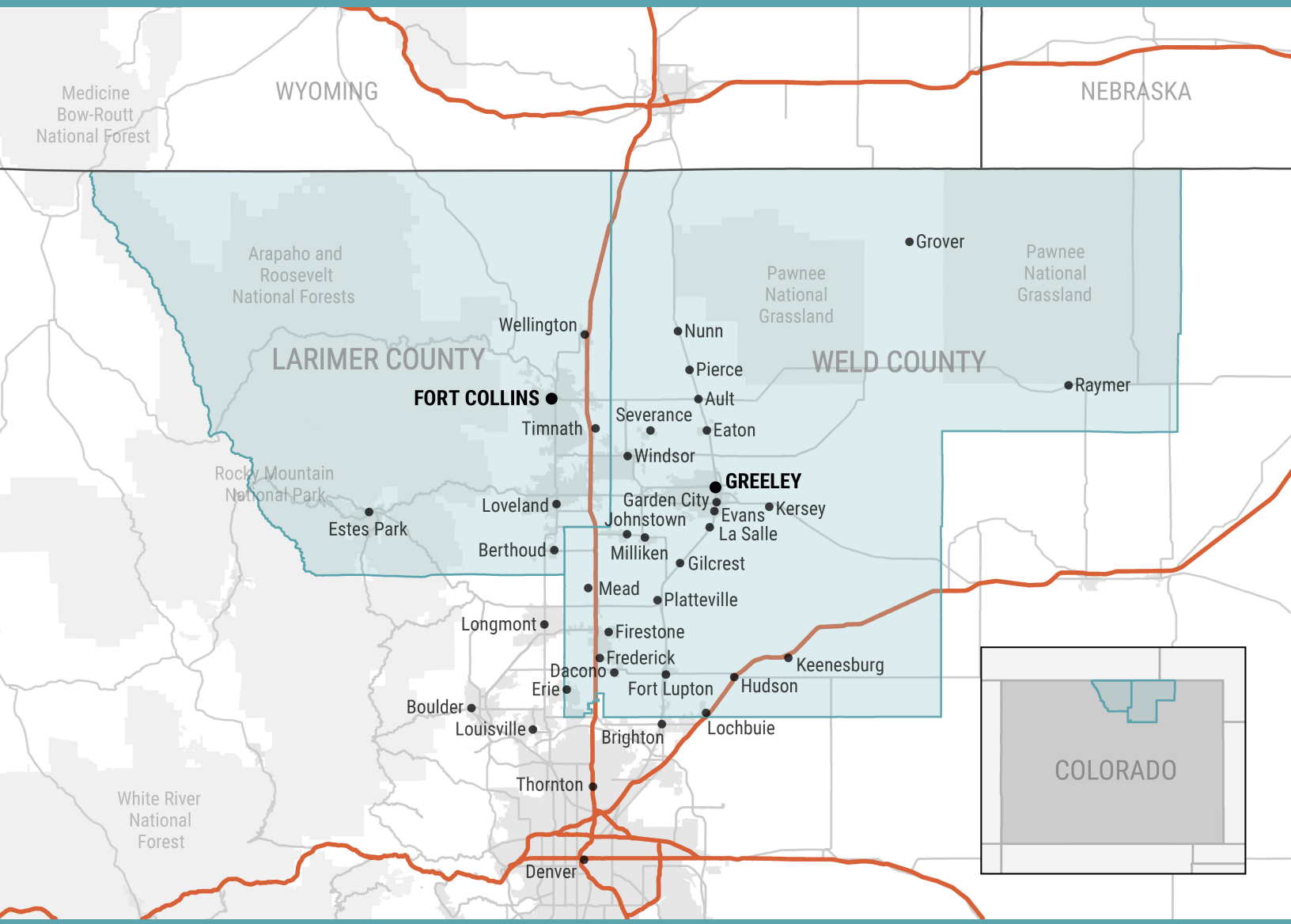
LABOR MARKET PROFILE

Northern Colorado



SEPTEMBER 2025

PROJECT SPONSORS

300 E. Olive Street
Fort Collins, CO 80524
(970) 416-2164
https://www.fcgov.com/

Nestled at the base of the Rocky Mountains in Northern Colorado, the city of **Fort Collins** is known for its high quality of life, vibrant college-town atmosphere, and strong connection to nature and outdoor recreation. The city boasts a lively downtown with historic architecture, a thriving craft brewery scene, and a rich cultural landscape. Key industries include high tech, manufacturing, and emerging sectors like clean energy and biosciences, supported by major employers such as Colorado State University and various healthcare and tech companies.

225 South Meldrum
Fort Collins, CO 80521
(970) 482-3746
https://fortcollinschamber.com/

The **Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce** is the leading membership-based business organization in Northern Colorado. Rooted in ownership and leadership by its members, the Chamber is a dynamic and forward-focused organization. Its diverse membership includes businesses of all sizes and types, ranging from sole proprietors to large multinational corporations, from locally owned retailers to internationally renowned high-tech firms. Embracing both brand-new startups and longstanding companies, including some that have been operating since its founding in 1904, the Chamber values and supports businesses at every stage of their journey.

200 W. Oak Street
Fort Collins, CO 80521
(970) 498-6600
https://www.larimer.gov/

Located in north central Colorado, **Larimer County** is the state's sixth-largest county by population and a cornerstone of Northern Colorado's economic strength. Spanning 2,640 square miles from the fertile plains to the Continental Divide, the county encompasses vibrant urban centers, thriving mountain communities, and some of Colorado's most productive farmland. As both a gateway to the Rocky Mountains and a growing metropolitan corridor, Larimer County offers an attractive environment for business investment, talent development, and quality of life. The County's economic and workforce development ecosystem spanning training, skills development, and employer partnerships aims to ensure residents and businesses thrive in a competitive, rapidly changing economy.

Cover: Regional map created by TIP Strategies, patterned after the Northern Colorado Regional Economic Development Initiative regional definition map.

CONTENTS

TIP STRATEGIES

TIP Strategies, Inc., is a privately held Austin-based firm providing consulting and advisory services to public and private sector clients. Established in 1995, the firm's core competencies are strategic planning for economic development, talent strategies, organizational development, resiliency planning, and equity initiatives.

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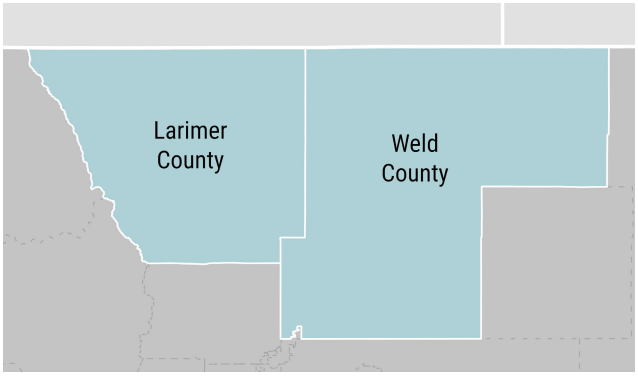
ABOUT THIS WORK

In preparation for a Northern Colorado talent strategy, local and regional partners commissioned TIP Strategies (TIP) to update a two-county workforce data analysis conducted as part of a strategy published in 2017. This *Labor Market Profile* synthesizes quantitative findings from an extensive analysis of workforce data for the Northern Colorado region that combines state and federal sources with job postings data, offering a real-time window into employer hiring needs. Insights from the data analysis will support the identification of workforce development priorities and provide context for potential next steps to be designed through a stakeholder-aligned, partnership-driven regional strategy.

Figure 1. Two-County Northern Colorado Region

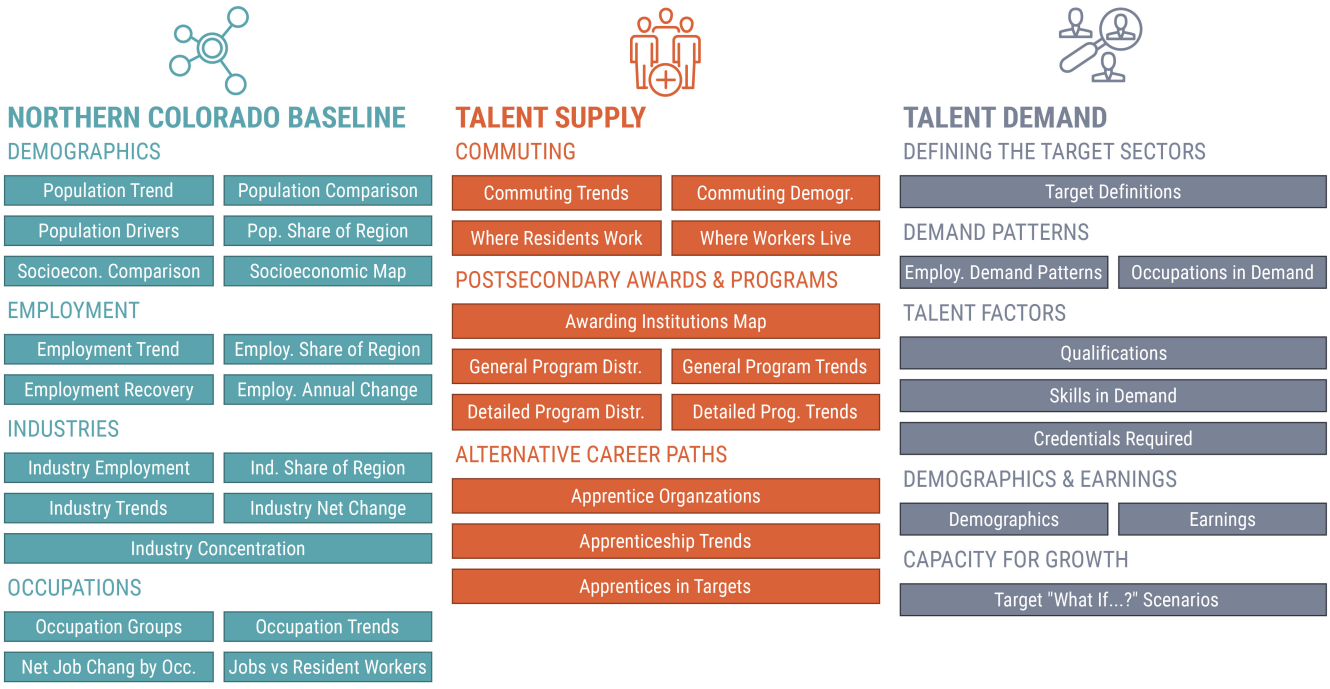


Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

DATA DELIVERABLES

The primary deliverable of the engagement was the *Northern Colorado Workforce Analysis*. Provided as an interactive data visualization, the menu of which is shown as Figure 2, this analysis offers a robust look at the baseline characteristics of the Northern Colorado labor market as well as factors influencing the supply and demand of talent across Larimer and Weld Counties. The baseline analysis provides traditional demographic, socioeconomic, and employment data. The supply analysis includes an examination of commuting patterns, postsecondary completions, and apprenticeship data. Finally, TIP's demand analysis relies on a query of a two-year trend in job postings data to measure occupational demand and skillsets in target sectors, identified by curated, representative lists of regional employers.

Figure 2. *Northern Colorado Workforce Analysis* Menu



The workforce data update was also informed by an additional, custom analytical tool, *Northern Colorado Job Quality and Access (JQA)*, prepared by TIP. The JQA's focus on occupational data provides insights into the different factors affecting job quality (such as earnings, career opportunity, and job stability) and accessibility (as measured by barriers to entry and the demographic composition of the occupation) for more than 700 detailed occupations in the two-county region. This interactive analysis is designed to promote equitable growth and opportunity by helping stakeholders obtain a better understanding of job quality and accessibility. The interactive nature of the *Northern Colorado Workforce Analysis* and the JQA makes contextualized data available for better-informed decision making.

MOVING FORWARD

Building on the updated workforce data analysis commissioned by the project sponsors, the region's workforce development coalition, NoCo Works, is moving forward to develop a regional talent strategy. This *Labor Market Profile* describes the key findings, summarized in Figure 3, from TIP's quantitative analysis of Northern Colorado's labor market. As a core component of the workforce development strategic planning process, the quantitative data and insights will inform the design of strategic workforce development opportunities, helping communities develop talent, strengthen career pathways, and meet the workforce needs of industry. The remainder of this profile expands on these findings and discusses broad structural changes shaping labor markets around the country, including in Northern Colorado.

Figure 3. *Labor Market Profile* Key Findings

1	Weld County is becoming the driver of population growth in the Northern Colorado region.
2	Northern Colorado benefits from the complementary demographic strengths of its counties.
3	Northern Colorado's industries vary significantly by sector and location.
4	Fort Collins is a net importer of labor, including work-from-home, while Weld is an exporter.
5	Regional demand for labor varies across the six industry sectors of opportunity.
6	Workforce needs of employers in opportunity sectors skew toward higher education.
7	Twelve occupations cut across multiple opportunity sectors.
8	Regional postsecondary program completions generally align with opportunity sectors.

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

TIP's quantitative analysis is only one component of the first phase of the strategic planning process. Using its three-phase planning model—discovery, opportunity, and implementation—the firm will build on the data analysis through stakeholder engagement and best practice identification to develop the regional talent strategy. TIP's engagement with the community began at the Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce's Talent Summit in April 2025. As the process continues, targeted engagement with industry, education, workforce, and economic development partners will also influence the creation of a regional framework, designed to drive implementation of strategic workforce development opportunities across Northern Colorado.

FINDINGS

To provide context to the engagement's primary quantitative deliverables, TIP compiled high-level findings on regional and national trends that influence Northern Colorado's labor market.

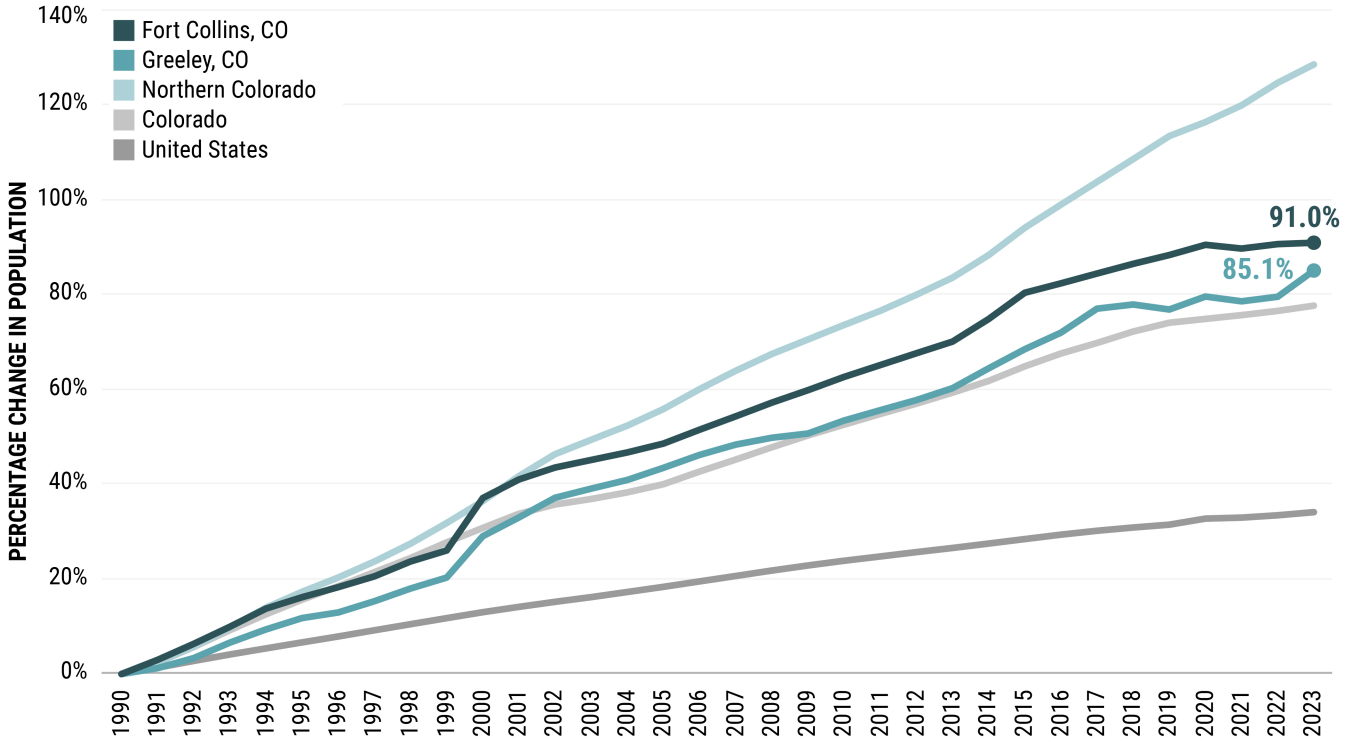
REGIONAL TRENDS

The interactive *Northern Colorado Workforce Analysis* provides a deep dive on characteristics of the regional labor market, including demographics, employment (by industry and occupational groups), commuting, postsecondary completions, and demand for talent. This section highlights factors that will shape the region's workforce development priorities and guide decision making about future investments.

Weld County is becoming the driver of population growth in the Northern Colorado region.

The population of Northern Colorado, consisting of Larimer and Weld Counties, has more than doubled since 1990 and increased by 30 percent since 2010 (Figure 4). The region's high quality of life, the enrollment growth at Colorado State University, and a wealth of economic opportunity afforded to residents have all yielded years of steady population increases. Though Fort Collins has long been a driver of the region's population increase, the city's growth has begun to show signs of struggle in the current decade. Over the same period, the broader Northern Colorado region has seen rapid and uninterrupted growth since the COVID-19 pandemic.

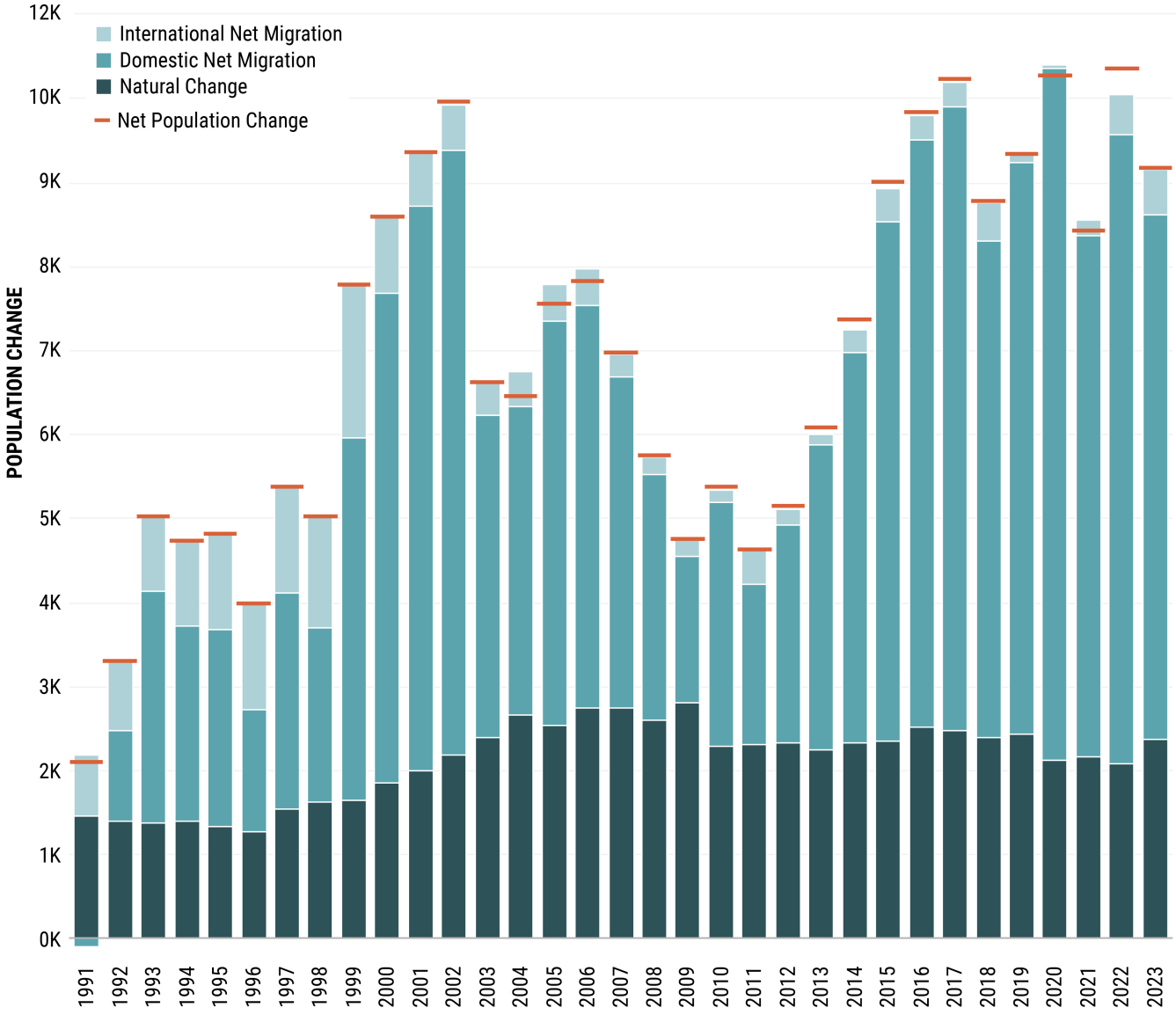
Figure 4. Comparative Population Change



Source(s): US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program; Moody's Analytics; TIP Strategies, Inc.
Note(s): Population estimates prior to 2010 are sourced from Moody's Analytics. Estimates from 2010 to 2023 are sourced from the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program vintages 2020 and 2023. The Northern Colorado region consists of Larimer and Weld Counties.

In more recent years, Northern Colorado's population gains have been largely driven by ongoing growth in Weld County, though the population of Larimer County continues to climb. Larimer County itself has added more than 70,000 residents since 2010, driven in large part by the growth of its largest municipalities, Fort Collins and Loveland. However, the county has begun to see its growth rate diminish in recent years. At the same time, Weld County has seen continued growth as its positive natural change has remained stable, and its domestic net migration has remained high following a sharp increase in the early 2010s (Figure 5). Weld County has added over 100,000 residents since 2010 compared to Larimer's 70,000, with the two counties' growth rates diverging since 2020.

Figure 5. Weld County, Colorado, Drivers of Population Change



Source(s): US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program; Moody's Analytics; TIP Strategies, Inc.
Note(s): Natural change is the difference between annual births and deaths. Total population change includes a residual (a change in population that cannot be attributed to any specific demographic component). Residual change is not shown in the chart but is included in the net population change shown by the red bars. 2010 and 2020 components are estimated based on a 12-month projection of the 2nd quarter (the period between the Census and the mid-year estimate) that is not seasonally adjusted.

Northern Colorado benefits from the complementary demographic strengths of its counties.

Fort Collins' status as a university town is underscored by its socioeconomic makeup. Within the region, the city is alone among its benchmark geographies in its large share of young adults—residents age 20 through 34 make up more than one third of the city's population (Figure 6, page 6). Among comparison geographies, the city has the smallest share of married households and is the only geography where less than a quarter of all households have children (Figure 7, page 6). The share of Fort Collins residents below the poverty line (16.0 percent) is higher than that of the Northern Colorado region (10.1 percent). However, the similarity in the share of SNAP-receiving households between the two geographies (7.2 percent citywide compared to 7.5 percent regionally) suggests a multitude of residents in Fort Collins who are not impoverished in the traditional sense, such as full-time students. In an era of workforce constraints, these demographics can be valuable for prospective employers. As explained on page 16, university towns like Fort Collins provide a source of much-needed skilled workers entering the labor market, thus affording regions like Northern Colorado a talent retention advantage over locations that lack similar institutional drivers.

In contrast to the city of Fort Collins, Weld County is home to more young families, and Greeley's status as a university town is less pronounced in the socioeconomic data. Among comparisons, the county has both the largest share of married households and households with children. Weld County has a large share of youth, with well over one quarter of the county's residents aged 19 or younger (Figure 6). Though Greeley, the seat of Weld County, is home to Northern Colorado University, its share of residents under the age of 25 that are enrolled in college or graduate school (25.2 percent) is less than one half that of Fort Collins (52.0 percent). Additionally, Greeley's comparatively high share of households with children (33.2 percent) and its corresponding shares of residents below the poverty line (14.7 percent) and households receiving SNAP (13.6 percent) suggest that the city is less demographically dominated by its university than Fort Collins.

Weld County's housing stock is relatively new; nearly a quarter of all housing units were built in 2010 or later. While the county's median household income ($93,287) exceeds that of the Northern Colorado region ($92,214), both its median value of owned homes ($444,500) and median monthly rent ($1,469) are lower than the respective regional values ($489,939 and $1,605), making it a comparatively affordable option for families who wish to live in Northern Colorado. Additionally, over 30 percent of Weld County residents are Hispanic, a significantly higher share than the county's comparison regions. Weld County also has a relatively high rate of foreign-born residents for the Northern Colorado region, at 9.1 percent.

Figure 6. Age Distribution, 2023
Sorted by the combined share of youth and young adults

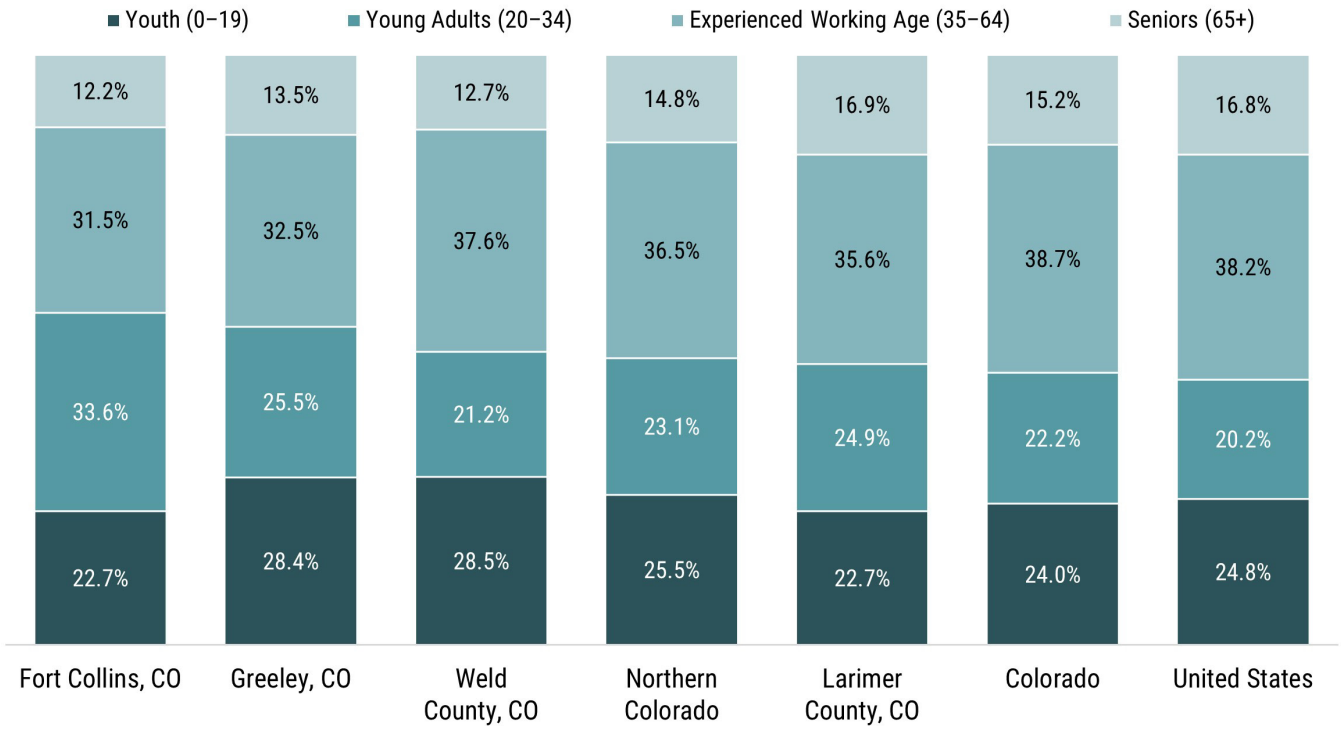
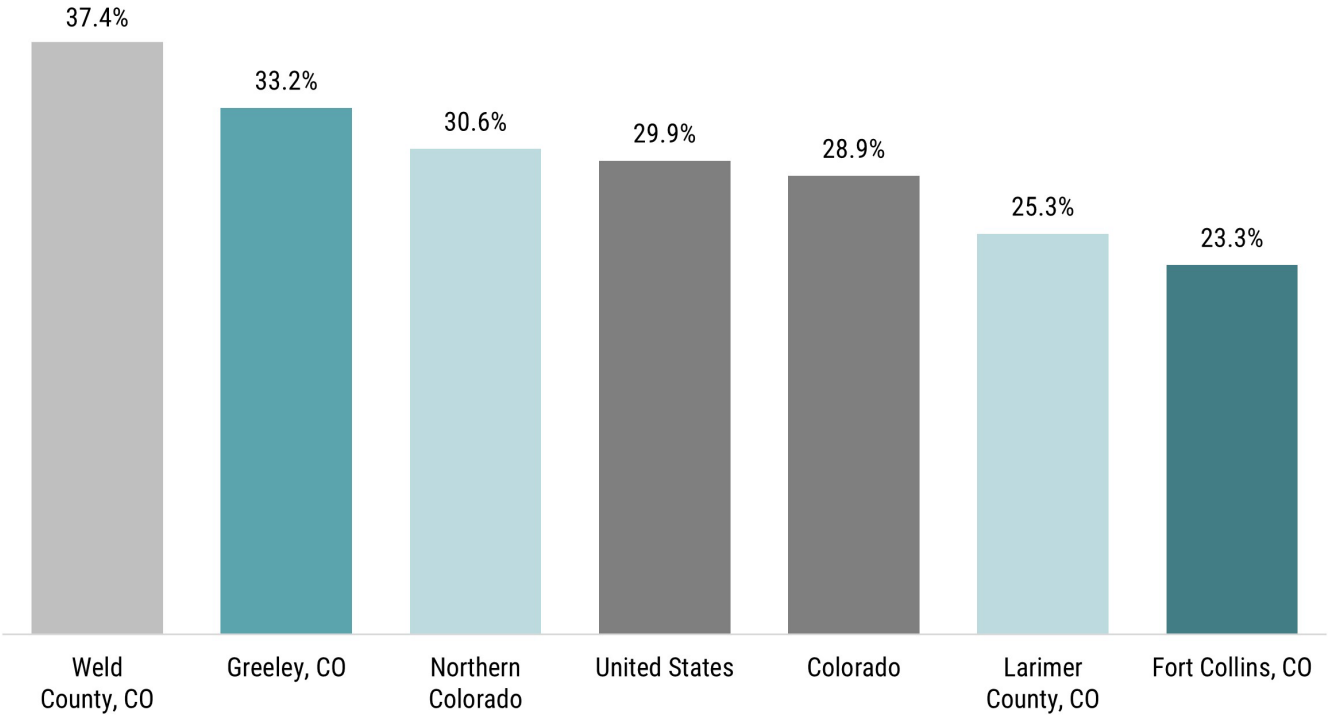


Figure 7. Households with Children, 2023

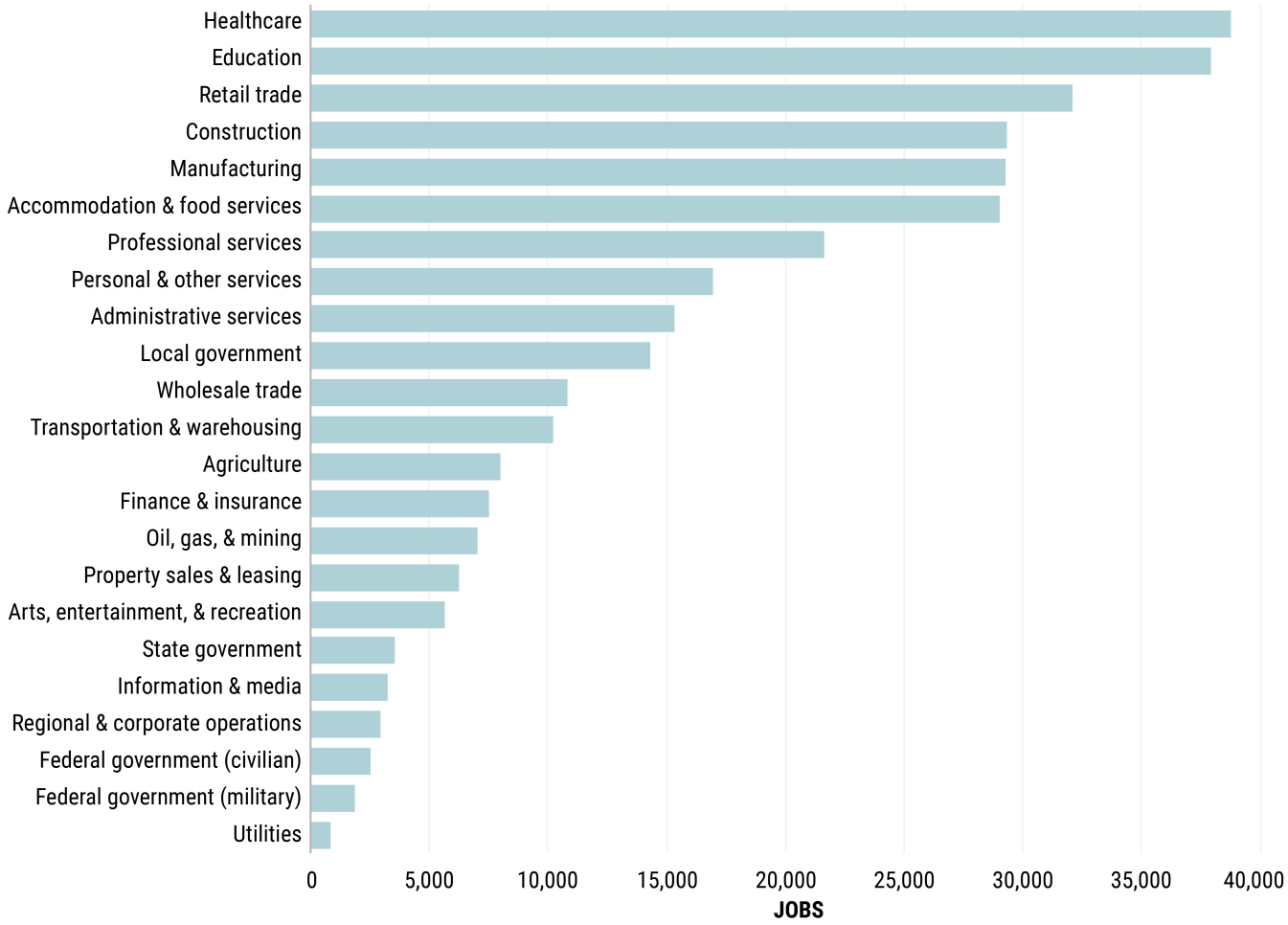


Source(s): Both figures—2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year sample; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Northern Colorado's industries vary significantly by sector and location.

The three largest industry sectors in Northern Colorado—Healthcare, Education, and Retail Trade—each employed upwards of 30,000 regional workers in 2024. These top performers were followed closely by three sectors that were approaching this 30,000-employee threshold: Construction, Manufacturing, and Accommodation & Food Services (Figure 8). While these top employment sectors may be close in size, they are distributed across the two-county region in a way that not only explains recent growth patterns but also suggests opportunities for future workforce development.

Figure 8. Industry Sector Employment in Northern Colorado, 2024



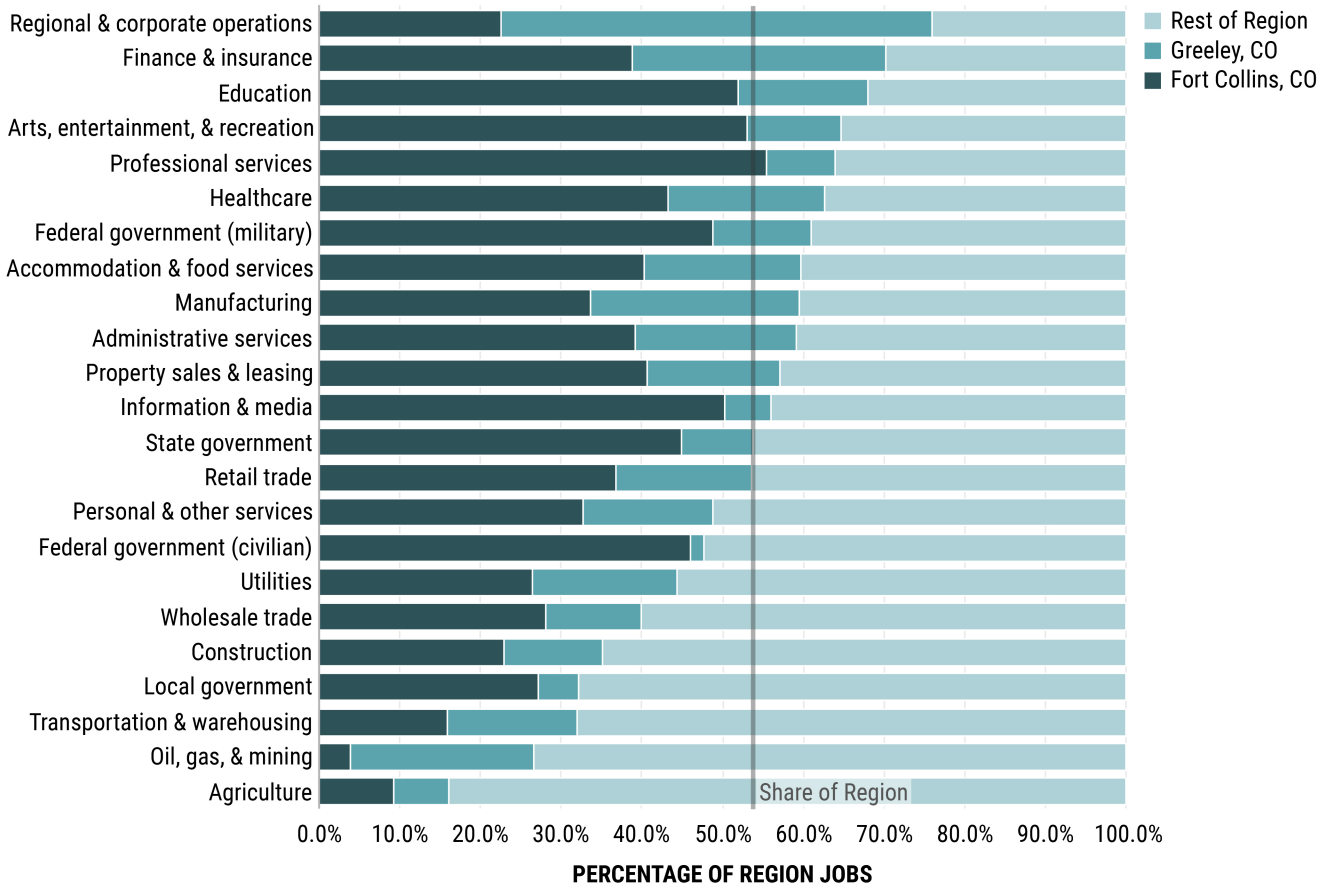
Source(s): US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS); Lightcast 2025.1—QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.
Note(s): The Northern Colorado region consists of Larimer and Weld Counties.

The county seats of Larimer and Weld Counties are notable drivers of demand for talent. At least one of every three jobs in the region can be traced to the city of Fort Collins. The concentration of regional employment in the city is particularly pronounced in a handful of sectors. In at least four sectors—Professional Services; Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation; Education; and Information & Media—Fort Collins is home to more than one half of the region's jobs (Figure 9, page 8). One in six regional jobs can be traced to the city of Greeley, which itself contains more than one half of Northern Colorado's Regional & Corporate Operations jobs. Additionally, Greeley's share of regional Oil, Gas, & Mining jobs is nearly six times that of Fort Collins.

Employment growth in Fort Collins echoes the trend exhibited by its population growth: a steady climb throughout the 2000s and 2010s has tempered through the early 2020s (Figure 4, page 3). Over the last 10 years (2015–2024), Northern Colorado's regional employment has increased by more than 16 percent, eclipsing the growth rate of Fort Collins, while employment in Greeley has grown by nearly 18 percent over the same period. Overall, the region has demonstrated an ability to recover, rebounding from the Great Recession more quickly than the state and nation, and exceeding its pre-COVID-19 pandemic job count by 2022.

Population trends have similarly shaped the balance and trajectory of employment in the two-county region outside of Fort Collins and Greeley, with population growth in both Larimer and Weld Counties exceeding that of their respective major cities. In Northern Colorado's sectors that depend most on land and natural resources (Agriculture and Oil, Gas, & Mining), most jobs are located outside of Fort Collins and Greeley. Transportation & Warehousing, a sector attracted to greenfield spaces with accessible infrastructure, employs just 16 percent of its Northern Colorado workforce in each of Fort Collins and Greeley, with the remainder of employment in outlying areas. In line with population growth trends, nearly two-thirds of construction employment lies outside of Fort Collins and Greeley.

Figure 9. Fort Collins and Greeley Share of Northern Colorado Employment by Industry Sector, 2024



Source(s): BLS; Lightcast 2025.1—QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.
Note(s): Fort Collins, Colorado, is approximated by ZIP Codes 80521, 80522, 80523, 80524, 80525, 80526, 80527, 80528, and 80553. Greeley, Colorado, is approximated by ZIP Codes 80631, 80632, 80633, 80634, 80638, and 80639. The Northern Colorado region consists of Larimer and Weld Counties. Only includes sectors with at least 10 jobs in 2024.

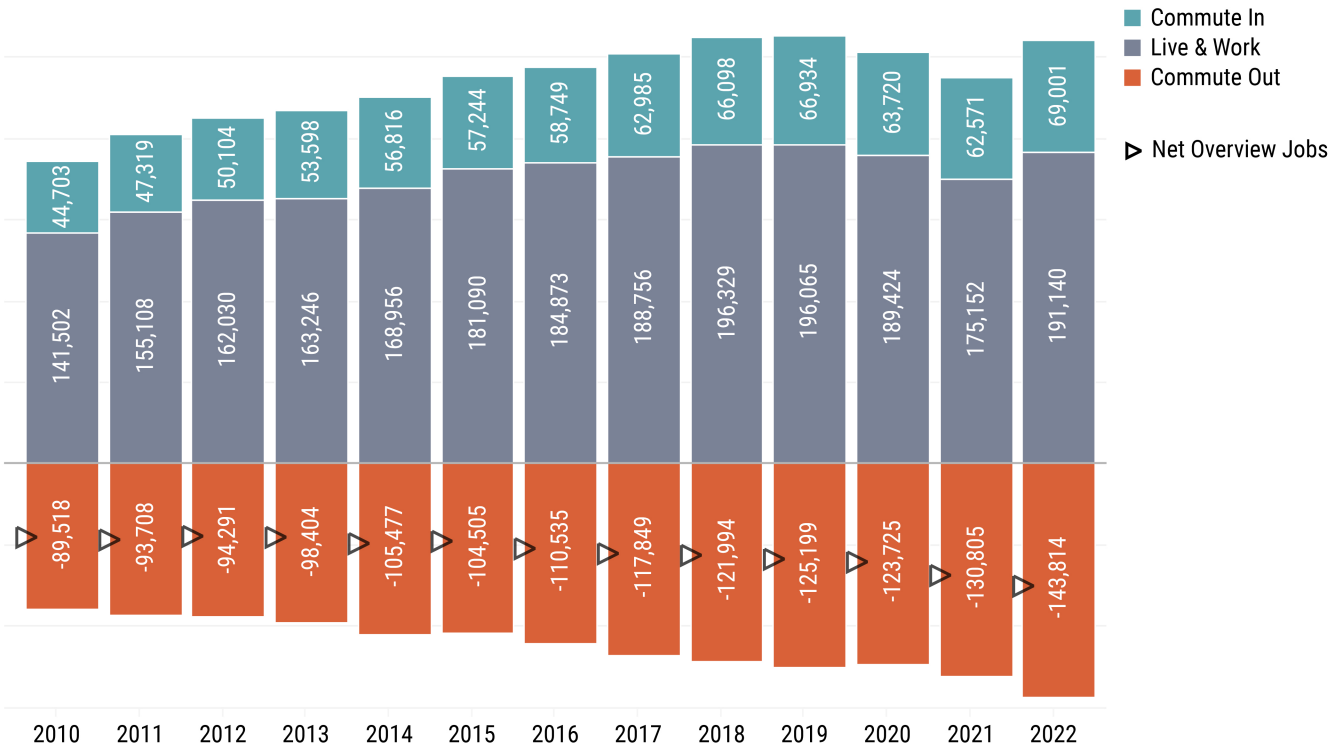
Fort Collins is a net importer of labor, including work-from-home, while Weld is an exporter.

While continued employment growth has allowed the number of Northern Colorado residents who are employed in the region to climb significantly since 2010, the region is increasingly a net exporter of labor (Figure 10). This export of labor is driven by both workers in typically higher-earning, specialized sectors, like Professional Services and Healthcare, and customer-oriented sectors like Retail and Accommodation & Food Services. The most common destinations for these outward commuters include other major Front Range cities like Denver, Boulder, and Aurora.

Weld County is seeing an ongoing population increase as regional growth patterns shift outward (see discussion on page 3) and is similarly a net exporter of labor. More than two-thirds of its working residents commute outward to communities both within and outside of Northern Colorado, like Denver (9.6 percent of working residents), Fort Collins (6.6 percent) and Loveland (4.3 percent). The City of Greeley, a net importer of labor as recently as 2015, is also an exporter, with major destinations including Denver (7.3 percent) and Fort Collins (5.6 percent).

Unlike the region as a whole, Fort Collins is a net importer of labor. The almost 50,000 daily workers who commute in from nearby communities represent nearly 60 percent of all jobs within the city. In almost every year from 2010 to 2020, most of the city's working residents were employed in Fort Collins, though outward commuters have outnumbered these live-and-work commuters in each of the two most recent years of data.

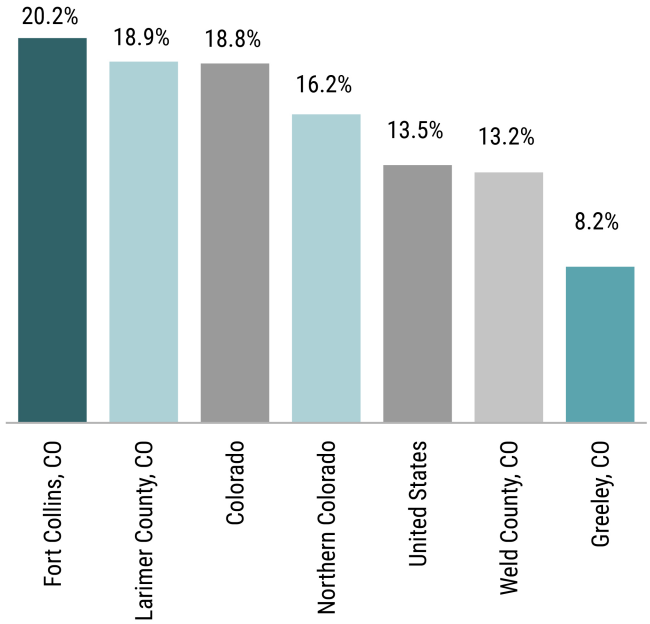
Figure 10. Commuting Patterns Through Northern Colorado, 2010–2022



Source(s): Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES); TIP Strategies, Inc.
Note(s): Only includes residents and workers in Colorado and Wyoming.

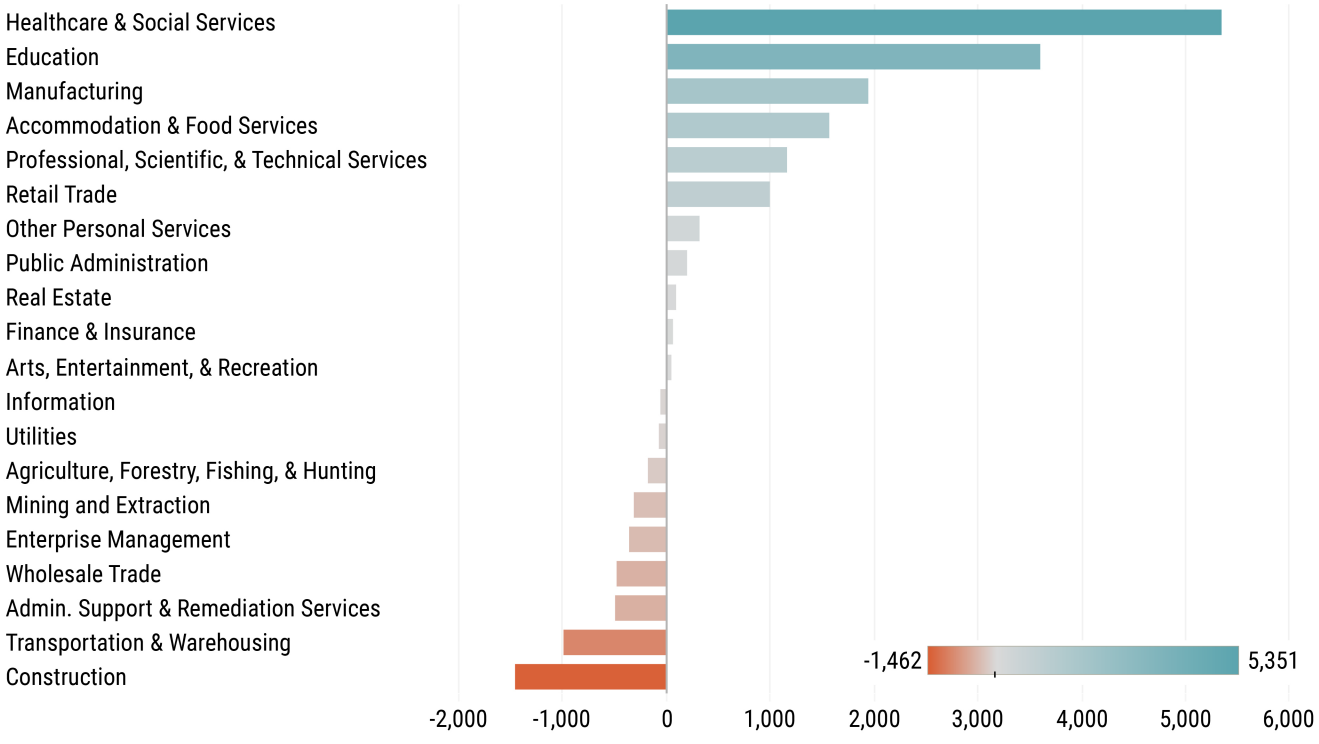
One in five Fort Collins residents work from home, the highest rate in the region (Figure 11). When compared to national remote work trends (Figure 20, page 18), the above-average rate in Fort Collins reflects the relatively high share of regional employment in industries that tend to work remotely, like Professional Services and Education (which includes employment at postsecondary institutions). Likewise, the low share of Greeley residents who work from home (8.2 percent) reflects that city's relative strength in Oil & Gas and Manufacturing—two sectors that have little opportunity for remote work. To further illustrate Fort Collins' status as a regional hub for service-related employment, Figure 12 shows the net flow of workers and residents through the city by industry sector. While this analysis provides an indication of which sectors draw labor into the city and which send resident workers to locations outside Fort Collins, it represents a straightforward comparison between place of employment and place of residence. It does not account for employees who work from home and who may not be physically commuting into the city limits on a regular basis.

Figure 11. Work-from-Home Workforce, 2023



Source(s): 2023 ACS 5-year sample; TIP Strategies, Inc.
Workers ages 16 and older who worked from home. Includes remote employees and home-based businesses.

Figure 12. Net Flow of Workers Through Fort Collins, Colorado by Industry Sector, 2010–2022



Source(s): LEHD, LODES; TIP Strategies, Inc.
Note(s): All states are included in determining the net flow values in this chart. Net flow may appear slightly different from the values presented in the commuter trends chart.

Regional demand for labor varies across the six industry sectors of opportunity.

Employer needs determine the scope and scale of the demand for talent. TIP's analysis focused on six industry sectors that represent opportunities for Northern Colorado to leverage existing and emerging strengths for business attraction and expansion. Each of these target sectors is defined by a list of employers with a presence in the Northern Colorado region and is based on an analysis of two years of job postings from March 2023 through February 2025 (Figure 13). Naturally, sectors that corresponded with some of the region's larger industry clusters by employment had more regional job postings, including Information Technology (3,271 job postings), Food Processing & Manufacturing (3,079), and Business Services (2,107). Smaller, more specialized target industries included Aerospace (1,105), Bioscience & Medical Devices (1,038), and Fabrication & Production Technology Manufacturing (741).

Regional demand for workers in the opportunity sectors was not evenly distributed across the region, underscoring the nuances of regional strengths across the two counties. Fort Collins drove demand for the region's highest education-requiring and most STEM-heavy targets, including Aerospace (with more than 80 percent of the job postings for this target located in the city), Bioscience & Medical Devices (58 percent, followed by Windsor at 24 percent), Information Technology (60 percent, followed by Loveland at 18 percent) and Business Services (47 percent, followed by Loveland at 24 percent). Nearby Loveland exceeded Fort Collins' demand for jobs in the Fabrication & Production Technology Manufacturing industry (31 percent, followed by Fort Collins at 28 percent), while Greeley dominated the Food Processing & Manufacturing industry at 59 percent of demand (followed by Fort Collins at 13 percent).

Figure 13. Summary of Hiring Landscape for Opportunity Sectors in Northern Colorado

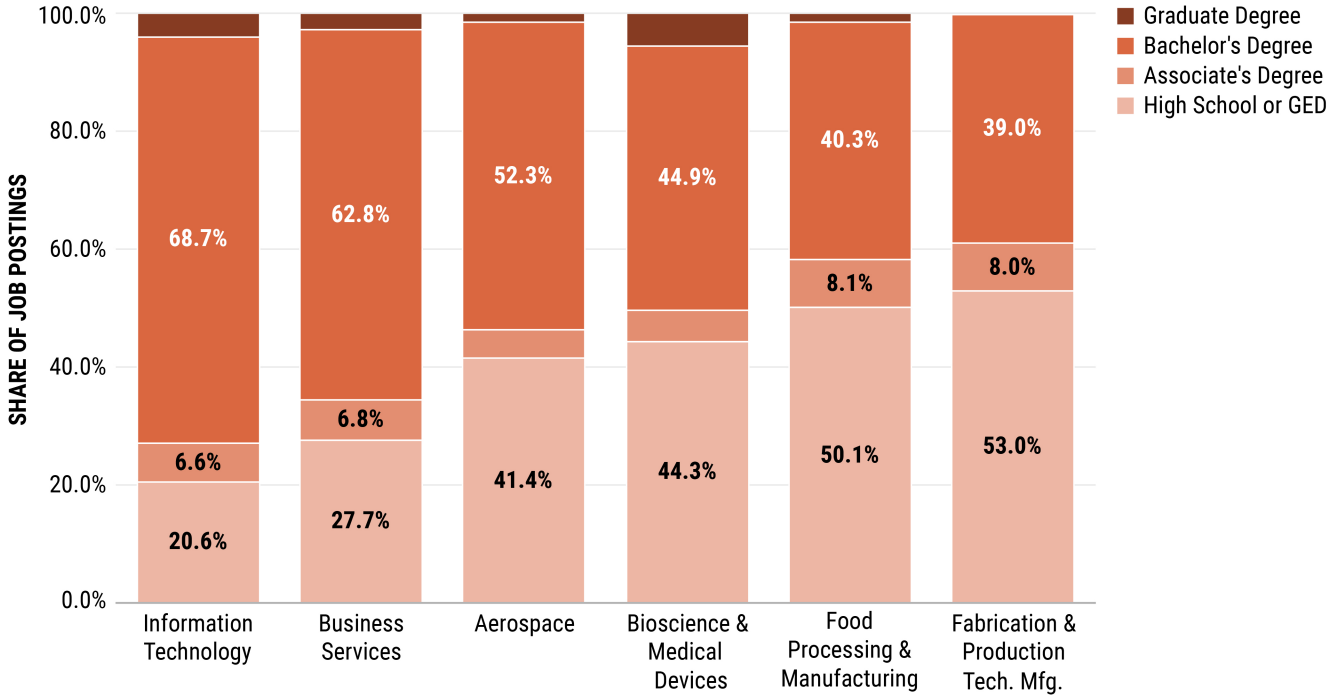
	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	FOOD PROCESSING & MFG.	BUSINESS SERVICES	AEROSPACE	BIOSCIENCE & MEDICAL DEVICES	FABRICATION & PRODUCTION TECH. MFG.
Summary of Job Postings, March 2023–February 2025						
Number of local and regional employers analyzed	52	54	44	55	53	57
Number of unique recent job postings identified in Northern Colorado	3,271	3,079	2,107	1,105	1,038	741
Share of regional job postings attributed to Fort Collins employers	60%	13%	47%	81%	58%	28%
Share of regional job postings attributed to Greeley employers	9%	59%	9%	2%	6%	6%
Share of job postings requiring a bachelor's degree or higher	73%	39%	67%	54%	51%	42%
Employment Growth, 2014–2024						
10-year growth rate for the most in-demand occupations in this target*	13%	15%	68%	17%	24%	13%

*For comparison, 10-year employment growth overall in Northern Colorado for 2014–2024 was 20 percent.
Source(s): BLS; Lightcast 2025.1—QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Workforce needs of employers in opportunity sectors skew toward higher education.

Across the six opportunity sectors, education requirements of employers were relatively high. In four out of the six sectors, most job postings during the analysis period required at least a bachelor's degree (Figure 14). At the furthest extreme, more than 70 percent of all job postings in Information Technology included this requirement, with leading occupations like Software Developers, Industrial Engineers, and Data Scientists demanding a high level of formal education and training. Employers in two of the sectors—Food Processing & Manufacturing and Fabrication & Production Technology Manufacturing—sought to fill most of their open job postings with less than a bachelor's degree, though both sectors still contained a significant share of jobs with the higher requirements, at around 40 percent each.

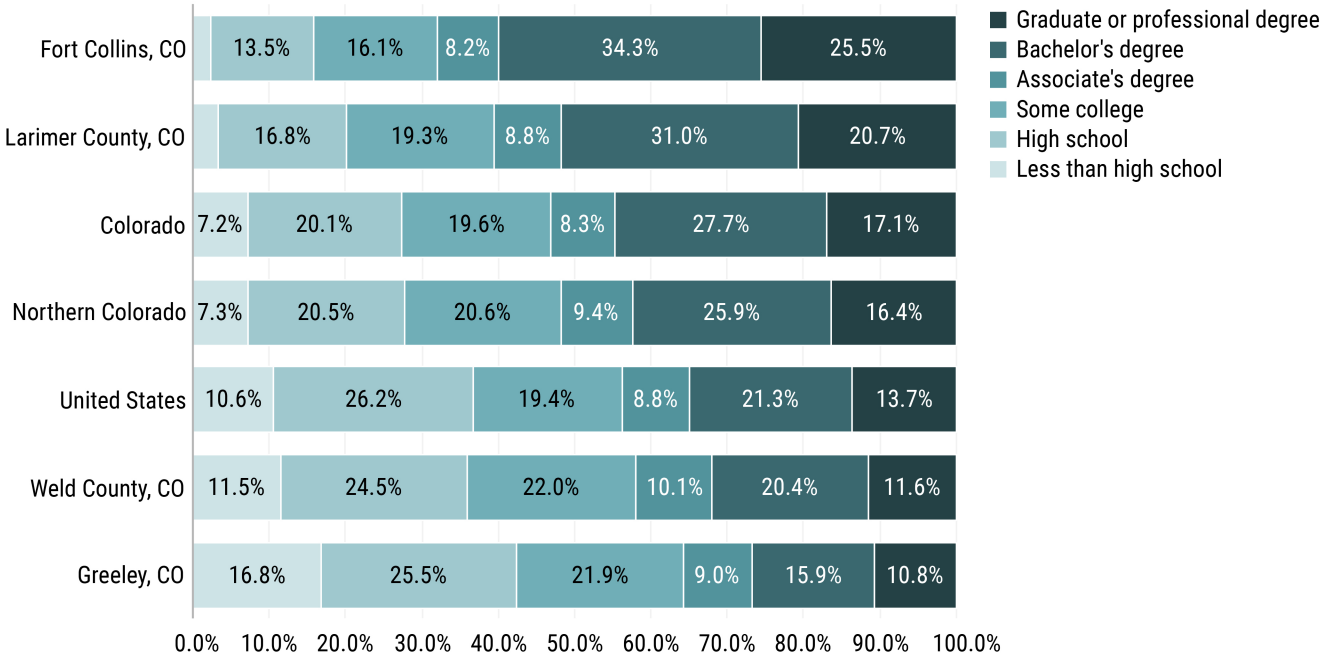
Figure 14. Target Industries, Minimum Education Requested
Based on an analysis of two years of job postings, March 2023–February 2025



Source(s): BLS; Lightcast 2025.1—QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.
Note(s): Job postings include non-staffing, unique, newly posted job postings for permanent full-time, part-time, and flexible positions, excluding internships, in Northern Colorado between March 2023–February 2025.

Although Northern Colorado residents are well suited to meet the diverse educational demands of target sector employers, regional partners should not be complacent about the demand for skilled talent below the bachelor's level. The region exceeds the national average in terms of educational attainment, with 4 in 10 of its residents over the age of 25 possessing a bachelor's degree or higher (Figure 15, page 13). This relative strength reflects both the presence of a major university in Colorado State, and the regional leadership in driving demand in target industries that typically require high levels of education. Additionally, target industry occupations with lower education requirements represent an opportunity for regional employers to provide quality local jobs for the large share of regional workers without a college degree, provided they have attained the right training and skillsets. To this point, regional apprenticeship programs have trended upward over the past decade. Among high-demand target industry occupations, the top program for apprentices residing in Northern Colorado is Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers (218 apprentices living in Northern Colorado between 2013 and 2024), while the top program for those training in the region is Industrial Engineering Technicians (52 training in the region over the same period).

Figure 15. Educational Attainment, 2023



Source(s): 2023 ACS 5-year sample; TIP Strategies, Inc.
Note(s): Education attainment only measured for population 25 and older. High school includes equivalency. Some college indicates no degree was received. Graduate degree includes professional degrees and doctoral programs.

Twelve occupations cut across multiple opportunity sectors.

When ranking occupations by the number of job postings in each opportunity sector, 12 occupations appear in the top 10 for two or more targets. Among these common in-demand occupations, shown in Figure 16 (page 14), the top two by job postings were Software Developers and Computer, All Other, representing more than 370 and 300 job postings over the study period, respectively. Both occupations are found in the top 10 most common occupations of three target sectors—Aerospace, Business Services, and Information Technology—and both typically require a bachelor's degree. An additional two of these twelve common occupations typically require a bachelor's degree—Industrial Engineers and Data Scientists—while two others require some level of formal education beyond high school, but below a four-year degree. This includes Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, who are required to possess a commercial driver's license, and Industrial Engineering Technicians, who must typically have a relevant associate's degree. The remaining six occupations require no formal education beyond the high school level, or as is the case with Laborers & Material Movers, Hand, typically have no formal education requirement.

In lieu of stringent higher education requirements, several of these occupations require moderate-term on-the-job training, with hands-on experience being more valuable than formal education in certain labor-intensive jobs. Other occupations that require a specific qualification, like Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, or those that require little in terms of front-end credentials, like Laborers & Material Movers, Hand, may require short-term on the job training.

Overall, the number of regional jobs in these 12 common occupations grew from more than 17,500 jobs to nearly 19,900 jobs from 2014 to 2024, an increase of more than 13 percent. Of the 12 occupations, 9 saw a positive change in number of jobs over this period, representing nearly 93 percent of jobs within the group in 2024.

However, access is not distributed evenly across target industry occupations. In three of the six target industries (Business Services, Information Technology, and Aerospace), a majority of top 10 in-demand occupations are classified as "less accessible," with access measured as a set of factors related to education and experience requirements, workforce demographics, and the structure and flexibility of the job. Among the 12 common in-demand occupations, seven received lower access scores than they otherwise would because the share of workers that are male vastly exceeds the male share of Northern Colorado's population (Software Developers; First-Line Supervisors—Production & Operations; Maintenance & Repair Workers, General; Industrial Engineering Technicians; Industrial Engineers; Laborers & Material Movers, Hand; and Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers).

For a single income, two adult household with two children, the living wage threshold ($44.61 per hour) exceeds the average advertised wage for the top 10 occupations in every target industry except for one, Information Technology ($44.78 per hour). Among the 12 occupations sought by employers in multiple target sectors, eight have a median hourly wage that falls below this living wage threshold. Notably, the four common occupations with a median hourly wage exceeding the living wage threshold all typically require a bachelor's degree. Though each target industry offers occupations with high-end wages that exceed the living wage threshold, the most common occupation by job postings in every target industry except for Information Technology offers a median wage below the living wage threshold.

Figure 16. In-Demand Occupations Common to Two or More Target Industries
Based on an analysis of job postings, March 2023–February 2025

		TYPICAL EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	FOOD PROCESSING & MANUFACTURING	BUSINESS SERVICES	AEROSPACE	BIOSCIENCE & MEDICAL DEVICES	FABRICATION & PROD. TECH. MFG.
1	Software Developers	Bachelor's degree	●		●	●		
2	Computer, All Other	Bachelor's degree	●		●	●		
3	First-Line Supervisors—Production & Operations	High school/GED		●		●	●	●
4	Industrial Engineers	Bachelor's degree	●			●	●	
5	Maintenance & Repair Workers, General	High school/GED		●		●	●	●
6	Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, & Weighers	High school/GED		●		●	●	
7	Production Workers, All Other	High school/GED		●				●
8	Laborers & Material Movers, Hand	No formal requirement		●				●
9	Sales Reps, Non-Technical & Scientific Products	High school/GED		●			●	●
10	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	Nondegree credential		●				●
11	Data Scientists	Bachelor's degree	●			●		
12	Industrial Engineering Technicians	Associate's degree					●	●

Source(s): BLS; 2025.1—QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.
Note(s): Job postings include non-staffing, unique, newly posted job postings for full-time, part-time, and flexible positions, excluding internships, in Northern Colorado between March 2023 and February 2025.

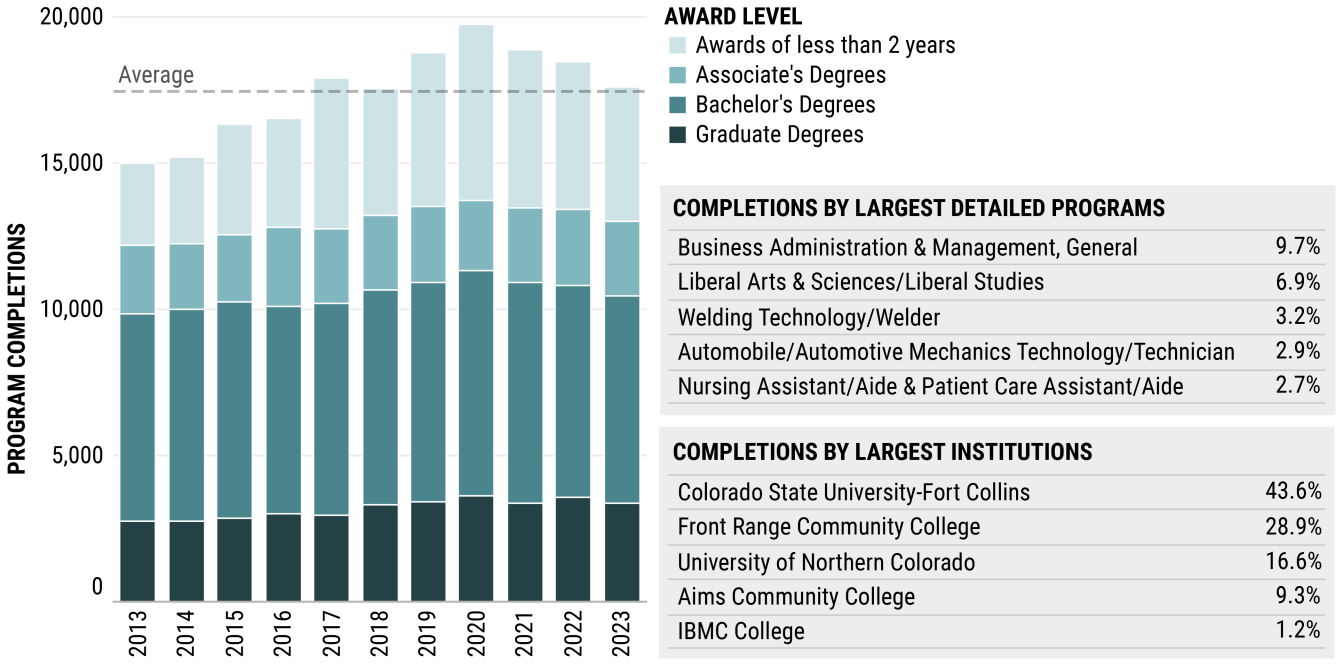
Regional postsecondary program completions generally align with opportunity sectors.

Higher learning institutions in the Northern Colorado region saw more than 17,500 program completions in 2023, representing a core workforce development strength of the region (Figure 17). The institution awarding the most completions over this period was Colorado State University (more than 44 percent of total completions), followed by Front Range Community College (more than 28 percent, though completions at Front Range Community College are combined across all campus locations). Other major institutions by share of regional completions include University of Northern Colorado (over 15 percent) and Aims Community College (nearly 11 percent).

Of these more than 17,500 completions, nearly 20 percent were graduate degrees, just over 40 percent were bachelor's degrees, almost 15 percent were associate's degrees, and the remaining 25 percent were awards of less than two years. Though the total number of regional program completions has trended upward since 2013, this number has declined year-over-year following a peak of more than 19,700 completions in 2020. This downward trend from 2020 to 2023 is reflected in the number of institution-level completions at Colorado State University, Front Range Community College, and University of Northern Colorado over this period.

Several top detailed programs represented completions related to high-demand occupations in the opportunity sectors. In 2023, the two largest detailed programs by completions were Business Administration & Management, General (1,544 completions) and Liberal Arts & Sciences/Liberal Studies (1,190 completions). Both programs related to top 10 occupations in all target industries except for Aerospace. The third largest detailed program was Welding Technology/Welder (719 completions), typically representing an award of less than two years, related to in-demand occupations in four of the six target sectors. Finally, Computer & Information Sciences, General, the sixth largest (447 completions), was related to in-demand occupations in three of the six target sectors.

Figure 17. Program Completions at Northern Colorado Institutions by Award Level, 2013–2023



COMPLETIONS BY LARGEST DETAILED PROGRAMS	
Business Administration & Management, General	9.7%
Liberal Arts & Sciences/Liberal Studies	6.9%
Welding Technology/Welder	3.2%
Automobile/Automotive Mechanics Technology/Technician	2.9%
Nursing Assistant/Aide & Patient Care Assistant/Aide	2.7%

COMPLETIONS BY LARGEST INSTITUTIONS	
Colorado State University-Fort Collins	43.6%
Front Range Community College	28.9%
University of Northern Colorado	16.6%
Aims Community College	9.3%
IBMC College	1.2%

Source(s): National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS); Lightcast 2025.1—QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; US Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Student and Exchange Visitor Program; TIP Strategies, Inc.
Note(s): Includes only general programs with at least 25 average annual completions between 2013 and 2023. Associate's degrees include certificates earned in more than two years and less than four years. Graduate degrees include professional certificates, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees.

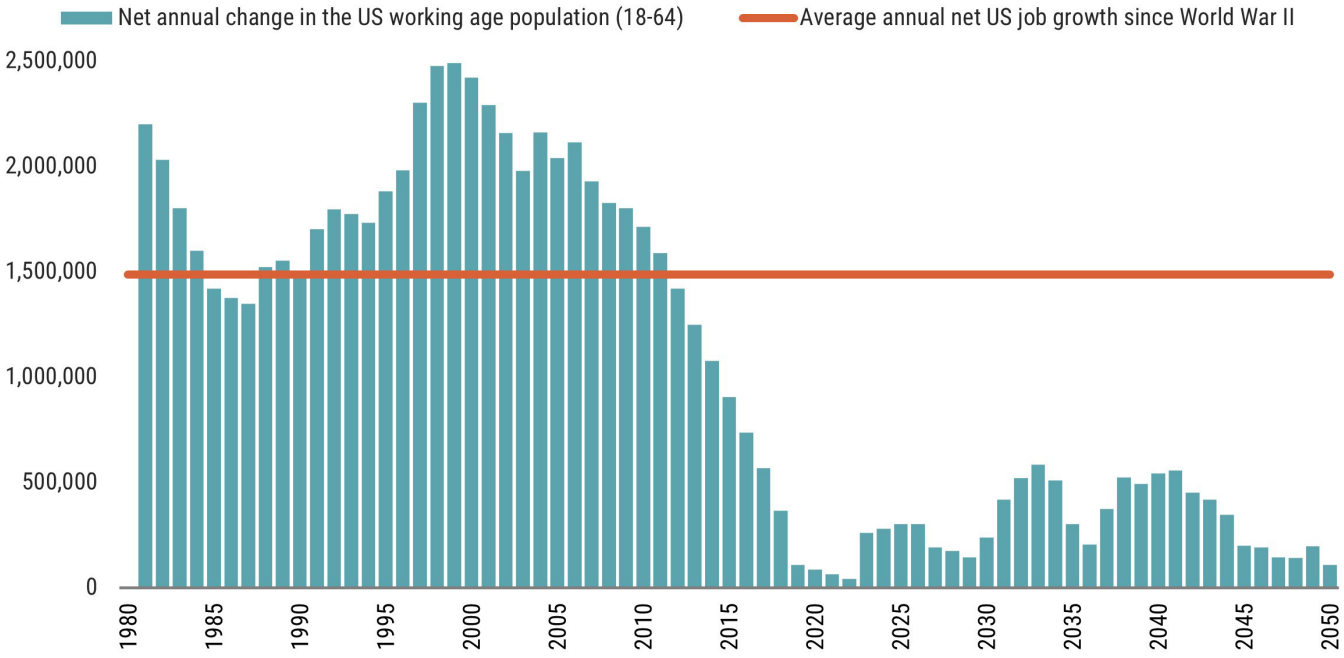
NATIONAL TRENDS

An examination of national trends points to broad structural changes shaping labor markets around the country, including in Northern Colorado. While these trends are outside the region's control, they merit consideration in local workforce development planning.

A misalignment of demographic forces creates workforce challenges.

Since World War II the US, on average, has reliably added nearly 1.5 million new jobs annually (Figure 18). Steady job creation coupled with a growing population, paints a largely positive picture of the national labor situation. Like everything else, demographics can be more complicated than appearances suggest. High birth rates in the first two decades following WWII ensured an ample supply of new entrants into the labor force well into the 1980s. And a loosening of immigration restrictions in the 1960s paved the way for new waves of workers in the late 20th century. These forces benefited US employers for decades, rewarding them with a seemingly endless labor supply to support a growing economy.

Figure 18. Supply and Demand of US Workers
The US labor supply faces long-term pressure



Source(s): US Census Bureau, International Database; US Bureau of Economic Analysis, Current Employment Statistics; TIP Strategies, Inc.
Note(s): Population estimates and projections are for the resident population. The US population components shown in the IDB may not match the official population components for the United States, in part, due to differences in how they are displayed (calendar year versus midyear-to-midyear estimates).

A number of factors have begun to change the picture in recent decades. A declining birthrate in the late 20th century has fallen even further in the 21st, turning a once-gushing fountain to a slowing trickle. The impact of this reversal has already started rippling through the workforce. At the other end of the demographic spectrum, the waves of babies born in the post-war boom are now entering retirement. Compounding these demographic shifts, the US has become increasingly less welcoming to immigrants since 9/11, so the backstop of imported labor to feed the workforce is no longer a certainty. As a result, the nation is confronted with a diverse array of long-term policy options across the political spectrum. These include, among other things, raising the retirement age, replacing

workers with automation, making immigration policies more welcoming, or implementing family-friendly policies in hopes of raising the birth rate. Regardless of the long-term policy choices, workforce development professionals are stuck in a near-term conundrum as net new job numbers in the US outpace the net supply of new workers.

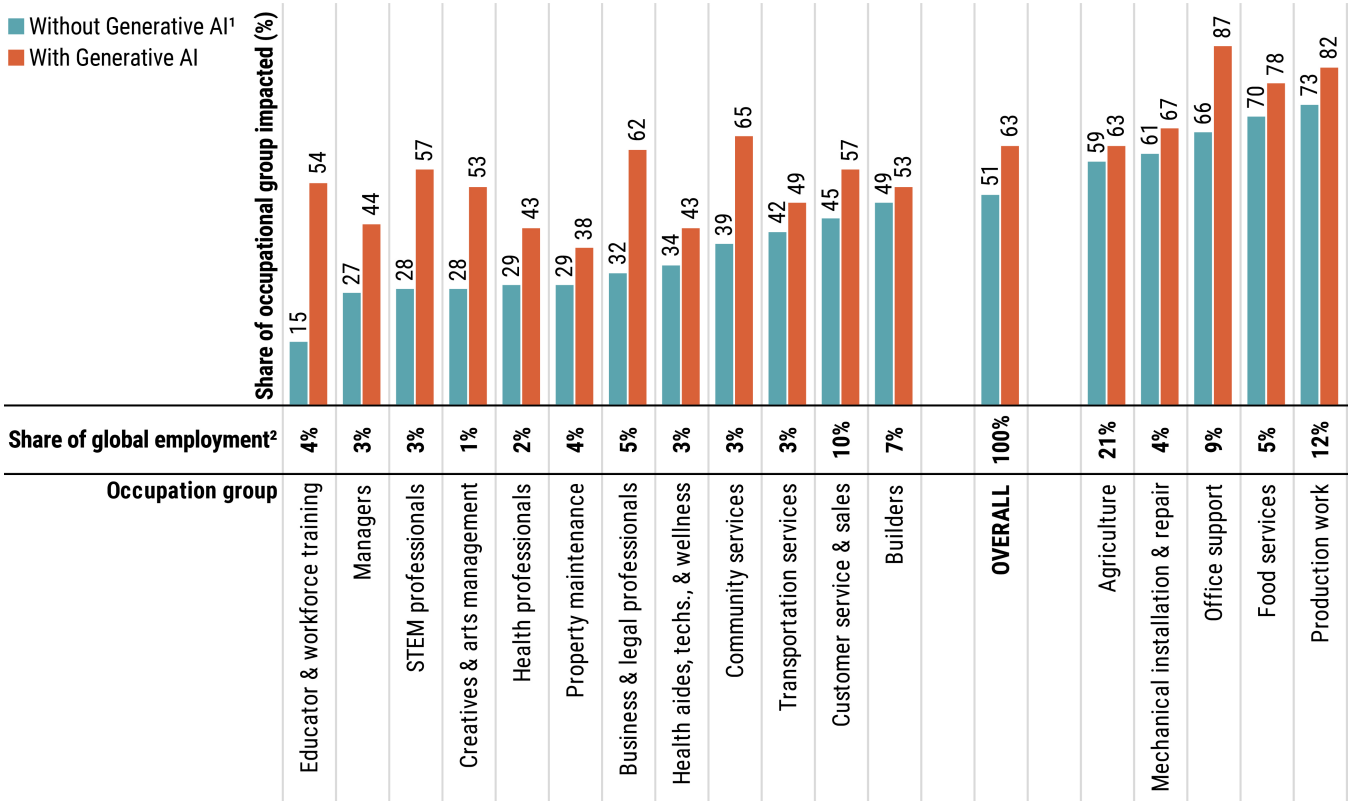
University towns like Fort Collins and Greeley hold one singular advantage. College towns are the tap providing much-needed skilled workers to the US economy. Locations like Northern Colorado are better positioned to retain talent than those lacking the same institutional advantages.

Rapid technological innovation: Threat or just-in-time solution?

The cycle of technological innovation eliminating jobs is not new, although the rapid deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) has heightened fears for many workers. News outlets, think tanks, and analysts routinely predict that many of today's jobs will go the way of horses, stenographers, and switchboard operators—all of which were once commonplace elements of the workforce until technology intervened. But it is worth remembering that the current hype surrounding AI happens with all new technologies. There is little doubt AI will displace some workers; the more relevant question is which ones are at risk. Whether it's AI or something else, technological change *always* chips away at rote functions and tasks. With AI, this chipping effect may be faster and more widely felt, but it will still be unevenly tilted toward occupations with more rote functions.

Given the tightness of the near-term workforce, the integration of AI into homes and workplaces could be well-timed. The challenge for workforce development professionals is how to adapt to this technological change in real time to ensure positive impacts.

Figure 19. Impact of Generative AI on the Automation of Occupational Groups

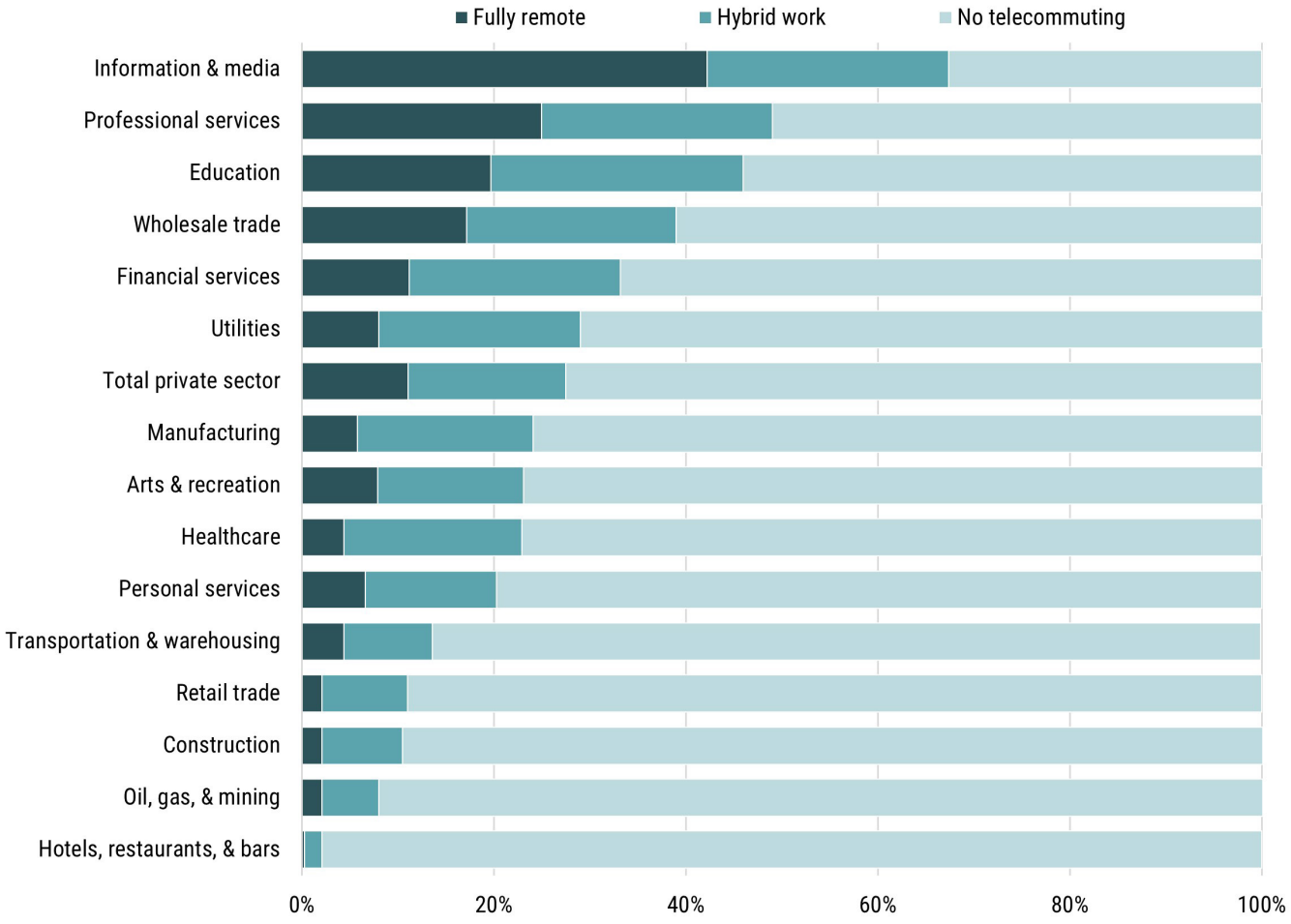


[1]Previous assessment of work automation before the rise of generative AI.
[2]Includes data from 47 countries, representing about 80 percent of employment across the world.
Source(s): McKinsey & Company, *The economic potential of generative AI: The next productivity frontier*, June 2023, Exhibit 11, p. 41.
Note(s): Figures may not sum, because of rounding.

Remote work is not an option for most occupations and industries.

While there is a persistent media buzz about remote work, the data surrounding this phenomenon are often misinterpreted or misunderstood. To begin, it's best to consider the extent of remote work in the modern workforce. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics implemented a temporary measure called a Business Response Survey to gauge the impact of a wide range of issues on employers. The results from August and September 2022, reported shortly before the rolling survey was discontinued, included work-from-home rates by industry sector (Figure 20). As would be expected, work-from-home rates for office-using workers, especially IT professionals, were quite high. Most of the remaining workers—e.g., waiters, maintenance workers, drivers, builders, postal employees—still had to be on the job, pandemic or not. The 2022 survey results may sound a bit dated at this point, but the unevenness of work-from-home potential is structural and thus unlikely to change much.

Figure 20. Share of Business Establishments with Telecommuting Options, US
Remote work varies dramatically by industry

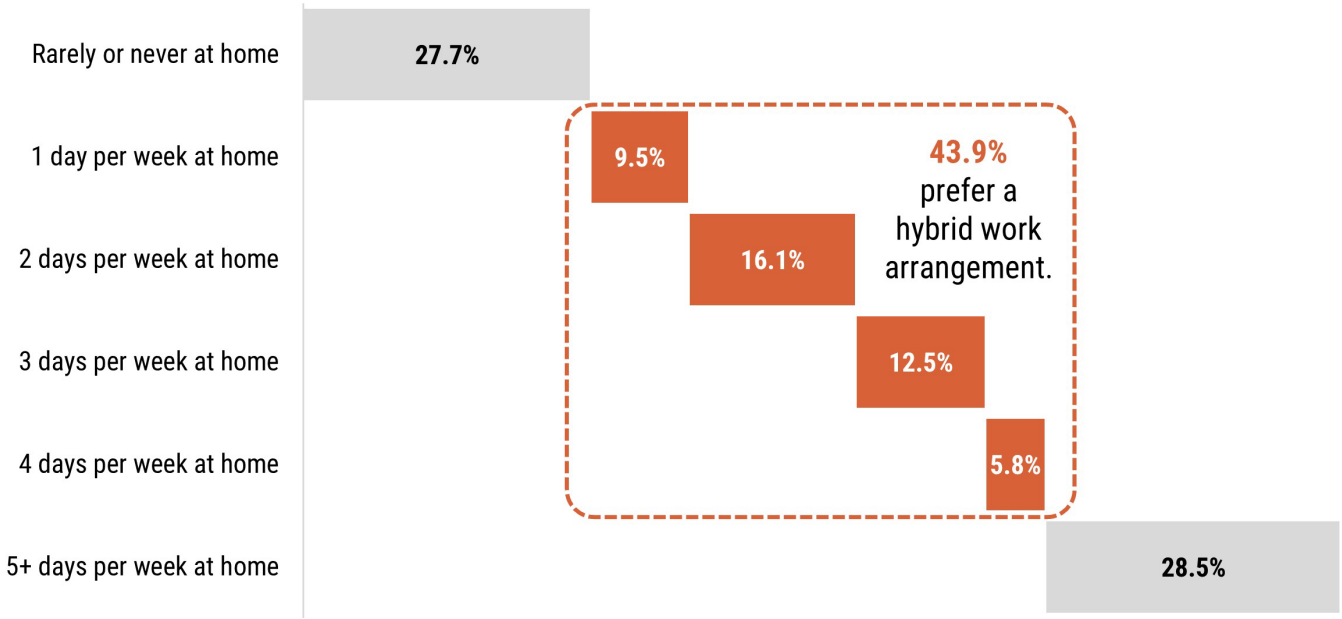


Source(s): BLS, Business Response Survey 2022, Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.
Note(s): The survey period covered August and September 2022.

For those eligible for remote work, hybrid options are preferred.

Work-from-home rates across the industry spectrum provide valuable context for interpreting data from other sources. For example, what work-from-home policies are preferred by workers who are theoretically able to do so? The *Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes* administered by a Stanford-led group of academic professionals on a rolling monthly basis assesses up to 10,000 workers in this eligibility category. The results are largely consistent from period to period (see Figure 21). There are those who want to be in the office every day and those who want to be home every day, but usually about one-half of all eligible workers are somewhere in the middle. They want a hybrid arrangement that mixes employer workplace with home office. This finding is likely to reflect the fact that most people lead busy lives that are complicated by the demands of children, aging parents, traveling spouses, and inflexible maintenance and delivery windows. It is no wonder that those workers who have the luxury to work from home do, in fact, desire a degree of flexibility in their schedules. Accommodating the needs of these workers is important. But it is equally important to bear in mind that they represent a small, albeit affluent, slice of the overall workforce.

Figure 21. Number of Work-From-Home Days Preferred by Eligible* Workers
Nearly one half of full-time salaried workers prefer a hybrid arrangement



*Eligible workers are those whose occupations are compatible with working from home.
Source(s): Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes (SWAA); Barrero, Jose Maria, Nicholas Bloom, and Steven J. Davis, 2021. "Why working from home will stick," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 28731.
Note(s): The Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes (SWAA) is a 12-month rolling monthly survey of US residents between the ages of 20 and 64 who earned $10,000+ in the prior year. The sample includes full-time wage and salary employees who worked 5 or more days during the survey reference week. The sample is re-weighted to match Current Population Survey on age, sex, education, and earnings. The sample covers N=36,332 responses from the September 2024 to August 2025 monthly waves of the SWAA. The exact survey question is, "Looking one year ahead, how often would you like to have paid workdays at home?"

CONCLUSION

Northern Colorado stands at a pivotal moment where demographic shifts, industry diversity, and educational assets converge to shape its workforce future. Weld County's rapid population gains, Fort Collins' role as a labor importer and higher education hub, and Greeley's industrial strengths underscore the region's complementary assets. Together, these dynamics provide a strong foundation for addressing employer demand across key opportunity sectors—ranging from IT and aerospace to food processing and advanced manufacturing—while also ensuring pathways for both degree-holding professionals and skilled workers without four-year credentials.

Looking ahead, regional partners have an opportunity to align data-driven insights with collaborative action. By leveraging the strengths of higher education institutions, tailoring training to in-demand occupations, and addressing barriers to participation, Northern Colorado can facilitate access to employment across all sectors of its growing, diverse economy. Anchored by strong local leadership and guided by national workforce trends, the region is well positioned to develop a talent strategy that not only supports the current and future needs of employers but also strengthens long-term resilience and opportunity for all residents.

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