

# Charleston Metro Region **TALENT DEMAND STUDY 2026**

Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester Counties

Created in Partnership with:





Occupations within advanced manufacturing and production fields will be the fastest growing in the next five years due to the economic impact of manufacturing plants in the Charleston area.

## **GROWTH AND THE CHANGING DEMAND FOR TALENT**

Understanding how workforce qualifications align with industry demand is essential to our region's continued economic growth. This study examines projected job opportunities and potential gaps in skills, certifications and degrees across the Charleston metro region, including Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties. The findings offer insight into how well the region's talent pipeline aligns with current and future workforce needs.

Our region anticipates adding approximately 33,200 net new jobs by 2030, a 7.9% five-year growth rate. While the region is expected to see strong overall job growth, that growth will vary significantly across occupation categories. Production, architecture and engineering, and information technology lead in projected percentage growth at 16.7%, 14.3% and 12.6%, respectively. Advanced manufacturing, AI-assisted design and analysis tools, and automation are also changing how work gets done in these fields. As demand grows and jobs evolve, gaps are emerging between the region's talent pipeline and the occupations and skills employers will need. Projected shortfalls include degree-dependent fields such as architecture and engineering and information technology, as well as skilled trades and occupations requiring specialized certifications.



Education instruction and library occupations are predicted to be some of the Charleston region’s career areas experiencing the largest talent shortages in the next five years.

Better alignment between education and training outcomes and market demand can help ensure individuals are equipped with the skills needed for evolving job opportunities. This includes the technical and digital fluency increasingly required across occupations. For employers, a talent pipeline that responds to changing workforce needs is also critical to supporting business growth, attracting new investment and strengthening the region’s long-term competitiveness.

For educators, policymakers, industry leaders and workforce development professionals, this study provides practical insight into where alignment exists and where gaps may require greater attention. The findings can help inform decisions about education, training and workforce development efforts that prepare individuals for career opportunities while responding to the needs of the region’s employers.

The study accounts for several factors that may affect the forecast, including adjustments for known major business expansions or announcements not reflected in the modeled forecast from Chmura Economics’ JobsEQ®. At the time of publication, economists nationally and locally held mixed views on the economic outlook, though most did not anticipate a major recession in the next several years.

# JOB GROWTH PROJECTIONS RANKED BY PERCENT CHANGE, 2025 – 2030

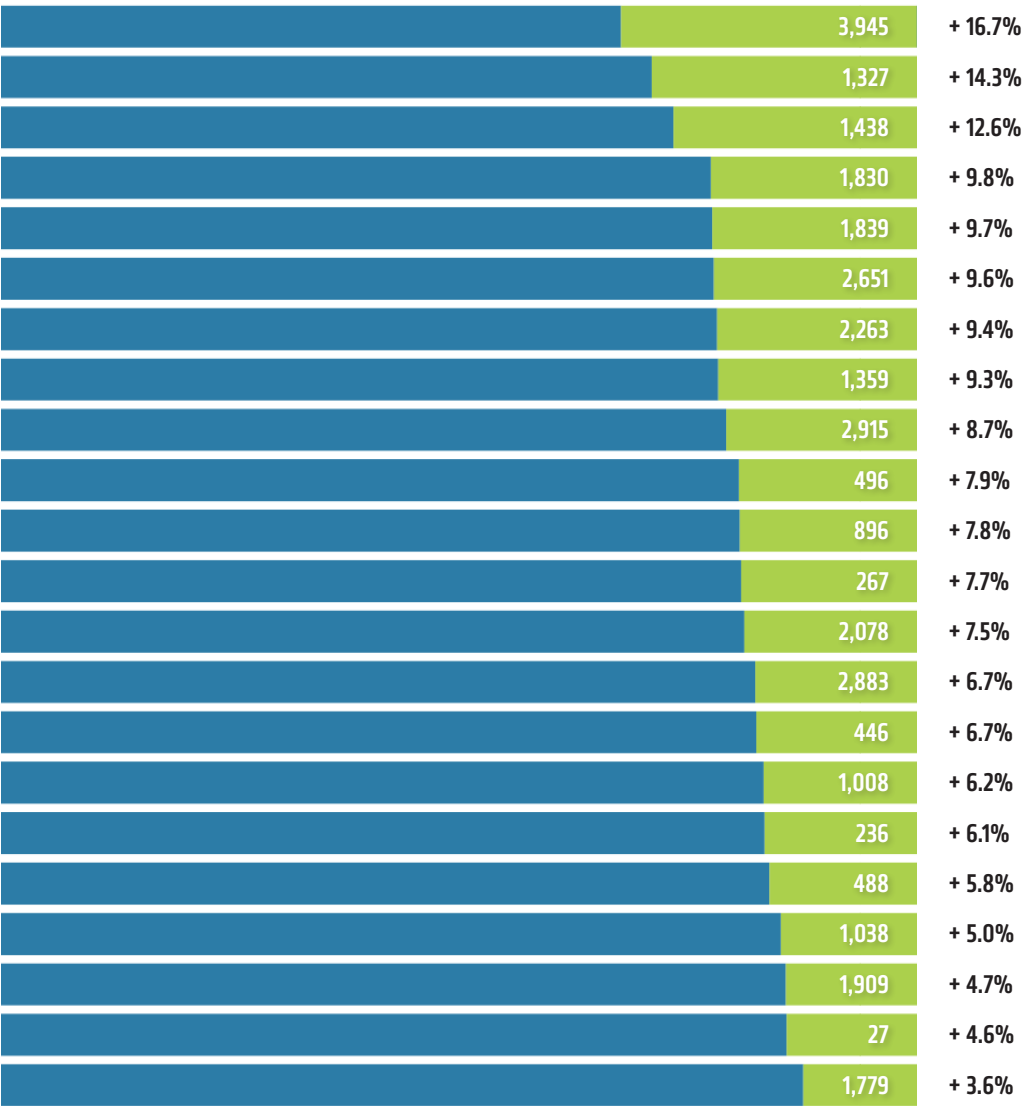
The following chart shows employment in 2025 in the Charleston Metro Area in each occupation category, as well as the number and percent change by 2030 due to new job growth.

**Charleston Metro Area Job Growth Projections by Percent Change, 2025-2030**

|                                               |        |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------|
| Production                                    | 23,572 |
| Architecture and Engineering                  | 9,290  |
| Information Technology                        | 11,405 |
| Installation, Maintenance and Repair          | 18,591 |
| Construction and Extraction                   | 18,875 |
| Management                                    | 27,535 |
| Business and Financial Operations             | 24,091 |
| Healthcare Support                            | 14,589 |
| Transportation and Logistics                  | 33,322 |
| Community and Social Service                  | 6,312  |
| Personal Care and Service                     | 11,493 |
| Life, Physical and Social Science             | 3,466  |
| Healthcare Practitioners and Technical        | 27,768 |
| Food Preparation and Serving Related          | 42,853 |
| Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media | 6,698  |
| Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance | 16,358 |
| Legal                                         | 3,871  |
| Protective Service                            | 8,453  |
| Educational Instruction and Library           | 20,698 |
| Sales and Related                             | 40,743 |
| Farming, Fishing and Forestry                 | 583    |
| Office and Administrative Support             | 50,006 |

■ Current Number Employed (2025)

■ 5-Year Job Growth Forecast

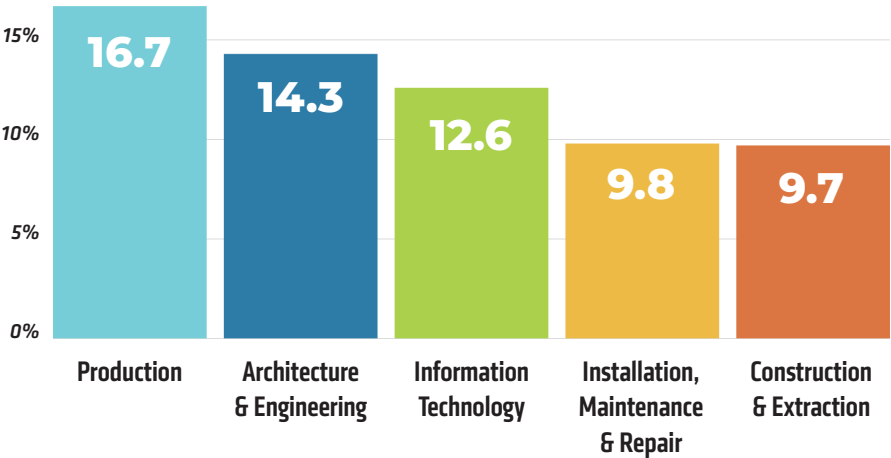


Source: JobsEQ 2025 data adjusted by Charleston Regional Development Alliance

# TOP 5 HIGH-DEMAND OCCUPATIONS MEASURED 3 WAYS

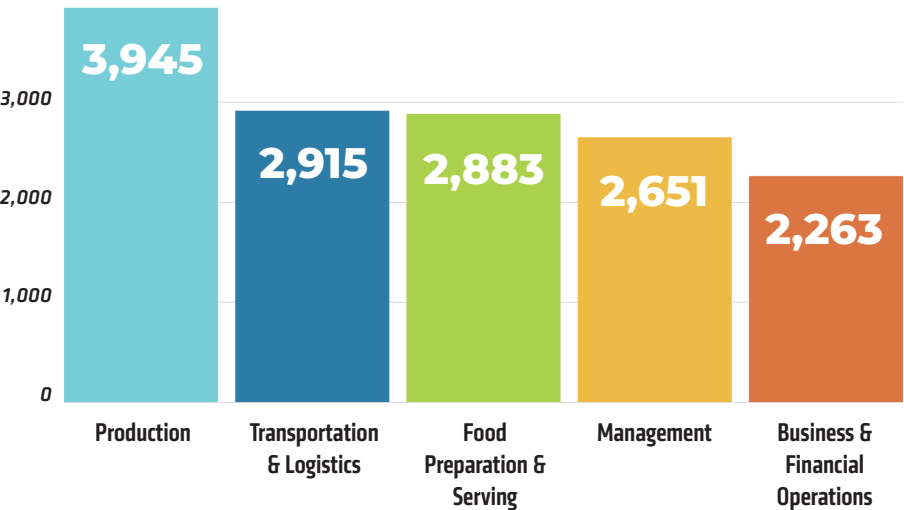
BY JOB GROWTH RATE, 2025 - 2030

Source: JobsEQ®



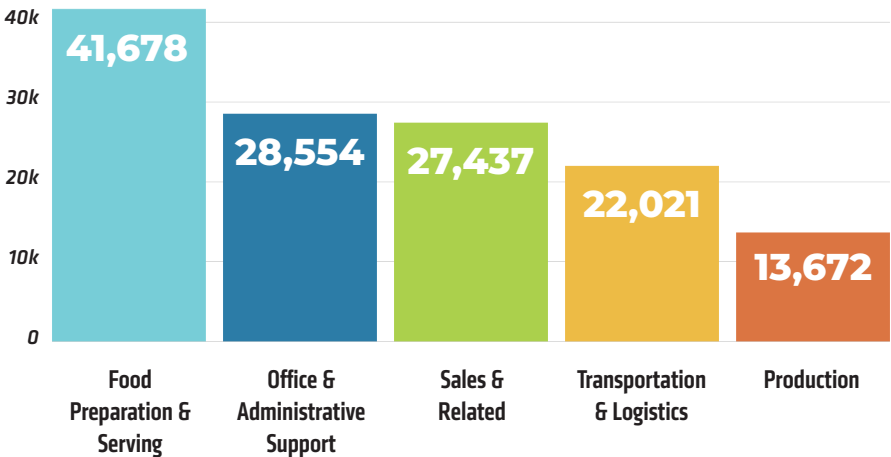
BY # OF NEW JOBS, 2025 - 2030

Source: JobsEQ®



**BY # OF EMPLOYMENT SEPARATIONS, 2025 - 2030**

Source: JobsEQ®



**WHY IT IS IMPORTANT  
TO MONITOR PROJECTIONS OF  
BOTH NEW JOB GROWTH AND  
EMPLOYMENT SEPARATIONS**

Opportunities for workers to enter an occupation come from two sources – newly created jobs and existing jobs where the current worker has left the occupation, also known as “employment separations.” Employment separations measure the number of workers who are projected to leave their occupation, including individuals who retire or leave the labor force for reasons other than retirement or who transfer into a different occupation. It does not include workers who change employers but stay in the same occupation. These separations create openings for workers, just as newly created jobs do. In the era of record levels of retiring Baby Boomers, separations are creating more opportunities than ever before.

## ADVANCED MANUFACTURING DRIVES SHIFTING TALENT DEMAND

This year's talent demand forecast shows production, architecture and engineering, and information technology occupations leading the region in projected growth over the next five years. The outlook reflects an economy increasingly shaped by advanced manufacturing and continued investment in the Charleston region's manufacturing base.

Information technology occupations led projected growth in the prior forecast, but production occupations have now moved into the top spot. This shift reflects continued manufacturing investment as well as the resurgence of maritime manufacturing in the region.



Production & Manufacturing takes the top spot away from Information Technology, marking a shift in the Charleston region's needs for the future.

*The following occupations are projected to be in highest demand within manufacturing, and not all require a four-year degree:*

## **PRODUCTION**

- Team Assemblers
- First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers
- Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, and Weighers
- Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers
- Electrical, Electronic, and Electromechanical Equipment Assemblers

## **ENGINEERING**

- Industrial Engineers
- Mechanical Engineers
- Civil Engineers
- Electrical Engineers
- Aerospace Engineers

## **MAINTENANCE**

- Maintenance and Repair Workers, General
- Industrial Machinery Mechanics
- Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics
- First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers
- Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers

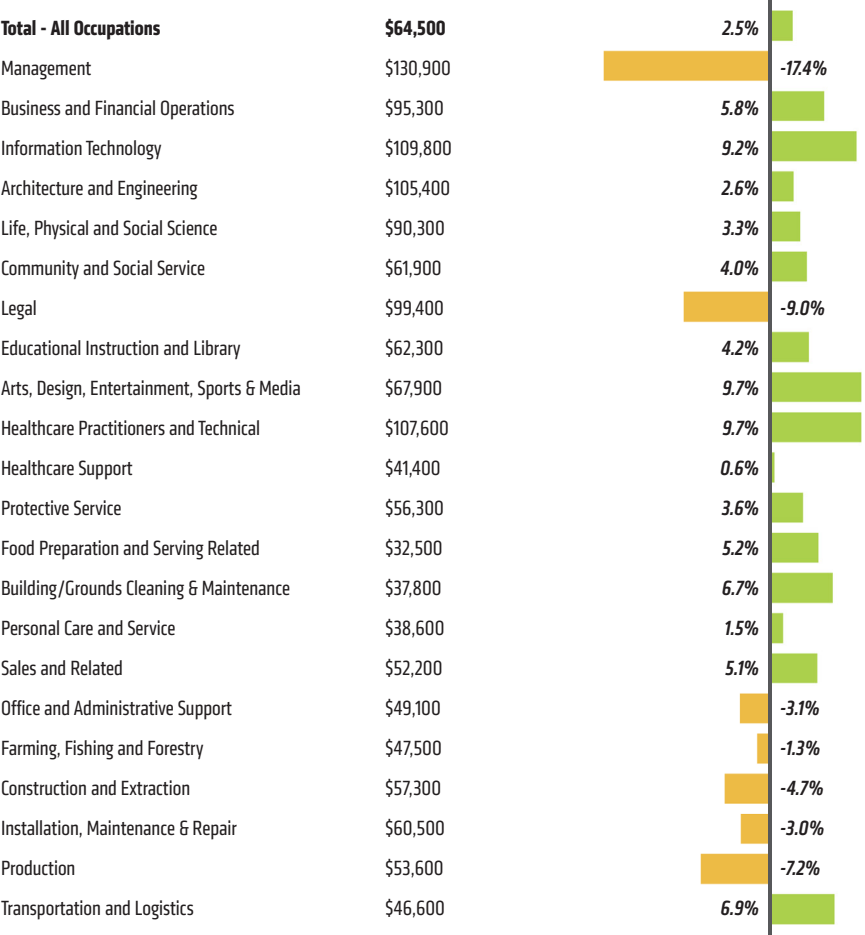
## **LOGISTICS**

- Stockers and Order Fillers
- Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand
- Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers
- Light Truck Drivers
- Industrial Truck and Tractor Operators

# CHARLESTON METRO AREA WAGE GROWTH

Like many places, the Charleston/Trident region experienced above-average wage growth in recent years. As of 2025, average annual wages across all occupations reached \$64,500, up from \$54,790 in 2022 and \$50,810 in 2020; a 17.7% increase over three years and 26.9% over five years. Accounting for inflation (estimated at 10% from 2022-2025 and 24.4% from 2020-2025), real wage growth was 7.7% over the past three years and 2.5% over the past five, meaning most of the nominal wage gains have outpaced inflation, though by a narrower margin over the longer five-year window.

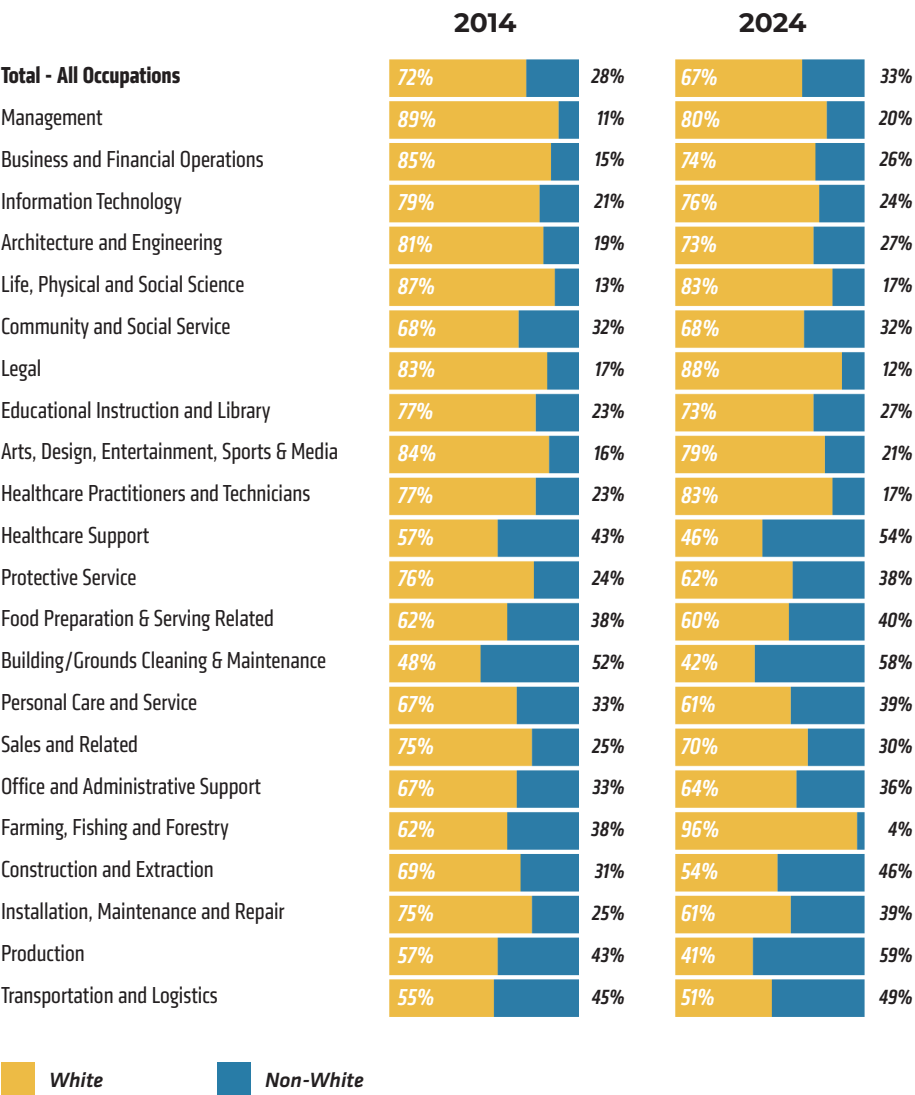
## CHARLESTON METRO AREA AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGES BY OCCUPATION CATEGORY & REAL WAGE GROWTH, 2020 - 2025



Source: JobsEQ, US Bureau of Labor Statistics

# CHANGE IN DIVERSITY IN OCCUPATIONAL EMPLOYMENT, 2014 - 2024

The Charleston/Trident metro area's total workforce in 2024 was 67% white and 33% people of color, compared to 72% white and 28% people of color in 2014; a roughly five-point shift over the decade.



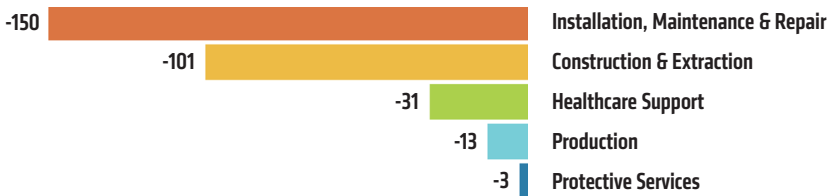
Source: US Census Bureau's 2014 and 2024 American Community Survey

# POTENTIAL TALENT SHORTAGES IN THE CHARLESTON METRO AREA MEASURED THREE WAYS

## 1. OCCUPATIONS NOT TYPICALLY REQUIRING A DEGREE

The shortages shown below are based on a forecast comparing growth in occupation demand (new jobs and separations) to the local population growth and the projected educational attainment of those residents, taking into account in and out-migration patterns, movement of graduated students between regions, as well as existing resident worker and commuter populations.

### POTENTIAL ANNUAL SHORTAGE BASED ON CURRENT TALENT DEMAND AND SUPPLY

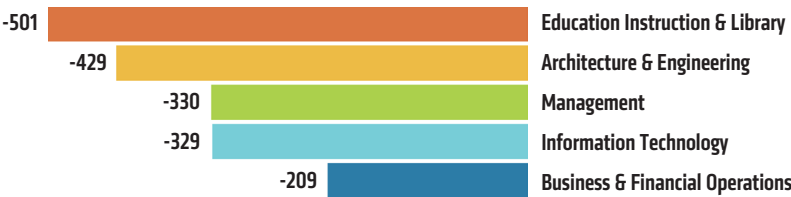


Source: JobsEQ, Q3 2025.

## 2. OCCUPATIONS TYPICALLY REQUIRING A TWO-YEAR DEGREE OR HIGHER

Degree Gaps estimate the current supply and demand balance between the Charleston region's postsecondary schools and our regional employers. This data attempts to answer the question: "Are schools in our region producing enough graduates compared to employer demand in our region?" Degrees conferred are for the 2023-2024 academic year and are provided by the National Center for Educational Statistics.

### POTENTIAL ANNUAL SHORTAGE BASED ON CURRENT DEMAND (2025) AND DEGREES CONFERRED DURING THE 2023-2024 ACADEMIC YEAR



Source: JobsEQ, Q3 2025.



Are schools in our region producing enough graduates compared to employer demand in our region?

**3. OCCUPATIONS REQUIRING A SPECIAL CERTIFICATION**

A Certifications Gap analysis compares the supply and demand of certifications for all occupations in the metro area. Certifications demand data is based on a one-year sample of job postings in the region. Certifications supply data is estimated using a five-year sample of voluntarily-posted online resumes.

**POTENTIAL ANNUAL SHORTAGE BASED ON CURRENT DEMAND (2025) AND FIVE-YEAR SAMPLE OF CHARLESTON METRO AREA WORKFORCE PROFILES/RESUMES**



Source: JobsEQ, Q3 2025

# THE RISING IMPORTANCE OF SOFT SKILLS IN OUR JOB MARKET

In today's rapidly evolving job market, technical expertise alone is no longer sufficient for success. While hard skills, the specific, teachable abilities required to perform a job, remain critical, soft skills are equally, if not more, important. As AI tools take on a growing share of routine technical and analytical tasks, the abilities that remain distinctly human - communication, judgment, adaptability and collaboration - are becoming more valuable, not less.

## TOP SOFT SKILLS IN DEMAND IN THE CHARLESTON METRO AREA

- 1 Communication (verbal & written skills)
- 2 Cooperative / Team Player
- 3 Customer Service
- 4 Organization
- 5 Detail-Oriented / Meticulous
- 6 Adaptability / Flexibility / Tolerance of Change
- 7 Problem-Solving
- 8 Ability to Work in a Fast-Paced Environment
- 9 Self-Motivated / Ability to Work Independently
- 10 Interpersonal Relationships / Maintain Relationships

Source: Active Online Job Postings by Charleston Metro Area employers, 10/2025-4/2026, JobsEQ



Soft skills, such as communication, are as critical to job success, if not more so, as teachable hard skills in our region's ever-changing business landscape.

This year's findings demonstrate why looking beyond top-line job growth is critical to understanding the region's evolving workforce needs. Examining growth alongside talent supply, skills and wages provides a clearer picture of where opportunities are emerging and where gaps may require attention.

Production has overtaken information technology as the region's fastest-growing occupation category, reflecting continued investment in advanced manufacturing and the growing integration of automation and AI-enabled processes. At the same time, some of the region's largest projected talent shortages are in architecture and engineering, information technology and management fields that typically require an associate degree or higher. These trends point to areas of misalignment between the region's talent pipeline and projected employer demand.

The data also reveals important dynamics within growth itself. Production is one of the few occupation categories where real wages have declined even as employment has increased. Technology is also reshaping job requirements, placing greater emphasis on skills such as adaptability and problem-solving across occupations.

Understanding where growth, talent shortages, skills and wage trends intersect can help educators, policymakers, industry leaders and workforce development professionals better target programs and investments. Using detailed, occupation-level data to inform those decisions can strengthen alignment between the region's talent pipeline and employer demand while helping the workforce adapt to continued economic and technological change.

