

Overview

In 2023, *Visit Fort Wayne* launched a 10-Year Tourism Master Plan to guide tourism-driven economic growth and development. A key priority identified in the plan was understanding and addressing the employment needs of the hospitality industry, as the people who power our restaurants, hotels, attractions, and venues make tourism possible.

To support this goal, *Visit Fort Wayne* partnered with Purdue University Fort Wayne's Community Research Institute (CRI) to conduct a voluntary and anonymous online survey of current and former hospitality employees in Allen County across restaurants, hotels, athletic facilities, event centers, and museums or other attractions.

Key Takeaways

Better Pay Tops the List: Among current employees, "better pay" was the top choice for how to improve the industry.

- Concerns around pay and benefits for the hospitality industry was a consistent theme throughout the survey results.
 - Low pay was the biggest challenge in filling open hourly positions
 - Many former employees left the industry for a job with better pay

Why Workers Stay: Current employees say they enjoy providing good customer service, having fun at work, and feeling familiar with the industry.

Turnover Is Expected: 51% of managers described employee turnover as "manageable" and typical for the industry.

- Management respondents believe hiring hourly employees is challenging because of a lack of qualified applicants and employees not showing up, which they attribute to low pay, inconsistent or unpredictable schedules, and a lack of benefits for these jobs.

Return Potential: 56% of former hospitality workers would consider returning to the industry. They would consider returning if the pay and hours are worth their time to return and the role fit their schedules, especially around another job.

Industry Support: *Visit Fort Wayne* can continue to help employers by driving more local and visitor spending, boosting demand for hospitality services.

Respondents

- The survey sample skewed toward white, female, higher-income individuals in management or supervisory roles.
- Most respondents had extensive experience in hospitality and plan to remain in the industry.
- The most common employers were:
 - Restaurants
 - Museums, zoos, and attractions (e.g., arcades, family fun centers, bowling alleys)
 - Hotels

What's Next

During the development of the Tourism Master Plan, the hospitality workforce was in flux. Today, the data suggests the industry has stabilized and there's no sense of crisis, but there is room for growth and improvement.

Hospitality offers meaningful work, connection with customers, flexible schedules, and a fun, dynamic environment. These strengths are key to attracting and retaining talent. *Visit Fort Wayne* and its partners will build on these findings with the following initiatives:

1. Advocate for Hospitality as a Career Path

Promote the industry as a vibrant, rewarding economic driver.

Action Items:

- Leverage events like *Savor Fort Wayne* and *Be A Tourist in Your Own Hometown* to spotlight hospitality careers.
- Celebrate the industry at *The Power of Tourism—Visit Fort Wayne's* annual hospitality awards luncheon.
- When requested, *Visit Fort Wayne* will continue to deliver presentations at local high schools and colleges about career opportunities and industry impact.

2. Engage Students Early

Create pathways for students to explore hospitality careers.

Action Items:

- Explore a high school work-based learning program in partnership with the Indiana Tourism Association and Grow Allen. *Visit Fort Wayne* will serve as the initial convener between Grow Allen and industry partners.
- When requested, *Visit Fort Wayne* will continue to participate in regional Hospitality Career Fairs.



Visit Fort Wayne will revisit and update the Hospitality Workforce Study every five years.

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