



# Empowering Entrepreneurship

Nevada Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Assessment and Strategy

April 2023

Nevada Governor's Office of  
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
*Empowering Success*

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Sparks  
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NEVADA

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Project Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Our Approach</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Nevada Statewide Executive Summary</b>	<b>8</b>
Overview	
Demographics	
Public Policy	
Place	
Resource Networks	
<b>Nevada Action Plan</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Reno Executive Summary</b>	<b>31</b>
Overview	
Reno Benchmark Cities	
Demographics	
Public Policy	
Place	
Resource Networks	
<b>Reno Action Plan</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Las Vegas Executive Summary</b>	<b>55</b>
Overview	
Las Vegas Benchmark Cities	
Demographics	
Public Policy	
Place	
Resource Networks	
<b>Las Vegas Action Plan</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Rural Executive Summary</b>	<b>82</b>
Overview	
Rural Benchmark Counties	
Demographics	
Public Policy	
Place	
Resource Networks	
<b>Rural Action Plan</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Nevada National Entrepreneurship Roundtable</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Closing Letter</b>	<b>101</b>

## Introduction

During the early 2000's the United States made a fundamental shift; away from an economy led by manufacturing to one driven by technology innovation. Since then, we have experienced two waves of global innovation. The first wave was tied to how we communicate, consume, transact, and travel. It gave us such innovations as Facebook and Instagram, Amazon and Uber. The second wave is underway and will ultimately transform every industry on the planet through artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, augmented reality, virtual reality and more. The bold emergence of ChatGPT in November of 2022 is just one of many disruptions on the horizon.

Behind these breakthrough innovations are hundreds of thousands of 'follow along' technologies created and scaled by entrepreneurs, each with the potential to grow into global companies serving this new economy. Less than twenty-five years into these shifts, nearly all net new jobs in the United States are coming from entrepreneurs running companies under five years old.

The benefits of an economy led by entrepreneurs are profound. Entrepreneurship creates wealth— not just for a few— but for individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds. It insulates the economy from economic flux by diversifying industry sectors and increases the overall number of businesses. Once established in a city, entrepreneurs are sticky; they tend to stay and grow where they were founded, in part, because of ecosystem networks built to support them.

In response to these changes, there has been a great deal of research and fieldwork conducted around understanding what makes up entrepreneurial ecosystems. Generally, they are characterized as regions that have purposeful environments supporting high levels of innovation. Short-term, these places create more businesses and enjoy a community vibrancy that attracts other entrepreneurs. Long-term, these cities are transformed by expanding cycles of economic activity from companies driven by globally connected, industry-agnostic innovation.

Over the past two decades, ecosystems have emerged in places like Austin, Boulder, Miami, and Boston— and more recently in smaller, rural communities. Many of these places are referenced in this report. These cities have realigned state and city economic development priorities and funding to accelerate technology transfer and commercialization. They are aggressively building out new programs and resources supporting entrepreneurs across the board and creating novel public-private partnerships to do more, faster. While each place leverages its own unique assets, best practices in building ecosystems are now well established. Cities of all sizes can foster innovation across industry and create the business infrastructure needed for them to thrive in a global economy.



## Project Summary

Entrepreneurial Communities LLC (EC) assessed the entrepreneurial ecosystems in Nevada between November 2022 and March 2023 using a combination of primary and secondary research. The state of Nevada was benchmarked against surrounding states, Las Vegas and Reno against ecosystems in cities elsewhere in the country. Comparisons were determined by a combination of “ideal benchmark cities” offered by local leadership as places where they intuitively compare themselves plus other cities whose demographics and level of entrepreneurial activity offered fair comparisons. Four rural counties were compared and contrasted within the state of Nevada. This report includes highlights and best practices showcasing novel initiatives and policy from these and other cities across the country.

### *About the Data*

The data in this report comes from the [Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation](#), the GoDaddy [Venture Forward](#) project, the [Your Economy](#) dataset of the University of Wisconsin System’s Business Dynamics Research Consortium, industry associations, and multiple census reports. These data points reflect current thinking in the field around how ecosystems, entrepreneurship, and economic development should be measured going forward.

### *Finding Nevada Voices and Views*

Over the winter of 2022-’23, EC staff spent several weeks in Reno, Las Vegas, and multiple rural communities, conducting 1:1 interviews and roundtables with businesses. Meetups were held with entrepreneur support organizations, investors, economic development organizations (EDOs), and nonprofits. Staff participated in Tech Alley meetups, entrepreneur breakfasts, small business development center (SBDC) workshops, Latino business events, Zoom roundtables, and toured many, many small businesses, incubators, and coworking spaces. More than 260 key leaders and entrepreneurs/small business owners were engaged from throughout Nevada’s entrepreneurial stack.

In addition, EC reviewed the public meeting records for the 2017-’18 Lt. Governor’s entrepreneurship task force, interviewing the members who had met over the course of 18 months to build a statewide entrepreneurship ecosystem plan. That plan did not materialize; however, the insights gathered are not lost. Many of those ideas, perspectives, and views still hold relevance to the Nevada ecosystems post-pandemic and are incorporated here.

### *About the Recommendations*

Recommendations in this report were guided by two national advisory roundtables, convened on February 2 and February 3, 2023. Attendees included academics, practitioners, economic development professionals, and entrepreneurs with expertise in the entrepreneurship economic development field from both urban and rural regions. These roundtables provided cutting-edge insight and perspectives that drive the recommendations in this report. The Nevada National Entrepreneurship Roundtable participants for this project are highlighted at the end.

## Our Approach

### The Entrepreneurial Stack

The Kauffman Foundation defines entrepreneurs as the “makers, doers, and dreamers in our society.” This simple definition is radically inclusive. It suggests that everyone who starts a business is an entrepreneur. Collectively, entrepreneurs in a given location are called “the stack.” Ensuring that entrepreneurs up and down the stack are engaged and supported is central to generating the density of innovation, talent, and capital needed to compete in a diverse, global, tech-led economy. These are the guiding ideals around which ecosystem building takes place.

Nationally, the entrepreneurial stack consists of more than 33M companies and is loosely defined by four business segments, each contributing to the economy in different ways.

### Microenterprises

The majority of businesses in the United States, about 22M companies, are microenterprises. Microenterprises are very small. Their business models are clustered in the creative arts, professional services, education, health care, and retail. A microenterprise side hustle may not last longer than a couple of years but can provide up to 38% of an average household’s income. The expansion of the internet has dramatically increased the numbers of microenterprises in recent years. These online vendors, custom coders, art venues, food trucks, candy shops, and more create the spark and personality that differentiate Paradise from Henderson, Fallon from Fernley.

### Small Businesses

There are approximately 8M small business owners in the United States. Small business owners are known to be lifestyle seekers, intent on securing normal profits from the businesses they launch. Their churn rate is much lower than others in the stack; the average small business might last a decade or more. Small business jobs often offer lower wages and few benefits, but those jobs are typically rock-solid. Small business owners ensure that everyone has access to groceries, day cares, and other goods and services we need to have a healthy economy. Without small businesses offering a regular supply of locally needed goods and services, our neighborhoods and the broader economy cannot thrive.

### Startups/Scaleups

Startups/Scaleups represent a small portion of the entrepreneurial stack but return outsize economic impact. Startup/Scaleup founders are opportunists, often early adapters, willing to exploit new and emerging innovation to build growth companies. These businesses are industry agnostic, although most growth is currently centered around applying technology across industry. Early ecosystem activity focuses on fostering a supportive community around startup/scaleups.

**For the purposes of this assessment, we have condensed the entrepreneur stack into two key segments: the small business owner, which encompasses microenterprises, and the startup/scaleup sector, which includes technology transfer.**

### Technology Transfer

Technology transfer promotes the movement of research and development (R&D) and the resulting intellectual property (IP) from the lab and the bench into the marketplace in commercialization. Most R&D comes from federal labs, universities, medical facilities, and private-sector-sponsored research. The opportunities to site global startups or spinoffs through favorable licensure of IP is important to venture growth and is largely untapped in traditional economic development.

## Entrepreneurial Communities Assessment Tools

We measured the strength of the ecosystems in this report using four pillars. They are:

**Demographics** There are baseline demographics common to vibrant ecosystems, including higher educational levels (particularly in STEAM fields), higher median household incomes, diversity, and high household adoption to the internet.

**Public Policy** Future-focused public policy should strive to reduce the friction associated with startup activity, including compliance, licensing, and regulation. The public sector should operate to guide and support vs. ban or bar. It is in the hands of public policy makers to ensure that everyone has access to ubiquitous, affordable, high-speed bandwidth.

**Place** Natural, built, and cultural resources collectively create a fertile landscape attracting entrepreneurs and the talent they hire. Central to this is the designation and branding of entrepreneurial hubs, and a supportive culture that promote lifestyles of innovation, curiosity, community connection, and creativity.

**Resource Networks** High-performing ecosystems offer a full spectrum of resources, including capital, technical assistance, and densely connected resource providers who provide onramps, interactions, and collisions to raise and empower all who wish to participate in the economy

**Note: Readers may wish to pull out the assessments for Reno, Las Vegas, or rural parts of the state as stand-alone documents. To facilitate this, some definitions and limited content are repeated.**





# Nevada

## **Nevada Executive Summary**

*Entrepreneurial Communities LLC. assessed the Nevada ecosystem during the winter of 2022-23.*

*Economic and community data were aggregated and benchmarked against other Western states, including Arizona, California, Idaho, Oregon and Utah. Stakeholder interviews and roundtables were hosted in December 2022 and January 2023. Two national roundtables of entrepreneurship researchers and practitioners, one urban and one rural, were convened in February 2023 to provide insight and recommendations for this report.*

The state of Nevada has an opportunity to reimagine economic and community development in response to accelerating changes in the global economy. Like many states, Nevada is half in the old economy and half in the new. In rural Nevada, economic development leaders and their communities have yet to be disrupted by technology innovation, automation and the demands of a new, globally engaged generation of workers. There is little urgency for change. However, as high-speed bandwidth becomes available to every home and business in places like Battle Mountain and Elko, these communities will have an exciting opportunity to reimagine their future.

In Las Vegas and Reno, globalization and technology automation is underway in every industry sector. Because the state is so internationally connected, the shifts here are rapid and dramatic. The entrepreneurs who are leading these shifts need the support of public sector policy and programs to fully contribute to Nevada's economy. This report is a call to leadership throughout Nevada to move at the speed of the innovation economy; to realign funding to support emerging industries and growth-oriented startups; to educate those in positions of leadership to be as bold as Nevada entrepreneurs by delivering upon new economic development initiatives that did not make sense in the old economy but are critical in the new one.

### **Governor's Office of Entrepreneurship**

The creation of a Governor's Office of Entrepreneurship can unify efforts to build an innovation driven economy by convening, then unifying, regional networks of entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs). Through training, education and centralized distribution of information, Nevada ESOs will be empowered to coordinate ecosystem building within their local regions, resulting in more collaboration, better referrals, and fewer overlapping resources. This office can reimagine the multitude of online resource directories to better align with entrepreneur needs. A biennial survey of the entrepreneurial community administered during non-legislative years can identify entrepreneur friction points and address resource gaps as they arise, and the creation of an Innovation Dashboard will track Nevada's collective progress in building the innovation economy over time.

### **Streamline Technology Transfer**

Unifying the technology transfer processes into a single streamlined system should be a long-term goal in Nevada. Short term, comprehensive plans from UNLV, UNR and DRI that outline commercialization and licensing goals and identify process improvements is key- and new resources are needed to ensure that the institutions have the capacity to deliver on licensing activity. Reviewing the inventor/institution licensing splits and adding patents and startup activity to the faculty tenure track will improve cultural support for commercialization among researchers and institutional leaders. The development of a Nevada First licensing strategy and building the capacity of LVGEA, EDAWN and other economic development organizations in the state to bring qualified licensees and startups to take part in commercialization at all stages will, over time, result in dynamic economic growth in emerging industries.



### Equitably Align State Resources with the Innovation Economy

Knowledge Fund was envisioned to deliver innovation based economic development. It has not been utilized to its potential, in part, because of a lack of full funding and limiting administrative rules guiding how funds are distributed. The fund should be increased to \$15M to deliver on building the innovation economy in Nevada. The administrative rules should be expanded to allow for greater flexibility in investments into the emerging capital needs of researchers and entrepreneurs and to seed public private partnerships in support of new programs and resources. Administratively, the state should continue to work to improve licensing policies across occupations and business registration systems.

Education of Nevada residents should be a priority. Among entrepreneurs interviewed, 100% indicated that their children were in private schools. Every high performing ecosystem from Boston to Austin, Nashville to San Diego has realigned and increased investments into education, resulting in a ready workforce, more innovation and entrepreneurship in those places. Investing now into the numbers of residents with high school degrees, bachelor's degrees and scientific certifications will reap critical rewards Nevada needs to compete in a global economy going forward.

### Help Microbusinesses Compete Online

The state has a significant opportunity to diversify the workforce by increasing the numbers of new business startups and to contribute to the expansion of nearly 90,000 existing Nevada companies with fewer than ten employees. By ensuring Nevadan's have access to affordable bandwidth statewide and stepping up digital literacy training and specific support in online business and work opportunities, significant strides in workforce diversity can be had. Funding for the NSBDC and GOED should be enhanced to lead in these efforts.

Every Nevadan should have an opportunity to be a part of the global economy whether through a side hustle, a small business or a venture driven technology company. If provided resources and roadmaps, the innovative and fiercely independent people of Nevada will respond, building thriving cities and strong communities ready to compete in the innovation economy.

## The Nevada Statewide Ecosystem

### Overview

Nevada is a beautiful reflection of the current American entrepreneurial scene. In the north, the city of Reno has built a vibrant community of entrepreneurs and creatives poised for growth in every sector. In the south, Las Vegas is engaged in a chaotic and organic movement toward economic diversity, positioned to launch an international ecosystem. Nevada’s rural communities are a mosaic of independent economies, stymied from growth and opportunity by the lack of bandwidth yet primed with talent, ideas, and self-determination. Collectively, the strategies needed to move all these ecosystems forward are as unique as the regions themselves.



The Kauffman Foundation’s Early-Stage Entrepreneurship series is a set of measurements that reflect new business creation activity in the United States. They are based on data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a joint study of the U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). These indicators include multiple, high-signal sources of information on early-stage entrepreneurship from 0-1 year of age. This data includes entrepreneurs from throughout the stack.

### Startup and Survival Rates of Nevada Entrepreneurs

	Rate of New Entrepreneurs	Startup Early Survival Rate
Nevada	0.34%	83.2%
Arizona	0.39%	81.7%
California	0.43%	82.6%
Idaho	0.33%	80.9%
Oregon	0.34%	78.4%
Utah	0.25%	81.8%
National Avg.	0.33%	80.5%

In 2021, the most recent year for which Kauffman has released its figures, approximately 0.34% of the population started a business in Nevada, meaning that an average of 340 out of every 100,000 adults became new entrepreneurs every month. Nationally, the rate of new entrepreneurs was 0.33%. The rate of new entrepreneurs varies greatly across Western states with the highest rate of startups occurring in California and lowest rate in Utah.

Source: 2021 Kauffman Indicators of Entrepreneurship.  
[indicators.kauffman.org/data-tables/early-stage](https://indicators.kauffman.org/data-tables/early-stage)

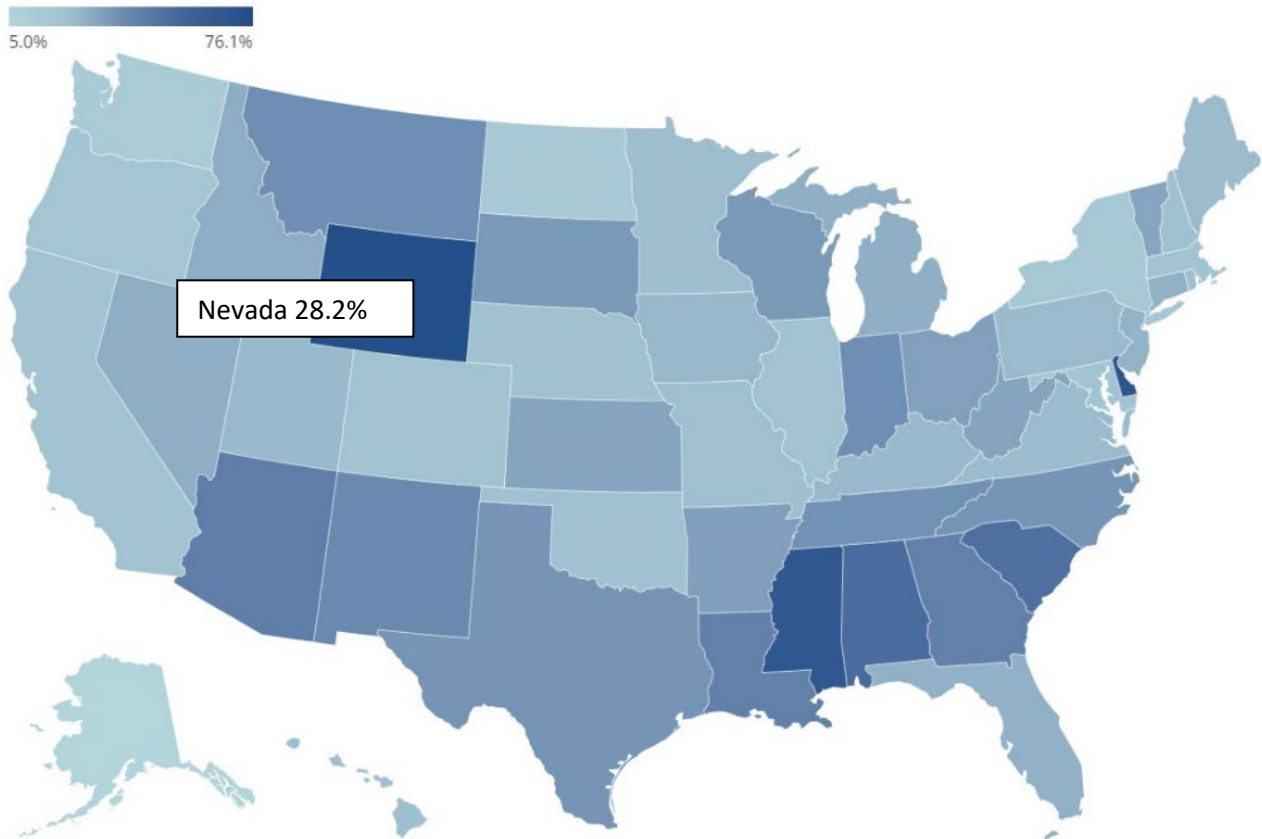
Companies who start a business in Nevada are very likely to survive their first year. More than 83% of Nevada entrepreneurs are still in operation after 12 months, the highest survival rate of the Western states.

### 2022 Business Startup Rates

For many Americans, 2022 marked the end of the pandemic. People across the country started businesses in record numbers. Nearly 1.7M Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) applications were filed by startup companies—a 27.8% increase over pre-pandemic baselines—and the second-largest total on record. Including sole proprietors, the number of new business applications filed by Americans totaled 5.1 million.

Nevada ranked 10th in the country for FEIN applications in 2022, with 5.6 applications per capita. This is a 28.2% increase over 2019 startup levels in the state. These potential startups are particularly important because they represent the businesses most likely to lead lasting job growth and innovation. According to the Economic Innovation Group (EIG), this trend may be the beginning of a long arc of resurgence in entrepreneurial activity nationwide.

Growth in 2022 relative to 2019 levels



Map: Economic Innovation Group • Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Business Formation Statistics



### Necessity Entrepreneurship

Nevada is still recovering from the pandemic, as reflected in the higher rates of necessity entrepreneurs in the state. The Kauffman Foundation measures necessity entrepreneurship as the percentage of individuals who start businesses directly from unemployment vs. those who start a business outside of unemployment benefits (likely due to a perceived opportunity).

Nationally, more people were driven to form a company out of necessity during the pandemic than during other recent economic disruptions. The increase in necessity entrepreneurs during the first year of the pandemic was more than twice as high as during the Great Recession.

Nevada’s share of necessity entrepreneurs is 23.6%, up from 17.48% pre-pandemic. Coupled with high state unemployment rates, this suggests that some individuals are starting businesses because they perceive few options for employment.

The KESE Index presents a snapshot of early-stage entrepreneurial activity and evenly weights contributions from Kauffman’s entrepreneurship indicators. It can be used to track changes in entrepreneurial activity over time at the national or state level. In 2021, the KESE Index ranged from a low of -6.0 in Rhode Island to a high of 8.8 in Florida.

### Necessity and Early-Stage Entrepreneurship

	Necessity Share	KESE Index
Nevada	23.6%	2.2
Arizona	21.6%	-0.2
California	22.4%	3.0
Idaho	10.7%	1.8
Oregon	23.4%	2.4
Utah	8.6%	4.0
National Avg.	20.8%	0.5

Source: 2021 Kauffman Indicators of Entrepreneurship. [indicators.kauffman.org/data-tables/early-stage](https://indicators.kauffman.org/data-tables/early-stage)

Nevada’s 2.2 KESE index in 2021 can be used as a baseline to track changes in the ecosystem in coming years, with an intent to drive the collective indicators higher over time.



### Small/Microbusinesses and Technology

In the aftermath of the pandemic, the economy has fundamentally changed. Throughout the entrepreneurial stack, all businesses are being forced to adopt tech-based operations, new sales channels, and online marketing/communications in response to accelerating automation, changing consumer behavior, and global competition. While there has been considerable emphasis around supporting disruptive tech-based startups/scaleups, the field has been slow to build metrics around how technology is empowering the next generation of small/microbusinesses.

***“In today’s economy, virtually every business is a technology company.”***

**—Dr. Kellen Gracey, Nevada Roundtable**

The Venture Forward project at GoDaddy has launched new measuring tools to explore this. Venture Forward examines the business experience of microbusinesses—defined as companies with 10 or fewer employees and an online presence—to understand how this portion of the stack holds up in the new economy. The Microbusiness Activity Index (MAI) below assesses the number of microbusinesses in an area (participation), how active they are (engagement), and how well-prepared a community is to support them (Infrastructure). MAI provides an overall score that community leaders can use as a benchmark for understanding patterns and opportunities within the ecosystem that serve this segment of the stack.

**Microbusiness Activity Index (MAI) and Component Sub-Indices**

	MAI	Engagement	Participation	Infrastructure
<b>Nevada</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>1.2</b>
Arizona	5.6	5.0	3.2	3.4
California	5.7	4.7	3.4	4.9
Idaho	4.4	6.4	1.3	3.4
Oregon	6.5	7.8	2.5	6.4
Utah	7.7	5.6	3.6	9.3
<i>National Avg.</i>	<i>2.7</i>	<i>7.6</i>	<i>-.6</i>	<i>2.6</i>

Source: 2022 GoDaddy Venture Forward Microbusiness Data. [godaddy.com/ventureforward](https://godaddy.com/ventureforward)

**Engagement** is a measure of signals determining how active a business is online—its traffic, economic footprint, and web security measures, for example. In Nevada, this is quite low at 1.7, suggesting the microbusinesses that are online could be doing more to attract visitors and conduct more business.

**Participation** considers the raw number and growth rate of small businesses and the numbers of entrepreneurs who own them. The state of Nevada is maintaining a healthy rate of participation year over year, leading comparison states.

**Infrastructure** assesses how well connected a community is. Nevada’s infrastructure score of 1.2 is very low and reflects the identifiable gaps in high-speed internet availability, adoption rates, and the socioeconomic status of microbusinesses in the state.

Venture Forward introduced the Microbusiness Industry and Commerce dataset, leveraging transactional data among microbusinesses in 2022. These metrics paint a picture of how healthy and economically powerful the online small business ecosystem is in a given area. The table below lists the top microbusiness industries operating in each metro area as measured by their gross merchandise value (GMV). In Nevada, health and medicine, beauty, and consulting are the top online industries.

**Microbusiness Industry and Commerce**

	Orders Rank	Merchants Rank	GMV Rank	Top 3 Industries
Nevada	10	5	13	Health and Medicine, Beauty, Consulting
Arizona	4	2	11	Beauty, Health and Medicine, Pets
California	35	27	33	Beauty, Health and Medicine, Automotive
Idaho	26	13	34	Sports, Automotive, Retail
Oregon	5	18	16	Health and Medicine, Sports, Automotive
Utah	7	26	24	Sports, Retail, Health and Medicine

Source: 2022 GoDaddy Venture Forward Microbusiness Data. [godaddy.com/ventureforward](https://godaddy.com/ventureforward)

The table above showcases three rankings. The Orders ranking provides a state rank for online orders per capita. Nevada ranks 10th in the number of online orders, lower than Arizona, Oregon, and Utah, which do very well in this space, but ahead of Idaho and California. The Merchants ranking measures the number of online merchants per capita. Nevada ranks favorably against all benchmarked states with only Arizona ranking higher. The GMV ranking represents sales totals, or the amount of goods and services that are sold pre-tax and before any shipping/handling fees. Nevada outranks all surrounding states but Arizona in GMV.



## Demographics

**Goals:** There are baseline demographics common to vibrant ecosystems, including higher educational levels (particularly in STEAM fields), higher median household incomes, diversity, and high household adoption to the internet.

### Age, Income, and Education

	Median Age	Median Household Income	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Nevada	39	\$66,274	28%
Oregon	40	\$71,562	36%
Idaho	37	\$66,474	31%
Utah	32	\$79,449	37%
Arizona	39	\$69,056	32%
California	38	\$84,907	36%

Source: 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau. [data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/)

Nevada's median age of 39 is aligned with benchmarked states. Household income is the lowest among surrounding states, and the state trails considerably in education among those who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. There are 171 private schools in Nevada, the majority of which are in Southern Nevada; they are split between private schools that are religious and private exempt schools that are nonreligious. Among entrepreneurs interviewed with families in Northern and Southern Nevada, 100% indicated their children were enrolled in private schools. There are several charter schools throughout the United States that offer specialized curriculum in STEM, technology, and entrepreneurship. San Diego's School for Entrepreneurship and Technology, for example, is a highly rated and accredited charter school serving 9th- to 12th-grade students with STEM-based education coupled with entrepreneurial-focused training. Such schools offer the potential to augment the pipeline of young talent and be attractive options for entrepreneurs with families.

**100% of entrepreneurs interviewed with families in Northern and Southern Nevada indicated their children were enrolled in private schools.**

## Diversity

The Kauffman Foundation reports that entrepreneurs in the United States are 80% white and 65% male. This is poorly representative of the U.S. population. Multiple studies show that American companies have more sustained, profitable growth when they have more women in leadership roles. Other global research shows that business problems are solved more quickly and effectively by teams made up of individuals of diverse backgrounds.

**Non-White Share of Total Population, Observed and Estimated**

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2019	2020	2030	2040	2050
Nevada	17%	21%	35%	46%	51%	53%	58%	64%	69%
Arizona	25%	28%	36%	42%	45%	46%	50%	54%	58%
California	33%	43%	53%	60%	63%	64%	68%	71%	74%
Idaho	6%	8%	12%	16%	18%	19%	21%	24%	27%
Oregon	7%	9%	16%	22%	24%	26%	30%	35%	40%
Utah	8%	9%	15%	20%	22%	23%	26%	29%	31%

Source: National Equity Atlas Data Summary  
<https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Race-ethnicity#/>

With more than half of Nevada’s current population non-white, and 69% of the state’s population projected to be so by the year 2050, cities and rural communities in Nevada are better positioned than most other surrounding states to take advantage of growing diversity to beta test programs and resources to increase the numbers of minority startups.

**Public Policy**

**Goal:** *Future-focused public policy should strive to reduce the friction associated with startup activity, including compliance, licensing, and regulation. The public sector should operate to guide and support vs. ban or bar. It is in the hands of public policy makers to ensure that everyone has access to ubiquitous, affordable, high-speed bandwidth.*

Nevada’s tax and regulatory policies reflect the state’s independent culture, dating back to the initial state government in 1864. Early lawmakers attempted to establish Nevada as a state that permitted activities that all other states prohibited. That included prostitution, gambling, easy divorces, prizefighting, and other “scandalous” activities of the time.

Today’s legislature continues to limit intrusion into business activities and to promote emerging industry. There are no corporate income taxes or personal income taxes in the state. According to a Kiplinger report in 2018, Nevada is among the most tax-friendly states in the United States. Nevada was the first state to green-light autonomous vehicles. Smart Assets ranks Nevada as the “best state for cryptocurrency enthusiasts” because of the state’s crypto-friendly legislation.

In 2019, Nevada passed the Sandbox Program, which exempts some businesses who are testing innovative financial products and services from certain licensing and regulatory requirements. Benefit Corporations (B Corps) were legalized in 2013. Paul Diflo, Business Portal Administrator at the Nevada Secretary of State office, stated in a January 2023 interview that he aspires to “make Nevada the Delaware of the West.” Welcoming public policy is one of Nevada’s greatest assets and still more can be done to improve the regulatory landscape.



These policies have had a positive impact on the movement of startup/scaleup companies from outlying states into Nevada in recent years. Both Reno and Las Vegas have seen an influx of entrepreneurs from California, specifically the Silicon Valley, drawn by the tax climate, lower costs of living, and the unique culture of the two cities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 128,000 households left the Bay Area in 2021 alone; many of them have landed in Nevada.

The city of Boise has a talent attraction strategy that markets to entrepreneurs in Portland, Oregon, and Seattle. Idaho offers similar attraction assets to the ones in Nevada, including beneficial tax treatments for businesses and quality-of-life assets. These efforts mirror founder attraction strategies underway in Reno at the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada (EDAWN) to attract startups from the Silicon Valley. Alternative strategies come from Tulsa, where remote workers (engineers, programmers, marketers) are invited to apply to Tulsa Remote to receive \$10K and various other incentives to relocate.



### **Tulsa Remote**

New models of entrepreneur and workforce attraction are emerging across the country as cities. One of the best models of talent attraction nationwide is Tulsa Remote, a program financed by the Kaiser Family Foundation which pays remote workers \$10,000 to move to Tulsa. Collectively, the program offers cash, housing, office space and community to remote workers nationwide to move to Tulsa for one year.

Tulsa Remote was first launched in December of 2018 in an effort to recruit a diverse group of talented professionals to relocate to the Tulsa region. In the first four years of the program, Tulsa Remote recruited 2,000 new residents.

An analysis by the Economic Innovation Group (EIG), estimated the economic impact of Tulsa Remote in 2021. They reported that one new full-time job was created in Tulsa for every two 'remoters' who moved there and that every dollar spent on the program created \$13 in economic activity. A 2022 Harvard Review publication notes that most people who have taken part in the program in the first five years have stayed. Cities and states across the country have used the Tulsa program to model and benchmark their own talent recruitment strategies.

## Broadband

While the state as a whole appears to have high percentages of high-speed broadband, most rural regions suffer from poor connectivity. Others rely on cell phone or satellite connections.

**Nevada Bandwidth**

	High-Speed Broadband	Cell-phone Only	Satellite Internet	No Internet
Nevada	90.5%	10.1%	7.4%	9.3%
Arizona	91.4%	9.9%	8.0%	8.4%
California	92.9%	10.1%	7.9%	7.0%
Idaho	90.5%	10.6%	10.7%	9.2%
Oregon	91.6%	9.5%	6.8%	8.2%
Utah	93.5%	8.3%	8.3%	6.4%

Source: 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau. [data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/) Accessed February 2023.

The High Speed Nevada Initiative, led by the Governor’s Office of Science, Innovation and Technology (OSIT), is poised to address bandwidth statewide. Director Brian Mitchell noted in a January 2023 interview that his goal is to bring “affordable, reliable, and scalable” broadband to the state by 2026. “

Bids closed in December 2022 on the first round of construction projects across 10 regions of the state, bringing fiber to more than 1,000 hubs in the state.

***“Residents cannot fully participate in the digital economy without access to affordable broadband and the ability to use it.”***

**—Brian Mitchell, Director OSIT**

A second phase of the project will include middle-mile connectivity and continued implementation of digital equity and affordable connectivity programs. Central to this phase is the implementation of capacity skill building among Nevada residents to utilize the Internet.

Connectivity is the key to economic growth throughout the state of Nevada. This project, if successfully implemented as envisioned by OSIT, will connect and build the capacity of Nevada residents to exploit the potential of the internet, unlocking unprecedented opportunities for entrepreneurship, remote work, and global business development throughout the state and especially in rural regions.

## Business Registration

All businesses in Nevada must register with the state, county, and local municipality where they intend to do business, using registration processes prescribed by each public entity. The state of Nevada has a business registration portal called SilverFlume, [nvsilverflume.gov/home](https://nvsilverflume.gov/home). SilverFlume was launched in 2012 as an award-winning online tool to expedite business registrations, licensing, and coordination between state, county, and local entities. In 2019, the technology was updated and the platform has since been plagued by a series of user navigation challenges, customer service problems, and IT infrastructure setbacks. During roundtables, SilverFlume was a consistent complaint. Numerous Nevada SBDC advisors reported that their clients struggle to navigate the site and cannot readily fix mistakes

without paying costly fees. Others noted that requests for assistance were not responded to or users were directed to the website to find answers. In Churchill County, SBDC advisor. Sara Beebe-Wolken estimated that as many as 30% of the clients she assisted in navigating SilverFlume walked away in frustration without completing the registration process. Over the past 12 months, two rounds of technical improvements were launched. Recent surveys of small businesses using the site show improved satisfaction, however fundamental challenges with the site remain unresolved.

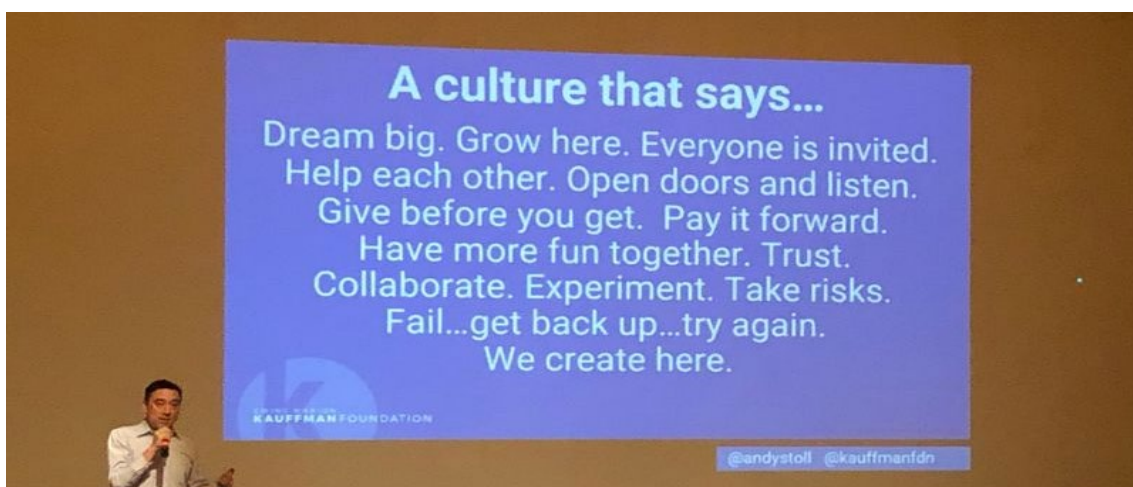
The Secretary of State's office, under a new administration, has committed to addressing the shortfalls at Silver Flume. They readily acknowledge the technology is seriously flawed but note it will take time and funding to build solutions; to this end, they have requested \$15m in funding from the legislature to address these issues. They also plan to conduct statewide working groups to begin building the framework for what comes next.

Alongside the office of the Lieutenant Governor, the Secretary of State has introduced a bill aimed at establishing the state business portal as a true "one stop shop", where business owners could receive all necessary state and local licensure. Reducing the red tape associated with licensing and registration is a core principle of the national Right to Start Movement, which suggests that we must level the playing field for more businesses to start. Licensing is the very first step in tilting the balance of economic opportunity toward entrepreneurs through making business registration and licensing frictionless, fair and as cost effective as possible.

### **Professional Licensing**

Professional licensing, including reciprocal agreements, was identified by a number of entrepreneurs as a barrier affecting their families when moving to Nevada. At an entrepreneur roundtable in Las Vegas, the difficulties associated with obtaining nursing and physical therapy licensing were among the occupations cited by attendees as friction points for family members of incoming entrepreneurs. Reciprocity agreements are not in place in Nevada for these occupations.

The American Institute for Research (AIR) published a *State of Occupational Licensing in Nevada* report in February 2021. AIR calculated a Composite Licensing Difficulty Score, which considers such things as entry requirements, education and training, and reciprocity agreements, to compare the difficulty level of licensing across states. Among four surrounding states, Nevada had the highest difficulty scores.



In January 2023, Nevada Gov. Joe Lombardo took an initial step toward universal licensing recognition via [Executive Order 2023-004](#), which instructs Nevada state licensing boards to report by April 1, 2023, on “pathways to professional licensure reciprocity that exist regionally, nationally or internationally.” Those findings, if submitted, have not been made publicly available as of this reporting date.

## Place

**Goal:** *Natural, built, and cultural resources collectively create a fertile landscape that attracts entrepreneurs and the talent they hire. Central to this are public-private partnerships (placemaking at scale), designation and branding of entrepreneurial hubs, and a supportive culture that promote lifestyles of innovation, curiosity, community connection, and creativity.*

Nevada is the gem of the West offering a full spectrum of natural, built, and cultural resources. In urban Nevada, the iconic Las Vegas strip offers unparalleled entertainment attractions. Reno has the highest concentration of world-class ski resorts in the country, including Mt. Rose. The Burning Man festival annually imbues the Nevada desert with both arts and ethos. The art district in Las Vegas and Reno’s midtown are stand-alone placemaking assets, all of which attract entrepreneurs and the talent they hire.

Rural Nevada’s most valuable assets include the large swath of Nevada’s landscape owned and managed by the federal government. These lands generate extraordinary economic impact in today’s economy by attracting an emerging generation of Americans who value such resources for hiking, camping, fishing, boating, and more in places like Lake Tahoe, Red Rock Canyon, and Great Basin National Park.

The passage of the Dark Sky Designation Program in 2021 is an example of public policy that contributes to entrepreneurial development by safeguarding these resources.



## Resource Networks

**Goal:** *High-performing ecosystems offer a full spectrum of resources, including capital, technical assistance, and densely connected resource providers who provide onramps, interactions, and collisions to raise and empower all who wish to participate in the economy.*

### Capital

During interviews and roundtables, entrepreneurs throughout the stack cited ongoing gaps in capital, particularly among small business owners seeking grants and loans, and among startup/scaleup entrepreneurs at multiple points in the equity capital spectrum.

#### *Small Business Capital*

In an August 2022 statewide survey of the small business community, conducted by the Nevada Small Business Development Center (NSBDC), more than half of small business owners indicated that securing financing is one of their top three challenges. Despite this perception, small business owners in Nevada appear to have a wealth of financing options. The Governor's Office of Economic Development's (GOED) 2023 State Small Business Credit Initiative-2 (SSBCI-2) includes \$16M in microloans financed through the state's community development finance institutions. Nevada's SSBCI program will receive up to \$113M in capital for small businesses over the next decade, including \$36M for venture capital as well. There are also commercial bank loans (including SBA guarantees), other state microloan funds, and gap financing programs. A wide array of specialty funds is managed by various city, county, state, and quasi-public entities such as economic and community development corporations (CDCs) and nonprofits. These programs serve targeted groups, including minorities, rural residents, retailers, and entire disadvantaged communities.

Further research is warranted within the small business community to determine if the terms and conditions of current small business offerings are out of alignment with the business needs, if there is a simple lack of awareness of these options, or if other obstacles exist to create this widespread perception. It is also possible that small business owners in Nevada may be seeking grants in lieu of debt and therefore are not finding what they need. Holding up crowdfunding or beta-testing forgivable loans may offer solutions, but more input from the small business community is needed.

#### *Equity Capital*

The equity capital spectrum in Nevada is bottlenecked in some sectors and missing critical investment dollars in others. As noted in the GOED Five-Year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and confirmed by multiple interviews with key leadership at the University of Nevada Reno (UNR), the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) and the Desert Research Institute (DRI), there is a gap at these institutions in the availability of late-stage research and commercialization capital prior to licensing. In Colorado, the Advanced Industries Proof of Concept Grant supports late-stage research and commercialization up to \$150K per project.

There is also a rapidly growing gap in capital available statewide to entrepreneurs seeking concept validation through the development of minimum viable products (MVPs), product-market fit, and customer discovery. In the past, funding in this space has come from angel investors, but nationally and within the state, angel investment has moved from pre-revenue investment to post-revenue.

This lack of late-stage funding among scientific researchers and additional lack of validation capital in the entrepreneurial community represent two bottlenecks that threaten to slow or stall technology transfer and the successful launch of community entrepreneurial ventures in the state.

Across the country there are many examples of funds that serve to address one or both capital gaps. In Iowa, the Proof of Commercial Relevance (POCR) program is part of a state pipeline that provides ongoing rounds of funding for technologically innovative ventures, beginning with a \$50K POCR loan supporting MVP and product-market fit. In California, the private-sector Growth Factory accelerator provides extended support for pre-revenue innovators, delivering pre-seed capital and technical assistance to help participants achieve \$1M in annual recurring revenue over 18 months. New small gap funds, venture studios, and additional niche accelerators are needed to address the needs of entrepreneurs from the lab to marketplace.

#### *Angel and Venture Funds*

Nationally, key indicators in the angel investment space have improved over the past two years. According to the Center for Venture Research, the number of companies who received funding nationwide increased by 7.1% to 69,060 in 2021. The average amount of each deal increased to \$421,675, up 7.6% over the previous year. The amount of equity received by investors averaged 9.5%, down a fraction from 2020, possibly reflective of higher valuations in 2021.

***Nationally, entrepreneurs had a roughly 1:4 shot of receiving equity investment in 2021.***

**—Center for Venture Research,  
analysis report, 2022**

In Nevada, there are several sources of funding with the potential to serve the angel investment needs of the startup/scaleup community. Four of these are led by StartupNV. StartupNV is a statewide, nonprofit accelerator and fund manager based in Las Vegas. The organization manages FundNV and a novel conference fund called AngelNV and in 2021 began raising a new \$10M fund called the 1864 Fund. In December 2022, StartupNV took over management of the Sierra Angels in Incline Village, one of the two established funds serving northern Nevada. Recent consolidation of angel funds in the state is expedient for fund managers and provides a simplified referral process to engage entrepreneurs. It can, however, stifle the emergence of other new customized funds. Consolidation in general leads to uniformity of service delivery, which is the opposite of what entrepreneurs need.

Access to venture capital in Nevada is a short flight from any urban area of Nevada. Both the Las Vegas and Reno entrepreneur communities have self-described expertise in seeking valley investors for series A and beyond. Recently, GOED compiled a list of in-state venture capital funds and investors. The list, while informal, includes more than 600 funds and individual investors in Nevada, but they are fragmented and largely unaligned. According to Zach Miles, Associate Vice President for Technology and Partnerships at UNLV, uniting the venture community is key to launching a stronger technology transfer pipeline where focused rounds of funding are needed to move intellectual property out of DRI, UNR, and UNLV. Leaders in Southern Nevada convened an investor summit in support of such a fund in February 2023. A new venture fund at UNLV called Scarlet Capital is under discussion.

#### *Knowledge Fund*

The Nevada Legislature created the Knowledge Fund to deliver on innovation based economic development. Authorized at \$10M, it is a key driver of support for technology transfer at UNR, UNLV and DRI. In recent years however, it has not been fully funded, slowing investments into research and commercialization. The Knowledge Fund is currently limited to investments funneled through the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE), stopping short of catalyzing commercialization beyond late-stage research or licensure. This leaves a gap in the Nevada ecosystem for supporting early-stage growth companies that could be addressed by the Knowledge Fund.

### Entrepreneur Support Organizations

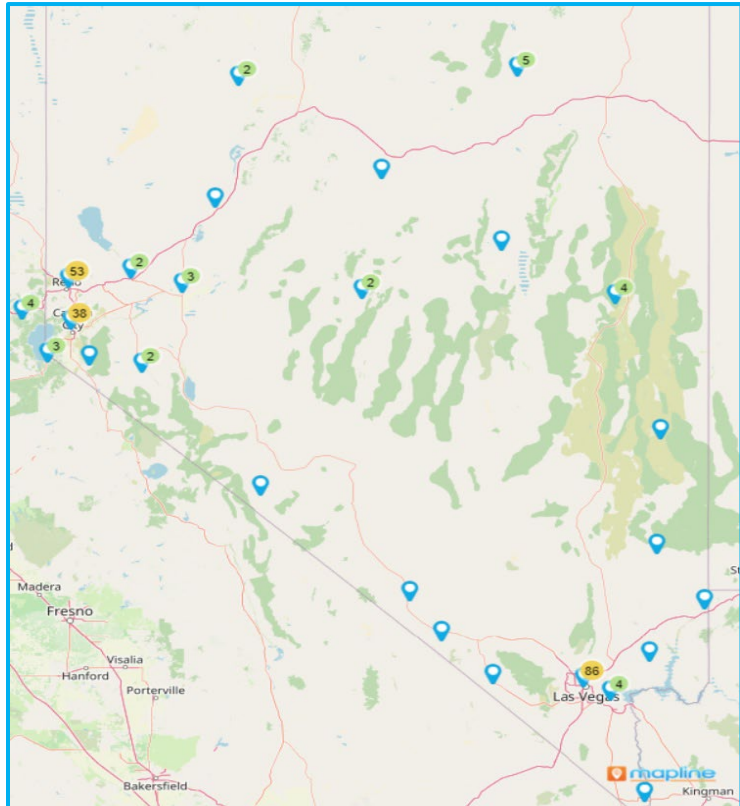
The array of resources and number of providers missioned to support entrepreneurs in the state are substantial. A healthy mix in Nevada of more than 200 professional public and private providers offers counseling, coaching, mentoring, capital, and specialty business services. While plentiful, these resources are largely clustered in highly populated areas of the state, as shown below, resulting in more proximity-based service delivery in urban Nevada with fewer services in suburban and rural areas.

Marcel Schaerer, Deputy Director for the Nevada Department of Business and Industry (NDBI), stands out in the state as a convener of Nevada’s entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs). He hosts regular online, statewide informational meetups among ESOs. These well-coordinated meetups are regularly attended by more than 100 individuals and represent the single most important network currently existing in the state.

At the regional and local levels, however, there is less collaboration. ESOs tend to be siloed and disconnected from one another.

Lack of regional and local collaboration among service providers has exacerbated statewide attempts to improve entrepreneur access to resources. In 2021, the Nevada Small Business Development Centers (NSBDCs) secured a two-year Google grant to aggregate the various providers of resources into a single online portal.

The vendor, Startup Space, scraped the social media profiles of hundreds of Nevada service providers and uploaded those organizations’ demographics into a single portal called the Nevada Entrepreneur Network (NEN), where entrepreneurs could subscribe then access providers by topic or need. This approach was predicated on the ESOs maintaining and updating those database entries for their own organization and co-marketing the resource to their various constituents. Neither happened in this case. The NSBDC, which invested time and staff into the creation of the resource, now seeks to turn it over to another provider or sunset the initiative after multiple attempts to engage the ESOs in participating were unsuccessful.



Startup Space is not the only directory in the state. GOED links to a [directory of resources](#) at The Nevada Department of Business and Industry (NDBI). On the same platform is the widely distributed Business Guide: The Roadmap, a downloadable click-through directory of resources that showcases resource providers by topic. In Southern Nevada, the city of Las Vegas has subscribed to [Dealroom](#), a venture-tracking software and resource portal that serves the startup/scaleup space alone. In [rural Nevada](#), most of the eight regional economic development websites audited for this project link to one or more of these resources.

***“I have no idea how to figure out who does what in Washoe County.”***

**—Thomas Bates, Senticon**

Across industry and stage-of-business growth in Nevada, business owners interviewed indicated that they rely mostly on word-of-mouth recommendations from other entrepreneurs, entrepreneur event organizers, or friends and family to discover and determine the right resource to meet their business needs. This would suggest that entrepreneurs may not be utilizing these directories as their first choice to obtain business help.

According to Michael Carmona, Senior Director for MoSourceLink and KCSOURCELINK, a national online directory of ESO resources, online directories are important and excellent tools. He noted, however, that they aren’t enough. “There is,” he said, “only so much technology can do. This is one area where we know we need human touch.” The SourceLink programs he manages employ novel Network Navigators, people who are intimately familiar with the resources and services of the regions, including the programs, staff, and operations for hundreds of ESOs. Network Navigators attend events and respond to phone calls, chat requests, and emails from entrepreneurs throughout the stack, ensuring that business owners are connected to the right resource at the right time.

The state of Maine has a [Business Answers Program](#) that is a first point of contact for small business owners to access initial resources. Los Angeles County in California has the [Small Business Concierge](#) on call to provide referrals to organizations and services in in the county.

## **KCSOURCELINK Network Navigators**

KCSOURCELINK is an online resource connecting entrepreneurs throughout the stack to resources, coaches, funding, education, and events in the greater Kansas City region in Missouri and Kansas. In 2016, community builders there realized the online portal wasn’t enough.

“In our quest to make Kansas City the most entrepreneurial city in the nation, we have aggregated more than 200 organizations on [KCSOURCELINK.com](#), but the reality is, that for a lot of the folks we serve, having people to touch them personally is very important.”

—Michael Carmona, Senior Director of KCSOURCELINK and MOSOURCELINK

KCSOURCELINK added three Network Navigators to their community who can provide hands-on triage through a phone hotline, live online support via chat or email, and walk-around support.



### *A Governor's Office of Entrepreneurship*

Many states have centralized offices for entrepreneurship or statewide innovation centers that serve to manage and promote all the state's activity around innovation, including connections with entrepreneurs. Based on the national Right to Start movement, 12 state legislatures are considering such offices in 2023. Victor Hwang, founder of the Right to Start movement, noted that "[O]ur aspiring entrepreneurs are ready to do their part. But government has to do its part as well, by breaking barriers at all levels. ... At a time of great political polarization, Americans want a level playing field for aspiring business-starters."

A central feature of these offices is the aggregation of data around the innovation economy. Multiple states have Innovation dashboards providing metrics around innovation indicators such as technology transfer, startup rates, emerging industries, and churn in the entrepreneurial stack.

Pennsylvania has an Innovation Economy Dashboard that tracks startup rates, government support of innovation, technology transfer, and workforce. In Iowa, an Innovation Dashboard was

launched in 2022 to track startup/scaleup activity. In North Carolina, the University of North Carolina has the Innovate Carolina dashboard, which collects and showcases data around technology transfer and commercialization. Collectively, these dashboards improve transparency and raise awareness of the impact of entrepreneurship economic development.



### *Technology Transfer*

More than \$250 million in research expenditures occur each year on average at UNR, UNLV, and DRI in support of basic, applied, and experimental research. Some of this research results in discoveries that have global importance. Technology transfer is the movement of the resulting intellectual property derived from this research into the economy through various forms of licensing and agreements.

These breakthrough innovations—air and water pollution solutions, or carbon-reduction innovations, for example—address critical global problems, yet only a very small portion of these innovations are actively marketed to would-be licensees. A shortage of funding, the lack of mandate to expedite these processes, and complicated licensing systems have stymied technology transfer in the state. Addressing these issues will create new business, allow for existing corporate expansion opportunities, and introduce important products, processes, and innovations into the global marketplace.

Interviews with leadership at UNR, UNLV, and DRI suggest that each institution has developed separate processes over the past decade for moving IP into the marketplace with differing success. DRI commercialization activities are currently supported by UNLV’s technology transfer office. UNLV is in the process of reimagining technology transfer with implementation of a strong “research to commercialization” pathway with multiple resource networks to guide campus innovators, including students, through the commercialization process. At both UNLV and UNR, interviews suggested that internal processes are bottlenecked and slow. Faculty/institutional splits, for example, may not be consistent with similar research institutions elsewhere in the country. Unlike most research universities, patenting and startup activity is not considered part of tenure track achievements. The overall technology process is stymied by a shortage of professional staff throughout the state, and connections between licensing professionals and regional economic development organizations are limited at best.



# Nevada Action Plan

## Realign State Economic Development Around the Innovation Economy

The state of Nevada will support the innovation economy as a key component of the state's overall economic development efforts. It will build capacity to leverage key policy and programs in support of entrepreneurial innovation statewide.

**Potential Owners: GOED, Nevada Legislature, Governor's Office**

1. Create a Governor's Office of Entrepreneurship
  - a. Guide and support entrepreneurial ecosystem building among ESOs in Las Vegas, Reno
    - i. Coordinate with GOED to support rural community ecosystems
  - b. Conduct a biennial statewide survey of the entrepreneurial stack during non-legislative years
  - c. Build a public facing, state-wide innovation dashboard to track economic impact
  - d. Provide statewide tools to collect data and manage resource networks online
    - i. Work with NSBDC to find a host or re-envision Startup Space
    - ii. Consider a statewide resource navigator
2. Host a Governor's Innovation Summit
  - a. Convene entrepreneurs and ESO's around ecosystem building in support of innovation economy.
3. Expand, Fully Fund, and Realign the Knowledge Fund
  - a. Expand the Knowledge Fund to \$15M
  - b. Realign administrative rules to be responsive to the needs of the innovation economy
    - i. Release \$4M across multiple RFPs for public-private collaboration on new resources
      1. Collaborate on federal funding opportunities
    - ii. Create a \$1M Proof of Commercial Relevance Fund (POCR)
      1. Target late-stage scientific research and early proof of commercialization.
      2. UNLV gateway for statewide application of funds

### Key Performance Indicators

Nevada economic development infrastructure will be aligned with the goals of an innovation-led economy through an active state office supporting entrepreneurship; funding aligned with the growing needs of Nevada's job creators and public-private partnerships in place to implement emerging programs and resources needed to accelerate entrepreneurship-led economic development.

## Streamline Statewide Systems

Nevada will streamline and improve access to licensing opportunities resulting from research; make business licensing and registration seamless and fair, and coordinate across departments to position Nevada as a frictionless state for talent and founders to pursue startup activity.

### Potential Owners: NSHE, UNLV, UNR, DRI, GOED, Nevada Legislature

1. Improve the capacity of Technology Transfer offices at UNR and UNLV
  - a. Add 1-2 licensing professionals at UNR, UNLV
2. Improve Nevada's technology transfer and commercialization processes
  - a. NSHE request licensing plans from UNR, UNLV (representing UNLV and DRI)
    - i. Develop commercialization metrics and objectives
      1. Annual licensing goals
      2. Marketing strategy, including a Nevada First licensing opportunity
      3. Specific process improvements to accelerate and streamline licensing
  - b. Review and adjust if needed, the investor/institutional splits at UNR, UNLV and DRI
  - c. Add startup and patenting activity to the tenure track metrics at UNLV and UNR

### Key Performance Indicators

Existing corporations, students, and startup companies (particularly those in Nevada) will have ready access to licensing opportunities at UNLV, UNR and DRI. The commercialization licensing process will be efficient, timely and strive to be responsive to the needs of the business community.

3. Streamline entrepreneur access to business data
  - a. Combine data and research organizations in the state into a single accessible program.
    - i. Consider a business data concierge program serving all small businesses
4. Address Nevada regulatory and licensing processes
  - a. Consolidate all state, county and local business licensing at Silver Flume.
  - b. Conduct UX audit of Silver Flume for ongoing usability improvements
  - c. Review, identify and address regulatory friction points in professional licensing.
    - i. Fairly assess reciprocity across all occupations to meet that of surrounding states

### Key Performance Indicators

Nevada businesses will have access to customized business data and analytics on demand through a single statewide office. Businesses will seamlessly register and pay for annual business licensing across government entities utilizing a single portal at Silver Flume. Incoming residents will find equitable licensing and reciprocity rules across all professional occupations in Nevada.

5. Position the state as attractive to entrepreneurs and innovators
  - a. Incorporate talent/founder attraction messaging into NDTCA marketing and publications.
  - b. Create a talent/founder attraction campaign

### Key Performance Indicators

Founders outside the state of Nevada, particularly in the Silicon Valley, will be incentivized to bring their companies and teams to one of Nevada's dynamic ecosystems supporting technology innovation.

## Empower Regional Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

Nevada will empower the three ecosystems in the state through training and incentive funding. Small businesses with fewer than ten employees will gain capacity to engage in the global economy, generating jobs and wealth in their cities and communities.

**Potential Owners: Nevada Legislature, GOED, EDAWN, NSBDC, RDA's statewide**

1. Legislatively fund an expansion of Main Street Program to lead rural entrepreneurship.
  - a. Expand rural Main Street program deliverables to include ecosystem building.
  - b. Host rural leadership training around ecosystem building for non-Main Street communities
  - c. Host a Rural Entrepreneurship/ Main Street Conference
  - d. Coordinate the deployment of e-commerce business training serving business owners
2. Empower rural communities to create their own solutions
  - a. Create a \$100K Launch Rural Nevada Seed Fund to support local entrepreneurship programs

### Key Performance Indicators

Rural communities will have access to best practices, training, and funding, empowering local leadership to develop locally appropriate entrepreneur support solutions in their communities.

3. Office of Entrepreneurship to provide capacity building support for Las Vegas and Reno ESOs
  - a. Host quarterly capacity building training
  - b. Incent Entrepreneur Development Certification (EDP)

### Key Performance Indicators

100% of RDA's trained and 50% awarded EDP certification by 2026.

4. Legislatively fund an annual increase to the NSBDC to build out comprehensive statewide business digital literacy program and host capital roundtables.
  - a. NSBDC develop and deploy statewide, a white label comprehensive online business curriculum
  - b. NSBDC host capital roundtables statewide to drill into small business capital gaps

### Key Performance Indicators

Level up the online business skills of 1,000 microbusinesses with fewer than 10 employees annually beginning in 2025. The capital needs of Nevada's small businesses will be identified, and solutions coordinated among ESOs to address.



# Reno

## **Executive Summary- Reno**

*Entrepreneurial Communities LLC. assessed the Reno ecosystem during the winter of 2022-23.*

*Reno economic and community data were aggregated and benchmarked against the entrepreneur ecosystems in five major U.S. cities, including Salt Lake City, Boise, Kansas City (MO), and Colorado Springs. Stakeholder interviews and roundtables were hosted in November and December 2022. A nine-person national roundtable of entrepreneurship researchers and practitioners was convened in February 2023 to provide insight and recommendations for this report.*

The Reno/Tahoe region has emerged as one of the most vibrant places in the West, attracting founders, talent, and remote workers in unprecedented numbers to Nevada's Biggest Little City. The Reno/Tahoe ecosystem as assessed in 2023 is the strongest ecosystem in the state of Nevada, with key infrastructure, culture and stakeholder engagement built out over the past ten years. The city offers dense startup connections and an innovation-focused entrepreneurial culture. It is a welcoming community of independent thinkers who value natural resources, small city life, and the arts. The region is anchored by multiple entertainment districts quickly evolving for this generation of founders. Much of this good work has been supported by a small number of local champions and organically rising community assets.

The Reno/Tahoe ecosystem can continue its steady growth into the coming decade by doing more of the same community building that brought it here, however the region also has an opportunity to become much more. With a bold future-focused vision that engages many more champions, Reno/Tahoe can lead the nation as Boulder, Portland and Kansas City have done in creating new economy jobs, businesses and economic growth. Reno is positioned to be the city of the future, attracting an entirely new generation of knowledge workers and innovators in equal measure with large corporations, resulting in an exceptional workforce, a center of gravity for independent American startups and a vibrant, wealthy city that will flourish in the new economy.

### **Envision a National Brand**

Entrepreneurs interviewed for this report repeatedly shared that they 'just didn't know what they didn't know' about the Reno experience until they arrived. Once here, entrepreneurs discover a wide array of benefits that support both business growth and community life in this mountain city. This report recommends unifying regional energy around the exemplary lifestyle and peer community of the Reno/Tahoe region. The arts and eclectic retail experience of Midtown, the vibrancy and entertainment of downtown and the year around natural resources of Tahoe and the northern deserts contribute to a community experience unlike any other in the West. Within the ecosystem, resources abound, Reno/Tahoe entrepreneurs give as much as they receive, broadband is improving, and statewide public policy is shifting to support the innovation-led economy. The creation and national marketing of a unified Reno/Tahoe brand will invite like-minded innovators to explore the Reno/Tahoe entrepreneurial life and propel this part of Nevada onto a national stage, rivaling the acclaimed Boulder experience.

### **Ignite Ecosystem Resources**

Reno/Tahoe ecosystem builders have made great strides in bringing the ecosystem to life in Northern Nevada over the past decade. Multiple groups regularly meet up and dense connections exist between dozens of ecosystem support organizations. Now these partners should ignite the network around a regional ecosystem vision where business startup and expansion is celebrated and supported for all residents. This will require purposeful inclusion of more entities to reflect the region's demographic changes. Leaders will need to set a larger table to make room for those who serve minorities, women, LBGTQ and other disadvantaged entrepreneurs. They will need to coach traditional organizations to

reimagine how they contribute to this ecosystem. Young leaders are emerging, people like Ania Calvillo-Mason, Jessica Phillips, Brent Freeman, Rachel Macintyre and Jake Carrico. These champions will be pivotal to the evolution of the ecosystem around youth and women entrepreneurship, incoming Silicon Valley tech startups and small business development. Among the many benefits resulting from expanded collaboration, an informed cross-organization and community supported funding strategy can be developed around an endowment fund to sustain the next phase of ecosystem growth.

This larger network can be tasked to address multiple current ecosystem needs as well, including gaps in flexible housing, especially near Midtown and downtown Reno and work together to fill gaps in the Reno/Tahoe capital stream supporting pre-seed and angel investments.

### **Fill the Pipeline**

Reno has developed benchmark metrics which can guide the growth of the Reno/Tahoe ecosystem in the coming decade. The entrepreneur community has grown by 4.5% on average since 2016 in spite of record-breaking business closures during the pandemic. Reno entrepreneurs are contributing 3% of employment and compensating employees at 65.8% of the average wages paid at all firms across the country. They create 5.6 more jobs than they shed in their first year of operations. These are strong metrics that compete well against most similarly sized cities, but Reno has the capacity to lead these metrics going forward.

Pushing energy toward the top of the stack in support of technology transfer and corporate partnerships will increase the numbers of growth companies and jobs in the region and raise average wages over time. This can be accomplished through streamlining the technology transfer processes at UNR and DRI and empowering EDAWN and Tahoe Regional Prosperity to support licensing opportunities among regional corporations. Improving connections between the startup community and corporations will foster greater co-investments, sponsored research and SBIR/STTR co-applications, reaping benefits across the economy. Empowering the nearly 15,000 regional Reno microbusinesses to utilize technology innovation will result in more breakout growth companies, local wealth and new businesses, moving Reno toward a place where side gigs, small business and scaling companies alike are all welcomed, ubiquitous and expected.

2023 will likely be remembered as the year ChatGTP was introduced to the world, marking another disruptive milestone in our movement toward fully engaging in the innovation economy. From here, change will come fast and furious to cities and communities throughout Nevada and the world. With state support and bold local action, Reno/Tahoe is poised to get ahead of these trends and build the economic future of the region by creating a center of gravity supporting American startups working at the edge of these innovations.



## The Reno Ecosystem

### Overview

The Reno/Tahoe region has emerged in recent years as one of the most vibrant places in the West, attracting founders, talent, and remote workers in unprecedented numbers to Nevada's Biggest Little City. The city is nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains along the Truckee River and near Lake Tahoe. Unlike its sister city of Las Vegas, Reno/Tahoe does not have an iconic international footprint to draw from. Over the course of the last decade, it has created its own, attracting growing numbers of new economy innovators. These efforts have been driven by EDAWN and a small, tight-knit group of entrepreneur support organizations.

Reno efforts began as a visionary policy decision in 2012 by the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada (EDAWN) and Director Mike Kazmierski. Utilizing best practices described in Brad Feld's book *Startup Communities* and Victor Hwang's Rainforest principles, a specialized EDAWN entrepreneurship team was tapped to build out a five-point approach to support the ecosystem.

- **Communicate** Utilize the new profile of EDAWN to tell the story of Reno's startup community both internally and externally.
- **Catalyze** Identify gaps in the ecosystem, find entrepreneurs to lead initiatives, and support the programs with both human and financial resources.
- **Connect** Bridge the gaps between the startup community, the broader business community, and regional governments.
- **Showcase** Shine a spotlight on the successes in the community to help startups break out from the noise and highlight entrepreneurial role models.
- **Attract** Uplift the ecosystem with outside founders, integrating new role models and capital from Silicon Valley and other hubs to continuously refresh and invigorate the community.



EDAWN's SVP of Entrepreneurial Development Doug Erwin, VP's Bryan McArdle and Juston Berg, and Manager Katie Romanko-Freeman have done an exemplar job. They seeded the creation of multiple angel investment organizations (Reno Seed Fund, Audacity Fund, Innevation Fund). They supported the rollout of 1M Cups, Startup Weekends, and Tech Rally then Tech Alley meetups. The EDAWN team led the creation of Founder Dinners, one of the region's most successful entrepreneur celebrations. Erwin has emerged as a super connector, acknowledged by the Kauffman Foundation as being one of the nation's best ecosystem builders. He and his team have served as go-to ambassadors to welcome and engage new startups and to connect community members ongoing with resources, information, and services.



The path to today's vibrant ecosystem has been marked by global disruptions. Between 2004 and 2020 the number of new business starts exceeded the number of exits every year except for during the Great Recession and the pandemic. Between 2019 and 2021, at the height of the pandemic, Reno saw more business closures than at any time in the past two decades. The rebound in 2021 was dramatic.

**Changes in Numbers of Businesses by Size in Reno MSA, 2005–2021**



Businesses	2011	2016	Change ('11-'16)	2016	2021	Change ('16-'21)
Self-Employed sole proprietorships of one employee	2,693	2,714	0.8%	2,714	3,176	17.0%
Small 2 to 9 jobs including proprietorships	12,261	14,493	18.2%	14,493	14,576	0.6%
SME (Small-medium Enterprises) 10 to 99 jobs	3,599	3,732	3.7%	3,732	4,099	9.8%
Mid Size 100 to 499 jobs	242	252	4.1%	252	268	6.3%
Large 500 or more jobs	34	24	-29.4%	24	25	4.2%
<b>TOTAL BUSINESSES</b>	<b>18,829</b>	<b>21,215</b>	<b>12.7%</b>	<b>21,215</b>	<b>22,144</b>	<b>4.4%</b>

Source: Business Dynamics Research Consortium, University of Wisconsin System.  
[youreconomy.org](http://youreconomy.org) Accessed February 2023.

Throughout the stack, the number of overall businesses continues to grow in the Reno Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Much of the net new business startup activity has been among sole proprietors and companies with 10-99 jobs. Many of these sole proprietors are home based businesses, remote workers or very early technology-adapted small business owners (such as ebay and other ecommerce vendors).

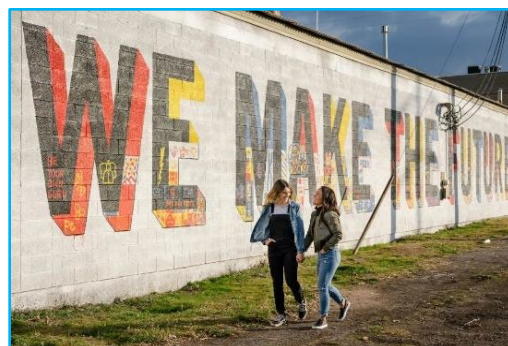
### Reno/Tahoe Benchmark Cities

Comparisons were determined by a combination of “ideal benchmark cities” held up by local leadership as places where they intuitively compare themselves plus other cities where population and entrepreneurial activity were comparable. For this assessment, we highlight the unique ecosystems of Salt Lake City, Boise, Kansas City, Mo., Orlando, and Colorado Springs.

#### 1. Salt Lake City

*Connections drive this ecosystem*

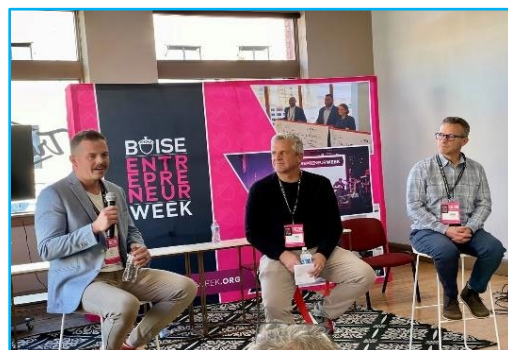
Salt Lake City’s tech scene is well-branded and densely connected. Marketed as the “Silicon Slopes,” the city proper is just over 200,000, big enough to offer an abundance of the necessary resources—people, capital, and expertise, coupled with more connecting events than most ecosystems—including its own [media nonprofit](#).



#### 2. Boise

*Best practices in entrepreneur attraction*

Boise is a major tech hub in Idaho, having built a strong strategy around luring entrepreneurial talent from bigger, higher-cost-of-living cities such as Portland and Seattle. Boise ranks 15th on the [U.S. News & World Report](#) Best Places to Live list for 2022-'23, offering thriving social scenes, excellent outdoor activities, and a reasonable cost of living.



### 3. Kansas City, Missouri

#### *Best stakeholder network in the nation*

Beginning in 2011, Kansas City articulated a vision to make KC America’s most entrepreneurial city. This region has built one of the strongest ESO networks in the country. Some of the first reporting metrics around ecosystems were published using aggregated data from KC. The “We Create Jobs” reports are globally known for quantifying the value of entrepreneurial ecosystems.



### 4. Orlando

#### *A united ecosystem brand*

Orlando, with a rich economic and cultural history tied to the entertainment sector, has emerged in 2023 with a complementary brand supporting its entrepreneurial ecosystem. The new brand, the “Center of the Metaverse,” brings together university, community, and Disney assets around entrepreneurship in IoT, augmented reality/virtual reality, gaming, and 3-D.



### 5. Colorado Springs

#### *Entrepreneur-led ecosystem building*

The entrepreneurs in Colorado Springs embrace Techstars cofounder Brad Feld’s vision for entrepreneur-led ecosystem building. Throughout the region, resources have been built and shared (largely for free) by founders, which makes this ecosystem unique and welcoming. The community is well-known for its health-tech and sport-tech innovations and a wealth of natural resources.



## Demographics

**Goals:** There are baseline demographics common to vibrant ecosystems, including higher educational levels (particularly in STEAM fields), higher median household incomes, diversity, and high household adoption to the internet.



### Age, Income, and Education

	Median Age	Median Household Income	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Reno	39	\$76,182	34%
Boise	37	\$73,343	36%
Colorado Springs	35	\$79,014	42%
Kansas City	38	\$73,900	40%
Orlando	39	\$64,936	35%
Salt Lake City	34	\$105,479	36%

Reno ranks favorably compared to benchmark cities in terms of age, household income, and education. The lack of education, which is a drag on the state as a whole, is not apparent here, as 34% of the adult population has a bachelor's degree or higher. Reno, Colorado Springs, and Salt Lake City each have 2.1% of their workforce in Information Technology, surpassing Boise, Kansas City, and Orlando.

### Information Technology (IT) Workforce as Share of All Employees

	Reno	Boise	Colorado Springs	Kansas City	Orlando	Salt Lake City
IT Workforce	2.1%	1.6%	2.1%	1.8%	1.8%	2.1%

Source: 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau.  
[data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/)

### Kauffman Indicators of Entrepreneurship

	Contribution	Creation
Reno	3.0%	5.6
Boise	4.2%	8.0
Colorado Springs	4.0%	3.9
Kansas City	3.0%	4.6
Orlando	3.3%	5.5
Salt Lake City	3.0%	6.3
National Avg.	3.1%	3.4

Companies less than a year old contributed 3.0% of private sector employment in the Reno MSA in 2020. This is measured as the ratio comparing employment among firms 0-1 year of age to total employment. This is just under the national average of 3.1%.

Reno companies less than a year old created 5.6 more jobs than were lost in 2020. Reno outperforms the country at 3.4 and Las Vegas at 4.7.

	Compensation	Constancy
Reno	65.8%	48.4%
Boise	53.6%	53.5%
Colorado Springs	62.0%	53.2%
Kansas City	118.1%	54.0%
Orlando	60.2%	53.0%
Salt Lake City	67.2%	53.2%
National Avg.	55.1%	53.8%

Reno startups are compensating employees at 65.8% of the average wages paid at all firms across the country. The only benchmarked region that exceeds the average wages paid across all firms is Kansas City.

Among companies tracked by EDAWN, wages average about \$90K annually. The region is seeing churn in those jobs; less than half of new jobs last longer than three consecutive quarters at 48.4%. This compares to a little more than half in Las Vegas (51.3%) and 53.8% nationally.

Source: 2021 Kauffman Indicators of Entrepreneurship.  
[indicators.kauffman.org/data-tables](https://indicators.kauffman.org/data-tables)



**Reno Area Race/Ethnicity**

	Asian and Pacific Islander	Black	Native American	White	Non-White Hispanic
Reno	6%	2%	1%	63%	26%
Boise	2%	1%	1%	79%	14%
Colorado Springs	3%	5%	1%	72%	18%
Kansas City	3%	12%	1%	72%	10%
Orlando	4%	16%	0%	48%	33%
Salt Lake City	5%	2%	1%	73%	19%

*Source: 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau. [data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/) Accessed February 2023.*

The Reno MSA is diverse and becoming more so. The number of minority residents has grown dramatically over the past decade and is expected to continue to climb between now and 2050.

Minority, women, and more international entrepreneurs will fill the pipeline in coming decades. A multitude of best practices across the stack have been instrumental in supporting these entrepreneurs. In Denver, Colorado Access Mode MVP Lab Accelerator is a novel prototyping lab serving very early-stage minority entrepreneurs. Because the program engages founders at the idea stage, this accelerator backfills dozens of entrepreneurs into the pipeline in Denver who graduate into the broader ecosystem better prepared to engage in the community and poised for investment.

In Portland, Oregon, business owner Junea Rosha launched an innovative pop-up program during Hispanic Heritage Month, supporting a single growth-oriented, consumer packaged goods entrepreneur with \$10,000 and 12 weeks of personalized mentoring with her team at Brazi Bites. This kind of peer support creates needed role models around entrepreneurship while promoting the growth of more businesses owned by Hispanic entrepreneurs.



Some of the highest rates in new business starts nationwide are coming from women and in particular, women of color. Dayo McIntosh of Yateou Inc., relocated to Reno from Silicon Valley. She noted she has been welcomed in meetups with angels in Reno. She said, “I sat with investors in the valley where, before I opened my mouth, I was dismissed. In Reno, I hear, ‘What are you building?’ and ‘How can I help?’”

Multiple women suggested there aren’t enough women in the overall community. They noted that many Reno programs and events tend to be built around schedules that are not conducive to the unique needs of women—on weekends, during evening hours, or at other times that women are unable to attend. Josh Leavitt, who leads Tech Alley, a popular meetup event in Las Vegas and Reno hosts his Reno events at the

Terry Lee Wells Discovery Museum in MidTown to address these needs. “The museum isn’t perfect, but it offers families the opportunity to participate in Tech Alley. It’s part of our mission to be inclusive. We work at it,” he said.

### **Startup/Scaleup Activity**

The movement of people and companies out of surrounding states, especially California, is well-documented. Many founders have migrated to Nevada, settling in Reno and Sparks and Incline Village and Truckee near Lake Tahoe. Entrepreneurs Brent Freeman and Matt Mireles participated in one of a dozen entrepreneur roundtables hosted throughout the state of Nevada during the winter of 2022-’23.

Brent Freeman is the founder of Stealth Venture Labs, a Silicon Valley digital marketing team-for-hire that helps subscription brands find product-market fit, push through growth plateaus, and integrate social good into their business models. He also founded Stealth Impact Labs, a 501(c)(3) providing free ecommerce education along with \$5,000 grants to inner-city teenage entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds in the U.S. Freeman relocated to Incline Village, collectively referred to as “Tahoe,” in 2022.

In the Silicon Valley, Freeman said, “It is ‘Who do you know? What do you do?’ It is all very competitive and how to get rich—it’s exhausting. What makes Reno/Tahoe different is the ability to be outside of that—to focus on quality of life—it’s ‘life arbitrage.’”

Matt Mireles of Oasis, an AI research lab, moved to Reno when he had children. “The Bay did not make sense for me the moment I had my son,” he said. “I didn’t know what I didn’t know about this place until I came here.” Mireles said he believes the next phase of the Reno/Tahoe ecosystem needs to borrow from the valley to “level up.” Reno/Tahoe’s ecosystem must be “rebuilt for the post-pandemic world; it needs new operating models that include high-signal curated gatherings.”



### **Small Business Activity**

Prior to the pandemic, small businesses with fewer than 10 employees had been growing at the fastest rate of all business sizes in Reno. Many of these companies closed during the pandemic; others received disaster aid. A substantial proportion of that assistance came in the form of Economic Injury Development Loans (EIDL). In Nevada, 41,286 small businesses received EIDL loans, averaging about \$71,000 apiece. In December 2022, all of these loans entered repayment. Today, many small businesses are carrying additional debt while struggling to adopt new tech-based operations in response to accelerating automation, changing consumer behavior, and global competition.

The ecosystem field has been slow to build metrics around how well the next generation of small and microbusinesses are adapting to a tech-led economy. The Venture Forward project at GoDaddy has launched new measuring tools to explore this. Venture Forward examines the business experience of microbusinesses—defined as companies with 10 or fewer employees and an online presence—to understand how this portion of the stack holds up in the new economy. The Microbusiness Activity Index (MAI) (next page) assesses how many microbusinesses are in an area (participation), how active they are (engagement), and how well-prepared a community is to support them (infrastructure). MAI provides an



overall score that ESOs can use as a benchmark for understanding the needs of this segment of the stack. Reno has a strong MAI at 13.9, just behind Salt Lake City and well above the national average of 5.5.

#### Reno Microbusiness Activity Index

	MAI	Engagement	Participation	Infrastructure
<b>Reno</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>12.8</b>
Boise	11.7	10.8	5.7	13.4
Colorado Springs	13.7	11.4	5.8	19.9
Kansas City	10.9	11.1	4.2	14.5
Orlando	12.1	7.5	7.3	14.9
Salt Lake City	14.3	12.2	7.1	17.5
<i>National Avg.</i>	<i>5.5</i>	<i>11.6</i>	<i>0.8</i>	<i>3.2</i>

Source: 2022 GoDaddy Venture Forward Microbusiness Data.  
[godaddy.com/ventureforward](https://godaddy.com/ventureforward)

**Engagement** is a measure of signals determining how active a business is online—its traffic, economic footprint, and web security measures, for example. Reno has the highest index at 14.4 among benchmarked cities, suggesting the microbusinesses that are online in Reno are actively engaged.

**Participation** considers the raw number and growth rate of both small businesses and the entrepreneurs who own them. Reno performs well here, too, sharing high participation rates of 7.3 with Orlando.

**Infrastructure** assesses how well-connected a community is to bandwidth and the socioeconomic status of its microbusinesses. Reno’s infrastructure score of 12.8 reflects the high-speed internet availability in the MSA, but other cities may be doing more to improve high-speed internet availability and adoption rates or may have businesses with a stronger socioeconomic status.

The Microbusiness Industry and Commerce table showcases the top three industries small businesses are engaged in online. In the Reno MSA the top industry is health and medicine, followed by hobby and beauty. The Orders percentile ranks each region for its online orders per capita. At 43, Reno ranks well in this ranking, ahead of most benchmark cities; only Boise ranks higher.

#### Microbusiness Industry and Commerce

	Orders Percentile	Merchants Percentile	GMV Percentile	Top 3 Industries
Reno	43	64	35	Health & Medicine, Hobby, Beauty
Boise	33	70	43	Retail, Restaurant, Automotive
Colorado Springs	45	67	77	Fitness & Wellness, Industrial, Beauty
Kansas City	80	44	75	Food & Drink, Fashion, Agriculture
Orlando	78	94	73	Beauty, Software/IT, Health & Medicine
Salt Lake City	68	24	40	Retail, Sports, Hobby

Source: 2022 GoDaddy Venture Forward Microbusiness Data.  
[godaddy.com/ventureforward](https://godaddy.com/ventureforward)

The Merchants percentile measures the number of online merchants per capita. Salt Lake City and Kansas City have the highest number of merchants. The online gross merchandise value (GMV) reflects gross sales per capita. Reno ranks high in this category at 35, suggesting that the average sale among online businesses is higher than in comparable cities.

### **Public Policy**

**Goal:** *Future-focused public policy should strive to reduce the friction associated with startup activity, including compliance, licensing, and regulation. The public sector should operate to guide and support vs. ban or bar. It is in the hands of public policy makers to ensure that everyone has access to ubiquitous, affordable, high-speed bandwidth.*

Reno has little public policy that directly supports early-stage business startup activity. Ordinances around emerging business models such as Airbnb, Uber are managed by the county. In some ways, this may be a lost opportunity for building an attractive Reno/Tahoe brand. Boulder, Colorado is a city that has implemented novel public policy in support of small and early-stage business startup for a very long time. In the 1960's, Boulder implemented green space rules that precluded development beyond certain city limits to protect the mountain views. Companies with more than 500 employees must leave the city (much to the delight of neighboring communities) to ensure space and opportunity for younger, smaller companies to conduct business. These policies and others have created a unique environment that holds up the needs of young, small companies helping to create the 'startup capital of the world' label that Boulder is famous for.

### **Business and Professional Licensing**

Business licensing in Reno is conducted through a stand-alone online [city portal](#). To apply for a license, an entrepreneur must first complete a short list of other state and local registrations, including applying for a state business license at SilverFlume. The application on the city portal is very similar to the application at SilverFlume, requiring an entrepreneur to enter their entire business information package twice. This process is then repeated when applying for a county business license on the ONE Regional Licensing & Permits portal at [aca-prod.accela.com](http://aca-prod.accela.com)

Professional licensing, including reciprocal agreements, were identified by a number of entrepreneurs as a barrier affecting families when moving to Nevada. The American Institute for Research (AIR) published a *State of Occupational Licensing in Nevada* report in February 2021. AIR calculated a Composite Licensing Difficulty Score, which considers such things as entry requirements, education and training, and reciprocity agreements, to compare the difficulty level of licensing across states. Among four surrounding states, Nevada had the highest difficulty scores.



#### Reno Bandwidth

	Cable, fiber, DSL	Satellite	Cell only	No Internet Service
Reno	77%	8%	8%	12%
Boise	79%	9%	8%	7%
Colorado Springs	84%	8%	7%	5%
Kansas City	78%	6%	10%	8%
Orlando	80%	5%	10%	7%
Salt Lake City	81%	7%	10%	6%

Source: 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau.  
[data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/) Accessed February 2023.

While the majority of residents in Reno have access to bandwidth, there are disparities, including 12% of households who have no internet service at all. Many of these households are in lower-income neighborhoods or rural regions of the Reno MSA. To compete in a global economy, whether with an online merchant side gig or running a tech-led business, access to high-speed and affordable internet is critical.

Some urban districts create their own mesh webs to serve entire neighborhoods. Main Street communities across the country have installed free Wi-Fi in downtown districts, attracting more local residents and home-based businesses, increasing the density of serendipitous connections in cafés, coffee shops, and outdoor green spaces.

## Place

**Goal:** *Natural, built, and cultural resources collectively create a fertile landscape that attracts entrepreneurs and the talent they hire. Central to this are public-private partnerships (placemaking at scale), designation and branding of entrepreneurial hubs, and a supportive culture that promote lifestyles of innovation, curiosity, community connection, and creativity.*

As Reno has emerged from the pandemic, the center of gravity in the city has shifted away from the casino-rich downtown to the adjacent MidTown District, where much of Reno’s entrepreneurial activity has begun to organically coalesce.

Midtown’s eclectic and newly renovated cottage district is made up of retail microenterprises, foodie pubs, new age ventures, and a surprising array of entertainment venues. It is near here that coffee shops and coworks like the Dropout Bike Shop, Coffeebar, The Virgil, Reno Hive, Reno Collective, and



others have played pivotal roles in connecting and building community around innovation over the past decade. On one side of MidTown—where the commercial district meets residential cottages—is the UNR Innevation Center. The 25,000-square-foot facility boasts an expansive coworking space with shared and private offices, conference rooms, cwork-style phone booths, and open seating for one hundred. The lower level houses an exceptional makerspace with 3-D printers; textile, leather, and electronics studios; a green room; and CNC machining, laser cutters, and woodworking equipment. On the main floor are smart classrooms for workshops and training and flex space for events. More than 20 partner organizations are housed at Innevation Center, including the Audacity Institute and Nevada Entrepreneurship Network.



Downtown Reno flanks the other side of MidTown. The local casino economy is centered here, including a trio of iconic casinos branded as The Row. Downtown is subtly evolving to coexist with local startups and to welcome new generations of residents and entrepreneurs. The iconic Harrah’s casino, for example, is undergoing the largest adaptive reuse development in Reno’s history, converting the 1,000-room casino into 530 market-rate residential units and 225,000 square feet of retail and office space. Central to this project is the inclusion of UNR graduate student housing, podcast rooms, coworking spaces, and a parklike plaza and amphitheater overlooking the Riverwalk.

Housing options near MidTown and downtown Reno are expensive and limited, however. Many entrepreneurs interviewed suggested that limited housing options—especially a lack of housing in walkable districts near MidTown and downtown—precluded them from making key hires.

Overlaying the connected energy around these districts are the arts and ethos of Burning Man and the acclaimed natural resource attractions of Lake Tahoe and the mountains. These amenities provide year-round opportunity for outdoor recreation. The Burning Man festival takes place each summer, 80 miles northeast of Reno in Black Rock Desert. In a Sparks makerspace and in private structures throughout Reno, artists build their larger-than-life sculptures throughout the year, bringing a wide array of activist artists to the community for months at a time. Some stay.

The city has been the recipient of dozens of sculptures from previous Burning Man festivals; the artwork is on street corners, in parks, in the foyers of corporations, and throughout the downtown Riverwalk and MidTown districts. In the winter, North Lake Tahoe features resorts for downhill skiing and snowboarding. A few miles further, Mount Rose offers 1,200 acres, including 60 trails and three terrain parks.

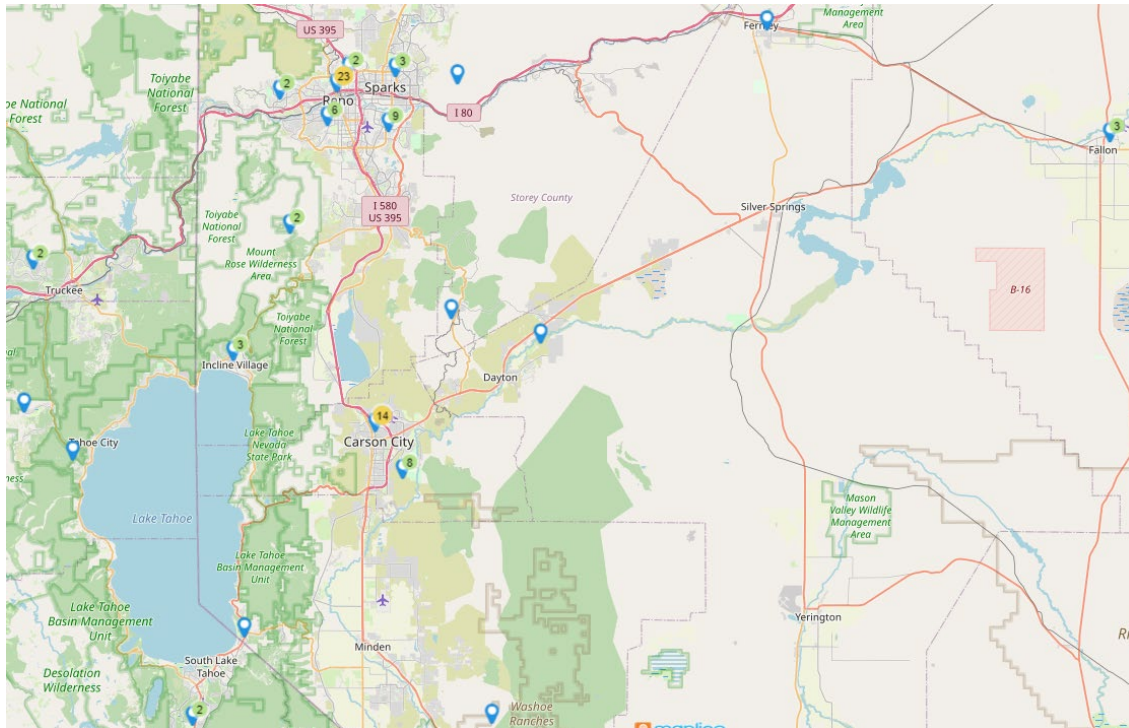
At the conclusion of an expansive MidTown reconstruction project in 2022, small business owners there were asked to select a sculpture that would reflect the forward vision of the district. According to Frances Weiner, MidTown District President, the sculpture they selected, is called “Reciprocity.” It was chosen because it resembled a vibrant bow. “We believe,” she said, “that MidTown is our gift to the city.”



## Resource Networks

**Goal:** High-performing ecosystems offer a full spectrum of resources, including capital, technical assistance, and densely connected resource providers who provide onramps, interactions, and collisions to raise and empower all who wish to participate in the economy.

More than 75 documented public and nonprofit entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs) are missioned to serve the Northern Nevada entrepreneurial community. Their services range from business counseling



and coworking, training, and mentoring to capital. Interconnection, trust, and collaboration among these resources is critical to creating the density of connections needed to support the Reno ecosystem. Several of these groups regularly meet in Reno, including a group called Entrepreneurship Nevada (EN) and a separate monthly online meetup hosted by EDAWN with about 20 ESOs.

Attendees to these meetups primarily include the NSBDC, UNR’s Ozmen Center for Entrepreneurship, EDAWN, StartupNV, Audacity Institute and SCORE. Young leaders are emerging; Ania Calvillo-Mason, Jessica Phillips, Brent Freeman, Rachel Macintyre, Jake Carrico and others. Their leadership will be pivotal to the evolution of the ecosystem around youth and women entrepreneurship, incoming tech startups and small business development. The two downtown organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, and county economic development organizations do not appear to attend. In interviews, multiple organizations indicated that they do not generally connect with one another or with the regular ESO meetups.

When resource providers actively collaborate, entrepreneurs benefit. Onramps are smoother and often faster, connecting startups and small business owners with the right resources at the right time. The best collaborations result in shared metrics and data capture within the ecosystem. Most all resource providers internally capture data around their good work. Aggregating that data within an ecosystem is a powerful tool to attract new funding, to identify new opportunities to create services and to evaluate the power of

various programs that support entrepreneurs. Network Kansas offers an [annual report](#) which aggregates the good work of ecosystem builders throughout the year, as does [Colemana66](#) in Puerto Rico. Missouri Sourcelink provides a series of [reports](#) broken into topics such as access to capital and jobs.

### **Funding Ecosystem Building**

While early-stage ecosystem building relies almost exclusively on the shared resources of ESOs, long-term stand-alone funding dedicated to ecosystem building is instrumental to sustaining it. Some communities create a separate nonprofit corporation to raise funds for ecosystem building on an annual or biennial basis. Red Cedar is a 501(c)(3) launched in 2019 to support ecosystem building in the [Cedar Valley of Iowa](#). Its MSA population is about 185,000. Red Cedar also supports management of a regional angel fund.

Don Macke, the founder of e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, published a comprehensive report about rural philanthropy and entrepreneurship in 2019. His [model](#), while framed for rural communities, offers some options for community-driven endowments. On the other side of the spectrum, an urban initiative called [Callaboratory](#) is emerging in southwest Florida with a grand vision to create “The Greatest Community Problem Solving Initiative in American History.” Ecosystem builders throughout the country are watching this collaboration closely for application in urban ecosystem building.

***“The obvious next step in Reno is the creation of a \$3M-\$4M endowment.”***

**—Andy Stoll, Kauffman Foundation,  
National Roundtable 2023**

### **Capital**

As noted in the Nevada ecosystem assessment, there is a rapidly growing gap in capital supporting entrepreneurs seeking concept validation through the development of minimum viable products (MVPs), product-market fit, and customer discovery. In the past, funding in this space has come from angel investors, but nationally and within the state, angel investment has moved from pre-revenue investment to post-revenue.

This lack of capital is a bottleneck that threatens to slow or stall the successful launch of community entrepreneurial ventures in Reno/Tahoe. Yateou’s Dayo McIntosh, for example, did not find funding in Nevada and joined RoadPitch, a multicity pitch tour to help Black tech founders raise pre-seed or seed capital from investors. This raises the possibility that firms like Yateou may be compelled to relocate to cities where those investments originate. Specialty funds serving women, minorities, BIPOC, and other disadvantaged entrepreneurs would open funding avenues for an increasingly diverse pool of founders, ensuring that talent like McIntosh have reason to stay in the local community.

Attracting angel investment funds in Northern Nevada has been a challenge. According to EDAWN’s Doug Erwin, investors maintained there was not enough deal flow, while entrepreneurs complained of a lack of funding. To address this, a \$3M fund called the Reno Seed Fund was raised in 2018. Led by local investor Gene Wong, the fund has proved successful and is nearly fully deployed. To date, the fund has averaged six new investments annually, totaling \$2.58M in seed and pre-seed investments into 25 startups. Twelve of the companies have earned follow-on investments. The Reno Seed Fund proved the region can support angel investment. Creation of a new fund or other novel options are in the works.

### *Technology Transfer*

Among the many assets of Nevada, the University of Nevada Reno (UNR), the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV), and the Desert Research Institute (DRI) stand out. Commercialization of intellectual property (IP) from these institutions into the Northern Nevada economy offers great potential for startup, spinoff, and local corporate expansion.

At UNR, the patent pathways are strong; however, interviews suggested that internal processes are bottlenecked and slow. Unlike most research universities, patenting at UNR is not considered part of tenure track achievements. The overall technology process is stymied by a shortage of professional staff in technology transfer and the connections between licensing professionals and regional economic development organizations are limited.

The existing Reno business community is a strong mix of more than 22,000 companies engaged in traditional and emerging industries, many of which could build growth strategies through favorable licensing. Alternatively, faculty innovators engaged in IP commercialization could spin out startup businesses into the Reno economy. A full decade of Reno ecosystem building has built a supportive infrastructure that, with coordination and intent, can bring together the capital, talent, space, and other resources needed to exploit technology transfer across the region.

Some work is already underway to develop connections and build the culture to support technology transfer. EDAWN's Juston Berg, in partnership with Dr. Vic Etyemezian, VP for Research at DRI, have begun connecting interested scientists at DRI with local Tech Rally events. UNR does not have programs in place to raise awareness and capacity of researchers on campus to support entrepreneurship. I-Corps is a program of the National Science Foundation that addresses these needs through an immersive entrepreneurial training program that facilitates the transformation of invention to commercialization. This seven-week experiential training program prepares scientists and engineers to extend their focus beyond the university laboratory—accelerating the economic and societal benefits of NSF-funded and other basic research projects that are ready to move toward commercialization.





## Reno/Tahoe Action Plan

### Envision A National Brand

The Reno/Tahoe region will unify energy around its exemplary assets to create a national brand to attract like-minded innovators from across the country and within the state to experience the Reno/Tahoe entrepreneur life and many benefits of this ecosystem.

**Potential Owners: EDAWN, Tahoe Prosperity, Midtown District, Downtown Reno, the City of Reno, Tourism Nevada, GOED**

1. Convene economic development and place-based organizations
  - a. Develop a shared vision to unify the unique culture, place amenities and resources of Reno.
    - i. Develop an outward facing national brand
    - ii. Co-market across entities nationally and regionally

**Key Performance Indicators:** Greater numbers of entrepreneurs are attracted and connected to the Reno/Tahoe region as evidenced by Dealroom.com and ESO's tracking systems. The region's employment in key new economy sectors and the numbers of businesses throughout the stack grow competitively as compared to similar MSAs.

### Ignite Ecosystem Resources

A larger network of ESOs, engaging more organizational resources, energy and perspectives will create dense connections and build strong metrics around the economic value of entrepreneurship.

**Potential Owners: All ESOs**

1. Develop a unified message to advocate for state priorities, including increasing the Knowledge Fund, reimagining the administrative rules and the creation of a Governor's Office of Entrepreneurship
2. Set a bigger table, engaging a greater share of the region's EDOs
  - a. Recast ESO meetups into open door roundtables
  - b. Hold up and empower emerging leaders
  - c. Craft a shared set of principles/values to guide the work of all
  - d. Collaborate on a shared calendar
3. Improve entrepreneur feedback loops to the ESO community
  - a. Institute feedback loops at all events and activities
  - b. Create an entrepreneur advisory board at every ESO
  - c. Get ESOs out of offices/complexes/campus and into the communities
    - i. Office at coworking spaces part-time, including Tahoe/Reno/Sparks
    - ii. Develop an accessible one-stop hub for multiple ESOs to office
4. Collaborate on a stand-alone annual entrepreneurship report to the community

**Key Performance Indicators:** Entrepreneurs from throughout the state and across culture, ethnicities and stage of business are better served by ESOs, resulting in accelerated access to resources, more overall businesses and a community-wide supportive culture around innovation.

**Potential Owners: EDAWN, Tahoe Prosperity, Midtown District, Downtown Reno, the City of Reno**

### Develop Entrepreneur-Centric Housing Options

The development of novel short-term and entrepreneur specific housing alternatives will ease a housing shortage that has precluded the attraction of founders and the talent they hire into Reno.

1. Survey entrepreneurs, creatives, small business to confirm their housing needs
2. Investigate the opportunity for ADUs, co-living, e-villages
  - a. Call for the city to prioritize novel housing development in and near Midtown/Downtown
  - b. Collaborate with City Center for needed resources (coworks, short-term living)

**Key Performance Indicators:** New housing aligned with the unique needs of entrepreneurs is developed in the region, specifically near the Midtown and downtown hubs.

**Potential Owners: EDAWN, Tahoe Prosperity**

### Instill Innovation Across Industry

Engaging corporate businesses and their talent in the ecosystem will seed collaboration between startups and corporations in key industries. Brokering corporate access to emerging IP at UNR, UNLV and DRI will result in local licensures and the creation of new venture companies.

1. Engage and involve corporate partners in the Reno/Tahoe ecosystem
  - a. Encourage the appointment of internal innovation officers at corporations
  - b. Cohost or support 'ideate' pitch contests to improve corporate operations, products
  - c. Create industry specific accelerators in alignment w/local industry sectors
  - d. Organize casual coworking Jellys at corporate facilities
2. Foster technology transfer and commercialization
  - a. Build capacity of EDAWN team to market and broker licensing of IP
    - i. Certify EDAWN team in technology transfer
    - ii. Conduct outreach to VP's of Innovation and Research at UNR, UNLV and DRI
  - b. Develop a tech-led strategy

- i. Add IP commercialization questions to surveys/site visits
- ii. Build a portfolio of companies poised for tech-led growth
- iii. Develop a marketing plan to connect emerging IP with regional corporations/startups

**Potential Owners: EDAWN, Community Foundation of Northern Nevada, all ESOs**

**Key Performance Indicators:** Corporations throughout Northern Nevada will foster innovation in their internal operations, engage with the Reno/Tahoe ecosystem in meaningful ways, and have access and support to commercialize IP emerging from UNR, UNLV and DRI.

### Institutionalize Ecosystem Funding

Reno will develop sustainable funding for ecosystem support in the form of a regional endowment to build capacity to embrace the next wave of economic growth.

1. Raise an endowment to support the Reno ecosystem
  - a. Identify dollars needed to support startup continuity in conjunction with regional ESOs
  - b. Identify fund administrative partners
  - c. Build, Share Campaign

**Potential Owners: EDAWN, Tahoe Prosperity, NSBDC, Wandering Wylde, Audacity Institute, Latino Research Center**

**Key Performance Indicators:** The Reno Fund will be launched in early 2024 with a goal of a \$2M-\$3M endowment.

### Fill the Pipeline

Introducing highly customized programs to level up the experience of all founders will result in more businesses throughout the stack, and globally inclusive approaches to innovation across industry. Ensuring that the capital needs of entrepreneurs are met and evolve with the ecosystem will be an ongoing priority.

1. Fill the Reno region pipeline
  - a. Seed the launch of new programs and resources serving women, minorities and international entrepreneurs.
  - b. Incent entrepreneurs to develop ‘high signal’ and other novel events and resources to better serve specific segments of the stack.

**Key Performance Indicators:** New programs and capital in place during 2024

1. Expand the angel capital offerings
  - a. Launch a Fund II for the Reno Seed Fund
  - b. Explore alternative fund development

**Key Performance Indicators:** The Reno Seed Fund will launch a second fund and/or a new angel fund will be launched in northern Nevada. Introducing highly customized programs to level up the experience of all founders will result in more businesses throughout the stack, and globally inclusive approaches to innovation across industry. Ensuring that the capital needs of entrepreneurs are met and evolve with the ecosystem will be an ongoing priority.

## Reno Voices

*“Our youth are our future, and without them, our entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem will cease to exist. Cultivating their passion now will be instrumental in developing a strong diverse pipeline of emerging innovators to join our workforce and continue to grow the Reno ecosystem. We must focus time and resources today on introducing Reno-area students to innovation, entrepreneurship, and the amazing STEAM opportunities that are available.”*

—Ania Castillo-Mason, Innevation Center

*“We need to capitalize on education/youth entrepreneurship and free flows of capital and highlight tax advantages.”*

—Matt Mireles, OASIS

*“Go to San Francisco when you’re 22; when you’re 35, go to Reno.”*

—Brent Freeman, Stealth Venture Labs



*“Combustible energy is here; the question is how can we focus it to become a self-generating cycle, the ‘flywheel?’”*

—Sean Montgomery, EmotiBit

*“We have so many resources, but we are missing an aggregator who can initiate that flywheel. Can we just get a warehouse for everyone to meetup?”*

—Ansley Fender, Atlas Solutions, 2022 Gener8tor Cohort

*“There is a lot of noise out there. We need to rethink our allotments to more efficiently use our organizational talent and assets. We are working in silos thinking we aren’t.”*

—Duke Nishimura, NSBDC, UNR College of Business Administrative Faculty

*“New entrepreneurs don’t know where to go. Doug (at EDAWN) connects people to the right person. For example, if I said I needed help with unreal engine, Doug would know to connect me with Value.”*

—Thomas Bates, Senticon

*“Housing is a barrier. They keep building apartments when we need something more. I love this community, but can I afford to start here without the housing we need?”*

—Kerry Cecere, DIA Creative



# Las Vegas

## **Executive Summary- Las Vegas**

*Entrepreneurial Communities LLC. assessed the Las Vegas ecosystem during the winter of 2022-23.*

*Las Vegas economic and community data were aggregated and benchmarked against the entrepreneur ecosystems in five major U.S. cities, including Boston, Denver, Portland, Nashville, and Tucson. Stakeholder interviews and roundtables were hosted in January and February 2023. A nine-person national roundtable of entrepreneurship researchers and practitioners was convened in February 2023 to provide insight and recommendations for this report.*

Entrepreneurial ecosystems require many contributors. At the heart of any ecosystem are the entrepreneurs who start and grow companies. Forward visioning regional leadership, responsive public policy, and infrastructure supporting workforce, capital and quality of life are all critical. This assessment finds that Las Vegas is a vibrant multi-faceted city, with resources in all of these areas, lacking only a collaboratively driven vision and strategy to ignite a world-class innovation driven economy.

### **Convene the Ecosystem Champions**

In Las Vegas, the number of founders and their companies are growing, and capital is beginning to flow into the region. Across the city, dozens of organizations are working to deliver policy, programs and other connecting resources in support of entrepreneurship, especially at the City of Las Vegas, UNLV and among a few entrepreneur support organizations. These entities, however, are working independently in silos, without significant collaboration. Other important organizations have not been active in these efforts, with needed leadership absent. This report recommends an Innovation Summit in 2023 to lay out a vision for the region as a critical first step toward broad-based regional collaboration.

With a unified vision, Las Vegas will be able to deliver a powerful message to the state legislature and NSHE in support of aligning the state's economic development strategies more equitably toward the needs of the innovation economy. In Nevada, this could include expanding the Knowledge Fund, a renewed focus upon technology transfer, more public private partnerships to build novel programs and the creation of an Office of Entrepreneurship as outlined in the state section of this report.

### **Ignite the Entrepreneurial Hubs**

This report recommends that Las Vegas dedicate resources and energy around three place-based hubs, including the smart-tech hub downtown, an immersive tech hub in the Arts District and the emerging commercialization hub at Black Fire Innovation Center. These three hubs currently engage more than 1,200 regional startups and could become internationally attractive to key innovation economy sectors through concentrated public and private sector investment.

#### **Smart Tech Hub Downtown**

Las Vegas has a unique opportunity to expand the City's Smart City Innovation district from a section of the downtown core into a collaboratively driven, one-of-a-kind, city-wide public lab supported by highly specialized accelerators, studios, and capital. The city currently hosts a Smart City Innovation District: an innovative public testing district where some entrepreneurs are invited to beta minimum viable products (MVPs) and software performance utilizing public, downtown infrastructure. To date, the city has partnered with entrepreneurs across multiple sectors, including self-driving shuttles, IoT-based public park safety software, and a novel technology that facilitates two-way communications between drivers, walkers, and bikers on city streets. No other city offers this kind of field-testing access to innovators. Cities are projected to spend an estimated \$327 billion on smart tech in coming years and the field has market potential of \$2.46 trillion by 2025. An expansion of the district, supported by key partnering organizations

providing industry specific capital, programs and testing resources, such as facilitated access to SBIR and STTR for example, will ignite this hub as a globally relevant resource for smart tech innovation.

#### *Immersive Technology Hub in the Art District*

Tony Hsieh's internationally acclaimed Las Vegas Downtown Project was tied to place-making. He envisioned a vibrant arts, retail and entertainment district offering creative collisions for technology entrepreneurs to incubate, innovate and grow. The Arts District today offers the same potential, even more so in many ways, but new energy and broad-based leadership is needed.

This report recommends building resources and community around immersive tech in the Arts District. These industries, including augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are well aligned with the creative ethos of the Arts District tenants and the market for immersive tech is expected to exceed \$95 billion by 2025. Multiple AR/VR innovators are housed in the new International Innovation Center@ Vegas II. The district is flanked by the 90-acre Area15 which features cutting edge immersive entertainment, and the casinos are experimenting with a wide array of immersive technologies on the Strip. Next steps should include convening a broad-based consortium of innovators, Las Vegas Strip leaders and investors to evaluate the feasibility of reinvigorating the Downtown Project as a multi-faceted AV/VR hub supporting immersive technologies.

#### *Commercialization Hub at Black Fire*

The Black Fire Innovation Center at UNLV should be tapped as a super hub; a gateway for connecting high growth global innovators with facilities, resources, and capital across industry in Southern Nevada. Over time, this facility should build capacity to serve as the statewide gateway for Nevada's technology transfer licensing opportunities. This hub will drive innovation toward the top of the stack by promoting commercialization and licensing of UNLV and DRI intellectual property, support SBIR and STTR applications in emerging industries, foster dense connections between faculty researchers and the startup community, and build out specialty programming and capital serving the gaming, health tech and sport innovation industries.

#### **Workforce Diversification through Entrepreneurship**

Workforce diversification remains a critical barrier to entrepreneurship and economic development. Currently, Las Vegas entrepreneurs are contributing 4.1% of employment in the region and creating 4.68 more jobs than they shed during their first year of business. Measured against benchmarked cities, Las Vegas performs well in these indicators, but could do much more. Ramping up talent attraction strategies for example, will deepen the pool of technology employment from 1.7% of the workforce to rival that of other successful ecosystems worldwide. At the other end of the entrepreneurial stack, leveling up the capacity of Las Vegas's 75,000 small businesses with fewer than ten employees to engage in the online economy is an important, but often overlooked opportunity for Nevadans to gain entrepreneurial experience, diversify the workforce and generate wealth among disadvantaged populations. It will require collaboration across organizations to build, fund and execute such programs.

Las Vegas is an amazing city with an iconic place-based global brand, rising entrepreneurial activity across innovation economy sectors, and an international community of entrepreneurs and investors poised to coalesce around big ideas. The Las Vegas of the future will be created by a new generation of ecosystem builders across the public and private sectors who are ready to give life to the City's new slogan "What Happens Here, Only Happens Here."



## The Las Vegas Ecosystem

### Overview

The success story that is Nevada's entertainment industry has been a compelling part of American vernacular throughout the 20th century. Fueled by supportive state laws that date to the state's founding and subsequent post-Depression legislation in the '40s, Nevada has a long history of support for gambling.

Nevada finished 2022 with more than \$14.8 billion in gaming revenue. The Las Vegas Strip accounted for \$8.2 billion of those funds. There is no argument that this industry drives the Las Vegas economy. During the past two decades, however, the state has been rocked by the boom-bust cycles stemming from the Great Recession in 2008 and, more recently, the pandemic. It is widely agreed that reliance on tourism and gaming should be augmented and diversified to soften these increasingly complex disruptions.

The opportunities in Las Vegas extend beyond diversification. The city's entertainment scene, year-round outdoor recreation, international culture, and intimate ties to capital and talent in the Silicon Valley position Las Vegas as an explosive hub in the innovation economy.

If a sole entrepreneur's vision could single-handedly create an ecosystem, Las Vegas would have become a global leader in the innovation economy a decade ago. One of the most nationally cited ecosystem case studies originated in Las Vegas between 2010 and 2015, when Zappos founder Tony Hsieh moved his corporate offices from San Francisco to downtown Las Vegas. Hsieh turned the former Las Vegas city hall into the Zappos headquarters then launched a \$350-million initiative called the Downtown Project, designed to transform downtown Las Vegas into a global entrepreneurship hub.



Hsieh bought a block of condominiums called the Ogden and offered shared space to startups and visitors. He invested in dozens of startups and championed hundreds more through events and meetups. He created the Downtown Container Park, a shipping container reuse project supporting retail, a green space, and a concert venue, fronted by a two-story flame-throwing praying mantis sculpture from Burning Man. By the mid-2010s, a [report](#) from Applied Analysis suggested that the Downtown Project had generated nearly \$120M in annual economic output and helped create more than 1,000 jobs in Las Vegas.

The Las Vegas Downtown Project faltered when Hsieh stepped down in 2015. No other partners from either the public or entrepreneurial sector were poised to take a leadership role, and the project’s big vision faded with Hsieh’s death in 2020. Many entrepreneurs in the city, however, credit Hsieh with planting seeds. After a pandemic-induced lull, the Las Vegas ecosystem has rushed back with record numbers of new companies.

***In the 2022 fiscal year, the City of Las Vegas approved 3,850 new business licenses, a 10.6% increase from the 3,481 licenses in 2021.***

Nevada ranked 10th in the country for federal employment identification number (FEIN) applications in 2022, with 5.6 applications per capita. This is a 28.2% increase over 2019 startup levels in the state. These potential startups are particularly important because they represent the businesses most likely to lead lasting job growth and innovation. According to the Economic Innovation Group (EIG), this trend may be the beginning of a long arc of resurgence in entrepreneurial activity nationwide, led by states like Nevada. The City of Las Vegas approved 3,850 new business licenses in FY 2022, up 10.6% over 2021.

**Las Vegas MSA Business Starts and Exits (Churn) 2004-2021**



Source: Business Dynamics Research Consortium, University of Wisconsin System. [youreconomy.org](http://youreconomy.org) Accessed February 2023.

Between 2004 and 2021, the number of new business startups exceeded the number of business exits except for during the Great Recession and the pandemic. During the pandemic years of 2020-’21, Las Vegas experienced the highest rate of business closures in over two decades. A substantial portion of those closures came from the small business community among businesses in the retail, hospitality, and services sectors with two to nine employees.

### Numbers and Sizes of Companies Over Time in Las Vegas MSA

<b>Businesses</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Change ('11-'16)</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Change ('16-'21)</b>
Self-Employed sole proprietorships of one employee	9,604	10,019	4.3%	10,019	12,438	24.1%
Small 2 to 9 jobs including proprietorships	47,093	58,915	25.1%	58,915	61,922	5.1%
SME (Small-medium Enterprises) 10 to 99 jobs	13,157	12,452	-5.4%	12,452	13,641	9.5%
Mid Size 100 to 499 jobs	1,021	1,059	3.7%	1,059	1,108	4.6%
Large 500 or more jobs	184	141	-23.4%	141	135	-4.3%
<b>TOTAL BUSINESSES</b>	<b>71,059</b>	<b>82,586</b>	<b>16.2%</b>	<b>82,586</b>	<b>89,244</b>	<b>8.1%</b>

Source: Business Dynamics Research Consortium, University of Wisconsin System. [youreconomy.org](http://youreconomy.org) Accessed February 2023.

In spite of these disruptions, the number of overall businesses in the Las Vegas Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) continues to grow. Between 2016 and 2021, every category of business size (with the exception of those companies with more than 500 employees) saw rising numbers of new businesses.

Sole proprietorships grew at the highest rates with an increase of 24.1% between 2016-21. (An unreleased preview of YE data reports additional growth in 2022 to 15,636). As noted in the state section of this report, however, Nevada has heightened rates of necessity entrepreneurship. The Kauffman Foundation measures necessity entrepreneurship as the percentage of individuals who start businesses directly from unemployment vs. those who start a business due to a perceived opportunity.

The state of Nevada's share of necessity entrepreneurs is 23.6%, up from 17.48% pre-pandemic. Las Vegas continues to have high unemployment rates, currently at 5.5%, which suggests that some individuals have become entrepreneurs because they perceive few options for employment. Necessity entrepreneurs may be leading the sole-proprietor growth in Nevada.

In the middle of the stack, Nevada has a growing influx of employer firms, driven in part by the poor business climate of California and the flexibility of remote work. These companies and new employer-based startups are driving solid growth among employer firms of 10-99 employees, with 9.5% growth between 2016 and 2021.



## Las Vegas Benchmark Cities

Comparisons were determined by a combination of “ideal benchmark cities” held up by local leadership as places where they intuitively compare themselves plus other cities where population and entrepreneurial activity were comparable. For this assessment, we highlight the unique ecosystems of Denver, Nashville, Portland, Ore., Tucson, and Boston.

### 1. Denver

#### *Solid technology transfer*

Denver is home to 63 venture capital firms, Techstars global accelerators, and the famous Commons on Champa, a high-tech coworking space that brands itself as Denver’s public campus for entrepreneurship. The Colorado Innovation Network (COIN) works to connect 29 Colorado research facilities with entrepreneurs. It is supported by the Colorado Impact Fund, a public-private \$80M fund.



### 2. Nashville

#### *A statewide ecosystem infrastructure*

Nashville boasts a thriving music scene, including rich historic and cultural placemaking resources. Nashville’s ecosystem is funded in part by the Launch Tennessee network, a public-private partnership that leverages customized programs and investment across multiple ecosystems throughout Tennessee.



### 3. Portland

#### *Serving specific industry clusters*

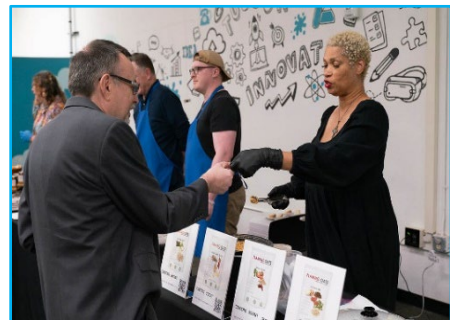
Portland, Oregon’s ecosystem is among the oldest in the United States. Efforts began in the early 2000s to foster climate technologies that align with the city’s natural resource ethos. Portland introduced the country’s first bachelor’s degree in renewable energy in 2008 and created novel state legislation called the Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF) to support marginalized communities. In 2021, climate tech companies raised nearly \$550M in venture capital.



### 4. Tucson

#### *Serving the entire entrepreneurial stack*

Tucson’s entrepreneurial support organization, Startup Tucson, has grown from one focused only on startups to an industry-agnostic driver of innovation. By adopting a broader definition of entrepreneurship and supporting entrepreneurs rooted in the city’s strengths, Startup Tucson has seen more diverse businesses, resulting in a very strong regional economy in Arizona.



## 5. Boston

### A tri-hub innovation district

Boston is one of the strongest ecosystems in the world, anchored by 44 universities and colleges in the region that support talent acquisition at a level not available in most American cities. The ecosystem, is anchored by three hub districts: The Seaport District, South Station complex, and the affluent Back Bay/ South End area.



## Demographics

**Goals:** There are baseline demographics common to vibrant ecosystems, including higher educational levels (particularly in STEAM fields), higher median household incomes, diversity, and high household adoption to the internet.

### Age, Income, and Education

	Median Age	Median Household Income	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Las Vegas	38	\$63,677	27%
Boston	39	\$100,750	51%
Denver	37	\$90,716	48%
Nashville	37	\$72,725	40%
Portland	39	\$83,943	42%
Tucson	39	\$60,667	35%

Source: 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau. [data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/) Accessed February 2023.

Las Vegas ranks similarly to benchmarked cities in median age. The median household income is above Tucson's but lower than for other cities.

Las Vegas trails in education among those who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Among entrepreneurs interviewed with families in Northern and Southern Nevada, 100% indicated their children were enrolled in private schools.

There are more than 7,500 charter schools across the United States and 78 in Nevada. Across the country, some charter schools offer specialized curriculum in STEM, technology, and entrepreneurship. San Diego's [School for Entrepreneurship and Technology](#), for example, is an accredited charter school serving about 400 students in grades 9-12 with STEM-based education and entrepreneurial-focused training.

**100% of entrepreneurs with families interviewed in Nevada, indicated their children were enrolled in private schools.**

### Kauffman Indicators of Entrepreneurship

	Contribution	Creation
Las Vegas	4.1%	4.68
Tucson	2.7%	2.38
Portland	3.1%	5.52
Boston	2.7%	3.65
Nashville	3.3%	5.69
Denver	3.3%	5.13
National Avg.	3.1%	3.36

According to the Kauffman Foundation, Las Vegas entrepreneurs less than a year old contributed 4.1% of private sector employment in the MSA in 2021. This is measured as the ratio comparing employment in firms 0-1 year of age to the total employment. This is the highest rate among benchmarked communities.

In the Las Vegas MSA, 4.68 more jobs were created than were lost at firms 0-1 year old. This compares to 3.36 at the national level.

	Compensation	Constancy
Las Vegas	65.5%	51.3%
Tucson	60.5%	53.3%
Portland	59.3%	54.2%
Boston	178.8%	59.2%
Nashville	69.8%	53.5%
Denver	79.0%	53.3%
National Avg.	55.1%	53.8%

Las Vegas startups are compensating their employees at 65.5% of the average wages paid at all firms across the country. Compensation varies widely across the country, with Boston ranking among the highest nationwide.

In 2021, most benchmarked cities experienced churn in jobs; just over half of new jobs in Las Vegas lasted longer than three consecutive quarters at 51.3% and 53.8% nationally.

Source: 2021 Kauffman Indicators of Entrepreneurship. [indicators.kauffman.org/data-tables](https://indicators.kauffman.org/data-tables) Accessed February 2023.

### Metro Workforce Employment by Industry (Top Five in Las Vegas)

	Accommodation and food services	Retail trade	Health care and social assistance	Arts, entertainment, and recreation	Construction
Las Vegas	13%	12%	11%	8%	7%
Boston	5%	9%	16%	2%	6%
Denver	5%	10%	12%	2%	8%
Nashville	6%	12%	14%	2%	6%
Portland	6%	11%	14%	2%	7%
Tucson	8%	12%	16%	3%	6%

The entertainment sector in Las Vegas continues to dominate the workforce. More than 20% of Las Vegas workers are in the accommodation and food services and entertainment sectors. The high proportion of hospitality workers is likely driving other indicators, including necessity entrepreneurship and lower household incomes.

About 1.6% of the workforce in Las Vegas is employed in the tech sector, ranking higher than Portland and Tucson. According to CompTIA’s 2022 State of the Tech Workforce, Las Vegas currently ranks 40th in the country for tech jobs.

Technology Workforce						
	Las Vegas	Tucson	Portland	Boston	Nashville	Denver
Information Technology	1.6%	1.5%	1.5%	2.2%	2.1%	3.0%

Source for all demographic tables: 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau. [data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/) Accessed February 2023.



### Las Vegas Metro Area Race/Ethnicity

	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic or Latino
Las Vegas	44%	12%	1%	10%	32%
Boston	68%	7%	0%	9%	12%
Denver	66%	6%	1%	4%	24%
Nashville	72%	14%	0%	3%	8%
Portland	72%	3%	1%	7%	13%
Tucson	58%	4%	3%	3%	39%

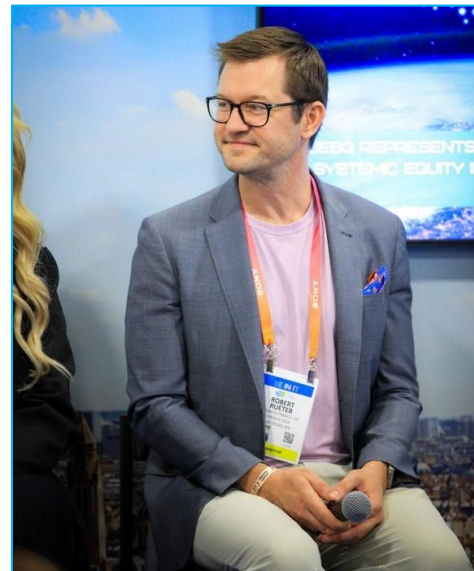
Source for all demographic tables: 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau. [data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/) Accessed February 202

The amount of diversity in Las Vegas is unparalleled compared to most urban cities in the United States. In a [2023 WalletHub survey](#), the Las Vegas valley was highlighted as one of the most diverse areas of the country. Four Las Vegas townships as well as the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas are in the top 50 cities nationwide. More than half the population of Las Vegas is Black, indigenous, or people of color. Residents speak many languages, including Spanish, Tagalog, Chinese, Amharic, Vietnamese, German, Mandarin, and Japanese. During 2021, more than 3.2 million visitors visited Las Vegas. Pre-pandemic, nearly 20% of visitors were from outside the country; those numbers are climbing back. The entire region is richly connected to dozens of cultures around the globe.

Diversity is not limited to ethnicity or race. According to [Gallup](#), the percentage of U.S. adults who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or something other than heterosexual has increased to a new high of 7.1%, which is double the percentage from 2012. Over 20% of Generation Z now identifies as LGBTQ. At a January 2023 Tech Alley meetup in Las Vegas, Robert Rueter of WebQ, a national LGBTQ advocacy organization headquartered in Las Vegas, fielded questions from an audience of founders around creating a more inclusive Las Vegas ecosystem.

“Historically, peripheral communities provide immeasurable opportunity for economic development. According to the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, only 13 nations in the world exceed the economic activities of our businesses.”

—Robert Rueter, Executive Director of WebQ.org and Entrepreneur in Residence, UNLV





### **Startup/Scaleup Activity**

According to [Las Vegas Dealroom](#), there are 1,200 technology startups in the Las Vegas region. They are split across multiple industries and include media and gaming, financial tech, marketing, and health tech. The number of funding rounds tracked by Dealroom associated with these companies has risen from 560 in September of 2021 to more than 715 in March of 2023. Collectively, companies in the Las Vegas region raised \$436M in 2022. In April of 2023, Las Vegas was ranked the #1 City for pre-IPO startups in the country by Crowdfund Capital Advisors. The assessment excludes established ecosystems like Boston and Los Angeles in order to showcase up and coming regions. Las Vegas outperformed growing ecosystems in important regions like Nashville, Denver and Atlanta.

Most of Las Vegas’s current ecosystem work is driving support around these innovators, including investments in facilities and programs by UNLV and the City of Las Vegas. Jamie Schwartz is the Director of Industry and Business Engagement at UNLV’s office of Economic Development. She is a constant leadership presence at events and programs; she presents at Tech Alley, leads university entrepreneur events and is central to the emerging technology transfer strategies being implemented to improve connections between the university and the entrepreneurial community. Similarly, Elizabeth Lopez, a Sr. Economic Development Specialist at the city of Las Vegas has been a connecting force. The city has invested both dollars and leadership into supporting partnering organizations and built the International Innovation Centers I and II. Lopez launched the entrepreneur breakfasts in downtown Las Vegas, hosts Mastermind events and is a key connector between the city and entrepreneurs. Other work is underway in Henderson, Paradise, Enterprise, and Spring Valley, orchestrated by ESOs and Chambers of Commerce in those regions.

In comparison, however, the number of entrepreneurs championing the ecosystem is substantial. Heather Brown is the cofounder and President of [StartUp Vegas](#), a startup support organization based in Las Vegas. She is a super connector and advocate for the Las Vegas ecosystem, instrumental in establishing public-private partnerships to promote entrepreneurial development in Nevada. StartUp Vegas hosts dozens of events throughout the year, including LevelUp, which kicks off at CES, and a monthly networking event called LinkUp. StartUp Vegas events provide entrepreneurs with opportunities to connect with investors, mentors, and other community leaders.



Last year, Brown became the youngest woman elected to the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) Board of Regents, where she focuses on building policy and educational change to develop the talent pipeline. In April 2023, Brown was tapped to join the Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance (LVGEA) to bring together entrepreneurs, investors, and community leaders to foster the growth and development of the startup ecosystem in the region.

Jeff Saling is a Silicon Valley entrepreneur with a focused vision around developing the angel capital spectrum in Nevada. He cofounded StartUpNV, which has launched multiple funds including FundNV and AngelNV, and is currently building a new \$10M fund called the 1864 Fund. In December, StartupNV was tapped to manage Northern Nevada’s Sierra Angels.

Jimmy Jacobson is a partner at [Codingscape](#). His company is made up of approximately 80 talented architects, senior-level engineers, and product people who helped build Zappos, Overstock, Amazon, and numerous tech startups. When recent rounds of layoffs were announced in the technology sector, Jacobson created a database of those being laid off and routed the list among peer companies to see who could pick up which coders. “We cannot let good tech people leave Las Vegas for better opportunities,” he said. “We need to ensure that when layoffs happen or someone is looking for the next step in their career, that there is always another tech job available in the valley. That is how we will keep the ecosystem healthy.”

***“Entrepreneurship is not a solo journey. StartUp Vegas was born from the understanding that it takes a grassroots community of support, collaboration, and innovation to bring ideas to life and create a lasting impact.”***

**—Heather Brown, Startup Vegas**

Dan Hugo is the founder and principal at ReallyCool Technologies LLC, a technology development and consulting company based in Nevada focused on innovation and social good in Las Vegas. He is also the Managing Director for the [Innovate for Vegas Foundation](#), a 501(c)(3) public charity dedicated to enabling and encouraging ideation, innovation, and implementation to make communities better, and to “Make Our Smart City Smarter.” In 2022, Hugo launched a project called Caffe Genius, which he describes as a forum for thinking outside the box—like experimental meetup colaboratories, pitch workout rooms, and genius roundtables—where participants seriously consider the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Las Vegas and how to measure and elevate it.

Kurt Walker at [Captal Platform](#) is a key Las Vegas ecosystem builder, brokering connections and relationships between entrepreneurs and ESOs in the city. He embodies the community-building ethos of “just show up.” He attends ESO meetings and entrepreneur networking events and is a key online presence supporting Las Vegas entrepreneurs. In 2022, he founded the Captal Platform, a startup he envisions will automate those connections, beginning with automating entrepreneur access to capital. Walker believes Las Vegas is close to building a ‘virtuous cycle’ of founders who attract capital, then invest in others. He is committed to accelerating that cycle.

Josh Leavitt leads [Tech Alley](#), a Las Vegas and Reno nonprofit that hosts regular, outward-facing unconference events in MidTown in Reno and in the Las Vegas Arts District. His events attract some of the most diverse entrepreneurs in the city, including high school innovators, venture capitalists, international entrepreneurs, scaling retailers, and many creatives.



Collectively, across the public and private sector in Las Vegas, there is activity, energy, and initial economic impact underway across a width swath of supporters; however, it is not unified or managed across the region. Central to the growth of ecosystems in places like Tucson and Denver has been uniting the champions from across the public and private sectors in support of a common vision.

### Small Business Activity

Throughout the Las Vegas MSA, thriving hubs of tightly knit small and minority businesses, clustered by language and culture, are operating microbusinesses across multiple sectors. These clusters are served by one or more of the 11 active Chambers of Commerce and by the NSBDC. The ecosystem field has been slow to build metrics around how well microbusinesses are adapting to a tech-led economy.

The Venture Forward project at GoDaddy has launched new measuring tools to explore this. Venture Forward examines the business experience of microbusinesses—defined as companies with 10 or fewer employees and an online presence—to understand how this portion of the stack holds up in the new economy. The Microbusiness Activity Index (MAI) (below) assesses the number of microbusinesses in an area (participation), how active they are (engagement), and how well-prepared a community is to support them (Infrastructure). MAI provides an overall score that community leaders can use as a benchmark for understanding patterns and opportunities within the ecosystem that serve this segment of the stack.



In Las Vegas, there are nearly 75,000 microbusinesses with fewer than 10 employees. Las Vegas has a low MAI at 9.9, trailing all the benchmark cities, but above the national average of 5.5.

**Microbusiness Activity Index (MAI) and Component Sub-Indices**

	MAI	Engagement	Participation	Infrastructure
<b>Las Vegas</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>8.4</b>
Boston	10.9	13.2	1.9	19.9
Denver	14.2	10.6	6.8	20.3
Nashville	11.8	10.8	5.6	14.4
Portland	14.5	13.3	6.6	18.7
Tucson	11.2	12.9	4.1	13.6
<i>National Avg.</i>	<i>5.5</i>	<i>11.6</i>	<i>0.8</i>	<i>3.2</i>

Source: 2022 GoDaddy Venture Forward Microbusiness Data. [godaddy.com/ventureforward](https://godaddy.com/ventureforward)

**Engagement** is a measure of signals determining how active a business is online—its traffic, economic footprint, and web security measures, for example. Las Vegas has the lowest index at 4.8 among benchmarked cities, suggesting the microbusinesses that are online in Las Vegas are not actively engaged.

**Participation** considers the raw number and growth rate of both small businesses and the entrepreneurs who own them. Interestingly, Las Vegas performs better than any other region here, suggesting that large number of microbusinesses and individuals are starting online companies.



**Infrastructure** assesses how well-connected a community is to bandwidth and the socioeconomic status of its microbusinesses. Las Vegas’s score of 8.4 reflects the gaps in high-speed internet availability in the MSA. Other cities may be doing more to improve high-speed internet availability and adoption rates or may have businesses who have a stronger socioeconomic status. While Las Vegas lags behind the benchmark cities, it is above the national average infrastructure index of 3.2.

The Microbusiness Industry and Commerce table showcases the top three industries small businesses are engaged in online. In the Las Vegas MSA, the top industry is beauty followed by consulting and fashion. The Orders percentile ranks each region for its online orders per capita. At 18, Las Vegas ranks well in this ranking, ahead of Boston, Denver, and Nashville.

**Microbusiness Industry and Commerce**

	Orders Rank	Merchants Rank	GMV Rank	Top 3 Industries
Las Vegas	18	9	16	Beauty, Consulting, Fashion
Boston	75	72	51	Fashion, Retail, Health and Medicine
Denver	30	28	26	Retail, Music, Hobby
Nashville	41	26	73	Events, Sports, Health and Medicine
Portland	8	52	31	Fashion, Automotive, Hobby
Tucson	5	80	44	Art & Design, Charity or Politics, Health and Medicine

Source: 2022 GoDaddy Venture Forward Microbusiness Data. [godaddy.com/ventureforward](https://godaddy.com/ventureforward)

The Merchants percentile measures the number of online merchants per capita. Las Vegas ranks top of this listing, reflecting the high number of online microbusinesses in the region. The online gross merchandise value (GMV) reflects gross sales per capita. Las Vegas ranks high in this category at 16 suggesting that the average sale among online businesses in Nevada is more than in comparable cities.

## Public Policy

**Goals:** Future-focused public policy should strive to reduce the friction associated with startup activity, including compliance, licensing, and regulation. The public sector should operate to guide and support vs. ban or bar. It is in the hands of public policy makers to ensure that everyone has access to ubiquitous, affordable, high-speed bandwidth.

Nevada's entrepreneurial culture does not thrive solely in the private sector. Some of the state's most innovative ideas have come from intrapreneurs, individuals who act entrepreneurially within an institution. More than one Nevada intrapreneur has positioned the state for global dynamism in the new economy. Michael Sherwood, Chief Innovation and Technology Officer for the City of Las Vegas, is one such person. Sherwood leads the Smart City Innovation District project, which encourages entrepreneurs to test their new smart technologies in a small section of Downtown Las Vegas under real world conditions.



Based on six strategic priorities of the city, entrepreneurs engaged in specific sectors are invited to beta minimum viable products (MVPs), software, and equipment utilizing multiple kinds of downtown infrastructure. This wide-open-door approach to research and testing in public spaces has drawn acclaim and envy from some cities and sharp criticism from others. During an interview for Bloomberg, Sherwood said, "It's not just about the technology. It's about letting companies know that Las Vegas is more than entertainment."

To date, the city has partnered with entrepreneurs across multiple sectors, including self-driving shuttles, IoT-based public park safety software, and a novel technology that facilitates two-way communications between drivers, walkers, and bikers on city streets. A [recent analysis](#) from Frost & Sullivan projects that smart cities will spend an estimated \$327 billion by 2025 and could spur up to \$2.46 trillion in business opportunities by the same year.

### Business Licensing

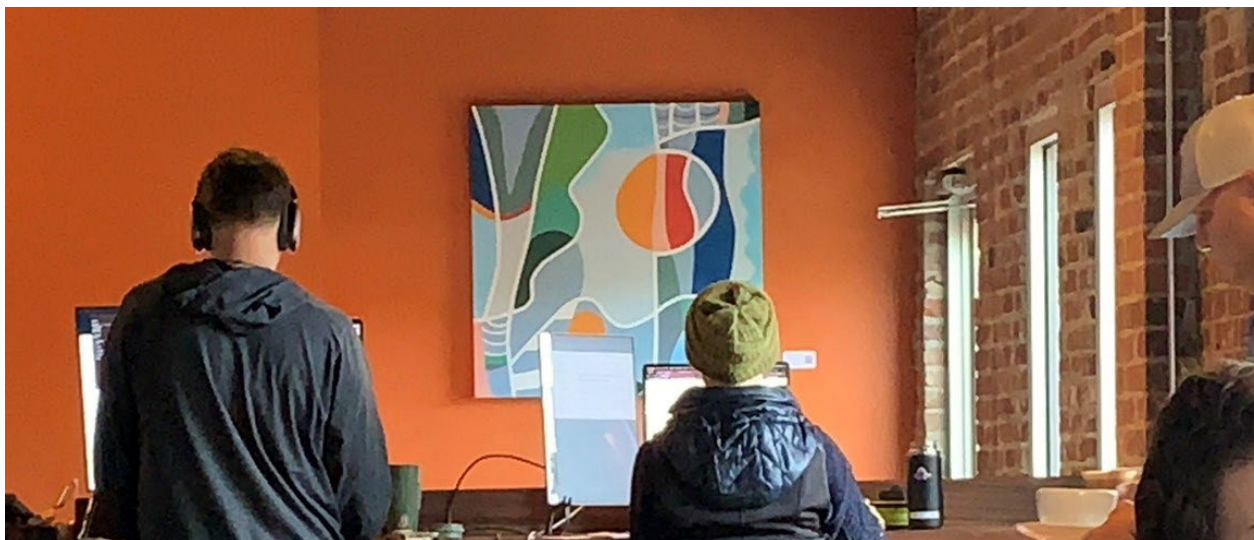
To apply for a business license in Las Vegas, an entrepreneur must first complete a short list of other state and local registrations, including applying for a state business license at SilverFlume, then apply for a separate city business license application on a Las Vegas city portal. The application on the city portal is very similar to the application at SilverFlume, in essence requiring an entrepreneur to enter their entire business information package twice.

**Broadband Access in the Las Vegas MSA**

	Cable, fiber, DSL	Satellite	Cell only	No Internet Service
Las Vegas	91%	6.8%	10.5%	12.5%
Boston	93%	2.8%	7.7%	8.9%
Denver	94%	6.7%	8.0%	7.5%
Nashville	93%	6.7%	10.9%	10.4%
Portland	94%	4.8%	9.0%	8.0%
Tucson	91%	7.0%	12.0%	10.7%

Source: 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau. [data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/) Accessed February 2023.

While the majority of residents in Las Vegas have access to bandwidth, 23% of Las Vegas residents have no internet or rely solely on cell phone connectivity. Many of these households are in lower-income neighborhoods. To compete in a global economy, whether with an online merchant side gig or running a tech-led business, access to high-speed and affordable internet is critical. Some urban districts create their own mesh webs to serve entire neighborhoods. Dozens of Main Street communities across the country have installed free Wi-Fi downtown to attract home-based businesses.



## Place

**Goal:** *Natural, built, and cultural resources collectively create a fertile landscape that attracts entrepreneurs and the talent they hire. Central to this are public-private partnerships (placemaking at scale), designation and branding of entrepreneurial hubs, and a supportive culture that promote lifestyles of innovation, curiosity, community connection, and creativity.*

The place-based assets of Las Vegas are substantial, ranging from the entertainment and hospitality sector of the Strip to the city's proximity to capital and talent in the Silicon Valley. The climate in Las Vegas is winter-mild, outdoor resources abound, and a diverse international culture supports big ideas. These are the kinds of resources other ecosystems aspire to. Three physical hubs in Las Vegas supporting entrepreneurs are interspersed in and along the Strip. Each of these hubs is vibrant, offering an emerging menu of unique services that attract and engage entrepreneurs across a broad swath of industries.

### Downtown Hub

The downtown hub is an emerging smart-tech cluster. Smart tech includes technologies for self-monitoring, analysis, and reporting that allow sensors, databases, and wireless access to collaboratively sense, adapt, and connect users. The city's Smart City Innovation District is a one-of-a-kind testing space for smart-tech experimentation. In the center of this hub is a city-owned coworking space called the International Innovation Center (IIC). The IIC supports 11,000 square feet of hot desks, offices, and meetup space. It serves an array of startups in IoT, virtual reality, and logistics. Multiple startups and ecosystem builders call the Innovation Center home. StartupNV and Startup Vegas both have offices and hold events regularly. Influential, the largest VC-backed Nevada startup is officed here.

### Arts District

Tony Hsieh's Downtown Project was tied to creating space—a vibrant community where creative collisions would occur and a hub where startups would share ideas and solve problems in a mash-up of culture, arts, and entertainment. That district has reemerged in 2023, deeply tied to the creative arts and entertainment sectors but also attracting growing numbers of augmented reality (AR) and immersive media companies. Multiple AR companies are in City's International Innovation Center II, which opened in the Arts District in September 2022, including PAM, a digital wayfinding system and Dragone, a Luxembourg-based creative media company with ties to large-scale Las Vegas multimedia shows. Tech Alley's unconference is hosted here and more efforts are underway at Area 15, an interactive arts complex near the district that has launched a 90-acre expansion, including Meow Wolf, a large-scale immersive arts and tech venture. In 2022, Gener8tor hosted its first accelerator cohort in the Arts District in 2022.



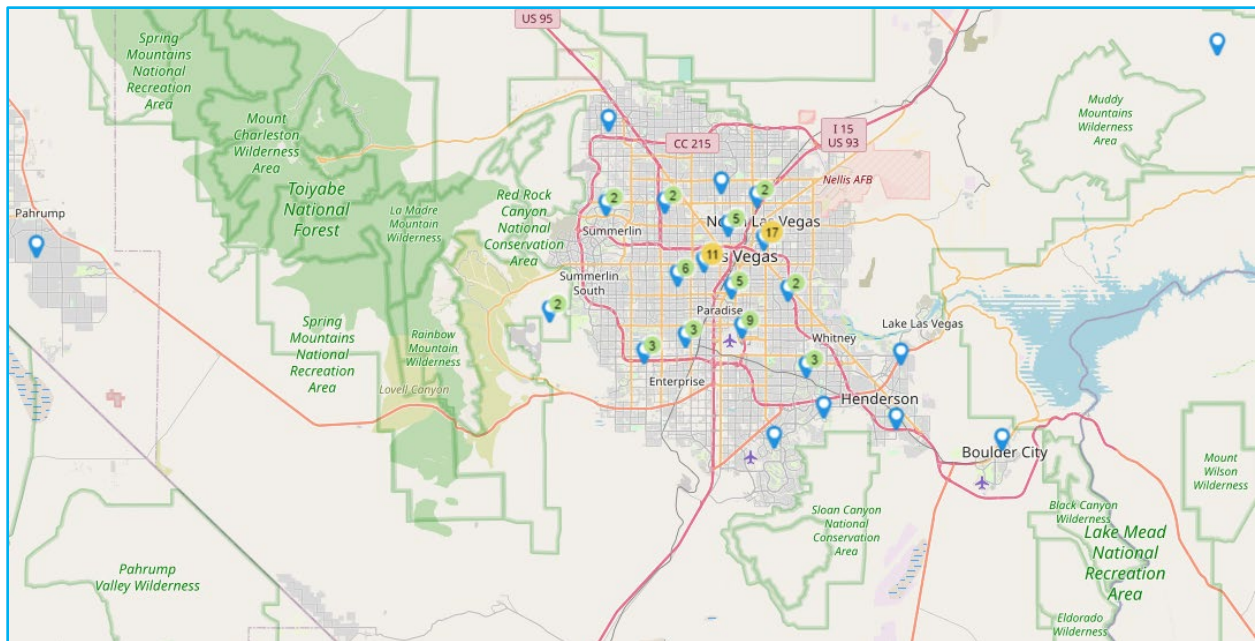
### Black Fire Innovation

At the edge of the strip is UNLV's Black Fire Innovation Center, a gaming and hospitality hub at the Harry Reid Research and Technology Park. The center resulted from a novel corporate partnership with Caesars Entertainment. It features an operational casino and hotel laboratory, a gaming accelerator, coworking spaces, and multiple resources partners, including the NSBDC and UNLV's Office of Technology Transfer. This spring, UNLV is launching another public-private partnership with Zero Labs, a novel incubator and accelerator founded by Quinton Singleton, a multigenerational Nevada native and well-known Las Vegas entrepreneur. Zero Labs will provide resources, support, and mentorship, including incubator and acceleration programs, to founder-led startups and early-stage companies based in or relocating to Nevada. The overarching property plan for the technology park includes a sports innovation complex with wet and dry labs, prototyping resources, and leasable spaces for startups and coworking.

### Resource Networks

**Goals:** *High-performing ecosystems offer a full spectrum of resources, including capital, technical assistance, and dense network resource providers offering onramps, interactions, and collisions to raise and empower all who wish to participate in the economy.*

More than 70 organizations in the Las Vegas MSA support entrepreneurs as a part of their mission, as shown below. Collectively, they are doing excellent work; however, there is little cross-collaboration. During interviews and roundtables in Southern Nevada, entrepreneurs and ESOs indicated that more connections and collaboration are needed to align the various resources.





A lack of connectivity can reduce the value of all community assets. The Kauffman Foundation issued a report in 2015 called Measuring an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem. In it, the authors describe the importance of “density” in ecosystems, suggesting that the mere existence of programmatic resources is not the same as effectiveness, let alone vibrancy; they suggest that dense networks of connections matter more. Across the benchmark communities of Denver, Nashville, and Boston, dense connections are widely credited as the catalyst for growing those cities’ ecosystems.

In Denver, entrepreneurs and ESOs gather annually for Denver Startup Week, which unites more than 20,000 entrepreneurs and ESOs for a full week of building connections and relationships. After a pandemic pause, the event is back in September 2023, billed as the largest free event of its kind built by the community for the community.

Nashville hosts two major connecting events. Innovation Week is an advocacy event in March that engages lawmakers, policy leaders, entrepreneurs, and ESOs to share and build support for the ecosystem. Later in the year is the iconic 3686 Festival, which celebrates entrepreneurship through a multiday entrepreneur-focused slate of speakers, events, tours, and peer celebrations. Collectively, these events are managed by Launch Tennessee, a novel statewide infrastructure created through public-private partnerships to seed, support, and manage the growth of Tennessee’s innovation economy.

At District Hall, one of Boston’s three entrepreneurship hubs, an 8,000-square-foot innovation center hosts dozens of events supporting entrepreneurs every year. Rather than a single supportive festival or conference, Boston hosts dozens, including entrepreneurship events targeting specific industries or segments of the entrepreneurial community, such as the Latino Small Business & Entrepreneurial Summit.

### Kansas City Ecosystem Building

In the aftermath of the pandemic, more than 160 ESO organizations came together for a half-day ecosystem-building event in Kansas City. This two-day event, held in September 2022, brought diverse ESOs to gather around one table to share their activities, learn from one another, and strategize how to best collectively support the ecosystem going forward.

*“... [R]elationships in the ecosystem take work to develop and maintain. Often it can be of great benefit for cities to pull as many of their entrepreneurship support organizations together just for the purpose of relationship building.”*

—Dr. Dell Gines, Nevada National Roundtable



## Capital

The equity capital spectrum in Nevada is bottlenecked in some sectors and missing critical investment dollars in others. As noted in the GOED Five-Year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and confirmed by multiple interviews with key leadership at UNR, UNLV, and DRI, there is a gap at these institutions in the availability of late-stage research and commercialization capital prior to licensing.

There is also a rapidly growing gap in capital available statewide to entrepreneurs seeking concept validation through the development of minimum viable products (MVPs), product-market fit, and customer discovery. According to entrepreneurs interviewed, funding in this space had come from angel investors, but nationally and within the state, angel investment has moved from pre-revenue investment to post-revenue. This lack of late-stage funding among scientific researchers and additional lack of validation capital in the entrepreneurial community represent two bottlenecks that threaten to slow or stall technology transfer and the successful launch of community entrepreneurial ventures in the state. Across the country there are many examples of funds that serve to address one or both capital gaps.

In Colorado, the Advanced Industries Proof of Concept Grant supports late-stage research and commercialization up to \$150K per project. In Iowa, the Proof of Commercial Relevance (POCR) program is part of a state pipeline that provides ongoing rounds of funding for technologically innovative ventures, beginning with a \$50K POCR loan supporting MVP and product-market fit. In California, the private-sector Growth Factory accelerator provides extended support for pre-revenue innovators, delivering pre-seed capital and technical assistance to help participants achieve \$1M in annual recurring revenue over 18 months.

### Angel Funds

Nationally, key indicators in the angel investment space have improved over the past two years. According to the Center for Venture Research, the number of companies who received funding nationwide increased by 7.1% to 69,060 in 2021. The average amount of each deal increased to \$421,675, up 7.6% over the previous year. The amount of equity received by investors averaged 9.5%, down a fraction from 2020, possibly reflective of higher valuations in 2021.

***Nationally, entrepreneurs had a roughly 1:4 shot of receiving equity investment in 2021.***

**—Center for Venture  
Research analysis report, 2022**

In Nevada, several sources of funding have the potential to serve the angel investment needs of the startup/scaleup community. Four of these are led by StartupNV. StartupNV is a statewide, nonprofit accelerator and fund manager based in Las Vegas. The organization manages FundNV and a novel conference fund called AngelNV and in 2021 began raising a new \$10M fund called the 1864 Fund.

Access to venture capital in Nevada is a short flight from any urban area of the state. Entrepreneurs in Las Vegas have self-described expertise in seeking valley investors for series A and beyond. Recently, the GOED compiled a list of in-state venture capital funds and investors. The list, although informal, includes more than 600 funds and individual investors in Nevada, but they are fragmented and largely unaligned. According to Zach Miles, AVP for Partnerships and Technology at UNLV, uniting the venture community is key to launching a stronger technology transfer pipeline where focused rounds of funding are needed to move intellectual property out of DRI, UNR, and UNLV. A new venture fund at UNLV called Scarlet Capital is planned.

### *Technology Transfer*

More than \$250 million in research expenditures occur each year on average, at UNLV, UNR, and DRI in support of basic, applied, and experimental research. Some of this research results in intellectual property (IP) that can be commercialized. Technology transfer is the movement of IP derived from this research into the economy through various forms of licensing and agreements.

UNLV is in the process of reimagining technology transfer. They are in the early stages of implementing a strong “research to commercialization” strategy with multiple industry specific pathways to guide campus innovators, including students, through the commercialization process. Their goals include increasing faculty research activity, improving campus awareness of how to engage with the UNLV Tech Transfer Office, supporting regional economic development and promoting industry and workforce diversification.

Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance (LVGEA) and other economic development organizations in Southern Nevada have an opportunity to position their existing industry engage with the startup community around innovative technologies and to secure licensing for key business expansion opportunities. The startup ecosystem has opportunities to add new, globally important companies in emerging industries in the local community.



## Las Vegas Action Plan

Las Vegas is a vibrant multi-faceted city, lacking only a unified effort to build a world-class ecosystem. This is a city where specialized sector resources abound, entrepreneurial activity across multiple new economy industries is on the rise and a vibrant international community of corporate leaders and investors are poised to actively support big ideas.

### Convene the Ecosystem Champions

Convening public and private sector champions together will catalyze the rich resources of the region, hold up the energy and perspectives of diverse champions and create a unified community around the innovation economy.

#### Potential Owners: Las Vegas Entrepreneurs, all ESOs

1. Host a Governor's Innovation Summit in Las Vegas.
  - a. Unite ESOs and entrepreneurs around a common vision
  - b. Develop a common pledge to dedicate resources and talent in support of the ecosystem
  - c. Coalesce around a unified message to advocate for entrepreneurship priorities in funding allocations, streamlined business licensing and a Governor's office of entrepreneurship
2. Establish regular Las Vegas ESO/entrepreneur meetups
  - a. Build common reporting and measuring tools to showcase good work and track progress
  - b. Deliver a stand-alone annual entrepreneurship report to the community
  - c. Institute feedback loops at all events and activities

**Key Performance Indicators:** A broad-based coalition of ecosystem champions will collaborate to ignite the Las Vegas ecosystem, including leveraging public and private sector talent, resources and programs, creating a shared set of metrics to guide success and dense connections throughout the ecosystem.

### Ignite the Las Vegas Hubs

More than 1,200 tech startups across multiple growth industries are served by three ecosystem hubs in Las Vegas. Building out unified strategies among public and private partners to advance each hub will accelerate the growth of industry sector innovation and ignite the entire ecosystem.

#### Potential Owners: City of Las Vegas, UNLV, LVGEA, Las Vegas Entrepreneurs

1. **Smart tech Hub:** Las Vegas will become America's smart tech testing and launch hub
  - a. Conduct a feasibility study associated with expanding the smart tech hub in Las Vegas
    - i. Identify barriers, develop application program, marketing
  - b. Expand the City of Las Vegas Smart City Innovation District into a city-wide laboratory
    - i. Invite global entrepreneurs to test smart-tech innovations

2. Develop an array of capital, accelerators, studios and research support resources supporting smart tech testing and commercialization.
3. Showcase Smart Innovation Projects and companies to a global market
  - a. Collaborate with Las Vegas conference schedule to host tours, share best practices, feature smart-tech entrepreneurs and their innovations to outside cities

**Key Performance Indicators:** Smart tech innovators will naturally relocate to Las Vegas to take advantage of the frictionless network of supportive services, public lab, capital and peer networks surrounding the smart-tech downtown hub.

**Potential Owners: 18B Arts District Association, City of Las Vegas, Tech Alley, LVGEA, Startup Vegas, LVCVA, Las Vegas Entrepreneurs**

1. **The Arts District Hub:** Las Vegas will reimagine the arts district as an immersive technology hub for next generation entertainment arts.
  - a. Convene a roundtable of public and private technology and arts entrepreneurs to ideate other resources needed to support immersive technologies
  - b. Host Nevada AR, VR and Creative Arts conference in the district
  - c. Build the AR, VR and Creative Arts talent and founder pipeline
    - i. Collaborate with LVCVA/LVGEA on AR founder attraction campaign

**Key Performance Indicators:** Immersive technology business starts and expansions will increase in the arts district.

**Potential Owners: UNLV, LVGEA, Las Vegas Entrepreneurs, regional corporations**

1. **Black Fire Innovation Hub:** Position UNLV's Black Fire Innovation Center as a connecting resource between founders and corporations, fostering collaboration, connections and shared economic resources.
  - a. Pursue corporate sponsorship in support of emerging innovation
    - i. Broker SBIR/STTR opportunities between local founders and corporate partners
    - ii. Connect like- industry corporate partners with startup founders
  - b. Encourage the appointment of internal innovation officers at Las Vegas corporations
  - c. Promote internal 'ideate' pitch contests at corporations to improve their operations, products
  - d. Organize coworking Jellys at corporate facilities to connect founders and corporate talent

**Key Performance Indicators:** Increased SBIR and STTR applications, new sponsored research acquired at UNLV, corporate spin-offs increase.

## Streamline Technology Transfer

Streamlining the technology transfer processes at UNLV and DRI will improve licensing capability in the state. Build the capacity of existing Nevada businesses and startups to commercialize IP.

**Potential Owners: GOED, OSIT, NSBDC, Chambers of Commerce, City of Las Vegas, College of Southern Nevada, Women’s Business Center, Nevada Department of Business and Industry,**

1. Foster technology transfer and commercialization capacity in the region
  - a. Implement the UNLV technology transfer plan (reflecting policy at UNLV and DRI) that streamlines access to and licensing of intellectual property
    - i. Position Black Fire Innovation as the gateway to all UNLV commercialization resources
    - ii. Normalize the inventor/institution licensing split if needed
    - iii. Institute tenure track policies which reward patenting and commercialization
    - iv. Include a ‘Nevada First’ licensing strategy
  - b. Fully fund the Scarlett Capital Venture Fund as a statewide Venture Fund
    - i. Convene investors statewide
    - ii. Launch campaign in tandem with LVGEA and EDAWN and other partners
      1. Goal of \$50M
  - c. Build capacity of LVGEA to market and broker licensing of IP
    - i. Certify LVGEA team in technology transfer
    - ii. Develop a tech-led strategy
      1. Add IP commercialization questions to surveys/site visits
      2. Build a portfolio of companies poised for tech-led growth
      3. Develop a marketing plan to connect emerging IP with regional corporations/startups

**Key Performance Indicators:** Businesses will easily access and navigate the licensing opportunities at UNLV, DRI through a gateway at Black Fire Innovation. LVGEA will be poised to broker resources and connections across the Southern Nevada business community, resulting in new global business startups and growth in the Las Vegas region.

## Workforce Diversification through Entrepreneurship

The Las Vegas economy is heavily reliant upon hospitality employment. Empowering the 75,000 microbusinesses in the region with 10 or fewer employers- many of whom are necessity entrepreneurs- to engage online in the global economy will diversify and expand the workforce and grow the ecosystem.

1. Provide the infrastructure and training microbusinesses need to succeed in the new economy
  - a. Create free WiFi hubs in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods
    - i. Utilize data visualization software at OSIT to target neighborhoods and districts
    - ii. Identify WiFi options for mesh and hot spots
    - iii. Secure cooperative agreements with existing ISP providers
    - iv. Identify funding partners from among state, city, local sponsors or businesses

- b.** Improve digital literacy and business technology skills of microbusinesses
  - i.** GOED, OSIT set aside funds for business digital literacy
  - ii.** Develop highly customized online training resources at NSBDC
  - iii.** Expand multi-lingual and online business training among other partners

**Key Performance Indicators:** Microbusinesses are engaged and conducting business online. The rate of necessity entrepreneurs is reduced while overall microbusiness numbers increase.

## Las Vegas Voices

*“There has been a seismic shift in entrepreneurship in Las Vegas. We haven’t done a good job of exploiting our hubs to keep up.”*

—Leith Martin, Executive Director, Troesh Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, UNLV

*“We have so many terrific resources. We cannot operate in isolation if we want to reach our potential.”*

—Jamie Schwartz, Director of Business and Industry Engagement, UNLV Office of Economic Development

*“Coordination is important for ecosystems like ours to thrive.”*

—Kegan McMullan, 2022  
Managing Director, Gener8tor, Las Vegas

*“We simply need the public sector to step up and meet us where we are.”*

—Yeves Perez, CEO, Workbnb Inc.

*“Las Vegas has been built to give us exactly what we have always gotten—almost last in education, talent leaving the city, and one industry that we all live or die by. Are we ready to change that? I hope so.”*

—Noel Hurst, Account Manager, Codingscape

*“Fundraising is the hardest and most time-consuming thing a founder will have to do across the board. Most founders are completely lost and spend a year-plus distracted from the problem in the market they want to solve.”* —Kurt Walker, Capital







# Rural Nevada

## **Executive Summary- Rural Nevada**

*Entrepreneurial Communities LLC. assessed the rural Nevada ecosystem during the winter of 2022-23. Rural economic and community data were aggregated for four rural counties and benchmarked within the state. Stakeholder interviews and roundtables were hosted in December 2022 and January 2023. A six-person national roundtable of rural entrepreneurship researchers and practitioners was convened in February 2023 to provide insight and recommendations for this report.*

Nevada's rural communities are a mosaic of independent economies, stymied from growth and the opportunities of the new economy by a lack of bandwidth, yet primed with talent, ideas, and self-determination. Currently, most rural counties in Nevada rely upon one or two industries for the majority of jobs and local economic activity. During boom times, this reliance is not an issue, but during bust cycles, the negative impact on the local community can be severe. As the economy becomes more global, these boom-and-bust periods have the potential to become steeper and last longer. Weathering downturns may be more difficult in coming decades than it has been in the past. Entrepreneurial ecosystems offer a roadmap for economic diversification, local wealth, and the creation of quality jobs in rural regions.

Distinct differences exist among rural economies in Nevada. Out-out counties in NE Nevada had consistently lower educational levels but often higher median incomes than counties closer to urban centers, in part due to the mining and mineral extraction workforce. Business startup rates in these counties recovered more quickly after the pandemic than those counties closer to urban areas. Close in rural counties were more apt to benefit from urban spillover benefits such as better infrastructure bedroom community populations and stronger tourism.

Diversifying rural economies through entrepreneurship is a key economic development strategy in most rural regions of the country. In Nevada, building the capacity of rural leadership to support the growth of locally owned business is a logical next step to prepare for the future. Integrating entrepreneurial ecosystem principles and practices into rural leadership training and seminars is key.

Community networks were extraordinarily strong in every county where entrepreneurs and entrepreneur support organizations were interviewed. Peer learning, peer lending and community volunteerism were often mentioned as a part of rural life. Connecting rural entrepreneurs with like-minded peers to learn, access capital and make connections will be key to fostering rural ecosystems in the state. This report recommends the launch of incubators/coworks to create community hubs, improve resident access to business resources and put entrepreneurship center stage in rural communities. Rural Nevada business owners appear to rely upon family and friend networks to capitalize their business activity. Leveraging these trends through organized crowdfunding or peer-lending portals like Kiva will take advantage of already strong community networks and offer a solution to a perceived statewide capital shortage.

Most rural counties have limited bandwidth. To compete in a global economy, whether with an online merchant side gig or running a tech-led business, access to high-speed and affordable internet is critical. OSIT has a strong plan for bringing more than 1,000 fiber nodes to government offices, schools and hospitals throughout rural Nevada by 2026. It is unknown when fiber will be readily available rural households. Accelerating access to broadband via free downtown and other public WiFi hubs and hot spots will give thousands of rural Nevadans 'early access' to the tools they need to start new businesses or engage in remote work. Bandwidth will create opportunities too, to attract new entrepreneurs and remote workers to rural Nevada.

Bandwidth alone will not ensure that rural Nevadans will be able to take advantage of online resources to build businesses. Digital literacy will be instrumental to safeguard the survival of existing rural businesses and the creation of new companies over time. Substantially escalating the array of classes, training, and counseling at the NSBDC and Great Basin College in areas associated with online marketing, e-commerce, web site development and other technology-based operations will be critical to getting rural entrepreneurs online and conducting business. Connecting rural innovators to programs like Launch Rural Nevada which support the scaling of traditional business models through technology will result in awareness of business scaling opportunities and connect geographically isolated innovators with peers and resources.



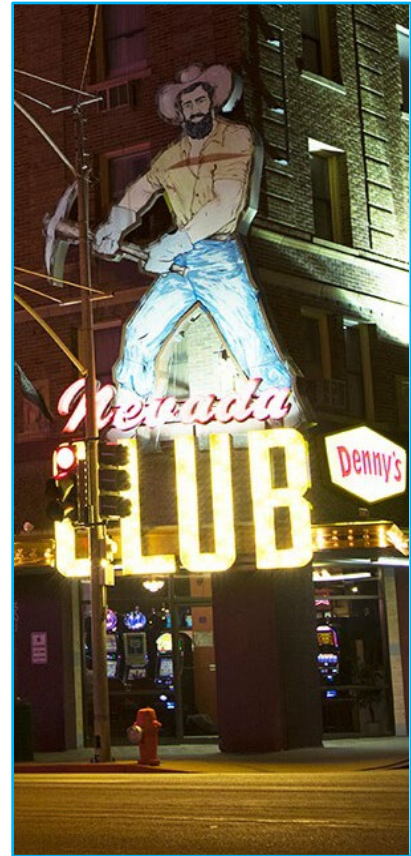
## Rural Nevada

### Overview

Dozens of different origin stories have given rise to the small, independent communities scattered throughout Nevada. From mining to tourism, crop agriculture to cattle ranching, naval bases to federal parks, many diverse industries built these places resulting in small, independent economies supported by increasingly fragile drivers.

Currently, most rural communities in Nevada rely on one or two industries for the majority of jobs and local economic activity. During boom times, this reliance is not an issue, but during bust cycles, the negative impact on the local community can be severe. As the economy becomes more global, these boom-and-bust periods have the potential to become steeper and last longer. Weathering downturns may be more difficult in coming decades than it has been in the past.

New economic disruptions are on the horizon that will also reduce the number of rural jobs in America in the coming decade. Some of these disruptions will be associated with the implementation of technological advances in mining or changes in agriculture contending with climate change. Online commerce and automation may permanently eliminate many rural service, entertainment, and manufacturing jobs. At the same time, access to high-speed internet will bring new opportunities for remote work and online businesses for rural residents.



Entrepreneurship economic development has emerged as a key strategy to navigate these changes in rural regions nationwide. Entrepreneurship benefits rural communities in multiple ways, including:

- *Insulates the economy.* The more businesses across different industries in a community, the better the community can weather economic flux. A downturn in agriculture, for example, may not harm a local online jewelry wholesaler.
- *Creates diverse jobs.* More small businesses result in a greater variety of jobs and employers. This creates employment opportunities for more residents with different skills and education.
- *Retains youth.* Founding a company gives young people the ability to create their own job and stay in the community rather than leaving in search of employment elsewhere.
- *Generates local wealth.* Having more locally owned businesses translates into greater local wealth. Profits from local companies tend to stay in the community rather than funneling to corporate offices in other places.

Transitioning rural communities throughout the state to embrace entrepreneurship is key to maintaining rural economic vitality while preserving and enhancing Nevada's fiery, independent rural spirit. Local economic development efforts that support remote work and new businesses associated with the internet and make it as easy as possible to start or expand a business are key. Entrepreneurial ecosystems offer a baseline road map for how to do these things.

## **Rural Benchmark Counties**

There is a saying among rural ecosystem builders: “If you have seen one rural community, you have seen one rural community.” This speaks to the variety of economies, people, stages of community growth, and cultures that exist independently in each rural place. The scattered, and often geographically isolated, rural communities in Nevada are no more the same than Reno and Las Vegas; therefore, painting all rural communities with the same brush can, and will, be viewed by some as a disservice to all. While it isn’t possible within the constraints of this project to assess every rural community in Nevada, there are commonalities across Nevada’s rural regions. Rural residents often described their home county as being “rural” or “out-out rural,” signifying perceived differences between some rural counties compared to others. Some of these differences showed up in rural interviews; others were evident from data capture. Two Nevada counties were selected to typify rural—Douglas and Churchill. Elko and White Pine counties were selected to typify out-out rural.

## **Rural Counties**

Douglas and Churchill counties are among four counties (including Storey and Lyon) that are close enough to the two urban centers to benefit from them. While rural in terms of population, these counties benefit from many urban assets, including stronger transportation and bandwidth infrastructure.

Some communities, like Mesquite in Southern Nevada, are in an urban county but are very rural. Mesquite has a population of only 21,158, but it is quickly becoming a bedroom community to Las Vegas, even though it is 82 miles from the city, as new residents are drawn there by lower housing costs and recent shifts in remote work.

## **Out-Out Rural Counties**

Elko and White Pine counties in Northeastern Nevada are more isolated counties, hours away from any urban hub. These places were largely founded during the 1800s Westward Trek along the Pony Express and railroad routes and flourished during the mining boom(s) of the last century. The county populations are slowly trending older and more diverse.

**Douglas County (pop. 49,870)**

Located close to the southern shores of Lake Tahoe, Genoa in Douglas County was the first settlement in the state (including the first bar). Nearby Gardnerville is a Main Street community and has a thriving retail district. Together they support a strong tourism economy. Douglas County supports a growing air tourism (flightseeing) sector with currents that support gliders, sky diving, and “aerial roller coasters.”



**Churchill County (pop. 25,723)**

With Naval Base Fallon located in the county, Churchill County has a reputation recently boosted by the release of *Top Gun: Maverick* in 2022. Churchill County is also home to an armful of drag racing events, quick-draw contests, and Sand Mountain singing sand dune, a hub for sand racers. The historic downtown district is healthy. Recent economic development work is centered on agritourism.



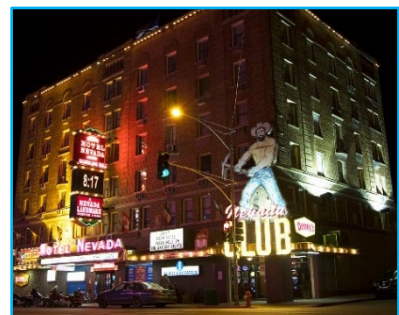
**Elko County (pop. 53,915)**

Elko County was founded in the 1860s as part of the transcontinental railroad. Mining and agriculture have anchored the economy for more than 150 years. The place-based assets of Elko are substantial, including outdoor recreation in the Ruby Mountains and citywide murals and cultural festivals, such as the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering, celebrating its 41st year in 2023.



**White Pine County (pop. 9,182)**

Heavily dependent on mining, Ely is the largest community in White Pine County. It has iconic gambling halls and serves as a hub for dozens of mountain bike trails that extend into the mountains along old mining routes. The entire region is famous for the best dark skies in the Lower 48 and for Great Basin National Park.



## Demographics

**Goals:** There are baseline demographics common to vibrant ecosystems, including higher educational levels (particularly in STEAM fields), higher median household incomes, diversity, and high household adoption to the internet.

### Age, Income, and Education

Distinct demographic differences exist among rural counties in Nevada. Douglas County is more similar to Reno than most other rural counties. (Reno has a median household income of \$76,182, and 34% of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher.) In Elko, household incomes skew higher than expected, attributable to the higher wages in the mining sector, which can average more than \$34 per hour for an underground miner. Educational levels are very low in Elko, White Pine, and Churchill counties.

	Median Age	Median Household Income	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Douglas County	53	\$75,688	32%
Elko County	35	\$82,462	16%
White Pine County	41	\$63,590	13%
Churchill County	41	\$61,776	19%

Source: 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau. [data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/)

While a bachelor's degree may not be relevant for every rural resident, access to training, certifications and digital literacy is. Elko and White Pine counties are served almost exclusively by Great Basin College, which educates 3,800 students across 86,500 square miles in ten of Nevada's largest rural counties. The main campus is in Elko County, and there is a center in White Pine County. The college currently leads the state in the number of online courses offered.



Business starts and exits across the four counties reflect the differences in impact that the pandemic exerted throughout the state. In Douglas County, the tourist economy suffered heavily, with nearly 800 businesses exiting between 2020 and 2021. Starts have been slow to rebound. In remote Elko and White Pine counties, starts dropped off during the pandemic, but after a spike in closures in 2020, they appear to have rebounded more quickly.

**Annual Gross Business Starts and Closures Around Rural Nevada Benchmark Counties**

Year	Douglas County			Elko County			White Pine County			Churchill County		
	Starts	Closed	Net	Starts	Closed	Net	Starts	Closed	Net	Starts	Closed	Net
2021	161	116	45	134	88	46	34	8	26	61	40	21
2020	207	671	-464	152	328	-176	27	41	-14	99	209	-110
2019	417	402	15	179	165	14	28	26	2	76	57	19
2018	486	290	196	306	220	86	78	33	45	83	145	-62
2017	422	291	131	130	155	-25	18	31	-13	47	76	-29
2016	418	421	-3	187	329	-142	25	33	-8	83	135	-52

Source: Business Dynamics Research Consortium, University of Wisconsin System.  
[youreconomy.org](http://youreconomy.org)

### Public Policy

*Future-focused public policy should strive to reduce the friction associated with startup activity, including compliance, licensing, and regulation. The public sector should operate to guide and support vs. ban or bar. It is in the hands of public policy makers to ensure that everyone has access to ubiquitous, affordable, high-speed bandwidth.*

Public sector leaders and entrepreneurs alike who were interviewed in out-out rural counties were largely disconnected from terms and phrases currently common to ecosystem building. Rural business owners did not self-identify with the word “entrepreneur,” for example, and often corrected interviewers with alternative terms like “business owner.” In most sessions with public sector leadership, interviewers were asked to explain what was meant by an entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Sheldon Mudd, Executive Director at Northeastern Nevada Regional Development Authority (NNRDA) in Elko and a former state economic development employee himself, indicated this language barrier is not something that needs to be changed about rural life, but *is* something the state needs to change in terms of how it supports rural communities. His locally built business startup program titled Ready-Aim reflects this. He noted, “The state would never





call a program Ready-Aim, but here it makes complete sense.”

Cultural differences extend into public policy relationships among local, county, and state governments. Bob Erickson, Chief of Staff in the Fallon Mayor’s Cabinet, indicated his reluctance to collaborate with the state in consolidating business licensing. After discussing the multiple pages of paperwork needed to complete the local business licensing—and the requirement to drop it off in person at City Hall—he happily defended those requirements, stating, “We want to know who the people are who are starting businesses here. They are not a number to us. If they come in, they can meet us and we them.”



### Bandwidth

Bandwidth connectivity is poor across most of Nevada’s rural counties. Thirty-nine percent of residents in White Pine County and 30% of households in Elko County have no internet at all or rely only on cell phone connectivity. In Douglas and Churchill counties between 16-20% of households have no internet or rely on cell phones alone. In Phase 1 of the High-Speed Nevada Initiative, OSIT solicited bids to install fiber in over 1,000 state and local government facilities, schools, and libraries in nearly every rural community in the state by 2026.

**High-Speed Internet and Connection Types**

	Cable, fiber, DSL	Satellite	Cell only	No Internet Service
Douglas County	80%	8%	8%	8%
Elko County	61%	11%	18%	12%
White Pine County	48%	15%	17%	22%
Churchill County	76%	5%	8%	12%

Source: 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates Data Tables,  
U.S. Census Bureau. [data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/)

Churchill County’s public library offers an example of how public institutions can improve digital literacy and innovation with access to bandwidth. The county has a municipal utility called CC Communications, one of fewer than 500 municipal utilities in the country. The utility dates back to telegraph days, making it one of the oldest in the nation. Most every home and business in Fallon already has access to fiber connectivity. As drones, virtual reality (VR), 3-D printing, and online library resources have become available, librarian Carol Lloyd has integrated these technologies into the library’s resources. It now has 10 drones, a 3-D printer, and a VR room with two headsets that are constantly in use, as well as a full-time



IT librarian, who on any given day may be working with a group of children in the VR room then heading over to the retirement facility to help seniors with email issues.

In 2021, Lloyd subscribed to LinkedIn Learning, an online educational platform that offers more than 5,000 expert-led course videos in business, technology, and creative media skills. In the past eight months, nearly 6,000 courses have been completed by county residents, all online. More than 3,388 residents have watched online StoryTime on the library’s YouTube channel, and every Friday there are hands-on, in-person STEAM workshops to engage children in science, technology, engineering, math, and arts activities. What has happened in Churchill County’s library can be a model for libraries throughout the state to improve digital literacy across generations once bandwidth is in place.

Some rural communities across the country have proactively worked to connect rural residents to the internet through free Wi-Fi hubs. One of the nation’s best practices in this space is from Vermont. The Vermont Digital Equality (VDE) project has installed free Wi-Fi mesh zones and hot spots in 33 Vermont communities in the past decade. Zones have been created in downtown districts, parks, and disadvantaged neighborhoods. VDE offers a toolkit called Planning and Implementing a Wi-Fi Zone for Your Town.

## Place

**Goals:** *Natural, built, and cultural resources collectively create a fertile landscape that attracts entrepreneurs and the talent they hire. Central to this are public-private partnerships (placemaking at scale), designation and branding of entrepreneurial hubs, and a supportive culture that promote lifestyles of innovation, curiosity, community connection, and creativity.*

Isolation of rural business owners has long been a barrier to business innovation. More than one business owner interviewed suggested that they see their business as “operating in a vacuum” or “alone” because of their lack of connection with like-minded individuals. A statewide survey of entrepreneurs and small business owners in Iowa found that even weak links such as Facebook groups, online communities, and Listserv, for example, can improve the ability of rural business owners to solve common problems and accelerate the movement of solutions throughout a community.

### *Rural Incubators and Coworks*

Incubation and coworking are business support services that connect and serve small businesses in valuable ways. In rural communities, either incubation or coworking (or a combination of both, customized to local needs) can be powerful place-based resources for young businesses.

#### Business Incubators

Business incubation is a long-term, comprehensive business support program generally coupling services, equipment and subsidized space to promote the growth of early-stage companies.

Business incubation has been a part of the economic development landscape since 1958 but did not take off in economic development circles until the 1980s. Today, there are more than 7,000 incubators worldwide, more than half of which are mixed-use incubators that serve a combination of industries, including retail. A wide array of one-off, niche incubators have emerged in the past decade (such as kitchen incubators, ghost kitchens, food truck incubators and even brewery incubators).

A business incubation program may serve a single tenant for an extended period- often up to two years, sometimes more. The best incubation programs offer post-graduation services as well. Recipients of business incubation services boast high success rates and are substantial contributors to their local economies. According to the International Business Innovation Association (INBIA), member incubators report that 87 percent of their graduates are still in business after five years, in contrast to the 52 percent success rate among the general business population. For every \$1 of estimated public operating subsidy provided, incubators generate approximately \$30 in local tax revenue. In addition, incubator graduates (84%) tend to remain within ten miles of where they received services. All of these benefits make incubation a good fit in many rural communities.

In New Straitsville, Ohio (pop. 654), the Southern Perry Incubation Center (SPICE), has been serving regional entrepreneurs with space, workshops and community since 2005. SPICE is a non-profit organization, started by a group of concerned rural Perry County residents who wanted a location to bring small businesses together to do business and learn. SPICE has served an astounding 2,281 microbusinesses.

#### **The Space On Main Cowork**

In 2016, Bradford, Vermont (pop. 3,000), converted a defunct five-and-dime store into a microhub, a community workspace that would build connection in the community while fostering long-term goals around entrepreneurship. Its founder, Monique Priestley, has created a rich array of business resources.



The Space on Main offers a podcasting studio, a digital fabrication lab, conference rooms, and open workspaces. “I can’t believe this is in Bradford!” is the most common reaction to seeing the space.

Through a partnership with Co.Starters, a 10-week program that equips entrepreneurs to start a new business, cohorts of local entrepreneurs were trained. In less than two years, more than 90 people have taken part in Co.Starters programs—almost 3% of the town’s population—and new business activity is taking off.

Coworking is similar to incubation in many ways. Coworks are shared spaces that fill a gap for important business services. Examples include access to expensive equipment like commercial-grade printers, servers, or video equipment and unique workspaces like green rooms, smart boards, and “phone booths” with video recording tools. Niche resources such as mail or package delivery, lockers, and alternative group telehealth care plans among members are emerging in some sectors as well. Coworks often are positioned as community hubs, providing meetup and workspaces for nonprofits, churches, and community groups, and sometimes serving as pseudo-incubators for new retailers. One big difference between coworking and incubation is that coworkers do not tend to ‘graduate’ from program services. Coworks also serve rising numbers of rural remote workers.

### **Natural Resources**

Throughout rural Nevada, natural resources abound. From dark skies to mountain biking, heli-skiing to caving, the variety of place-based outdoor recreational activities is exceptional. In Bemidji, Minnesota (pop. 14,998), a new recruitment program has been successful in attracting remote workers based on the outdoor recreational assets of the area. The program, called 218 Relocate, offers up to \$2,500 in expenses for moving, free coworking space, and access to a program connecting newcomers to established residents.

In Tennessee, the state created the TN Placemakers Entrepreneurship Fund, which allows rural communities to apply for up to \$100K to support and train small business owners to start and expand their placemaking assets. The website notes: “Talent is everywhere, opportunity is not, and availability does not equate to equitable access. TN Placemakers strives to help communities provide opportunity through true access for the small businesses and entrepreneurs that are and will be a part of their community.”



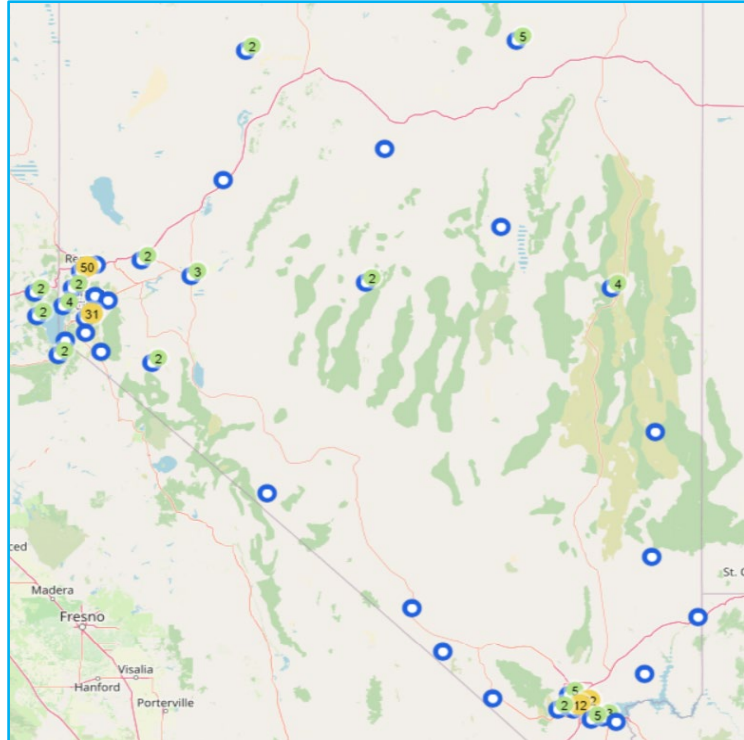
## Resource Networks

**Goals:** *High-performing ecosystems offer a full spectrum of resources, including capital, technical assistance, and dense network resource providers offering onramps, interactions, and collisions to raise and empower all who wish to participate in the economy.*

The resources serving entrepreneurs throughout rural Nevada are sparse, as shown in the adjacent map, but the community networks are strong. Rural Nevada counties have exceptional community stakeholder networks—small, tight-knit groups of local leaders who meet regularly around community issues. These groups include city and county entities, EDOs, Chambers, SBDC advisors, nonprofits, and/or tourism professionals.

In Gardnerville, a small group of roundtable attendees indicated there were more than 100 volunteers behind them who are regularly called on to support local initiatives.

GOED’s Rural Community and Economic Development division hosts multiple Main Street communities and delivers programming to facilitate community development across the state. Main Street programs have a long history of economic impact and community development, dating to 1982.



In an interview with Shari Davis at GOED’s Director of Community and Economic Development, she noted that rural entrepreneurs often have a more difficult time accessing information and other resources they need to start or expand a business. “A very Nevada thing to do,” she said, “is to start your own business, but a lack of knowledge about resources and business information makes it difficult. Our expanse is a challenge.”

Many rural business owners interviewed suggested they were unable to navigate the directories of resources providers available to them to know who they should turn to. “I don’t want to make four phone calls to know who the right person is to help me figure out information about my target market,” noted Mary Claire Boucher of MCB Creative during a rural roundtable.

## Capital

Among rural entrepreneurs interviewed, capital was regularly cited as a key concern, echoing the findings of the Nevada SBDC's 2022 Small Business Challenges Survey. The Kauffman Foundation has noted that pre-pandemic, the top three sources of capital used by businesses for startup were personal and family savings of the entrepreneur (64.4%), business loans from banks or financial institutions (16.5%), and personal credit cards (9.1%).

Many rural small business owners interviewed indicated they self-funded their business startup. A surprising number of those businesses were additionally supported financially by neighbors and friends. Gifts and small loans from trusted and known sources were described as normal, but institutional funding less so. This kind of relationship-based funding was prevalent throughout the state among those interviewed.

Benefits crowdfunding is an example of effective relationship-based funding. Small business owners register on a crowdfunding platform and post their business financial funding goal, along with some soft benefits for those who contribute, then they leverage social media to attract would-be funders to their campaign to contribute. In Wyoming, the SBA Women's Business Center subscribed to a community crowdfunding portal called The Local Crowd Wyoming. It provides a single community website for many businesses to seek funding on one website, boosting the value of each founder's social media network. Twenty campaigns there have raised over \$150,000 dollars.

Kiva is another online resource based on relationships. Kiva provides microloans of up to \$10,000, paid back over a period of between three and 36 months. In order to qualify to participate in Kiva, a local friend or family member must invest first. In Iowa, a nonprofit called NewBoCo has partnered with Kiva to leverage zero-interest loans from \$1,000-\$15,000, primarily serving rural Iowa.

A rural capital fund launched during the pandemic is doing exceptional work in NE Nevada. The Rural Nevada Development Corporation (RNDC) manages the I80 Fund, launched in July of 2020, supported by mining industry sponsors. It initially served only disaster affected existing business owners in Humboldt (pop. 17,648), Lander (pop. 5,798), Eureka (pop. 1,903) and Elko (pop. 53,515) counties. The program recently pivoted to serve startups and expansion projects in the same region. The loan terms are exceptional: 2% interest in fixed term financing initially, then graduating to 3.75%. According to Michelle Beecher loan officer for the fund, the I80 Fund has supported 58 businesses to date, with \$6,453,380, supporting the creation of 125 jobs and the retention of 207 jobs in a region with a combined population of 78,864.

Launch Rural Nevada is a pitch, education, and networking event founded by a big network of ESOs including GOED, StartUpNV, Audacity Institute, NNRDA, the Ozmen Center for Entrepreneurship, NSBDC, Great Basin College, and UNR. Rural business founders can choose from a youth or adult division to receive training and technical assistance culminating in a statewide pitch event.

## Rural Nevada Action Plan

### Empower Rural Entrepreneur Support Networks

Empowering GOED to integrate entrepreneurial ecosystem principles and practices into rural leadership trainings and seminars is key to building capacity to support entrepreneurs. Providing equitable funding to rural communities to develop community-led tools to support entrepreneurship will result in locally appropriate resources and services.

**Potential Owners: GOED, local Main Street programs, RDAs**

1. Bring community leaders together around entrepreneurship economic development
  - a. Host rural leadership trainings around ecosystem building throughout Nevada
    - i. Expand participation to include entrepreneurs, libraries, non-profits
  - b. Host an annual Rural Entrepreneurship/ Main Street Conference
    - i. Different communities each year, showcase districts/entrepreneurs
2. Empower rural communities to create their own solutions
  - a. Create a Launch Rural Fund to incentivize the creation of locally developed programs
    - i. Incent the creation of community crowdfunding portals or KIVA

**Key Performance Indicators:** Rural communities will be empowered through training, technical assistance, networking and funding to develop locally appropriate entrepreneurship ecosystem programs and funding throughout rural Nevada.

### Accelerate The Potential of Rural Bandwidth

Free public WiFi hubs coupled with digital literacy support will give thousands of rural Nevadans 'early access' to online tools to start companies or work online. Bandwidth creates opportunities to attract like-minded talent to rural Nevada.

**Potential Owners: OSIT, NSBDC, GOED, Great Basin College, Regional Economic Development Alliances**

1. Build out free downtown WiFi in rural communities statewide
  - a. Partner with Main Streets, Chambers of Commerce, city government to identify hubs and lead organizations.
  - b. Explore WiFi options including 'do it yourself' models
  - c. Secure cooperative agreements with existing ISP providers
  - d. Identify funding partners from among state, city, local sponsors or businesses

**Key Performance Indicators:** Multiple rural downtowns will launch free WiFi hubs for their residents

1. Empower and educate rural residents to take advantage of coming broadband connectivity
  - a. Develop and deliver baseline digital literacy training in rural communities
    - i. Partner with OSIT County Broadband Action Teams to identify training opportunities.
    - ii. Utilize rural libraries to engage rural residents of all ages in online learning
  - b. Build and deliver highly customized rural business startup training and technical assistance
    - i. Tap, train and fund local champions at RDAs to deliver NSBDC startup workshops
    - ii. NSBDC develops and deliver specialty e-commerce and online business workshops supporting rural e- business start-up and expansion.
    - iii. Expand the online and in person course offerings at Great Basin College to include business startup, e-media, web design, coding and other tech-based curriculum

**Key Performance Indicators:** Rural residents have multiple options for digital literacy beginning in 2024.

1. Develop a talent attraction strategy to recruit new rural residents as fiber hubs are installed
  - a. Convene rural community leaders to ideate an attraction strategy
    - i. Inventory regional quality of life and place-based assets
    - ii. Develop a menu of attraction resources and incentives for incoming
  - b. Partner with multiple GOED departments to market a series of rural attraction campaigns

**Key Performance Indicators:** Rural talent attraction campaigns will increase the number of new rural entrepreneurs and remote workers.

### Engage Rural Entrepreneur Networks

Coworking hubs will raise awareness of entrepreneurship, network rural innovators and increase community-wide access to critical business resources. Ramping up rural innovators engagement with tech-led programs like Launch Rural Nevada and RUBA will foster support for rural growth companies.

**Potential Owners: GOED, local Main Street programs, RDAs, Travel Nevada**

1. Establish community incubation/coworking hubs in rural downtowns
  - a. GOED to host informational meetups statewide to showcase models, best practices
  - b. GOED to develop a rural coworking business plan template for distribution
2. Seed funds from proposed one- time 2023 appropriation for Main Street for incubation/coworks
  - a. Empower rural libraries to participate

**Key Performance Indicators:** Rural residents will have access to business resources, training and networking and the ability to connect more readily with peers in other rural communities.

1. Enhance and expand programs that support tech-based business startup/scaleup
  - a. Expand marketing of Launch Rural Nevada to reach more rural innovators
    - i. Engage local leadership
    - ii. Host EntreBash networking events to engage would-be innovators

**Key Performance Indicators:** Rural innovators in Nevada will be empowered to engage in the global economy.



## Rural Nevada Voices

*“If you don’t like it, you have to invent it.”*

—Alicia Main, Executive Director, Carson Valley Chamber of Commerce, Minden

*“Everyone out here for the most part is here for a reason. They like the small-town feel; they like the kind of Old West culture—certainly rugged individualists, very independent, with a self-sustaining attitude—and we like that. The fact of the matter is that it’s not realistic that we’re going to have so much development that it’s going to compromise any of those things.”*

—Sheldon Mudd, Executive Director NNRDA, Elko

*“We have four priorities in Ely: broadband, childcare, housing, and workforce. Solve those issues and people will start companies no problem.”*

—Caroline McIntosh, Business Advisor, NSBDC, Ely

*“Rural small business owners just don’t know what they don’t know. That is a bigger challenge than you might think.”*

—Kassandra Butterfield, Digital Marketing Director, Adams Hub for Innovation, Carson City

*“There are the rural parts of Nevada, and then there is the out-out rural. Very different places.”*

—Kathy Halbardier, Business Counselor and Economic Development Specialist, University of Nevada Reno NSBDC

*“I came here because my husband was deployed here. I did a walk around and thought, ‘I don’t want to drive an hour and a half for a pillow or great dress.’ I opened Memorie Boutique, and we have not looked back. I love it here. It is the people that matter. We give 5% of our net to the Fallon Youth Center. I asked my husband to do a second extension, and we intend to retire here.”*

—Kathy Fouss, Owner Memorie Boutique, Fallon



## Nevada National Entrepreneurship Roundtable



### Andy Stoll

Andy Stoll is a senior program officer at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, where he is responsible for the implementation and management of the foundation's ecosystem development strategy. He is the co-founder of six entrepreneurial-focused organizations, including the national Startup Champions Network. Stoll leads the annual ESHIP Summit, the Kauffman Ecosystem Playbook Series and multiple large-scale grant programs supporting ecosystem building in communities across the U.S.



### Bryan McArdle

Bryan McArdle is the Revitalization Manager at the City of Reno, Nevada, where he leads efforts to enhance and redevelop the city's urban core. Prior to this role Bryan served as the Vice President of Entrepreneurial Development at the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada (EDAWN) where he led various programs supporting entrepreneurs and startups including the Summit VMS mentoring program and the Reno Seed Fund Fund.



### David Branch

David Branch is the Executive Director of Cuming County Economic Development Inc. in eastern Nebraska (county pop. 8,984). He is a local champion and practitioner for rural entrepreneurship and has developed a coworking space, social networks, and funding capacity around programs and resources serving rural entrepreneurs. Prior to the CCED, Branch served in a variety of senior-level roles in rural communities associated with workforce, mediation, and downtown and Chamber management.



### Dell Gines

Dr. Dell Gines is a nationally recognized leader in entrepreneurship ecosystem building and serves as the VP of Partnerships, Advisory Services, and Thought Leadership at the International Economic Development Council. His specific focus is on communities of color and economically distressed small rural communities. He has authored six guides and one e-book. His most notable work is a 2018 research report on Black women business startups, cited in *PBS*, *Forbes*, *Black Enterprise*, *CNN Business*, and *Entrepreneur*.



### **Jeff Bennett**

Jeff Bennett is a leading community and ecosystem builder in Sacramento, California. His work focuses upon systems change and helping entrepreneurial ecosystem builders connect, share their stories and knowledge. Bennett cofounded and publishes [StartupSac.com](http://StartupSac.com) and founded the [Ecosystem Builder Hub](#) in 2019.



### **Kaylee Williams**

Kaylee Williams is Investment Director for [InnoVenture Iowa](#), a \$30M public SSBCI funded venture capital fund designed to support early-stage startups in advanced manufacturing, biosciences, or information technology. She is the cofounder and former CEO of [VolunteerLocal](#). She serves as a startup mentor for TechStars and the Global Insurance Accelerator.



### **Kellen Gracey**

Dr. Kellen Gracey is a Senior Data Scientist spearheading data operations for [Venture Forward](#) at GoDaddy, an initiative aimed at equipping decision-makers and policy professionals with timely and critical information around technology, innovation, and ecommerce. Currently, his research emphasis is on data-driven solutions for business economic recovery from COVID-19 impacts.



### **Lindsey Cox**

Lindsey Cox is the Director of [Launch Tennessee](#), a statewide public-private partnership with a vision to make Tennessee the most startup-friendly state in the nation. Its mission is to empower a high-functioning network of resources focused on core priorities that support Tennessee's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Prior to Launch Tennessee, Cox served at the federal EDA Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship as program manager of the agency's Build to Scale project.



### **Mike Heaton**

Mike Heaton is a rural entrepreneurial ecosystem builder and non-profit fundraising professional, currently serving the New Bohemian Cooperative (NewBoCo), a nationally acclaimed urban entrepreneurial ecosystem. He specializes in building non-profit fundraising strategies that sustain programs while stewarding community connections and empowering diversity.



### **Nicole Manapol**

Nicole Manapol is an international rural development specialist. She is a national thought leader around the identification and development of rural entrepreneurship economic development and rural broadband. She was recently recruited to the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), where she will represent rural policy and practice.



### **Rob Williams**

Rob Williams is the director of SourceLink, a national technology and services platform transforming entrepreneurship-led economic development throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. He provides leadership to a network of more than 70 communities and ecosystem builders (affiliates) representing urban and rural regions, providing best practice guidance and direct technical assistance in ecosystem building.



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Entrepreneurial Communities, LLC, was founded in 2012 to support forward-thinking city and state leaders interested in fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems. We serve communities, cities, and state governments across 15 states, providing ecosystem feasibility studies, stakeholder capacity training, surveys, listening tours, and direct coaching and mentoring of entrepreneurs.

Our trademark onsite engagement, coupled with quality benchmarking and specialized entrepreneurship data, results in reports and publications that capture more fully and authentically the density of connections, culture, regional innovation, and trends within the ecosystems we assess.

Our plans are guided by a thoughtfully convened roundtable of academic and field experts from our curated national network. These individuals bring rich insight and informed policy recommendations, perspectives, and field solutions that no single company can hope to achieve alone.

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Sincerely,

*Mo Collins*

CEO, Entrepreneurial Communities, LLC