

FUNERAL SERVICE EDUCATION AND WAGE DATA

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The data in this report was drawn from the Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) program of the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. The OES program collects data on wage and salary workers in order to produce employment and wage estimates for about 800 occupations. Data from self-employed persons are not collected and are not included in the estimates. The OES program produces these occupational estimates for the nation as a whole, by state, by metropolitan or nonmetropolitan area.

The OES program surveys approximately 200,000 establishments per panel (every six months), taking three years to fully collect the sample of 1.2 million establishments. The collection is on a three-year survey cycle that ensures that establishments are surveyed at most once every three years.

The occupational titles studied for this report are: 1) Mortician, Undertaker, Funeral Director; 2) Embalmer; and 3) Funeral Service Manager. Because of the variety of licensing schemes among the states, it is likely that there are reporting errors in the data. For example: If a state has a “mono” license rather than “dual” licenses for funeral directors and embalmers, the data reported for “Embalmer” may mean all licensees instead of just those working as an Embalmer only.

In 2016, the top paying states for the “umbrella” occupational title “Mortician, Undertaker, Funeral Director” were:

State	FS Ed Required	Annual Mean Wage
Massachusetts	Associate	\$73,390
Delaware	Associate	\$72,850
Illinois	Associate	\$69,040
New Jersey	Associate	\$68,840
North Dakota	Associate + 60 credits	\$63,520

The Massachusetts data is skewed by higher wages in the Boston Metropolitan area (see Page 3). Illinois is impacted by the union driven wages of Chicago. New Jersey and New York City can be considered together and have consistently high wages for obvious reasons. There is no readily apparent reason for North Dakota to be among the top five. There may be some residual affect from neighboring Minnesota which topped the 2014 list of states for the job title “Embalmer” (see Page 2).

In 2014, the top paying states for “Mortician, Undertaker, Funeral Director” were:

State	FS Ed Required	Annual Mean Wage
Illinois	Associate	\$74,980
Maryland	Associate	\$68,010
New Jersey	Associate + 1 yr Gen Ed	\$66,480
Nebraska	Associate + 2 yr Gen Ed	\$66,460
Wisconsin	9 mo MSC + 2 yr Gen Ed	\$65,720

Illinois and New Jersey make the list every time for reasons explained earlier. Delaware and Maryland are geographically proximate and part of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area; so it is no surprise that they make the lists. *All* of these states require only an Associate degree for licensure. There is no obvious explanation for Nebraska and Wisconsin making the list. Longitudinal data over time is necessary to determine a pattern.

As noted in the introduction, it is reasonable to assume that data reported for the over-arching occupational title “Mortician, Undertaker, Funeral Director” most accurately reflects what industry members refer to as “fully licensed” individuals and represents the majority of individuals working in the field. The following data for “Embalmers” is reflective of states that have “split” licenses, meaning they license funeral directors and embalmers separately.

In 2016, the top paying states for the occupational title “Embalmer” were:

State	FS Ed Required	Annual Mean Wage
Missouri	Associate	\$51,680
Virginia	Associate	\$50,860
Ohio	Associate	\$47,610
Arkansas	Associate	\$46,510
California	Associate	\$46,340

It is especially noteworthy that every state on this list has separate licenses for Funeral Directors and Embalmers except for Virginia which is a “mono” license state. Therefore, this data is likely to be an accurate depiction of the wages of people employed solely as Embalmers. The states that license Funeral Directors (non-embalmers) require little or no formal education. For example: In Missouri, a person can become licensed as a “Funeral Director” via completion of a “12 consecutive month apprenticeship in lieu of formal education.”

In 2014, the top paying states for “Embalmers” were:

State	FS Ed Required	Annual Mean Wage
Minnesota	Bachelor	\$72,640
Connecticut	Associate	\$65,670
Iowa	Associate	\$53,590
Kansas	Associate	\$46,730
California	Associate	\$46,490

Minnesota is the only state that requires an actual “bachelor’s degree” in funeral service for licensure. While it may be tempting at first glance to conclude that there is a direct correlation between the level of education and the higher wages, doing so would be premature for the following reasons: First, Minnesota did not make a repeat appearance on the list in 2016. Furthermore, the significant differences in the wages between Minnesota and the other top states indicates that there might have been a reporting error in 2014. It would be reasonable to conclude that the figure quoted for Minnesota as attributable to only “Embalmers” is actually a state average for *all* licensees because Minnesota has only one, combined license. Finally, there are many other locales with higher wages than Minnesota which have lower educational requirements. Longitudinal data will be necessary to determine patterns.

Further evidence that wages are determined by geographic location and not by education is determined by drilling down to specific locations, i.e. which cities/regions pay the most.

The top paying locations for “Mortician, Undertaker, Funeral Director” in 2016 were:

Metropolitan Area	Annual Mean Wage
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA	\$88,310
Dutchess County-Putnam County, NY Metropolitan	\$84,730
Chicago-Naperville-Arlington Heights, IL Metropolitan	\$81,370
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metropolitan	\$80,210
Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL	\$76,720
Elkhart-Goshen, IN	\$76,490
Nassau County-Suffolk County, NY Metropolitan	\$76,130

As noted above, wages are high in the Boston metropolitan area just as they are in other major cities. All the other areas are major urban centers except for Elkhart-Goshen, IN. There is no obvious explanation for their appearance on the list. It is possible that there is some residual affect from their proximity to

Chicago and Indianapolis. As with other “outlier data,” longitudinal study will be necessary to determine a pattern.

The top paying geographic locations for “Embalmers” in 2016 were:

Metropolitan Area	Annual Mean Wage
Richmond, VA	\$62,380
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metropolitan	\$55,320
St. Louis, MO-IL	\$50,620
Kansas City, MO-KS	\$45,440
Oklahoma City, OK	\$45,080
San Diego-Carlsbad, CA	\$44,940
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	\$42,320
Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO	\$42,090
Colorado Springs, CO	\$38,850
New Orleans-Metairie, LA	\$37,430

This demonstrates that the highest wages are *always* in urban areas while rural areas, even those very close to urban centers, have significantly lower wages.

Moreover, the fact that Denver and Colorado Springs Colorado rank 8th and 9th on the list of the ten highest paying geographic areas for Embalmers is particularly significant because Colorado eliminated education and licensing requirements in 1982. It is intuitively obvious that lower entry requirements should drive wages down; but that is not the case.

In conclusion, there are two important items that jump out of the data:

- 1) Only one of the states on *any* of these lists requires a “bachelor’s degree” for licensure. That is Minnesota and it only appears once, in 2014. A few states do have educational requirements in addition to “mortuary school.” For example: Nebraska and North Dakota require mortuary school plus 60 hours (two years) of general education. Since the national standard for mortuary school is now two years, their educational requirement is the equivalent of the bachelor’s degree.

But the very highest paying locations require no more than two years of education. Simply put: ***There is no correlation between the amount of education required and wages in funeral service. Wages are a function of geography and cost of living – not of education.***

- 2) Finally, but perhaps most significantly, it must be pointed out that there is a decided “wage gap” among the different occupational sub-groups in death care. To wit: The national average wage for Funeral Director/Embalmers is \$54,700; while the average wage for those who work as Embalmers only is just \$42,260. But that disparity is not nearly as significant as the wage gap between line staff and managers. The average wage for a “Funeral Service Manager” in the United States is \$110,550. There is no data available on the actual amount of education possessed by people with this job title; but in those states that license non-embalmer funeral directors, little or no formal education is required. Yet managers make two to three times as much as their employees.

Sources:

International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards. <https://theconferenceonline.org/>.

United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/home.htm>.