

# Employment Market Snapshot

## Light Industrial Positions

4th Quarter 2025

For the fifth consecutive year, attracting the right talent is the top challenge facing HR leaders, according to The QTI Group's [2026 HR Trends survey](#). 88% of survey participants ranked it as their top challenge for 2026, with more than half ranking recruitment as a top priority. Higher total rewards demands, low unemployment rates, quality of candidates, and an increase in retirements are contributing factors to this challenge.

In this market snapshot, we explore the talent attraction challenge and the latest HR trends shaping the 2026 landscape. You'll find actionable insights and talent strategies designed to help you navigate today's competitive landscape and attract the right people for your organization.

### MEETING TOTAL REWARDS DEMANDS

70% of HR Trends participants state, "Meeting Higher Compensation, Benefits, and Total Rewards Demands" is a moderate-to-significant challenge for 2026. Compensation is a key part of total rewards. Ensuring your organization's compensation is fair and competitive is table stakes for attracting and retaining talent.

### AVERAGE HOURLY PAY RATES

#### Dane County

After a slight dip in May of 2025, average hourly pay rates for light industrial workers in **Dane County increased to \$19.19/hour** (Nov. 2025). This represents an increase of \$0.20/hour since May 2025 and the highest average hourly pay rate in the last six years.

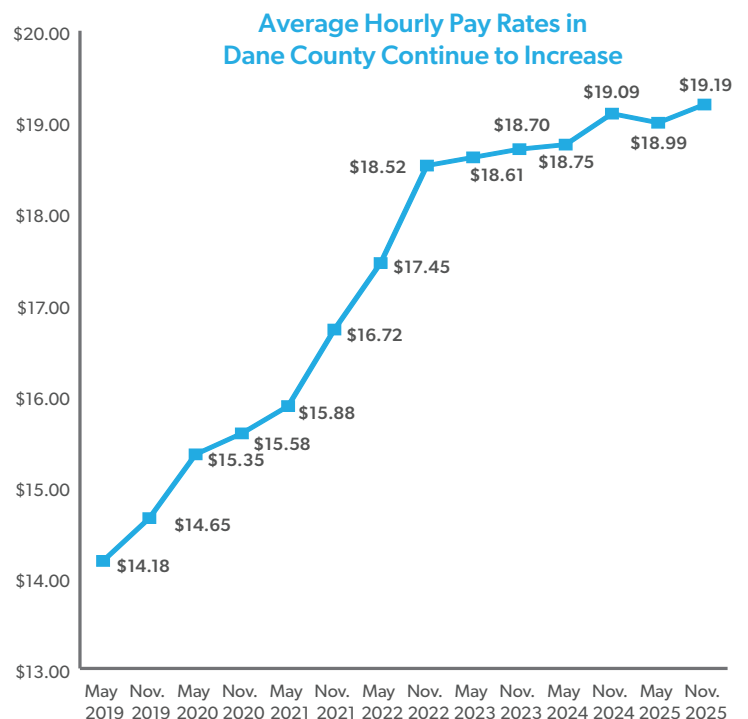
Whether the job is **on or off the bus line** in Dane County can affect the hourly pay rate. Jobs off the bus line pay, on average, over \$2.20 more per hour than those located on the bus line.



**\$17.22/Hour**  
**On the Bus Line**



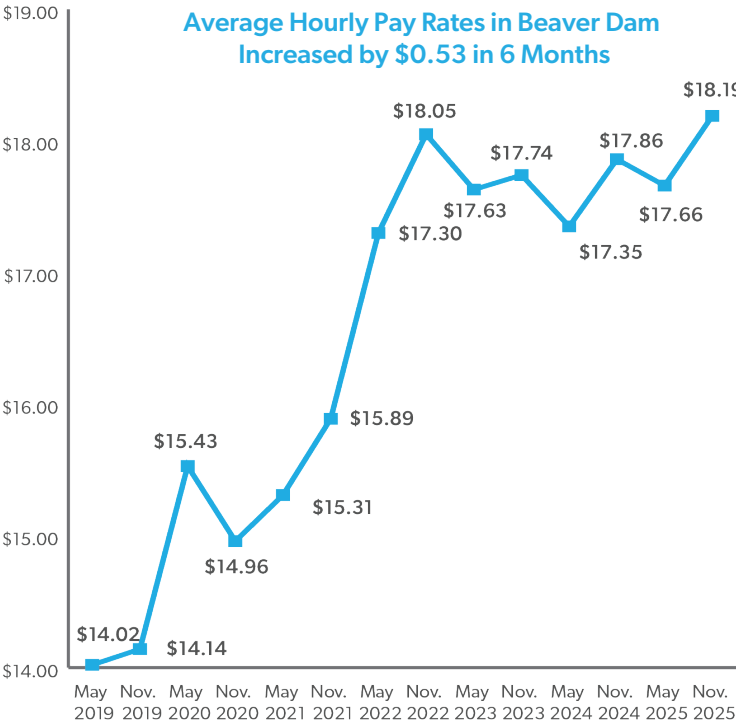
**\$19.45/Hour**  
**Not on the Bus Line**



Beaver Dam

After a slight dip in May of 2025, average hourly pay rates for light industrial workers in the Beaver Dam area increased to \$18.19/hour (Nov. 2025). This represents an increase of \$0.53/hour in just six months and the highest average hourly pay rate in the last six years.

For jobs located in the city of Beaver Dam, the average hourly pay rate was nearly \$1 higher than in May 2025, at \$18/hour. However, for jobs outside the city of Beaver Dam, employers should expect to pay more, with the average hourly pay rate in November 2025 equal to \$18.48.



**Location Matters**

**\$18.00/Hour**  
Beaver Dam, WI

**\$18.48/Hour**  
Not in Beaver Dam, WI

*Average Hourly Pay Rates Based on Location*

Milwaukee

After a slight dip in May of 2025, average hourly pay rates for light industrial workers in the Milwaukee market increased to \$18.57/hour (Nov. 2025). This represents an increase of \$0.43/hour since May 2025 and a \$0.27 increase year-over-year.

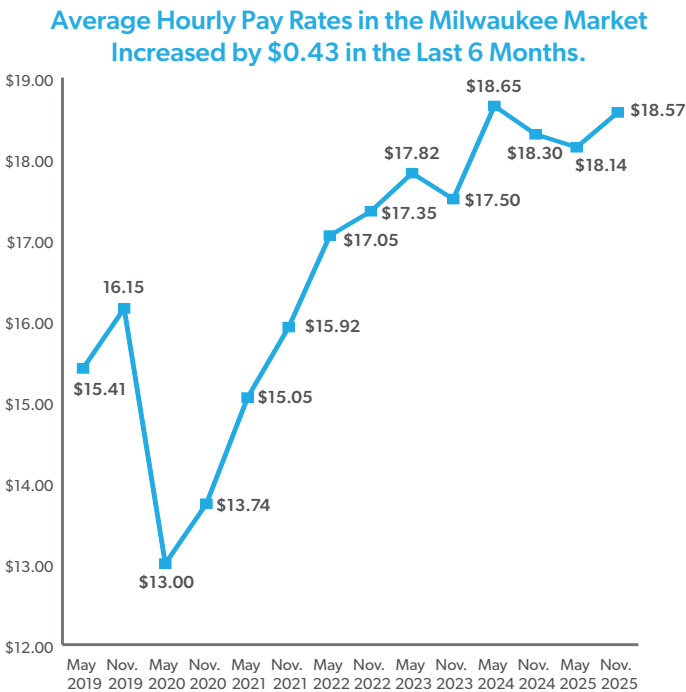
Whether the job is on or off the bus line in the Milwaukee market can affect the hourly pay rate. Jobs off the bus line pay, on average, \$1.36 more per hour than those located on the bus line.



**\$18.23/Hour**  
On the Bus Line



**\$19.63/Hour**  
Not on the Bus Line



## PROJECTED BASE PAY INCREASES

According to QTI’s 2025 HR Trends Survey, Wisconsin employers are projecting base pay increases of 3% for 2026, reflecting no change from the median increase in 2025. Similarly, Wisconsin manufacturers are also projecting 3% base pay increases for 2026, consistent with their 3% actual increases in 2025.



**Pro Tip:** QTI’s 2026 HR Trends Survey found that the projected base pay in the manufacturing industry for 2026 is 3%.

## LOW UNEMPLOYMENT

Wisconsin continues to experience low unemployment, especially in the more sought-after and skilled roles. According to preliminary estimates for September 2025, the WI Department of Workforce Development states that “Wisconsin’s seasonally adjusted unemployment rate remained unchanged at 3.1%, which is 1.3 percentage points below the national unemployment rate of 4.4%.” For Dane County, unemployment rates\* were lower, at 2.7%.

3.1%

Wisconsin  
Unemployment Rate

2.7%

Dane County  
Unemployment Rate

2.9%

Columbia County  
Unemployment Rate

2.7%

Dodge County  
Unemployment Rate

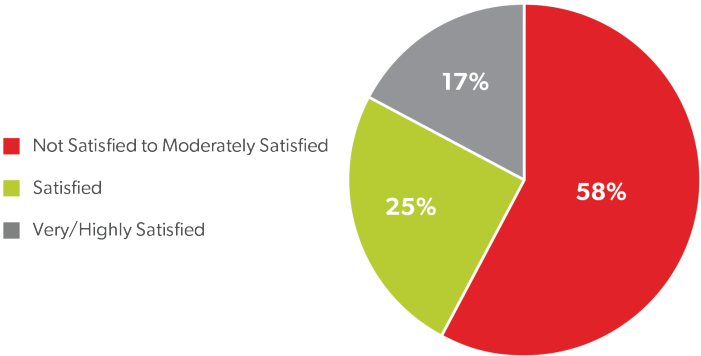
4.3%

Milwaukee County  
Unemployment Rate

\*FRED Aug. 2025

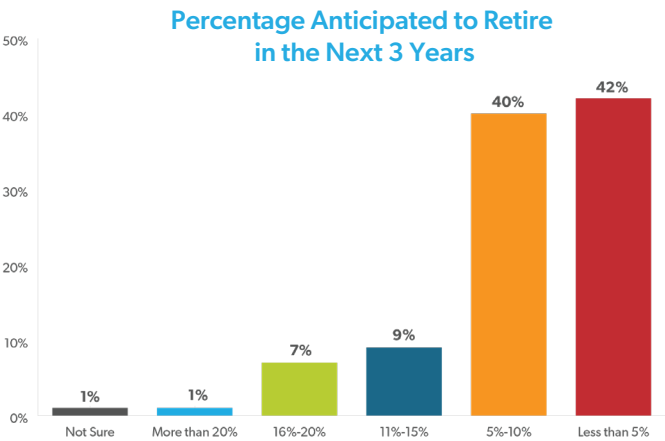
## CANDIDATE QUALITY

According to QTI’s HR Trends Survey, 58% of participants reported being either moderately satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of candidates their organizations attract. To improve candidate quality, it’s essential to have clear job descriptions that distinguish between must-haves and nice-to-haves and use language that reflects your company culture. Additionally, building a strong employer brand and offering competitive wages can help attract stronger candidates.



## RETIREMENTS

Currently, 18% of the workforce is aged 65 or older. It is projected that by the year 2030, one in five Americans will be 65 years old or older. As the workforce continues to age, the number of retirements is expected to rise, with 40% of HR Trends participants anticipating that 5-10% of employees will retire within the next three years. This trend could lead to talent gaps and potential loss of knowledge within organizations.



## TALENT ATTRACTION STRATEGIES

To help overcome the talent attraction challenge, we've put together a list of actionable solutions for you to consider for 2026.

- ✓ Ensure job descriptions are clear and specific. Use language that reflects your company's culture to attract talent with the right fit.
- ✓ Use AI tools to customize job descriptions and engage talent.
- ✓ Prioritize the candidate experience. Slow or unorganized hiring processes hurt your brand over time.
- ✓ Promote your employer brand on social media by sharing employee success stories, testimonials, and your company's values.
- ✓ Review your [compensation and total rewards program](#) to ensure it is fair and competitive.
- ✓ Develop a succession plan to identify internal candidates who may be ready for the next step. When retirements occur, review job descriptions and rewrite for future needs.
- ✓ Identify and develop internal candidates.
- ✓ Use [external recruiting resources](#) to fill talent gaps.
- ✓ Ask your best employees for referrals.
- ✓ Hire for the "5 A's." Attitude, Agility, Alignment, Aptitude, and Ability

**Partner with QTI to overcome today's toughest HR challenges—from attracting top talent in a competitive market to designing fair and competitive compensation strategies. Whether you need [staffing solutions](#), [professional and executive recruiting](#), or [compensation consulting](#), our team is ready to deliver tailored strategies that drive results. [Connect with us](#) today and discover how QTI can help your organization reach its full potential through people.**



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