

INNOVATION  ADOPTER

Idaho

Building out STEM education to keep pace with booming growth

Idaho was the nation's fastest-growing state in 2016 — the Census Bureau shows its population increased by 2.2 percent — and the state's tech workforce is growing, too.

Though its Tech Workforce grade does not yet reflect the state's progress, Idaho scored a major increase in technology jobs. The Gem State nonetheless faces the challenge of keeping up with demand for workers to fill tech positions: In 2017, according to the director of the Idaho STEM Action Center, 7,000 STEM jobs in the state went unfilled — twice as many as in the year before. By 2024, the deficit could reach 36,000.

State officials hope more funding for STEM programs will fix that. Governor Butch Otter's 2019 budget included \$1 million to expand post-secondary training programs at six technical colleges around the state to prepare students to enter seven high-demand fields.

The 2019 budget also set aside \$2 million for a STEM Action Center initiative, which will funnel financial support into regional STEM fairs, grants for computer science activities at public schools and professional development for STEM teachers.

And the K-12 STEM branch of the Idaho National Laboratory is lending a hand. The INL offers funding to schools to train teachers in STEM subjects, promotes computer science education for students and awards grants for STEM-centered projects to give students around the state easy access to hands-on programs.

Sources: (Census) (Idaho Statesman) (Department of Energy)

WHAT DID WE DO RIGHT?

Idaho invested more than \$920 per capita in research and development, well ahead of most other states.

WHAT CAN WE DO BETTER NEXT YEAR?

Idaho can lift overly burdensome and duplicative laws on drone operation.

WHERE HAVE WE MOST IMPROVED?

Idaho is now home to more than 48,000 technology jobs, a step ahead of neighboring Montana and Wyoming.

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



Tax Friendly

With moderate property taxes and a corporate tax rate of 7.4 percent, Idaho scores better than most states.



Grants Advanced Degrees

Only 9 percent of Idahoans over age 24 have an advanced degree, a smaller share than most other states.



Best & Brightest

Though a Right-to-Work state, Idaho lacks a state law to protect workers from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.



Short-Term Rentals

In 2016, Idaho passed a bill legalizing short-term rentals and permitting companies to collect and remit taxes for them.

New Kind of Power Plant for Safer, More Affordable Nuclear Energy

Idaho Falls will be the first city to host a power plant using new modular technology developed by NuScale Power.

The plant at Idaho National Lab will fuel more than 1,200 construction jobs and add 400 permanent jobs to the local workforce after it opens in 2026. "Of course we have the world's expertise in nuclear energy right here in our backyard," said Jackie Flowers, general manager of Idaho Falls Power. "And so for us it's an opportunity to maintain that leadership role in advancing nuclear generation, tap into that intellectual talent that we already have."

The Oregon-based company hopes to turn the lagging tide of the nuclear power industry with its modular reactors, which are safer, nimbler and more affordable than traditional models.

Modular reactors can be built piece by piece in a factory and assembled onsite, and allow the reactors to go online incrementally rather than waiting until an entire power plant is completed.

PHOTO CREDIT: Idaho National Laboratory | Sources: (Local News 8) (Washington Post)

