

Wyoming

State leaders field plans to support innovation

The least populous state in the nation — and one of the only ones to fall all the way from Innovation Leader to Modest Innovator on the 2018 Scorecard — Wyoming has several new initiatives to support innovation and diversify an economy dominated by mining.

In 2016, Governor Matt Mead created the Economically Needed Diversity Options for Wyoming council to research ways in which the state can broaden its economy. In early 2018, Gov. Mead signed executive orders to increase the number of residents earning advanced degrees and promote the use of local technologies in government.

In 2017, Microsoft announced TechSpark, a multi-million-dollar program to make tech investments in Wyoming and five other states. Microsoft plans to expand rural broadband access in target communities by partnering with telecom companies on more affordable alternatives to fiber optic delivery systems.

Meanwhile, Wyoming offers one of the lowest tax burdens in the country, which benefits companies such as LogiLube. The fledgling business makes Internet of Things (IoT) sensors that provide real-time data for oil and gas producers. LogiLube was started with the help of the University of Wyoming's Technology Business Center, which incubates local startups and supports entrepreneurs. The company is now expanding its customer base to the growing wind energy sector, where detecting problems early is critical because wind turbines are difficult to access.

Sources: (UWYO) (Star Tribune) (U.S. News & World Report) (Billings Gazette) (ENDOW) (BEA)

WHAT DID WE DO RIGHT?

Wyoming led the country for its Tax Friendly policies.

WHAT CAN WE DO BETTER NEXT YEAR?

A 2017 law allows Wyoming authorities to develop their own drone rules and imposes multiple restrictions on drone operations, bringing the state's grade down sharply from an 'A' in 2017 to a 'D' in 2018.

WHERE HAVE WE MOST IMPROVED?

The Wyoming legislature passed a bill legalizing ride-sharing statewide.

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



Ridesharing

A 2017 law legalized ridesharing in the state.



Best & Brightest

Wyoming has a Right-to-Work law but no state legislation protecting workers from discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation.



Fast Internet

More than half of households have internet connections of at least 10 mbps, and 45 percent have connections of at least 25 mbps.



Tax Friendly

Wyoming ranks first in the nation for its tax policies.

Sparking New Innovation in Rural Communities of the Cowboy State

Wyoming policymakers, including Governor Matt Mead, are pushing to increase support for computer science education. In October 2017, an education committee of the state legislature recommended that high school students be allowed to count computer science credits toward their science requirements for graduation.

"No matter if you're a construction worker or working in a store, or an attorney or engineer or working in a coal mine, you're not just going to need to know how to use your smartphone and computer," said state superintendent of public instruction Jillian Balow. "You're going to have to solve problems with technology."

And now the Cowboy State has a new computer science program to help make its students more competitive in tech fields. Cheyenne is one of six cities participating in Microsoft's TechSpark, an initiative to give rural schools a boost in tech. The southern Wyoming city was an ideal candidate for the program, thanks to its proximity to a Microsoft data center, and the fact that it closely resembles other rural areas attempting to keep pace with their urban counterparts in computer science training, said Cheyenne TechSpark manager Dennis Ellis.

PHOTO CREDIT: Microsoft | Sources: (Wyoming Tribune Eagle) (Sweet Water Now)

