

Finding Employment Data for a State or Metropolitan Area

Basic Concepts

Two kinds of employment related data are available. The first is the level of employment; technically, the level of non-farm wage and salary jobs. This is the best measure of job growth.

Technical details: This definition excludes the self-employed. On the positive side, it is available with less than a one-month time lag, and the data are pretty accurate. Coverage: all state and officially defined metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs). Seasonality: State data usually available seasonally adjusted; most metro area data not seasonally adjusted.

The other data, called Local Area Unemployment Statistics, includes the unemployment rate. This survey also produces an estimate of employment, but is less accurate. So if you want to look at employment, use the first source, for non-farm wage and salary jobs. If you want the unemployment rate, use the Local Area Unemployment Statistics data.

Technical details: Local Area Unemployment Statistics cover all states, metropolitan areas and counties. Data for states are seasonally adjusted; most metro area data are not seasonally adjusted.

Getting and Using Employment Data

Go to <http://www.bls.gov/data/home.htm>

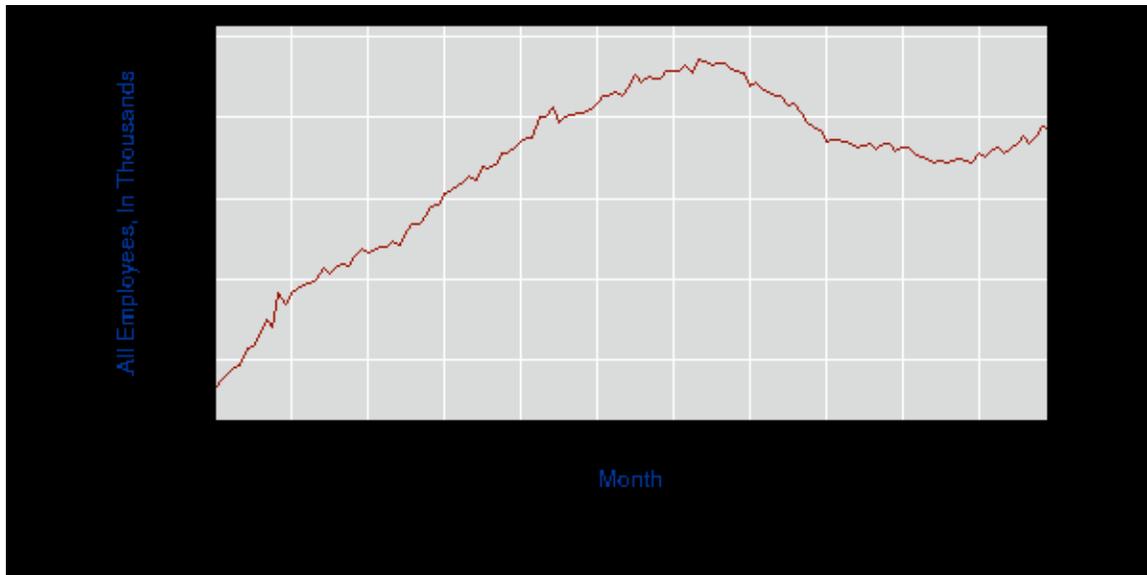
Look for the row labeled “Employment, Hours, and Earnings from the Current Employment Statistics survey (State and Metro Area).” If your browser is set to allow Java plug-ins and pop-ups, click on the third icon in this row. The column with the icon is labeled “Create Customized Tables (One Screen).” Most browsers will work fine with this approach; it’s easiest, and I recommend it. If you prefer not to have pop-ups and plug-ins, skip down to “No Pop-ups/Plug-ins” below.

This brings up a new screen with simple numbered directions.

1. Select one or more states
2. Select one or more areas within each state
3. Select one or more Supersectors. A supersector is a category of employment. For the grand total, select Total Nonfarm.
4. Select one or more industries. The industries that you will see in this step are based on the supersectors you selected in Step 3. If you want data for a specific industry, and you cannot find it here, go back to Step 3 and look for another supersector that might contain it.
5. Select one or more Data Types. Almost always you will want “All Employees”
6. Select seasonal adjustment. Usually it’s best to select Seasonally Adjusted. However, if you will be comparing two different areas, and one of them does not have seasonally adjusted data, it may be best to use Not Seasonally Adjusted data in each case.

7. Get Data or Add to Your Selection. Get Data takes you directly to your data. Add to Your Selection allows you to select the information you have been choosing; then go through the steps to select additional information.

When you finally select Get Data in Step 7, you will see a new screen pop up with your data. One nice option here is to click the box that says “Include graphs” and then click “Go” next to the dates. This graph can be pasted into any application. Here it is in Word:



This graph is fine for looking at on the screen, and it prints out well, but there’s too much black outside the chart area. You’ll probably be better off making a new chart in Excel or some other spreadsheet. However, you can make this image look better by going into an editing program such as Paint. Copy the picture; select the little paint bucket icon (“Fill with color”), select white from the palette, and then click in the black area. That makes the graph much nicer.

You can copy and paste the data into Excel. I prefer to copy and paste data that are in one long column, rather than in table format. I also find it easier to work from csv data rather than the web page (html) data. To make these changes, click on “More Formatting Options.”

No Pop-up/Plug-in Approach

Click on the fourth icon, “Create Customized Tables (Multiple Screens).” You will now go from one screen to another, answering the same questions listed in 1 – 7 above, though in a different order. This approach does not give you the option of looking at a graph of the data.

Local Area Unemployment Statistics

To get unemployment rate time series, start again at <http://www.bls.gov/data/home.htm>

Find the sixth row down, “Local Area Unemployment Statistics.” As in employment data, you have a choice between an approach that uses pop-ups and plug-ins (the preferred approach) or a series of separate screens.

Select the state, type of area, and then the specific area you want. Then either Get Data immediately, or select Add Data and select additional states or areas.

Note that the data provided will include four concepts: Labor Force, Employment, Unemployment, and Unemployment Rate. The Employment generated by this report will not equal the employment in the non-farm wage and salary data. The definitions and survey procedures are very different. The non-farm definition is the preferred definition for looking at employment.

State Data Sources

Every state’s employment department includes a Labor Market Information group. This group works with the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics to jointly develop the data described above. In some states, additional information may be available on the state web site. To find your state’s labor market information web site, go to <http://www.bls.gov/bls/ofolist.htm> and click on your state.

William B. Conerly, Ph.D.
Conerly Consulting LLC
www.ConerlyConsulting.com