

The Best Places in Arizona for Job Seekers

by [Annie Wang](#) on October 28, 2013

While Arizona was hit hard by the recession, the Grand Canyon State is on the rise. Over the next five years, [Arizona](#) is expected to have 3 percent job growth – the fastest growth rate in the nation – and 3.6 percent growth in household income, the second-highest in the nation. NerdWallet crunched the numbers to find the best places for job seekers in Arizona.

We found the best places for job seekers in the state by asking the following questions:

1. **Is the city growing?** We assessed growth in the working-age population, ages 16 and older, from 2009 to 2011 to ensure that the city was attracting workers and exhibiting a trend of upward population growth.
2. **Can you afford to live in the city comfortably?** We measured a city's median household income to see if workers made a good living. We also analyzed the monthly homeowner costs, including mortgage payments, to see if the city had a reasonable cost of living.
3. **Are most people employed?** We looked at the unemployment rate.

For more information, check out our cost of living calculator [here](#).

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1. Sahuarita

Located on the north end of Green Valley, Sahuarita is situated approximately 15 miles south of Tucson. Sahuarita is surrounded by beautiful [natural attractions](#) such as the Pena Blanca Lake, Madera Canyon and Tohono O'odham Nation. The town saw 13.1 percent growth in the working-age population between 2009 and 2011, and households earned a high median income of \$72,781. Additionally, Sahuarita has an unemployment rate of 6.9 percent. The town's [largest employers](#) include Freeport-McMoRan, Asarco and Farmers Investment Co. Sahuarita is located in Pima County, which offers job assistance to all county residents at its [One-Stop Career Centers](#). These centers provide career counseling, job-searching assistance and occupational-training programs.

2. Flagstaff

Flagstaff is the largest city in northern Arizona and a popular travel destination, with over 5 million visitors every year. Due to the mild climate, the city is a mecca for [outdoor enthusiasts](#), with miles of trails in 14 parks and skiing opportunities in the San Francisco Peaks, located 14 miles from downtown. Flagstaff saw 11.7 percent growth in the working-age population between 2009 and 2011, and the unemployment rate is a low 6.3 percent. [Major employers in](#)

[Flagstaff](#) include Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff Medical Center and W.L. Gore & Associates. Northern Arizona University provides [career resources](#) online on how to search for jobs, network and interview. Additionally, its students and alumni can take advantage of individual career counseling as well as resume and cover letter reviews.

3. El Mirage

El Mirage, situated in Maricopa County, is the [gateway to the Northwest Valley](#) and is located approximately 25 miles northwest of Phoenix. The town saw 19.9 percent growth in the working-age population from 2009 to 2011. The [largest employers in El Mirage](#) include Dysart Unified School District, Walmart and Parks & Sons. The town government has embarked on an [ambitious plan](#) to build up El Mirage's economy by revitalizing the downtown area and attracting new businesses.

4. Queen Creek

Queen Creek is located in both Maricopa and Pinal Counties, southeast of Phoenix. Residents see [330 days of sunshine](#) per year and have access to natural recreation, with San Tan and Goldmine Mountains just south of town. The town saw 19.2 percent growth in the working-age population between 2009 and 2011, and households earned a median of \$83,601. [Top employers](#) in the town include Queen Creek Unified School District, Canyon State Academy and Target. The [Greater Phoenix Economic Council](#) aims to attract businesses to the Phoenix metropolitan area by connecting private companies to Arizona's key leaders as well as providing market data and analysis.

5. Surprise

Located in Maricopa County, Surprise is approximately 25 miles northwest of Phoenix. Surprise has it all – the town is surrounded by the beautiful Sonoran Desert, Surprise Lake and the White Tank Mountains. Additionally, sports fans will love that [Surprise Stadium](#) is the Spring Training home of the Texas Rangers and Kansas City Royals. The town saw 19.7 percent growth in its working-age population from 2009 to 2011, and the median household income was \$60,687. [Major employers in Surprise](#) include Dysart Unified School District, Walmart and Fry's Food and Drug. Surprise is home to the [AZ TechCelerator](#), a business incubator focused on innovative technology by providing growing businesses with affordable workspace and experienced mentors.

6. Goodyear

Located at the foot of the Sierra Estrella, Goodyear is situated approximately 15 miles west of Phoenix, in Maricopa County. The town was [originally named](#) for the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, which bought 16,000 acres in 1917 to grow cotton to make rubber tires. Goodyear saw 14.4 percent growth in the working-age population between 2009 and 2011, and households earned a median income of \$72,500. [Goodyear's major employers](#) include Lockheed Martin, Macy's and West Valley Hospital. Maricopa County offers job seekers free workshops in the [Maricopa Workforce Connections Career Center](#) on interview techniques, resume writing and job-search skills.

7. Gilbert

Gilbert, Arizona's [seventh-largest city](#) by population, is located 30 miles southeast of Phoenix and directly south of Mesa. Gilbert's households earned a median income of \$80,090, and the unemployment rate is only 5.9 percent. [Gilbert's top employers](#) include Banner Health, GoDaddy and Mercy Gilbert Medical Center. Nearby Mesa is home to [The Leadership Centre](#), which is a non-profit organization that provides education, resources and tools to build leadership skills to help people become more effective business and community leaders.

8. Marana

Marana is a town approximately 25 miles northwest of Tucson, in southeast Arizona. Marana residents enjoy a median household income of \$70,705 while the town's unemployment rate is at 6.6 percent. [Top employers](#) in town include the Hunter Contracting, FLSmith Krebs and Sargent Aerospace & Defense. Marana's Chamber of Commerce launched the [Marana Job Creation Incentive Program](#) in January 2013, which is aimed at developing skilled, career-oriented jobs by helping businesses find and train new employees.

9. Chandler

Located 20 miles east of Phoenix, Chandler is bordered by Tempe to the north and Gilbert in the south. Chandler is Arizona's [fourth most populous city](#) and has [330 days of sunshine](#) per year. Chandler's households earned a median household income of \$71,343 while the unemployment rate remains low, at 6.1 percent. [Major employers in Chandler](#) include Bank of America, Wells Fargo and [Intel](#), which built its second-largest site in the city. Chandler is home to the Chandler-Gilbert Community College, which has a [Center for Workforce Development](#) that helps people gain the job training they need with both off and online programs.

10. Maricopa

Incorporated in 2003, Maricopa is a young city located 30 miles south of Phoenix. Maricopa's [residents](#) are well-educated – nearly 58 percent of all residents have earned an associate's degree or higher. The city saw 11.8 percent growth in the working age population between 2009 and 2011, and households earned a median income of \$65,556. The [largest employers in Maricopa](#) include Harrah's Ak-Chin, Volkswagen and Pinal Feeding Company. Maricopa's Chamber of Commerce provides plenty of [online resources](#) for local businesses looking to expand and grow their company.

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Rank	City	Nearest Big City	Working-Age Population Change (2009 to 2011)	Median Household Income (2011)	Monthly Homeowner Costs (2011)	Unemployment Rate (2013)	Overall Score
1	Sahuarita	Tucson	13.1%	\$72,781	\$1,633	6.9%	73.1
2	Flagstaff	-	11.7%	\$48,758	\$1,608	6.3%	68.9
3	El Mirage	Phoenix	19.9%	\$48,084	\$1,364	8.7%	68.0
4	Queen Creek	Mesa, Phoenix	19.2%	\$83,601	\$2,129	8.3%	67.3
5	Surprise	Phoenix	19.7%	\$60,687	\$1,611	8.9%	66.2
6	Goodyear	Phoenix	14.4%	\$72,500	\$1,732	8.3%	64.8
7	Gilbert	Mesa, Phoenix	1.2%	\$80,090	\$1,860	5.9%	63.5
8	Marana	Tucson	2.7%	\$70,705	\$1,665	6.6%	61.7
9	Chandler	Phoenix	-2.4%	\$71,343	\$1,712	6.1%	58.0
10	Maricopa	Phoenix	11.8%	\$65,556	\$1,654	9.1%	56.4

Methodology

The overall score for each city was derived from the following measures:

1. Population change from 2009 to 2011 from the U.S. Census (2009 and 2011 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS))
2. Median household income from the U.S. Census (2011 ACS, half-weighted)
3. Monthly homeowner costs with mortgage payments from the U.S. Census (2011 ACS, half-weighted)
4. Unemployment rate from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013)

30 communities designated as places by the U.S. Census were included in this analysis. Only places with a population greater than 25,000 were considered.

<http://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/2013/best-places-arizona-job-seekers/>