

Tulsa Remote: How a Remote Work Incentive is Responding to Local Challenges and Spurring Economic Growth in Tulsa, OK

The rise of remote work—the ability to perform certain jobs from anywhere—provides new opportunities for communities such as Tulsa, Oklahoma, to redefine the terms on which they compete for skilled workers. Started in 2018, the Tulsa Remote program is designed to target the expanding cohort of remote workers nationwide and incentivize them to move to Tulsa for at least one year. Tulsa Remote program members are provided a \$10,000 incentive to relocate, a membership to a local co-working space, and community programming designed to build professional, social and civic connections among the membership. The incentive program is designed to attract a skilled cohort of newcomers who in turn prompt economic growth, further build out the local bench of tech talent, and provide a positive jolt to the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. In the process, the program also raises national awareness of Tulsa as a top-tier destination to live and work.

An economic impact analysis by the Economic Innovation Group (EIG) found that the program was responsible for millions in new local earnings and bringing just under 600 new jobs to the Tulsa area in 2021 alone. Thus far the incentive has succeeded in attracting a highly educated, well-paid cohort of remote workers and their families: The median income of a Tulsa Remote member stood at \$85,000 while the average was just over \$104,600 as of mid-2021, and program members frequently held an advanced college degree in addition to working in the knowledge-intensive information or professional and scientific services industries.

Tulsa Remote is one of the earliest and most noteworthy initiatives in the United States designed to harness remote work to level the national playing field for talent. The early evidence suggests that it is having a significant impact on the local economy.

Considering only the Tulsa Remote program members present at the start of 2021, Tulsa Remote is estimated to...

- Add **\$62.0 million** in new local earnings in 2021 — \$51.3 million directly attributable to relocated remote workers and \$10.7 million from the employment boost generated in the local economy.
- Support approximately **592 jobs** in 2021 — 394 jobs directly attributable to relocated remote workers and approximately 198 newly created full-time equivalent jobs based in Tulsa.

Which means that in 2021...

- There is an estimated **\$13.77** boost in new local labor income for every \$1 spent toward relocating a remote worker.
- On average, approximately **one new job** was created in Tulsa for every **two remote workers** who relocated.

Tulsa Remote has already grown significantly since the start of 2021 and intends to build upon these economic impacts and expand further in the years ahead. On its current growth trajectory, in 2025, the Tulsa Remote program is estimated to...

- Add approximately **\$500 million** in new local earnings.
- Support upwards of **5,000 high-impact jobs**, including thousands of relocated remote workers and at least **1,500 newly created full-time equivalent local jobs**.

Tulsa Remote responds to specific economic challenges familiar to many communities across the heartland.

Challenge 1. Inconsistent population growth slower than many peers

- In four of the last ten years, more people moved away from Tulsa to other parts of the United States than moved to Tulsa from other parts of the country.
- The most economically productive segment of the workforce—prime-age population in the 25-54 age range—has been growing especially slowly relative to its peers.

How Tulsa Remote addresses the issue:

- By the end of 2021, Tulsa Remote will have brought over 1,200 new residents to the community, many of whom stick around beyond their one-year requirement: 88% have elected to stay more than one year.
- The median age of Tulsa Remote members is 35, and 90% of participants are critical prime-age workers.
- On average, at least one additional household member, such as spouses, children, or other relatives, moves to Tulsa for every two program members.

Challenge 2. Difficulty attracting and retaining highly educated workers

- Tulsa's share of adults with at least a four-year college degree trails the U.S. share and that of several peer cities.
- Most recent graduates from local colleges leave the region after graduation, reflecting a statewide problem: Oklahoma has recorded a net loss of working-age college graduates every year since 2013 due to domestic migration.
- Tulsa has the smallest share of job postings requiring a bachelor's degree among a group of peer cities, leaving relatively fewer opportunities in the local economy for college-educated workers who would want to reside in Tulsa.

How Tulsa Remote addresses the issue:

- Tulsa Remote attracts a highly educated contingent of workers before a corresponding local job opening needs to exist for them, giving Tulsa a headstart in amassing talent: Among members, 88% have completed a bachelor's degree or higher (49% hold a bachelor's degree, while 39% percent hold an undergraduate degree as well as some kind of additional advanced degree like a masters or PhD).

Challenge 3. Lagging growth in high-tech, high-wage industries and jobs

- The share of employment in the high-wage professional and business services and information sectors has declined over the last 15 years. For the past five years, Tulsa has had lower than average demand for labor in the same sectors.
- Tulsa's business startup rate—the share of new firms created in a given year—lags most of its peers and the nation.

How Tulsa Remote addresses the issue:

- Nearly half of Tulsa Remote members are employed in the professional services or information industries.
- 37% of Tulsa Remote members have considered starting a business in the near future.

About The Economic Innovation Group (EIG)

The Economic Innovation Group (EIG) is a bipartisan public policy organization dedicated to forging a more dynamic and inclusive American economy. Headquartered in Washington, DC, EIG produces nationally-recognized research and works with policymakers to develop ideas that empower workers, entrepreneurs, and communities.