
Food and Beverage Serving and Related Workers

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Significant Points

- Most jobs are part time and have few educational requirements, attracting many young people to the occupation—more than one-fifth of these workers were 16 to 19 years old, about five times the proportion for all workers.
- Job openings are expected to be abundant through 2016, which will create excellent opportunities for jobseekers.
- Tips comprise a major portion of earnings, so keen competition is expected for jobs in fine dining and more popular restaurants where potential tips are greatest.

Nature of the Work

Food and beverage serving and related workers are the front line of customer service in restaurants, coffee shops, and other food service establishments. These workers greet customers, escort them to seats and hand them menus, take food and drink orders, and serve food and beverages. They also answer questions, explain menu items and specials, and keep tables and dining areas clean and set for new diners. Most work as part of a team, helping coworkers to improve workflow and customer service.

Waiters and *waitresses*, the largest group of these workers, take customers' orders, serve food and beverages, prepare itemized checks, and sometimes accept payment. Their specific duties vary considerably, depending on the establishment. In coffee shops serving routine, straightforward fare, such as salads, soups, and sandwiches, servers are expected to provide fast, efficient, and courteous service. In fine dining restaurants, where more complicated meals are prepared and often served over several courses, waiters and waitresses provide more formal service emphasizing personal, attentive treatment and a more leisurely pace. They may recommend certain dishes and identify ingredients or explain how various items on the menu are prepared. Some prepare salads, desserts, or other menu items tableside. Additionally, servers may meet with managers and chefs, before each shift to discuss the menu and any new items or specials, review ingredients for any potential food allergies, or talk about any food safety concerns, coordination between the kitchen and the dining room, and any customer service issues from the previous day or shift. Servers usually also check the identification of patrons to ensure they meet the minimum age requirement for the purchase of alcohol and tobacco products wherever those items are sold.

Waiters and waitresses sometimes perform the duties of other food and beverage service workers. These tasks may include escorting guests to tables, serving customers seated at counters, clearing and setting up tables, or operating a cash register.

However, full-service restaurants frequently hire other staff, such as hosts and hostesses, cashiers, or dining room attendants, to perform these duties.

Bartenders fill drink orders either taken directly from patrons at the bar or through waiters and waitresses who place drink orders for dining room customers. Bartenders check the identification of customers seated at the bar to ensure they meet the minimum age requirement for the purchase of alcohol and tobacco products. They prepare mixed drinks, serve bottled or draught beer, and pour wine or other beverages. Bartenders must know a wide range of drink recipes and be able to mix drinks accurately, quickly, and without waste. Besides mixing and serving drinks, bartenders stock and prepare garnishes for drinks; maintain an adequate supply of ice, glasses, and other bar supplies; and keep the bar area clean for customers. They also may collect payment, operate the cash register, wash glassware and utensils, and serve food to customers who dine at the bar. Bartenders usually are responsible for ordering and maintaining an inventory of liquor, mixes, and other bar supplies.

Most bartenders directly serve and interact with patrons. Bartenders should be friendly and at ease talking with customers. Bartenders at service bars, on the other hand, have less contact with customers. They work in small bars often located off the kitchen in restaurants, hotels, and clubs where only waiters and waitresses place drink orders. Some establishments, especially larger, higher volume ones, use equipment that automatically measures, pours, and mixes drinks at the push of a button. Bartenders who use this equipment, however, still must work quickly to handle a large volume of drink orders and be familiar with the ingredients for special drink requests. Much of a bartender's work still must be done by hand.

Hosts and *hostesses* welcome guests and maintain reservation or waiting lists. They may direct patrons to coatrooms, restrooms, or to a place to wait until their table is ready. Hosts and hostesses assign guests to tables suitable for the size of their group, escort patrons to their seats, and provide menus. They also schedule dining reservations, arrange parties, and organize



Food and beverage serving and related workers need good interpersonal skills to deal with customers.

any special services that are required. In some restaurants, they act as cashiers.

Dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers assist waiters, waitresses, and bartenders by cleaning tables, removing dirty dishes, and keeping serving areas stocked with supplies. Sometimes called backwaiters or runners, they bring meals out of the kitchen and assist waiters and waitresses by distributing dishes to individual diners. They also replenish the supply of clean linens, dishes, silverware, and glasses in the dining room and keep the bar stocked with glasses, liquor, ice, and drink garnishes. Dining room attendants set tables with clean tablecloths, napkins, silverware, glasses, and dishes and serve ice water, rolls, and butter. At the conclusion of meals, they remove dirty dishes and soiled linens from tables. Cafeteria attendants stock serving tables with food, trays, dishes, and silverware and may carry trays to dining tables for patrons. Bartender helpers keep bar equipment clean and glasses washed. *Dishwashers* clean dishes, cutlery, and kitchen utensils and equipment.

Counter attendants take orders and serve food in cafeterias, coffee shops, and carryout eateries. In cafeterias, they serve food displayed on steam tables, carve meat, dish out vegetables, ladle sauces and soups, and fill beverage glasses. In lunchrooms and coffee shops, counter attendants take orders from customers seated at the counter, transmit orders to the kitchen, and pick up and serve food. They also fill cups with coffee, soda, and other beverages and prepare fountain specialties, such as milkshakes and ice cream sundaes. Counter attendants also take carryout orders from diners and wrap or place items in containers. They clean counters, write itemized bills, and sometimes accept payment. Some counter attendants may prepare short-order items, such as sandwiches and salads.

Some food and beverage serving workers take orders from customers at counters or drive-through windows at fast-food restaurants. They assemble orders, hand them to customers, and accept payment. Many of these are *combined food preparation and serving workers* who also cook and package food, make coffee, and fill beverage cups using drink-dispensing machines.

Other workers serve food to patrons outside of a restaurant environment. They might deliver room service meals in hotels or meals to hospital rooms or act as carhops, bringing orders to parked cars.

Work environment. Food and beverage service workers are on their feet most of the time and often carry heavy trays of food, dishes, and glassware. During busy dining periods, they are under pressure to serve customers quickly and efficiently. The work is relatively safe, but care must be taken to avoid slips, falls, and burns.

Part-time work is more common among food and beverage serving and related workers than among workers in almost any other occupation. In 2006, those on part-time schedules included half of all waiters and waitresses and 39 percent of all bartenders.

Food service and drinking establishments typically maintain long dining hours and offer flexible and varied work opportunities. Many food and beverage serving and related workers work evenings, weekends, and holidays. Many students and

teenagers seek part time or seasonal work as food and beverage serving and related workers as a first job to gain work experience or to earn spending money. More than one-fifth of all food and beverage serving and related workers were 16 to 19 years old—about five times the proportion for all workers.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most food and beverage service jobs require little or no previous experience and provide training on the job.

Education and training. There are no specific educational requirements for most food and beverage service jobs. Many employers prefer to hire high school graduates for waiter and waitress, bartender, and host and hostess positions, but completion of high school usually is not required for fast-food workers, counter attendants, dishwashers, and dining room attendants and bartender helpers. For many people, a job as a food and beverage service worker serves as a source of immediate income, rather than a career. Many entrants to these jobs are in their late teens or early twenties and have a high school education or less. Usually, they have little or no work experience. Many are full-time students or homemakers. Food and beverage service jobs are a major source of part-time employment for high school and college students.

All new employees receive some training from their employer. They learn safe food handling procedures and sanitation practices, for example. Some employers, particularly those in fast-food restaurants, teach new workers using self-study programs, on-line programs, audiovisual presentations, and instructional booklets that explain food preparation and service skills. But most food and beverage serving and related workers pick up their skills by observing and working with more experienced workers. Some full-service restaurants also provide new dining room employees with some form of classroom training that alternates with periods of on-the-job work experience. These training programs communicate the operating philosophy of the restaurant, help establish a personal rapport with other staff, teach formal serving techniques, and instill a desire to work as a team. They also provide an opportunity to discuss customer service situations and the proper ways of handling unpleasant circumstances or unruly patrons.

Some food serving workers can acquire more skills by attending relevant classes offered by public or private vocational schools, restaurant associations, or large restaurant chains. Some bartenders also acquire their skills by attending a bartending or vocational and technical school. These programs often include instruction on State and local laws and regulations, cocktail recipes, proper attire and conduct, and stocking a bar. Some of these schools help their graduates find jobs. Although few employers require any minimum level of educational attainment, some specialized training is usually needed in food handling and legal issues surrounding serving alcoholic beverages. Employers are more likely to hire and promote based on people skills and personal qualities rather than education.

Other qualifications. Restaurants rely on good food and quality customer service to retain loyal customers and succeed in a competitive industry. Food and beverage serving and related workers who exhibit excellent personal qualities—such as a neat clean appearance, a well-spoken manner, an ability to

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Food and beverage serving and related workers	—	7,422,000	8,415,000	993,000	13
Food and beverage serving workers.....	35-3000	6,081,000	6,927,000	846,000	14
Bartenders	35-3011	495,000	551,000	56,000	11
Fast food and counter workers	35-3020	3,036,000	3,542,000	506,000	17
Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food	35-3021	2,503,000	2,955,000	452,000	18
Counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession, and coffee shop	35-3022	533,000	587,000	54,000	10
Waiters and waitresses	35-3031	2,361,000	2,615,000	255,000	11
Food servers, nonrestaurant	35-3041	189,000	219,000	30,000	16
Other food preparation and serving related workers.....	35-9000	1,341,000	1,488,000	147,000	11
Dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers....	35-9011	416,000	466,000	49,000	12
Dishwashers	35-9021	517,000	571,000	54,000	10
Hosts and hostesses, restaurant, lounge, and coffee shop.....	35-9031	351,000	388,000	37,000	10
Food preparation and serving related workers, all other.....	35-9099	56,000	64,000	7,300	13

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

work as a part of a team, and a pleasant way with patrons—will be highly sought after. All workers who serve alcoholic beverages must be at least 21 years of age in most jurisdictions and should be familiar with State and local laws concerning the sale of alcoholic beverages. For bartender jobs, many employers prefer to hire people who are 25 or older.

Waiters and waitresses need a good memory to avoid confusing customers' orders and to recall faces, names, and preferences of frequent patrons. These workers also should be comfortable using computers to place orders and generate customers' bills. Some may need to be quick at arithmetic so they can total bills manually. Knowledge of a foreign language is helpful to communicate with a diverse clientele and staff. Prior experience waiting on tables is preferred by restaurants and hotels that have rigid table service standards. Jobs at these establishments often offer higher wages and have greater income potential from tips, but they may also have stiffer employment requirements, such as prior table service experience or higher education than other establishments.

Advancement. Due to the relatively small size of most food-serving establishments, opportunities for promotion are limited. After gaining experience, some dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers advance to waiter, waitress, or bartender jobs. For waiters, waitresses, and bartenders, advancement usually is limited to finding a job in a busier or more expensive restaurant or bar where prospects for tip earnings are better. Some bartenders, hosts and hostesses, and waiters and waitresses advance to supervisory jobs, such as dining room supervisor, maitre d'hotel, assistant manager, or restaurant general manager. A few bartenders open their own businesses. In larger restaurant chains, food and beverage service workers who excel often are invited to enter the company's formal management training program. (For more information, see the section on food service managers elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Employment

Food and beverage serving and related workers held 7.4 million jobs in 2006. The distribution of jobs among the various food and beverage serving occupations was as follows:

Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food	2,503,000
Waiters and waitresses	2,361,000
Counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession, and coffee shop	533,000
Dishwashers	517,000
Bartenders	495,000
Dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers	416,000
Hosts and hostesses, restaurant, lounge, and coffee shop	351,000
Food servers, non restaurant	189,000
All other food preparation and serving related workers	56,000

The overwhelming majority of jobs for food and beverage serving and related workers were found in food services and drinking places, such as restaurants, sandwich shops, and catering or contract food service operators. Other jobs were in hotels, motels, and other traveler accommodation establishments; amusement, gambling, and recreation establishments; educational services; grocery stores; nursing care facilities; civic and social organizations; and hospitals.

Jobs are located throughout the country but are typically plentiful in large cities and tourist areas. Vacation resorts offer seasonal employment, and some workers alternate between summer and winter resorts.

Job Outlook

Average employment growth is expected, and job opportunities should be excellent for food and beverage serving and related workers, but job competition is often keen at upscale restaurants.

Employment change. Overall employment of these workers is expected to increase by 13 percent over the 2006-16 decade,

which is about as fast as the average for all occupations. Food and beverage serving and related workers are projected to have one of the largest numbers of new jobs arise, about 993,000, over this period. The popularity of eating out is expected to increase as the population expands and as customers seek the convenience of restaurants and other dining options. Projected employment growth varies somewhat by job type. Employment of combined food preparation and serving workers, which includes fast-food workers, is expected to increase faster than the average in response to the continuing fast-paced lifestyle of many Americans and the addition of healthier foods at many fast-food restaurants. Average employment growth is expected for waiters and waitresses, hosts and hostesses, and bartenders. Restaurants that offer table service, more varied menus, and an active bar scene are growing in number in response to consumer demands for convenience and to increases in disposable income, especially among families who frequent casual family-oriented restaurants; affluent young professionals, who patronize trendier, more upscale establishments; and retirees and others who dine out as a way to socialize. Employment of dishwashers, dining room and cafeteria attendants, and bartender helpers also will grow about as fast as average.

Job prospects. Job opportunities at most eating and drinking places will be excellent because many people in service sector occupations change jobs frequently and the number of food service outlets needing food service workers will continue to grow. Many of these workers, such as teens, those seeking part-time employment, or multiple jobholders, do so to satisfy short-term income needs before moving on to jobs in other occupations or leaving the workforce. Keen competition is expected, however, for jobs in popular restaurants and fine dining establishments, where potential earnings from tips are greatest.

Earnings

Food and beverage serving and related workers derive their earnings from a combination of hourly wages and customer tips. Earnings vary greatly, depending on the type of job and establishment. For example, fast-food workers and hosts and hostesses usually do not receive tips, so their wage rates may be higher than those of waiters and waitresses and bartenders in full-service restaurants but their overall earnings might be lower. In many full-service restaurants, tips are higher than wages. In some restaurants, workers contribute all or a portion of their tips to a tip pool, which is distributed among qualifying workers. Tip pools allow workers who don't usually receive tips directly from customers, such as dining room attendants, to feel a part of a team and to share in the rewards of good service.

In May 2006, median hourly wage-and-salary earnings (including tips) of waiters and waitresses were \$7.14. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.42 and \$9.14. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.78, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$12.46 an hour. For most waiters and waitresses, higher earnings are primarily the result of receiving more in tips rather than higher hourly wages. Tips usually average between 10 and 20 percent of guests' checks; waiters and waitresses working in busy, expensive restaurants earn the most.

Bartenders had median hourly wage-and-salary earnings (including tips) of \$7.86. The middle 50 percent earned be-

tween \$6.77 and \$10.10. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.00, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$13.56 an hour. Like waiters and waitresses, bartenders employed in public bars may receive more than half of their earnings as tips. Service bartenders often are paid higher hourly wages to offset their lower tip earnings.

Median hourly wage-and-salary earnings (including tips) of dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers were \$7.36. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.62 and \$8.59. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.91, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$10.60 an hour. Most received over half of their earnings as wages; the rest of their income was a share of the proceeds from tip pools.

Median hourly wage-and-salary earnings of hosts and hostesses were \$7.78. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.79 and \$8.97. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.99, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$10.80 an hour. Wages comprised the majority of their earnings. In some cases, wages were supplemented by proceeds from tip pools.

Median hourly wage-and-salary earnings of combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food, were \$7.24. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.47 and \$8.46. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.79, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$10.16 an hour. Although some combined food preparation and serving workers receive a part of their earnings as tips, fast-food workers usually do not.

Median hourly wage-and-salary earnings of counter attendants in cafeterias, food concessions, and coffee shops (including tips) were \$7.76. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.85 and \$9.00 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.11, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$10.86 an hour.

Median hourly wage-and-salary earnings of dishwashers were \$7.57. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.78 and \$8.62. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.01, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$10.00 an hour.

Median hourly wage-and-salary earnings of food servers outside of restaurants were \$8.70. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.27 and \$10.87. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.36, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$13.81 an hour.

Many beginning or inexperienced workers earn the Federal minimum wage of \$5.85 an hour. However, a few States set minimum wages higher than the Federal minimum. Under Federal law, this wage will increase to \$6.55 in the summer of 2008 and to \$7.25 in the summer of 2009. Also, various minimum wage exceptions apply under specific circumstances to disabled workers, full-time students, youth under age 20 in their first 90 days of employment, tipped employees, and student-learners. Tipped employees are those who customarily and regularly receive more than \$30 a month in tips. The employer may consider tips as part of wages, but the employer must pay at least \$2.13 an hour in direct wages.

Many employers provide free meals and furnish uniforms, but some may deduct from wages the cost, or fair value, of any meals or lodging provided. Food and beverage service workers who work full time often receive typical benefits, but part-time workers usually do not. In some large restaurants

and hotels, food and beverage serving and related workers belong to unions—principally the Unite HERE and the Service Employees International Union.

Related Occupations

Other workers who prepare food for diners include chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers. Those whose job involves serving customers and handling money include cashiers, flight attendants, gaming services workers, and retail salespersons.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about job opportunities may be obtained from local employers and local offices of State employment services agencies.

A guide to careers in restaurants plus a list of 2- and 4-year colleges offering food service programs and related scholarship information is available from:

➤ National Restaurant Association, 1200 17th St.NW., Washington, DC20036. Internet: <http://www.restaurant.org>

For general information on hospitality careers, contact:

➤ International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education, 2810 North Parham Rd., Suite 230, Richmond, VA 23294. Internet:<http://www.chrie.org>