

West Virginia

Wild, wonderful and welcoming new technologies

As a Modest Innovator, West Virginia has room for improvement in several categories. But when it comes to public policy, the state is among the country's leaders for encouraging emerging technologies and new business models.

West Virginia earned an 'A' in three categories that measure legislative support for new technologies. The state has no significant restrictions on the use of drones, the testing of development of self-driving vehicles and ridesharing services operate free of burdensome restrictions.

At the Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College, students can learn how to apply drone tech to real-life business needs such as surveying coal piles at nearby mines. It's also one of only two places in the state where students can earn an FAA certification to fly drones for commercial purposes.

The LaunchLab Network, a startup resource center at West Virginia University, recently received a federal grant to continue its work helping student-entrepreneurs bring their ideas to life. Those students have access to a wide network of services at WVU, from a patent application advisory center to the West Virginia Manufacturing Extension Partnership. These young innovators are creating a new kind of economy in West Virginia, adapting the old to the new and building a bridge to the future.

Sources: (WVU) (Herald Dispatch)

WHAT DID WE DO RIGHT?

Ridesharing is legal across West Virginia.

WHAT CAN WE DO BETTER NEXT YEAR?

West Virginia can increase the number of residents with advanced degrees, which currently stands at just 7.7 percent. The state can also promote tech jobs, which are only 22.25 per 1,000 people.

WHERE HAVE WE MOST IMPROVED?

Nearly half of households in the state now have internet connections of at least 10 mbps.

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



Best & Brightest

West Virginia is a Right-to-Work state but does not protect workers from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.



Short-Term Rentals

Short-term rentals can operate but there is no statewide legal framework.



Drones

West Virginia restricts operators from flying drones to aid in hunting and fishing, but otherwise allows the technology without limitation.



Tax Friendly

West Virginia has largely business-friendly tax policies and a reasonable corporate tax rate of 6.5 percent.

Green Energy Offers a New Path Forward – and New Jobs – to West Virginian Coal Communities

As coal jobs in West Virginia disappear, one entrepreneur hopes solar energy project can bring new life into the communities hit hardest.

In 2014, 31-year-old entrepreneur Dan Conant returned from Vermont to his hometown of Shepherdstown to start Solar Holler, a solar installation company. "It's important we diversify quickly so young folks don't have to move away," Conant says. "The state is experiencing a serious brain drain."

In 2016, West Virginia had close to 400 solar-related jobs. Despite a lack of state government support for the solar industry – which grew by 25 percent nationwide from 2015 to 2016 – more companies are creating solar jobs to keep young workers in-state.

As part of his efforts, Conant partners with the Coalfield Development Corp, a nonprofit that offers paid apprenticeships and trains workers for new jobs, including installing solar panels and other electrical equipment.

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