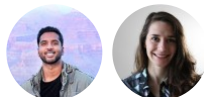


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Best Places for STEM Grads 2016



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College graduates entering science, technology, engineering and math fields in 2016 will find a robust job market and the potential for handsome paychecks.

According to the most recent data, the unemployment rate for STEM workers was 2.3% in June 2015, which compares with the 5.3% jobless rate nationwide among all industries in the same period, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The BLS estimates growth in STEM jobs will top 9 million over the decade from 2012 to 2022.

STEM employees are sought after and often earn more than workers in other industries. The average STEM salary was \$85,570 in 2014, compared with \$47,230 for all occupations, according to the BLS.

To identify the best places for STEM graduates, NerdWallet analyzed the nation's 330 largest metro areas. We examined the most recent federal data available from the BLS on salaries, concentration of STEM jobs and unemployment rate, as well as U.S. Census Bureau data on the cost of median monthly rent in each location.

NerdWallet's analysis

STEM opportunities span the U.S. Sure, the STEM field brings to mind images of Silicon Valley, with its Google-sized behemoths and up-and-coming startups, and the tech mecca certainly did make our list. But our top 10 metro areas aren't only in California. We found opportunities for STEM jobs in seven other states, including Alabama, Colorado, Washington, North Carolina, Florida, New Jersey and Texas.

Cost of living is a factor. Some places made our cut because the cost of living is lower than in the cities on the coasts. For example, when we crunched the numbers on the average STEM salary and median monthly rent in each metro area, we found that a STEM worker in Huntsville, Alabama, will pay about 9% of his or her income on rent, compared with a peer in San Jose, California, who can expect housing to claim at least 17% of his or her salary.

Research opportunities aplenty. Several places ranked high on our list because of STEM-related research opportunities. Huntsville and

Durham, North Carolina, each boast a massive research park. Boulder, Colorado, is home to over a dozen federally funded laboratories; and in Richland, Washington, thousands find jobs at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

Best places for STEM grads 2016

1. Huntsville, Alabama

Huntsville, near the state's northern border, has a lot to offer STEM grads. The city has the lowest median monthly rent in our top 10 (\$718 a month in 2014) and boasts higher-than-average STEM salaries. Of the 330 cities we analyzed, the average STEM salary was \$84,222; in Huntsville, it was \$95,150. About 29,000 people work at Cummings Research Park, a science and technology hub that encompasses nearly 4,000 acres. Dozens of Fortune 500 companies have a presence at the research park, including AT&T, IBM and Comcast. Huntsville stands out in particular for its opportunities in aerospace and defense. The research park hosts the Boeing Co., United Technologies, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon. The Huntsville area is home to the Army's massive Redstone Arsenal, which employs over 35,000 people, many in the science and engineering fields. NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center is located on the grounds of the Redstone Arsenal and is the area's third-largest employer.

2. San Jose, Sunnyvale and Santa Clara, California

This Silicon Valley metro area boasts more STEM employees per 1,000 jobs than any other city in our analysis. The metro area that is

synonymous with tech includes companies such as Adobe Systems, Cisco Systems, Applied Materials, eBay and AMD. STEM employees here make more money than in any other metro area we analyzed. The average STEM worker in all 330 cities in our study earned \$84,222 in annual income, compared with the San Jose area's \$122,398. However, workers here must allocate a larger percentage of their salaries to cover the valley's high cost of housing, which has the most expensive median monthly rent (\$1,779 a month in 2014) in our analysis.

3. Boulder, Colorado

Boulder is loaded with a variety of STEM companies, in fields such as aerospace, bioscience, IT and software. The city is home to over 260 clean tech companies, which focus on environmentally friendly technology. Boulder's research institutions, including the University of Colorado Boulder and federally funded labs, boost the city's economy as well. Federal offices in Boulder include the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Weather Service and over a dozen others. In February 2016, Boulder had one of the lowest unemployment rates in our 330-city analysis: 2.7%, compared with the 5.2% national average for the same month.

4. Seattle, Bellevue and Everett, Washington

The Puget Sound area is home to many potential employers for STEM grads, including aerospace giant Boeing, which enlists professionals in cybersecurity, engineering and IT. In addition to Microsoft and Amazon, recent

graduates could find opportunities at Expedia, Zillow, Zulily and Tableau, all based in Seattle. STEM wages are higher here than in all but three other metro areas in our study. The average STEM employee in the Seattle area earns six figures (\$101,033).

5. Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina

This region is defined by its universities — Duke University in Durham and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill — as well as its booming health care and science technology industries. At about 7,000 acres, the area's Research Triangle Park is the largest science park in the U.S. Over 46,000 employees work in the park's 200-plus companies, which range from biotechnology and life sciences to IT to clean tech. IBM and Cisco are the largest employers in the park. Thanks in part to these employers, the area boasts one of the highest concentrations of STEM employees in our entire study. Of the 330 metro areas analyzed, the Durham area is one of only nine that has over 100 STEM employees per 1,000 jobs.

6. San Francisco, Redwood City and South San Francisco, California

This metro area stretches from San Francisco at the northern tip of the peninsula down to South San Francisco and Redwood City. Between the companies in those cities and those farther south and east in Silicon Valley, recent grads have access to employers like Google, Twitter, Yelp and more. The average STEM employee living in this area earned \$107,722 in 2015. That average salary is second only to nearby San Jose. STEM employees in

the San Francisco area command high wages, but like their peers in the valley, they also face a high cost of living when it comes to housing.

7. Kennewick and Richland, Washington

This metro area in southeast Washington, also known as the Tri-Cities, includes Kennewick, Richland and Pasco. STEM graduates moving to this area may find opportunities at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, which employs over 4,400 people and is partially funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. The average STEM employee in this area makes \$92,635 a year, and the median monthly rent (\$859 a month in 2014) is relatively inexpensive compared with the other metro areas in our top 10. However, in February 2016, this region had an 8.1% unemployment rate, which is nearly three percentage points higher than the national average for the same month.

8. Palm Bay, Melbourne and Titusville, Florida

These three cities in east-central Florida are part of the Space Coast, named for the nearby Kennedy Space Center and Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. The aerospace industry bolsters the local economy and could provide opportunities for STEM grads in that field. Employers include Lockheed Martin Space Systems, URS Corp., United Launch Alliance, Rockwell Collins and Northrop Grumman. The concentration of STEM workers in this area is high, at 96.4 per 1,000 jobs. For context, the median number of STEM employees among all 330 cities in our study is 40.95 per 1,000 workers.

9. Trenton and Princeton, New Jersey

This metro area includes Trenton, the state capital, along with the rest of Mercer County, which includes Princeton and Princeton University. STEM graduates may find opportunities at the headquarters of the energy company NRG or by commuting on the train to Philadelphia or New York City. The Trenton area's average STEM salary (\$92,824) and concentration of STEM employees (98.42 per 1,000 jobs) are higher than the average metro area in our 330-city analysis.

10. Austin and Round Rock, Texas

The Austin area is home to many tech companies that provide opportunities for STEM grads — including an IBM research lab, an Apple operation and an Accenture office, each of which employs thousands. Dell's headquarters are located about 20 miles north of Austin, in Round Rock. The Austin-Round Rock area also stands out for having one of the lowest unemployment rates in our analysis, which was 3.1% in February 2016.

Best places for STEM grads 2016

Move your cursor to the table below and scroll horizontally and vertically to see the data for the top 100 metro areas.

Rank	Place	STEM employees per 1,000 jobs in 2015	Average 2015 STEM salary
	IA		

24	Ames, IA	87.34	\$65,698
25	Jackson, MI	67.03	\$75,841.0
26	Decatur, AL	43.22	\$87,403
27	Bloomington, IL	63.17	\$83,081.
28	Dayton, OH	65.36	\$79,355.

METHODOLOGY

Here's how we calculated the score for each of the 330 largest U.S. metro areas.

1. The number of STEM employees per 1,000 total jobs is 40% of the score. Data are from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2015 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates](#).
2. Annual average wage for STEM jobs is 25% of the score. Data are from the Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2015 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates.
3. Median monthly rent for each metro area is 25% of the score. Data are from the [U.S.](#)

Census Bureau's 2014 American Community Survey.

4. Unemployment rate is 10% of the score. Data are from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics February 2016 Unemployment Rates for Metropolitan Areas](#).

This analysis includes data for all jobs classified as computer and mathematical occupations, architecture and engineering occupations or life, physical and social science occupations.

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