



Small-business options: Occupational outlook for self-employed workers

Elka Torpey and Brian Roberts | May 2018

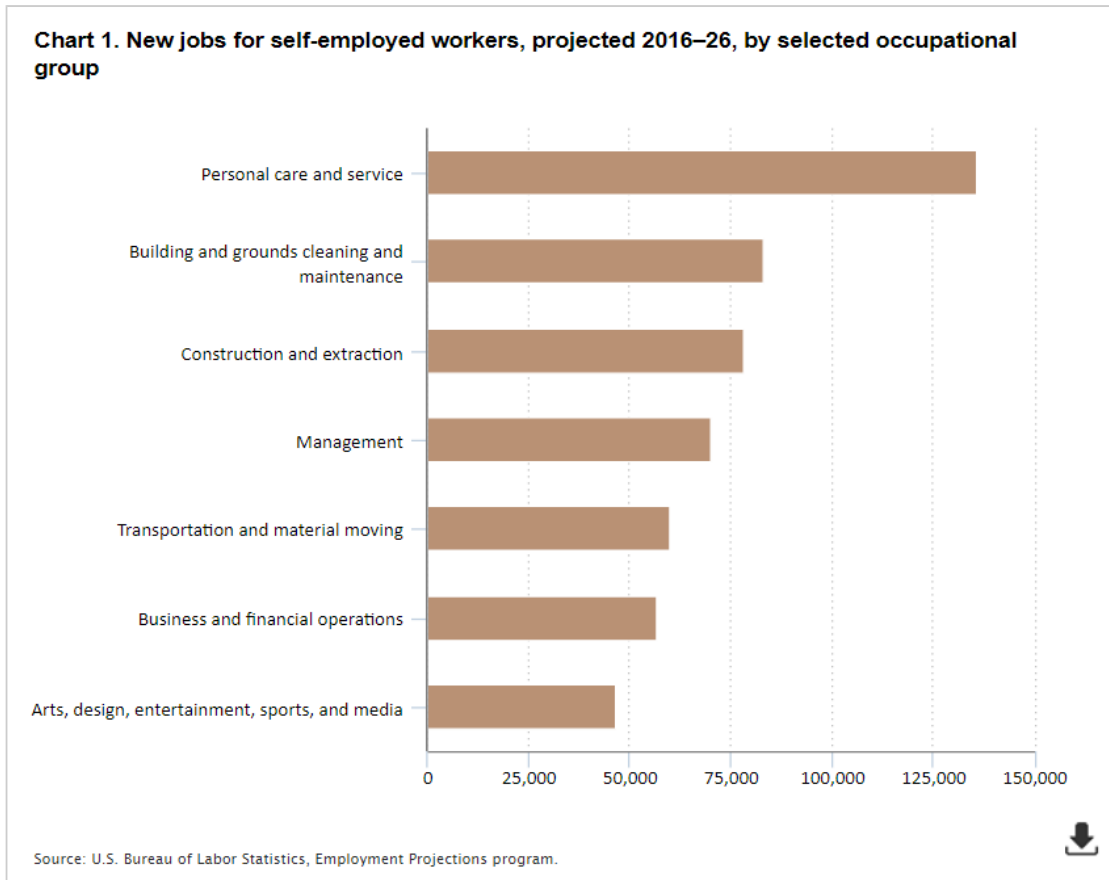
Before starting a business, you may want to research which occupations are expected to have strong growth for self-employed workers. And a good place to begin is with projections data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

BLS counts self-employment in different ways. By one count, there were about 9.6 million self-employed workers in 2016—and BLS projects this number to increase to 10.3 million by 2026. That's a 7.9-percent growth rate, slightly faster than the 7.4-percent rate projected for all workers.

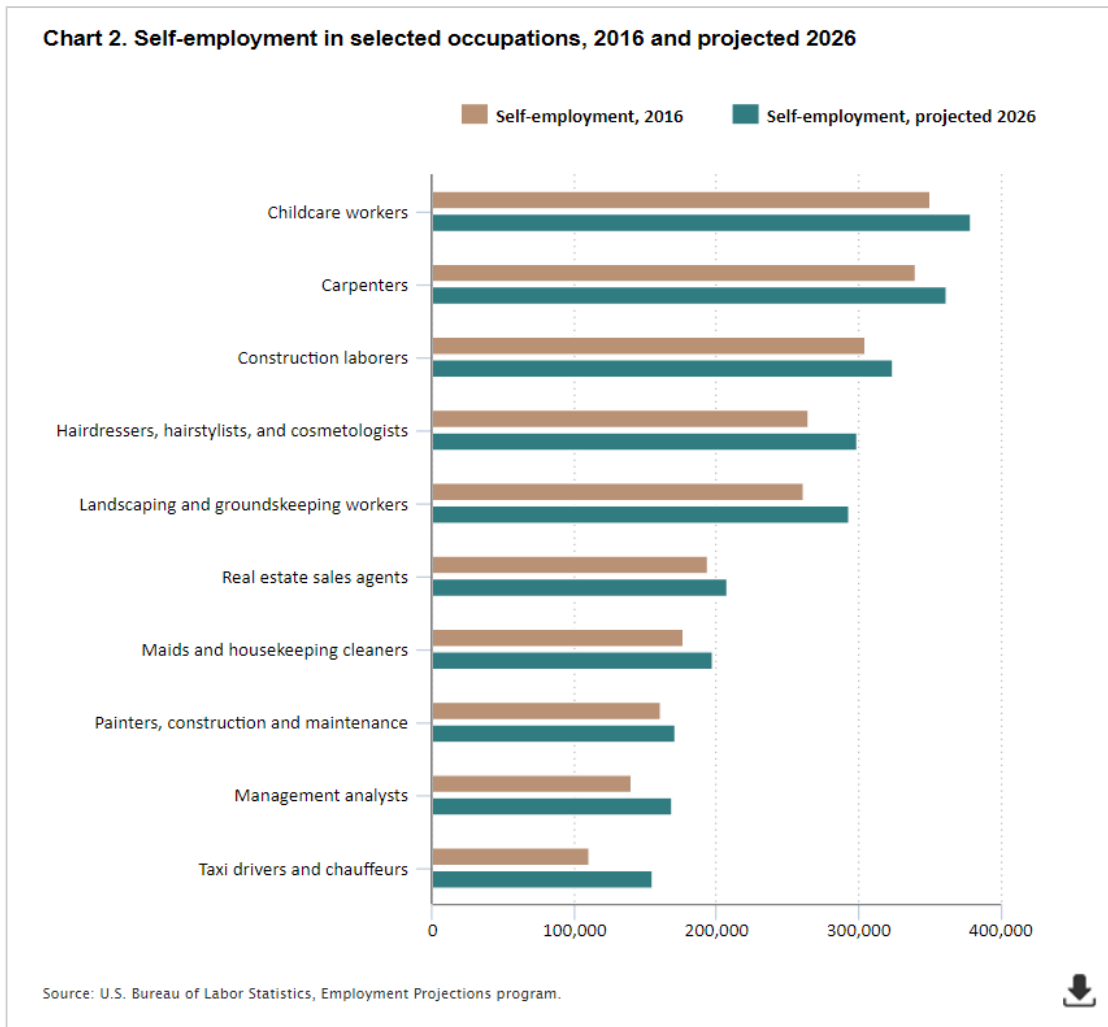
This article highlights selected occupations that are projected to have many jobs for, or high concentrations of, self-employed workers. It compares self-employment rates for those selected occupations with the percentage of all workers projected to be self-employed in 2026.

Many new jobs

Projected growth in self-employment varies by occupational group. BLS projects service occupations, such as those in [personal care](#) and in [cleaning and maintenance](#), to have many new jobs for self-employed workers from 2016 to 2026. (See chart 1.)



By detailed occupation, BLS projects self-employment to grow in some occupations and to decline in others. For example, the occupation of [farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers](#)—which had nearly 750,000 self-employed workers in 2016, the most of any occupation—is projected to lose about 21,000 jobs by 2026. But the occupations in chart 2, including [childcare workers](#), [real estate sales agents](#), and [management analysts](#), are projected to have many new jobs for self-employed workers from 2016 to 2026.

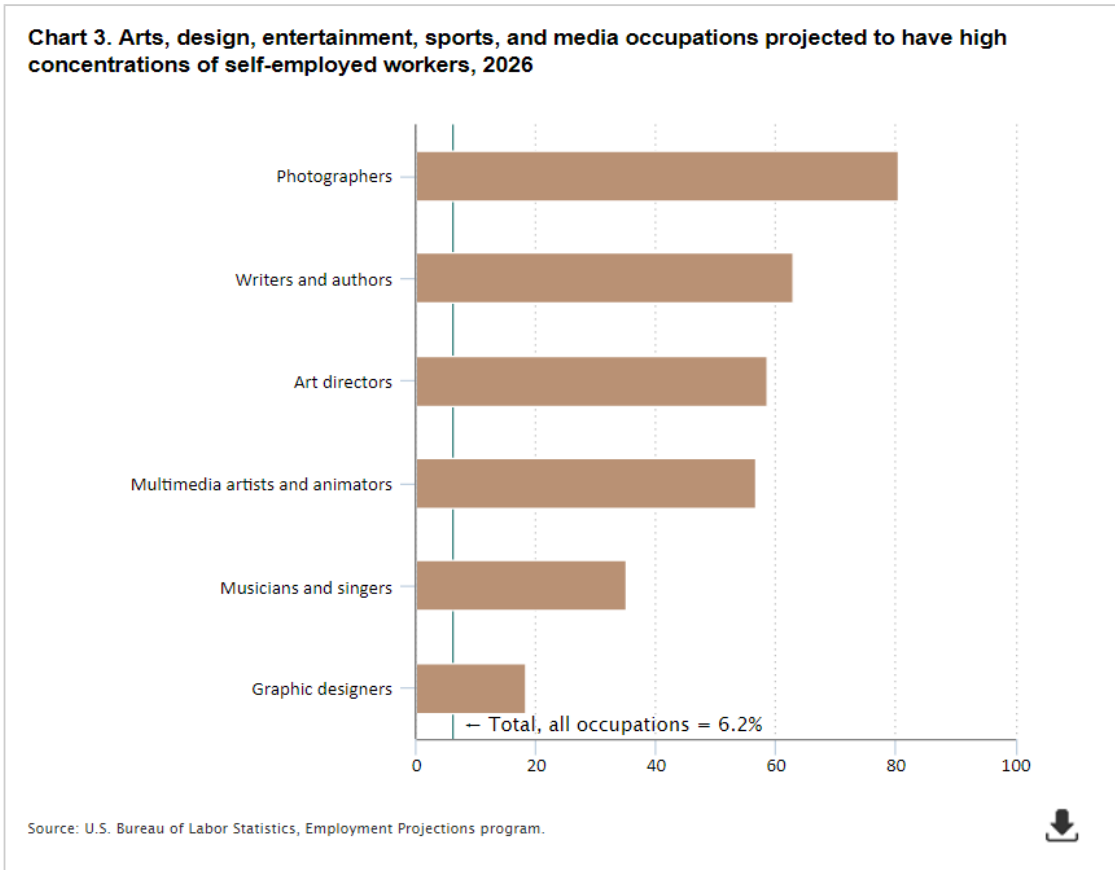


Half of the occupations in chart 2 typically require no formal educational credential for entry, but they might need other qualifications. [Taxi drivers and chauffeurs](#), for example, may need a taxi or limousine license in addition to a regular driver’s license.

High concentration

Of the groups shown in chart 1, the [arts, design, entertainment, sports](#), and [media](#) group is projected to add the fewest jobs for self-employed workers from 2016 to 2026. However, 25 percent of jobs in these occupations are projected to be for self-employed workers in 2026, the highest concentration of any group.

Chart 3 shows the percentage of workers projected to be self-employed in selected occupations in the highest concentration group in 2026. The chart also shows the percentage of self-employed for all occupations projected for 2026: 6.2 percent. Although these workers focus on different tasks, all of the occupations involve [creativity](#).



Most of the occupations in chart 3 typically require a bachelor’s degree for entry. [Musicians and singers](#), the one occupation that typically requires no formal education to enter, does require an ability or talent that must be cultivated over several years—which is also the case for [photographers](#) and [writers and authors](#).

High pay for self-employed

In all of the occupations in table 1, self-employed workers had a median annual income greater than \$60,000 in 2016. That’s nearly twice \$32,020, the median annual income for all self-employed workers. These high-income occupations for self-employed workers also are projected to have above-average rates of self-employment in 2026. Income data in the table were calculated from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey.

Table 1. Projected self-employment, 2026, and typical education and training requirements in selected occupations with high incomes for self-employed workers, 2016



Occupation	Self-employment, projected 2026	Percent self-employed, projected 2026	Median annual income, 2016	Typical entry-level education	Typical on-the-job training to attain competency
Management analysts	169,400	18.4%	\$65,090	Bachelor's degree ¹	None
Lawyers	163,900	19.1	90,460 ²	Doctoral or professional degree	None
Accountants and auditors	100,300	6.5	71,560	Bachelor's degree	None
Personal financial advisors	72,200	23.1	100,900	Bachelor's degree	Long-term on-the-job training
Clinical, counseling, and school psychologists	41,700	24.8	76,960 ³	Doctoral or professional degree	Internship/residency
Dentists, general	30,500	19.2	150,920 ⁴	Doctoral or professional degree	None
Appraisers and assessors of real estate	19,600	21.3	60,540	Bachelor's degree	Long-term on-the-job training
Chiropractors	16,300	30.6	61,930	Doctoral or professional degree	None
Veterinarians	11,800	12.5	80,050	Doctoral or professional degree	None

¹ In addition to a degree, this occupation typically requires less than 5 years of work experience in a related occupation.

² Data are for self-employed lawyers and judges, magistrates, and other judicial workers.

³ Data are for all types of self-employed psychologists.

⁴ Data are for all types of self-employed dentists.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program (employment data; education, experience, and training analysis) and authors' calculations from 2016 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata (income data).

All of the occupations in table 1 typically require a bachelor's, doctoral, or professional degree for entry. Nearly half of them also require people to have work experience in a related occupation in order to enter or require workers to get on-the-job training to attain competency.

Explore further

There are many options for self-employment. For more inspiration, see table 2 to find some other occupations in which BLS projects at least 30,000 self-employed workers in 2026.

Table 2. Projected self-employment for workers in selected occupations, 2026

More than 100,000 self-employed workers, projected 2026		
Occupation	Self-employment, projected 2026	Percent self-employed, projected 2026
First-line supervisors of retail sales workers	355,200	22.3
Construction managers	162,800	36.3
Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers	154,300	7.8
Property, real estate, and community association managers	140,600	40.2
Food service managers	113,200	33.7
Automotive service technicians and mechanics	104,300	13.1
Personal care aides	102,100	3.7
Janitors and cleaners, except maids and housekeeping cleaners	101,200	3.9
Insurance sales agents	100,200	18.2

Less than 100,000 but more than 50,000 self-employed workers, projected 2026		
Occupation	Self-employment, projected 2026	Percent self-employed, projected 2026
Self-enrichment education teachers	80,000	19.4
Light truck or delivery services drivers	77,900	7.7
Door-to-door sales workers, news and street vendors, and related workers	74,800	90.7
Chief executives	74,400	25.1
Massage therapists	72,200	35.7
Plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters	64,300	11.6
Electricians	57,600	7.9
Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing, except technical and scientific products	55,800	3.6
Nonfarm animal caretakers	53,200	17.7

Less than 50,000 but more than 30,000 self-employed workers, projected 2026		
Occupation	Self-employment, projected 2026	Percent self-employed, projected 2026
Barbers	45,800	71.6
Nursing assistants	41,600	2.5
Manicurists and pedicurists	39,500	27.6
Driver/sales workers	39,200	8.5
Fitness trainers and aerobics instructors	36,000	10.9
Roofers	32,600	20.1
Heating, air conditioning, and refrigeration mechanics and installers	32,300	8.4
Web developers	31,300	16.7
Coaches and scouts	30,300	9.7

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program.

Learn about the occupations mentioned in this article, along with hundreds of others, in the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) (OOH). The OOH describes what workers do, what wage and salary workers are paid, what it takes to enter an occupation, and more.

Elka Torpey and Brian Roberts are economists in the Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections, BLS. They can be reached at torpey.elka@bls.gov and roberts.brian@bls.gov.

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Elka Torpey and Brian Roberts, "Small-business options: Occupational outlook for self-employed workers," *Career Outlook*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2018.

RELATED CONTENT

[Working in a gig economy](#)

[Self-employment: What to know to be your own boss](#)

[BLS Employment Projections program](#)

[American Community Survey](#)

RELATED SUBJECTS

[Business](#) | [Career planning](#) | [Employment](#) | [Infographics](#) | [Occupations](#) | [Pay](#) | [Projections](#) | [Self-employed](#)