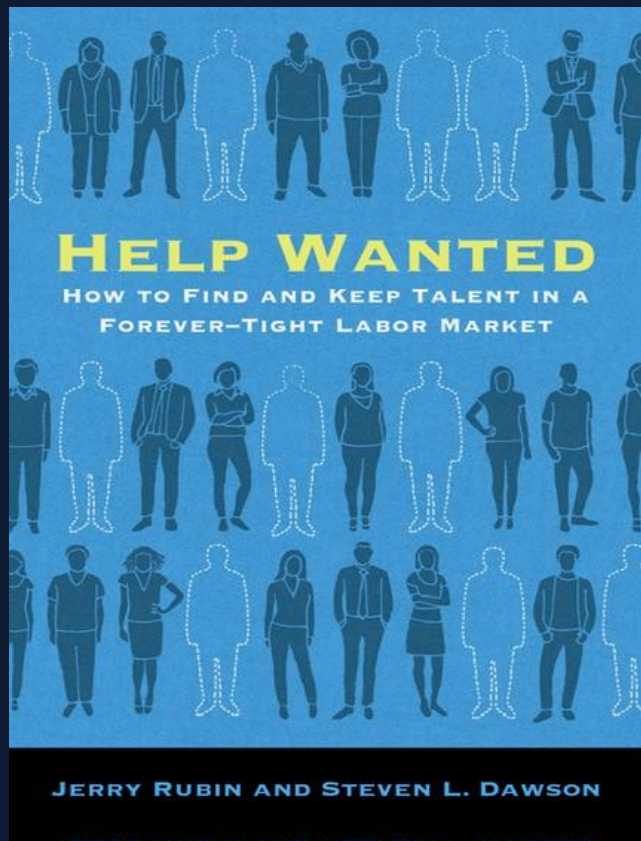




# *Help Wanted*

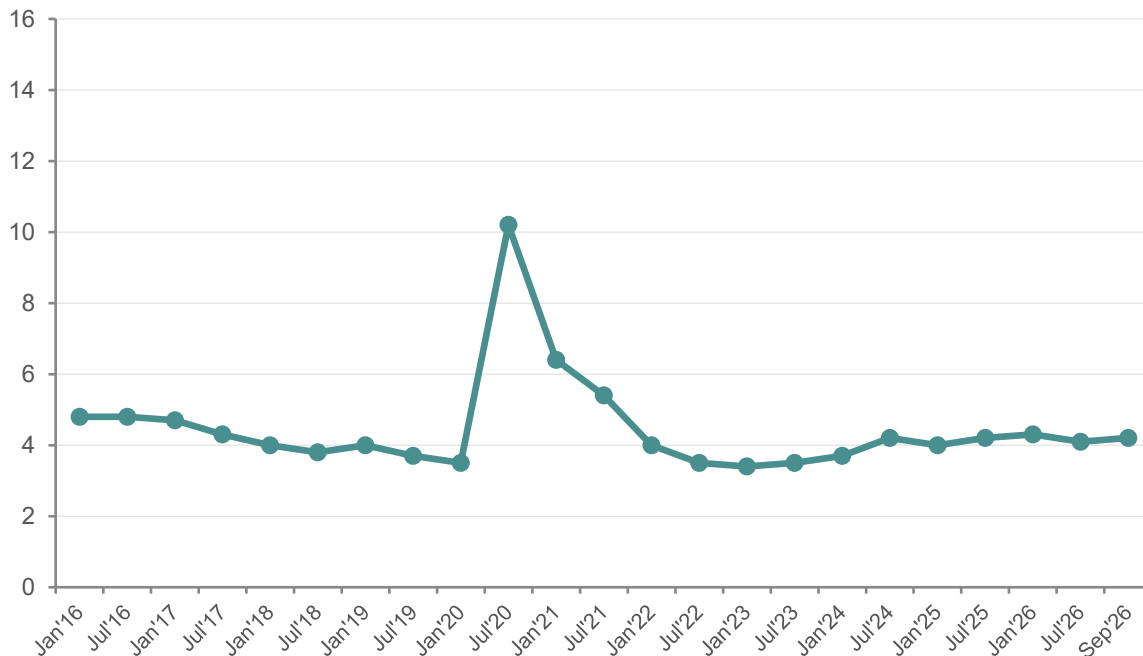
*How to Find and Keep Talent  
in a Forever-Tight Labor Market*

Jerry Rubin · Steven L. Dawson

MIT Press, 2026

*“Building an employee-centered company is no longer a competitive advantage — it is now a competitive necessity.”*

# U.S. Unemployment Rate: 2016 – 2026



## Key Events

**3.5%** Pre-pandemic low (Feb 2020)

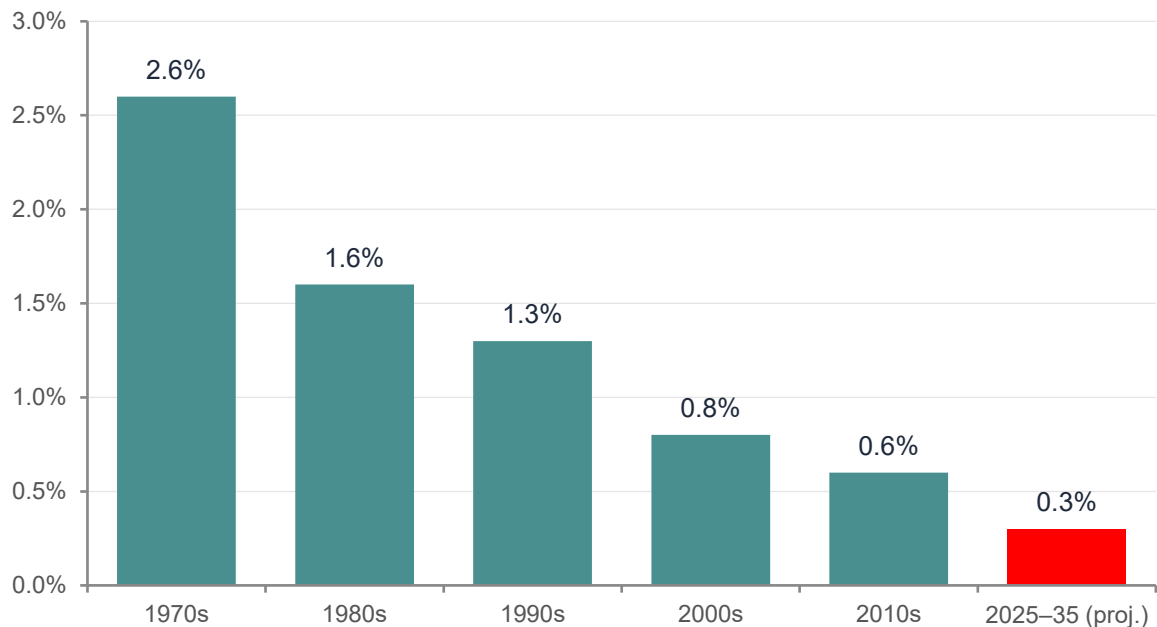
**14.8%** COVID peak (April 2020)

**4.2%** Sept 2026 current level

Source: BLS Labor Force Statistics (LNS14000000), seasonally adjusted, Jan 2016 – Sept 2026 (released Oct 2, 2026) (Fig. 1.1)

# The Slowing Rate of U.S. Labor Supply

*Ten-year compound average annual growth rates*



# 0.3%

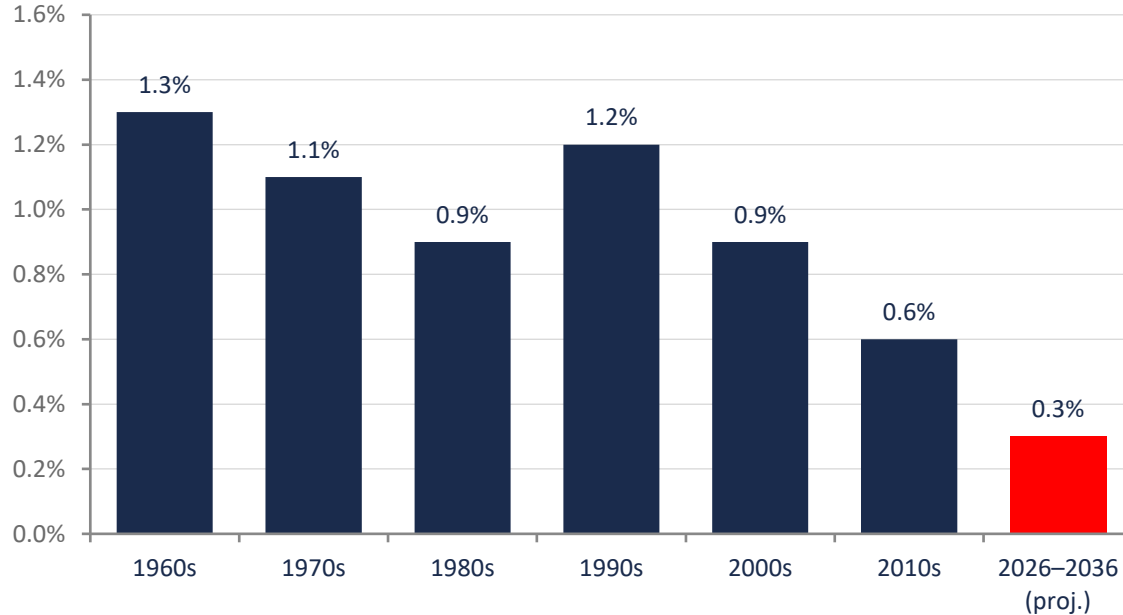
Projected annual  
labor force growth  
2025–2035

The labor force is 1.0 million  
smaller than a year ago, though  
it has risen since July.

*Sources: BLS Employment Projections 2025–2035 (released Aug 27, 2026); EPI analysis of BLS CPS data; actuals through Sept 2026 (Fig. 1.2)*

# Growth Rate of U.S. Population Slows...

*U.S. population growth — ten-year compound average annual rates*

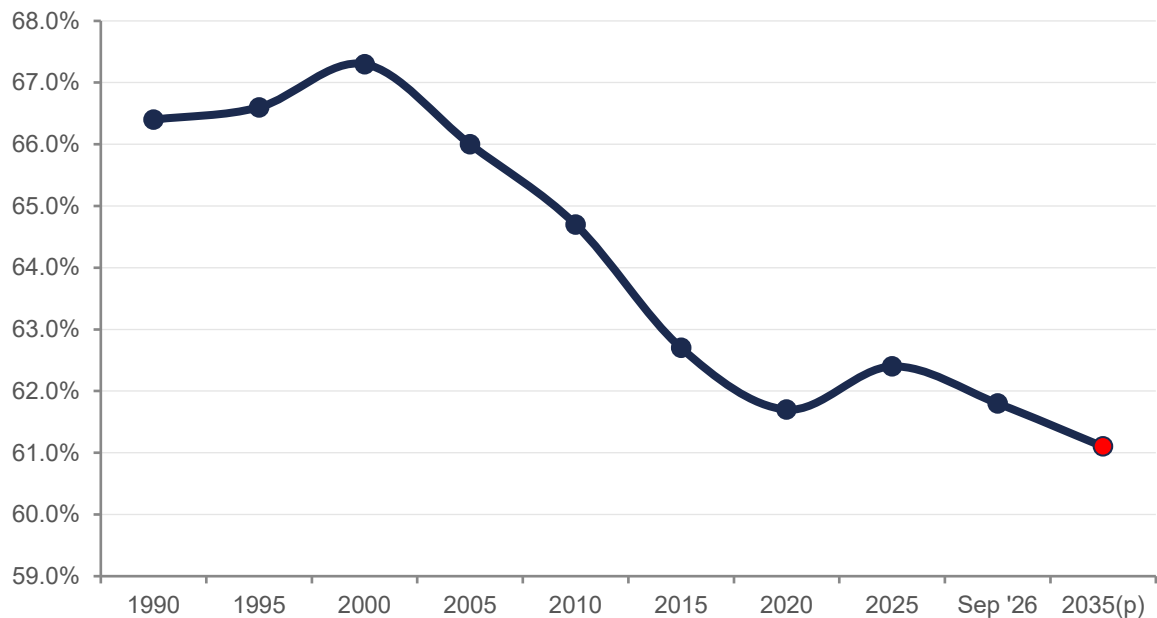


# 0.3%

Annual US population  
growth projected  
2026-2036

*Sources: U.S. Census Bureau Vintage 2025 population estimates (Dec 2025); CBO, The Demographic Outlook: 2026-2056 (Jan 2026) (Fig. 1.3)*

# Workforce Participation: Falling to 50-Year Lows



Then

**67.3%**

Peak participation rate  
(early 2000)

Now — Sept 2026

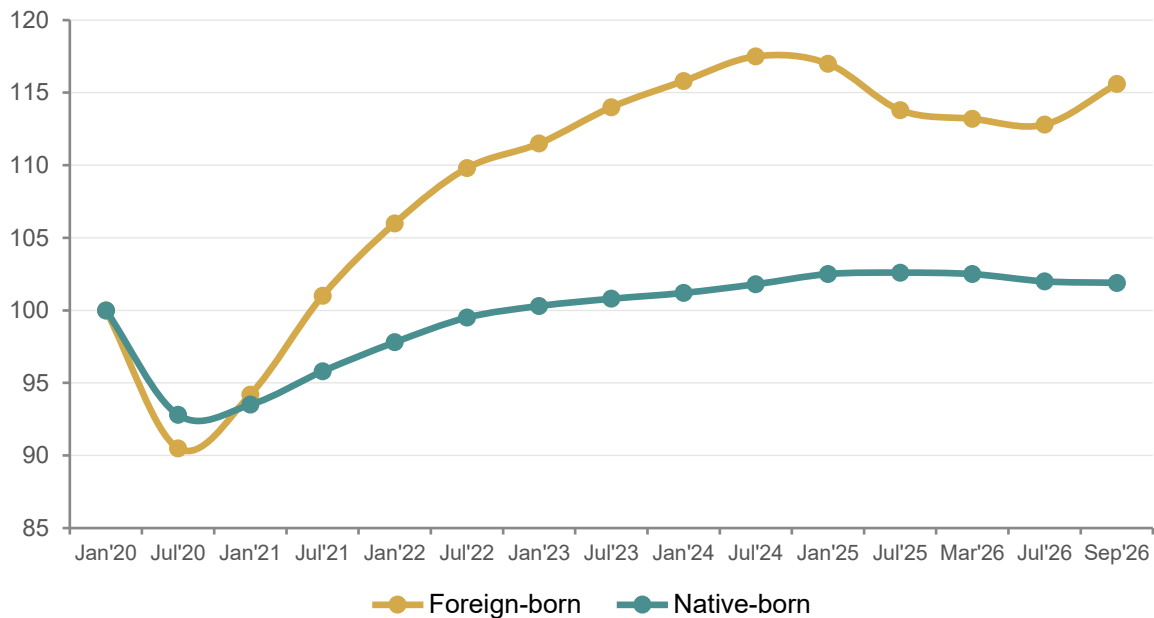
**61.8%**

Back near 2020–21 lows; BLS  
now projects 61.1% by 2035

Sources: BLS labor force participation rate (LNS11300000), Sept 2026, seasonally adjusted; BLS Employment Projections 2025–2035. 1990–2025 are annual averages (Fig. 1.4)

# Foreign-Born Workers Account for Most of U.S. Labor Growth

Employment indexed to 100 at January 2020 — each line scaled to its own base, not to each other



**+4.2M**

Foreign-born employment added since January 2020

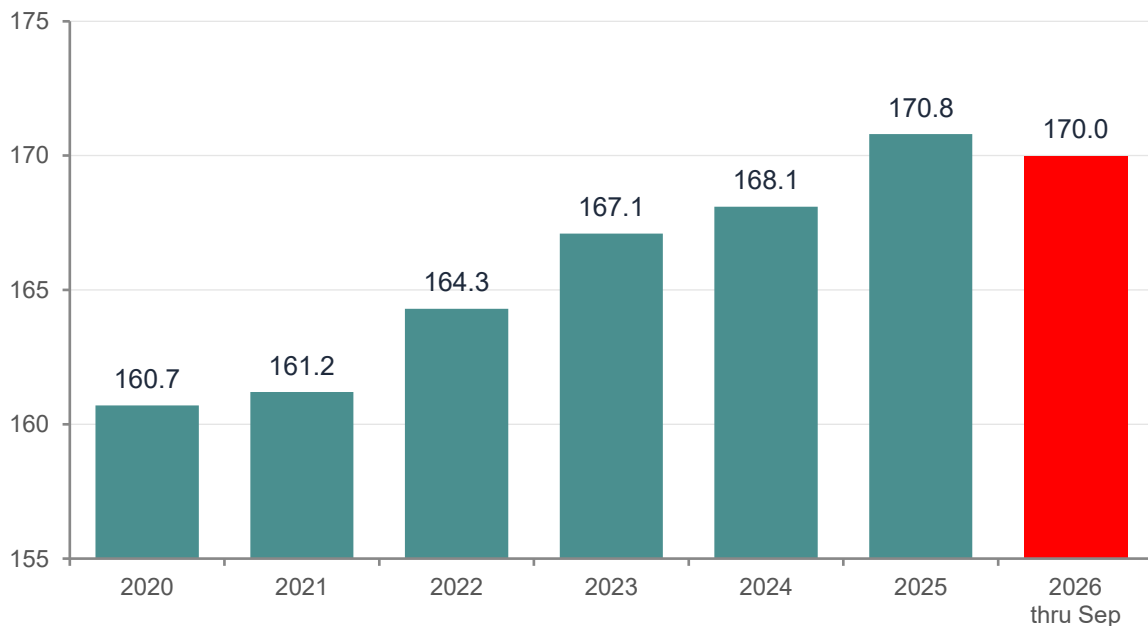
**63%**

Share of all U.S. employment growth since Jan 2020.  
Foreign-born +4.2M;  
native-born +2.5M.

Source: BLS CPS Table A-7, Jan 2020 – Sept 2026 (not seasonally adjusted). Employment change since Jan 2020: foreign born +4.2M, native born +2.5M, total +6.7M (Fig. 1.5)

# Labor Force Growth Stalls in 2026

*U.S. civilian labor force, annual average, in millions (note: vertical axis begins at 155M)*



—0.8M

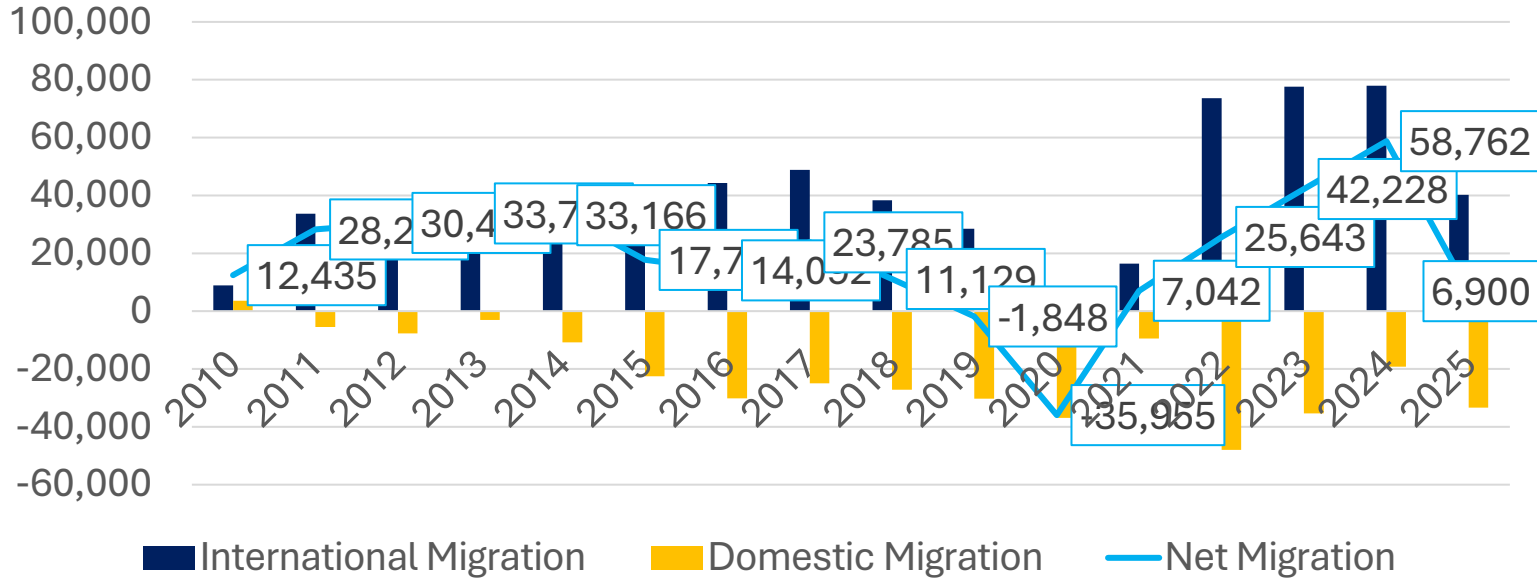
Labor force change,  
2025 average to 2026  
through September

But the labor force has risen  
since July, and ~0.4M of the  
gap is the Jan 2026 reset.

*Source: BLS Current Population Survey, annual averages (cpsaat01). 2025 is an 11-month average excluding October (shutdown); 2026 is the Jan–Sept average, seasonally adjusted.*

# The Impact of International Migration on the Massachusetts Population

Massachusetts Population Summary, 2010 – 2025



U.S. Census Bureau State Population Estimates

# Change How and Whom You Hire

*The old playbook: Screen OUT applicants. The new imperative: Screen IN talent.*

## OLD — Screens Talent OUT

- ✗ Degree requirements that exclude qualified candidates
- ✗ Applicant tracking systems that auto-reject résumés
- ✗ Online applications too complex for many applicants
- ✗ Waiting for candidates to come to you

## NEW — Screens Talent IN

- ✓ Skills-based hiring: drop unnecessary degree requirements
- ✓ Build pipelines to nontraditional, untapped talent pools
- ✓ Partner with workforce intermediaries to find candidates
- ✓ Proactively recruit from overlooked communities

# The Job Quality Hierarchy: A Menu not a Mandate

(read from bottom up)



# Workforce Barriers

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*The business community often argues that “social issues are not our responsibility” — but in a forever-tight labor market, they may be some of your biggest business challenges.*

**Childcare**

**Housing**

**Transportation**

# Overcoming Resistance to Change

## SOURCES OF RESISTANCE

### *External:*

- Structural Barriers
- Cultural Narratives

### *Internal:*

- Structural Barriers
- Organizational Power Dynamics
- A Look in the Mirror

## THE RESPONSE

Talk with your employees

*Start small; test often*

*Connect with your peers*

*Only then, tap outside expertise*

# You Are Not Alone: Workforce Partners

**Community Colleges**

**Nonprofit Workforce  
Intermediaries**

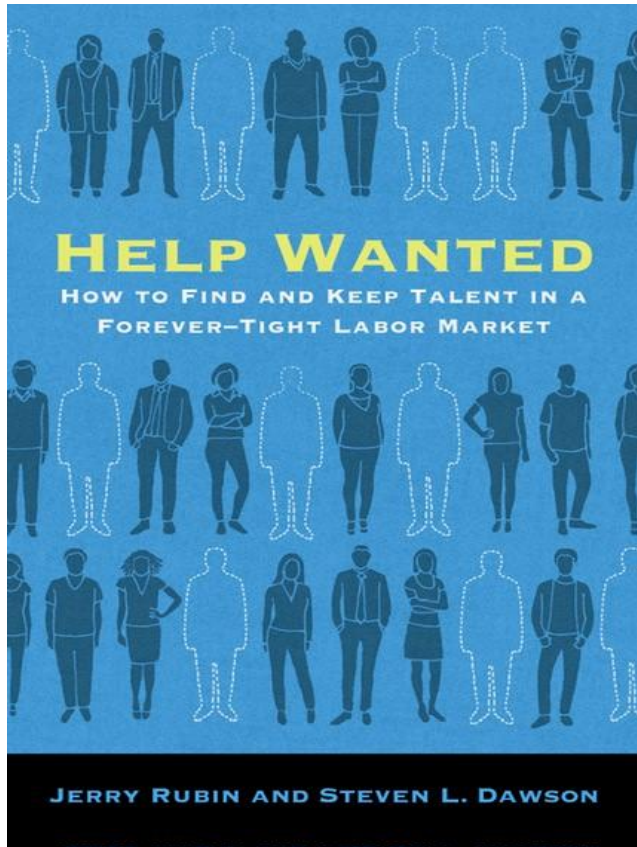
**Union Training Programs**

**Government Workforce  
Boards**

**Industry Associations**

**CEO Peer Networks**

*Source: Help Wanted Ch. 6 — 'You Are Not Alone'. The quality of partners varies widely; ask for employer references before committing.*



## How to get: *Help Wanted*

