

Understanding the Local Labor Market

Promising Career Pathways in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County

Focus: Customer Service Representatives

Understanding the Local Labor Market: Promising Career Pathways in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County is intended as a useful resource for career counselors and other professionals responsible for helping jobseekers make informed decisions about employment and training. Featured occupations are selected on the basis of vacancies, wages and benefits, and opportunities for advancement.

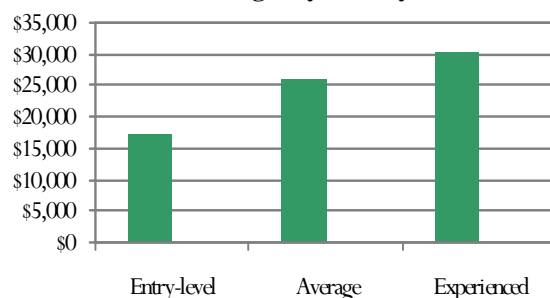
What do customer service representatives do?

- Employers across a variety of industries hire customer service representatives to **serve as a direct point of contact for customer questions and concerns**. They answer routine questions as well as more involved questions requiring further research and follow-up. They may also spend a portion of their time selling additional products or services to customers.
- Communication with customers takes place in-person and/or via phone, email, written mail, or fax. Job responsibilities may vary by industry and **industry-specific knowledge may be required**.

What are customer service representatives' wages, benefits, and work conditions?

- These positions can be part-time or full-time; the Customer Service Supply Chain (CSSC) program estimates average hourly wages for entry-level customer service representatives locally at **\$8 to \$12**. The PA Department of Labor and Industry estimates average annual wages for customer service representatives in Allegheny County at **\$26,074**.
- Most full-time customer service representatives are eligible for **benefits including medical, 401K, and sometimes tuition assistance for further training**. These positions, especially in a call center environment, may be closely monitored and performance may be evaluated based on the volume of customers served. Some employers offer **incentives for efficiency** based on the number of customers served.

**Wages for Customer Service Representatives
Allegheny County**



Source: PA Dept. of Labor & Industry, Center for Workforce Information & Analysis (www.dli.state.pa.us/workforceinfo)

What do customer service representatives like about their jobs?

- Customer service representatives enjoy **communicating with and helping people** by answering questions and solving problems. They also like **case managing an issue** and seeing it through from start to finish.
- Customer service representatives may benefit from **flexible schedules** as many employers offer shift-work in evenings and on weekends for these jobs.
- Customer service representatives generally **work in a professional office environment**.

What are related jobs and advancement opportunities?

- Customer service representatives possess skills that are transferable across industries and to other related occupations including: account manager; clerk; teller; salesperson; computer support specialist; and, medical receptionist.
- Some local employers, particularly in the healthcare and financial services industries, consider **customer service representative positions as a training ground for higher-level positions within the company**. Through work experience and good performance, customer service representatives may move to higher-level jobs (in the same company or with a different employer) including managerial and sales positions.

How many customer service representative openings are there?

- Locally, current demand for customer service representatives is high. The PA Department of Labor & Industry's Center for Workforce Information & Analysis estimates that there are approximately **18,270 customer service representatives working in Allegheny County**.
- **Local employers posted 545 local customer service representative jobs** on the **Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink** website (www.careerlinkpittsburgh.com) in the past two months.
- In Allegheny County, a large number of customer service representatives work for employers in the finance and insurance industry. Communications and utilities companies also tend to hire large numbers of customer service representatives locally. Customer service representatives working for telecommunications and utilities firms are often unionized.

How can I become a customer service representative?

- Most customer service representative positions require a **high school diploma or equivalent**.
- Excellent **communication, listening, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills as well as good math skills** (especially in the financial services industry) are needed.
- **Computer skills** are generally required as customer service representatives often use computers to respond to customers and to modify databases containing customer information.
- For these jobs, employers seek **people who are friendly and professional** and can patiently handle customers who may exhibit frustration or anger.
- While training continues on the job, most employers look for individuals with some **relevant work experience** and **applicable training** for these positions.
- There are some **local training programs** where individuals can acquire the skills needed for customer service representative positions. (See list, right.) These programs generally allow individuals to choose from a menu of training modules in order to obtain the exact training they need.
- Employers often use assessments (including **workplace skill, workplace culture, language, and basic reading and math assessments**) when screening applicants for customer service representative positions.
- Employers may also require **drug and alcohol, criminal background, and credit checks** of applicants for these jobs. Demonstrated knowledge of the industry may also be a factor in hiring decisions for these positions.
- Visit www.careerwired.com to learn more about required skills and training for customer service representatives.

Can I get help paying for training?

- Limited training funds may be available through **Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink**.
- Some local training programs offer scholarship opportunities based on income eligibility.

Remember...

Labor markets are affected by economic, social, and institutional factors that are difficult to predict. No one can forecast perfectly how many jobs will be available, or whether there will be too many or too few workers to fill those jobs. The reality is that employment is never a guarantee, even for individuals who pursue training in demand occupations.

The Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board (TRWIB) is charged with promoting a coordinated and accountable employment and training system for Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. Responsibilities include setting and monitoring local performance standards, chartering CareerLink comprehensive and community centers that provide a range of services to jobseekers and employers, and certifying qualified training providers. Board members are appointed by Mayor Tom Murphy (City of Pittsburgh) and Chief Executive Dan Onorato (Allegheny County).

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The TRWIB does not warrant that the information in this publication is accurate or complete.

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Where can I get training locally?

Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) Customer Service Representative Training
412-237-2723; www.ccac.edu. CCAC offers a 5-week, 150-hour customer service representative training addressing the customer service and computer skills required by entry-level customer service representatives. It is offered three to four times a year and takes place Monday-Friday (8:30AM-3:30PM).

Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) Modern Office Systems Training (MOST)
412-274-6440; www.ccac.edu. This program includes training in office technologies, data entry, customer service, written and oral communications, payroll, and accounts payable and receivable. The total training is 450 hours but students may take fewer hours by choosing the modules they need to fill specific skill gaps.

Customer Service Supply Chain (CSSC)
1-877-272-2772; www.careerwired.com. CSSC offers a regular and fast-track customer service training three times a year between January and August. The program includes assessments, training in key customer service functions, an externship, and a job fair. It is free to eligible participants.

How do I find out about customer service representative jobs?

- **Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink** has many customer service representative job postings (contact 1-866-317-JOBS or visit www.careerlinkpittsburgh.com to learn more).
- Many employers use **local newspapers** to advertise customer service representative openings.
- Some local training programs offer **career fairs** for interacting with employers upon program completion.

