

# NFIB Wisconsin: Jobs Report: Employment Index ticks up

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*More small businesses are raising compensation*

**MADISON, WI (March 06, 2026)** - [NFIB's February Jobs Report](#) shows that the Small Business Employment Index ticked up nearly 1 point to 103.5, showing further tightness after January consolidated the gains measured in December. This current reading is 2.3 points above the 2025 average of 101.2, and 3.5 points above the historical average of 100.

In February, 33% (seasonally adjusted) of small business owners reported job openings they could not fill, up 2 points from January. Unfilled job openings remain above the historical average of 24%. Twenty-eight percent have openings for skilled workers (up 3 points), and 10% have openings for unskilled labor (unchanged).

"February's numbers show a growing tightness in the small business labor market," said **Chief Economist Bill Dunkelberg**. "While the overall market remains in balance, employers need more skilled workers to fill open positions."

"Wisconsin's manufacturing heritage relies on skilled trades, so the fact that skilled job openings rose to 28% this month is a significant signal," said **NFIB Wisconsin State Director Luke Bacher**. "Quality of labor continues to be a pressing concern for the small business community. The search for qualified expertise remains the primary bottleneck for Wisconsin's growth."

A seasonally adjusted net 12% of owners plan to create new jobs in the next three months, down 4 points from January and the lowest level since May 2025. Despite the decrease, hiring plans are close to their average of a net 11%.

Overall, 54% of owners reported hiring or trying to hire in February, up 4 points

from January. Forty-six percent of owners (85% of those hiring or trying to hire) reported few or no qualified applicants for the positions they were trying to fill (up 2 points). Twenty-five percent reported few qualified applicants (unchanged), and 21% reported none (up 2 points).

In February, 15% of small business owners cited labor quality as their single most important problem, down 1 point from January and the fourth consecutive monthly decline. The last time labor quality, reported as the single most important problem, was this low was in April 2020. Labor costs, reported as the single most important problem by small business owners, remained at 9%.

Seasonally adjusted, a net 34% of small business owners reported raising compensation in February, up 2 points from January and the highest level since March 2025. A net 22% (seasonally adjusted) plan to raise compensation in the next three months, unchanged from January.

Click [here](#) to view the entire NFIB Jobs Report.