

Alternative Measures of County Employment and Wages

Three widely used measures of county employment and wages by place of work are (1) employment and payroll in the *County Business Patterns* (CBP) series from the Census Bureau, (2) employment and wages from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) program from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and (3) wage and salary disbursements and employment from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). These measures differ in source data and coverage.

The CBP data are derived from Census Bureau business establishment surveys and federal administrative records. The QCEW data are tabulations of monthly employment and quarterly wages of workers who are covered by state unemployment insurance programs or by the unemployment insurance program for federal employees.¹ The BEA estimates of employment and wages are primarily derived from the BLS data; the estimates for industries that are either not covered or not fully covered in the QCEW are also based on supplemental data from other agencies, such as the Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Railroad Retirement Board.

The coverage of the Census Bureau data differs from that of the BLS data primarily because the Census Bureau data exclude most government employees and because the BLS data cover civilian government employees.² The CBP data also exclude several private industries that are partly covered by the QCEW: crop and animal production; rail transportation; insurance and employee benefit funds; trusts, estates, and agency accounts; and private households. However, the CBP data cover the employees of educational institutions, membership organizations, and small nonprofit organizations in other industries more completely than the BLS data.³ In addition, the Census Bureau reports employment only for the month of March; the BLS employment data are quarterly and annual averages of monthly data.

In 2001, both BLS and BEA began to include employees of Indian tribal councils in local government. These employees were previously included in the relevant private industries.⁴ In the Census Bureau data, these employees are still classified in private industries.

BEA estimates of employment and wages differ from the BLS

data because BEA adjusts the estimates to account for employment and wages that are not covered or not fully covered by the unemployment insurance programs. BEA adds estimates of employment and wages to the BLS data to bridge small gaps in coverage for nonprofit organizations that do not participate in the unemployment insurance program (in several industries), for students and their spouses employed by colleges or universities, for elected officials and members of the judiciary, for interns employed by hospitals and by social service agencies, and for insurance agents classified as statutory employees. In addition, BEA uses supplemental source data to estimate most, or all, of the employment and wages for the following: farms, farm labor contractors and crew leaders, private households, private elementary and secondary schools, religious membership organizations, rail transportation, and military. BEA also adjusts for employment and wages subject to unemployment insurance but not reported by employers. Other adjustments to wages include estimates for unreported tips, judicial fees paid to jurors and witnesses, compensation of prison inmates, and marriage and license fees paid to justices of the peace.⁵

The Census Bureau released 2011 data for total employment and payrolls for counties on its Web site on April 2013. BLS released county data on total employment and average weekly pay for 2012 on its Web site on September 9, 2013. BEA released preliminary estimates for 2012 and revised estimates for 2010–2011 of total wage employment and total wage and salary disbursements for counties on its Web site on November 21, 2013.

5. For a detailed description of the sources and methods used to prepare the estimates, visit www.bea.gov/regional/methods.cfm.

National Totals of BEA County Estimates of Wages and Salaries and CBP Payrolls and QCEW Wages

[Billions of dollars]

	2010	2011	2012
Total CBP payrolls.....	4,941.0	5,164.9	n.a.
Plus: Differences in coverage:			
QCEW civilian government wages ¹	1,031.6	1,033.7	n.a.
Other differences, net ²	3.1	18.7	n.a.
Equals: Total QCEW wages.....	5,975.7	6,217.3	6,490.6
Plus: BEA adjustments:			
For unreported wages and unreported tips on employment tax returns.....	69.7	78.1	80.8
For wages and salaries not covered or not fully covered by unemployment insurance:			
Private.....	194.6	205.4	217.5
Government.....	131.6	130.7	131.0
Other BEA adjustments ³	-2.9	-3.2	-2.8
Equals: BEA estimates of wages and salaries ⁴	6,368.6	6,628.3	6,917.2

n.a. Not available

1. Adjusted to remove the wages of Indian tribal councils that are included in the Census Bureau's total payroll data.

2. Includes differences of coverage in private education, membership organizations, and government.

3. Adjusted to remove wages and salaries of employees of U.S. companies stationed overseas and to reflect updates to QCEW data.

4. Consists of the earnings of persons who live in the United States and of foreign residents working in the United States. The regional total differs from the national estimate; see "Personal income in the NIPAs and State Personal Income," SURVEY OF CURRENT BUSINESS 93 (November 2013): 57.

NOTE: Details may not equal totals due to rounding.

Michael Jadoo

1. The QCEW data account for 93 percent of BEA's wages and salaries.

2. The Census Bureau data cover only those government employees who work in government hospitals, federally chartered savings institutions and credit unions, liquor stores, and wholesale liquor establishments, and university publishers. The BLS data in most states exclude state and local elected officials, members of the judiciary, state national and air national guardsmen, temporary emergency employees, and employees in policy and advisory positions.

3. The BLS data do not cover certain religious elementary and secondary schools because a Supreme Court decision exempts some of these schools from unemployment compensation taxes. The BLS data also exclude college students (and their spouses) who are employed by the school in which they are enrolled and student nurses and interns who are employed by hospitals as part of their training. In half of the states, the BLS data only include nonprofit organizations with four or more employees during 20 weeks in a calendar year.

4. For example, employees of casinos owned by tribal councils were included in "Amusement, Gambling, and Recreation Industries."