

OCCUPATIONAL SUPPLY AND DEMAND:  
A LOCAL OFFICE PERSPECTIVE  
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INTRODUCTION

The Alaska Department of Labor's local Employment Service (ES) offices throughout the state were surveyed to obtain their perceptions and knowledge of local labor market conditions as they relate to occupational supply and demand. Specifically, local office personnel were asked to list those jobs most in demand by employers (job orders received) and the occupational skills of unplaced or hard-to-place job seekers. Additional questions were asked about whether the local labor market could supply the demand and whether most job seekers were able to find work using their primary occupational skills. Finally, comments were requested concerning any new or planned projects or activities affecting the local labor market, the effects (if any) of Federal program cutbacks, and information useful to local job seekers.

Records of the Employment Services Automated Reporting System (ESARS) were researched to provide statistical data on job orders and worker applications to supplement the survey of local offices. This data is presented in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 data is limited to those occupations having 50 or more job openings and Table 2 data is limited to those industries with unfilled openings greater than 40 percent of total openings received. Data is therefore concentrated on occupations and industries with obvious surpluses or shortages of job applicants.

SUMMARY

Information from local offices and data from ESARS indicate that jobs most in demand are in the retail trade and services industries. Occupations in demand include experienced food service workers and skilled office workers. In the professional and technical occupational category there is a demand for experienced and well-trained engineers, mechanics, and computer operators.

Although the supply of workers appears adequate to fill the openings in food service and office jobs, there is a lack of experienced and trained workers. Consequently, employers are selective in their hiring practices and many openings go unfilled or are cancelled. The construction industry is definitely over-supplied with applicants outnumbering jobs ten to one.

Federal budget cuts appear to have had only a slight to moderate effect on local economies so far.\* Greatest impact is in clerical and social service jobs where competition is fierce. The current trend in federal agencies is to reduce staff by attrition rather than by layoff. This may change in the future.

Long term economic growth focuses on petrochemicals, coal, grain, and hydroelectric projects. Increasing doubt surrounds the possible construction of a gas pipeline. Current and short term growth relies on state-funded capital projects, state and local governments, and Alaska's rapidly expanding tourism "industry".

Comments from the local offices indicate that the majority of job seekers who obtain their jobs through the local offices are able to utilize their primary occupational skills. An exception occurs in the summer months when many applicants are not overly concerned with primary skills and are willing to broaden their field of work search. More jobs are available in the summer and many applicants are interested in part-time, temporary or seasonal work during these months.

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\*Comments are limited to areas served by local ES offices, and are not necessarily indicative of statewide trends. Federal budget cuts will most likely have the greatest impact in rural areas of the state which are not represented by these comments.

Local demand for jobs is more than amply covered by the local labor supply. A few highly trained technical positions such as petroleum engineers, computer operators, system analysts and mechanics, may sometimes have to be recruited outside the local area.

Data from the local Employment Service offices and ESARS does not encompass all occupational supply and demand information in Alaska. For instance, the construction trades which have substantial union memberships are not well represented since workers are generally dispatched from union hiring halls and not ES offices. Also, many professional positions are filled by private agencies, individually presented resumes and interviews, trade papers, and the informal word-of-mouth network. Employment Service offices do provide, however, one of the more readily available and concentrated sources of information.

#### DEMAND

The concensus among the local offices was that the greatest demand occurs in the services and retail trade industries. The retail trade industry needs experienced food service workers. ESARS data for the period October 1980 through June 1981 show approximately 3,600 job openings received for eating and drinking places. The services industry, specifically clerical and sales, requires skilled office workers such as secretaries, typists, bookkeepers, word processing operators, payroll clerks, and general clerks. The greatest number of job orders received by local offices are in the clerical and sales occupations. ESARS tables list some 5,500 openings in these fields. The professional and technical sector has demand for well-trained and skilled engineers, mechanics, and computer operators.

#### SUPPLY

A first glance at the ESARS tables seems to show that more than an ample number of applicants are registered at local offices to fill those jobs most in demand.

For instance, there were approximately 9,900 applicants active some time during the period (10/80-6/81) to cover the 5,500 job openings in the clerical and sales sector. However, 2,000 or 38 percent of these openings went unfilled or were cancelled. The problem, according to local office personnel, is that many of the applicants are inexperienced and/or unskilled. Comments from the Anchorage local office illustrate: "Clerical applicants who type less than 40 wpm with limited clerical backgrounds are as difficult to place as those with an unstable work history. Even though there are many clerical openings, employers continue to be very selective. In other words, it is difficult for these applicants to find work". And, "The majority of sales applicants who can't find work do not have the necessary experience that employers require. Due to this factor, this type of applicant is not competitive and not finding employment". For some of these jobs, a sort of "Catch 22" exists. If you can't find a job to acquire experience, how do you obtain a job requiring experience?

However, in many fields, there is a need for proper training prior to entering the work force which should be provided in schools or technical institutes. It appears that this need is not being fully met. Modern technology in today's business and government offices, for instance, requires workers skilled on word processing equipment and computers. Few of the surplus applicants in the clerical and sales sector, it seems, have this ability. The construction industry is another area where a surplus of applicants over jobs exist. Examples in the ESARS data include 790 applicants for operating engineer with only 70 job openings available, and 1,100 carpenter applicants for 300 openings. This data may even be seriously understated. A great many construction workers are unionized and seek employment through local union hiring halls and not through Employment Service offices. This surplus of construction workers has existed since the completion of the Trans Alaska Oil Pipeline.

One occupation where there appears to be an excess of job openings over applicants is cannery workers. ESARS data shows approximately 2,200 openings and only 1,300 applicants. However, this is an example of workers filling jobs not necessarily in their primary occupational field. Local offices were able to fill almost 2,000 of these openings.

### JOB SEEKER INFORMATION

All job seekers should be aware of certain basic facts and ideas when entering the competitive labor market. Some of these ideas seem simple and unimportant to the world of work, but they can make the difference between getting and not getting a job. Many people never learned these tips and many others have forgotten them. Presented below are selected comments from the ES local offices for the job seeker:

ANCHORAGE "[Applicants] need to understand that there are limitations due to seasonal employment..." "There is more competition in the clerical job market during the summer...", "any training on newer, computerized equipment would be valuable..."

SEWARD "Job hunters should have the means to provide living quarters, transportation, and contact availability..." (If the employer can't find you, how can he hire you?!!)

KODIAK "Write to an area regarding what the labor market conditions are before proceeding there. When completing an application for work, list all-ALL-work experience and/or training (including military)."

KENAI "[Applicants] should have more than one marketable skill and those [interested] in office work should be proficient on office machines. Auto mechanics should be well-trained to work on the new cars or foreign imports."

Some comments by the Anchorage Youth Employment Service (YES) are of particular value to the younger job seeker (but are

also relevant to older job seekers):

1. Get a Social Security Number before you start to look for work.
2. Think about the work you might like. What do you enjoy doing? You will be happier and more successful with a job if you like what you are doing.
3. Look to various sources to obtain a job. Contact people you know. Look at newspapers. Go to business establishments and leave applications, and also register with Youth Employment Services (or ES).
4. Go to an interview alone.
5. Be prepared to give an employer a listing of your past jobs and date of employment.
6. Seeking a job takes patience and perseverance. Don't get discouraged or, at least, don't let it show-- a positive attitude is the best approach.

### LOCAL LABOR MARKET OUTLOOK

The local offices were asked to comment on current or long term projects and activities in their areas which will have an impact on local labor markets. Below is a summary of comments by local office:

#### KETCHIKAN

##### CURRENT

1. Completion of wastewater treatment system (construction trades and laborers).
2. Beginning construction of a State marine maintenance facility (construction trades and laborers).
3. Construction of State Jail (construction trades and laborers).
4. Finish Pioneers Home (inside trade workers-painters, dry wall workers, etc).

5. Local real estate lot developments (equipment operators and laborers).
6. Increased tourism from additional tour boat stops, etc. (services industry including hotel, restaurants and retail positions).
7. Construction of an \$85 million hydro-electric project (all construction trades).

LONG TERM

1. Construction and operation of a molybdenum mine (construction-all trades peaking at 1,100 workers in 1984 to 1985. Operation-750 operators and maintenance workers, operations beginning circa 1987-88).
2. Continued development of marine maintenance facility including operations (shipwrights, electronic technicians, laborers, painters welders, HD mechanics, etc, to begin circa 1982).
3. Additional hydro projects, circa 1990-2000.

KODIAK

1. Bottomfish processing (cannery workers).
2. Additional state parks (park managers and aides).

SITKA

CURRENT

1. Green Lake Dam completion by March, 1982 (construction trades).
2. New hospital (operating engineers, laborers, carpenters).
3. Sewer projects (teamsters, operating engineers, laborers).

SEWARD

CURRENT

1. Some highway projects and a sewage

treatment plant (construction trades).

LONG TERM

1. Possibility of shipyards, grain terminal and coal loading facility (construction trades).

ANCHORAGE

CURRENT

1. New shopping centers and chain stores (experienced sales clerks and cashiers).
2. Road construction (construction trades).

LONG TERM

1. Project 80's (construction trades, food services, some clerical).
2. Susitna Dam (operating engineers, cement masons, other heavy construction trades).
3. Gas pipeline (construction trades, food services).
4. Petrochemical projects (some professional positions).

MAT-SU

CURRENT

Road construction, low cost housing, indoor hockey rink, swimming pool, four fire halls, college library, city garage, extension of storm sewer system, street improvement, and a new hospital are planned for this year or next (primarily construction trades).

LONG TERM

Future activities include the Susitna Hydroelectric Project and development of Point Mc Kenzie (agriculture).

Table 1  
Active Applicants, Job Orders Received  
and Openings Filled by Occupational Title  
(With 50 or More Openings)  
OCTOBER 1980-JUNE 1981

	ACTIVE APPLICANTS	JOB OPENINGS Rc'd	OPENINGS FILLED	OPENINGS UNFILLED or CANCELLED	PERCENT UNFILLED	RATIO: ACTIVE APPS. to JOB OPENINGS*
<u>PROFESSIONAL, TECHNICAL and MANAGERIAL</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>51</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>49.0%</u>	<u>0.7</u>
Drafter, Civil	38	51	26	25	49.0%	0.7
<u>CLERICAL and SALES</u>	<u>9866</u>	<u>5495</u>	<u>3417</u>	<u>2078</u>	<u>37.8%</u>	<u>1.8</u>
Secretary, Legal	287	97	52	45	46.4%	3.0
Secretary	913	402	233	169	42.0%	2.3
Clerk Typist	833	735	535	200	27.2%	1.1
Keypunch Operator	123	54	32	22	40.7%	2.3
Survey Worker	19	177	165	12	6.8%	0.1
Clerk, File	70	177	130	47	26.6%	0.4
Clerk, General	2085	909	650	259	28.5%	2.3
Bookkeeper I	440	215	122	93	43.3%	2.0
Bookkeeper II	214	165	80	85	51.5%	1.3
Teller	177	269	152	117	43.5%	0.7
Cashier II	453	111	53	58	52.3%	1.6
Accounting Clerk	596	315	180	135	42.9%	1.9
Clerk, Admin.	1229	611	327	284	46.5%	2.0
Clerk, Stock	305	72	43	29	40.3%	4.2
Telephone Operator	144	88	42	46	52.3%	1.6
Receptionist	598	389	201	188	48.3%	1.5
Clerk, Hotel	90	124	79	45	36.3%	0.7
Salesperson, Gen. Merch.	396	150	82	68	45.3%	2.6
Salesperson, Parts	76	69	43	26	37.7%	1.1
Clerk, Sales	810	303	193	110	36.3%	2.7
Telephone Solicitor	8	63	23	40	63.5%	0.1
<u>SERVICES</u>	<u>4358</u>	<u>3171</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1216</u>	<u>38.3%</u>	<u>1.4</u>
Counter Attend.	219	399	129	170	56.9%	0.7
Bartender	519	126	65	61	48.4%	4.1
Cook Hotel/ Restaurants	605	440	300	140	31.8%	1.4
Cook, Short Order	294	366	143	223	60.9%	0.8
Cook	417	134	73	61	45.5%	3.1
Pantry Goods- Maker	53	73	29	44	60.3%	0.7
Kitchen Helper	648	736	514	222	30.2%	0.9
Cleaning, Housekeeping	388	329	215	114	34.6%	1.2
Nurse Aide	377	60	45	15	25.0%	6.3

\*A ratio in excess of 1.0 indicates an excess of applicants over job openings (supply) and a ratio less than 1.0 indicates more openings than applicants (demand).

TABLE 1 (continued)

Attendant, Nursery School	182	202	135	67	33.2%	0.9
Security Guard	142	91	69	22	24.2%	1.6
Janitor	514	315	238	77	24.4%	1.6
<u>AGRICULTURAL, FORESTRY, &amp; FISHERIES</u>	<u>110</u>	<u>181</u>	<u>156</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>13.8%</u>	<u>0.6</u>
Forest Fire Fighter	110	181	156	25	13.8%	0.6
<u>PROCESSING</u>	<u>1359</u>	<u>2245</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>274</u>	<u>12.2%</u>	<u>0.6</u>
Cannery Worker	1359	2245	1971	274	12.2%	0.6
<u>MACHINE TRADES</u>	<u>693</u>	<u>229</u>	<u>148</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>35.4%</u>	<u>3.0</u>
Mechanic, Auto	486	171	105	66	38.6%	2.8
Mechanic, Con- struction Equip.	207	58	43	15	25.7%	3.6
<u>STRUCTURAL WORK</u>	<u>4970</u>	<u>1731</u>	<u>1467</u>	<u>264</u>	<u>15.3%</u>	<u>2.9</u>
Welder, Combination	322	51	39	12	23.5%	6.3
Electrician	225	80	59	21	26.2%	2.8
Painter	168	86	77	9	10.5%	1.9
Operating Engineer	790	71	63	8	11.3%	11.1
Carpenter	1136	300	248	52	17.3%	3.8
Construction - Worker I	1874	973	872	101	10.4%	1.9
Maintenance - Repairer, Bldg.	455	170	109	61	35.9%	2.7
<u>MISCELLANEOUS</u>	<u>2455</u>	<u>2443</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>485</u>	<u>19.6%</u>	<u>1.0</u>
Truck Driver, Heavy	722	76	53	23	30.3%	9.5
Truck Driver, Light	296	102	60	42	41.2%	2.9
Bus Driver	271	182	133	49	26.9%	1.5
Service Station - Attendant	278	188	135	53	28.2%	1.5
Parking Lot - Attendant	15	52	36	16	30.8%	0.3
Car Wash Attendant	0	72	54	18	25.0%	---
Cleaner	40	83	46	37	44.6%	0.5
Bagger, Grocery	76	170	89	81	47.6%	0.4
Material Handler	757	1518	1352	166	10.9%	0.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23849</b>	<b>15546</b>	<b>11098</b>	<b>4448</b>	<b>28.6%</b>	<b>1.5</b>

TABLE 2  
Unfilled Job Openings  
by Major Industry  
(Unfilled Rate Greater Than 40%)  
OCTOBER 1980-JUNE 1981

	<u>OPENINGS</u>	<u>FILLED</u>	<u>UNFILLED</u>	<u>% UNFILLED</u>
<u>MINING</u>	<u>453</u>	<u>228</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>50.0%</u>
11 Anthracite	3	1	2	66.7%
13 Oil and Gas	450	227	223	49.6%
<u>MANUFACTURING</u>	<u>210</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>116</u>	<u>55.2%</u>
22 Textiles	2	1	1	50.0%
23 Apparel	16	5	11	68.7%
26 Paper	20	10	10	50.0%
27 Printing and Publishing	172	78	94	54.7%
<u>TRANSP., COMM., &amp; UTILITIES</u>	<u>192</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>47.9%</u>
40 Railroad	9	4	5	55.6%
49 Electric, Gas	183	96	87	47.5%
<u>RETAIL TRADE</u>	<u>3598</u>	<u>2068</u>	<u>1530</u>	<u>42.5%</u>
58 Eating and Drinking	3598	2068	1530	42.5%
<u>FINANCE, INS., &amp; REAL ESTATE</u>	<u>1161</u>	<u>539</u>	<u>622</u>	<u>53.6%</u>
60 Banking	767	366	401	52.3%
61 Credit agency	120	65	55	45.8%
62 Security Brokers	28	10	18	64.3%
63 Insurance	111	44	67	60.4%
64 Insurance Agents	135	54	81	60.0%
<u>SERVICES</u>	<u>1846</u>	<u>969</u>	<u>877</u>	<u>47.5%</u>
72 Personal Services	247	132	115	46.6%
76 Misc. Repair	154	88	66	42.9%
80 Health Services	660	336	324	49.1%
81 Educational Services	232	130	102	44.0%
89 Misc. Services	553	283	270	48.8%

Source: ESARS, Table 12