

Arkansas

Sowing the seeds for homegrown startups

Arkansas is home to established Fortune 500 powerhouses, and it is also spawning startups to serve them. In Fayetteville, in the northwest corner of the state, Walmart and Tyson have invested in emerging technologies companies in retail, food and logistics.

In 2017, the state legislature passed a law green lighting driver-assisted truck platooning, which allows a convoy of connected vehicles to operate with the lead vehicle controlling the others. Arkansas is one of only nine states that have approved commercial use of the technology, which proponents say could make large vehicles more fuel efficient and ease traffic congestion.

State leaders also maintained their focus on keeping homegrown talent flowing into the state's tech sector. A 2014 bill made the Natural State the first in the nation to require all public and charter high schools to teach computer science, after which the number of students taking courses in the subject leapt 260 percent in a year. In 2018, more than 6,100 students were enrolled in the classes.

And in 2018 the state expanded its branch of the Environmental and Spatial Technology Initiative, a hands-on education program that gives students experience with high-end technology in a variety of professions. The latest expansion adds cybersecurity training to the options available to students, building on course offerings that already include video and audio editing and community mapping.

Sources: (Arkansas EDC) (GovTech) (Wired) (KSLA) (Time) (East Initiative) (Arkansas Online)

WHAT DID WE DO RIGHT?

Arkansas continued to split the costs of electronics recycling between government and industry.

WHAT CAN WE DO BETTER NEXT YEAR?

Arkansas can increase its internet speeds, and the percentage of residents with advanced degrees, in which it currently ranks last.

WHERE HAVE WE MOST IMPROVED?

Ridesharing services are now legal across Arkansas, and Uber expanded its presence in the state in 2017.

Best & Brightest	C
Fast Internet	D-
Grants Advanced Degrees	F
Tech Workforce	D
Tax Friendly	C
Attracts Investment	F
Entrepreneurial Activity	D-
Ridesharing	A
Short-Term Rentals	B+
Sustainable Policies	B+
Self-Driving Vehicles	A
Drones	A



Tech Workforce

Arkansas has only 78,000 tech jobs, fewer than every neighboring state except Mississippi.



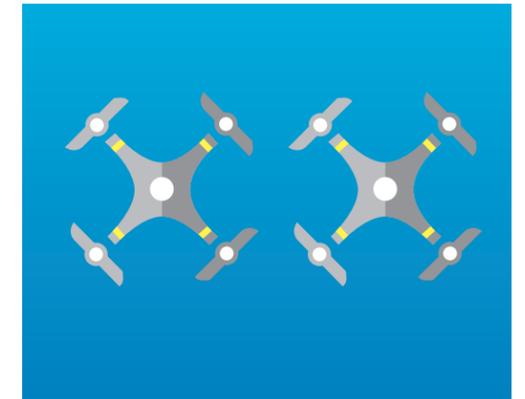
Short-Term Rentals

Arkansas reached a tax agreement with Airbnb that allows the platform to collect taxes for hosts and remit them to the state.



Ridesharing

Ridesharing is legal across Arkansas without undue regulatory burdens.



Drones

Arkansas permits operators to fly drones without overly restrictive regulations.

Telecom Brings Hundreds of New Jobs to Little Rock

North Little Rock's tech workforce is growing thanks to telecommunications company First Orion's decision to locate its global headquarters in the city.

First Orion, which produces call transparency software to identify scam and other unwanted phone calls, will hire 200 people to staff its 60,000-square-foot center. "Central Arkansas is an inspiring place for us to be," said First Orion CEO Charles D. Morgan. "Not only is First Orion building technology, but we are also building careers."

The headquarters will anchor the as-yet-unfinished Argenta Plaza, a communal space city leaders hope will revitalize the downtown area and attract a new wave of businesses.

"We believe the Argenta Plaza will be a community where big, brave ideas are given the chance to grow unfettered. First Orion is a shining example of our state's best and brightest creating technologies that make the world a better place," said North Little Rock Mayor Joe Smith.

Sources: (Area Development) (Area Development)

