



Middle-Wage Jobs in Seattle/King County February 2017

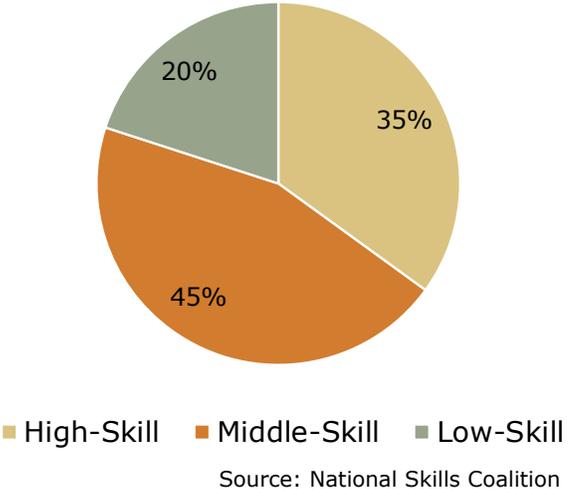
OPENING DOORS TO LIVING-WAGE CAREERS AUTHOR: KELLY RICHBURG

As a workforce intermediary seeking to better connect low-income individuals to living-wage jobs, Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) focuses its labor market research on identifying middle-wage jobs in our local economy. Training residents for these jobs provides an opportunity to meet the greatest skills shortages facing local employers while helping low-income and low-skill individuals advance into good-paying careers.

The purpose of this work is to update our definition of “middle-wage” and identify middle-wage job opportunities currently in-demand in the Seattle/King County region.¹ SJI’s focus has been on *accessible* middle-wage jobs, meaning those that do not require a bachelor’s degree. Some accessible middle-wage jobs are also “middle-skill”, meaning they require education beyond high school but less than a four-year degree, while others do not require formal post-secondary education. According to the National Skills Coalition, between 2017 and 2022, 45 percent of the job openings in Washington will be middle-skill.²

This brief presents information about the income earned by residents of the Seattle/King County region, as well as the amount of money it takes to live in this area, to inform our definition of a middle-wage job. Furthermore, the brief identifies middle-wage jobs that are in-demand in the region, including the gender and racial make-up of workers in those positions.

Figure I: Job Openings by Skill Level, Washington, 2017-2022



What about the middle-class?

According to the White House Task Force on the Middle-Class, middle-class families are defined by their aspirations more than their income. Middle-class families aspire to own a home and a car, send their children to college, experience health and retirement security and take occasional family vacations.

This brief focuses on income.

¹ SJI’s 2008 and 2011 reports can be accessed at <http://seattlejobsinitiative.com.s151400.gridserver.com/wp-content/uploads/SJIMWJReport07242008.pdf> and http://seattlejobsinitiative.com.s151400.gridserver.com/wp-content/uploads/MWJ_Dec2011_FINAL.pdf.

² National Skills Coalition, *Washington’s Forgotten Middle*, 2014. Available at: <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/middle-skill-fact-sheets-2014/NSC-Washington-MiddleSkillFS-2014.pdf>.

Area Income

Reports by both the Pew Research Center³ and the Brookings Institute⁴ describe the middle-income tier of households as those earning between 75 percent and 150 percent of area's median income. The median household income in Seattle is \$80,349; similarly, in King County it is \$81,916.⁵ Thus, middle-income households in Seattle earn between approximately \$60,261 and \$120,524 (\$61,437—\$122,874 in King County). In the U.S., on average, there are 1.3 earners per household.⁶ Working full-time, year-round, every wage earner in an average-size household would need to earn **\$22.29 per hour**, on average, to reach the low end of the middle-income tier in Seattle.⁷ Attaining the high end of the middle-income tier would require households to earn \$44.58 per hour, on average, though we are less concerned with establishing a ceiling for the middle-income tier.

Area Cost of Living

In addition to considering the income earned in the Seattle/King County area, another factor to consider is the cost of living in the area. Massachusetts Institute of Technology developed the Living Wage Calculator, a market-based, geographically-specific approach to defining a minimum subsistence wage.⁸ The calculator draws upon expenditure data for a family's likely minimum costs for food, child care, health insurance, housing, transportation, and other basic necessities (e.g. clothing, personal care items, etc.), as well as taxes. It does not budget for any "extras" (e.g., restaurant meals, vacations, etc.), nor does it provide for the future (e.g., retirement savings, home purchases, etc.). Table I shows the minimum hourly wage needed for full-time workers in the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan Statistical Area depending on their family situation.

In addition, the University of Washington prepares the Self-Sufficiency Standard, which defines the amount of income necessary to meet the basic needs of Washington families, differentiated by family type and where they live.⁹ Like the Living Wage Calculator, it accounts for housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, other basic necessities, and taxes, but does not budget for recreation or retirement savings. Unlike the Living Wage Calculator, the Self-Sufficiency Standard provides information specific to the City of Seattle, rather than the Metro area. Minimum wages needed by family type from the August 2015 version of the Standard can be found in Table I.

The Economic Policy Institute (EPI), a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank focused on the needs of low- and middle-income workers, developed the Family Budget Calculator, which goes beyond a subsistence wage, estimating what families need to live securely, yet modestly.¹⁰ The components of EPI's family budgets are similar to those used in the Living Wage Calculator and Self-Sufficiency Standard; however, the Family Budget Calculator provides a more generous allowance for "other necessities". Like the Living Wage Calculator, the Family Budget Calculator uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Expenditure Survey, but includes expense categories excluded by the Living Wage Calculator, including school supplies and entertainment.

³ Taylor, P. et al. *Inside the Middle Class: Bad Times Hit the Good Life*. Pew Research Center, 2008. Available at: www.pewsocialtrends.org/2008/04/09/inside-the-middle-class-bad-times-hit-the-good-life/.

⁴ Holzer, H. *Job Market Polarization and U.S. Worker Skills: A Tale of Two Middles*. Brookings Institute, 2015.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Available at: www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/polarization_jobs_policy_holzer.pdf.

⁷ An individual would need to earn \$28.97/hour to make \$60,261 annually.

⁸ Glasmeier, A. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. *Living Wage Calculator for Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA, 2016*. Available at: <http://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/42660>.

⁹ Pearce, D. *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Washington State 2014* (revised August 2015). University of Washington School of Social Work. Available at: http://depts.washington.edu/selfsuff/drupal/sites/default/files/selfsuff/docs/WA2014_SSS_Aug2015Rev.pdf.

¹⁰ Gould, E.; Cooke, T.; Kimball, W. *What Families Need to Get By. EPI's 2015 Family Budget Calculator*. EPI Issue Brief #403, August 26, 2015. Available at: <http://www.epi.org/publication/what-families-need-to-get-by-epis-2015-family-budget-calculator/>

Despite these additions, the Family Budget Calculator is still not future-oriented. Not only does it not provide savings for an emergency (e.g., job loss or unexpected medical bills), it also does not provide savings for retirement (except through Social Security payments), or further investments in one’s children (e.g., enrichment activities or college savings). Accordingly, SJI built upon EPI’s Family Budget Calculator by adding 10 percent of a family’s expenditures (minus taxes) for savings.¹¹ These figures are also displayed in Table I, based on the 2015 Family Budget calculator for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Table I: Estimated Wages Needed to Live in Seattle Area by Family Size

	Modest Wage with Basic Savings	Modest Wage	Subsistence Wage	
Family Type	SJI (EPI’s Family Budget Calculator plus 10% of expenses for savings)	EPI Family Budget Calculator (Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, 2015)	MIT Living Wage Calculator (Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, 2016)	UW Self-Sufficiency Standard (Seattle, 2015)
1 Adult	\$16.77	\$15.44	\$12.19	\$12.05
1 Adult 1 Child	\$28.29	\$26.41	\$25.62	\$24.83
1 Adult 2 Children	\$33.96	\$31.24	\$29.99	\$30.62
1 Adult 3 Children	\$44.16	\$40.70	\$38.75	\$37.41
2 Adults	\$11.58	\$10.65	\$9.21	\$8.32
2 Adults 1 Child	\$16.57	\$15.23	\$14.04	\$13.71
2 Adults 2 Children	\$18.94	\$17.37	\$16.29	\$16.50
2 Adults 3 Children	\$23.37	\$21.44	\$19.98	\$19.65
2 Adults (One Working)	\$23.16	\$21.29	\$19.55	\$16.64
2 Adults (One Working) 1 Child	\$32.69	\$25.88	\$23.84	\$21.53
2 Adults (One Working) 2 Children	\$37.21	\$28.06	\$26.29	\$23.51
2 Adults (One Working) 3 Children	\$46.03	\$35.87	\$31.65	\$29.90

Note: Numbers in italics calculated by SJI, not provided by original authors.

Source: Economic Policy Institute; MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning; UW School of Social Work, Center for Women’s Welfare

¹¹ The 10 percent savings rate is consistent with multiple versions of the Job Gap Study. The latest in the series is: The Job Gap Economic Prosperity Series: Waiting for the Payoff. According to this report, the living wage for a single adult in Washington State is \$17.59/hour. This report is available at <https://jobgap2013.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/waiting-for-the-payoff-web.pdf>.

Middle-Wage Jobs

Table II below shows all of the in-demand, accessible middle-wage jobs (not requiring a bachelor's degree) in King County¹²:

- **Demand**—Determined by the Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD) based on job growth and total job openings.¹³
- **Wage**—Median wage of approximately \$22/hour to \$44/hour (\$27.88, on average; only 1 occupation has a median wage above \$40) based on the middle-income tier of households in the area. The 25th and 75th percentile of wages for the occupation are also shown to illustrate the wage progression that may be possible given a worker's experience or other factors. We also examined accessible, in-demand jobs "on the cusp" of middle-wage in the \$17-21/hour range, consistent with SJI's modest wage calculation. The purpose of this was to determine if any jobs that pay modestly provide a clear pathway to middle-wage jobs. Of these, a few tied directly to a job in Table II — secretaries/administrative assistants and medical secretaries both tied to executive secretary. In addition, working as a helper in installation, maintenance, and repair, as well as a general maintenance and repair worker may provide experience that can lead to one of the middle-wage careers in that field displayed in Table II.
- **Total Number of Jobs**—Included to show the size of the workforce in the region. All occupations employ at least 100 people.
- **National Educational Attainment**—Reflects the most common level of education attained by workers in that occupation nationally based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Education and Training Measurements for Workers 25 Years and Older by Detailed Occupation. These attainment levels will generally exceed the minimum levels required for the occupation. For example, a registered nurse position may not require a bachelor's degree; however, 57 percent of RNs have a bachelor's degree or higher. Similarly, web developers may not need a bachelor's degree, but the reality is that 68 percent of them have at least a bachelor's degree, so it may be difficult for those without one to be competitive. Any occupations with 40 percent or more of the workforce with a bachelor's degree or higher were excluded from Table II, which displays in-demand occupations not requiring a bachelor's degree. The rationale is that if 60 percent or more of the workers attained these positions with less than a bachelor's degree, the occupation is relatively accessible to those with a high school diploma or some college. SJI established a cutoff of 60 percent because educational attainment in the Seattle area is higher than the national average.
- **Portion of Workforce Male & Portion of Workforce White**—Shows the percentage of the occupation's workforce made up of men and those who are White. Overall, King County residents are evenly split by gender and 70 percent are White. Table II highlights in red all of the occupations in which 80 percent of the workforce is dominated by one gender.

Overall, there are 35 middle-wage jobs currently in demand that do not typically require a bachelor's degree (57 others have a workforce comprised mainly of people with bachelor's degrees or higher). Of the occupations shown in Table II, most are also middle-skill jobs given that workers typically have some post-secondary education. Nineteen percent, however, do not typically require education beyond high school.

¹² The only in-demand occupations that were excluded were supervisory positions, as workers may have to spend considerable time in a low-wage position before they attain a supervisory role, and tree trimmers, as there are fewer than 50 jobs in King County.

¹³ To determine jobs in-demand in 2016, ESD uses two-year (second quarter 2015 through second quarter 2017), five-year (2014-2019) and ten-year (2014-2024) projections of average annual growth rates and total job openings. For a full description of the methodology, see <https://fortress.wa.gov/esd/employmentdata/reports-publications/occupational-reports/occupations-in-demand/determine-demand>.

Accessible, in-demand, middle-wage jobs in the Seattle/King County region are concentrated in Healthcare, Installation, Maintenance & Repair, and Construction, as shown in Table II below. Healthcare has been consistently represented in SJI's 2008 and 2011 work on middle-wage jobs. Construction was highlighted in 2008, but not in 2011, due to the economic downturn. Several of the Installation, Maintenance & Repair occupations were also featured in SJI's previous work – most notably, Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists as well as Industrial Machinery Mechanics, which were featured both years.

Accessible, in-demand, middle-wage jobs are not representative of the population, particularly women. Many of the occupations in Table II are heavily male-dominated – with 45 percent comprised of 80 percent or more male workers and half of those with a workforce at least 95 percent male – suggesting that women face barriers to entering these professions. In contrast, 20 percent of the occupations are female-dominated. Besides the greater number, male-dominated positions are different in the typical level of education required. Forty-four percent of the male-dominated jobs do not typically require education beyond high school; all of the female-dominated jobs—such as licensed practical nurse and legal secretary—require some post-secondary education. This demonstrates that securing a middle-wage job is a greater time commitment and financial burden for women.

Racial disparities in the composition of the middle-wage workforce are not as stark, though still present. Thirty-seven percent of the occupations have a workforce that is at least 80 percent White (the King County population is 70% White); none exceed 85 percent White. Only one accessible middle-wage job—chef/head cook—is disproportionately comprised of people of color.

Addressing Gender Disparities

When occupations are so heavily male-dominated it can be difficult to recruit and retain women. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, women may be isolated and exposed to harassment and discrimination. In addition, it may be challenging for them to become fully skilled, if they have to rely on senior colleagues for training.¹⁴

On the employer side, Deloitte and The Manufacturing Institute identified a number of steps that companies can take to attract and retain female workers.¹⁵ Similarly, Jobs for the Future and Wider Opportunities for Women created a toolkit for employers and workforce developers.¹⁶ Some of the recommendations include:

- Reviewing recruitment materials and curricula to ensure that women are represented
- Communicating that hostile behaviors are not acceptable
- Ensuring that women have adequate facilities and appropriate protective gear for their bodies
- Setting targets (regarding the portion of female applicants, participants, graduates, hires, promotions, etc.), and measuring the company's or program's progress in reducing gender disparities

On the policy side, making progress towards reducing disparities can be factored into decisions regarding public funding of workforce development programs or economic development initiatives.

¹⁴ Institute for Women's Policy Research. *Pathways to Equity: Narrowing the Wage Gap by Improving Women's Access to Good Middle-Skill Jobs*, 2016. Available at: http://womenandgoodjobs.org/app/uploads/2016/03/Middle-skills_layout-FINAL.pdf.

¹⁵ Deloitte Development, LLC and The Manufacturing Institute. *Untapped resource: How manufacturers can attract, retain, and advance talented women*, 2012. Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/manufacturing/us-indprod-pip-women-in-manufacturing-report-02052013.pdf>.

¹⁶ GreenWays, U.S. Department of Labor, and Green Jobs Innovation Fund. *The Pink to Green Toolkit: Adding a Gender Lens to Green Jobs Training Programs*, 2012. Available at: www.jff.org/initiatives/greenways/pink-green-toolkit-adding-gender-lens-green-jobs-training-programs.

Conclusion

Information about the wages and job prospects associated with particular occupations can help individuals, educators, workforce developers, and policymakers make informed personal choices and resource allocation decisions. In the Seattle region, an individual may be able to live a modest lifestyle with wages of approximately \$17 an hour. It is imperative, however, to consider family composition when determining the wages needed to sufficiently manage a household. In addition, reaching the middle-income tier requires higher wages of at least \$22 an hour. At this level, families may be able to invest in enriching activities for their children, post-secondary education, and retirement. The good news is that attaining a middle-wage job does not require a bachelor's degree, a common myth. This report demonstrates that a number of accessible, middle-wage jobs in Healthcare, Construction, and Installation, Maintenance & Repair continue to be in-demand in our region.

Table II: In-Demand, Middle Wage Jobs in King County Not Requiring a Bachelor's Degree

Standard Occupational Classification	Occupation	Median Hourly Earnings	25th Percentile Hourly Earnings	75th Percentile Hourly Earnings	Total Number of Jobs	National Educational Attainment	Portion of Workforce Male	Portion of Workforce White
MANAGEMENT								
119051	Food Service Managers	\$27.18	\$22.03	\$33.39	1,049	Some college	60%	67%
119141	Property, Real Estate, and Community Association Managers	\$35.29	\$27.11	\$53.57	1,520	Some college	39%	81%
ENGINEERING								
173011	Architectural and Civil Drafters	\$27.76	\$22.72	\$33.02	907	Associate's degree	74%	81%
173022	Civil Engineering Technicians	\$30.02	\$26.39	\$37.09	699	Associate's degree	77%	77%
173026	Industrial Engineering Technicians	\$35.33	\$28.92	\$42.29	1,098	Associate's degree	80%	72%
HEALTH								
291126	Respiratory Therapists	\$34.97	\$30.31	\$39.26	783	Associate's degree	41%	78%
292031	Cardiovascular Technologists and Technicians	\$32.22	\$22.82	\$42.40	397	Associate's degree	32%	77%
292032	Diagnostic Medical Sonographers	\$42.67	\$37.44	\$47.29	574	Associate's degree	32%	77%
292034	Radiologic Technologists	\$33.52	\$28.59	\$39.34	1,596	Associate's degree	32%	69%

Middle-Wage Jobs in Seattle/King County: 2017 UPDATE

Standard Occupational Classification	Occupation	Median Hourly Earnings	25th Percentile Hourly Earnings	75th Percentile Hourly Earnings	Total Number of Jobs	National Educational Attainment	Portion of Workforce Male	Portion of Workforce White
292055	Surgical Technologists	\$26.58	\$22.40	\$30.62	863	Some college	27%	66%
292061	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	\$26.15	\$22.45	\$29.77	2,387	Some college	11%	65%
292071	Medical Records and Health Information Technicians	\$21.90	\$17.63	\$27.93	2,206	Some college	12%	71%
292081	Opticians, Dispensing	\$26.21	\$22.88	\$28.77	370	Some college	25%	79%
292099	Health Technologists and Technicians, All Other	\$24.68	\$20.21	\$32.26	1,127	Some college	37%	63%
312011	Occupational Therapy Assistants	\$27.92	\$22.01	\$31.68	106	Associate's degree	9%	83%
319011	Massage Therapists	\$26.92	\$17.62	\$34.65	2,118	Some college	20%	78%
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT								
436011	Executive Secretaries and Executive Administrative Assistants	\$28.90	\$24.21	\$34.53	5,210	Some college	4%	82%
436012	Legal Secretaries	\$25.97	\$19.24	\$33.75	1,965	Some college	3%	83%
CONSTRUCTION								
472031	Carpenters	\$27.24	\$21.15	\$34.35	10,738	High school	97%	76%
472081	Drywall and Ceiling Tile Installers	\$25.55	\$22.58	\$35.90	1,535	Less than high school	94%	62%
472111	Electricians	\$36.58	\$27.11	\$45.40	6,011	Some college	89%	67%
472152	Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	\$31.48	\$21.47	\$44.94	4,815	High school	99%	85%
474011	Construction and Building Inspectors	\$35.23	\$29.91	\$41.25	1,016	Some college	86%	83%

Middle-Wage Jobs in Seattle/King County: 2017 UPDATE

Standard Occupational Classification	Occupation	Median Hourly Earnings	25th Percentile Hourly Earnings	75th Percentile Hourly Earnings	Total Number of Jobs	National Educational Attainment	Portion of Workforce Male	Portion of Workforce White
INSTALLATION, MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR								
492022	Telecommunications Equipment Installers and Repairers, Except Line Installers	\$27.47	\$20.37	\$35.66	1,751	Some college	90%	81%
492098	Security and Fire Alarm Systems Installers	\$23.53	\$16.73	\$28.30	337	Some college	98%	76%
493021	Automotive Body and Related Repairers	\$26.75	\$19.73	\$37.08	746	High school	98%	76%
493023	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	\$21.94	\$15.15	\$27.90	4,102	High school	98%	74%
493031	Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists	\$28.93	\$23.95	\$34.87	1,882	High school	99%	83%
499011	Mechanical Door Repairers	\$22.30	\$19.84	\$25.66	328	Some college	94%	82%
499041	Industrial Machinery Mechanics	\$29.53	\$24.40	\$38.56	1,692	High school	97%	82%
499062	Medical Equipment Repairers	\$26.94	\$20.79	\$33.48	631	Associate's degree	92%	80%
OTHER								
194091	Environmental Science and Protection Technicians, Including Health	\$23.38	\$20.70	\$28.24	278	Associate's degree	51%	74%
232011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	\$30.18	\$25.47	\$36.74	2,854	Associate's degree	14%	79%
351011	Chefs and Head Cooks	\$24.41	\$20.50	\$30.47	1,151	Some college	85%	43%
518031	Water and Wastewater Treatment Plant and System Operators	\$35.64	\$30.75	\$40.47	475	Some college	96%	83%

Sources: WA State Economic Security Department (ESD) and Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc. (EMSI Q3 2016 Data Set).

Notes: Demand determined by ESD based on job growth and total job openings; other information obtained from EMSI. All information is specific to King County, Washington, except for educational attainment, which is reported at the national level based on the most common level of education attained by workers in that occupation. These attainment levels will generally exceed the minimum levels required for the occupation.