Q1 2026 | MKE Tech Workforce Report

Milwaukee, Washington, Waukesha, Ozaukee, Racine, Kenosha & Walworth Counties

Primary Data: Lightcast Q1 2026 Occupation Snapshot + Job Posting Analytics | Computer and Mathematical Occupations | SOC 15-0000
Data Access: Lightcast datasets provided through a partnership with Employ Milwaukee. Thank you to the Employ Milwaukee team for supporting data-informed workforce strategy across the M7 region.
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A Note on Scope: This report measures the M7 region's digital tech workforce, defined by the federal Computer and Mathematical Occupations group (SOC 15-0000). That category captures software developers, data analysts and scientists, information security engineers, network and database architects, AI engineers, IT support specialists, and related roles. It does not yet capture the applied tech disciplines that are equally central to the M7 region's identity and competitiveness, including manufacturing and industrial engineers, robotics and automation specialists, and biotech research and development roles. Those workforces sit in different federal occupational codes and across more disparate data sources, which are far harder to pull in real time than the labor market datasets used here. Expect applied tech to become a more visible part of future editions as those data pipelines mature.

Audience and Intent: This report is designed for employers, educators, and workforce partners working to build the M7 region's digital tech talent pipeline. It translates Lightcast employment data, employer demand signals, and skills indicators into a shared evidence base for hiring, upskilling, program design, and regional strategy decisions.

Executive Summary

The data is telling us the M7 region cannot hire its way to a competitive tech ecosystem. We must grow one.

The graphic below summarizes the region's performance for the digital tech industry across supply, demand, compensation, and diversity relative to national benchmarks.

27,373	−22%	$89,324	0%
Regional Tech Jobs	**Gap vs. National**	**Median Salary**	**Projected Growth**
Q1 2026 supply	*Same-size region avg*	*$17K below national average*	*Lightcast model, through 2030*

5 SIGNALS DRIVING THIS REPORT

- Supply has softened while the peer benchmark edged up: The M7 region's tech jobs moved from 27,575 to 27,373 (−0.7%) while the national peer benchmark grew 0.2%. Both movements are small enough to sit within the noise band of a modeled estimate; the trend across multiple quarters matters more than this single Q3-to-Q1 delta.
- Growth projections weakened: Lightcast's 5-year outlook for the region dropped from +2% to 0% in a single quarter while the national peer set continued to trend up. Projections revise frequently, but the direction of revision is the relevant signal.
- Disclosed advertised pay is well above the recorded median: among the 40% of postings that disclose compensation, the advertised median ($116.1K) sits roughly 30% above the recorded

$89,324 figure. The disclosing subset is not representative, so the gap likely overstates full-market advertised pay.

- AI, automation and industrial tech are reshaping what employers want: Python, Azure, and Automation skills are all “Rapidly Growing.”
- The M7 region’s southern counties show elevated posting activity relative to supply density: Kenosha (983 postings, 14:1 intensity) and Racine (617 postings). Kenosha’s 14:1 ratio is the region’s most extreme; before calling it a crisis, the employer and staffing-firm composition behind it should be verified. Waukesha County, by contrast, is the region’s second-largest tech hub and is not part of this pattern.

Note for the M7 Region

Growing a tech ecosystem rather than hiring into one is a deliberate act, and this report is the evidence base for that work.

The M7 region’s tech workforce is the engine of our regional economy, and this report is a call for all of us to treat it that way. We publish it because business leaders, educators, and civic partners cannot make bolder decisions without shared, transparent evidence.

This quarter's Lightcast data confirms what our members have been experiencing firsthand. Regional tech talent supply has declined to 27,373 workers, and Lightcast's five-year projection for region’s tech employment has been revised from +2% to 0% in a single quarter. Meanwhile the national peer-region benchmark continues to trend upward. Projections are model outputs, not forecasts, but the direction of revision is the signal worth acting on.

At the same time, a new data lens changes the compensation story in important ways. The Job Posting Analytics Report, covering 10,048 unique postings in the 7-county region from April 2025 through March 2026, shows that employers are advertising tech roles at a median of $116,100, a full $26,800 above what government surveys have recorded as the regional median. For member organizations wrestling with retention and talent attraction, this gap is significant.

The skills employers need are shifting in ways that are impossible to ignore. Python has surged to the second most in-demand specialized skill. Azure and AWS are both "Rapidly Growing." Rockwell Automation entered our top ten employer rankings, underscoring that the region’s industrial sector and its software-intensive neighbors are now competing for the same talent pool. And "Agentic Commerce Consultant" is an actual job title being posted in Milwaukee right now.

The region’s strongest competitive asset is our mid-career technical workforce, which is experienced, place-rooted, and ready to grow. This report is a call to invest in that asset before the window narrows further. The next 12 to 24 months will shape the M7 region’s tech competitiveness for the decade ahead. We have the employers, the workforce, and the educational institutions to lead. What this moment asks of us is coordinated action.

Where to start if you are short on time: The *Regional Implications & Call to Action* section at the end of this report distills these findings into five regional priorities and immediate next steps. Readers pressed for time are encouraged to begin there and use the body of the report as supporting evidence.

By the Numbers: Q3 2025 vs. Q1 2026

Most indicators moved in the wrong direction. A modest uptick in active graduate programs and a one-point improvement in cost-of-living-adjusted purchasing power are worth noting, but both are small enough that they may reflect measurement refinement as much as real gains.

Indicator	Q3 2025	Q1 2026	Trend
Regional Tech Jobs (Supply)	27,575	27,373	▼
National Benchmark (same-size region)	35,195	35,273	▲
Supply Gap vs. National Benchmark	−21%	−22%	▼
5-Year Projected Growth	+2%	0%	▼
Recorded Median Annual Compensation	$89,189	$89,324	—
Advertised Salary Median (Job Postings)	N/A	$116,100	▲
COL-Adj. Purchasing Power vs. Nation	−20%	−19%	▲
Avg Monthly Job Postings	1,120	1,041	▼
Companies Actively Posting	1,968	1,761	▼
Unique Job Postings (12 months)	13,435	10,048*	▼
Avg Monthly Estimated Hires	932	907	▼
Median Posting Duration (days)	22	20	▼
Workers Age 55+ (Retirement Cohort)	4,943	4,950	—
Regional Graduate Programs Active	112	118	▲
Annual Tech Completions (most recent)	6,632 (2023)	6,630 (2024)	—

** Unique postings from Lightcast Job Posting Analytics (Apr 2025–Mar 2026).*

Compensation: Story Behind the Numbers

Employers are advertising regional tech salaries 30% higher than government statistics record, a signal that the regional market is more competitive than headlines suggest.

There is interesting movement among tech salaries that the reported numbers do not clearly reveal. To understand where our region ranks among tech salaries, we're going to dig a little deeper than the government's recorded median wage and assess advertised salary from active job postings as well. The two numbers measure different things, and understanding why they differ is the first step to using them well. The recorded median of $89,324 comes from government surveys of what tech workers in the M7 region are actually paid right now. That figure averages everyone in the workforce, including long-tenured employees still at the pay bands they were hired into years ago before the market moved.

The advertised median of $116,100 comes from a different place. It is the salary employers are publishing in active job postings to attract a new hire today. Between April 2025 and March 2026, 40% of the 10,048 unique tech postings in the M7 region disclosed a salary. Among that disclosing 40%, the median advertised pay sat roughly 30% above the recorded median, a gap of $26,776. Think of it this way: the recorded figure shows what people on the job today have been paid over their full tenure, while the advertised figure shows what employers are willing to put on the table to bring someone in this week.

One important caveat: the 40% of postings that disclose salary are not a random sample of M7 region employers. Employers that publish a salary range tend to be larger, are more likely subject to salary-transparency laws in other states where they also hire, and are often competing hardest for the most in-demand talent. The other 60% of postings, the ones without a salary listed, may or may not pay at the same level. Read $116,100 as "what the most competitive, transparency-leaning employers in the M7 region are advertising," not as a true regional median across every employer.

Compensation Measure	M7 Region	National Benchmark
Recorded Median (Government Survey)	$89,324	$106,477
Advertised Median (Job Postings)	$116,100	N/A
Gap: Advertised vs. Recorded	+$26,776 (+30%)	—
COL-Adjusted Gap vs. National Recorded	−19% below	National avg

Even with that caveat, the divergence matters. For talent attraction conversations, the $116K figure is likely closer to current candidate expectations than the $89K recorded median. For retention strategy, it suggests that some employees hired at recent market rates may be materially better compensated than colleagues hired before the market shifted. And for workforce planning, it indicates that at least the most competitive subset of regional employers are paying in line with the advertised market, which makes pipeline and skills-match the binding constraint for those employers rather than salary range.

Advertised salary held relatively stable across the trailing 12 months (ranging $110K–$120K), with a slight uptick of +0.8%. That stability, combined with the posting volume trends, suggests employers are maintaining their compensation standards even as overall hiring activity cools.

★ WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

- If your organization is benchmarking compensation against the $89K regional median, you may be underpricing new hires relative to the active market. Review offers against the $116K advertised benchmark as an upper reference point, recognizing that this figure reflects disclosing employers and likely sits above a true full-market median.
- The 30% advertised-vs-recorded gap also suggests that your existing workforce may be underpaid relative to what they could command in the market today.

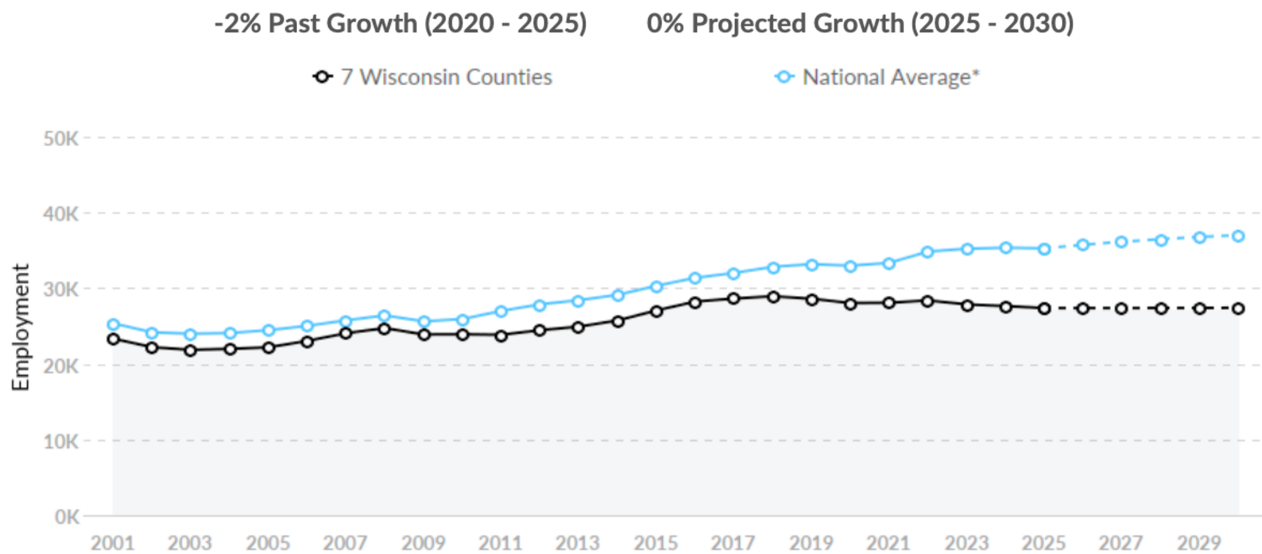
Talent Supply: A Stalling Pipeline

The M7 region lost 202 tech jobs since Q3 2025 while the national peer benchmark grew. Lightcast's five-year growth projection for the region fell from +2% to 0% in the same period. That is a material revision worth tracking, though projections are not forecasts and can move again.

The M7 region now employs 27,373 workers in Computer and Mathematical Occupations. The supply trend line below illustrates the regional trajectory against national peers over time.

Supply Is Lower Than the National Average

The regional vs. national average employment helps you understand if the supply of Computer and Mathematical Occupations is a strength or weakness for your area, and how it is changing relative to the nation. An average area of this size would have 35,273* employees, while there are 27,373 here. This lower than expected supply may make it more difficult to find candidates. The gap between expected and actual employment is expected to increase over the next 5 years.



Source: Lightcast Occupational Snapshot (Apr 2026)

The more interesting shift from our Q3 2025 report is not the raw headcount decline of 202 jobs, but the direction of the forward projection. Lightcast's Q1 2026 model projects 0% growth in regional Computer and Mathematical employment through 2030. Six months ago, the same model projected +2%. The peer-region trend line continues to climb. A two-point downward revision in a single quarter is not a forecast of stagnation, but it is a signal worth acting on rather than waiting to see whether next quarter's model reverses it. **The direction of revision is the story.**

Geographic concentration of employment remains a structural feature of the M7 region's tech market. The Milwaukee central business district (ZIP 53202) anchors approximately 3,633 tech jobs, with Brookfield's two primary commercial ZIP codes (53005 and 53045) contributing roughly 2,254 more. Together, these corridors account for a disproportionate share of the region's tech employment density.

At the same time, the Job Posting Analytics data tells us that Kenosha County (983 unique postings) and Racine County (617 postings) are generating meaningful demand even without proportional supply density. Kenosha in particular posted a 14:1 posting intensity, one of the highest ratios in the region. A ratio that elevated could reflect a genuinely hard-to-fill local market, a concentration of staffing firms re-advertising the same standing vacancies, or a small number of employers driving most of the volume. Elsewhere in this report we apply the same caution to high re-posting ratios (for example, Uline's 8:1 and the 7:1 on the Software Developers title). The Kenosha signal is worth taking seriously, but the employer composition behind that number should be examined before it is treated as evidence of a generalized county-level crisis.

★ WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

- A downward-revised projection is a call for supply-side investment. The projection itself may move again, but organizations that treat it as an argument for waiting rather than acting are making an expensive bet. Every graduate program, upskilling partnership, and regional talent attraction initiative is now more consequential.

- Kenosha and Racine County posting activity looks hard-to-fill on the surface, but the 14:1 Kenosha intensity could be inflated by staffing firm re-posting or a small number of large employers. If your organization has positions in those counties, expect longer time-to-fill, but validate what is driving the ratio before committing to aggressive pipeline development or relocation incentives.
- Geographic concentration of jobs in the Milwaukee CBD and Brookfield means that public transit access, childcare, and housing affordability in those corridors are workforce issues.

Employer Demand: Where the Jobs Are

Hiring activity cooled across the M7 region, but demand still significantly outpaces available supply, and the county-level picture reveals important geographic disparities.

The Q1 2026 Job Posting Analytics Report captures 10,048 unique tech postings from 1,509 companies across the region between April 2025 and March 2026. The median posting duration was 21 days, two days below the regional average, with an overall posting intensity of 3:1. That means for every unique position posted, it was re-advertised an average of three times before being filled (or abandoned).

Consistent with broader national hiring trends, the M7 region's tech market was more cautious in Q1 2026 than in Q3 2025. Companies actively posting fell from 1,968 to 1,761, average monthly postings declined from 1,120 to 1,041, and estimated monthly hires moved from 932 to 907. This mirrors the MMAC Q4 2025 Business Outlook Survey finding that only 31% of regional firms expected headcount growth in Q4, down 13 percentage points from Q3.

County-Level Posting Distribution

Milwaukee County dominates the regional posting volume, but Waukesha County's position as a strong secondary market underscores the importance of the I-94 corridor to regional tech employment.

County	Unique Postings	Share of Total	Posting Intensity	Notes
Milwaukee	5,754	57%	3:1	City + suburbs
Waukesha	2,086	21%	3:1	Brookfield hub
Kenosha	983	10%	14:1	Hard to fill
Racine	617	6%	3:1	—
Washington	275	3%	2:1	—
Ozaukee + Walworth	~333	3%	varies	Lower density

Note: Kenosha's 14:1 posting intensity indicates heavy re-advertising of the same positions. This may reflect genuine difficulty filling roles or concentration in a small number of employers and staffing firms; worth validating before drawing county-wide conclusions.

Top Industries by Posting Volume

The industry mix reflects the M7 region's unique economic identity: a major wholesale distributor, professional services firms, manufacturers, and financial services organizations competing for the same technical talent pool.

Industry	Total Postings	Unique	Intensity	Median Days
Industrial & Personal Service Paper Wholesalers	7,796	950	8:1	13
Computer Systems Design Services	888	630	1:1	21
Custom Computer Programming Services	1,079	593	2:1	18
Offices of Certified Public Accountants	631	379	2:1	23
Relay & Industrial Control Manufacturing	785	308	3:1	31
Direct Life Insurance Carriers	570	229	2:1	21
Commercial Banking	440	212	2:1	19

Uline's 8:1 posting intensity and 13-day median reflect aggressive re-posting of a large standing vacancy set. Rockwell's 31-day median indicates difficult-to-fill specialized roles.

★ WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

- Line 1's outsized posting volume (7,796 total for 950 unique positions) is a market signal worth watching. If a regional anchor employer is re-posting at 8:1 intensity, the positions are not being filled at expected rates. Either the pool is too shallow or the criteria need adjustment.
- Manufacturing's 31-day median posting duration for industrial control manufacturing roles points to a gap between the skills manufacturers need and the talent available. This is precisely where the regional upskilling partnerships have strategic impact.

Who's Hiring: Top Employers

The employer landscape expanded meaningfully in Q1 2026, with healthcare, professional services, and industrial tech firms joining the traditional tech and financial services recruiters.

The Q1 2026 Job Posting Analytics data reveals a broader and more diverse set of top employers than Q3 2025. Ten organizations account for a significant share of total posting volume, and their collective presence reflects the M7 region's economic breadth.

Employer	Unique Postings	Intensity	Median Days	Sector
Uline	948	8:1	13	Distribution
Accenture	363	3:1	21	Consulting
Rockwell Automation	235	3:1	31	Industrial Tech
Northwestern Mutual	221	2:1	22	Insurance/Finance
Froedtert / MCW	174	2:1	21	Healthcare
PwC	164	2:1	23	Professional Svcs
Johnson Controls	153	2:1	22	Building Tech

Employer	Unique Postings	Intensity	Median Days	Sector
GE Healthcare	116	2:1	21	Healthcare Tech
KPMG	109	2:1	23	Professional Svcs
Fiserv	108	2:1	21	Fintech

Three observations stand out. First, Rockwell Automation's appearance at #3 with a 31-day median posting duration signals persistent difficulty filling industrial technology roles. Second, Froedtert/MCW's tech posting volume (174 unique) reflects the growing digitization of healthcare operations and the integration of health informatics as a mainstream technology discipline. Third, the Big Four accounting and consulting presence (Accenture, PwC, KPMG) points to the continued demand for tech consultants who can bridge business strategy and implementation.

★ WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

- Manufacturing's difficulty filling roles (31-day median) creates a partnership opportunity for upskilling programs focused on industrial automation, OT/IT convergence, and embedded systems.
- Healthcare tech is now a mainstream employer category in the M7 region. Organizations building talent pipelines should treat health informatics and clinical data systems as core tech disciplines, not specialty niches.

In-Demand Roles: What Employers Are Posting

Software development remains the dominant posting category, but Business Intelligence, Cybersecurity, and Data roles are rising fast, and Artificial Intelligence Engineer is now a distinct job title.

Top Posted Job Titles

The following table reflects actual job titles as posted by employers, which is useful for understanding how companies are framing their searches and what vocabulary candidates need to use.

Job Title	Total Postings	Unique	Intensity	Median Days
Software Engineers	399	217	2:1	18
Data Analysts	330	90	4:1	20
Network Engineers	293	88	3:1	16
Application Engineers	163	77	2:1	29
Data Scientists	134	74	2:1	20
Systems Engineers	258	69	4:1	25
Software Developers	438	67	7:1	8
Solutions Architects	90	55	2:1	21
Business Intelligence Analysts	327	53	6:1	9
IT Project Managers	221	51	4:1	23

Note: "Software Developers" at 7:1 intensity and 8-day median signals aggressive re-posting, likely by staffing firms. "Data Analysts" at 4:1 intensity indicates genuine difficulty filling.

Top Occupations by O*NET Category

This view, based on standardized occupational classifications, provides a cleaner signal of where employer demand is truly concentrated regardless of how individual postings are titled.

Occupation (O*NET)	Total / Unique	Intensity	Median Days	Signal
Software Developers	5,626 / 2,238	3:1	20	Dominant
Computer User Support Specialists	2,334 / 958	2:1	22	Stable
Business Intelligence Analysts	2,062 / 834	2:1	19	Growing
IT Project Managers	1,761 / 781	2:1	23	Stable
Computer Network Architects	1,211 / 435	3:1	25	Specialized
Information Security Engineers	1,154 / 314	4:1	23	Hard to fill
Data Scientists	524 / 290	2:1	18	Fast fill
Artificial Intelligence Engineers	348 / 212	2:1	21	Emerging
Database Architects	1,336 / 416	3:1	23	Specialized
Cyber/Info Security Analysts	1,409 / 456	3:1	23	Growing

NOTABLE SHIFT: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ENGINEER

- **AI Engineer** has emerged as a distinct occupational category in region's job postings with 348 total, 212 unique, 2:1 intensity, 21-day median. This is no longer a national tech-sector abstraction.
- The sample postings in the Lightcast Analytics Report include a role titled **Agentic Commerce Consultant** explicitly referencing AI agents, RAG environments, and real-time decisioning.

Skills in Demand: What Employers Are Requiring

Nine of the 10 top specialized skills are classified as "Rapidly Growing"

The Job Posting Analytics data provides a skills view that is more current and market-facing than the Occupation Snapshot. The chart below from the Q1 2026 Occupation Snapshot illustrates how demand for key skills has shifted quarter over quarter.

Top Specialized Skills in Job Postings

Skill	Postings	% of Total	Projected Growth	Status
Computer Science	3,030	30%	+26.8%	Rapidly Growing
Automation	1,878	19%	+30.5%	Rapidly Growing
SQL (Programming Language)	1,714	17%	+6.4%	Stable

Skill	Postings	% of Total	Projected Growth	Status
Workflow Management	1,652	16%	+18.0%	Growing
Project Management	1,519	15%	+19.8%	Rapidly Growing
Python (Programming Language)	1,491	15%	+24.5%	Rapidly Growing
Agile Methodology	1,485	15%	+19.8%	Rapidly Growing
Scalability	1,428	14%	+25.2%	Rapidly Growing
Data Analysis	1,269	13%	+25.8%	Rapidly Growing
Continuous Improvement Process	1,154	11%	+23.4%	Rapidly Growing

Top Software & Platform Skills

Software / Platform	Postings	% of Total	Projected Growth	Status
SQL	1,714	17%	+6.4%	Stable
Python	1,491	15%	+24.5%	Rapidly Growing
Microsoft Azure	1,064	11%	+28.9%	Rapidly Growing
Microsoft Excel	951	9%	+17.7%	Growing
Amazon Web Services (AWS)	852	8%	+24.0%	Rapidly Growing
Power BI	786	8%	+20.4%	Rapidly Growing
Dashboard Tools	726	7%	+25.3%	Rapidly Growing
Operating Systems	666	7%	+22.6%	Rapidly Growing

Top Common (Foundational) Skills

Communication tops the list at 51% of postings, but it is classified as “Lagging” relative to market growth. Technical skills are outpacing soft skills in importance growth even as employers continue to list them universally.

Common Skill	Postings	% of Total	Projected Growth	Status
Communication	5,078	51%	+3.6%	Lagging
Problem Solving	2,952	29%	+11.3%	Growing
Leadership	2,821	28%	+8.5%	Stable
Troubleshooting	2,678	27%	+19.0%	Growing
Management	2,585	26%	+5.3%	Stable
Information Technology	1,721	17%	+24.8%	Rapidly Growing

Common Skill	Postings	% of Total	Projected Growth	Status

★ **WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION**

- Automation skills (+30.5% projected growth) are the single fastest-growing specialized demand area in the M7 region, directly relevant to our manufacturing and industrial sector members.
- Azure (+28.9%) and Python (+24.5%) are cloud and coding skills with the highest growth trajectories.
- The skills gap between what employers want and what workers have is measurable: Computer Science skills appear in 30% of postings but only 2% of worker profiles. Automation skills are in 19% of postings but only 8% of profiles.

What Employers Want: Education, Experience & Credentials

68% of regional tech postings require a bachelor's degree minimum, but non-traditional pathways remain viable, and certifications are increasingly treated as standalone qualifications.

Education Requirements

Education Level	% of Postings	Interpretation
Bachelor's degree minimum	68%	Majority expectation
Master's degree	13%	Specialized / senior roles
Associate's degree	12%	Technical / support roles
High school / unspecified	7%	Entry-level / vocational

Experience Requirements

Experience Level	% of Postings	What This Signals
4–6 years (largest bracket)	24%	Mid-career core demand
2–3 years	20%	Early career on-ramp
7+ years	18%	Senior / leadership roles
0–1 year / unspecified	38%	Entry-level opportunity

Most-Requested Certifications

Certifications appear in a meaningful subset of postings and are increasingly used as screening criteria alongside (or in place of) degree requirements.

Certification	Postings	Domain
Valid Driver’s License	350	Field / operations roles
CISSP (Certified Info Systems Security Professional)	249	Cybersecurity
CompTIA A+	210	IT support
Microsoft Certified Professional	151	Platform / Azure
CompTIA Network+	137	Networking
Project Management Professional (PMP)	128	Project management
CompTIA Security+	126	Cybersecurity
Certified Information Security Manager (CISM)	123	Cybersecurity leadership
Epic EMR Certification	117	Healthcare IT
Cisco CCNA	116	Networking

★ WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

- Cybersecurity certifications (CISSP, CompTIA Security+, CISM) appear in hundreds of postings and represent a viable upskilling target for mid-career IT professionals. Boot camp-style certification programs in this space have demonstrated strong employment outcomes.
- Epic EMR certification’s presence in 117 postings confirms healthcare IT as a growing hiring domain. MATC and other regional training providers may find a ready market for EMR certification programs.
- The 4–6 year experience bracket is the largest single demand segment, reinforcing that the M7 region’s mid-career professional development focus targets the most active hiring tier.

Workforce Demographics: A Persistent Equity Gap

The M7 region’s tech workforce is 70.7% male and 75% White, with Black and Hispanic workers meaningfully underrepresented relative to national tech-sector benchmarks. The composition poses a long-term competitiveness risk that will not resolve without deliberate pipeline work.

The composition of the region’s tech workforce has not changed materially from Q3 2025. Gender representation remains at 70.7% male and 29.3% female, lagging national averages for tech. Racial and ethnic composition shows 75% White, 12.1% Asian, 5.8% Black or African American, and 4.9% Hispanic or Latino. Asian representation across the M7 region sits roughly in line with national tech-sector benchmarks, depending on the comparison set used. The pronounced gaps are in Black and Hispanic representation, both of which trail national tech benchmarks meaningfully and trail population shares in the M7 region. These are the groups where regional pipeline strategy has the most ground to make up.

Age distribution continues to show concentration in the 35–44 cohort (28.6%) and the 25–34 cohort (25.8%), a workforce with experienced mid-career professionals at its core. The 55+ retirement cohort holds steady at approximately 4,950 workers, representing a meaningful near-term attrition exposure that replacement pipelines must anticipate.

From an employer perspective, the homogeneity of the regional tech workforce is both an equity issue and a business risk. Research consistently links diverse teams to stronger innovation outputs. The M7 region’s existing talent pool underrepresents the communities that will make up the majority of future workforce entrants. Programs specifically designed to broaden participation, including apprenticeship models and community college to employer pipelines are a talent strategy.

★ WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

- The 55+ retirement cohort (4,950 workers) represents a time-sensitive knowledge transfer challenge. Organizations that have not begun succession planning conversations are behind.
- Representation gap = talent gap. The region's pipeline disadvantage relative to peer regions cannot be closed without broadening participation from Black, Hispanic, and female workers, the groups where the region's underrepresentation is most pronounced.

Graduate Pipeline: Growth in Programs, Steady in Completions

The number of active regional tech programs grew from 112 to 118 and annual completions held steady near 6,630. On paper that exceeds annual openings, but structural factors (job-readiness, in-region retention, and credential mismatch) compress the effective pipeline considerably.

The M7 region now supports 118 active academic programs in Computer and Mathematical disciplines, compared with the 112 tracked in Q3 2025. A six-program increase in six months is worth verifying as true program growth rather than a refresh of Lightcast's program inventory, but even if new, the incremental capacity is small. The 2024 completion count is 6,630, essentially flat with the 6,632 completions in 2023. Against approximately 2,895 annual job openings in the region, the raw completion number exceeds annual openings. That nominal surplus, however, obscures structural mismatches: not all completions are job-ready for open roles, not all graduates stay in the region, and many of the most in-demand occupations require credentials and experience levels that entry-level graduates do not yet have. The practical supply gap for employers remains meaningful even when the headline numbers appear to balance.

Institution	Annual Completions	Share	Notable Programs	Trend
UW-Milwaukee	2,076	31%	CS, IS, Data	—
UW-Whitewater	1,231	19%	IT, CS	—
Marquette University	902	14%	CS, Engineering	—
MATC	504	8%	Networking, IT Support	—
UW-Parkside	357	5%	CS, CIS	—
Other Institutions	~1,560	24%	Various	—

A note on this list: the ranking above reflects the Lightcast Q1 2026 Occupation Snapshot's top five regional institutions by annual completions in Computer and Mathematical disciplines only (SOC 15-0000). Several other partners core to the M7 region's tech talent pipeline, including **Milwaukee School of Engineering** (**MSOE**), **Waukesha County Technical College** (**WCTC**), and **Gateway Technical College**, are folded into the "Other Institutions" aggregate. Their position here reflects this report's scope, not their importance. MSOE's largest output sits in engineering disciplines that fall outside SOC 15-0000. WCTC and Gateway concentrate in applied technical programs including industrial automation, electronics, and advanced manufacturing, which also sit outside this report's current scope. Gateway in particular is a critical partner for the Kenosha and Racine talent pipeline called out elsewhere in this report. As future editions expand to include applied tech, these institutions will be more prominently represented in the rankings, and we welcome their direct input on how to characterize their contributions to the regional pipeline.

The programs growing fastest in number of completions at MATC, including networking, IT support, and associate-level credentials, align directly with employer demand categories. The certification pathway (CompTIA A+, Network+, Security+) is increasingly accepted as equivalent to a two-year degree for technical support and infrastructure roles.

★ WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

- MATC's 504 annual completions represent the most direct employer-ready pipeline for technical support, infrastructure, and entry-level analyst roles. Employer engagement with MATC through co-ops, advisory boards, and credential-stacking programs is among the highest-ROI talent investments in the region.
- Graduate retention is an unseen variable. The M7 region's competitive disadvantage on COL-adjusted compensation means that some graduates, particularly top performers from UWM and Marquette, are likely comparing M7 region offers against Chicago and other metro markets. Employer-sponsored scholarships and signing bonuses tied to regional commitment are practical retention levers.

Regional Implications & Call to Action

The data in this report points to five areas where coordinated regional action will move the needle. Each priority below pairs the underlying signal with an immediate next step that is actionable within the next one to two quarters.

PRIORITY 1: BUILD THE MID-CAREER UPSKILLING SYSTEM

- The M7 region's strongest competitive asset is its experienced, place-rooted mid-career technical workforce. MKE Tech Hub's Fall 2025 convenings confirmed that mid-career tech professionals lacked clear on-ramps to emerging tech skills.
- Immediate next step: The region should prioritize 12-week sprint programs focused on Automation, Python, and Azure, the three fastest-growing skills in M7 region employer postings.

PRIORITY 2: CLOSE THE COMPENSATION TRANSPARENCY GAP

- Among employers that disclose compensation, the advertised median sits roughly 30% above the recorded $89K regional median. Non-disclosing employers may or may not pay at that same level, and many candidates continue to anchor to the lower recorded figure. A regional effort to develop shared benchmarking norms would improve market function and reduce information asymmetry without overstating where the full employer landscape actually sits.
- Immediate next step: MKE Tech Hub Coalition can convene member companies to develop shared salary benchmarking norms for the most in-demand roles.

PRIORITY 3: VALIDATE AND ACT ON THE KENOSHA AND RACINE DEMAND SIGNALS

- Kenosha County's 14:1 posting intensity is the most extreme ratio in the region and warrants a closer look. The ratio could reflect a genuinely hard-to-fill local market, concentration of staffing-firm re-advertising, or a small number of employers driving most of the volume. Before scaling a response, the signal needs to be validated against the underlying employer composition.
- Immediate next step: Commission a targeted diagnostic of Kenosha and Racine tech posting activity to identify the top employers, staffing-firm share, and occupational concentration behind the intensity ratios. If the analysis confirms a genuine employer demand gap, convene those

employers with Gateway Technical College and UW-Parkside to design a dedicated regional talent pipeline.

PRIORITY 4: ELEVATE CYBERSECURITY AND AI AS REGIONAL PRIORITIES

- Cybersecurity (Information Security Engineers at 4:1 intensity, 23 days) and AI Engineering (emerging, 2:1 intensity) are the two most capacity-constrained emerging disciplines.
- Immediate next step: Develop stackable credential pathways for CISSP and adjacent certifications, and begin piloting AI literacy programs for the manufacturing and healthcare sectors.

PRIORITY 5: EXPAND DIVERSE TALENT PIPELINES

- The M7 region’s pipeline disadvantage relative to peer regions cannot be closed without broadening participation from the groups most underrepresented in our current tech workforce, specifically Black and Hispanic workers and women across all race and ethnicity categories. This is where the regional pipeline has the most ground to make up and the greatest upside.
- Immediate next step: Identify 3–5 member companies to participate in a pilot apprenticeship model specifically designed for non-traditional entry points, including community college transfers, bootcamp graduates, and career changers.

Connect With the Coalition

This report is published by the MKE Tech Hub Coalition as part of our ongoing commitment to data-informed regional workforce strategy. If your organization would like to discuss how this data applies to your specific talent challenges, partner on upskilling initiatives, or contribute to the Workforce Advisory Committee, we would welcome the conversation.

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Data Sources

- Lightcast Q1 2026 Occupation Snapshot: Employment supply, compensation (government-surveyed), projections, demographics, and graduate pipeline data. Reflects the most current modeled labor market estimates as of Q1 2026.
- Lightcast Q1 2026 Job Posting Analytics Report: Real-time employer demand data drawn from 10,048 unique job postings collected from online sources between April 2025 and March 2026. Covers 1,509 posting companies, advertised salary (where disclosed, 40% of postings), skills, occupations, certifications, and employer activity metrics.
- Lightcast Q3 2025 Occupation Snapshot: Used as the prior-period baseline for quarter-over-quarter trend comparisons throughout this report.
- MMAC Q4 2025 Business Outlook Survey: Supplementary regional business sentiment data from 52 member firms, used to contextualize hiring demand trends.
- MKE Tech Hub Fall 2025 Upskilling Debrief: Coalition-generated insights from three member events in October 2025, including the Member Meeting (24 participants), SEWI-ATD Talent Development Forum (100+ L&D professionals), and Executive Roundtable (25 leaders).

- “Same-size region” national benchmark: Comparisons in this report to a “same-size region average” or “national benchmark” refer to a Lightcast-constructed peer set of U.S. metropolitan regions grouped by total employment scale. The peer set is not a hand-curated list of Milwaukee’s economic comparators (e.g., Pittsburgh, Kansas City, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Columbus), and membership can shift as the data underlying the Lightcast model updates. Readers should treat the −22% supply gap and related benchmark statistics as directional rather than precise.

Occupation Snapshot figures represent modeled estimates and are subject to revision as additional data becomes available. Job Posting Analytics figures reflect employer-facing market activity and may not capture all job activity (particularly internal transfers and unposted roles). Projection figures (such as the 5-year employment outlook) are model outputs and have been revised materially in prior quarters. For questions about data methodology, contact casey.obrien@mketech.org.

The MKE Tech Hub Coalition gratefully acknowledges Employ Milwaukee for providing access to the Lightcast datasets that make this report possible. Employ Milwaukee’s partnership in supporting regional labor market intelligence is a meaningful contribution to data-informed workforce strategy across the M7 region.