
Memorandum: Skilled Wage Rate Maps

Aug. 1, 2026

Construction Skilled Wage Rate Maps

The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's (DWD) Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards (BAS) has released the updated construction skilled wage rate guidance maps to assist sponsors in setting appropriate wage schedules for apprentices not subject to a collective bargaining agreement. This year's maps use data from the Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics (OEWS) survey. Skilled wage rate maps are **not** intended as a basis for the pay rates of journeyworkers or skilled workers but rather to provide transparency to the criteria DWD uses to approve apprenticeship wage scales. Furthermore, the base skilled wage rate published by DWD is to be used to inform the floor, not the ceiling, when it comes to apprentice compensation.

History of Skilled Wage Rate Maps

Wis. Admin. Code § DWD 295.02(2)(b) establishes the standards for a registered apprenticeship program in the State of Wisconsin. Included in these standards are, "a progressively increasing schedule of wages to be paid to the apprentice."¹ The department, through BAS, has a role in approving apprentice wage scales set by the sponsor as "adequate."² Apprentice wage scales are deemed "adequate" if they average 60% of the current journeyworker rate or skilled wage rate over the term of the apprenticeship training. For construction sector apprentices not covered by a collective bargaining agreement, the "skilled wage rate" is the "rate average, calculated as the mean, based on the geographical area of the appropriate local committee."³ BAS will not normally approve a skilled wage rate for the purpose of establishing apprentice wages that is more than 20% below the journeyworker rate in the area.

BAS's role is to approve the wage schedules in apprentice contracts. To do this, BAS must review the skilled wage rate for journeyworkers in the same geographical area. Historically, BAS has released the skilled wage rate maps that it used to confirm the adequacy of apprentice wage schedules. Those maps used survey data collected as part of the prevailing wage law, which was also used to set wage rates for journeyworkers on public works projects.

The survey data collected under Wisconsin's prevailing wage law to determine skilled wage rates by trade and geographical area is no longer available.⁴ The prevailing wage law was repealed in 2015, and the final annual survey was conducted in 2016. In 2018 and 2020, BAS

¹ Wis. Admin. Code §§ DWD 295.02(2)(b)7; 295.02(2)(b)14

² Wis. Admin. Code § DWD 295.05(1)

³ Wis. Admin. Code § DWD 295.05(2)

⁴ Wis. Stat. § 66.0903(3)(ar) (repealed by 2015 Wisconsin Act 55, effective January 1, 2017); Wis. Admin. Code § DWD 290.015.

used the average annual increase in construction wages by trade group to determine the adequacy of apprentice wages based on the 2016 prevailing wage data.

New Methodology

The new skilled wage rate maps are derived from the OEWS survey, which is a joint effort of the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the Local Employment and Wage Information System (LEWIS). The survey uses unemployment insurance information to identify the number of employees in a given occupation and the wages paid to them.

Apprenticeship occupations are organized according to the standard occupational classification system (SOC), which is a list of 867 detailed occupational definitions used by federal agencies for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data. The skilled wage rate is calculated based on the SOC code of the apprenticeship occupation and the jurisdictional area of the local apprenticeship committee. BAS's skilled wage rate maps identify the "experienced" wage rate for each SOC code, which is the mean of the top 2/3 of wages within that SOC code. BAS is using the "experienced" wage rate as the best analogue to the "skilled wage rate" identified by the Wisconsin administrative code.

Release of Skilled Wage Rate Maps

The OEWS employment data used to establish the new skilled wage rates is generally released by the end of May, each year. BAS aims to release updated skilled wage rate guidance maps and initiate the wage setting process following the publication of that data.