

# How much could I be earning? Using Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics data during salary negotiations

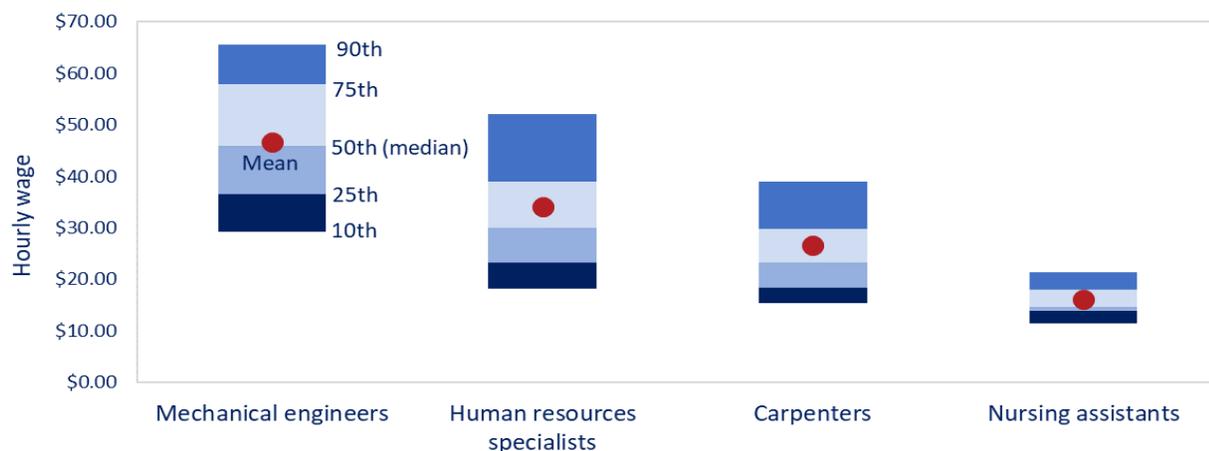
Understanding how wages and wage distributions vary by occupation, industry, and location is invaluable information when negotiating a starting salary or requesting a raise at your current job. The Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) program produces hourly and annual wage estimates for about 830 occupations. Data shown here are from the May 2021 OEWS estimates, available at [www.bls.gov/oes/](http://www.bls.gov/oes/).

## Find your occupation

First, find your occupation. The OEWS occupational profiles have a wealth of wage information for each of the approximately 830 occupations. Each profile page includes the occupation's definition; national employment and wage estimates; and data by state and area, and by industry. Find and click on your occupation in the list at [www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_stru.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_stru.htm). Whether you are a nurse, accountant, security guard, or electrician, the occupational profiles will get you started in determining how much you could be earning.

Each occupational profile not only contains the average (mean) wage for the occupation, it also shows the wage distribution, which provides information on the spread of the wages. Percentile wages, including the 10th, 25th, 50th (median), 75th, and 90th percentiles, indicate how much the wages vary for an occupation. For example, 10 percent of workers earn wages at or below the 10th percentile and 90 percent earn at or more than the 10th percentile. Eighty percent of workers earn wages between the 10th and 90th percentiles. The chart below shows the mean wage and the wage distribution for four different occupations.

**Percentile and mean wages for selected occupations, May 2021**

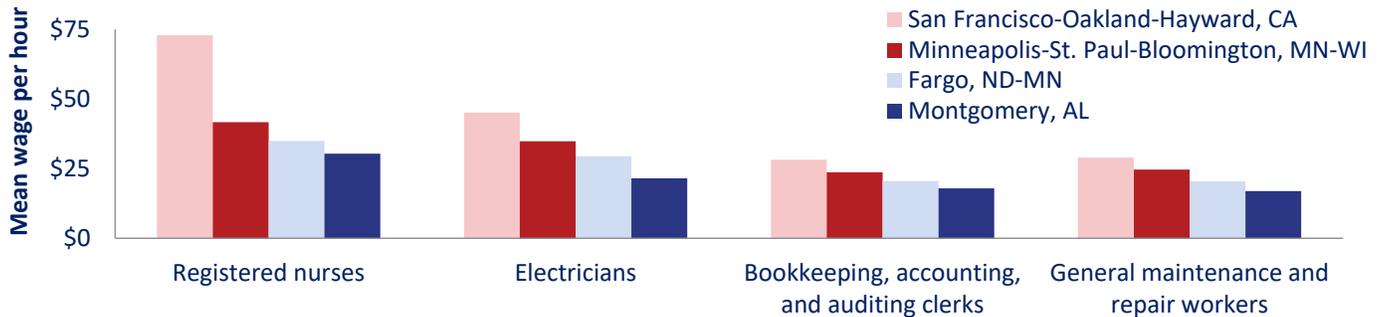


Where an individual's wage should fall within the national distribution depends on a number of factors. Of course, experience and education are factors. Someone new to the field may expect wages near the 10th or 25th percentile, whereas those with more experience and education could expect wages near the 75th or 90th percentile. In addition, location is a very important factor in determining where you might fall in the wage distribution, and in many cases the industry also plays a role.

## Wages vary by location

The geographic location affects wages because workers tend to earn higher salaries in large metropolitan areas, where a higher cost of living and other factors can drive wages upward. For example, the mean hourly wages for all four occupations in the chart below are highest in the San Francisco area, followed by Minneapolis. OEWS has wage data for approximately 580 states and areas. The occupational profiles have maps illustrating mean wages for all areas. Hovering over the area with your mouse provides that area's wage distribution.

### Occupational wages in selected metropolitan areas, May 2021



## Wages vary by industry

Wages for workers in the same occupation can vary by industry. This may be due to differences in working conditions, where industry employment is concentrated, whether or not unions are prevalent, and other factors. The table below illustrates how annual wages for computer systems analysts can differ considerably across industries. For example, wages for computer systems analysts in aerospace product and parts manufacturing tend to be high, while colleges, universities, and professional schools pay lower wages.

### Annual wages for computer systems analysts, by industry, May 2021

Industry	Mean	10th percentile	25th percentile	Median	75th percentile	90th percentile
Colleges, universities, and professional schools	\$85,930	\$59,520	\$62,970	\$80,050	\$101,170	\$123,270
Insurance carriers	100,500	62,730	78,800	99,040	119,990	131,040
Computer systems design and related services	105,770	59,040	77,500	100,220	128,880	164,800
Aerospace product and parts manufacturing	128,230	79,860	100,690	127,930	160,950	169,290

## Additional information

In addition to showing wage data, occupational profiles include employment information. It may be helpful to know whether or not the areas or industries with the highest wages also have high numbers of jobs in the occupation. By using OEWS wage data, you can obtain a better understanding of how your current wage or salary compares with the average wage for the nation, the area where you live, and the industry in which you work. In addition to the occupational profiles, you can download OEWS data in Excel format at [www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm). Customizable charts and maps are located at [www.bls.gov/oes/charts.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/charts.htm). For more information, contact the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program at [oeinfo@bls.gov](mailto:oeinfo@bls.gov) or (202) 691-6569.