

King County Profile

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Overview

Regional context

King County's current boundaries situate it between Puget Sound to the west and the crest line of the Cascade Range to the east. It borders Snohomish County to the north and Pierce County to the south. King County is very geographically diverse, with points at sea level and a high point of nearly 8,000 feet. The human geography of King County is also diverse, characterized by high-density urbanization along the shores of Puget Sound, suburban communities to the east of Lake Washington, rural communities to the southeast and remote towns in the Cascade foothills. There are 39 towns and cities located in King County.

King County and Seattle, the county seat, are the most populous county and city in Washington state, respectively. King County ranks 11th in the state in terms of total land area and first in the state for population density.

King County is the central county in the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), consisting of King, Pierce and Snohomish County, belongs to the Seattle-Bellevue-Everett Metropolitan Division (MD), and is part of the nine-county Seattle Consolidated Statistical Area (CSA).

Local economy

European-American settlement of the area now known as King County began in the 1840s. Natural resources – especially timber – played a major role in King County's early history. Maritime trade spurred the development and growth of Seattle, which was established in 1869. Seattle became an important stopping point for those hoping to prospect for gold in Alaska and the Yukon Territory at the close of the 19th century.

The early 20th century was a time of population growth and industrial diversification. In more recent decades, the regional economy became highly dependent on the aerospace industry, which was centered on the Boeing Company.

Throughout the 1990s, the county underwent extraordinary gains in employment, population and wages. Despite the county's increasing cost of living, especially in housing, the high-tech job boom lured well-educated newcomers to the area. King County continues to hold a strong national reputation as a hub for information technology development.

In 2005, the county was renamed in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The area is culturally diverse and aims to be a place where people from a variety of backgrounds can feel at home. King County has an active port, maintaining extensive connections to East Asian markets.

In 2008, King County nonfarm employment reached a peak in excess of 1.2 million jobs and then fell rapidly into recession with the rest of the nation. From 2008 to 2010, average employment plummeted by about 6.4 percent, with the loss of approximately 79,000 jobs. King County has led the statewide economic recovery since turning the corner in 2010. In 2019, King County accommodated nearly 1.47 million jobs and was characterized by a diverse labor market.

Major industry sectors in King County supplying more than 100,000 estimated jobs include professional and business services, education and health services, government, retail trade, leisure and hospitality, information and manufacturing.

The pandemic-induced recession of 2020 interrupted the long arc of local employment growth. From January to April, total nonfarm employment plummeted by more than 158,000 jobs – more than 10 percent. Since April, employment has increased. As of November (preliminary), employment was still down 5.5 percent compared to November 2019, with different industry-specific experiences beneath the surface.

Geographic facts

	King County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	2,115.6	11
People per square mile, 2020	1,068.65	1

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management

Outlook

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic recession, King County was relatively well-situated. King County has been at the center of the statewide recovery from the last recession. All major industry sectors expanded employment since 2010. Industries reporting the largest proportional post-recession gains (2010 to 2018) include construction, retail trade, information, leisure and hospitality, and professional and business services. The largest absolute gains were observed in professional and business services and retail trade (which, notably, includes online retail). King County’s early recovery was driven in large part by employment growth in manufacturing and professional and business services. As the recovery matured, growth was observed in most industries. From 2018 to 2019, employment was expanded or maintained in all major industries except government and wholesale trade

The pandemic disrupted all industries at a local level, with employment patterns varying substantially from one industry to the next. Leisure and hospitality lost the largest number of jobs (down nearly 60,000 jobs from January to April, not seasonally adjusted). As of November, this set of industries was still down 44,000 jobs or about 30 percent. At the other end of the continuum, industries such as information and professional and business services maintained or even expanded employment over the year, insulated by the ability to establish telecommuting arrangements for their workforces.

Labor force and unemployment

Current labor force and unemployment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page on ESD’s labor market information website.

King County's 2019 labor force was about 1.29 million, with an average annual unemployment rate of 2.8 percent. Within this estimate, about 1.25 million county residents were counted among the employed and nearly 36,000 were counted among the unemployed.

The unemployment rate in King County had been steadily declining since reaching a peak level of 9.5 percent in early 2010 and has been in the 3 to low 4 percent range since 2015. In 2019, the average unemployment rate was 2.8 percent. Throughout the recession and recovery, King County's unemployment rate has been lower than that of Washington state.

In 2020, the unemployment rate increased from a record low 2.2 percent in February to a record high 14.9 percent in April. Over the course of the year, the unemployment rate decreased bit by bit, reaching 4.3 percent in November (preliminary). The downside of the unemployment report shows a declining labor force in recent months.

Source: Employment Security Department

Industry employment

Current industry employment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page on ESD's labor market information website.

King County is the largest labor market in the state. In 2019, more than 42 percent of all nonfarm jobs in Washington state were reported from King County-located businesses.

King County averaged nearly 1.47 million nonfarm jobs in 2019. From 2018 to 2019, average annual employment increased by 36,300 jobs or 2.5 percent. By comparison, Washington state as a whole saw the addition of about 67,100 jobs over the same time period, an increase of 2.0 percent.

- Goods-producing industries supplied an average of 186,400 jobs in 2019, making up nearly 13 percent of the total count of nonfarm jobs. Over the year, employment rose by 4,400 or 2.4 percent.
 - Employers in the construction industry added 1,400 jobs (1.8 percent) from 2018 to 2019. The rate of growth in construction has slowed over the past couple years. Employment in construction dropped sharply in April 2020, but picked up quickly afterward. By November (preliminary), employment was up over the year.
 - Manufacturing expanded by 3,000 from 2018 to 2019, following a dip in the previous couple years. The manufacturing industry was hit hard in 2020, as demand for aircraft dropped amidst the pandemic. As of November 2020, the tally of local manufacturing jobs was down nearly 14 percent compared to November 2019.
- Service-providing employment accounted for 87.3 percent of all nonfarm jobs in King County in 2019. From 2018 to 2019, service-providing industries collectively added 31,900 jobs or 2.5 percent.
 - Average annual employment in all major private sector service-providing industries (except wholesale trade) expanded over the year. The largest year-to-year employment gains were made in information, professional and business services, and educational and health services.
 - The collection of industries that make up the information sector added 10,400 jobs or about 9.4 percent. Nearly half of the observed job gains were attributable to hiring by software publishers.

- Professional and business services, which includes professional scientific and technical services, management, and administrative and support services, added 6,100 jobs or 2.6 percent over the year.
- Education and health services added 4,100 jobs or 2.2 percent. The largest year-over-year gains were observed in social assistance.
- Government employment contracted by 2,300 jobs over the year. Losses were concentrated among state government educational services (i.e. state colleges and universities).

For historical industry employment data, [contact an economist](#).

Source: Employment Security Department

Industry employment by age and gender

The Local Employment Dynamics (LED) database, a joint project of state employment departments and the U.S. Census Bureau, matches state employment data with federal administrative data. Among the products is industry employment by age and gender. All workers covered by state unemployment insurance data are included; federal workers and non-covered workers, such as the self-employed, are not. Data are presented by place of work, not place of residence.

King County highlights:

King County has a young workforce, relative to the rest of Washington state. In 2019, workers age 25 to 44 made up 49.3 percent of the workforce. For comparison, the statewide proportion of workers age 25 to 44 was 45.8 percent. The proportion of workers younger than age 24, as well as those age 55 and older in King County, is lower than observed statewide.

In 2019, men held 53.0 percent and women held 47.0 percent of the jobs in King County. There were substantial differences in gender dominance by industry.

- The proportionally male-dominated industries included goods producers such as mining (84.9 percent), construction (80.4 percent), and manufacturing (70.0 percent). Among service-providing industries, information and transportation and warehousing stand out as the most male-dominated industries (68.5 and 67.6 percent respectively).
- The most female-dominated industries included healthcare and social assistance (75.0 percent), educational services (67.0 percent), other services (59.8 percent) and finance and insurance (58.0 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

In 2019, there were more than 1.43 million jobs covered by unemployment insurance, with a total annual payroll of approximately \$133.8 billion.

The 2018 average annual wage was \$93,319. For comparison, the statewide average annual wage was \$69,615.

The median hourly wage in 2018 was \$33.26, above the state's median hourly wage of \$25.98.

Personal income

Personal income includes earned income, investment income, and government payments such as Social Security and Veterans Benefits. Investment income includes income imputed from pension funds and from owning a home. Per capita personal income equals total personal income divided by the resident population.

In 2018, per capita personal income was \$90,438, more than both the state (\$62,026) and the nation (\$54,446).

According to the American Community Survey, the median household income was \$128,694 in 2019. The county's median household income was greater than the state (\$94,709) and the nation (\$80,944).

In 2019, 7.6 percent of the population residing in King County was living below the poverty level, lower than the state at 9.8 percent. Of King County's children under 18, 7.1 percent were living below the poverty level, compared to the state's 12.9 percent.

Source: Employment Security Department; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

Population

King County's estimated population was over 2.2 million in 2020. The county's population grew at a faster rate (1.5 percent per year) than the state (1.2 percent per year) over the most recent decade. Over the past year, however, King County's population expanded by 1.55 percent compared to 1.45 percent for Washington state as a whole. Most of the growth was, however, within the neighboring counties and other urban areas.

The largest city in King County is Seattle (761,100 in 2020). Other large cities include Bellevue, Kent, Renton, Federal Way, Kirkland and Auburn.

Population facts

	King County	Washington state
Population 2020	2,260,800	7,656,200
Population 2010	1,931,249	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2020	17.1%	13.9%

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management

Age, gender and ethnicity

The age distribution of King County residents compared to the state and the nation reflects a relatively large working-age adult population and smaller resident populations at either end of the age spectrum. Residents age 25 to 49 have a proportionally high presence in King County, while residents age 0 to 24 and 55+ have a less prominent presence relative to shares seen at the state and national levels.

King County has proportionally larger Black and Asian, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations than the state as a whole, but a smaller Hispanic or Latino presence.

Demographics

	King County	Washington state
Population by age, 2019		
Under 5 years old	5.7%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	20.0%	21.8%
65 years and older	13.5%	15.9%
Females, 2019	49.7%	49.9%
Race/ethnicity, 2019		
White	66.2%	78.5%
Black	7.0%	4.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1.0%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	20.9%	10.4%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	9.9%	13.0%

Educational attainment

Overall, King County has a more highly educated population than the state or the nation.

Ninety-three percent of King County residents age 25 and older graduated from high school, which is slightly higher than Washington state residents as a whole and higher than the nation. More than 52.5 percent of King County residents have a bachelor's degree or higher education, substantially higher than the state (36.0 percent) or the nation (32.1 percent).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [History of Seattle and King County](#)
- [King County home page](#)
- [King County on Choose Washington.com](#)
- [King County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Puget Sound Regional Council](#)
- [Seattle-King County Workforce Development Council](#)
- [Seattle Office of Economic Development](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Port of Seattle](#)
- [Washington Ports](#)
- [Workforce Development Areas and WorkSource Office Directory](#)

Employment Security Department is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Language assistance services for limited English proficient individuals are available free of charge. Washington Relay Service: 711.