

# **A PROFILE OF THE NONRESIDENT JOB SEEKER**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

**E**very summer thousands of job seekers migrate north to Alaska looking for work in construction, canneries and in probably every industry in the state. Some come because they believe work is available and pay is good. Others come simply for adventure or out of curiosity. Because of the seasonal nature of Alaska's economy, this influx of workers is a natural phenomenon that will likely continue in the future.

With the exception of oil pipeline construction, when Alaska experienced the largest in-migration of job seekers in its history, not much attention has been paid to this topic. Little has been done to determine where the job seekers come from, how many come, why they come and what type of jobs they look for. During the past 6-9 months there has been an increased interest concerning this topic as Alaska presently experiences more than average growth in the number of nonresident job seekers due to the recession in the rest of the country.

Prior to the oil pipeline experience Alaska was a curiosity to much of the nation's population. During the pipeline and since that time, thousands of people have worked in and visited Alaska. When they leave they take stories of the state back with them. Media and literature have also given the state a great deal of nationwide exposure recently. With the removal of previous misconceptions and fear of the unknown gone, more people in the remainder of the country now consider Alaska a potential labor market. Presently not enough information exists to estimate the actual number of people coming to the state looking for work. This article explores three information sources and addresses some of these questions concerning the job seekers.

Data pertaining to job seekers was collected through surveys of phone calls, letters, and Job Service applications. Thousands of letters and phone calls from persons throughout the country are received by Alaska's Job Service each year. Thousands of newcomers to the state also apply for work through Job Service each year. A sample of 430 of these letters, phone calls and applications were surveyed from October 1981 to April 1982. The six basic questions asked in the survey were: 1) origin of the job seeker, 2) skills, 3) type of job sought, 4) current job status, 5) reason to look for work in Alaska and 6) sex. Additional information such as age and family size was gathered only from the survey of Job Service applications. Not all questions could be answered by the three surveys since information was not always available. For example, job status could not be determined from many letters and other data were not in a form that was always possible to elicit this information. This survey is limited to job seekers who contacted the Anchorage Job Service by letter, phone or in person.

### **ORIGIN OF JOB SEEKERS**

All but five states in the nation were represented in the survey results. The top ranked state was California (See Table I), with Oregon and Washington in second and third place, respectively. All geographic regions in the country were represented (See Table II). The Western region was dominant with 54.7% of all job seekers, followed by the Mid-West. A surprising number of inquiries were received from foreign countries; one from as far away as Zimbabwe.

While results were not surprising for the most part, some results were not anticipated. Though California is the most populated state in the nation (23.6 million), Washington state was expected to rank first in the number of job seekers. This is because Washington state residents, who earned wages in Alaska, received more than double the amount in unemployment compensation dollars than Californians. This unexpected result may be because Washington residents have a longer tradition of coming to Alaska to work, have better contacts in Alaska's labor market, and therefore do not seek as much Job Service placement assistance. The Mid-West region came in second and this may be closely linked to the fact that most of these state economies have been severely affected by the present recession. Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin, and

**Table I**  
**Origin of Job Seekers**  
**By Top Ten States**

RANK	STATE	PERCENT DISTRIBUTION
1	California	17.7
2	Oregon	11.6
3	Washington	11.4
4	Michigan	4.0
	Pennsylvania	4.0
5	Colorado	3.5
6	Indiana	3.0
	Ohio	2.8
7	Idaho	2.8
	Texas	2.8
	Wisconsin	2.8
8	Montana	2.6
9	Minnesota	2.3
10	New York	2.1
	Foreign Country	2.1

**Table II**  
**Origin of Job Seekers**  
**By Region**

RANK	REGION	PERCENT DISTRIBUTION
1	West	54.7
2	Mid-West	22.1
3	South	12.3
4	Northeast	8.8
5	Foreign Country	2.1

Minnesota were all ranked among the top 10 states. Somewhat surprising was the lack of representation by the Southern states, with only Texas falling in the top ten. The results of the origin of nonresident job seekers were similar in the telephone, Job Service application, and letter surveys.

## JOB SEEKER SKILLS

The occupational characteristics and skills of job seekers in the survey represent what the job seekers themselves considered to be their primary occupation or job skill. The job seekers surveyed represented a wide spectrum of occupational categories. As shown in Table III, job seekers with construction skills represented the largest proportion of those surveyed, followed by those with professional and technical skills. The next highest concentration of surveyed skills were in the clerical, sales, and services occupations, followed by those job seekers with truck driving and warehouse skills and students (See Table III).

Table III  
Job Seeker Skills  
By Occupation

OCCUPATION	PERCENT DISTRIBUTION
Construction	37.4
Professional, Technical and Managerial	15.8
Clerical and Sales Services	8.4
Trucking and Warehouse	7.2
Student	5.8
Mechanics and Machinery Repair	4.9
Miscellaneous	4.4
Benchwork (Fabrication and Repair)	3.5
Mineral and Oil Extraction	2.8
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	2.6
Manufacturing	2.6
Not Available	0.5
	4.1

Detailed characteristics of selected occupational categories revealed that the majority of those interviewed with construction skills had general construction and laborer backgrounds. Remaining responses indicated specific construction skills, such as welding, carpentry, and heavy equipment operation (See Table IV). Among those surveyed in professional and technical occupations, engineers and surveyors topped the

**Table IV**  
**Detailed Characteristics For**  
**Selected Occupations**

OCCUPATIONS	PERCENT DISTRIBUTION
<b>Construction</b>	<b>100.0</b>
General Construction and Laborer	45.9
Welders	16.1
Carpenters	13.6
Heavy Equipment Operators	10.5
Electricians	8.2
Plumbers and Pipefitters	3.8
Painters and Plasterers	1.9
<b>Professional and Technical</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Engineers and Surveyors	22.1
Teachers	14.7
Managers	14.7
Health Fields	8.8
Life Sciences	8.8
Social Sciences	7.4
Miscellaneous and Other Professionals	23.5

list, followed by teachers, managers, those with occupations in life and social sciences and health fields (See Table IV). Job seekers with restaurant related skills (waitresses, waiters and cooks) represented 61% of those surveyed with services skills. Loggers and sawmill workers comprised the bulk of those reporting skills in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry category.

Occupational distribution varied depending on the survey source. Telephone survey results were more highly skewed toward construction skills than were other survey sources, while letters reflected more professional job seekers. Job Service applicants had a more normal distribution of occupations, however those job seekers with clerical skills showed up significantly more often than they did in letters or telephone interviews. It should be mentioned that Job Service applications reflect the characteristics of nonresident job seekers that are physically in Alaska while letters and telephone calls represent those who are only inquiring about work.

The results of the overall distribution of job skills did not reveal any unusual results. The high concentration of construction job seekers in the survey is primarily a result of the slump in the construction industry in the lower 48. Across the nation construction is one of the industries hardest hit by high interest rates and recession, while the Anchorage and Alaska construction industry is in good health. Also, construction workers are generally very mobile and will migrate to places in search of work.

## **OTHER CHARACTERISTICS**

Among those job seekers surveyed, 78% inquired about work in the same type of field as their stated skills, while 15% were looking for work in canneries or summer work in general. The remaining 7% indicated they would take any type of work. The students surveyed reported they were mostly interested in summer work with a small number looking for work in their field of major study.

Employment status characteristics contained in the telephone and letter inquiries revealed that of those job seekers searching for work from outside Alaska, 14% were students, while the number of employed and unemployed was almost equal. However, when the Job Service applicants were added to the sample, the number of unemployed outnumbered those with jobs by more than 2 to 1. This was because 98% of new Job Service applicants surveyed reported they were out of work (See Table V). The difference in the percentage of students in Table III and Table V was a result of the order in which questions were asked in the telephone survey. Skills were asked for first and if the student responded with a skill instead of stating they were a student, that skill would be recorded. Then, when asked their current employment status they would respond that they were presently a student.

The sex distribution for the entire sample as shown in Table V shows that men outnumbered women 3 to 1. Characteristics of family size and age of the job seeker were available only for Job Service applicants. Family size was small, the single person represented 29% of job seekers while two and three person families represented 41% of job seekers. Job seekers also tended to be young with the ages of 21-25 representing 28% of those surveyed, followed by the age groups of 26-30

**Table V  
Other Characteristics  
of the Job Seeker**

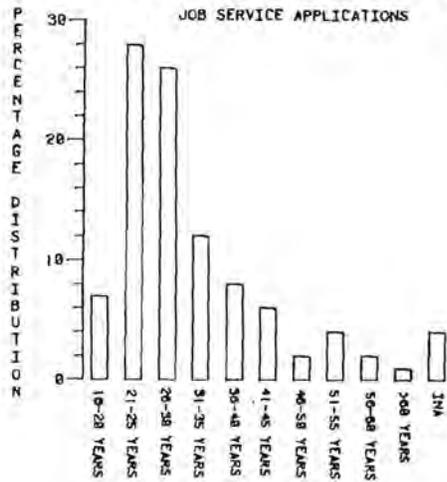
**SEX**

Male	76.7%
Female	23.3%

**EMPLOYMENT STATUS**

	Total Survey	Letters and Telephone Calls	Job Service Applications
Employed	18.7	27.1	1.0
Unemployed	51.2	28.1	98.0
Student	9.4	13.6	1.0
Not Available	20.7	31.2	0.0

**AGE DISTRIBUTION OF NONRESIDENT**



and 31-35, representing 26% and 12%, respectively, (See graph for more detail).

When the nonresident job seeker was asked why they were

looking for work in Alaska the majority said they heard there were lots of jobs in Alaska while others stated that pipeline work was their primary reason. Other answers included summer work, the allure of high wages or just wanting to come to Alaska. Some people had lived in Alaska before and wanted to return.

### **CONCLUSION**

The typical job seeker surveyed was from California, a construction worker and an unemployed single male between 21 and 25 years old. However, a wide range of characteristics were revealed by the survey. It was found that the job seekers were from almost every state. Job skills spanned the entire spectrum of occupational classes. Students were mainly looking for summer work and more males were seeking work than females. Family status tended to be single and two or three person families. Two-thirds of job seekers were between 21 and 35 years old.

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