

# THE NEXT HOT JOBS

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## FULL TEXT

The job market in Chicago looks a lot different than it was before the pandemic, but one thing remains the same: The competition to fill positions and to snag the best employees is fierce.

More than half of Chicago employers (52 percent) plan to hire for new roles throughout 2021, according to a recent survey by Robert Half, a staffing company. And 48 percent plan to fill vacated positions or rehire furloughed employees.

As restaurants and retailers are seeing across the country, reopening industries are driving the highest demand for workers. "In particular, industries that need in-person workers like leisure and hospitality, transportation and warehousing, and retail are desperate for workers," says Daniel Zhao, senior economist and data scientist at Glassdoor, a job and recruiting site.

"The labor shortages are also driving an increase in demand for office-based workers that support hiring, with human resources workers and recruiters in high demand a reversal from earlier in the pandemic, when many of these workers were laid off," Zhao says.

A new study from LinkedIn confirms this trend. The top emerging job trend this year in Chicago, New York and Washington, D.C., is in the e-commerce space, with more than 400,000 open positions. Companies are seeking warehouse workers, gig workers and delivery drivers. Hiring for these positions is growing 73 percent year over year, LinkedIn finds.

Another pandemic effect is a housing boom, resulting in the increased demand for loan and mortgage experts in Chicago, New York and Dallas (salary \$44,000 to \$60,000), according to LinkedIn. Driving the demand are historically low interest rates combined with Paycheck Protection Program loan rollouts and changing work situations that make it possible for many to work remotely. Hiring for loan and mortgage experts in 2020 increased about 59 percent from 2019.

Chicago is also facing a shortage of health care support staff, LinkedIn finds. The pandemic showcased the immediate and sustained need for doctors, nurses and health care support professionals such as record-keepers and administrators, and as a result, hiring increased 34 percent in Chicago, New York and Boston (salary \$65,000 to \$106,000).

But those aren't the only in-demand jobs especially in Chicago, which is the third-highest-ranking city for tech jobs (outranking San Francisco) as of first-quarter 2021.

According to a new report from Dice, a professional technology database, Illinois was the sixth-highest hiring state for tech positions in the first quarter.

From January to April, Chicago added 2,600 tech job postings, compared with a loss of 3,000 jobs in the year-earlier period, according to Dice.

The tech occupations most in demand are software developer, project manager, network engineer and systems engineer. Product managers are also highly sought after, as they're being recruited to coordinate the delivery of new services. The fastest-growing career is a data warehouse developer, which saw a 52 percent month-over-month increase from February to March.

In Chicago, the professional-level jobs most in demand are software developer, network security professional and cloud engineer, says Marisa Ellis, regional vice president in Chicago at staffing agency Robert Half.

Chicago along with New York and San Francisco is also seeking workplace diversity experts to help their organizations reach inclusion and diversity goals, LinkedIn says, citing a 90 percent increase in these positions (pay \$73,000 to \$97,000) since 2019.

The major issue: Employers can't find the qualified candidates they need. "Their biggest challenges are finding candidates with the right skills and hiring quickly enough," Ellis says. "Companies are going above and beyond to hire the best talent by offering signing bonuses, more flexible work schedules and broadening their search geographically."

Chicago employers today are seeking workers with strong soft skills interpersonal skills that help in a social environment with just 10 percent of employers willing to overlook these qualifications when recruiting for open roles.

For example, Ellis says, an employee needs solid interpersonal skills in today's highly collaborative work environment; that is, problem-solving chops and critical thinking to drive innovation. Developing leadership skills may be an indicator of entrepreneurial spirit and inquisitiveness and all these qualities are in demand.

Despite the fierce competitiveness of finding the ideal candidate, however, today's labor market is in many ways similar to that of 2019, Zhao says. Wage increases and raises are the most straightforward ways to attract new workers, but employers should also consider other creative ways to attract the attention of job seekers.

"In a fast-moving, high-turnover labor market, it may be difficult to compete on pay alone," Zhao says. "Attracting and retaining workers requires a concerted effort by employers to offer competitive pay on top of an appealing workplace and growth opportunities."

Offering work-from-home options popular after many workers got used to working outside of an office during the pandemic flexible scheduling, child care subsidies and other benefits to make balancing work and life easier is more important than ever, Zhao says.

Tight labor markets are also a clarion call for employers to re-evaluate their candidate pools. Offering on-the-job training or internal transfers can expand talent pools while also rewarding high-potential employees, Zhao says. Loosening degree or experience requirements or looking at remote workers can also help expand the pool of available candidates.

Looking ahead to the near future in Chicago, Ellis says we can expect demand for professionals in the areas of customer-service support, call-center representatives, legal associates, open-enrollment professionals and tax accountants.

"Generally, contract professionals are hired toward the end of the year to support seasonal needs in retail and distribution, open enrollment and end-of-year budgeting," she says.

It's still unlikely that the labor shortages will halt anytime soon and these may even become our new normal, Zhao says, adding that this is why you're seeing large employers like Walmart, McDonald's and Chipotle committing to permanent wage increases. "They perceive long-term structural challenges in hiring and retaining workers," Zhao says.

Similarly, the health care system has been strained by the pandemic, but on top of that, the aging American population will increase demand for health care even after the pandemic is over, he says.

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