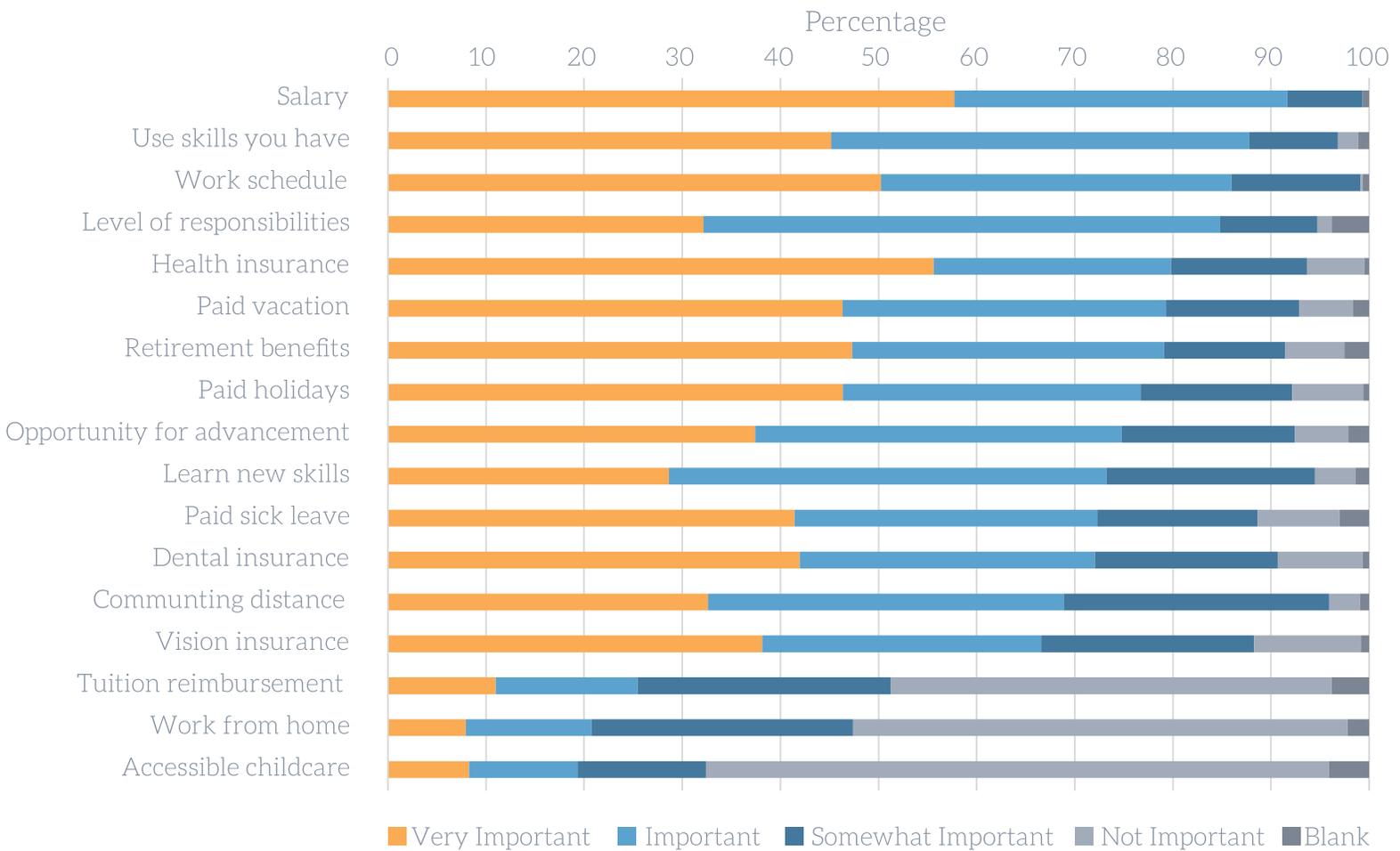
COLUMBUS SAMPLED AREA 18 AND OVER POPULATION BY SEEKER STATUS

There are an estimated 35,544 adults in the Columbus area who reported that they are likely or very likely to change jobs or reenter the workforce in the next year if a suitable job is available. For the sake of brevity, we will call these people “potential job seekers.” About 25,832 of these seekers are currently employed, and about 9,711 are not employed. Exactly what qualifies as a suitable job varies from person to person, but data from the survey allow us to make some generalizations.



The most important factor to people likely or very likely to change jobs or reenter the workforce was salary, with 91.7% marking it as important or very important. Using skills, work schedule, and level of responsibilities also ranked high on the list. The factors that were rated very important were salary (57.7%), health insurance (55.6%), and work schedule (50.2%). More than half of respondents who were likely or very likely to change jobs or reenter the workforce listed these three factors as very important. The second, third, and fourth factors ranked by percentage of potential job seekers designating them important are all non-compensatory: they represent factors that are not a form of payment. These factors (skills, schedule, and responsibilities) were all more likely to be identified as important than health insurance and vacation. Of the 17 factors presented, more than half of potential job seekers ranked 14 factors as important or very important.

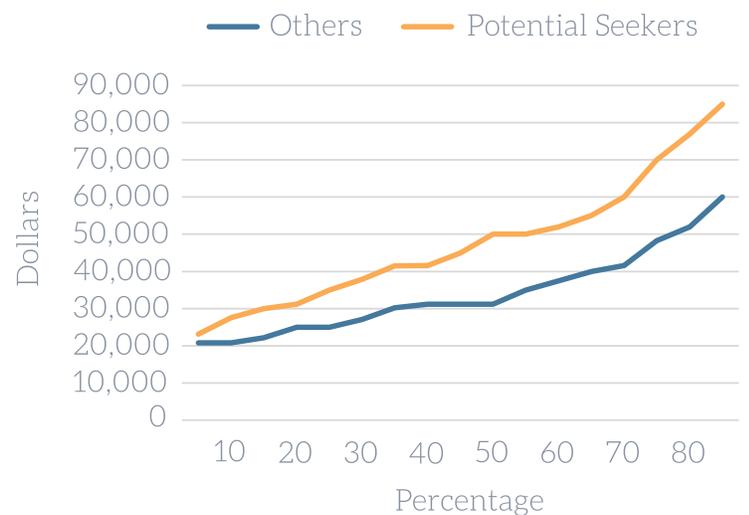
FACTORS IMPORTANT TO POTENTIAL JOB SEEKERS



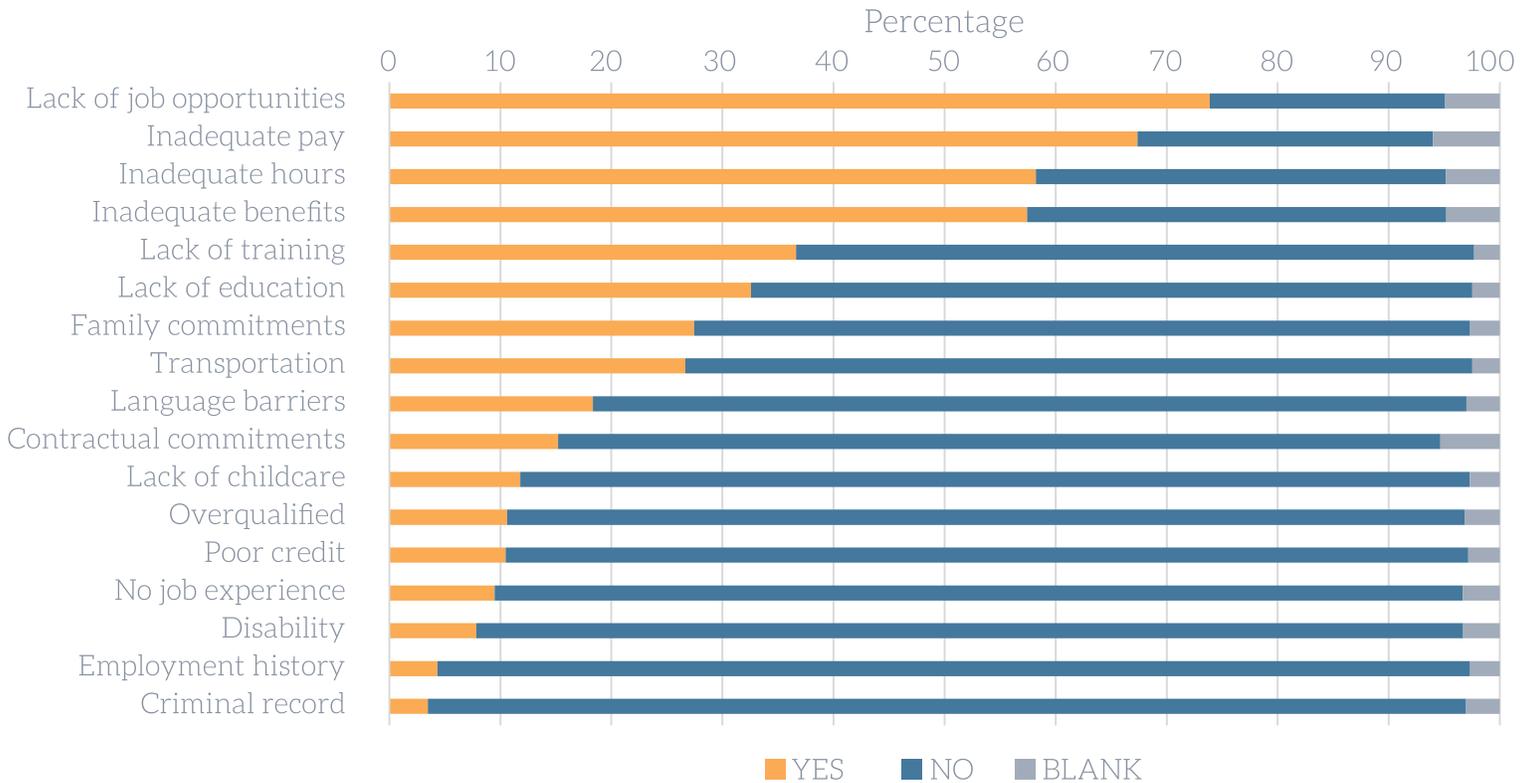
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION WILLING TO IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION BY ANNUAL WAGE

The median minimum wage sought by potential job seekers in Columbus to improve their employment situation is estimated at **\$31,200** annually. For full-time, year-round work, this means a wage of about **\$15** per hour. Those who were less likely to change jobs or reenter the workforce generally reported that they would require higher wages to do so. The median minimum wage to improve the employment situation for that group was **\$50,000** annually.

Those who reported that they were likely or very likely to change jobs or reenter the workforce required lower wages to do so than those who did not.



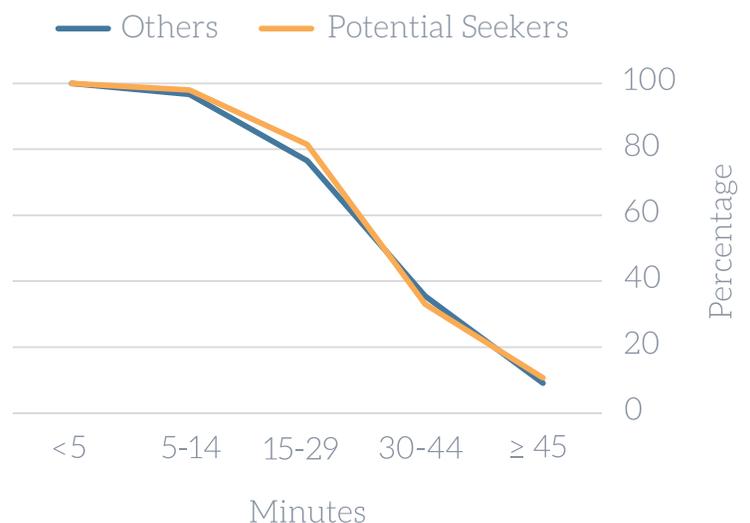
BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED BY POTENTIAL JOB SEEKERS



The top barrier to improvement reported by potential job seekers was lack of available opportunities. None of the top four barriers reported were related to qualities of the potential seekers themselves. These top four, lack of job opportunities, inadequate pay, inadequate hours and inadequate benefits, were the only barriers identified by a majority of potential seekers. Lack of training and lack of education were the next two most commonly reported barriers.

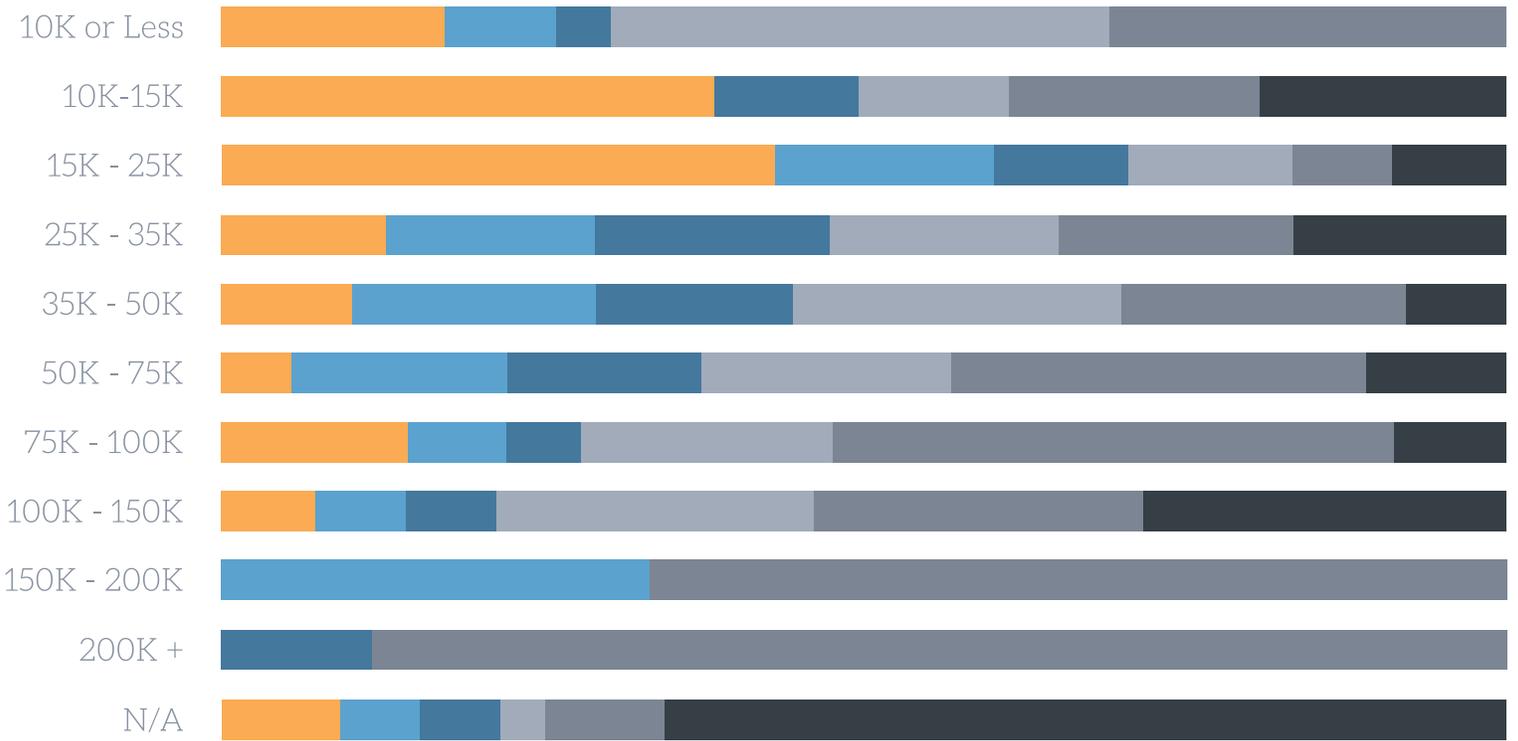
SHARE OF POPULATION WILLING TO COMMUTE A GIVEN TIME TO IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

Most of the potential job seekers indicated willingness to commute to improve their employment situation. Four in five potential job seekers reported that they would commute up to 29 minutes away for work, and one in three said that they would be willing to commute 30 minutes or more. The figures on commute time willingness for those less likely to change or improve their employment situation were very similar to those for potential job seekers. This is likely because commuting is simply a fact of life for workers living in a rural area like the one sampled.



LIKELIHOOD TO CHANGE JOBS BY INCOME LEVEL

■ Very Likely ■ Unlikely ■ Neither likely nor unlikely
■ Likely ■ Very Unlikely ■ BLANK

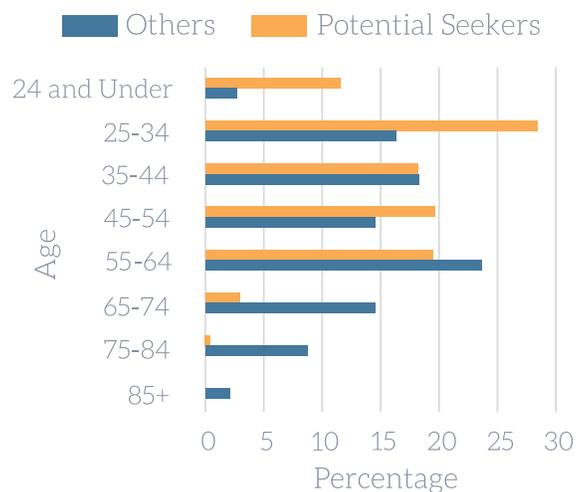


*Each bar represents 100% of that income level

Survey questions allowed respondents to communicate explicitly the conditions under which they would seek or not seek improvement in their employment situation, while others allowed researchers to examine implicit factors in their motivations. Identifying causation is always difficult, but when looking at the survey responses, clear patterns emerge. One of the clearest patterns was related to income. In general, the more people earned, the less likely they were to self-identify as potential job seekers. However, this was not true at the lowest income levels. Workers who reported earning less than \$10,000 annually were less likely than all but the highest earners to be potential job seekers. One potential explanation for this finding is that these workers are not working full time and do not wish for full time work. In general, higher paying jobs tend to be more specialized and not as plentiful, so the survey respondents earning the most may not be seeking an employment change in part due to a perceived lack of available alternatives to their current job. They also may have already attained their career goal, or be satisfied with their work environment.

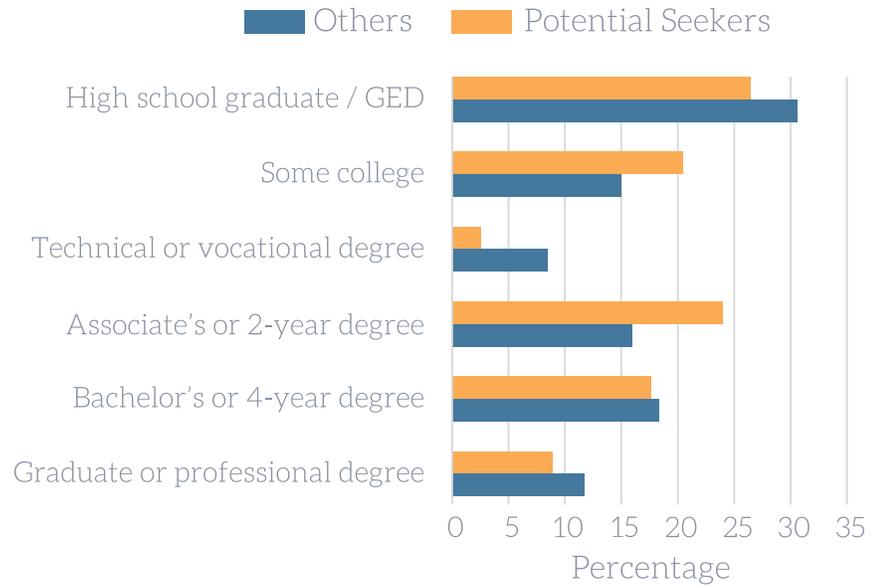
AGE DISTRIBUTION BY SEEKER STATUS

Those people who reported themselves likely or very likely to change jobs or reenter the workforce were in general younger than those who did not. People in the oldest age categories were much more likely to identify as retired, and retired people identified as much less likely to change jobs or reenter the workforce.

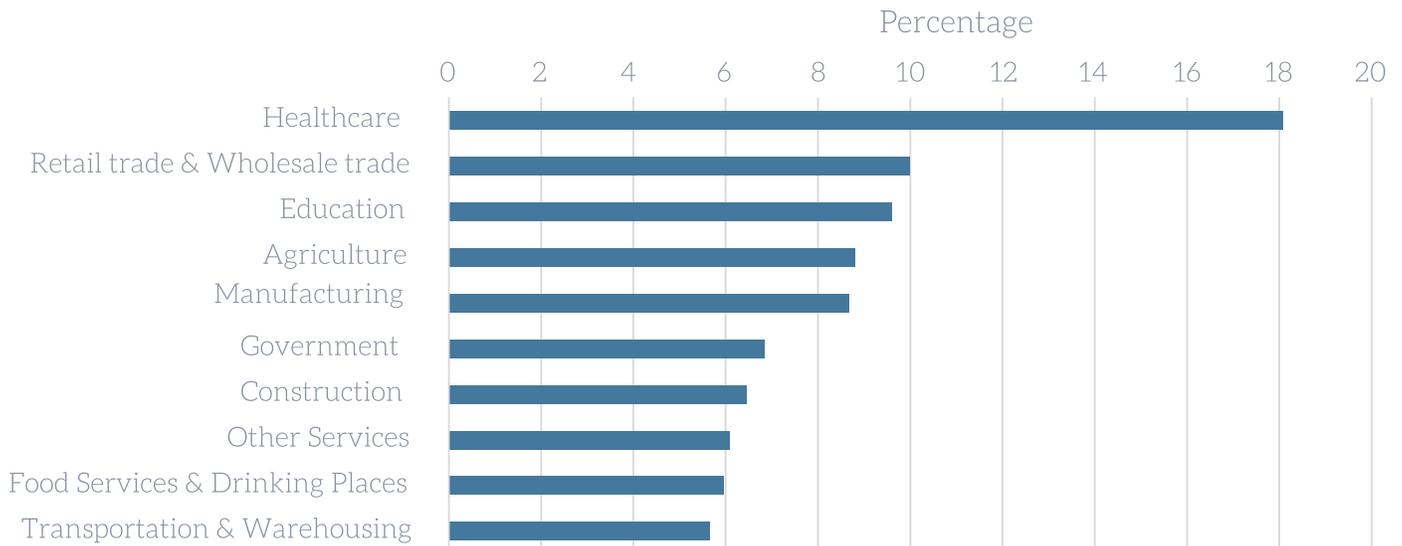


HIGHEST COMPLETED LEVEL OF EDUCATION

The population willing to change jobs or reenter the workforce reported different levels of education than those who were less likely to change or reenter. The potential job seekers were concentrated in the middle of the spectrum, with 44.41% of potential job seekers reporting that they had completed some college or an associate's or two-year degree. Only 30.93% of non-potential job seekers fell into these categories. Conversely, those who did not indicate they were potential job seekers were more concentrated on the ends of the spectrum, with higher percentages reporting a high school graduate/GED education or a graduate or professional degree."



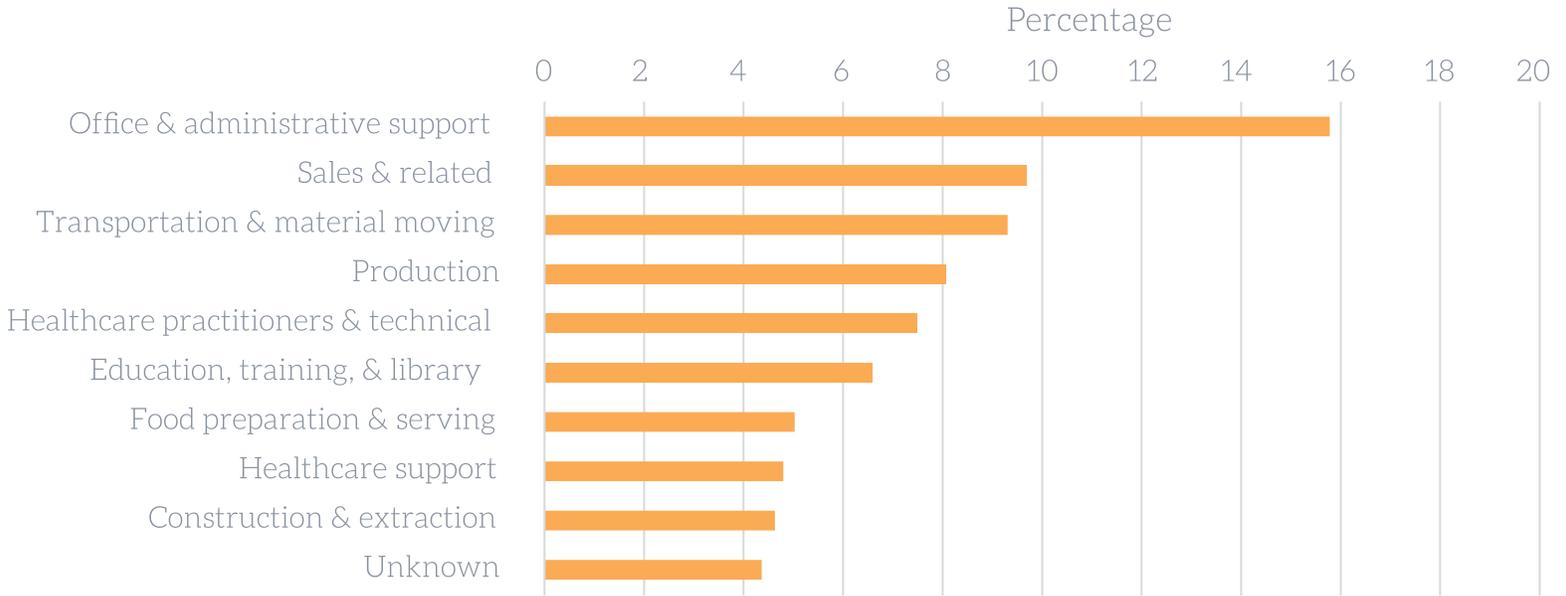
LIKELIHOOD TO CHANGE JOBS BY INDUSTRY



Potential job seekers were most highly concentrated in the healthcare industry; healthcare workers were close to twice as likely to be potential job seekers as those in other all other industries. Because this measure is based on industry of employment the conclusions that can be drawn about workers are limited. A top executive and a janitor working for the same employer share an industry, but are likely to have very different incomes, levels of education, and priorities. It is worth noting that the industries which saw the highest proportion of their workers self-identify as potential job seekers were among the largest industries by employment in the Columbus area.

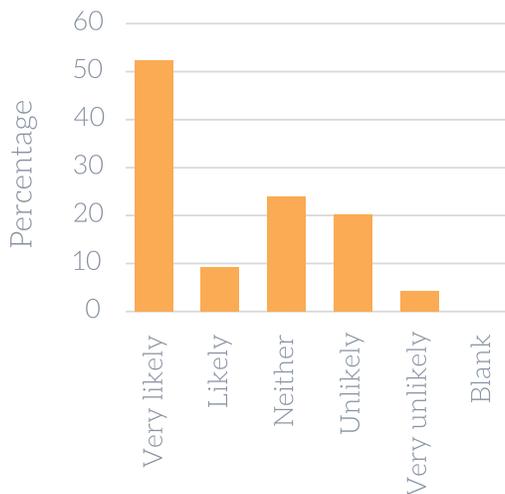
Most potential job seekers identified themselves as working in an office and administrative support occupation. Other common occupations for potential job seekers were sales, transportation and production occupations. While the reasons that potential job seekers tended to concentrate in these occupations were not measured by the survey, the factors important to potential job seekers, as well as their income and education levels, may yield some clues.

LIKELIHOOD TO CHANGE JOBS BY OCCUPATION

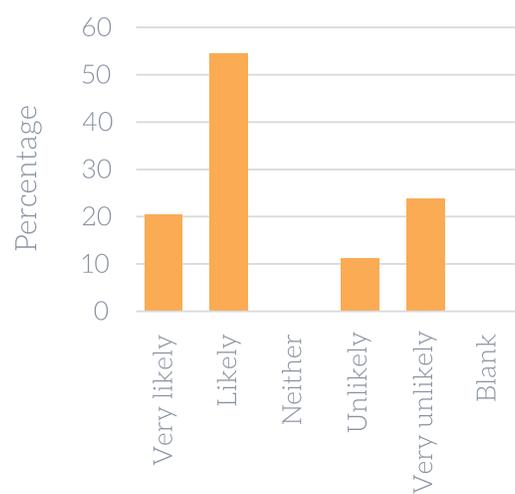


Respondents employed on a seasonal or temporary basis were more likely to be potential job seekers than respondents who were permanently employed. Most employed survey respondents that were seasonal employees (68.2%) indicated they were likely or very likely to change jobs. Similarly, 56.0% of survey respondents who were temporary employees indicated they were likely or very likely to change jobs. This compares to only 32.5% of employed survey respondents that were permanent employees and likely or very likely to change jobs.

TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES LIKELIHOOD TO CHANGE JOBS

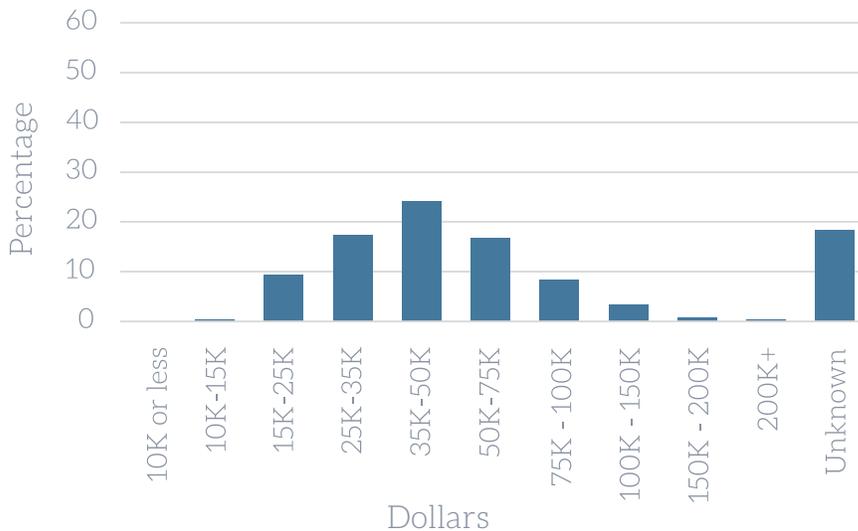


SEASONAL EMPLOYEES LIKELIHOOD TO CHANGE JOBS

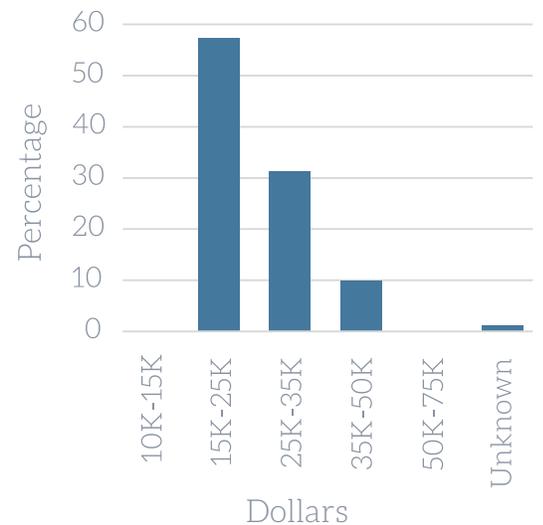


6 OTHER FINDINGS

MINIMUM DESIRED PAY TO CHANGE JOBS FOR CURRENTLY EMPLOYED



DESIRED WAGE OF THOSE NOT CURRENTLY EMPLOYED SEEKING WORK



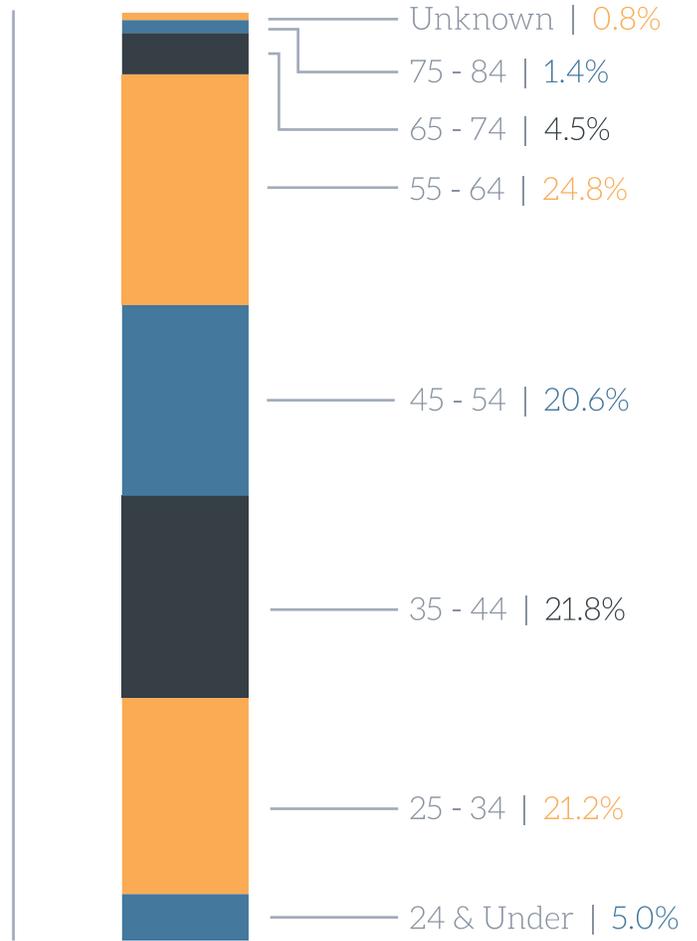
More than half (57.4%) of those not currently employed but seeking work desired an annual wage between \$15,000 and \$25,000. This equates to between minimum wage and about \$12 per hour for full-time employment.

Of those currently employed, most desire a slightly higher wage of between \$35,000 and \$50,000 a year. This equates to between \$16.82 and \$24.04 per hour.

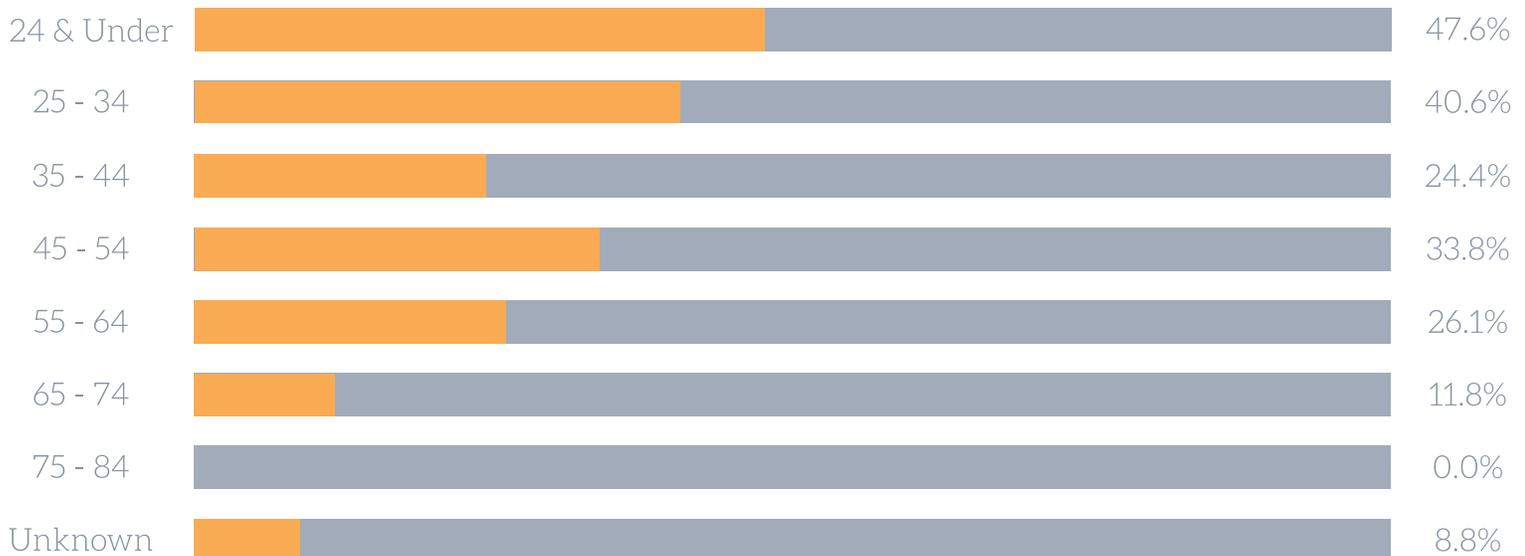
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE EMPLOYED

Among survey respondents employed in the Columbus area, most were between the age of 25 and 64, with survey respondents fairly evenly distributed across each of the four ten-year age groups. The percentage of employed respondents ranged from 20.6% for the 45 to 54 age group to 24.8% for the 55 to 64 age group. Approximately 5.9% of the employed respondents were age 65 and over, while 5.0% of the respondents were between 20 and 24 years of age.

However, the reported likelihood of changing jobs differed greatly by age group. As shown by the following chart, the younger the age group, the more likely the age group is to change jobs. Among those 24 and under who were employed, 47.7% were either very likely or likely to change jobs. Similarly, among workers age 25 to 34, 40.6% were either very likely or likely to change jobs. The likelihood of changing jobs begins to fall as age increases. Only 24.4% of workers age 35 to 44, 33.8% of workers 45 to 54, 26.1% of workers 55 to 64, and 11.8% of workers 65 to 74 were likely or very likely to change jobs.

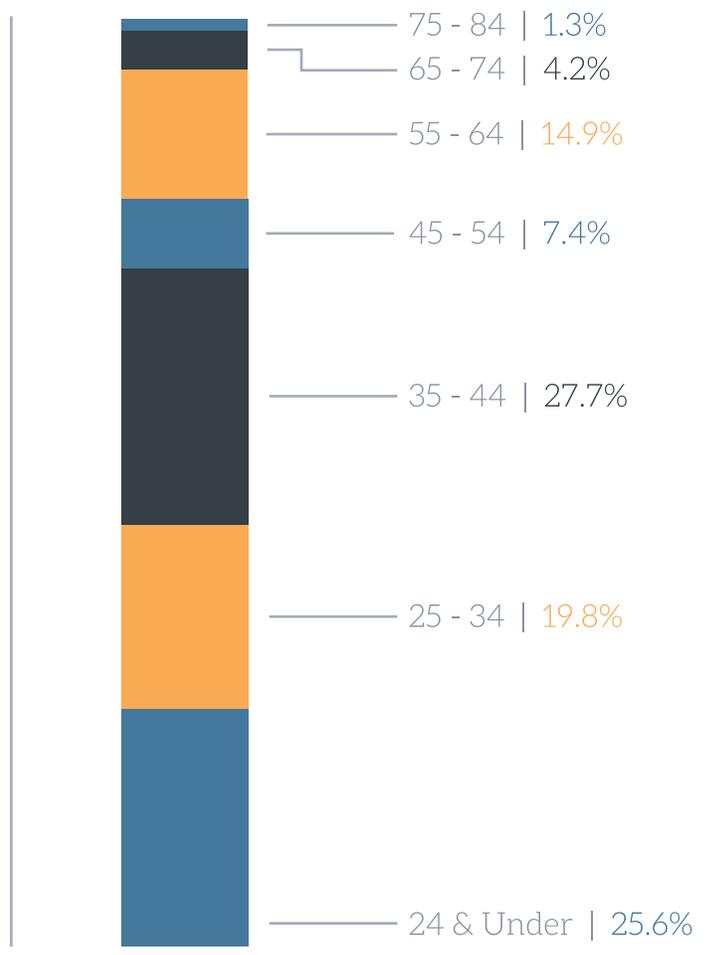


EMPLOYED & LIKELY OR VERY LIKELY TO CHANGE JOBS

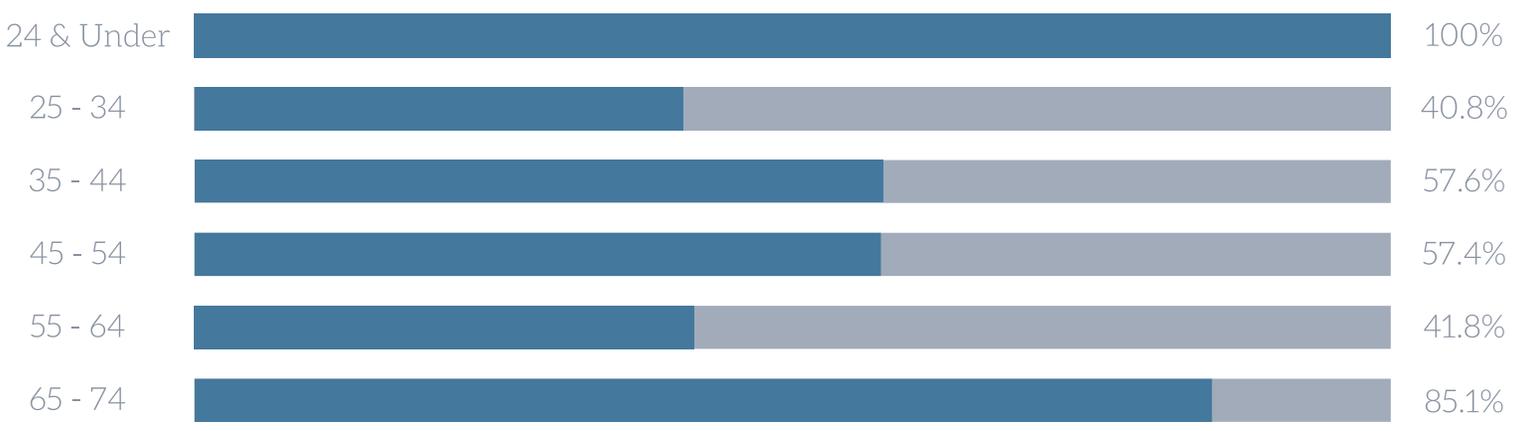


AGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE UNEMPLOYED

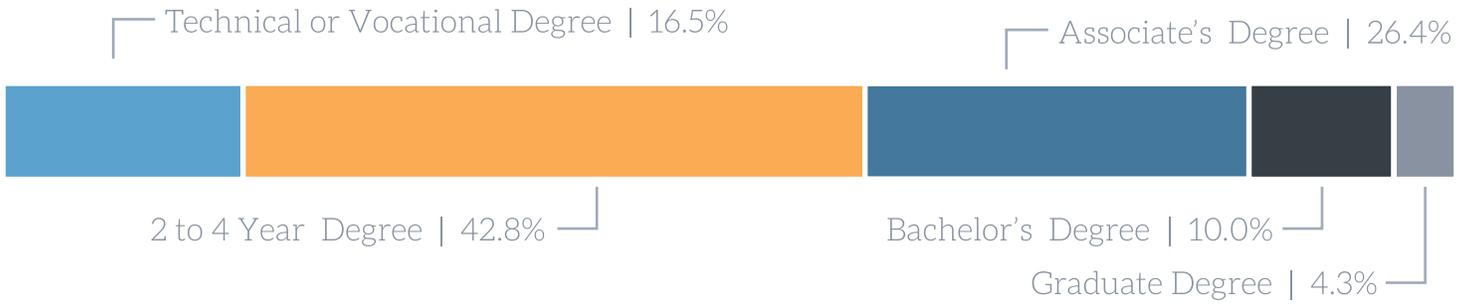
Among survey respondents who were unemployed in the Columbus area, most were between the ages of 20 and 44. Their likelihood of changing jobs differs greatly by age group, however. As shown by the following chart, all survey respondents under the age of 24 indicated they were likely or very likely to reenter the workforce. Among workers age 25 to 34, 40.8% were either very likely or likely to reenter the workforce. For workers in older age groups, the likelihood of reentering the workforce was similar. Among people 35 to 44, 57.6% indicated they were likely or very likely to reenter the workforce, 57.4% of people 45 to 54 were likely or very likely to reenter the workforce, and 41.8% of people 55 to 64 were likely or very likely to reenter the workforce.



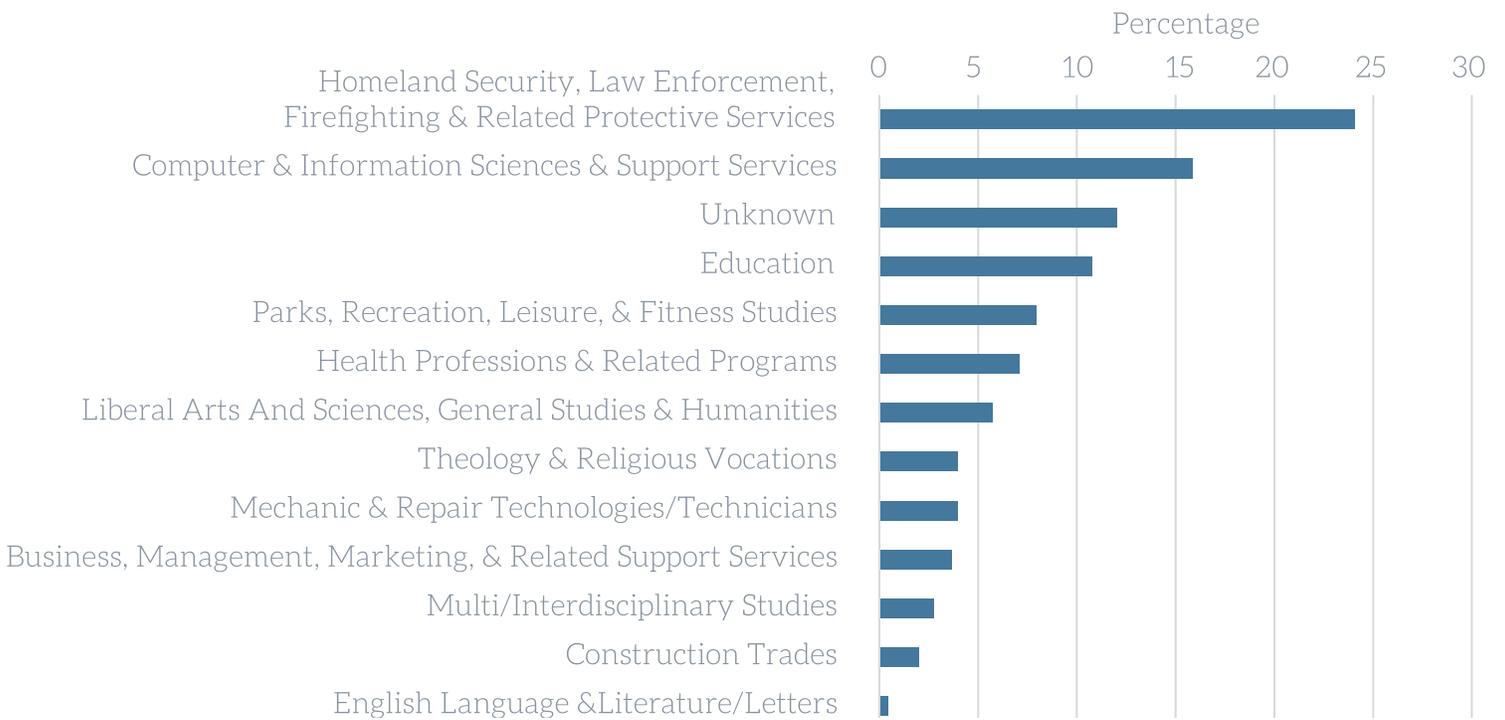
UNEMPLOYED & LIKELY OR VERY LIKELY TO CHANGE JOBS



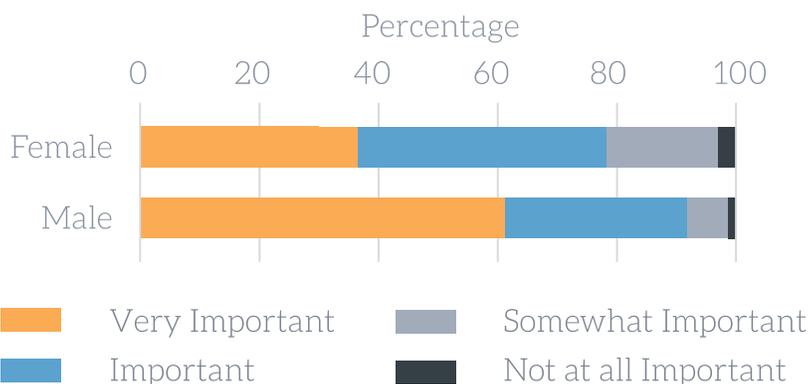
PERCENTAGE UNEMPLOYED BY EDUCATION LEVEL



PERCENTAGE UNEMPLOYED BY DEGREE PROGRAM

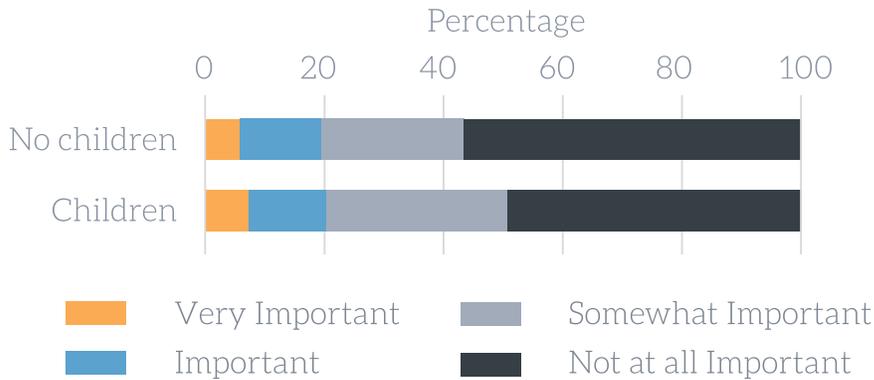


IMPORTANCE OF WORK SCHEDULE



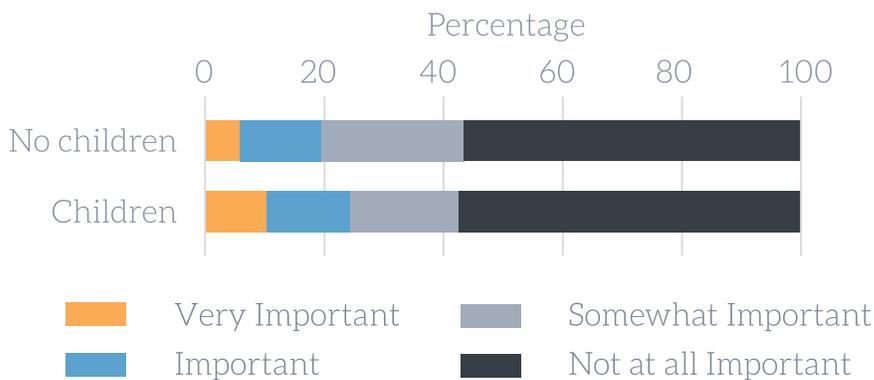
A work schedule that fits an employee's needs was listed as very important by males more often than females. Overall, most respondents marked work schedule as either important or very important.

IMPORTANCE OF WORKING FROM HOME



The importance of working from home was only slightly more important to those with children than to those without children.

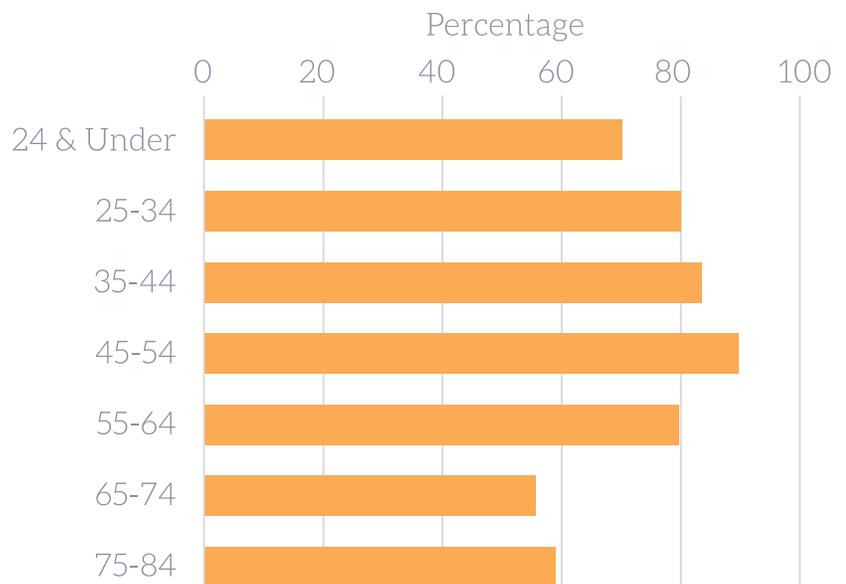
IMPORTANCE OF ACCESSIBLE CHILDCARE



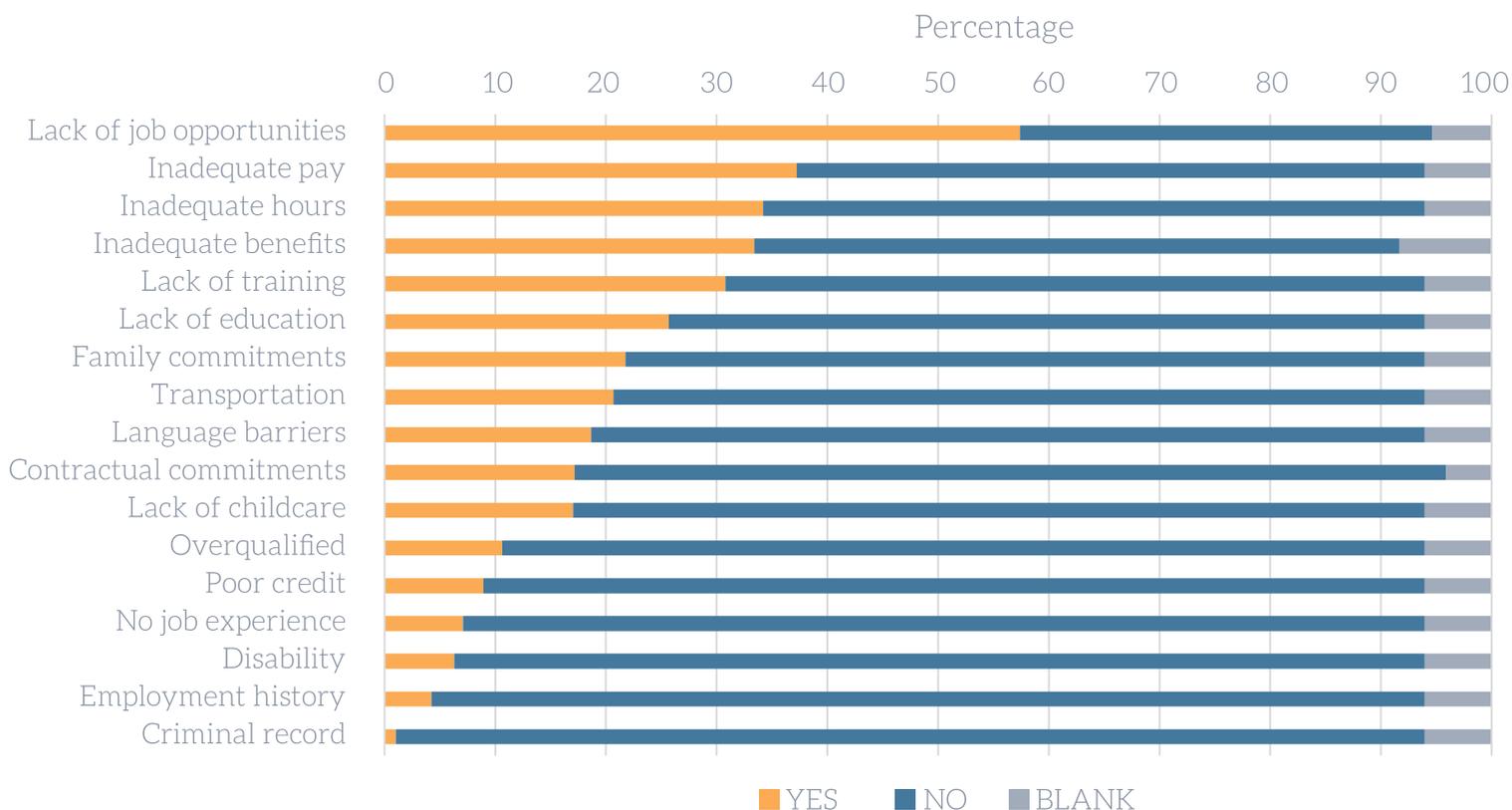
Accessible childcare was only slightly more important to respondents with children than to those without children.

IMPORTANCE OF RETIREMENT BENEFITS

The importance of retirement benefits was fairly steady across age groups, until age 65 and over, where the importance of retirement benefits began to drop off.

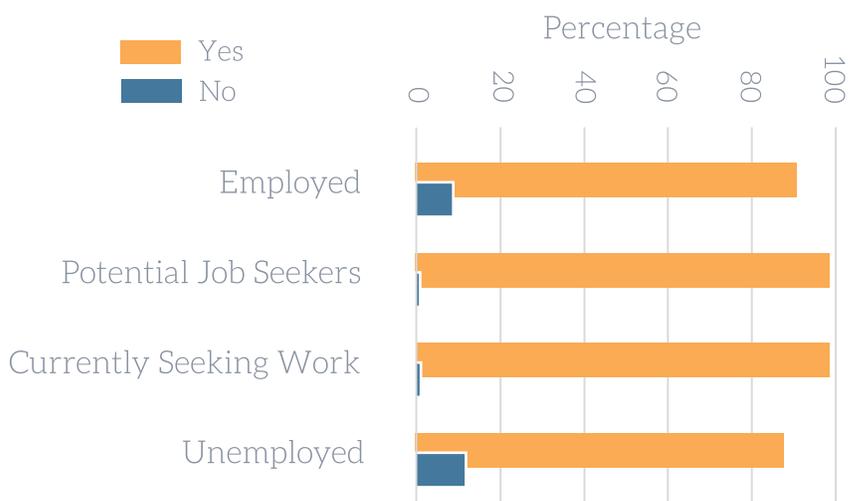


OBSTACLES TO REENTERING THE WORKFORCE, NOT CURRENTLY EMPLOYED, SEEKING WORK



Of those not currently employed, but seeking work, several obstacles to reentering the workforce were identified. The most common obstacle noted was lack of job opportunities. Other obstacles frequently reported were inadequate pay, inadequate hours, and inadequate benefits.

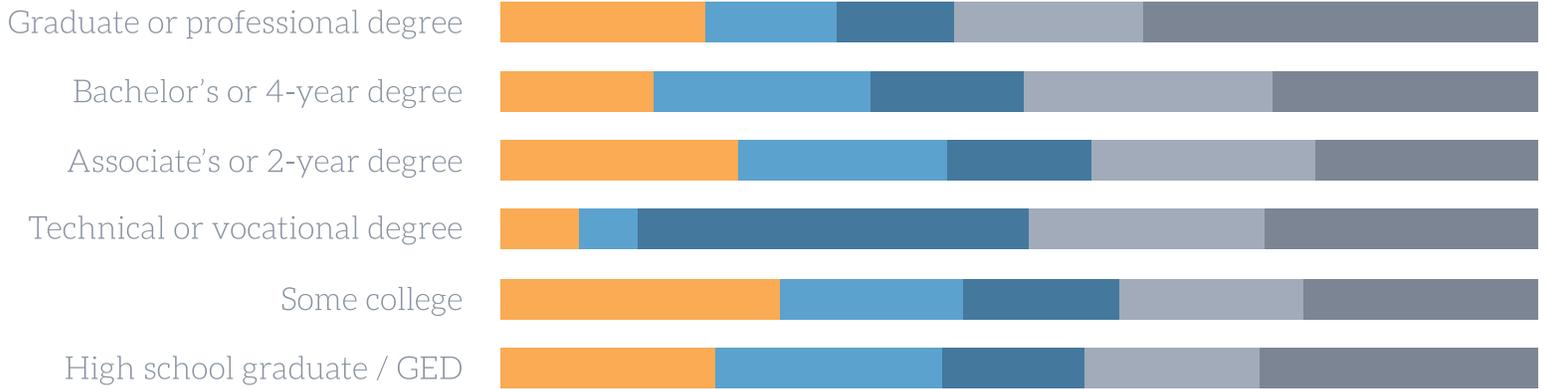
WILLINGNESS TO RETRAIN



When asked if people would be willing to retrain or learn new skills that may improve their employment situation, the response was an overwhelming yes. Most employed persons (79.0%) indicated that they would be willing to retrain or learn skills to improve their employment situation, while 98.8% of respondents who were potential job seekers who were not currently employed also indicated they would be willing to retrain or learn skills to improve their employment situation.

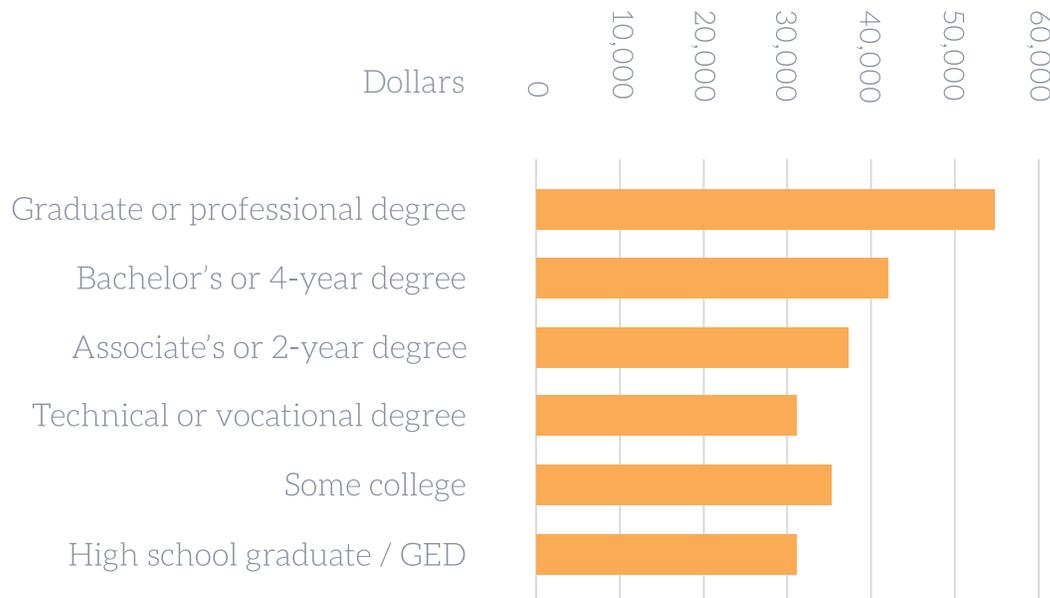
Similarly, 97.4% of respondents who indicated they were currently seeking work also indicated that they would be willing to retrain or learn skills to improve their employment situation. Of those who were unemployed, 87.9% indicated they would be willing to retrain or learn skills to improve their employment situation.

LIKELIHOOD TO CHANGE JOBS BY EDUCATION LEVEL



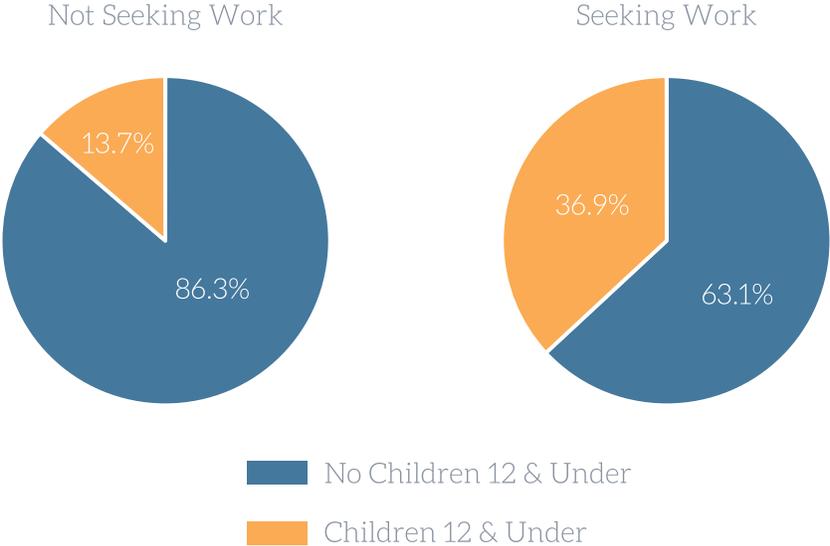
No clear pattern emerged in evaluating respondents willingness to change jobs or reenter the workforce relative to their highest completed level of education. However, it was notable that people who reported technical or vocational school as their highest completed level of education were much less likely than others to make a change. Thirteen percent of these respondents were likely or very likely to make a change, compared to at least 32% for all other groups.

MEDIAN WAGE BY EDUCATION LEVEL



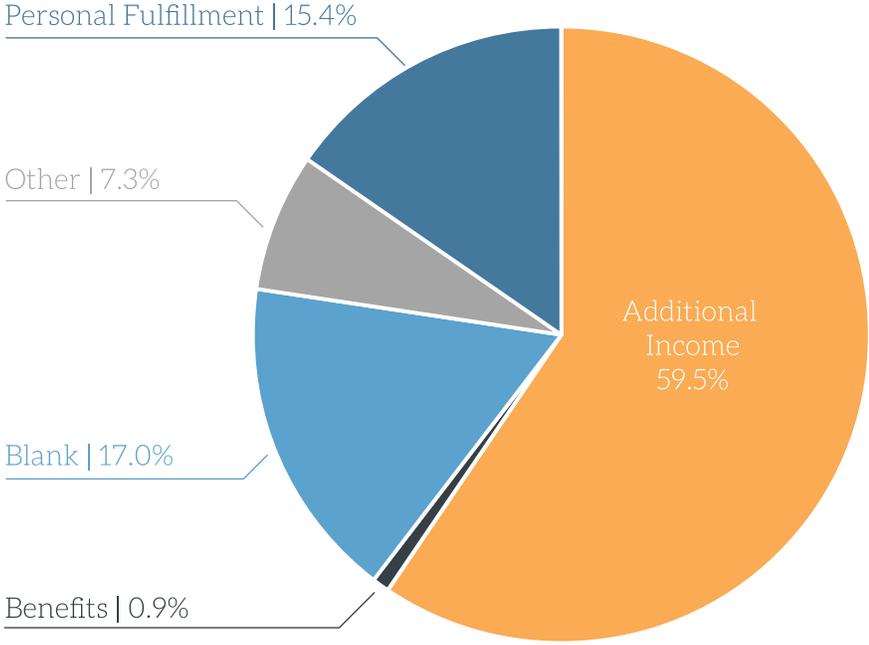
Respondents with higher levels of education also saw higher median earnings. Those who earned bachelor's degrees saw a median income of \$11,000 more annually than those who completed high school. Even completing some college saw a wage premium of \$4,160 annually on the median relative to completing high school.

SEEKERS VS. NON-SEEKERS & CHILDREN



Of those not currently employed, and not seeking work, 13.7% had one or more children under 12 living in their household. Of those seeking work, 36.9% had one or more children under 12 living in their household.

REASONS FOR WORKING MULTIPLE JOBS



Some survey respondents who were employed indicated that they worked multiple jobs. The most common reason given for working multiple jobs was additional income (59.5%).

APPENDIX / GLOSSARY

TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Potential Job Seeker

A person who answered either 'likely' or 'very likely' to the following question: "How likely or unlikely are you to change jobs or reenter the workforce in the next year if a suitable job is available?" Note that people not currently employed were asked separately if they were actively seeking work, while the employed were not.

Industry

A group of businesses categorized by the goods or services they produce. Industries are typically organized by the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS). This survey used a modified version of NAICS categories in an attempt to make the categories easier to understand. More information on NAICS can be found at <https://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/>.

Occupation

A group of jobs categorized by duties. Occupations are typically organized by Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system. This survey used a modified version of SOC categories in an attempt to make the categories easier to understand. More information on SOC can be found at <http://www.bls.gov/soc/>.

Wages

In each instance where wages were addressed in this survey, respondents were given the option to report annual or hourly wages. When analyzing these wages, the responses were all assumed to represent full-time employment at 40 hours per week, to allow comparison.

Unemployed

While the US Bureau of Labor Statistics has a detailed, stratified, and technical set of definitions for unemployment, this survey simply allowed respondents to select 'unemployed' as one of four choices describing their employment status.

Not Employed

'Not Employed' differs from unemployed in this document. 'Not Employed' includes all respondents who indicated they were unemployed, retired, or homemakers.

COLUMBUS AREA ZIP CODES SAMPLED

This table shows the ZIP codes sampled to create survey estimates for the Columbus labor availability area.

County	State	Zip Code	Responses Received
Butler County	NE	68001	1
Butler County	NE	68014	4
Butler County	NE	68036	3
Platte County	NE	68601	214
Boone County	NE	68620	33
Wheeler County	NE	68622	3
Nance County	NE	68623	1
Butler County	NE	68624	9
Butler County	NE	68626	3
Boone County	NE	68627	4
Merrick County	NE	68628	3
Colfax County	NE	68629	11
Platte County	NE	68631	1
Butler County	NE	68632	31
Platte County	NE	68634	1
Butler County	NE	68635	2
Wheeler County	NE	68637	2
Nance County	NE	68638	18
Nance County	NE	68640	12
Colfax County	NE	68641	16
Platte County	NE	68642	8
Colfax County	NE	68643	10
Platte County	NE	68644	5
Platte County	NE	68647	8
Polk County	NE	68651	12
Boone County	NE	68652	5
Platte County	NE	68653	5
Polk County	NE	68654	4
Boone County	NE	68655	1
Butler County	NE	68658	8
Colfax County	NE	68659	1

County	State	Zip Code	Responses Received
Boone County	NE	68660	13
Colfax County	NE	68661	38
Polk County	NE	68662	6
Merrick County	NE	68663	6
Greeley County	NE	68665	6
Polk County	NE	68666	17
Butler County	NE	68669	4
Madison County	NE	68701	250
Madison County	NE	68715	16
Holt County	NE	68735	9
Pierce County	NE	68747	2
Madison County	NE	68748	20
Madison County	NE	68752	7
Madison County	NE	68758	11
Pierce County	NE	68765	11
Pierce County	NE	68767	33
Stanton County	NE	68768	5
Pierce County	NE	68769	12
Stanton County	NE	68779	17
Madison County	NE	68781	16
Hall County	NE	68801	5
Merrick County	NE	68826	26
Merrick County	NE	68827	2
Greeley County	NE	68842	7
Merrick County	NE	68864	8
Howard County	NE	68872	1
Greeley County	NE	68875	3
Greeley County	NE	68882	2

Total Responses : 992

