

Top Cities for Jobs in 2010

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There was a whole lot of shaking going on in 2009 -- job losses, volatile markets, recovery packages, a new president. But in surprising contrast to that, the rankings for top cities this year remained fairly steady.

"None of [the top 10] had a meteoric rise over the last year. Most of them went up and the couple that dropped did not drop dramatically," commented Kevin Klowden, managing economist at the Milken Institute, and co-author of Best-Performing Cities 2009 report. "The fact remains essentially that there are certain locations that have advantages in terms of lower costs, improved access to talent, certain key industry resources, and other factors that help to drive things."

The Milken Institute's report highlights the fact that the top cities didn't experience the same inflation in housing prices as the rest of the country, and so they avoided the devastating correction experienced elsewhere. Another factor in success was a prominence of the oil and gas industry. These two came together favorably for Texas, whose cities took five of the top 10 rankings.

All top performers, however, showed only mild increases in employment, if any at all. High marks in 2009 reflect how well a city's economic infrastructure weathered the storm, so it is important to look at a city's performance relative to the nation and other metro areas -- 2009 is not the year to focus on the numbers alone.

The Milken Institute rankings are based on a variety of factors, two of which include job and [salary](#) growth trends. Put together, these factors demonstrated a well-balanced local economy that should remain strong into the next year and likely beyond that for the following top 10 cities for jobs. Also listed is an example job position and its median annual salary in each town, according to online salary database PayScale.com.

1. Austin-Round Rock, Texas (pop. 1,653,000)

Last year's rank: 4

Job growth: 0.32%

Due to its well-prepared grads of top research institutions and its entrepreneurial spirit as evidenced by the high rate of self-employed workers, Austin has been cooking up a hot economy in recent years. It has been recruiting a lot of technology companies, due to low business costs in the area. Plus, Austin is positioning itself well in the clean tech industry, giving it an excellent outlook for the foreseeable future. Environmental engineer - \$73,500

2. Killeen-Temple-Fort Hood, Texas (pop. 379,000)

Last year's rank: 13

Job growth: 1.81%

A major army base, a strong concentration of health-care services, and robust higher education joined forces to earn this area the top spot for job growth in 2008, and it is continuing on that track in 2009. Texas A&M is in the process of building a new major satellite facility, drawing work that is already strong from Central Texas College's strong enrollment. Consolidation of military bases to Fort Hood has increased the population of stably employed workers as well. Additionally, the region had a very low rate of sub-prime mortgages, so the bursting housing bubble had a minimal effect on this region's economy. **Registered nurse - \$54,000**

3. Salt Lake City, Utah (pop. 1,116,000)

Last year's rank: 3

Job growth: -2.58%

Holding steady in third position is Salt Lake City, with its strong technology industry and high number of quality jobs. The finance industry is also strong here, but appears to have played the lending game a little smarter than most of the country. The region demonstrated much less speculative activity and was minimally affected by the sub-prime mortgage fallout. State budget problems have been occurring, as in many capitals across the country. However, cutbacks appear to be modest, and Utah as a whole appears to be poised for growth and strong recovery in the next year. **Financial analyst - \$61,300**

4. McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, Texas (pop. 1,116,000)

Last year's rank: 7

Job growth: -0.01%

McAllen has been coming on strong in the list of top cities over the past few years, driven by its top ranking for employment growth and high-tech GDP growth between the years of 2003-2008. The area has been luring companies with its low business costs, which has fueled employment growth numbers and helped to increase population. The service-based industry, which has taken such a hit elsewhere, continues to prosper. **Software developer - \$63,100**

5. Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, Texas (pop. 5,728,000)

Last year's rank: 16

2009 Job growth: -0.69%

As a leader in the oil and gas industry, and a major health services center, the greater Houston metro area rose from 16th to 5th in this year's top city rankings. Though it has experienced a slip in job growth in most recent months, partially due to cutbacks in natural gas exploration, forays into new energy technologies -- nuclear, wind, and other alternative sources -- are helping to set this area up for strong growth potential in the next year. **Petroleum engineer - \$114,500**

6. Durham, North Carolina (pop. 490,000)

Last year's rank: 21

2009 Job growth: -1.75%

Making an even bigger jump up the list is Durham with its strength in technology, biopharmaceutical, medical research, and higher education. This area is a hotspot for young professionals, which has spurred positive population growth and has helped mitigate the effects of falling property prices. Most recently, communication technology company Nortel Network's bankruptcy has caused some hardship and layoffs, but the strength of the health and education industries has given Durham the balance needed to get through economic difficulties smoothly. **Research laboratory technician - \$42,800**

7. Olympia, Washington (pop. 245,000)

Last year's rank: 9

2009 Job growth: -0.39%

Olympia, Washington's capital, offers a high percentage of government jobs. In recent years, the economy has also been bolstered by an influx of businesses relocating there due to its relatively low business and living costs compared to Seattle. This has encouraged employment rates; in fact, Olympia placed 14th in the nation for job growth between 2007-2008. However, significant state budget cutbacks are on the horizon, and employment with the state government is expected to take a dip in the coming year. **High school teacher - \$49,500**

8. Huntsville, Alabama (pop. 396,000)

Last year's rank: 5

2009 Job growth: -2.19%

If you're looking for a new place with a well-diversified economy, Huntsville might be the spot for you. This city has been ranking consistently well in the last few years with its diverse industry profile, which includes professional, scientific and technical services; computer and electronic product manufacturing; biotechnology; aerospace industry; and a growing military base. **Electrical engineer - \$77,400**

9. Lafayette, Louisiana (pop. 396,000)

Last year's rank: 14

2009 Job growth: -0.37%

High energy prices have been a boon to Lafayette's oil and gas exploration industry, pushing this metro area into the top 10 for the first time. This side of the economy is extremely vulnerable to price fluctuations, however, and for sustained growth and stability, Lafayette will need to begin moving away from reliance on its traditional industries for revenue. A focus on developing a skilled workforce, luring new businesses, and continued building of the already strong education and health industries are essential for prosperity down the road. **Engineering technician, oil & gas - \$51,100**

10. Raleigh-Cary, North Carolina (pop. 1,089,000)

Last year's rank: 2

2009 Job growth: -3.36%

This metropolitan area's economy is founded on a strong base that educational and research institutions have created with the business community. It has laid the groundwork for Raleigh's strong technology, biopharmaceutical, and professional and business services industries. There seems to be a little bit of rough road ahead with state budget constraints leading to cutbacks, and looming changes to the pharmaceutical industry. However, Raleigh is expected to fare much better than other major centers during the readjustment and recovery. **Information technology (IT) manager- \$80,700**

Source: Salary data from PayScale.com. The salaries listed are median annual salaries for full-time workers with 5-8 years of experience and include any bonuses, commissions, or profit sharing.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin