

Payroll Administrator

You make sure everybody gets paid the right amount, on time, with the right tax taken off. Get it wrong and the whole company notices.

TYPICAL PAY

\$58,260

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$40k to \$81k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 2 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Company offices, payroll service providers, school districts, hospit...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Finish with solid math and any accounting, business or computer classes your school offers. Spreadsheet skill matters more than anything else here.
- 2 Certificate, associate degree, or straight in** 0 to 2 years
 A one or two year accounting or business program at a community college is the usual route. Some people go straight into a clerk job and learn there.
- 3 Payroll clerk or assistant** 1 to 3 years
 Timekeeping, data entry, checking hours, answering the question of why a check looks wrong. This is where you learn the rules.
- 4 Certify** Exam plus study
 PayrollOrg runs the Fundamental Payroll Certification for beginners and the Certified Payroll Professional for experienced practitioners. The second one is what employers look for.
- 5 Payroll administrator or manager** 3 to 6 years in
 You own the cycle: processing, tax deposits, quarterly and year-end filings, audits and the software itself.

Pros and cons

- + Cheap and fast to get into, often with no degree
- + Every organization needs it, in every town
- + Predictable hours and lots of remote roles
- The federal outlook is a decline as software takes the routine work
- Deadlines are immovable and mistakes are very visible
- Repetitive by design, because consistency is the point

Good to know

The federal minimum wage has not moved since 2009

The Fair Labor Standards Act floor has been \$7.25 an hour since July 24, 2009. Most states now set a higher one, and where both apply the employee gets whichever is higher, which is exactly the kind of rule p...

Weekends do not trigger overtime

Under federal law overtime is owed for hours past 40 in a workweek, not for working a Saturday or a holiday. Plenty of people are surprised by that, and the payroll office is who explains it.

Optional boosts

Certified Payroll Professional. Multi-state payroll. Major payroll platforms. Union and prevailing wage payroll.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Payroll and Timekeeping Clerks (43-3051.00)

PayrollOrg: payroll certification

Internal Revenue Service: employment taxes

US Department of Labor: the Fair Labor Standards Act

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/payroll-administrator>



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