

OK COMPETES: TECH EDITION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Report Prepared for the Oklahoma Technology Alliance
by Economic Leadership, LLC

October 2026



WHY TECHNOLOGY MATTERS FOR OKLAHOMA

It is not hyperbole to say that technological innovation has driven the US economy for the better part of a century, accounting for perhaps "half of the nation's growth" over the past 100 years. The tech sector's two trillion-dollar output represents nearly ten percent of the American economy, and tech industry employment has been growing at about twice the national average. Innovation has driven gains in every industry, from agriculture to healthcare to finance.

However, continued success is far from certain. The United States faces tremendous competition for technology adoption and innovation from China, India, other Asian nations, much of Europe, and Canada. States compete with one another in the same way, and states that fail to keep pace risk falling behind in wages, investment, and competitiveness.

The Oklahoma Technology Alliance, an affiliate of the Oklahoma State Chamber of Commerce, commissioned this report to give policymakers, industry leaders, and the economic development community a clear, data-driven picture of where Oklahoma's technology sector stands today and what it will take to strengthen it. Economic Leadership LLC built this assessment from 2025 industry and occupation data, interviews with 18 tech sector leaders across the state, and a review of how peer and competitor states are approaching tech competitiveness. This summary presents the highlights of the full report.



Oklahoma's technology sector tells two stories at once. It is already an outsized contributor to the state's economy. Tech jobs carry high wages, and for every job created in the tech industry, more than two additional jobs are created elsewhere, the highest multiplier effect of any industry in the state. At the same time, Oklahoma trails many states in the rate of growth of both tech industries and tech occupations, and lags on several of the investments (research funding, patents, and venture capital) that convert today's tech presence into tomorrow's growth.

This report looks at tech in two ways. The tech industry is defined as firms that operate in the tech space but may employ workers in non-tech roles, such as an accountant at Tenstreet or a lawyer at Enverus. Tech occupations refer to workers whose roles are tech-related and who may be employed at either tech-focused or non-tech-focused companies, such as a software engineer at Boeing or an IT professional at an insurance company. The term "tech sector" is used to encompass both.

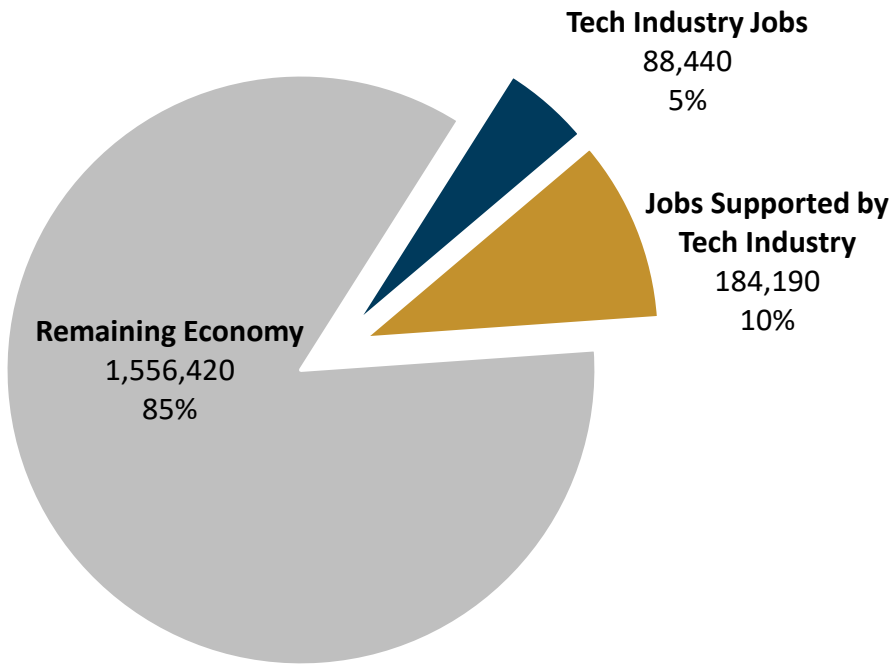
Throughout the report, Oklahoma's performance is compared to national trends as well as to 11 peer and neighboring states identified in consultation with the Oklahoma Technology Alliance. These are Texas, Kansas, Colorado, Arkansas, New Mexico, Missouri, Arizona, Nebraska, Tennessee, Indiana, and Iowa.

OKLAHOMA'S TECH INDUSTRY TODAY

In 2025, Oklahoma's tech industry employed 88,440 people, and workers earned about \$17 billion in income. The tech industry accounted directly for almost five percent of the total jobs in the state, but over ten percent of the state's total earnings and about 15 percent of sales. The industry also contributes heavily to the state's

tax revenue, exports, and gross state product. The tech industry accounts for over 32 percent of taxes paid within the state and contributed about 17 percent, \$47 billion, of gross state product.

Tech Industry Contribution to Oklahoma's Economy, 2025

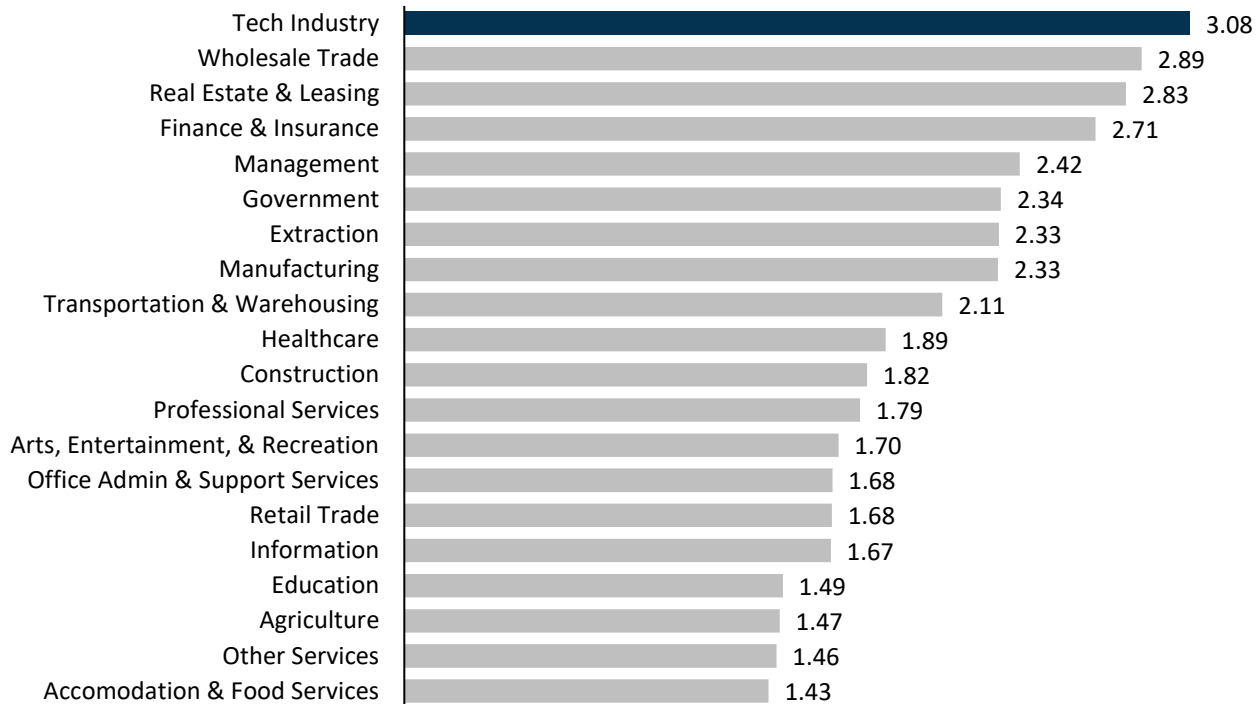


Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2026.3

The presence of the tech industry also helps generate activity in other sectors of the economy. In 2025, the tech sector in Oklahoma had a job multiplier of 3.08, meaning that for every job created in the tech sector, more than two additional jobs were created or supported elsewhere in the economy. This was the highest job multiplier effect across all industries in the state. Accounting for these multiplier effects increases the tech sector's overall employment impact from five percent to 15 percent. In 2025, an estimated 184,190 workers in Oklahoma were supported by the tech industry through supply chain impacts or tech workers spending their earnings.



Oklahoma Job Multiplier by Industry, 2025



Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2026.3

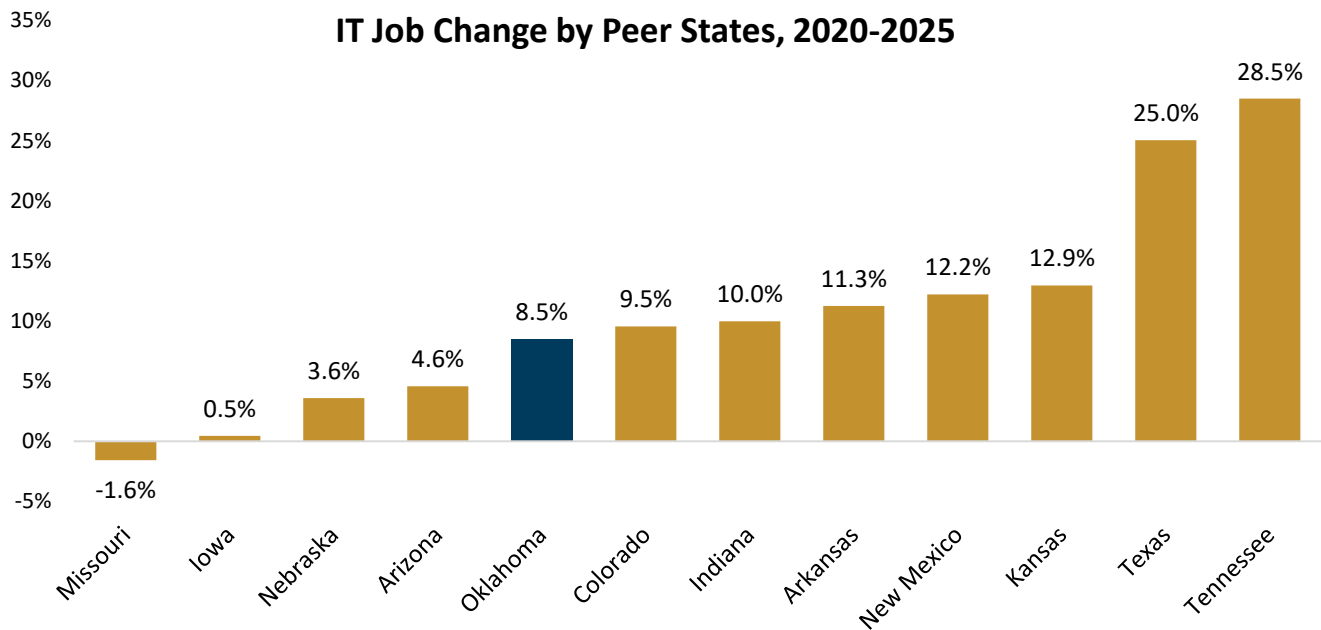
Employees within technology companies in Oklahoma earn high incomes. The average earnings per worker in the tech industry were \$134,200 in 2025, compared with about \$72,300 for workers across all industries in the state. On average, a tech industry worker earns roughly 1.9 times more than most workers in the state.

Tech earnings in Oklahoma remain low compared to national averages. This is both a positive and a negative competitive factor. Lower wages can attract businesses relocating from higher-cost regions, but they can also make it more difficult to recruit talent to move to the state. Oklahoma had the 8th lowest cost of living in 2025, so a dollar in Oklahoma stretches farther. When this purchasing power is accounted for, Oklahoma's wages become more competitive, but the best talent can likely find higher earnings in other states.

Energy technology is by far Oklahoma's largest and most concentrated part of the tech industry. Employment in energy tech is over three times more concentrated than the national average, the 6th highest concentration in the country. This demonstrates the unique role the energy sector plays in Oklahoma's economy. It is also the only part of the tech industry losing jobs, down 6.8 percent over the past five years, with a further 12.6 percent decline projected over the next five. This trend is consistent with national trends where jobs in fossil fuel extraction are declining and renewable energy employment growth has been robust but not at a large enough scale to offset the losses. Energy tech has also become increasingly linked to the core IT segment of the industry as demand for data centers has surged amid the AI boom.

Five-year job change has been strong in all other parts of the tech industry. Software services remain a significant driver of tech industry growth in the state, employing 14,110 workers, with jobs up 32 percent from 2020 to 2025. Environmental tech grew 18.5 percent, the 14th highest growth rate in the nation. Life sciences jobs expanded by 8.9 percent, although this growth ranked 43rd nationally because many other states experienced growth rates above 30 percent during the same period.

Oklahoma's rate of IT job growth between 2020 and 2025 exceeded that of four peer states but lagged Colorado, Indiana, Arkansas, New Mexico, and Kansas and was far below that of Texas or Tennessee.



Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2026.3

Overall, Oklahoma's rankings for the total tech industry were all in the bottom half of states. Total tech industry jobs grew 2.3 percent over the past five years, compared with 10.1 percent nationally, ranking Oklahoma 47th. Tech industry jobs are projected to decline 2.1 percent over the next five years while growing 6.3 percent nationally. This is largely due to losses in the energy tech subsector pulling down net job change.

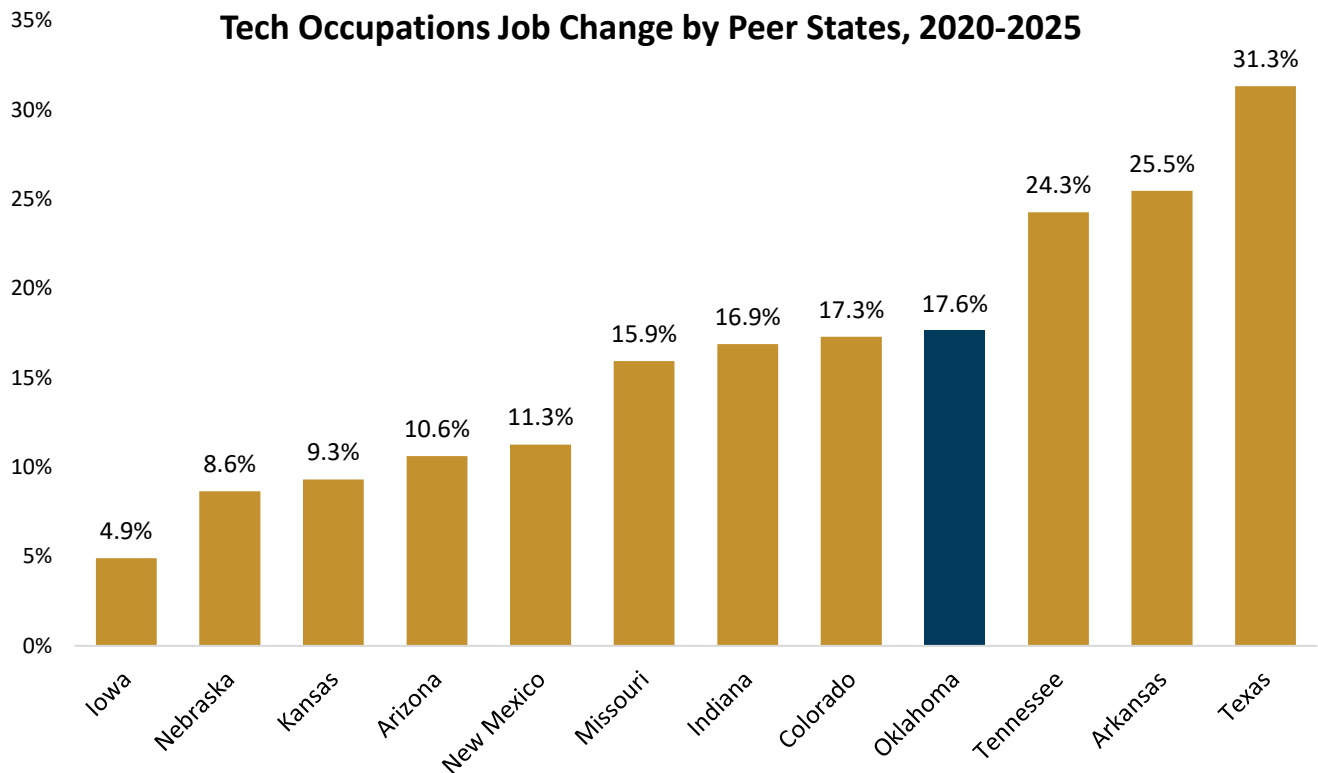
TECH WORKERS ACROSS OKLAHOMA'S ECONOMY

Technology workers today are present in virtually every industry. As technology has become increasingly important to company competitiveness, industries such as banking, media, and health care now employ larger numbers of tech workers.

The data show that 119,290 workers in Oklahoma are employed in tech occupations. This number is higher than the 88,440 workers employed directly by the tech industry. In fact, only about 22 percent of tech occupation jobs in the state are located at tech industry firms. The remaining tech workers are employed across other industries, from manufacturing to finance. About 14 percent of all jobs in the finance and insurance industries are tech occupations, and tech workers now account for nine percent of employment in manufacturing as production becomes more automated.

The median annual wage for tech workers is \$87,700, and tech jobs in the state have grown by 18 percent over the past five years. Each year, an average of 14,810 tech jobs must be filled in Oklahoma to accommodate growth and retirements. Computer user support specialists are the largest tech occupation, and workers who have skills in analyzing data and cybersecurity are in high demand across a variety of industries. Information security analyst jobs, for example, grew 87 percent over the past five years.

Tech occupation growth is an area in which Oklahoma has generally improved over time. The state has risen to 19th in the nation in five-year job growth, an improvement from 33rd place. Median cost-of-living-adjusted earnings for tech occupations rank among the top 20 states.



Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2026.3

Oklahoma's talent pipeline needs attention. About 64 percent of tech job postings in the last year required some form of postsecondary education. In 2025, postsecondary institutions in Oklahoma produced about 7,500 completions across all STEM programs, but Oklahoma ranked 40th for the change in STEM degrees from 2020 to 2025, largely due to a decline in engineering program completions. Many STEM graduates stay in the state, but there is some significant leakage of students to Texas. About 17 percent of Oklahoma STEM graduates' online profiles reviewed listed Texas as their current location.

Women account for just over one-third of tech occupations while representing just over one-half of Oklahoma's population. Oklahoma has a large share of Native American residents, but this group is underrepresented in the tech workforce. As the tech market continues to grow in the state, it is important that all communities have opportunities to participate and benefit. Older workers represent about 20 percent of tech jobs in Oklahoma, and companies will need to plan for replacing these workers' skill sets as they retire.

Artificial Intelligence and the Tech Workforce

Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to be a highly disruptive force within the existing tech workforce. Unlike previous efficiency technologies, AI tools like ChatGPT automate tasks performed by knowledge workers, including writing, editing, coding, and problem-solving.

AI is also creating jobs. In August 2026, there were 2,150 job postings in Oklahoma that mentioned AI, and AI job postings in the state have soared to their highest rates since online job posting data began in 2010. In the last two years, about 1,560 different employers in consulting, finance, healthcare, manufacturing, and technology were competing for AI-skilled workers in the state. The average advertised salary for AI-related postings in Oklahoma was \$127,400.

The other side of the AI discussion concerns how this technology could reduce job demand. Stanford researchers found evidence that employment levels for younger workers have declined since the introduction of AI tools in the occupations most exposed to AI. One of the tech careers that could be the most affected is computer user support specialists, Oklahoma's largest tech occupation. Oklahoma will need to be prepared to train the next generation of AI experts to support its local companies, while also identifying ways to retrain workers whose jobs may be displaced.

HOW OKLAHOMA COMPARES

Similar to other parts of the economy, the technology sector needs a solid infrastructure to flourish. Logistics firms must have good highways, agriculture firms need good ports for export, and many manufacturers need robust water systems. For tech, that infrastructure includes funding for research and new companies, a skilled and educated labor force, physical infrastructure such as broadband, and collaboration between universities, the private sector, and government.

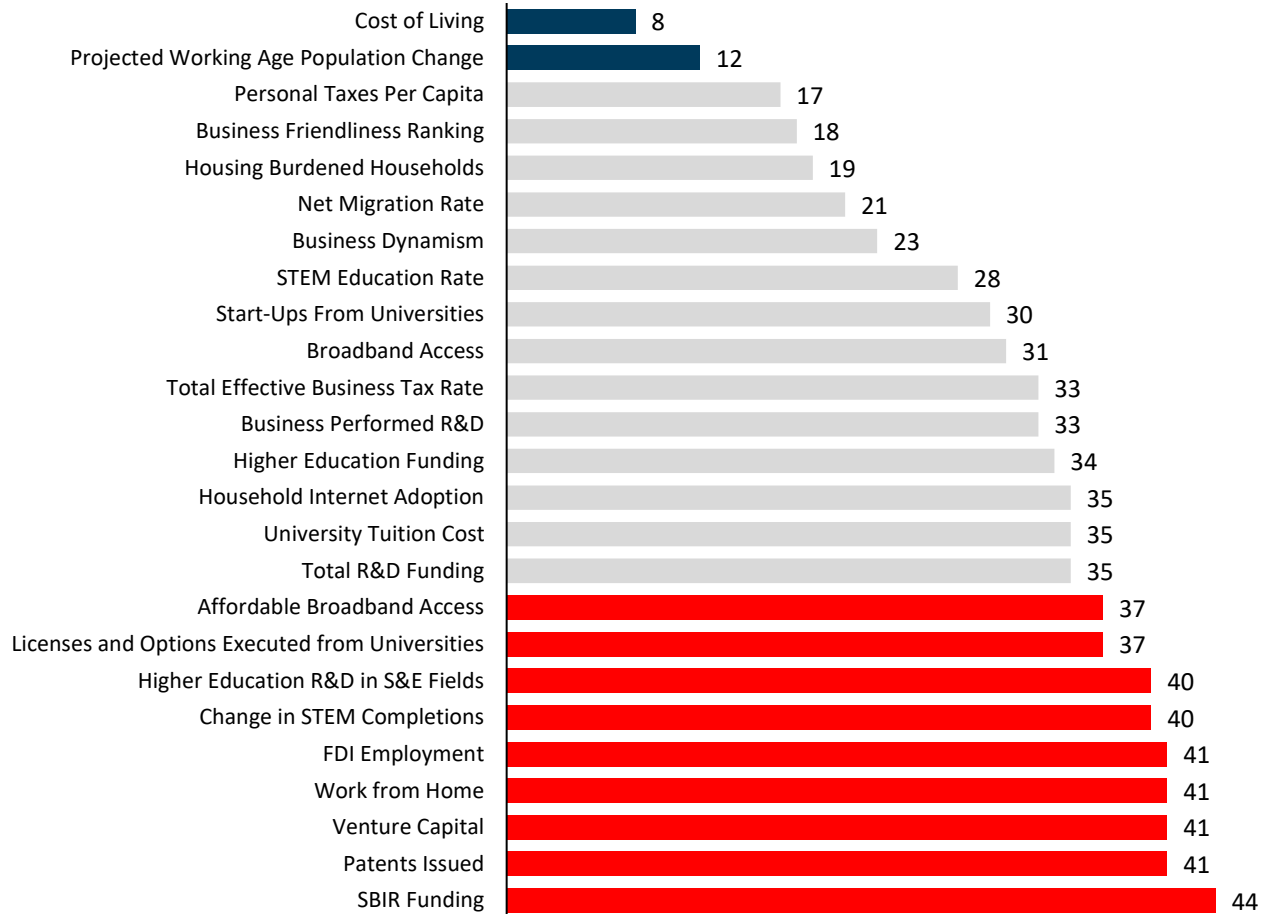
Oklahoma's rankings tell a consistent story. The state is strong on cost and affordability but weaker on the drivers of future tech growth.

Oklahoma's strengths include the 8th lowest cost of living in the nation, the 12th highest projected growth in working-age population (10 percent over the next ten years), an 18th place ranking for business friendliness, and one of the lower shares of households burdened by housing costs. As companies tend to locate where they can find workers, these trends help Oklahoma remain competitive in today's talent wars.

The state's weaknesses are concentrated in the investments that turn ideas into companies.

- Research and development (R&D) funding helps companies and universities develop new technologies that can be commercialized. Relative to the size of its economy, Oklahoma ranks 35th.
- Patents are another indicator of innovation. Oklahoma ranked 41st in patents per science and engineering worker, and the rate is trending down over time.
- Venture capital is often an essential tool for start-up companies to grow into tech leaders. Oklahoma's venture capital funding was almost six times higher in 2025 than in 2016, but other markets garner the vast majority of venture capital investment. Information technology accounted for only ten percent of Oklahoma's 2025 funding.
- Federal Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) awards provide critical early-stage funding for high-reward concepts. Oklahoma ranked 44th, its lowest ranking in the analysis. States can help local startups apply for and secure these funds with matching grants and other incentives.
- About 24 percent of Oklahomans lacked access to affordable high-speed broadband in 2025, ranking the state 37th.

Oklahoma State Rankings for Tech Infrastructure Indicators



Independent national assessments reach similar conclusions, and several neighboring states fare better.

- WalletHub's 2026 ranking of the most innovative states placed Oklahoma 43rd. Neighbors Texas and New Mexico placed 13th and 15th.
- In CNBC's 2026 Top States for Business, Oklahoma was third in the nation for the lowest cost of doing business, but ranked 30th in technology and innovation, 42nd in workforce, and 39th overall. Neighboring Texas and Colorado both ranked in the top 10 for technology and innovation.
- The Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF) ranked Oklahoma 40th for employment in advanced industries. Neighboring states ranked higher, including Kansas (8th), Missouri (16th), Colorado (19th), Texas (32nd), and Arkansas (33rd). Only New Mexico (46th) ranked lower. Other peer states ranked Indiana (3rd), Iowa (9th), Nebraska (28th), Tennessee (29th), and Arizona (38th).
- A 2025 study of the top states for digital innovation, such as AI, cloud computing, and fintech, placed neighboring Missouri (6th), Texas (8th), and Colorado (10th) in the top 10.

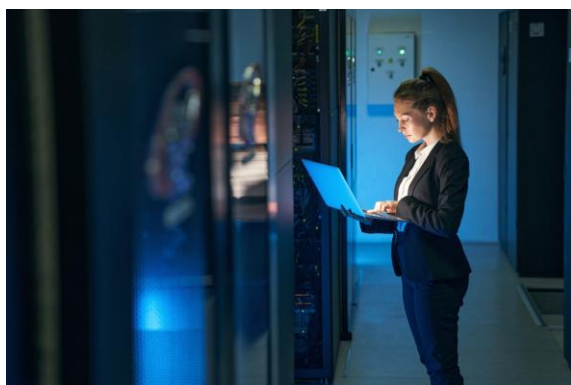
WHAT OKLAHOMA'S TECH LEADERS ARE SAYING

Economic Leadership interviewed 18 tech sector leaders between May and July 2026. They came from a variety of tech industries, the education and financial sectors, tribal nations, economic development, and innovation support organizations in several regions of the state.

Oklahoma's primary strengths revolve around the "essentials." These include affordability and a low cost of doing business, reliable and low-cost energy and other infrastructure, available land, a strategic US location, and an attractive quality of life, especially for families. Stakeholders also point to the presence of the tribal nations and to the small size of Oklahoma, meaning that leaders are easy to identify and only "one phone call away." By far, the shining star of education and training assets in Oklahoma is the two-year CareerTech system, viewed as responsive, nimble, a "jewel." The Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology (OCAST) was also cited.

The most often noted weakness that hampers tech development in Oklahoma is the K-12 education system. Interviewees described education shortcomings as reality, perception, a lack of funding, system fragmentation (too many districts), and suffering from "very low expectations" overall. Other weaknesses cited by stakeholders include:

- A lack of venture capital and angel investor funding, especially in-state investors knowledgeable about emerging technologies
- Difficulty finding experienced, top-level tech talent and recruiting it from outside the state
- University tech transfer processes described as too controlling and bureaucratic, at times a "nightmare"
- The lack of a unified vision around tech in Oklahoma and how to strengthen state competitiveness
- The lack of a positive narrative around tech and economic growth



Stakeholders were also clear that positioning Oklahoma primarily as a low-cost place to live does not, on its own, win high-skill tech talent or investment. As one put it, it "doesn't work to sell that we're cheap."

Asked which issues would most move the needle, tech leaders prioritized three.

1. Improving the public education system
2. Adding or strengthening tools to promote and "de-risk" R&D investment, like R&D tax credits or similar innovation tax credits
3. Bringing tech companies together regularly to share information and foster discussion that can lead to better statewide plans and policies

Stakeholders also noted the importance of using scarce resources wisely by focusing on those tech niches in which Oklahoma has a competitive advantage. Asked what a more competitive Oklahoma would look like in ten years, the top response was that Oklahoma will be known as a tech hub in a few specialized areas in which it has an advantage, such as drones, space, new energy, weather, and autoimmune diseases, with a robust R&D pipeline in those niches.

Interviewees pointed to programs in other states, including Texas putting serious money into aerospace and its new space commission, Indiana's regional grants and encouragement of angel investment, the Missouri Chamber's effective Technology Alliance, and Tennessee's Launch TN public-private partnership.

GROWTH SECTORS WHERE OKLAHOMA CAN COMPETE

Nationally, sectors of particular relevance to Oklahoma are all in periods of significant growth and innovation, and states are competing aggressively for a share of that growth.

Aerospace and defense is a large global industry with growth expected at more than seven percent annually through 2030, and jobs in the sector pay about 40 percent over the national average. The drone subsector is growing even more rapidly. Oklahoma scores near the top in evaluations of drone development, ranking 2nd for commercial drone readiness behind only neighboring Arkansas. Oklahoma is also home to one of nine FAA drone test sites in America, operated by the Choctaw Nation.



Energy demand in the US has grown by more than two percent annually over the last five years after 15 years of practically flat consumption, with data centers a major factor. Emerging technologies such as long-duration batteries and small modular nuclear reactors are drawing investment.

Data centers are the most widely discussed tech-related economic development story in the country. Neighboring Texas leads the nation in data centers under construction or announced and is on track to surpass Virginia as the top US data center hub. Developers are now looking anywhere in the US with available and reasonably priced land and ample power and water. Data centers are also controversial, with 15 state legislatures proposing moratoriums or other bans this year, leaving greater opportunities for states that remain open to data centers.

Healthcare is aggressively adopting technologies of all kinds, from AI to wearable devices and virtual care. A July 2026 article suggested Oklahoma City as an up-and-coming biotech location, citing its public-private partnerships and BioTC workforce training program.

Agriculture technology is expected to grow 12 to 15 percent annually, becoming a roughly \$50 billion industry by 2030. In neighboring Missouri, the University of Missouri launched a Digital Agriculture Research and Extension Center in 2024 to speed farm adoption of digital tools.

WHAT NEIGHBORING AND PEER STATES ARE DOING

A common thread across the states outperforming Oklahoma is a clear, resourced strategy focused on a small number of sectors rather than a broad, unfocused approach. The following examples show how Oklahoma's neighbors and peer states are competing.

Texas was rated by CNBC in 2026 as the 4th best state for business overall, 1st in workforce, and 3rd in technology and innovation. Texas has attracted huge investments in semiconductors and aerospace. Its JETI (Jobs, Energy, Technology, and Innovation) incentive rewards capital-intensive tech projects and makes it easier for projects in small, rural counties to qualify. The Texas legislature established the Texas Space Commission in 2023 and allocated \$150 million for it to spur space research and innovation. Texas also has the largest renewable energy industry in America, an advantage in attracting data centers.

Kansas is known as a longtime aviation hub and ranked 8th nationally in the ITIF study of advanced tech industries. Wichita State University's National Center for Aviation Training and its Innovation Campus, where companies like Airbus have established engineering centers, help speed research and commercialization.

Kansas offers angel investor tax credits and in 2025 passed a "regulatory sandbox" law that gives businesses time and flexibility to test new ideas with reduced regulatory burden.

Colorado was named the 4th most innovative state by WalletHub in 2026. Its Advanced Industries Accelerator program, launched in 2013, supports seven priority sectors including aerospace, advanced manufacturing, energy, and biosciences. Colorado provides an Advanced Industry Investment tax credit of 25 percent, or 35 percent in rural areas, and offers businesses up to \$250,000 to help commercialize advanced technologies.

Arkansas ranked 33rd in the ITIF study of advanced industries, ahead of Oklahoma at 40th. Arkansas provides grants up to \$250,000 to foster the development of startup tech companies and matches federal SBIR awards up to \$50,000 for Phase I and \$100,000 for Phase II. It also offers small tech transfer grants to help move university research into private businesses. In 2015, Arkansas became the first state to pass a comprehensive law requiring all public schools to offer computer science courses.

New Mexico, home to Los Alamos and two other national research laboratories, frequently leads the US in federal R&D funding per capita. In 2025 the state established a Technology and Innovation Office to provide business assistance in four key sectors, aerospace, advanced energy, bioscience, and advanced computing. Of particular note for Oklahoma, New Mexico uses its sovereign wealth funds, which benefit from oil and gas revenues, to invest in venture capital funds. The state committed \$1.8 billion over the last three years to firms born in or moving to New Mexico, partly to diversify the state economy and protect it from "the volatility of the oil and gas industry."

Missouri ranks among the top 10 digital innovation states. The Missouri Chamber's Industry-Driven IT Apprenticeship program created over 4,500 new IT apprentices from 2020 to 2025. Sixty-two percent of participants were under the age of 25, and the average salary of apprentices was \$63,000. The Missouri Technology Corporation, a public-private nonprofit established in 1994, makes venture capital investments matched to the growth stage of Missouri firms. Missouri also passed a regulatory sandbox law in 2024.

Other peer states offer additional models.

- Tennessee created Launch TN, a nonprofit public-private partnership that boosts startups through commercialization, capital, and connections. Its IRIS grant program awards at least \$250,000 for R&D partnerships between industry and research universities.
- Indiana has funded its 21st Century Research & Technology Fund consistently since 1999, offers a 25 percent venture capital investment tax credit, and has provided \$80 million in matching grants for more than 770 manufacturing modernization projects since 2020.
- Nebraska's Business Innovation Act provides early-stage capital to entrepreneurs. Every dollar invested has leveraged \$11.52 in private funding, and recipients have created about 2,400 jobs.
- Iowa provides small and mid-sized manufacturers up to \$75,000 toward robots, 3D printers, cybersecurity software, and other new technologies.
- Arizona has created Future48 Workforce Accelerators, partnerships between community colleges and employers focused on aerospace and defense, semiconductors, and advanced manufacturing.

As of mid-2026, 39 states offer an R&D tax credit, including all adjacent states and all other identified competitors except Tennessee.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND THE PATH FORWARD

Oklahoma's technology sector is already an outsized contributor to the state's economy. At the same time, Oklahoma is losing ground relative to other states on many forward-looking measures, including employment growth, R&D investment, patent activity, venture capital, and national innovation rankings. The state is not behind because tech doesn't matter here. It is behind because the infrastructure that turns today's tech presence into tomorrow's tech growth needs deliberate investment and coordination.

Seven takeaways emerge from this analysis.

1. **Oklahoma's tech economy is bigger than its industry statistics suggest.** Tech occupations outnumber tech industry employment by more than 30,000, and 78 percent of tech workers are embedded in other industries. A plan that only targets tech companies misses most of the state's tech workforce.
2. **Energy tech is Oklahoma's greatest concentration and its greatest vulnerability.** Growth areas within energy, including renewables and the energy demands of data centers, are real but not yet large enough to offset legacy declines. Energy deserves a dedicated strategy rather than being folded into general tech policy.
3. **Oklahoma is significantly under-invested in the tools that convert research into companies.** Low rankings in R&D funding, patents, and SBIR funding are not awareness problems. They are the direct result of limited state tools (R&D tax credits, matching grants, streamlined tech transfer) that stakeholders identified as missing or under-resourced.
4. **K-12 education is the constraint stakeholders return to most often, and it shows up in the data.** Closing this gap is a multi-year commitment, but it is the precondition for nearly every other takeaway in this list. STEM exposure is limited for K-12 students compared with competitor states. The CareerTech system is the standout exception.
5. **Oklahoma competes on cost, not yet on opportunity, and that ceiling is real.** Affordability is a genuine advantage, but it should be framed as one input to quality of life and business cost, not the headline pitch.
6. **The AI transition is already reshaping the workforce Oklahoma needs to plan for.** A state that trains for yesterday's tech occupations while the workforce is repricing around AI will fall further behind.
7. **There is no shortage of good ideas, but there is a shortage of a shared plan.** Every peer state highlighted in this report succeeded by picking a lane and committing state-level resources and coordination to it. Oklahoma has the underlying assets (affordability, land, energy infrastructure, tribal nation partnerships, and a workable business climate) but lacks a unifying vision for where the state competes and wins in tech.

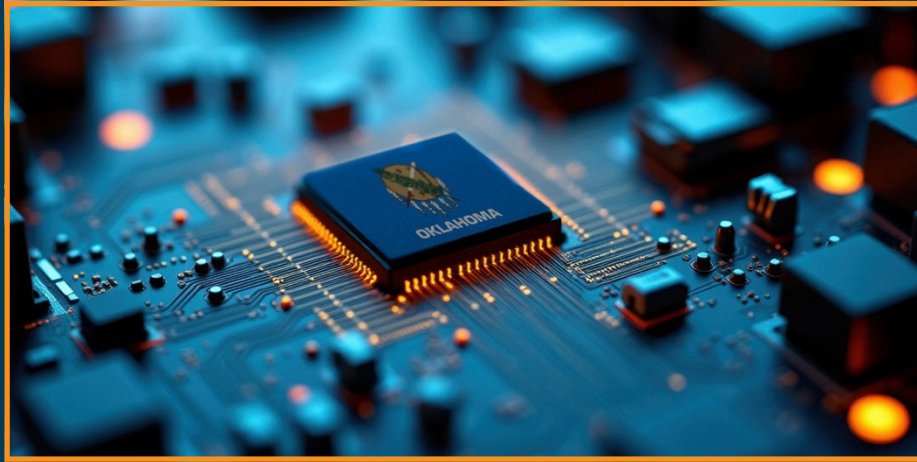
The report also identifies a specific role for the Oklahoma Technology Alliance and the State Chamber.

- Lead efforts to help define a vision for tech growth in Oklahoma, bringing business, government, and education together to align the ecosystem and focus resources on the state's most promising opportunities.
- Be a sector convener, bringing often-isolated tech groups and leaders together from across the state on a regular basis.
- Change the narrative around tech and innovation in Oklahoma with positive stories about tech-related economic growth and the opportunities created for residents, and educate both the public and state legislators.

Oklahoma does not have to choose between its traditional strengths and a stronger tech future. The energy expertise, affordable land, reliable infrastructure, and close-knit business community that built the state's economy are exactly what today's fastest-growing tech sectors are looking for. But Oklahoma's neighbors are not standing still. Texas, Kansas, Colorado, Arkansas, New Mexico, and Missouri are each putting real money and coordinated effort behind a few clear priorities. Each year Oklahoma waits, the gaps in research, investment, and talent get harder to close. Tech already supports roughly one in seven Oklahoma jobs. Whether that number grows or shrinks over the next decade depends on choices the state makes now and business, government, education, and tribal nations each hold a piece of the solution.

The full report, including detailed data, state comparisons, and sources, is available from the Oklahoma Technology Alliance.

This report was written and researched by Mike Malone, Skylar Casey, and Greg Payne of Economic Leadership LLC between February and September 2026.



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