



***Greener Pathways:***  
**Paving Your Way to Career  
Success Starts with Understanding  
New Jersey's Labor Market**



## Today's Labor Market

Today's labor market is complex and confusing. Making decisions about which career to pursue and how to continue the journey on your career path can seem difficult. As you think about these things, you may have other questions:


- What skills are most important to employers today?
- How can I build skills that will help me succeed at any job?
- How do I know if the type of work I want to do is in demand by employers in my area?
- How do I make good decisions about education and training programs, especially for new or emerging types of jobs, such as green jobs?

To begin, you should understand that you are not just part of a New Jersey economy or even a U.S. economy anymore; it is a global economy. This means that even the basic, entry-level skill requirements of most jobs have increased for today's workers. Workers need to know more, and be able to do more, from day one on the job.

The good news is that there is a common set of skills that many employers agree are important for workers at all levels in many types of jobs across all industries. Learning these cross-industry skills will give a foundation to build upon as you follow a successful career path, adding more specific skills and work experiences as you go.

Workers today are not limited to a single job title. They must be able to perform job tasks across a wide range of occupations. To be successful, workers must also master both "hard" technical skills as well as "soft" personal skills, such as teamwork and leadership.

This brochure seeks to: 1) educate young people and job seekers about the changing workplace and the emerging skill requirements of New Jersey's 21st Century knowledge-based labor market; 2) provide a tool that counselors, parents, and teachers can use to help students and job seekers make critical life decisions about their education and career options; and 3) provide information on additional resources offered by the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development to guide students and job seekers as they find their place in the world of work.





## Skills Pyramid

Unlike the past, success in today's global labor market is based on strong competence in five high-priority skills that cross industries and occupations. In-depth knowledge of an industry and occupation-specific skills rank second and third in importance to employers. Having a wide range of the cross-industry high-priority skills (described inside) will serve as a solid foundation for building a successful career. Employers particularly value workers who are able to balance technical knowledge with strong communication and business skills.



## Six Workforce Trends and their Implications for the Skills Workers Need

A number of workplace trends have emerged in recent decades as skills and education are reshaped by increased globalization and technological advances.

### **Trend #1: Firms that harness knowledge and innovation — and the people who advance them — are most successful.**

What you know — and your ability to use different types of knowledge to create new products and ideas — is highly valued by employers. New types of jobs dedicated to encouraging knowledge sharing and innovation within the workplace are emerging.

### **Trend #2: Decentralization of business operations and management places more responsibility on individual workers and creates changes in the way some jobs are structured.**

As companies move away from traditional “top-down” management structures, managers are placing more responsibility on frontline workers to identify problems, create solutions, and use good judgment to take independent action. Companies will continue to use more contract workers, outsource important tasks, and create more nontraditional work relationships, such as telecommuting.

### **Trend #3: There is a growing reliance on technology in the workplace to increase workplace efficiency and to train workers, forcing many workers to upgrade their technology skills and perform more complex tasks.**

While technology seems to make some jobs easier, it often makes them more complex. As new tools and software are developed, workers must learn new program functions and take on new tasks in other areas. For example, while scanners make taking retail inventory easier, workers may be expected to take on more customer service roles involving more complex interactions.

### **Trend #4: Increasing diversity in the workplace requires workers to have a broader set of “soft skills.”**

Whether it relates to differences in culture and language or generational gaps, our increasingly diverse society is being reflected in the workplace. This diversity can make communication among workers and between workers and supervisors more complex, requiring workers to develop new people skills and other soft, nontechnical skills.

### **Trend #5: Increased employer concern over security, privacy, and ethics places more responsibility on all workers and requires higher skill levels for most workers.**

From terrorism to mismanagement to cyber attacks, employers have a lot to worry about in today’s complex, global, technology-driven marketplace. Although specialists exist to manage these threats, employers also expect all workers to help safeguard the firm against these types of problems, which demands greater knowledge and skills.

### **Trend #6: New patterns of national and international regulations, including new rules and deregulation, increase the level of knowledge that affected workers must acquire.**

In a global marketplace, many workers must navigate a web of state, national, and even international regulations to do their jobs effectively. Decentralization can also increase the complexity of jobs. In the case of financial deregulation, which removed barriers that had separated banking, insurance, and securities, many workers in these fields had to expand their knowledge to include rules and regulations from more than one of these areas, whereas in the past they were specialists in one area alone.





## Five High-Priority Skills Workers Must Have in the 21st Century Workforce

Due in part to the trends noted earlier, employers in today's economy value workers with five high-priority skills. These skills cut across industries and job titles, so students and job seekers should understand what these skills are, find ways to develop them through education and work experience, and vigorously market themselves to employers to gain a competitive advantage in the job market. These skills are:

- **Adaptability Skills**  
Adaptability skills include critical thinking and problem solving, time management, flexible role orientation, and lifelong learning. Workers who are rigid, unable to synthesize ideas or identify and solve problems in their area of work, or who resist change are at a severe disadvantage.
- **Information Management and Communication Skills**  
Information Management and Communication skills focus on the ability to gather data, understand it, pick out what is relevant, and convey it effectively to a range of different audiences through writing, public speaking, and teamwork. The ability to negotiate and cultural awareness and sensitivity are also included in this skill.
- **Business Skills**  
Basic business finance and project management, particularly in a more virtual work environment, are all part of the overall business skills workers need today. Product management and marketing also fall under the category of business skills.
- **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Skills**  
For success today, workers should have advanced knowledge in a math/technology/science/engineering discipline and must be adept at adapting to and applying new technologies at work, especially distance learning tools.
- **Interdisciplinary Skills**  
Skills that combine both science and engineering knowledge with business acumen are in demand across many industry sectors.

## Using the Skills on the Job

**Here's how you might use Information Management and Communication skills on the job today:**


When sending an email out to her project team, a solar panel installation project manager must be able to summarize the status of the project, assign next project steps, and resolve pending project issues in clear and concise language.

**Here's how you might use Interdisciplinary skills on the job today:**

An employee at an energy company must be able to design a project that identifies both the feasibility of its technology from an engineering perspective, as well as its profit and loss potential on the business side.

**Here's how you might use Business skills on the job today:**

A wind turbine salesperson might need to have a greater understanding of how the wind turbine is made, how it is installed, and how it is serviced in order to sell it.



## Key New Jersey Industries

New Jersey's labor market is diverse and exciting, with opportunities for the workers with the right skills. Some of New Jersey's leading and emerging industries include:

### Green Jobs

The green economy employed 200,521 workers in 2009 in three major areas: green energy production/renewable energy (about one-quarter of green employment), energy efficiency – green building/construction/design (about two-thirds of green employment), and environmental remediation/waste management reduction (approximately 8%). Nearly \$15.5 million in wages were paid to workers in green jobs in 2009 and New Jersey is said to be the number one state for renewable energy incentives. **For more information regarding New Jersey's Green workforce, visit <http://www.jobs4jersey.com/>.**

### Transportation, Logistics, and Distribution (TLD)

A key supplier of global markets, New Jersey has a vibrant TLD industry. The industry is critical for the state's economy, providing thousands of well-paying jobs. In 2009, TLD supported over 390,000 jobs in the state, and over 30,000 workers were hired each quarter to fill new and replacement jobs at wages significantly higher than wages in other industries. Key workforce challenges facing TLD in New Jersey are a high level of turnover among new hires who fail to meet performance expectations or job requirements and current workers who fail to upgrade their skills and obtain the training they need to move into higher positions. **For more information regarding the TLD workforce, visit <http://www.njtld.org/>.**

### Health Care

Health care is a vital component of New Jersey's economy and a critical source of jobs. The health care and social assistance industries employed more than 525,000 people in New Jersey in 2009, over 14% of the state's total workforce. Before health care reform, the industry was projected to add 7,600 jobs per year between 2008 and 2018, a number that may grow as increased consumer demand from previously uninsured individuals drives up employment. The health care sector includes a wide spectrum of career paths, including business, information technology, health care administration, and direct patient care. **For more information regarding the Health Care workforce, visit <http://www.jobs4jersey.com/>.**

### Advanced Manufacturing

Advanced manufacturing consists of four main industry groups: chemical manufacturing, computer and electronic product manufacturing, machinery manufacturing, and transportation equipment manufacturing. The advanced manufacturing industry generated approximately \$17 billion of New Jersey's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2009 and employed more than 127,000 workers statewide. New Jersey's chemical manufacturing industry makes up more than 7% of all U.S. chemical manufacturing. **For more information regarding the Advanced Manufacturing workforce, visit <http://www.jobs4jersey.com/>.**

### Financial Services

While financial services only made up 5.2% of overall total employment in New Jersey in 2010, its importance to New Jersey cannot be overstated. Finance and insurance contributes over 8% to the state's GDP and added 31,200 jobs from 1990 to 2007. There were roughly 199,000 jobs in finance and insurance in New Jersey in 2010. **For more information regarding the Financial Services workforce, visit <http://www.jobs4jersey.com/>.**

### Technology

New Jersey's Technology industry has supported a high-skill workforce for many years, and has the highest concentration of science-related professionals in the nation. New Jersey is home to more than 410,000 scientists and engineers, and is within commuting distance for another 754,000. It has also been ranked among the top 10 "most wired" states in the nation with regard to broadband accessibility. **For more information regarding the Technology workforce, visit <http://jobs4jersey.com>.**

### Biosciences

The Biosciences industry employed 125,965 in 2009, which was 4% of New Jersey's private-sector workforce. It contributes \$23 billion to the state's GDP and pays more than 8% of the state's total wages. The Biosciences industry includes three primary sectors: pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and medical device manufacturing. **For more information regarding the Biosciences Talent Network, visit <http://www.bio-1stop.org/>.**





## Employer Advice about Workplace Success

**When you follow your interests and pursue your passion, you will be successful at your job and your professional life will be fulfilling.** “Green/sustainability is a way of life. If you have passion for the concept, you will be very happy with your job.”

— New Jersey Green Employer

**Employers are looking for more than education alone. A strong foundation with a mix of work experience and high-priority skills will make a worker more employable.** “Getting a green education without any related experience in the industry is not very helpful in the labor market.”

— New Jersey Green Employer

“If you have training and experience on your résumé, that will put you to the top of the stack.”

— New Jersey Green Employer





## Choosing Your Path: Advice for Aligning Education and Career Goals

- Careers in the 21st century require workers to have higher, more technical skills. Make the most of your time in high school by taking rigorous courses that get you further on the path toward a degree or certification in your career.
- Before selecting your education path, do some self assessment and reflect on the work experiences you have had to figure out what you want to do in life. Your likes/interests should dictate your education, not the other way around.
- In selecting an education program or institution, consider the investment you are making against the labor market you will face and the salaries you can expect in the short term. Ask yourself if the return on investment makes sense.
- Make sure the credential you earn when your education program is complete is the desired credential of employers in your field.
- Make sure the educational institution that you invest in is accredited by the proper accrediting board or agency. All accreditations are not equal and do not hold the same value to employers.
- Research New Jersey's Consumer Report Card (<http://www.njtopps.com>) to learn how graduates of the schools in which you are interested have fared in the labor market after completing their program.
- Find out about the type of career services the school offers to students, including during school and after completion.
- Nearly every work experience teaches a lesson, even if it is learning what you **do not** want to do. Pursue internships, volunteer opportunities, and other work-based learning experiences to obtain real-world insight into a career and start developing the high-priority skills employers need.
- Reflect on all your work experiences when considering an education path. Every job is an experience on which to make postsecondary education decisions.
- Interview faculty and students. Talk to faculty and fellow students about how you might use your education at work, how the educational requirements relate to the latest skill standards set by employers, and the extent to which you can tailor your education to meet your career pursuits.
- Lifelong learning should always be an option. Find out if articulation agreements exist between educational institutions and the extent to which credits transfer so you can continue on your career path now or later down the road.
- Visit the campus of your school, especially the career services office, and get a feel for how connected the school is to the employer community. Good career services offices should have close partnerships with the employer community it serves.

## Resources

<http://www.jobs4jersey.com/> The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Web site provides information on job openings in a variety of industries, links to general career development and Unemployment Insurance resources, One-Stop Career Center office locations, and professional services groups. Users of the site can also access New Jersey's NJ OnRamp tool that allows job seekers to search for jobs, build and upload their résumé, and perform job matches of their skills with skills demanded by open job postings.

<http://www.NJCAN.org/> The New Jersey Career Assistance Navigator Web site can help you find assistance in planning for your career, including links to information on schools as well as financial aid.

<http://www.njtopps.com/> This Web site provides a searchable list of education providers in New Jersey, and allows you to compare the employment outcomes of select programs.

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