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Best-Performing Cities **2021**

Foundations for Growth and Recovery

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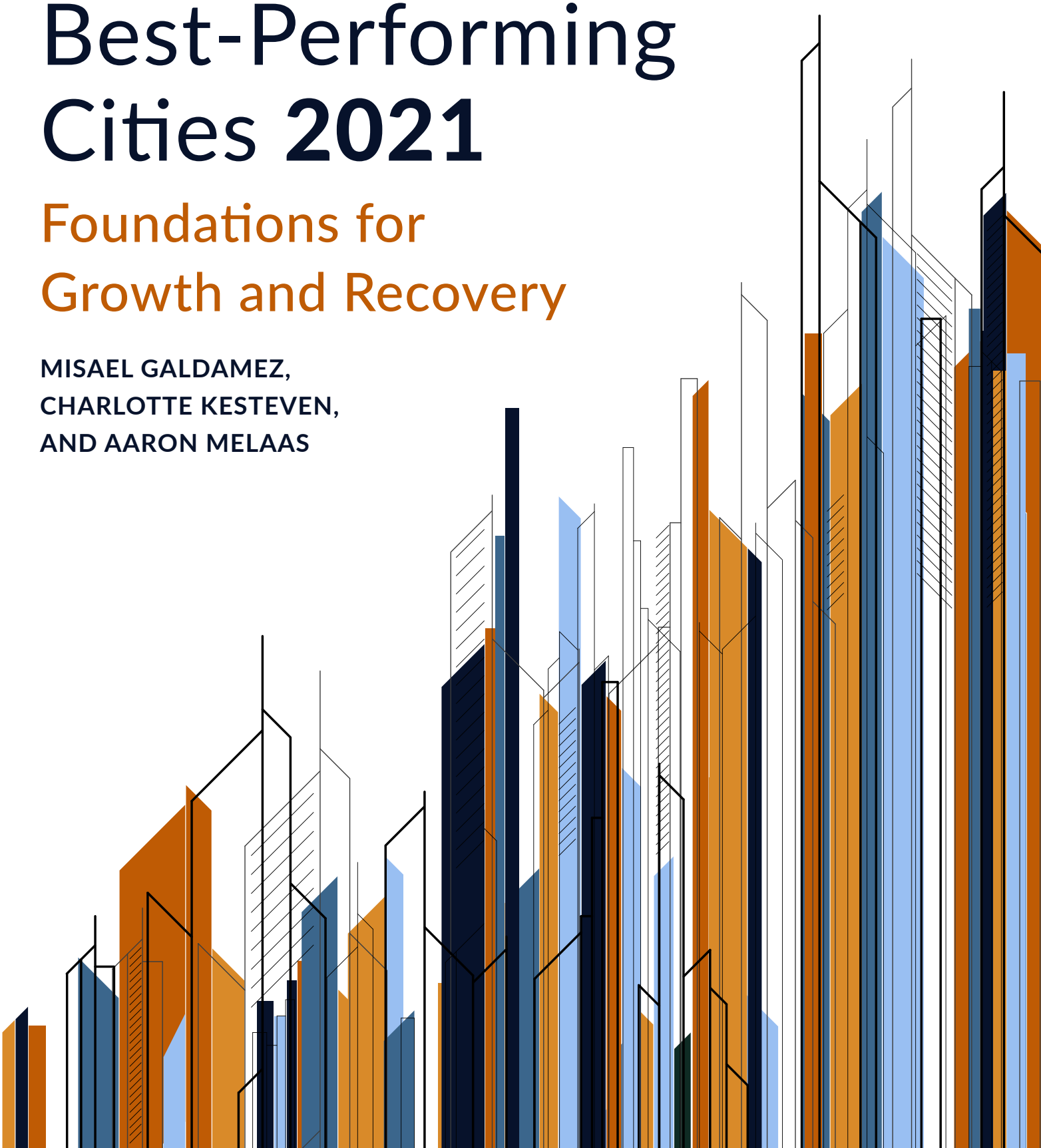

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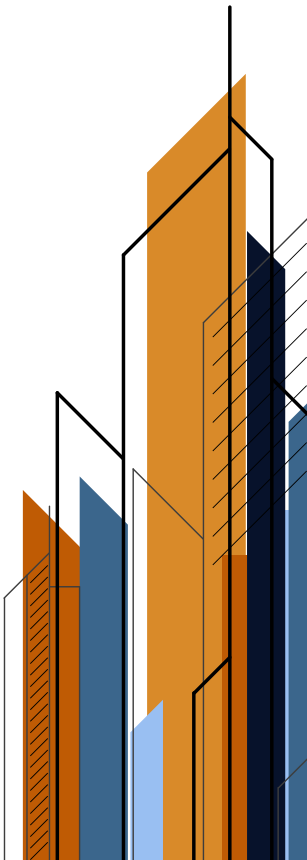

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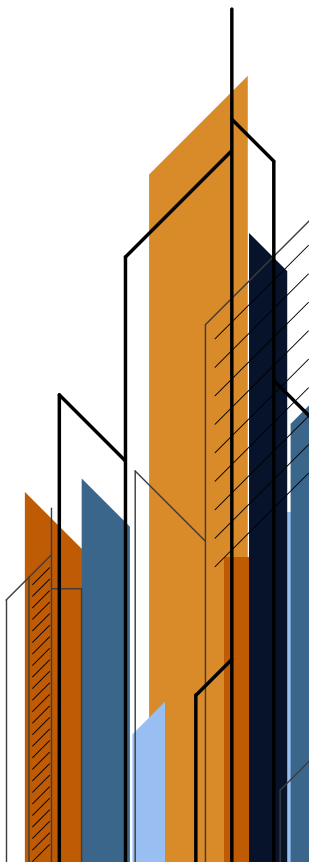


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cities drive economic growth nationwide. They are the primary locations where businesses create new jobs and workers earn higher wages, keeping the United States competitive in the global economy. However, metro areas are also incredibly diverse. Each has unique characteristics generated through a combination of investment and policy choices that influence the community's economic outcomes. The Milken Institute's Best-Performing Cities Index (BPC) provides a means for comparing metro areas' recent performance.

Here are the highlights of the 2021 Best-Performing Cities Index:

- The 2021 version of the index emphasizes jobs, wages, and high-tech growth while incorporating new measures of housing affordability and household broadband access.

- For the first time, the index includes the designation of five tiers across the overall rankings. By grouping cities with similar scores, we have provided new benchmarks for city leaders to define objectives that can help them become more competitive over time. Tier 1, containing 13 large and 13 small cities, replaces the top 25 category used in previous years.

- **Provo-Orem, Utah,** takes the top spot among this year's Best-Performing Large Cities on the strength of job, wage, and high-tech GDP growth.

- **Tier 1 Large Cities** included metros in the **Intermountain West** and **South** that demonstrated wage and job growth levels far above the national median and concentrated high-tech sectors. They also had relatively affordable housing costs and very high levels of broadband access, indicating inclusive growth based on housing and infrastructure.

- California's usual standouts, including **No. 24 San Francisco** and **No. 22 San Jose,** dropped to Tier 2 of the index due to the high cost of housing and a strong negative shift in short-term job growth. This may indicate the outsized effect of the coronavirus pandemic on so-called "superstar cities."

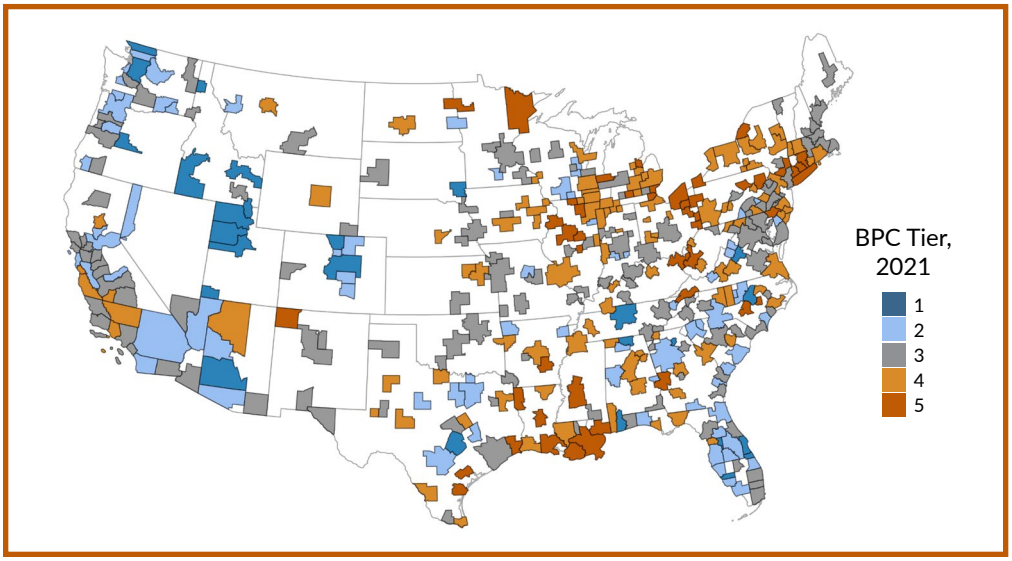
- **Idaho Falls** rises to first in the 2021 Best-Performing Small Cities. The Gem State's second-largest city experienced short-term job growth of 4.7 percent and includes the ninth-best high-tech GDP concentration among all small cities.

- **Tier 1 Small Cities** also included several cities in the Intermountain West and the South that distinguished themselves through high levels of job and wage growth over one- and five-year periods and generally had some degree of high-tech specialization.

Overall, high-ranking and upwardly mobile large cities performed better than the median on one- and five-year measures of housing affordability and short-term job growth. Notably, the center of gravity of the Best-Performing Large Cities—and many high-tech industries in general—has shifted from its traditionally dominant centers in California and Massachusetts to the Intermountain West and the South (Figure 1).

This is not to say that legacies of innovation are irrelevant. A dynamic, concentrated high-tech sector is still very indicative of economic success, and cities with histories of innovation are more resilient to economic shocks. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, cities' capacity for economic recovery will rely on the alignment between opportunities in high-tech industries and affordable costs of living. Cities that support innovation as well as inclusion are more likely to provide a foundation for broad-based economic growth.

Figure 1. Tier 1 Large and Small Metros Concentrated in Several Regions
Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) and Metropolitan Divisions by 2021 Rank



Note: *MSAs in Hawaii and Alaska, not shown here, scored in Tiers 4 and 5.*
Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2021)*

Best-Performing Large City

PROVO-OREM, UTAH

Provo-Orem, Utah, which ranked second in 2020, reclaims the top spot among this year's Best-Performing Large Cities. Provo ranked first in both one- and five-year job growth while also ranking highly in high-tech GDP concentration and the number of high-tech industries. Provo-Orem is a recipient of the tech sector's out-migration from the expensive West Coast. It is a relatively new innovation center but offers a high quality of life and amenities in the mountain region. With significantly lower costs than Silicon Valley, Provo-Orem has attracted such tech giants as Qualtrics, Vivint, and SmartCitizen.

Best-Performing Small City

IDAHO FALLS, IDAHO

Idaho Falls, Idaho, gained six ranks to claim the title of Best-Performing Small City. It experienced significant short-term job growth from October 2019 to October 2020 and performed well on the one- and five-year job growth indicators (ranking sixth and fifth, respectively). High-tech industries play an important role in the city's dynamism, including scientific research and development services. High-profile regional employers include the Idaho National Laboratory and Battelle Energy Alliance, LLC.

Table 1. Tier 1 Large Cities

Metropolitan Statistical Area	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	2020 Tier
Provo-Orem, UT	1	2	1	1
Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville, FL	2	10	8	1
Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown, TX	3	3	-	1
Salt Lake City, UT	4	25	21	1
Raleigh-Cary, NC	5	11	6	1
Boise, ID	6	7	1	1
Phoenix-Mesa-Chandler, AZ	7	12	5	1
Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN	8	14	6	1
Ogden-Clearfield, UT	9	22	13	1
Huntsville, AL	10	49	39	2
Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO	11	18	7	1
Fort Collins, CO	12	21	9	1
Seattle-Bellevue-Kent, WA Metro Division	13	8	-5	1

Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2021)*

Table 2. Tier 1 Small Cities

Metropolitan Statistical Area	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	2020 Tier
Idaho Falls, ID	1	7	6	1
Logan, UT-ID	2	3	1	1
The Villages, FL	3	5	2	1
St. George, UT	4	4	–	1
Daphne-Fairhope-Foley, AL	5	14	9	2
Coeur d'Alene, ID	6	5	-1	1
Sioux Falls, SD	7	24	17	2
Sebastian-Vero Beach, FL	8	9	1	1
Gainesville, GA	9	8	-1	1
Charlottesville, VA	10	11	1	1
Punta Gorda, FL	11	39	28	2
Bellingham, WA	12	10	-2	1
Bend, OR	13	1	-12	1

Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2021)*

INTRODUCTION

Cities are the engines of economic growth. They are the primary locations where businesses create new, high-paying jobs that ensure the US remains competitive in the global economy. However, each metro area's unique characteristics, which stem from a mix of investments and policy choices, affect their economic outcomes.

The Best Performing Cities (BPC) Index uses an outcomes-based set of metrics—including job creation, output growth, and wage gains especially in high-technology sectors—to evaluate the relative performance of metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) and metropolitan divisions (MDs) in the United States. The goal of the index is to help readers evaluate how well these cities promote economic vitality relative to their peers.

National and global forces can affect a city's economic performance, as they have throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the top-performing metro areas leverage their assets to remain competitive places for businesses to operate and workers to live, regardless of the nation's overall economic trajectory. These cities combine steady growth on one hand and dynamic innovation on the other, particularly through concentrated investment in high-tech sectors that generate positive spillover effects for local communities.

The index is a tool for understanding the geography of economic opportunity, indicating where employment is stable and expanding, wages and salaries are increasing, and businesses are thriving. In this sense, it is a valuable complement to the Milken Institute's biennial State Technology and Science Index (STSI),[1] which assesses each US state's knowledge economy, including their capacity to generate new scientific ideas through research and support for industries that bring new technologies to market.

Nonetheless, BPC's highest-ranking cities are not all located in states with the strongest knowledge economies. Several metro areas stand out from their surrounding regions as magnets for high-tech investment. Others have relatively lower levels of high-tech activity but rank highly on the index because they are attractive destinations for companies in other industries to locate their operations and for workers to live.

While the process of ranking cities on the index continues to rely on outcomes-based measurement, we incorporated several new indicators this year that show how the best-performing cities generate economic gains accessible to all their residents. Another important modification to the index this year was the designation of five tiers across the overall rankings. By grouping cities with similar scores, we have provided new benchmarks for cities to compare their economic performance with their peers.

As in previous years, BPC 2021 separately ranks large and small metros. This year, we used outcomes-based metrics to calculate economic performance scores for 200 large metros—those with a population of over 250,000 residents—as well as 201 small metros with a population of over 60,000.

EMPHASIS ON OUTCOMES

BPC rankings are based on scores calculated using a combination of short- and medium-term growth in jobs, wages, salaries, and technology output. Measures of access to those gains, including costs of living or quality of life, were traditionally excluded from the index due to relatively higher levels of short-term volatility and because prior versions of the index had not emphasized access to opportunity as a key measure of cities' economic performance.

However, the unique nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has provided an inflection point. We have responded by modernizing the index to show which cities have built inclusive local economies. We did so by adding one- and five-year measures of housing affordability—the percentage of households spending less than 30 percent of income on housing costs—and a measure of household access to any form of broadband internet. These highlight the degree to which infrastructure improvements reflect economic performance, and local job creation and higher wages make prosperity more accessible for all of a metro area's residents.

The 2021 version of the index retains an emphasis on jobs, wages, and high-tech growth while incorporating these new measures in the calculation of metro scores, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Components of the Best-Performing Cities Index

Component	Weight
Job growth (I=2014)	0.1180
Job growth (I=2018)	0.1180
Wage and salary growth (I=2014)	0.1180
Wage and salary growth (I=2018)	0.1180
Short-term job growth (Oct. 2019-Oct. 2020)	0.1180
High-tech GDP growth (I=2014)	0.0585
High-tech GDP growth (I=2018)	0.0585
High-tech GDP location quotient (2019)	0.0585
Number of high-tech industries with GDP LQ>1 (2019)	0.0585
Household access to broadband (2019)	0.0585
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	0.0585
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	0.0585

Note: *"I" refers to the beginning year of the period to which data are indexed. Weights do not add up to 1, due to rounding.*

Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2021)*

As in previous years, job growth and wage and salary growth are heavily weighted because they signal the quality of jobs being created and sustained. Other measures reflect the concentration and diversity of technology industries within MSAs and MDs.

High-tech location quotients (LQs), which measure industry concentration in a metro area relative to the national average, are included to gauge participation in the knowledge-based economy. We also measure the number of specific high-tech sectors (out of a possible 20) whose concentrations in an MSA or MD are higher than the national average.

As mentioned earlier, this year's index also includes measures of broadband availability and housing affordability. Our broadband indicator measures the share of households in an MSA or MD with any form of broadband internet access. Housing variables, meanwhile, indicate the number of households spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing, thus measuring the relationship between wages and local costs of living.[2]

Finally, the rankings include a measure of 12-month job growth (October 2019-October 2020) to capture recent momentum among metropolitan economies. We have used the most recent short-term data available to account for the economic impacts of the current global pandemic.

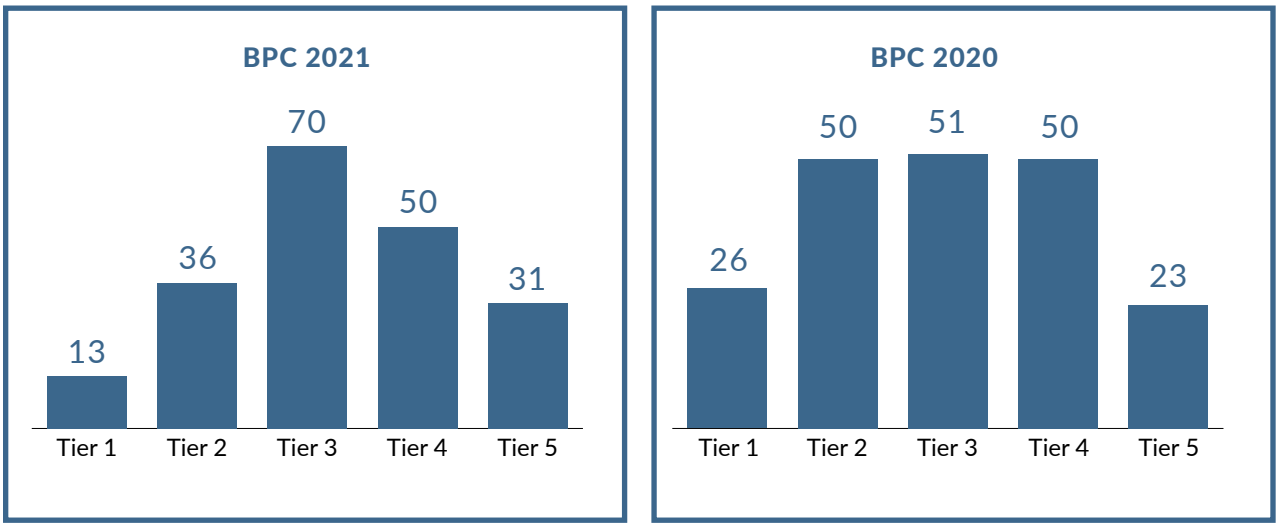
For the first time, the Best-Performing Cities Index also divides the overall rankings into five tiers based on their index scores. The size of these tiers is defined by the range of scores—or the difference between the top- and bottom-ranked cities—for both large and small MSAs. Boundaries for each tier are defined in 20 percent increments between the top and bottom scores on the index rankings, and cities fall into specific tiers based on whether their scores are above or below these increments.

BREAKING DOWN THE RANKINGS

When comparing the 2021 overall rankings with previous editions, the distribution of large metros across all five tiers changed substantially from last year to this year, as shown in Figure 2. In contrast, the distribution of small metros was more consistent, albeit with a larger number of mid-ranked metro areas in Tier 3 and a smaller number of low-ranked metro areas in Tier 5, as shown in Figure 3.

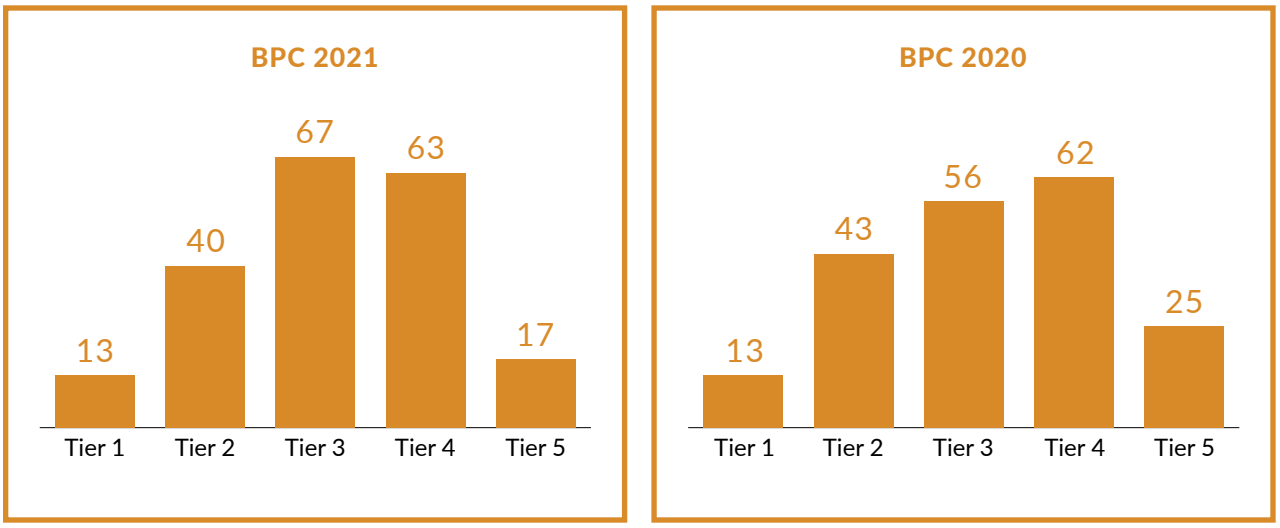
In the large metro index, the addition of new indicators further differentiated the top-ranked performers. These locations had the necessary ingredients for overall growth as well as equitable access to economic opportunity. The inclusion of the new indicators did not affect the small metros ranking as profoundly.

Figure 2. Recent Best-Performing Large Cities
Number of Cities by Tier



Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2019-21)*

Figure 3. Recent Best-Performing Small Cities
Number of Cities by Tier



Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2019-21)*

Even after we adjusted the method for calculating index scores, large and small cities acutely felt the turmoil in short-term job market indicators caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, regardless of their ranking. Taken together, these trends demonstrate the importance of creating and sustaining the local foundations for resilient, broad-based growth that will also be required for economic recovery in 2021 and beyond.

When looking at individual tiers, cities from each group shared some common characteristics. Among large metros, many of the top performers in **Tier 1** came from the Intermountain West, including Provo, Salt Lake City, and Ogden, Utah; Boise, Idaho; Phoenix, Arizona; and Denver and Fort Collins, Colorado. These cities registered levels of wage and job growth that were far above the national median. And they also had relatively affordable housing costs and very high levels of broadband access, indicating inclusive growth based on housing and infrastructure investment. Tier 1 also included several metros in the South—including Palm Bay, Florida; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Huntsville, Alabama—with very concentrated high-tech sectors. The placement of these cities in Tier 1 demonstrates the extent to which high-tech industries have expanded far beyond Silicon Valley and the Route 128 corridor outside Boston.

Cities in **Tier 2** also stood out for their job and wage growth performance, though households in some cities were more likely to face housing cost burdens and a mixed outlook in the local job market over the past year. California metros such as San Francisco (ranked No. 1 in BPC 2020), San Jose (No. 5 in 2020), and Riverside (No. 25 in 2020) dropped to Tier 2 due largely to high costs of housing. A negative shift in the short-term job growth indicator also played a role in this drop, as all three cities ranked outside the Top 100. This may indicate the outsized effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on so-called "superstar cities" that have suffered the most local job losses and the migration of high-tech workers to lower-cost areas as they work from home.[3] Meanwhile, the shift in local job markets also affected metros such as Spartanburg, South Carolina (No. 15 in BPC 2020). Although it had one of the lowest housing rates among large metros, its 11,000-employee BMW manufacturing facility closed for more than a month during March and April due to the pandemic, adversely affecting small businesses in the local economy.[4]

Tier 3 cities exhibited an extremely diverse group of characteristics. This group included several of the country's largest metro areas—such as New York City (No. 1); Los Angeles (No. 2); Houston (No. 4); and Washington, DC (No. 8)—that demonstrated enough variation in outcomes between high-income and low-income areas that their overall performance on the index did not stand out in either direction. It also included a number of metros with extremely concentrated high-tech economies as well as high costs of living and limited access to prosperity for lower-income residents. Two cities emblematic of this pattern were Cambridge, Massachusetts, which ranked No. 5 for high-tech LQs and No. 1 for LQ count but in the bottom 25 percent of the index for both housing measures, and Oakland, California, which ranked No. 14 and No. 1, respectively, for measures of high-tech concentration but in the index's bottom 15 percent for both housing measures. Another group of cities in this tier showed a very different pattern. For example, agribusiness hubs in California's Central Valley like Stockton, Merced, and Visalia ranked in the index's bottom 10 percent for high-tech concentration but in the top 25 percent for job growth and wage growth over both the short- and medium-term.

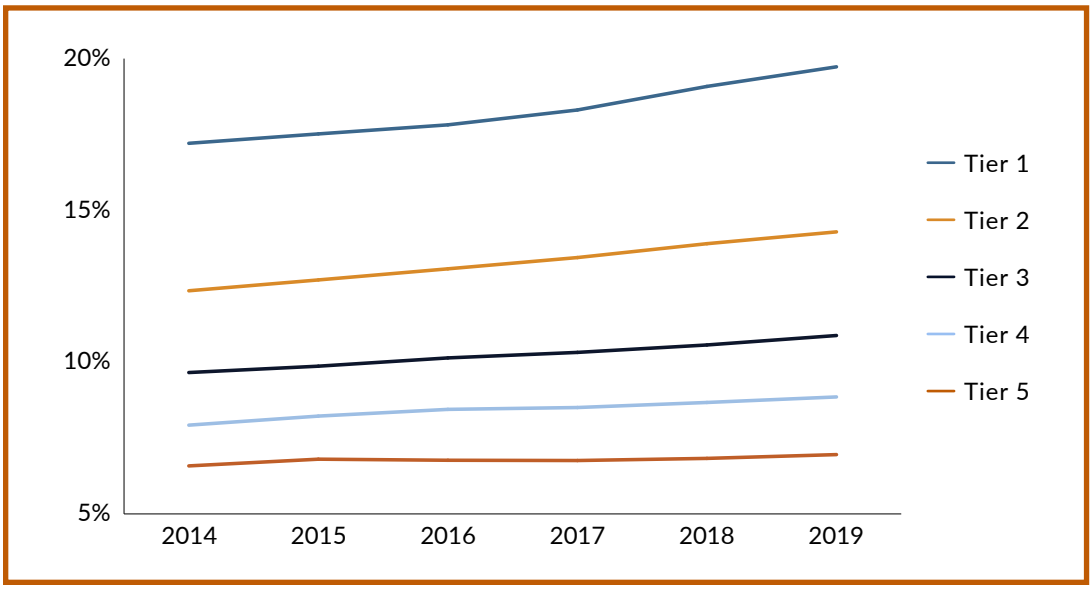
Cities in **Tier 4** also showed a mix of characteristics, though their performance on several indicators lagged. Very few cities ranked in the index's top half on measures of job growth or wage growth, and rates of broadband access were also very low across the group. Numerous traditional centers of heavy manufacturing fit this characterization. In the Midwest, this included Dayton and Toledo, Ohio; Green Bay and Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Chicago, Illinois; and South

Bend and Gary, Indiana. And in the Northeast, this group included Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Buffalo, Syracuse, and Rochester, New York; and Springfield, Massachusetts. A small number of Tier 4 cities—such as Salinas and Bakersfield, California; and Lubbock, Laredo, and Brownsville, Texas—posted relatively stronger medium-term job growth numbers that ranked in the top half of large metros. However, these cities all showed much lower levels of long-term growth and very low levels of high-tech concentration that contributed to their low overall rankings.

Finally, **Tier 5** cities consistently registered very low or negative levels of both job growth and wage growth over one- and five-year periods as well as limited high-tech industry concentration. Many of these cities were also traditional centers of heavy manufacturing, from Midwestern metros such as Detroit, Michigan, and Cleveland, Ohio, to several cities on the Gulf Coast, including Lafayette and New Orleans, Louisiana; Gulfport, Mississippi; and Beaumont and Corpus Christi, Texas. Broadband access was also limited among cities in the bottom tier. However, notable exceptions in Anchorage, Alaska, and Nassau County, New York, ranked in the top 10 percent of the index on that indicator. Given the number of metros in Tier 5 that had experienced long periods of economic stagnation, it was also not surprising that many recorded small numbers of cost-burdened households. In this case, our inclusion of the indicator showed how housing costs can reflect low demand due to a metro area's relatively weaker economic performance.

Figure 4. High-Tech Concentration Clearly Differentiates Each Tier of Large Cities

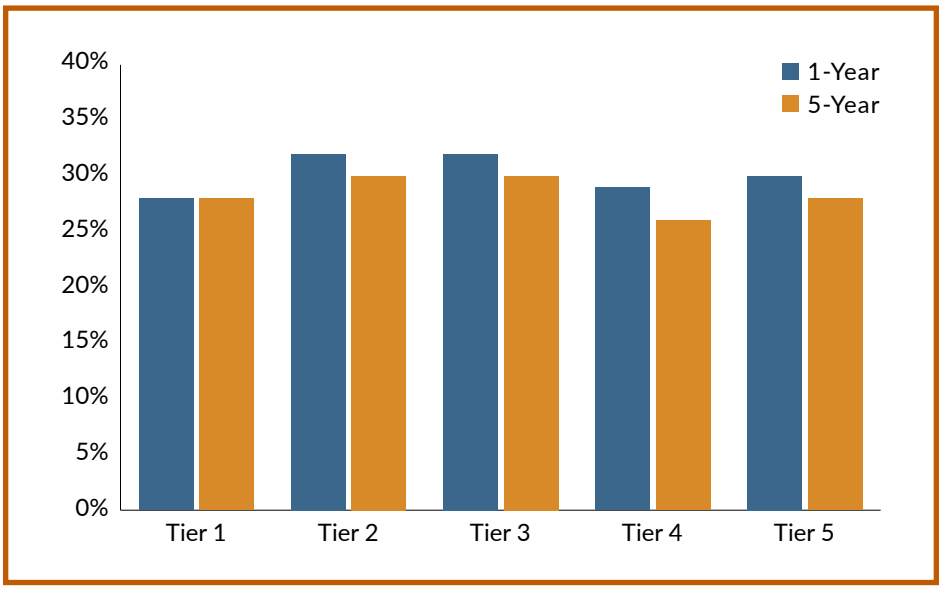
Large Cities: Average High-Tech GDP Share by Tier



Source: *Milken Institute analysis of US Bureau of Economic Analysis (2014-19)*

Figure 5. Tier 1 Large Cities Boast an Affordability Advantage

Large Cities: Median Share of Housing Cost-Burdened Households



Note: *Housing cost-burdened households spend above 30 percent of their income on housing costs.*

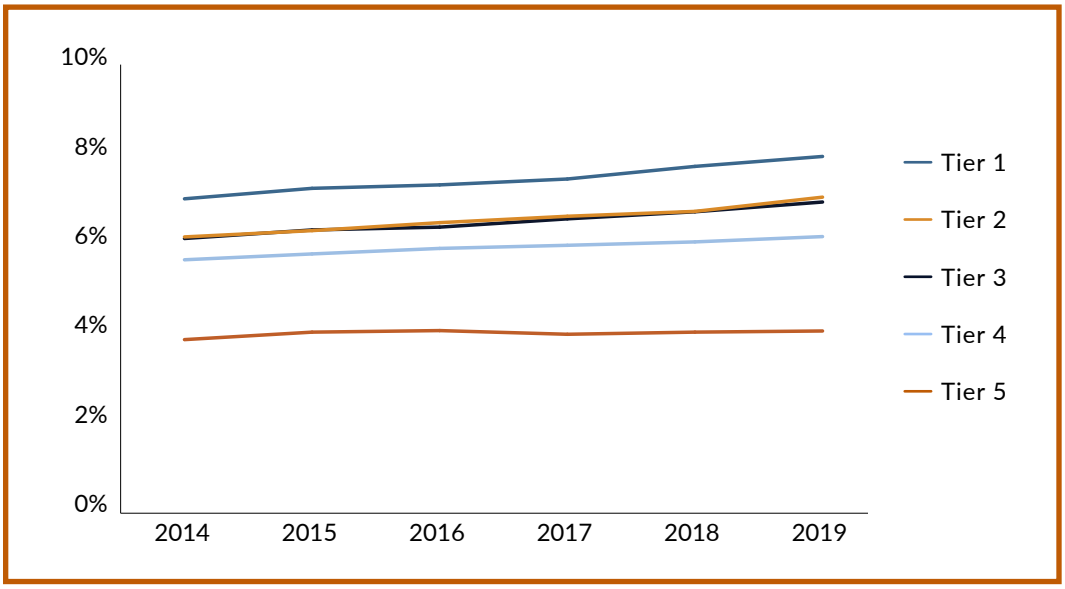
Source: *Milken Institute analysis of American Community Survey 1-Year (2019) and 5-Year (2014-18) Estimates*

In the index of small metros, our analysis drew similar distinctions between each of the tiers, albeit with several key differences. **Tier 1** once again included a number of cities found in the Intermountain West, from Idaho Falls and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, to Logan and St. George, Utah, as well as several dynamic growth centers in the South, such as The Villages, Florida, and Daphne, Alabama. And **Tier 4** and **Tier 5** both included a variety of traditional manufacturing hubs—including Lake Charles, Louisiana; Pittsfield, Massachusetts; Monroe, Michigan; and Williamsport, Pennsylvania—that recorded extremely low or negative rates of short-term job growth over the past year.

When it came to differences from the large cities, **Tier 1** of the small cities was not as clearly dominated by metros with significant levels of high-technology growth and concentration. Instead, most cities in the top tier primarily distinguished themselves through high job and wage growth levels over one- and five-year periods, regardless of their dominant local industries. Another key difference involved housing costs, which did not significantly affect small cities' movement toward higher or lower tiers of the index. Several of the most affordable metros—including Wheeling, Weirton, and Beckley, West Virginia—were found in **Tier 4** and **Tier 5**, while others with much higher numbers of households facing housing cost burdens—such as Bellingham, Washington; Grants Pass, Oregon; and College Station, Texas—ranked near the top of the index in **Tier 1 and Tier 2**.

Figure 6. High-Tech Concentration Similar across Different Tiers of Small Cities

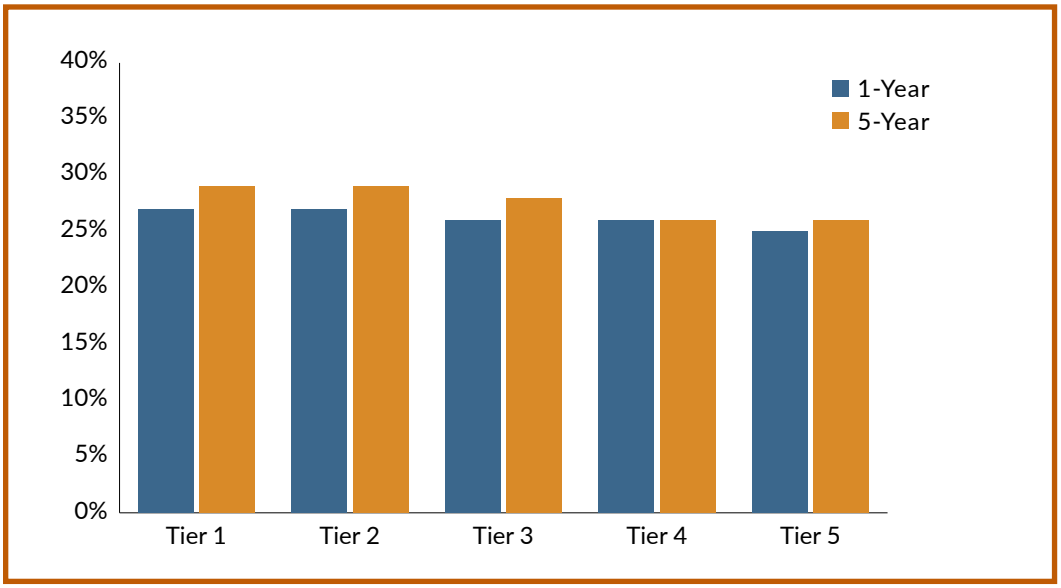
Small Cities: Average High-Tech GDP Share by Tier



Source: *Milken Institute analysis of US Bureau of Economic Analysis (2014-19)*

Figure 7. Small Cities Display Broadly Similar Housing Affordability Levels

Small Cities: Median Share of Housing Cost-Burdened Households



Note: *Housing cost-burdened households spend above 30 percent of their income on housing costs.*

Source: *Milken Institute analysis of American Community Survey 1-Year (2019) and 5-Year (2014-18) Estimates*

NATIONAL ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Since the last edition of the Best-Performing Cities Index was published in February 2020, the US economy has experienced several profound changes. The most important of these changes was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the deepest recession the country has faced since the Great Depression. Though the recession lasted less than a year, economic activity and growth had not reached pre-pandemic levels when this report was published.

Beginning in late 2019, a global outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infections began to spread, causing the disease now known as COVID-19. The World Health Organization declared a global pandemic in March, and by the end of that month, all 50 US states had declared a state of emergency. More than 20 million cases of infection and 350,000 deaths were reported in the United States as of January 2021.[5]

Within weeks of the pandemic declaration, there were signs of an imminent recession in the United States. A record-high 3.3 million unemployment claims were filed in the third week of March.[6] And by the second week of May, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported an official unemployment figure of 14.7 percent and a total unemployment figure (including part-time and underemployed workers) of 22.8 percent.[7]

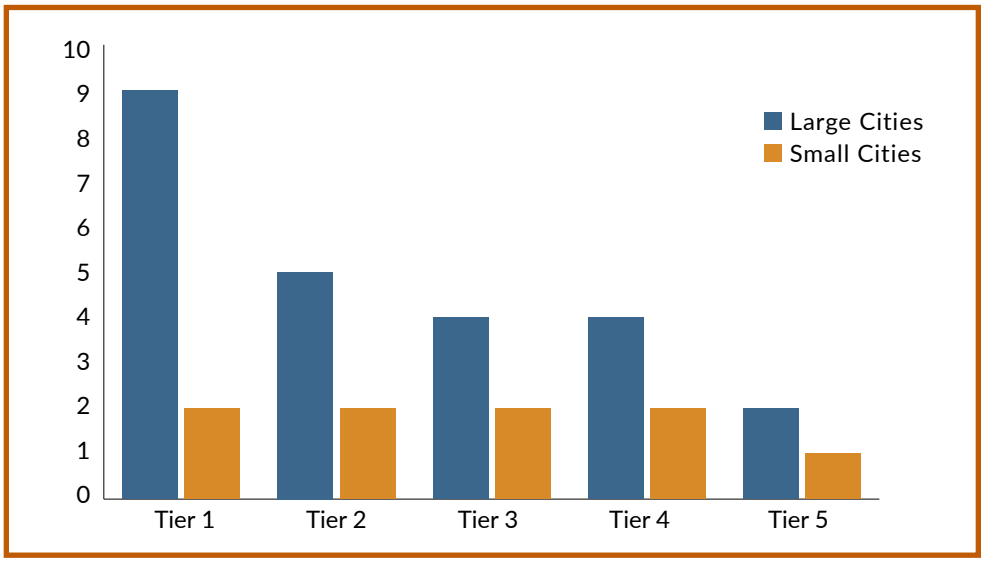
The federal government responded with more than $2.2 trillion in new spending through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The legislation provided direct cash transfers, increased unemployment benefits, forgivable loans for small businesses, aid for large corporations, and additional funding for state and local governments. Meanwhile, state, county, and city governments had limited capacity to provide fiscal stimulus but responded to the pandemic with a variety of public policy measures aimed at controlling the spread of the disease. These included stay-at-home orders, requirements to wear face coverings in public, prohibitions on large gatherings, restrictions on out-of-state travel, and closures of schools, child care facilities, restaurants and bars, and non-essential retail stores. The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CARES Act 2), signed in December 2020, provided additional funds to support individuals and small businesses. However, state and local governments are still likely to face continued financial struggles in the near future.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on cities' economic performance during the past year varied widely because economic shutdowns to contain the spread of the virus were only fully implemented in early pandemic hotspots like New York, Massachusetts, and California, whereas summer and fall hotspots largely maintained normal levels of activity. This variance was most evident in the indicators on short-term job growth, as outlined previously in this section.

However, this should not constitute the only insight from the BPC index regarding the pandemic's economic impact. Cities' capacity for economic recovery also relies on the alignment between opportunities in high-tech industries and more affordable costs of living. Those that host multiple industries driving the pace of technological change are more likely to demonstrate resiliency in the face of unprecedented economic upheaval (Figure 8), while those with greater levels of inclusion are more likely to provide a foundation that attracts additional firms and workers—particularly those prioritizing quality of life. Together, these factors are two crucial components of a foundation for broad-based economic growth.

Figure 8. Tier 1 Cities Dominated by High-Tech Hubs

Median Number of High-Tech Industries with LQ>1 by Tier, 2019



Source: *Milken Institute analysis of US Bureau of Economic Analysis (2019)*

Several recent studies of high-tech industries in the United States have discussed the steady increase in the concentration of high-wage jobs in "superstar" cities such as San Francisco over the past two decades.[8] Although the United States has 3,143 counties and county equivalents, this research showed that as much as one-third of the nation's innovation jobs in 2017 were distributed across just 16 counties (or 0.5 percent of the total number of counties in the United States) and more than half of these jobs were found in just 41 counties.[9]

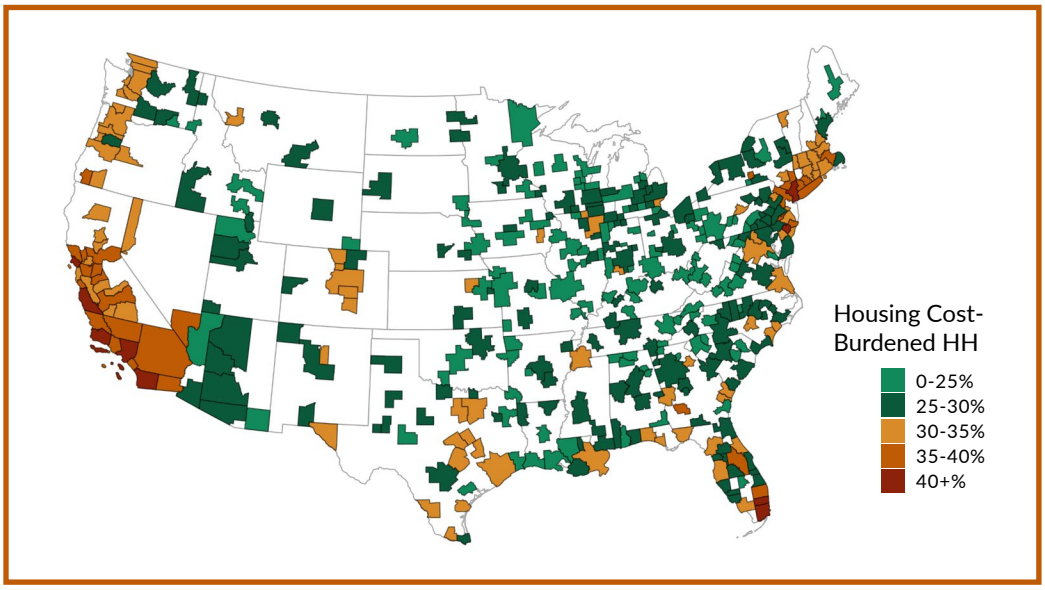
To be sure, the COVID-19 pandemic is unlikely to fully reverse these trends, even as it continues into its second year in the United States. Nonetheless, changes in the condition of the national economy have illustrated the need for a broader set of criteria to evaluate cities' economic performance.

The shift to remote work that took place over the course of 2020 has become permanent in many firms and industries, including some of the highest-profile high-technology firms in the country.[10] Even for companies that do not permanently shift to remote work, hybrid models—whereby workers are only required to report to an office to complete certain tasks or are assigned to staggered schedules with their colleagues—could become increasingly common. As employers shift their calculus, workers will also face different choices with respect to the cities that offer the most attractive combination of opportunity and affordability.[11]

Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in California. San Francisco, last year's top-ranked city, fell to No. 24 in 2021, while San Jose fell to No. 22 from No. 5 in 2020. Prior to the pandemic, living in the Bay Area, Silicon Valley, and other coastal metros (including Los Angeles and San Diego in Southern California) was becoming increasingly cost-prohibitive, as shown in Figure 9. Shifts to remote work during the pandemic have thus led to out-migration from these cities among many higher-wage workers in high-tech industries.[12] Affordability challenges have been even greater for many low-wage workers, particularly as the pandemic chips away at recent wage increases in the service sector.[13] And for many of these workers, they now face greater potential risks due to the state's housing crisis, particularly if housing prices spike in outer suburbs and local communities continue to oppose construction of new housing units.[14]

Figure 9. Coastal Metro Areas Face Higher Housing Costs

Percentage of Households Spending Above 30 Percent of Income on Housing, 2019



Source: *Milken Institute analysis of 1-Year American Community Survey Estimates (2019)*

Slowing economic dynamism due to pandemic stressors—including business closures, reduced incomes, and a public health crisis—caused California's metro areas to drop in the rankings on the 2021 Best-Performing Cities Index. But many cities in the state are also home to skilled workers and high-tech firms, whose presence provides a foundation for recovery from the pandemic. By using BPC's insights into the relationship among investments, policy choices, and economic outcomes, cities can begin to make better choices that will support economic growth as well as making those gains accessible to all their residents.

BIGGEST GAINS

Table 4. Biggest Gains among Large Cities

Metropolitan Statistical Area	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change
Wichita, KS	64	150	86
Harrisburg-Carlisle, PA	54	133	79
Albuquerque, NM	89	161	72
Durham-Chapel Hill, NC	42	102	60
Madison, WI	34	93	59
Lincoln, NE	80	139	59
Columbia, SC	77	128	51
Kennewick-Richland, WA	19	69	50
Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson, IN	56	106	50

Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2021)*

None of the biggest gainers moved into the top tier this year (as shown in Table 4), but the top 10 gains among large metros were still significant. The most notable rise was Wichita, Kansas, gaining 86 places to land at 64th in 2021, after placing 150th in 2020. Madison, Wisconsin, ranked highest among this group, landing at 34th after placing 93rd last year.

Two patterns emerge from this group of cities. First, all top 10 gainers ranked higher than the median on one- and five-year measures of housing affordability and short-term job growth. Second, all these cities are located outside traditional high-technology corridors in the Northeast and on the West Coast. Together, these findings demonstrate the importance of costs of living for making economic gains accessible to all residents, especially given the significant level of recent volatility in the nation's economy.

Table 5. Biggest Gains among Small Cities

Metropolitan Statistical Area	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change
Cleveland, TN	58	186	128
Appleton, WI	47	139	92
Jacksonville, NC	91	183	92
Blacksburg-Christiansburg, VA	43	128	85
Hinesville, GA	46	124	78
Dothan, AL	60	138	78
Jefferson City, MO	67	144	77
Muncie, IN	113	184	71
Decatur, AL	35	105	70

Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2021)*

While none of the largest gainers among small metros reached Tier 1 status, their ascents in the rankings were nonetheless impressive. Cleveland, Tennessee, experienced the largest change of all cities—large or small—rising 186 ranks in our 2020 index. Decatur, Alabama, was the top-ranked among this group, rising to 35th and placing squarely in Tier 2. Geographically, the largest gainers were all located in either the Midwest or South.

Most of these small metros gaining in the ranks experienced a recent economic surge that was reflected in one-year gains in jobs, wages, and high-tech GDP. Additionally, six of the nine biggest gainers had higher housing affordability than the median on both one-year and five-year indicators. It remains to be seen whether these metros can translate their short-term success into sustained, equitable economic growth.

BIGGEST DROPS

Table 6. Biggest Drops among Large Cities

Metropolitan Statistical Area/ Metropolitan Division	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change
Salinas, CA	131	41	-90
Elgin, IL	184	109	-75
Santa Cruz-Watsonville, CA	124	52	-72
Lake County-Kenosha County, IL-WI	154	96	-58
Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA	133	79	-54
Tacoma-Lakewood, WA	118	67	-51
Rockford, IL	194	144	-50
New York-Jersey City-White Plains, NY-NJ	106	57	-49
Tallahassee, FL	123	74	-49
Oakland-Berkeley-Livermore, CA	65	17	-48

Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2021)*

A number of large metros dropped dramatically in the rankings this year. Salinas, California, took the wooden spoon, dropping 90 places from 41st to 131st. Oakland, California, placed in the top tier of large cities in 2020, ranking 17th, but fell 48 places to the second tier to finish 65th. A notable common characteristic of the cities that dropped the most is their proximity to larger "superstar cities." Elgin, Illinois, is roughly 35 miles from Chicago; Tacoma, Washington, is located on the Puget Sound south of Seattle; and Santa Cruz, Salinas, and Oakland are all located in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area. Most of these metros also have low levels of high-tech industry concentration and extremely high housing costs. In Oakland's case, these pressures have displaced many residents and decreased socioeconomic diversity.[15]

In short, these cities are close to larger metropolitan engines of economic growth but without the jobs and salaries in high-tech industries to compensate for high costs of living. As a result, many of them were profoundly affected by the economic shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the exception of Tacoma, they all fell to the bottom 50 percent of the index for short-term job growth.

Table 7. Biggest Drops among Small Cities

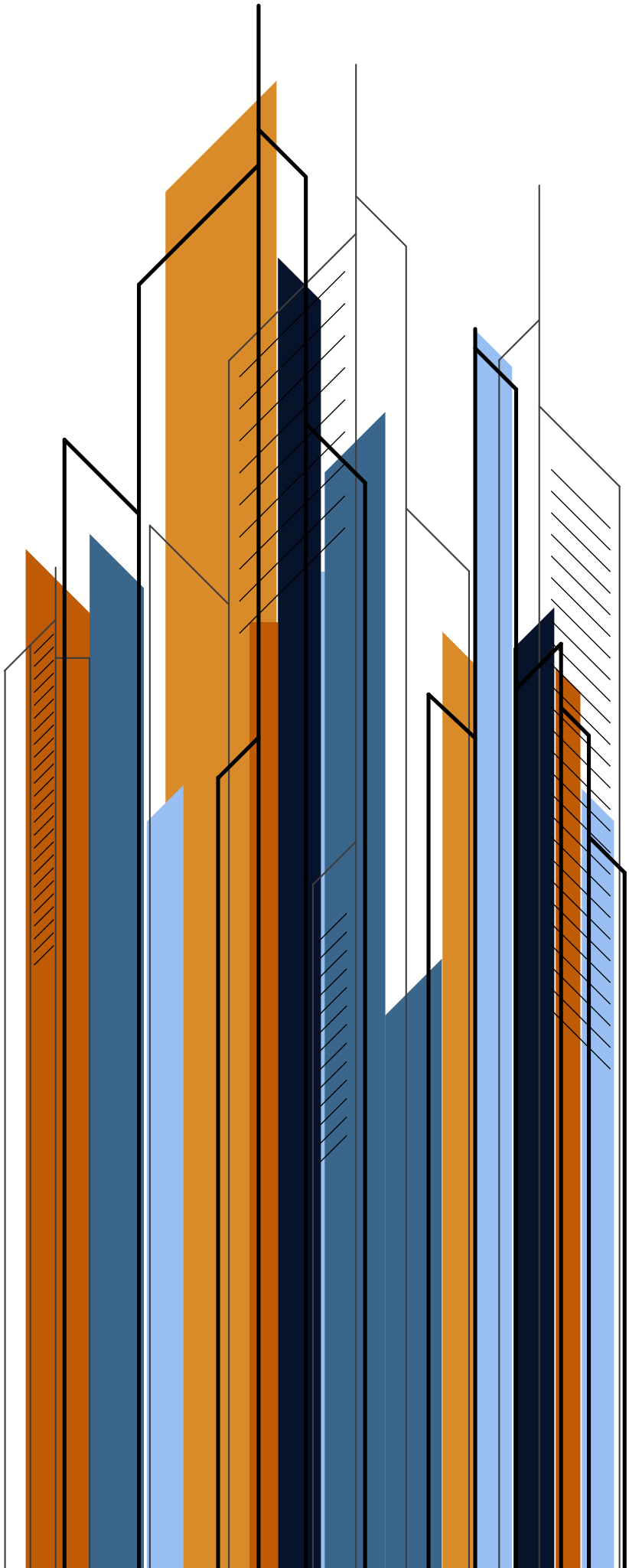
Metropolitan Statistical Area	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change
Lake Charles, LA	166	37	-129
Wheeling, WV-OH	191	70	-121
Midland, MI	153	43	-110
Chico, CA	145	36	-109
Muskegon, MI	192	98	-94
Ithaca, NY	146	56	-90
Kahului-Wailuku-Lahaina, HI	178	88	-90
Odessa, TX	135	47	-88
Elkhart-Goshen, IN	129	45	-84
Flagstaff, AZ	169	87	-82

Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2021)*

In contrast to the biggest gains, the small metros that dropped furthest in the rankings displayed no clear geographic pattern, ranging from the Northeast to the Southwest and from the Midwest to the West Coast. Lake Charles, Louisiana, experienced the largest single drop in the rankings, falling 129 places to 166th. Wheeling, West Virginia, was close behind, falling 121 places and finishing in the bottom 5 percent of the overall index.

Despite their geographic diversity, these 10 metros shared characteristics that made them vulnerable to the economic volatility generated by the pandemic. These included relatively high housing costs, low levels of broadband connectivity, few high-tech industries, and perhaps most importantly, they were all extremely hard-hit in short-term employment figures. For these 10 cities, developing strategies for recovery from the pandemic is of primary importance, as is creating the local infrastructural conditions to sustain growth in the long term.

TIER 1 LARGE CITIES



1

PROVO-OREM

UTAH MSA

Provo-Orem, Utah, which ranked second in 2020, is first in this year's Best-Performing Large Cities because of job, wage, and high-tech GDP growth. Provo also ranked highly in high-tech concentration as well as the number of high-tech industries. Ranking first in both one- and five-year jobs growth, the metro improved significantly on last year, where the city ranked ninth and third, respectively. Provo-Orem also moved up to 11th in short-term jobs growth, compared to 29th in 2020.

The Silicon Slopes has a flourishing tech sector[16] and strong reputation for hosting young startups due to robust support from local educational institutions and an accommodating lifestyle. BYU provides skilled graduates and research and innovation support to the tech sector and is a large and stable employer.

Provo-Orem, as well as its neighboring cities, have benefited from the tech sector's out-migration from the expensive West Coast. It is a relatively new innovation center but comes with unparalleled lifestyle and amenities in the mountain region.[17] With significantly lower costs than Silicon Valley, Provo-Orem has attracted such tech giants as Qualtrics, Vivint, and SmartCitizen.[18]

However, the city scored much lower on broadband access and housing affordability compared to other large cities. Provo is the most expensive city for Utah renters, highlighting the need to build more affordable housing, while its costs remain lower than Coastal Tech Hubs.[19]

Gained 1 rank

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	27.7%	1st
Job growth (2018-19)	3.5%	4th
Wage growth (2014-19)	58.7%	1st
Wage growth (2018-19)	11.5%	1st
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-1.1%	11th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	78.9%	4th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	11.8%	8th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 1.7	12th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	9	19th
Households with broadband access (2019)	88.8%	73rd
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	72.2%	93rd
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	71.8%	61st

Assets

- Provo-Orem has a strong reputation for being accommodating to the tech industry and startups.
- Brigham Young University (BYU) provides research support, high-quality graduates, and stable employment.

Liabilities

- A tight labor market and typically low unemployment rate may make it difficult for tech companies to expand further.
- The area competes with neighboring Salt Lake City and Ogden-Clearfield.

2

PALM BAY

MELBOURNE-TITUSVILLE, FLORIDA MSA

The **Palm Bay, Florida,** MSA continues its ascent up the Best-Performing Cities rankings, propelled to second by strong one-year wage (third) and job growth (eighth). The Space Coast improved on last year's breakout performance, transforming one-year gains into long-term jobs (13th) and wage growth (16th). This continued success is largely due to a diversified, high-tech industrial base, including a significant part of the national aerospace and defense industries.

In 2018, Brevard County, where Palm Bay is located, accounted for over a tenth of total direct defense spending in the Sunshine state.[20] Palm Bay thus boasts 11 industries with location quotients above one (12th), including defense subindustries like semiconductor manufacturing (LQ of 10.6), magnetic and optical media manufacturing (LQ of 6.5), and navigational, measuring, and control instruments manufacturing (LQ of 4.3).

The aerospace and defense industries have also largely stabilized the metro, despite COVID-19 shuttering tourism in the region. In 2018, cruises from the region's port, Cape Canaveral, generated $1.3 billion in tourism expenditures in Central Florida.[21] However, cruise operations have been suspended since mid-March and are not expected to resume until at least 2021. They are unlikely to return to full operations for some time.[22] The port has since reduced its staff by 40 percent, including 68 permanent layoffs, and is anticipating a $36.6 million loss in 2020-21.[23]

Despite this, employment has only fallen 1.5 percent in the short-term (13th), and recovery is a matter of time and combatting the virus. The Space Coast could stand to improve its housing affordability, however. While 70 percent of all households spent less than 30 percent of their income on housing in 2019 (87th overall), rents and median home sales have increased in recent years, highlighting a need to build low-income, affordable housing today.[24]

Additionally, continued investment in attracting and growing an educated workforce would also ensure greater economic opportunity for residents and supply of talent for industry partners. In 2019, only 30.4 percent of the population aged 25 or older had a bachelor's degree, about 3 percentage points less than the national average.[25]

Gained 8 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	17.6%	13th
Job growth (2018-19)	3.2%	8th
Wage growth (2014-19)	37%	16th
Wage growth (2018-19)	8.7%	3rd
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-1.5%	13th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	48.6%	21st
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	6.8%	56th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 1.84	10th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	11	12th
Households with broadband access (2019)	89.9%	49th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	72%	87th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	70%	87th

Assets

- The defense and aerospace industries have stabilized the Space Coast in an unprecedented year.
- A diversified industrial base provides strong wages.

Liabilities

- The pandemic currently hampers service and tourism industries.
- While housing is generally affordable, greater investments may be necessary to ensure affordability across all income levels.

3

AUSTIN

ROUND ROCK-GEORGETOWN, TEXAS MSA

Austin, Texas, maintains last year's third-place rank, demonstrating marked improvement in many of our indicators. It ranked first and second in one-year job and wage growth, respectively, and fourth in five-year job and wage growth. The Central Texas metro also performed well in high-tech GDP growth from 2014-19 (ninth), but it was held back by a drop in one-year high-tech GDP growth, from 17th in 2020 to 46th in 2021.

Among its many advantages, the Lone Star State offers a low tax rate and ample space for expansion and development. Austin boasts a relatively low cost of living despite a thriving tech sector and has marketed itself as friendly and open to business relocations. Dell, Apple Inc., IBM, and Samsung Austin Semiconductor are all major employers,[26] and BAE Systems recently announced a new Austin campus, which plans to bring an additional 800 jobs to the city.[27] The state capital is also home to the University of Texas at Austin, which is a major research university with strong ties to industry. Oracle, the world's second-largest software maker, also recently announced plans to move its headquarters to Austin from Redwood City, highlighting the city's magnetic tech pull.[28]

Despite a tumultuous 2020 globally, the large public sector has helped stabilize the economy. The federal, state, and city governments each employ over 6,000 people, contributing to a 16th place rank in short-term job growth.[29] Housing affordability, however, will continue to be an issue beyond the pandemic, especially with the growth in housing costs in recent years.

Maintained previous rank	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	20.9%	4th
Job growth (2018-19)	3.8%	1st
Wage growth (2014-19)	47.4%	4th
Wage growth (2018-19)	8.8%	2nd
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-1.8%	16th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	59%	9th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	7.4%	46th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 1.94	9th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	10	15th
Households with broadband access (2019)	91.1%	29th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	67.7%	130th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	68.6%	138th

Assets

- Austin offers a low tax rate and ample space for expansion and development.
- Academic and industry R&D are a key tradition of the region, as is the engineering sector.

Liabilities

- Despite being strong in hardware development, the region is comparatively weak in information-content compared to West Coast and Northeast technology clusters.
- Housing is expensive, especially for Texas.

4

SALT LAKE CITY

UTAH MSA

Salt Lake City, Utah, (SCL) joins the upper echelon of the Best-Performing Cities, notching a fourth-place rank overall. The region has experienced consistent employment growth—3 percent growth for one-year (11th) and 15.5 percent for five years (28th)—spanning a range of sectors. Most notably, SLC is home to a regional tech, finance, and professional services hub.

As a result of the thriving tech sector, wage growth has been particularly strong in the region, and high-tech GDP has continued to grow. The region ranks 40th for high-tech GDP concentration and 15th for the number of high-tech industries. This does not preclude concentrations of middle-skill jobs in medical supply and service industry machinery manufacturing, which pay average annual salaries of $58,770[30] and $63,770,[31] respectively.[33]

However, both the recent COVID-19 downturn and trade tensions pose economic challenges to these export-oriented industries, especially considering that nearly 60 percent of the state's pharmaceutical and medical devices are sold outside the state.[32] In fact, Salt Lake City accounted for 67.8 percent of the Beehive state's exports in 2018.

Despite these economic headwinds, SLC is well-positioned for continued economic growth. Salt Lakers enjoy widespread access to broadband (17th) and a generally low cost of housing. From 2014-18, 72.4 percent of Salt Lakers spent less than 30 percent of their income on rent (58th). As with other metros, however, housing affordability could pose a challenge to future growth, especially if job and wage growth remain hot.

Gained 21 ranks

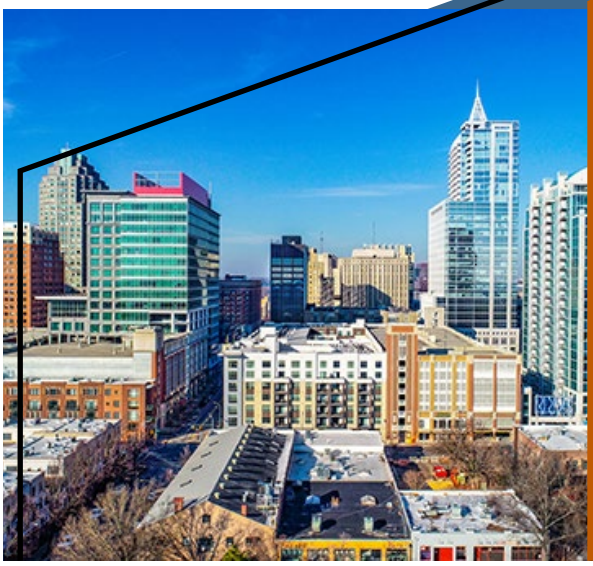
	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	15.5%	28th
Job growth (2018-19)	3%	11th
Wage growth (2014-19)	36%	18th
Wage growth (2018-19)	7.1%	19th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-2.1%	19th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	51.6%	16th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	8.7%	25th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 1.15	40th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	10	15th
Households with broadband access (2019)	92%	17th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	72.4%	58th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	72.9%	79th

Assets

- Salt Lake City has strong employment and wage growth, including middle-income opportunities and varied high-tech industries.
- There is widespread access to broadband internet.

Liabilities

- COVID-19 and trade tensions will slow tradable industries.
- Competition with neighboring cities for talent and investment may pose a challenge.



5

RALEIGH

CARY, NORTH CAROLINA MSA

Raleigh, North Carolina, ranks fifth and rejoins the ranks of the Top 10 Best-Performing Cities, fueled by a dynamic, diversified, and dense high-tech sector (eighth in High-Tech GDP Concentration). Further, the region has experienced significant growth over the last five years in both high-tech output (18th) and overall wages (sixth), resulting in an all-time best performance in five-year wage growth.

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has hit the Research Triangle particularly hard. Since October 2019, employment has fallen 6.1 percent, landing the city in the bottom half of the short-term job growth indicator (100th). Unemployment peaked in May at 11.5 percent, with job losses particularly concentrated in the Hospitality and Educational and Health services sectors. From October 2019 to October 2020, these industries shed 25.4 percent and 13.9 percent of their employment, respectively.[34] These employment challenges come into focus when considering that education and health services are the region's third-largest industry.

Despite these losses, the region is well-poised for recovery. The Raleigh metro boasts three major research universities, which provide a well-educated, young workforce. The metro also has 12 high-tech industries (seventh), including communications equipment manufacturing (LQ of 4.4), pharmaceuticals manufacturing (LQ of 4.8), and software publishers (LQ of 3.4). Moreover, the region is backstopped by generally affordable housing (30th for 2014-18)—especially when compared to tech hubs like San Francisco—and top-tier broadband access (31st).

In recent weeks, the Triangle has experienced a surge of tech hiring, most notably in e-commerce related work.[35] Amazon, for instance, is looking to fill 1,400 jobs in the region, including at its new delivery facility in Cary.[36] The region has also experienced an increase in seasonal customer service jobs, some of which may become permanent, providing a short-term boost to the local economy.[37]

Gained 6 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	16.2%	25th
Job growth (2018-19)	2.6%	20th
Wage growth (2014-19)	45.6%	6th
Wage growth (2018-19)	7.3%	17th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-6.1%	100th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	50.1%	18th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	5.3%	97th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 2.02	8th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	12	7th
Households with broadband access (2019)	91%	31st
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	73.7%	30th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	74.7%	43rd

Assets

- There are highly diversified, dense high-tech sectors with record wage growth.
- Research universities provide a talented, young workforce.

Liabilities

- COVID-19 has hit local employment hard, especially education and health services.

6

BOISE

IDAHO MSA

Boise, Idaho, gained one rank from 2020 to sixth, an improvement driven by high rankings in job and wage growth, both in one- and five-year indicators. The City of Trees is held back, however, by low rankings in high-tech GDP growth and few specializations in high-tech industries (110th).

Health care, food and beverage, and high-tech manufacturing and services form the basis of Boise's diversified economy. The health-care sector is a major pillar of the economy and a large employer—St. Luke's Health Systems and Saint Alphonsus Health System are two of the city's three largest employers. Micron Technology is also a significant employer, as are Albertsons and Walmart.[38]

But despite high employment in the services industries, the high-tech sector is also a key driver of the region's economic growth. The low cost of doing business in the region has attracted tech companies such as Clearwater Analytics, HP, Perspecta, and Micron. Micron is the second largest employer in the metro area, employing almost 6,000 people in the semiconductor industry.[39]

Boise is also recognized as a popular destination for skilled workers from higher-cost West Coast regions. Boise was named the fastest-growing American city in 2018,[40] and the main factors drawing in-migration are affordable housing, short commute times, low cost of living, and access to nature. In fact, Boise scores higher than some of the other Tier 1 cities in broadband access (25th) and housing affordability (52nd in 2014-18; 70th in 2019). This recent popularity has, however, driven up housing costs, somewhat eroding the city's attractiveness. The median house price has risen by more than 80 percent over the last five years.[41]

Gained 1 rank

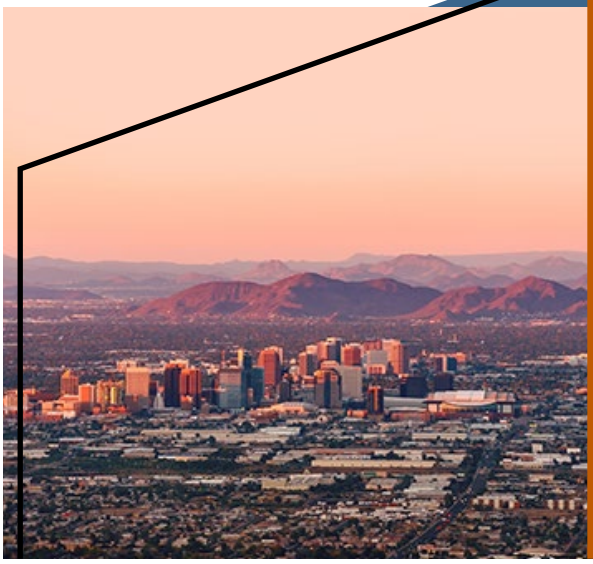
	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	22.1%	3rd
Job growth (2018-19)	3.7%	2nd
Wage growth (2014-19)	40.8%	8th
Wage growth (2018-19)	6.9%	26th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-0.14%	5th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	38.1%	56th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	2.3%	157th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 1.08	44th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	3	110th
Households with broadband access (2019)	91.4%	25th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	72.7%	52nd
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	73.4%	70th

Assets

- Affordability, high quality of life, low commute times, and natural amenities make the city an attractive destination.

Liabilities

- Reliance on service-based sectors means lower salaries compared with those in more diverse economies.
- Rising house prices have eroded some of the affordability advantages.



PHOENIX

MESA-CHANDLER, ARIZONA MSA

Phoenix, Arizona, rises to No. 7 in this year's Best-Performing Cities Index. The metro continues to grow at unprecedented rates, including top-tier one-year job (sixth) and wage growth (15th). Phoenix also improved five ranks in high-tech GDP concentration (47th), while its seven high-tech industries land it at 37th, highlighting a deepening high-tech economy.

As of 2019, the Valley of the Sun's strongest high-tech industries revolve around medical laboratories (LQ of 2.1) and various forms of high-tech manufacturing, including semiconductor (LQ of 4.0), aerospace (LQ of 2.5), and audio and video product manufacturing (LQ of 2.0). However, a deeper investment in nascent subsectors with an LQ close to one, such as communication equipment manufacturing (LQ of 0.94) and computer systems design (LQ of 0.92), would further strengthen the region's high-tech foothold and provide opportunities to improve in the index.

The region's generally low cost of living has attracted significant in-migration from Western states in recent years,[42] fueling consumption and housing construction. As of September 2020, total housing permits in the Phoenix MSA were up 29.9 percent year-over-year, despite weak construction activity during the pandemic.[43] And while short-term job growth is down 2.5 percent since October 2019 (24th), the region's job loss and jobless rates remain lower than the US average.[44]

Despite Phoenix's relative housing affordability, it ranks middle-of-the-pack compared to other large cities, ranking 103rd from 2014-18 and 98th in 2019. More generally, the Grand Canyon State's cost of living is only 3.6 percent below the national average.[45] In 2019, Phoenix rents grew as much as 7 percent year-over-year, while home values in the city rose 5.8 percent.[46] Proactive investment in affordable housing stock can help prevent Phoenix from becoming a victim of its own success.

Gained 5 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	17.6%	14th
Job growth (2018-19)	3.3%	6th
Wage growth (2014-19)	34.2%	27th
Wage growth (2018-19)	7.3%	15th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-2.5%	24th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	37.1%	61st
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	6.9%	54th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 1.04	47th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	7	37th
Households with broadband access (2019)	89%	67th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	69.2%	103rd
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	71.4%	98th

Assets

- Strong population and employment growth have fueled economic prosperity.
- The region continues to diversify its high-tech industrial base.

Liabilities

- Rent and housing price growth threaten its competitive advantage as a cost-effective, livable city.

8

NASHVILLE

DAVIDSON-MURFREESBORO-FRANKLIN, TENNESSEE MSA

Nashville, Tennessee, improves six ranks to place eighth in the 2021 Best-Performing Large Cities Index. Notable improvements included five-year job growth (from 14th to ninth), one-year job growth (from 17th to seventh), five-year wage growth (from 21st to 14th), and one-year high-tech GDP growth (from 24th to ninth).

Nashville's emerging tech sector provides high paying jobs to the region, and businesses are attracted by a business-friendly environment, low cost of living and of doing business, and a quality talent pool, as well as a high quality of life and natural amenities. Despite being primarily famous as the home of country music, Nashville is emerging as a hot spot for the tech sector and entrepreneurial expansion. In 2021, for instance, Amazon's Operations Center of Excellence in downtown Nashville will bring an additional 5,000 jobs to the region.[47]

The Music City is also a hub for the health and health-technology industries, with more than 500 health-care companies in the region.[48] The single largest employer is the University of Vanderbilt's Medical Center.[49] Other universities, including Belmont University and Middle Tennessee State University, provide the region with an educated workforce. The city has a higher than average level of education, with over 40 percent of the adult population possessing a college degree or higher, compared with around 31 percent average nationwide.[50]

The city was held back, however, by its high-tech GDP concentration (106th), which offers room for improvement in future years. And despite low rankings in housing affordability, the city does score better than several other Tier 1 cities on these indicators.

Gained 6 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	19.1%	9th
Job growth (2018-19)	3.3%	7th
Wage growth (2014-19)	38.1%	14th
Wage growth (2018-19)	6.6%	29th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-5.0%	78th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	55.4%	11th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	11.5%	9th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.65	106th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	6	48th
Households with broadband access (2019)	89.6%	56th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	72%	65th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	73.3%	72nd

Assets

- The area has a comparatively low cost of living and doing business.
- The abundance of cultural and natural amenities provide a high quality of life.

Liabilities

- There is below-average concentration of advanced industries.

9

OGDEN

CLEARFIELD, UTAH MSA

Ogden, Utah, made a big leap from 22nd place last year to reach ninth overall, driven primarily by improvements in job and wage growth indicators. Notably, Ogden-Clearfield moved up to second place in short-term job growth, one of only a handful of large cities (and the only Tier 1 city) to achieve positive job growth over the last 12 months.

Hill Air Force Base is an economic stabilizer, providing over 25,000 jobs with a payroll of almost $1.5 billion, and it pumps hundreds of millions more into the economy in construction and service contracts.[51] The defense technology industry is a key driver in Ogden-Clearfield's economy, as the Air Force supports innovation in the field.

Educated workers in the metro come from Weber State University, Utah State University, BYU, and the University of Utah in neighboring cities. Weber State University, located in Ogden, recently received a $50 million grant to expand the region's high-tech sector to sustain growth. As of 2020, there are almost 6,000 tech-sector jobs in Ogden, with an average annual salary of $64,403.[52]

The construction industry is also a significant part of Ogden's economy, which should continue to be the case as the downtown area is redeveloped. The "Make Ogden" Downtown Master Plan outlines how the city plans to add 5,000 new housing units and 7,000 new jobs over the next 25 years.[53] Exceptional scores in broadband access (second) and housing affordability (third over the five-year measure) also make Ogden-Clearfield an attractive prospect for future growth.

However, Ogden-Clearfield is held back in the rankings by its performance in the high-tech indicators, especially one-year high-tech GDP growth (115th) and number of high-tech industries (110th). Ogden-Clearfield is a close neighbor of two other Tier-1 cities: Salt Lake City and Provo-Orem. Like its two neighbors, Ogden-Clearfield has significant cost advantages over the West Coast tech hubs. However, the city also faces the disadvantage of having to compete with these two cities for investment and talent.

Gained 13 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	16.6%	20th
Job growth (2018-19)	2.7%	15th
Wage growth (2014-19)	34.3%	26th
Wage growth (2018-19)	5.9%	52nd
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	0.7%	2nd
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	32.6%	73rd
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	4.5%	115th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.66	102nd
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	3	110th
Households with broadband access (2019)	93.9%	2nd
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	77.3%	3rd
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	77.2%	16th

Assets

- The cost of doing business is comparatively low.
- Federal government agencies provide economic stability and employment.

Liabilities

- Competition with neighboring cities (namely Salt Lake City and Provo-Orem) for skilled workers contributes to a tight labor market.

10

HUNTSVILLE

ALABAMA MSA

Huntsville, Alabama, makes its debut in this year's top tier of Best-Performing Cities, showcasing top-tier one-year job (21st) and wage growth (10th). The regional economy includes nine total high-tech specializations (19th) and the seventh most concentrated high-tech sector among large cities. This includes deep specializations in magnetic and optical media manufacturing (LQ of 17.5), aerospace manufacturing (LQ of 7.3), architectural and engineering services (LQ of 6.4), and scientific R&D services (LQ of 4.2).

Employment in the Rocket City is particularly concentrated in two employers: the US Army's Red Stone Arsenal post (38,000 employees) and NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center (6,000 employees).[54] While these federal employers have stabilized the metro in a turbulent year, growing private-sector employment would generate more dynamic employment and high-tech GDP growth. Adjacent industries like semiconductor manufacturing (LQ of 0.98) and commercial machinery manufacturing (LQ of 0.75) hold promise for growing and attracting private-sector employment.

Huntsville has succeeded in providing a solid infrastructural foundation for growth, ranking in the Top 10 for one-year (eighth) and five-year (sixth) housing affordability indicators and 40th in broadband access. Combined with access to a highly educated workforce—two-fifths of the population 25 and older has at least a bachelor's degree[55]—and four major universities, it is no surprise that new projects and expansions in 2020 will generate 852 new jobs and over $1 billion in new capital investments.[56]

Gained 39 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	12.5%	54th
Job growth (2018-19)	2.5%	21st
Wage growth (2014-19)	28.3%	63rd
Wage growth (2018-19)	7.6%	10th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-2.4%	23rd
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	20%	125th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	4.4%	118th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 2.1	7th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	9	19th
Households with broadband access (2019)	90.2%	40th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	76.6%	6th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	78.1%	8th

Assets

- The area boasts deep specializations in nine high-tech subindustries.
- Top-tier housing affordability, broadband access, and an educated workforce provide a solid foundation for employers.

Liabilities

- Private-sector employment is a smaller share of the regional economy, which poses challenges for economic dynamism.

11

DENVER

AURORA-LAKEWOOD, COLORADO MSA

Denver, Colorado, climbed seven places in this year's rankings to 11th. The metro ranked similarly to 2020 in most indicators, with the exception of one-year wage growth (which improved from 20th to seventh) and one-year high-tech GDP growth (22nd). High one-year wage growth also helped the Mile-High City achieve this ranking, despite middling rankings in many of our other indicators.

Looking at newly included indicators, Denver scores very well for broadband access, with over 92 percent of households having access (11th), but scores poorly for housing affordability. Traditionally, Denver had a cost advantage over the coastal tech clusters, but the increasing cost of living—especially housing—may be eroding this advantage.[57] Vacancy rates have typically been very low in the city, but the effects of the pandemic have caused vacancy rates to increase drastically.[58] While in the short term this may improve affordability, it is too early to determine what overall impact this will have on Denver's housing market.

The high level of talent in the city also makes it an attractive destination for technology companies: More than 50 percent of the city's population over 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher.[59] And in 2018, 120 tech companies formed in Denver, while Amazon and Lockheed Martin have plans to increase its number of employees. In 2020, a number of new tech companies announced plans to commence operations in the Denver area, including Wix, Todyl, and DAT solutions.[60] However, the unemployment rate in the region remains low while the population continues to grow, highlighting the increased pressures on the labor and housing markets, and the possibility of losing the region's affordability advantage in coming years.

Gained 7 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	14.1%	38th
Job growth (2018-19)	2.2%	41st
Wage growth (2014-19)	34.1%	28th
Wage growth (2018-19)	7.9%	7th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-3.2%	40th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	35.1%	66th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	9%	22nd
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 1.24	32nd
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	9	19th
Households with broadband access (2019)	92.5%	11th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	68.2%	120th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	68.5%	141st

Assets

- The area has a highly educated workforce.
- High quality of life and natural amenities makes it an attractive destination for skilled workers.

Liabilities

- The increasing cost of living may erode the city's affordability advantage.

12

FORT COLLINS

COLORADO MSA

Fort Collins, Colorado, rises to No. 12 in this year's rankings on the wings of the high-tech sector and wage growth. The metro experienced impressive high-tech GDP growth of 11.5 percent from 2018-19 (10th), while wages and employment grew 37.8 percent (15th) and 16.7 percent (19th), respectively, over the last five years. Fort Collins also enjoys well-established employer-education linkages that have sustained the regional economy through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Colorado State University, for example, is one of the largest employers in the region, offering high-tech employers a talented workforce and access to research facilities. As such, Fort Collins boasts nine high-tech industries (19th), including computer equipment (LQ of 6.2) and semiconductor manufacturing (LQ of 1.7), and the presence of high-tech firms like Hewlett-Packard and Intel.[61] The region's high-tech industry cluster (LQ of 1.3; 25th) provides high-value, high-skill jobs in a comparatively lower-cost city.

The Choice City performed poorly in measures of housing affordability, ranking 164th and 138th in our one- and five-year measures, respectively. A number of factors affect affordability in the region: home prices rising faster than wages,[62] lower housing permitting in recent years,[63] and "U+2," a local law that limits the number of unrelated persons who can cohabit legally.[64] These challenges indicate a need to build more housing—especially subsidized affordable housing—and to better understand how current policies are adversely affecting the region's economic vitality.

Gained 9 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	16.7%	19th
Job growth (2018-19)	2.5%	23rd
Wage growth (2014-19)	37.8%	15th
Wage growth (2018-19)	7.1%	20th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-5.8%	93rd
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	37.2%	60th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	11.5%	10th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 1.3	25th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	9	19th
Households with broadband access (2019)	91.2%	18th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	67.2%	138th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	66.5%	164th

Assets

- There's a strong link between Colorado University and the regional high-tech cluster.
- Fort Collins has widespread and top-tier broadband access.

Liabilities

- Housing costs remain high, with little supply elasticity.

13

SEATTLE

BELLEVUE-KENT, WASHINGTON MD

The **Seattle, Washington,** metropolitan district rounds out our Tier 1 Best-Performing Large Cities at No. 13. The Emerald City performs in the top five for a number of indicators: one- and five-year wage growth (fourth and fifth respectively), high-tech GDP concentration (third), and household broadband access (third). Of course, the region's excellent performance is no surprise, given the sheer number of high-value, high-tech employers, including Amazon, Boeing, and Microsoft.[65]

Although the region boasts seven high-tech industries (37th), its expertise is deepest in aerospace manufacturing (LQ of 12.5) and software publishing (LQ of 11.5), two sectors with diverging trajectories during the current pandemic. On the one hand, the aviation industry is in a particularly vulnerable position, given low flight demand and the recent grounding of Boeing's 737 Max Fleet. As a result, Boeing has announced plans to cut more than 15 percent of its commercial jet workforce,[66] and short-term job growth in the metro was a dismal -7.1 percent (138th).

On the other hand, cloud computing and storage firms such as Amazon, Microsoft, and Google have become even more important with the sheer number of employees now working remotely. In the third quarter of 2020, for instance, Microsoft posted a 30 percent increase in net income on the back of its Azure cloud platform.[67] Seattle is thus well-positioned for recovery, despite short-term economic pain.

It is clear, however, that the Seattle metro will need to continue investing in housing supply and affordability. Metro Seattle performed in the bottom quarter of our five-year housing affordability measure (152nd), and rent growth in the past decade surpassed San Francisco's.[68] Moreover, housing price growth in September 2020 outpaced all cities except Phoenix in September 2020.[69] Preserving affordable units and increasing production of low- and middle-income affordable units could help alleviate housing cost pressures.

Dropped 5 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	14.3%	37th
Job growth (2018-19)	2.4%	30th
Wage growth (2014-19)	46.9%	5th
Wage growth (2018-19)	8.5%	4th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-7.1%	138th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	46.4%	27th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	10.6%	12th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	2.95	3rd
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	7	37th
Households with broadband access (2019)	93.5%	3rd
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	67.5%	152nd
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	67%	141st

Assets

- Deep technical expertise in cloud computing, which is thriving during the current coronavirus pandemic, positions the city for a strong recovery.
- The city has top-tier wage growth, high-tech GDP concentrations, and household broadband access.

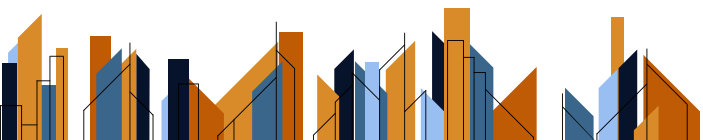
Liabilities

- The aerospace industry is particularly vulnerable due to reduced flight demand and the grounding of Boeing's 737 Max Fleet.

COMPLETE RESULTS: 2021 BEST-PERFORMING LARGE CITIES*

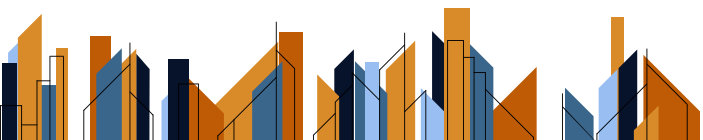
TIER 1 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Provo, UT	1	2	1	4	1	1	1	11	8	4	12	19	73	93	61
Palm Bay, FL	2	10	8	8	13	3	16	13	56	21	10	12	49	87	87
Austin, TX	3	3	0	1	4	2	4	16	46	9	9	15	29	138	130
Salt Lake City, UT	4	25	21	11	28	19	18	19	25	16	40	15	17	79	58
Raleigh, NC	5	11	6	20	25	17	6	109	97	18	8	7	31	43	30
Boise, ID	6	7	1	2	3	26	8	5	157	56	44	110	25	70	52
Phoenix, AZ	7	12	5	6	14	15	27	24	54	61	47	37	67	98	103
Nashville, TN	8	14	6	7	9	29	14	78	9	11	106	48	56	72	65
Ogden, UT	9	22	13	15	20	52	26	2	115	73	102	110	2	16	3
Huntsville, AL	10	49	39	21	54	10	63	23	118	125	7	19	40	8	6
Denver, CO	11	18	7	41	38	7	28	40	22	66	32	19	11	141	120
Fort Collins, CO	12	21	9	23	19	20	15	93	10	60	25	19	18	164	138
Seattle, WA Metro Division	13	8	-5	30	37	4	5	138	12	27	3	37	3	152	141

TIER 2 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Dallas, TX Metro Division	14	9	-5	13	18	41	34	20	171	23	23	25	68	146	112
Fayetteville, AR	15	37	22	47	15	16	21	7	78	49	179	168	111	21	8
Bremerton, WA	16	40	24	39	71	42	45	12	1	3	87	110	1	140	111
Colorado Springs, CO	17	36	19	43	36	11	62	29	57	131	27	25	9	155	135
Reno, NV	18	4	-14	45	2	38	7	106	39	5	104	86	47	122	139
Kennewick, WA	19	69	50	18	32	69	49	8	116	152	66	110	75	44	24
Naples, FL	20	58	38	12	7	18	19	25	32	97	160	168	74	129	144
Atlanta, GA	21	29	8	36	42	85	53	39	87	32	29	48	54	104	110
San Jose, CA	22	5	-17	59	41	72	2	105	72	7	1	5	4	165	165
Cape Coral, FL	23	23	0	28	5	28	9	32	66	81	177	168	50	106	133
San Francisco, CA Metro Division	24	1	-23	3	10	135	3	179	6	2	2	15	26	142	159
Lakeland, FL	25	39	14	10	21	8	31	31	68	24	182	168	187	108	84
Charlotte, NC-SC	26	16	-10	22	26	75	25	100	176	48	82	48	60	54	59
Orlando, FL	27	5	-22	16	6	35	11	177	30	20	71	25	51	171	168
Crestview, FL	28	61	33	40	47	12	51	64	24	76	79	110	96	125	92
Charleston, SC	29	13	-16	32	22	27	22	103	83	17	60	64	184	84	128
Olympia, WA	30	19	-11	95	31	13	12	71	3	1	107	136	72	137	136
Port St. Lucie, FL	31	35	4	17	12	76	37	14	40	90	153	110	77	105	153
Tampa, FL	32	48	16	24	33	89	54	63	29	52	67	37	69	145	143
Ocala, FL	33	80	47	44	59	44	67	1	153	86	138	86	97	57	35
Madison, WI	34	93	59	105	115	43	58	85	13	10	28	48	36	73	82
Fort Worth, TX Metro Division	35	56	21	19	63	24	68	38	113	136	74	136	37	121	81
Riverside, CA	36	25	-11	31	8	9	13	140	26	57	114	110	58	187	191
Wilmington, NC	37	45	8	9	34	45	33	149	75	29	38	64	79	159	162
Portland, OR-WA	38	24	-14	58	43	63	29	137	64	42	17	25	35	154	151
Jacksonville, FL	39	33	-6	38	24	109	59	61	74	54	101	110	59	101	115
Spartanburg, SC	40	15	-25	26	11	22	35	115	186	50	189	168	165	10	16
Tucson, AZ	41	77	36	50	124	55	109	47	47	15	33	15	87	115	124
Durham, NC	42	102	60	52	72	40	92	87	88	169	6	7	76	85	90
Greeley, CO	43	20	-23	5	30	101	43	125	23	28	187	136	48	116	78
Boulder, CO	44	28	-16	48	50	100	73	111	19	116	4	6	8	166	149



TIER 2 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Greenville, SC	45	42	-3	101	68	108	81	22	190	14	69	48	130	12	23
North Port, FL	46	62	16	71	23	138	38	49	62	62	122	86	88	92	116
Sacramento, CA	47	50	3	49	35	32	48	128	52	122	73	64	24	175	174
San Antonio, TX	48	30	-18	56	48	54	50	57	189	108	88	64	125	114	85
San Diego, CA	49	38	-11	85	62	48	66	130	69	33	13	3	10	196	196

TIER 3 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Myrtle Beach, SC-NC	50	31	-19	46	29	58	36	153	117	55	173	168	44	69	97
San Luis Obispo, CA	51	54	3	68	70	14	32	197	31	51	77	48	20	191	186
Savannah, GA	52	66	14	94	53	119	64	34	4	70	50	110	174	118	134
Salem, OR	53	27	-26	72	40	47	20	158	49	6	156	136	70	156	147
Harrisburg, PA	54	133	79	76	108	84	121	50	41	147	81	64	134	32	36
Pensacola, FL	55	103	48	27	39	115	83	60	60	168	152	136	115	86	75
Indianapolis, IN	56	106	50	86	80	144	86	21	94	195	43	48	122	52	51
Gainesville, FL	57	72	15	67	51	116	71	55	5	46	146	86	149	148	148
Cambridge, MA Metro Division	58	83	25	106	117	25	55	163	82	100	5	1	32	150	150
Santa Rosa, CA	59	34	-25	155	79	30	17	175	58	39	53	19	7	185	185
Fresno, CA	60	32	-28	33	27	34	42	117	48	72	172	110	183	188	184
Anaheim, CA Metro Division	61	46	-15	98	64	65	57	160	126	43	18	3	6	189	192
Chattanooga, TN-GA	62	85	23	64	61	104	84	9	181	89	178	168	133	50	29
Fort Lauderdale, FL Metro Division	63	43	-20	100	67	56	47	144	42	22	75	25	89	197	197
Wichita, KS	64	150	86	55	155	36	165	62	147	45	11	136	121	48	25
Oakland, CA Metro Division	65	17	-48	152	65	61	24	193	102	12	14	1	13	177	173
Lancaster, PA	66	97	31	114	90	88	77	18	51	64	118	136	172	90	79
Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN	67	105	38	134	118	59	95	56	100	105	99	110	82	24	42
Ann Arbor, MI	68	81	13	54	86	197	105	83	63	79	39	37	15	99	104



TIER 3 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Deltona, FL	69	65	-4	131	49	74	46	17	137	121	110	48	162	139	145
Montgomery County, PA Metro Division	70	114	44	99	119	102	128	132	17	106	15	25	16	75	86
Trenton, NJ	71	94	23	75	73	5	99	110	132	126	35	48	118	169	167
Vallejo, CA	72	86	14	102	55	6	23	181	159	146	36	86	12	170	176
Asheville, NC	73	55	-18	62	52	67	44	192	127	101	105	37	171	77	69
Stockton, CA	74	76	2	37	17	23	10	143	89	134	186	193	101	184	182
Santa Maria, CA	75	71	-4	51	125	37	87	148	120	68	19	7	28	195	193
Rockingham County, NH Metro Division	76	51	-25	108	94	60	82	186	107	34	41	12	33	147	96
Columbia, SC	77	128	51	111	104	99	126	51	7	19	131	110	136	83	72
Springfield, MO	78	75	-3	83	111	80	96	27	99	84	92	136	196	81	60
Washington, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Division	79	104	25	88	91	132	103	88	85	115	24	64	14	119	119
Lincoln, NE	80	139	59	150	144	125	106	4	92	112	85	64	41	56	41
Merced, CA	81	60	-21	34	44	39	41	176	18	141	200	193	38	132	171
Fort Wayne, IN	82	111	29	93	102	161	104	26	166	163	111	86	55	3	4
Columbus, OH	83	100	17	110	82	106	88	116	70	124	103	110	39	55	64
Philadelphia, PA Metro Division	84	78	-6	61	96	66	90	114	2	30	62	136	140	180	170
West Palm Beach, FL Metro Division	85	47	-38	82	45	50	56	119	143	63	100	110	98	182	180
Kalamazoo, MI	86	101	15	151	106	78	70	121	161	91	59	64	81	27	44
Spokane, WA	87	68	-19	53	69	142	79	167	43	67	94	64	64	107	121
Las Vegas, NV	88	44	-44	14	16	64	40	196	71	75	163	136	148	172	164
Albuquerque, NM	89	161	72	96	135	31	114	33	108	182	48	48	177	97	122
Allentown, PA-NJ	90	115	25	73	100	82	125	99	16	118	55	86	129	113	129
Knoxville, TN	91	99	8	89	107	191	116	15	124	71	95	64	175	26	20
Grand Rapids, MI	92	73	-19	158	75	93	61	141	123	69	128	110	94	18	14
Los Angeles, CA Metro Division	93	53	-40	107	88	62	60	157	76	77	20	7	90	199	199
Portland, ME	94	87	-7	97	98	70	74	172	129	44	98	48	85	91	99
Kansas City, MO-KS	95	95	0	125	112	127	112	53	156	180	56	37	83	37	34
Evansville, IN-KY	96	142	46	163	158	46	124	10	11	200	109	168	113	11	37
Miami, FL Metro Division	97	59	-38	87	66	33	52	108	44	59	150	136	191	200	200

TIER 3 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Salisbury, MD-DE	98	88	-10	81	78	91	80	91	119	127	136	110	132	102	107
Manchester, NH	99	84	-15	116	116	103	117	151	110	37	16	19	27	144	123
Worcester, MA-CT	100	107	7	129	131	95	119	123	79	38	31	12	78	130	126
Visalia, CA	101	89	-12	65	56	49	39	127	21	93	190	193	179	162	187
Omaha, NE-IA	102	127	25	120	152	90	101	44	167	113	130	136	71	36	40
McAllen, TX	103	63	-40	29	60	96	108	101	199	8	183	110	198	120	105
Minneapolis, MN-WI	104	98	-6	145	113	141	98	112	142	132	51	48	43	39	39
Boston, MA Metro Division	105	64	-41	103	83	143	65	190	27	25	54	48	53	173	169
New York, NY-NJ Metro Division	106	57	-49	63	76	92	89	194	34	41	58	48	119	194	198
Modesto, CA	107	70	-37	113	57	57	30	150	50	53	176	168	103	181	179
Tulsa, OK	108	151	43	104	148	83	177	95	101	26	116	86	117	46	28
Frederick, MD Metro Division	109	155	46	119	151	147	130	58	136	107	21	25	5	124	117
Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN	110	132	22	160	103	94	85	82	73	104	155	168	142	31	26
El Paso, TX	111	141	30	57	77	68	113	73	191	161	137	86	151	134	131
Houston, TX	112	117	5	42	110	53	171	75	151	148	140	136	65	127	101
Baltimore, MD	113	124	11	139	127	124	120	94	77	85	46	37	91	112	113
Oklahoma City, OK	114	116	2	84	128	133	170	46	130	47	168	136	99	38	38
Hickory, NC	115	112	-3	133	114	170	76	164	131	35	83	48	168	1	7
Killeen, TX	116	143	27	91	89	51	131	37	106	196	174	193	105	149	80
Richmond, VA	117	120	3	109	92	77	94	65	141	154	143	136	147	110	100
Tacoma, WA Metro Division	118	67	-51	66	46	145	75	74	170	166	149	168	23	163	156
Eugene, OR	119	108	-11	124	74	118	78	36	177	164	120	86	63	167	177

TIER 4 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Reading, PA	120	145	25	90	143	164	140	6	86	149	125	86	155	41	109
York, PA	121	135	14	149	140	169	118	72	35	92	89	86	112	58	73
Winston-Salem, NC	122	82	-40	80	109	111	132	104	152	135	135	64	156	76	54
Tallahassee, FL	123	74	-49	77	87	117	97	142	37	142	97	86	137	160	146
Santa Cruz, CA	124	52	-72	74	81	134	72	199	93	110	64	64	45	186	195
Dayton, OH	125	158	33	161	142	152	141	89	103	128	65	25	106	35	50
Augusta, GA-SC	126	92	-34	128	95	113	93	86	192	103	133	136	160	66	71
Pittsburgh, PA	127	134	7	132	168	131	150	146	28	78	57	110	126	17	19
St. Louis, MO-IL	128	113	-15	142	141	137	133	84	111	173	76	86	93	30	49
Waco, TX	129	90	-39	69	84	194	91	3	155	162	78	168	170	157	125
South Bend, IN-MI	130	129	-1	137	121	79	100	170	168	95	115	64	193	45	10
Salinas, CA	131	41	-90	78	58	86	69	188	14	109	184	193	66	198	194
Birmingham, AL	132	136	4	92	133	130	127	41	162	151	148	168	150	63	43
Des Moines, IA	133	79	-54	123	93	193	111	102	139	80	147	168	116	20	18
Clarksville, TN-KY	134	110	-24	60	99	180	188	28	114	13	197	193	141	74	94
Albany, NY	135	119	-16	176	145	123	123	174	134	40	30	25	102	62	74
Lubbock, TX	136	131	-5	79	97	122	102	43	200	192	126	136	163	117	137
Warren, MI Metro Division	137	91	-46	177	101	195	110	159	154	117	63	64	34	40	31
Oxnard, CA	138	126	-12	117	129	136	167	154	55	65	26	7	57	190	190
Green Bay, WI	139	122	-17	186	139	151	107	113	112	83	165	136	104	15	13
Virginia Beach, VA-NC	140	173	33	156	146	87	148	30	109	153	129	110	86	153	160
Cedar Rapids, IA	141	164	23	146	174	181	160	96	197	155	45	37	84	2	1
Bakersfield, CA	142	138	-4	25	123	21	159	168	61	184	181	136	169	192	172
Syracuse, NY	143	123	-20	143	171	140	139	195	145	36	49	37	158	59	46
Camden, NJ Metro Division	144	140	-4	140	105	159	129	126	169	120	86	64	52	143	161
Roanoke, VA	145	180	35	141	182	81	180	59	174	181	139	86	176	29	45
Lexington, KY	146	137	-9	138	138	174	151	98	122	194	113	64	92	78	63
Greensboro, NC	147	162	15	118	150	128	155	145	144	139	68	25	181	96	83
Fort Smith, AR-OK	148	197	49	193	187	126	185	42	15	74	196	136	197	23	21
Laredo, TX	149	149	0	35	85	120	152	120	196	31	199	193	192	136	163
Little Rock, AR	150	177	27	136	137	178	175	69	133	191	123	64	138	42	56

TIER 4 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Montgomery, AL	151	174	23	181	167	97	168	66	180	133	84	86	164	60	76
Chicago, IL Metro Division	152	118	-34	147	134	150	115	139	96	96	90	86	100	151	157
Newark, NJ-PA Metro Division	153	125	-28	126	147	112	136	184	105	145	42	25	80	183	181
Lake County, IL-WI Metro Division	154	96	-58	174	132	183	137	129	164	176	22	86	21	88	108
Flint, MI	155	147	-8	172	179	110	154	67	178	111	80	110	173	67	95
Providence, RI-MA	156	130	-26	144	149	121	153	133	67	130	93	64	114	158	154
Baton Rouge, LA	157	165	8	183	157	139	147	52	128	188	180	136	139	33	32
Buffalo, NY	158	146	-12	175	172	146	138	135	160	82	96	86	123	68	67
Brownsville, TX	159	194	35	70	130	71	142	107	194	187	194	193	200	111	102
Utica, NY	160	178	18	154	175	129	158	131	165	140	119	86	144	28	47
Springfield, MA	161	121	-40	159	136	73	144	198	33	99	127	64	167	161	158
Milwaukee, WI	162	160	-2	184	164	167	156	124	36	88	91	86	131	95	127
Lansing, MI	163	154	-9	168	122	148	122	178	84	119	158	168	120	53	68
Mobile, AL	164	168	4	148	160	168	162	54	173	138	132	86	195	64	88
Gary, IN Metro Division	165	195	30	153	176	156	178	79	59	160	192	168	154	25	33
Memphis, TN-MS-AR	166	152	-14	112	126	153	145	48	185	179	166	136	190	123	132
Rochester, NY	167	148	-19	179	166	171	164	187	121	58	37	25	127	89	98
Hagerstown, MD-WV	168	169	1	166	170	173	149	171	38	94	145	110	135	71	55
Toledo, OH	169	193	24	171	159	182	161	136	20	102	162	168	145	49	62

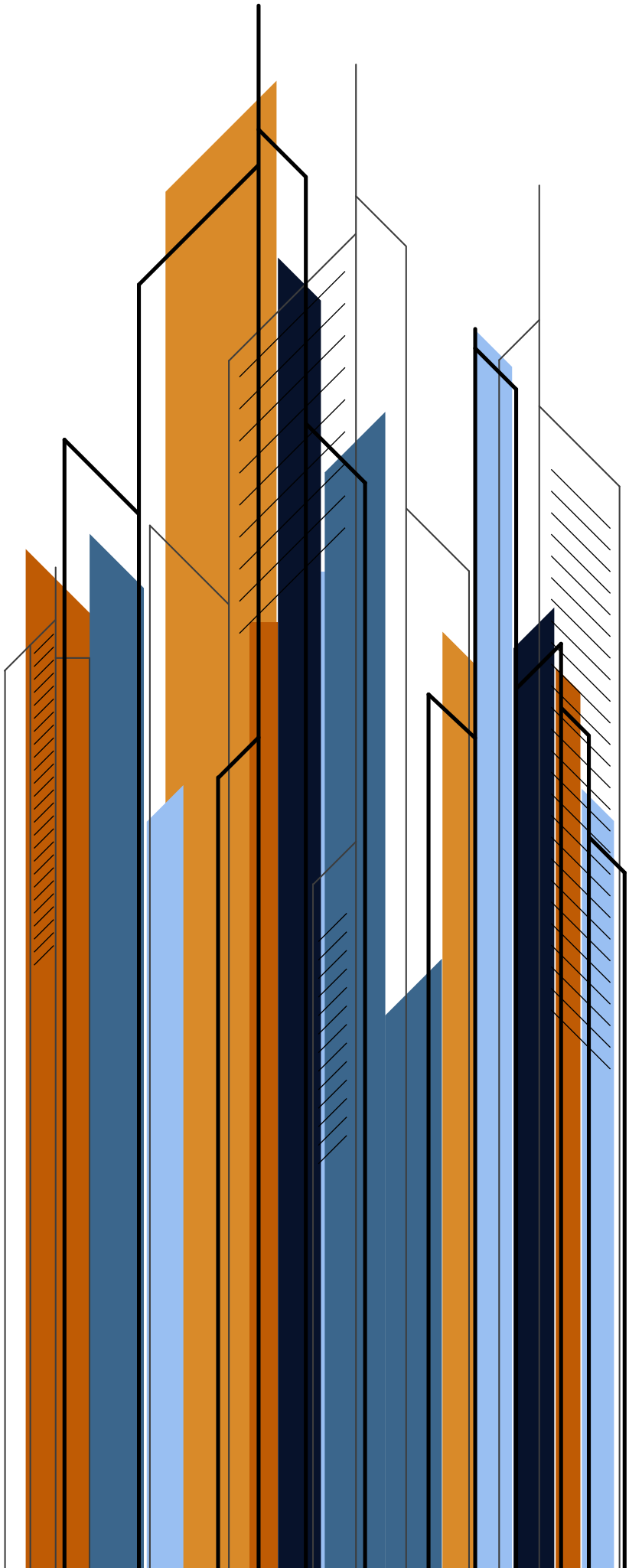
TIER 5 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Hartford, CT	170	176	6	180	177	163	181	76	125	137	61	86	95	133	140
Wilmington, DE-MD-NJ Metro Division	171	153	-18	127	153	149	176	122	172	199	144	136	46	103	89
Duluth, MN-WI	172	166	-6	196	184	114	157	166	146	87	159	110	157	22	27
Cleveland, OH	173	175	2	122	156	158	163	165	91	159	124	110	185	80	77
Anchorage, AK	174	199	25	167	197	98	198	68	179	198	151	136	19	109	114

TIER 5 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Jackson, MS	175	183	8	162	163	189	184	70	81	150	164	168	146	65	53
Lafayette, LA	176	187	11	169	200	190	200	90	80	156	170	110	128	19	11
Gulfport, MS	177	190	13	135	185	198	196	35	45	143	154	168	180	94	93
Beaumont, TX	178	184	6	165	193	105	172	134	184	193	198	168	107	5	15
Davenport, IA-IL	179	172	-7	170	183	162	183	97	149	165	167	168	153	7	17
Akron, OH	180	191	11	182	178	166	169	162	90	98	134	168	108	47	57
Kingsport, TN-VA	181	179	-2	191	192	199	190	77	65	197	157	110	189	4	5
Huntington, WV-KY-OH	182	192	10	188	195	188	194	45	138	167	188	136	194	13	9
Fayetteville, NC	183	186	3	130	165	107	174	147	148	144	142	136	124	168	166
Elgin, IL Metro Division	184	109	-75	185	161	184	143	180	195	158	112	64	42	82	118
New Haven, CT	185	188	3	178	180	175	182	92	104	178	72	48	109	179	175
Scranton, PA	186	182	-4	197	181	186	166	173	53	189	117	64	152	51	66
Bridgeport, CT	187	170	-17	194	190	172	197	155	95	129	34	37	30	176	183
Detroit, MI Metro Division	188	159	-29	115	120	165	134	189	183	174	121	136	182	126	142
Nassau County, NY Metro Division	189	163	-26	173	154	176	146	169	193	171	70	64	22	178	188
Poughkeepsie, NY	190	156	-34	157	162	192	179	161	150	175	52	37	62	174	178
Columbus, GA-AL	191	157	-34	187	188	154	187	80	158	123	108	86	188	135	155
Canton, OH	192	171	-21	195	189	185	189	118	140	157	195	168	159	6	12
Erie, PA	193	196	3	189	194	155	192	182	135	190	141	110	161	61	48
Rockford, IL	194	144	-50	200	186	200	173	156	188	170	161	136	110	34	70
New Orleans, LA	195	181	-14	121	169	177	186	183	98	185	185	136	166	128	152
Urban Honolulu, HI	196	167	-29	192	173	157	135	200	198	114	171	136	61	193	189
Shreveport, LA	197	197	0	190	196	187	191	81	187	177	193	136	199	100	106
Youngstown, OH-PA	198	200	2	199	198	179	193	191	175	172	175	136	186	14	22
Corpus Christi, TX	199	185	-14	164	191	160	195	152	182	186	191	168	143	131	91
Peoria, IL	200	189	-11	198	199	196	199	185	163	183	169	168	178	9	2

**MSA unless otherwise noted.*

Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2021)*

TIER 1 SMALL CITIES



1

IDAHO FALLS

IDAHO MSA

Idaho Falls, Idaho, the Gem State's largest city outside Boise, moved up from seventh to take the top spot this year. Idaho Falls experienced significant short-term job growth, achieving growth of 4.7 percent compared to many other cities with negative jobs growth over the same period. The city also performed well on the five-year and one-year job growth indicators (sixth and fifth, respectively).

High-tech industries play an important role in the city's dynamism. Idaho Falls boasts three high-tech industries (44th) and the ninth-best high-tech GDP concentration. The region's location quotient for scientific research and development services (its high-tech industry with the greatest competitive advantage) is 16, well and above many other cities in our index. The Idaho National Laboratory (INL) Battelle Energy Alliance, LLC, for instance, is the largest employer in the region and the fifth-largest employer in Idaho, with a staff of over 4,000.[70]

Idaho Falls is also considered one of the best places to live in Idaho due to its natural amenities, safety, and low cost of living, as well as access to high-quality jobs.[71] However, only 29 percent of the population over 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher, which is lower than the US average of 31 percent. The region also has comparatively low industrial diversification, which may hamper stable growth in the future.

In 2019, for instance, retail trade, professional and business services, education and health services, and government accounted for over 60 percent of all employment.[72] Costco recently opened a new store in Idaho Falls in August 2020, adding another 100 jobs to the retail sector.[73] Despite weak industrial diversification, however, Idaho Falls is poised for continued, robust economic growth.

Gained 6 ranks

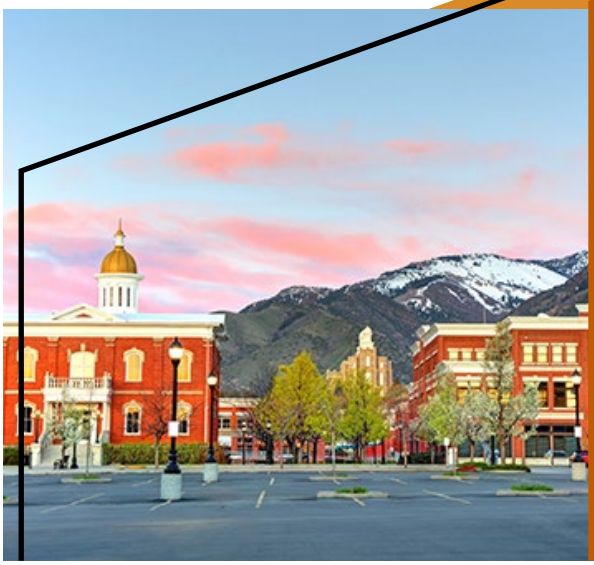
	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	17.8%	6th
Job growth (2018-19)	3.4%	5th
Wage growth (2014-19)	36.6%	10th
Wage growth (2018-19)	4.6%	64th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	4.7%	1st
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	18.1%	111th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	8.4%	36th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 1.15	9th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	3	44th
Households with broadband access (2019)	91.1%	7th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	75.9%	35th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	76.5%	56th

Assets

- Natural amenities contribute to a high quality of life.
- The Idaho National Laboratory provides high-paying, stable employment.

Liabilities

- Low industrial diversity may make the city more susceptible to economic fluctuations.



2

LOGAN

UTAH-IDAHO MSA

Logan, Utah, continues to ascend the Best-Performing Small Cities Index, improving one place to finish second. The Cache Valley, reaching into Idaho, is home to a host of high-tech medical manufacturing industries, for instance, pharmaceutical (LQ of 3.29) and medical equipment manufacturing (LQ of 1.88). It ranks fifth overall in high-tech industry diversity.

These prominent medical industries have sustained the local economy through an otherwise difficult 2020. Notably, Logan is one of the few metros in both our large and small cities with positive short-term job growth (ninth). Unemployment peaked at 6.1 percent in April 2020, but since then, it has hovered around 3 percent.[74] Meanwhile, impressive five-year employment (19th) and wage growth (12th) have attracted workers, resulting in a tight labor market despite the ongoing pandemic.[75]

The Logan metro is also home to numerous food manufacturing firms, which are experiencing a host of pandemic-related challenges, including decreased dairy demand due to school closures[76] and COVID-19 outbreaks in food production plants.[77] These challenges highlight the importance of controlling coronavirus outbreaks to ensure continued economic success in the medium-term.

Gained 1 rank

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	13.4%	19th
Job growth (2018-19)	2.3%	23rd
Wage growth (2014-19)	33.6%	12th
Wage growth (2018-19)	7.5%	7th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	1%	9th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	37.7%	39th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	7.8%	41st
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 1.01	12th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	6	5th
Households with broadband access (2019)	89.5%	18th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	72%	110th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	72.7%	126th

Assets

- Logan experienced sustained job and wage growth, even through the duration of the pandemic.
- The city has a diversified, high-tech industrial base.

Liabilities

- Food manufacturing industries are especially vulnerable to coronavirus-related headwinds, including decreased demand and potential closures.
- Low structural unemployment contributes to a tight labor market.

3

THE VILLAGES

FLORIDA MSA

The Villages, Florida, gains two ranks, finishing third in this year's Small Cities rankings. The Villages improved in the job growth indicators, placing second in five-year job growth and first in one-year job growth, after placing fourth in both indicators last year. The Villages also improved from 20th to 13th in short-term job growth. Its biggest decline, however, was in one-year wage growth, falling from eighth to 92nd.

The city is attractive to retirees due to a large number of community groups and amenities, primarily targeted at people over 65,[78] as well as Florida's famously warm weather. The Villages has multiple recreation and neighborhood centers, more than 3,000 social clubs, and hosts an annual Senior Games, where residents can compete in various events against others in their age groups.[79] In 2019, almost 80 percent of the population was over 65.[80]

As a popular retiree destination, service-based employment is consistently strong in the metro, and the city has recently experienced solid job and wage growth. Recent population growth—40.5 percent over the last decade[81]—has also fueled home construction, which in 2017 led to a 93 percent increase in home permits compared to the previous year.[82]

While Florida has only recovered around 50 percent of jobs lost due to the coronavirus, The Villages is one of only four metros in Florida to have experienced positive job growth over the past 12 months (+200 jobs).[83] However, the biggest industries in The Villages are health care and retailers, and Publix, Walmart, and Winn-Dixie are all major employers. Further diversification of industries would help the region experience more sustained economic development.

Gained 2 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	25.7%	2nd
Job growth (2018-19)	6.2%	1st
Wage growth (2014-19)	35.9%	11th
Wage growth (2018-19)	4.1%	92nd
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	0.31%	13th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	50.9%	17th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	12.2%	10th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.3	151st
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	1	131st
Households with broadband access (2019)	89.4%	19th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	77.2%	20th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	74.6%	93rd

Assets

- High population growth drives the construction and retail sectors.
- Low crime rates and strong community amenities contribute to quality of life.

Liabilities

- A high proportion of the population is over 65.
- Key industries are more susceptible to economic fluctuations.

4

ST. GEORGE

UTAH MSA

St. George, Utah, holds steady at fourth in the 2021 Best-Performing Cities Index, capitalizing on first-place finishes in five-year job and wage growth. Economic growth in St George is consistently head-and-shoulders above other small cities, particularly regarding jobs. Employment grew 3.3 percent (sixth) from 2018-19, for instance, and 29.1 percent from 2014-19. St. George was also one of the few cities with positive short-term job growth through 2020 (14th).

Notably, 2021 data reveal no concentrations in high-tech industries (167th) and, consequently, a middling high-tech GDP concentration (80th). One opportunity to sustain economic dynamism is to deepen industry clusters on the verge of specialization. This includes industries like electromagnetic and navigational instrument manufacturing (LQ of 0.81), data processing (LQ of 0.78), and semiconductor manufacturing (LQ of 0.75). Nevertheless, high-tech GDP continues to grow in the long-term (12th), highlighting the metro's superior growth prospects beyond the pandemic.

Outside of high-tech industries, the COVID-19 downturn has slowed the tourism industry significantly. Tourism to Zion National Park, the region's major draw, has been depressed for most of 2020, although the park reported record highs in September.[84] However, it seems unlikely that the hospitality and tourism industries will recover fully until the pandemic is under control nationwide.

Maintained previous rank	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	29.1%	1st
Job growth (2018-19)	3.3%	6th
Wage growth (2014-19)	54.2%	1st
Wage growth (2018-19)	6.8%	13th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	.3%	14th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	58%	12th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	3.4%	117th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.49	80th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	0	167th
Households with broadband access (2019)	89.7%	15th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	70.5%	132nd
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	73.2%	119th

Assets

- High levels of wage and employment growth mean strong long-term growth prospects.

Liabilities

- There is little specialization in high-tech industries.
- COVID-19 has stalled the region's hospitality and tourism industries.

5

DAPHNE

FAIRHOPE-FOLEY, ALABAMA MSA

Daphne-Fairhope-Foley, on the Alabama coast, moves up nine ranks to fifth. While scoring poorly in the high-tech indicators, most notably 164th in high-tech GDP concentration, the Jubilee City scored well in one- and five-year job growth (seventh and fifth, respectively), as well as one- and five-year wage growth (second and sixth, respectively).

The city's employment is largely concentrated in education, health care, and retail sectors, and only 0.5 percent of employment is in high-tech sectors.[85] The city's largest employer is the Baldwin County Board of Education, and a large proportion of the city's employment is in health, social assistance, and education. Further deepening a foothold on its two high-tech industries (74th)—aerospace manufacturing and medical laboratories—would provide an avenue for improvement in the index.

With respect to the coronavirus, unemployment in the metro rose to over 15 percent in April 2020 but by September had returned to 5 percent, significantly lower than the national rate of 7.9 percent.[86] Further, Baldwin County's beaches are the city's key natural asset and, combined with the low cost of living and economic growth, the city is an attractive place to live.

Gained 9 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	18.8%	5th
Job growth (2018-19)	3.2%	7th
Wage growth (2014-19)	38%	6th
Wage growth (2018-19)	8.3%	2nd
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-2.8%	45th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	31.9%	54th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	4.3%	104th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.28	164th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	2	74th
Households with broadband access (2019)	86.7%	58th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	74.1%	71st
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	76.1%	64th

Assets

- Natural amenities and beaches contribute to quality of life.
- Strong housing affordability is a boon.

Liabilities

- Lack of high-value-add employment sectors may contribute to slow wage growth.

6

COEUR D'ALENE

IDAHO MSA

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, (CDA) clocks in at sixth in this year's Best-Performing Small Cities Index, falling one rank from last year's performance. The Lake City is one of Idaho's fastest-growing regions,[87] posting 11th and 10th place finishes in one- and five-year job growth, respectively. Competitive job growth has paired with strong wage growth, which has risen 40.1 percent over the medium-term (fourth) and 6.9 percent over the short-term (10th).

Employment growth has largely been driven by consumption-oriented industries like retail trade, leisure and hospitality, and construction.[88] These services have grown to meet higher demand from West Coast migrants.[89] As such, the largest employers in the metro include a mix of government, leisure and hospitality, and high-tech manufacturing firms, for instance, Kootenai Health, a public hospital; Coeur d'Alene Resort; and Esterline Manufacturing, an aerospace manufacturing firm.[90] In the short-run, the prominence of consumption and service industries in the local economy will heighten the challenges of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, the region is not without high-tech industries. CDA boasts three high-tech industries (44th), and high-tech GDP grew 48.6 percent from 2014-19 (20th). Pressing into fields adjacent to current specializations—computer equipment, semiconductor, and navigational and electromedical instrument manufacturing—would increase high-tech GDP concentration and promote economic dynamism in the region. Some opportunities include computer systems design (LQ of 0.56) and architectural and engineering services (LQ of 0.80).

Dropped 1 rank

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	16.7%	10th
Job growth (2018-19)	2.9%	11th
Wage growth (2014-19)	40.1%	4th
Wage growth (2018-19)	6.9%	10th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-3.5%	66th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	48.6%	20th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	2.6%	139th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.51	71st
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	3	44th
Households with broadband access (2019)	88%	34th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	69.4%	148th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	73.6%	108th

Assets

- Recent in-migration from Western states has fueled job and wage growth, especially in service and consumption industries.
- Diversified high-tech industries help strengthen the local economy.

Liabilities

- Large sections of industrial employment are exposed to downturns in consumer spending, especially leisure and hospitality.
- Housing affordability has fallen in recent years.

7

SIOUX FALLS

SOUTH DAKOTA MSA

Sioux Falls, South Dakota, moves up significantly, finishing seventh after placing 24th in 2020. While the Queen City didn't score in the Top 10 for most indicators, it ranked highly for household broadband access (eighth) and high-tech GDP growth, both over one (25th) and five years (27th). On the other hand, the city has few specializations in high-tech industries and fared particularly poorly in the short-term jobs growth indicator, with a 4.1 percent decline year-over-year (79th).

One draw to the city is its low cost of doing business. South Dakota overall has one of the lowest tax burdens of any state, with no corporate or personal income taxes, low sales tax, and no personal property tax.[91] This has made the state an attractive location for the finance industry. The banking sector, for instance, is now a major employer in Sioux Falls. Wells Fargo, First Premier Bank, and Citi combined employ over 5,000 people in the city. The largest employment sector in Sioux Falls, however, is health care, with Sanford Health and Avera Health employing more than 18,000 people together.[92]

The retail and restaurant industries in Sioux Falls, like in much of the United States, have been hit hard by the events of 2020. Many stores have closed, and stores that were under construction or had plans to open have not opened.[93] Leisure and hospitality continue to struggle in the city,[94] but while the unemployment rate is still significantly higher than it was a year ago, Sioux Falls is recovering rapidly. The current unemployment rate of 3.4 percent for October 2020 is considerably lower than the 6.9 percent US average.[95]

Gained 1 rank

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	8.2%	50th
Job growth (2018-19)	1.3%	59th
Wage growth (2014-19)	27.2%	31st
Wage growth (2018-19)	5.8%	26th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-4.1%	79th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	43.8%	27th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	9.1%	25th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.61	56th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	1	131st
Households with broadband access (2019)	90.5%	8th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	77%	24th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	77.2%	43rd

Assets

- The city is attractive to businesses due to comparatively low costs.
- Housing affordability and low cost of living make it an attractive destination for workers.

Liabilities

- Dependence on service-based employment has meant high job losses in 2020.

8

SEBASTIAN

VERO BEACH, FLORIDA MSA

Rising one rank on the wings of the aerospace industry, **Sebastian, Florida,** finishes eighth in the 2021 rankings. As in previous years, wages have consistently grown, ranking 19th in our one-year and 20th in our five-year indicators. Employment growth also remains steady—increasing 1.6 percent from 2018-19 (45th) and 13.8 percent from 2014-19 (16th)—driven by growth in health care, professional and business services, and construction jobs.[96]

The metro's industrial mix largely reflects its desirability as a prime tourism and retirement hub. The median age in the metro is 54.5,[97] compared to 38.5 years old nationally.[98] The region also draws some 900,000 visitors per year, generating roughly 1,000 local jobs and $93.2 million in business revenues.[99] The large retiree and tourist populations are a boon for local business and service spending. However, given pandemic-related travel shutdowns and COVID-19's disproportionate effect on the elderly, these twin factors will complicate economic recovery.

Apart from the service sector and consumption work, the regional economy also includes two high-tech specializations (74th): commercial and service industry machinery manufacturing (LQ of 1.74) and aerospace parts manufacturing (LQ of 3.5). As such, the city ranks in the top quarter of all small cities for high-tech concentration (50th). Future economic development activity should emphasize preparation for budding adjacent industries with strong potential, for instance, architectural and engineering services (LQ of 0.99) and medical and diagnostic laboratories (LQ of 0.98).

Gained 1 rank

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	13.8%	16th
Job growth (2018-19)	1.6%	45th
Wage growth (2014-19)	31.5%	20th
Wage growth (2018-19)	6.2%	19th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-2.6%	40th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	39.7%	35th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	7.8%	42nd
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.62	50th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	2	74th
Households with broadband access (2019)	84.1%	108th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	70.4%	136th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	73.1%	122nd

Assets

» The region boasts two high-tech specializations, with two adjacent, budding industries.

Liabilities

» The metro's consumption-spending based industries are particularly exposed to COVID-19's economic impacts.

9

GAINESVILLE
GEORGIA MSA

Gainesville, Georgia, fell one rank this year, finishing 10th. While staying strong in our five-year job (seventh) and wage growth (fifth) indicators, household broadband access was also robust, ranking fourth overall with 92 percent of all households possessing broadband access. For one, the city's proximity to Atlanta's infrastructure makes it a popular destination for both new residents and new employers. Over a third of the metro's population works in Atlanta.[100]

Known by some as the poultry capital of the world, Gainesville's poultry industry is a significant employer: Fieldale Farms, Pilgrim's Pride, and Victory Processing are all major employers. The city also has many manufacturing jobs, and Kubota Manufacturing of America, a tractor maker, employs more than 2,500 people in Georgia.[101] The region's largest employer is Northeast Georgia Health System, with around 8,000 employees across several hospitals and medical centers.[102]

Gainesville's performance dropped in the one-year indicators, however, falling from 12th to 48th in one-year job growth and from ninth to 22nd in one-year wage growth. Gainesville also dropped from third to 38th in short-term job growth, which may indicate the city's employment was impacted by the effects of the pandemic. Additionally, low levels of high-tech GDP growth (170th in 2019) highlight the need to develop a competitive specialization in a high-tech industry.

Dropped 1 rank

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	17.4%	7th
Job growth (2018-19)	1.7%	48th
Wage growth (2014-19)	39.4%	5th
Wage growth (2018-19)	6.1%	22nd
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-2.6%	38th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	27.8%	75th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	0.1%	170th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.35	141st
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	2	74th
Households with broadband access (2019)	92%	4th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	71.5%	116th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	75.6%	72nd

Assets

- Recent improvements in amenities have improved quality of life.
- The city has easy access to Atlanta's job market and infrastructure.

Liabilities

- Competition with Atlanta for talent and investment may hinder growth.

10

CHARLOTTESVILLE

VIRGINIA MSA

A newcomer to the Top-10 Best Performing Small Cities, **Charlottesville, Virginia,** joins the ranks of Tier 1 Small Cities at 10th. The metro has the beginnings of a high-tech hub—its high-tech GDP location quotient is almost one (28th)—and boasts high-tech GDP growth of 42.2 percent over the last five years (31st) and four specializations in high-tech industries (24th).

Charlottesville's high-tech success has at least partly resulted from investments made with the University of Virginia (UVA). Research activity features prominently at UVA, and the university's new Research Park includes wet labs and secured rooms for projects with security clearance.[103] Research partners at the park include high-tech firms like Northrop Grumman and TASC, with projects spanning a range of fields, including undersea power units, cybersecurity, bioinformatics, and infectious disease.[104]

Two key challenges face Charlottesville. First, services make up a significant portion of employment in the metro, which may be among the last sectors to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.[105] Second, while the region ranked 95th for our one-year housing affordability indicator, housing costs have increased an average of 5 percent every year since 2012.[106] In any case, investment in affordable housing and continued economic growth in competitive industries will ensure Charlottesville progresses up the rankings.

Gained 1 rank

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	11.4%	26th
Job growth (2018-19)	2.2%	28th
Wage growth (2014-19)	27.6%	29th
Wage growth (2018-19)	4.1%	91st
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-3.9%	72nd
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	42.2%	31st
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	7.4%	47th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.79	28th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	4	24th
Households with broadband access (2019)	85.8%	79th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	72.1%	104th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	74.4%	95th

Assets

» The University of Virginia provides a well-trained workforce and opportunities for high-tech industries to grow and commercialize.

Liabilities

» Housing affordability has decreased in recent years, straining lower-income households.

PUNTA GORDA

FLORIDA MSA

Moving up from 39th place in 2020, **Punta Gorda, Florida,** is firmly in the top tier this time around, finishing 11th. Punta Gorda's strongest results were in one-year wage growth (eighth) and short-term jobs growth (fourth), one of the handful of cities to see positive year-on-year jobs growth. These results come despite the prominence of service work for the local economy. For instance, retail trade, accommodation and food services, health care and social assistance, and professional services make up roughly half of all jobs in the metro.[107]

Major employers include Publix Supermarkets, Millennium Physician Group, Punta Gorda Airport, and Allegiance Air.[108] The region has room to grow high-tech industrial specializations. Punta Gorda performed worst in high-tech GDP concentration (170th), and there are no high-tech industries with a local concentration higher than the national average as of 2019 (167th). However, over the last five years, high-tech GDP has grown 58.6 percent (11th), demonstrating progress and potential in the development of a high-tech economy.

Additionally, Punta Gorda has a more even age distribution compared to many other small cities in Florida, with only 56 percent of the population age 65 and over.[109] Hurricane Charley in 2004 destroyed many buildings in Punta Gorda, but investment in the city's recovery has turned it into a tourist destination.[110] Improved local amenities, such as local parks and an improved downtown area, have caused local real estate to be in high demand.[111] The future is bright for Punta Gorda.

Gained 1 rank

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	13.5%	18th
Job growth (2018-19)	2.3%	19th
Wage growth (2014-19)	33%	14th
Wage growth (2018-19)	7.3%	8th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	2%	4th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	58.6%	11th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	3.6%	114th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.26	170th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	0	167th
Households with broadband access (2019)	88%	37th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	69.8%	146th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	71.8%	140th

Assets

- There has been positive short-term job growth and high one-year wage growth.
- Careful planning and investments have led to improved local amenities.

Liabilities

- Low housing affordability is a hindrance.

12

BELLINGHAM

WASHINGTON MSA

Bellingham, Washington, holds on to Tier 1 status, falling two ranks to land 12th. Although nicknamed the City of Subdued Excitement, the metro's economy is by no means subdued. Bellingham's seven high-tech industries are well above all other small metros (second), save for Corvallis, Oregon, while the metro is close to reaching an overall high-tech GDP location quotient of one (24th).

Additionally, while both job and wage growth ranked lower in our one-year indicators (64th and 31st, respectively), five-year job (24th) and wage growth (15th) were among the best of all small cities. Local manufacturing has driven much of the job growth over the past decade, especially in petroleum and wood manufacturing. Professional services in retail, hospitality, and accounting have experienced similar job growth.[112] Meanwhile, high-tech GDP growth has been propelled by aerospace manufacturing, software publishing, and medical diagnostic laboratories.

In the near-term, both the petroleum and aerospace industries will likely suffer from lower global demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The French aerospace company Safran, for instance, recently announced plans to close its Bellingham factory, resulting in a loss of 250 jobs.[113] In the longer-term, Bellingham will need to invest in greater housing production, especially subsidized affordable units. Wage growth has also been consistently slower than housing cost growth, resulting in an attractive city with few options for average incomes.[114]

Dropped 2 ranks

	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	11.9%	24th
Job growth (2018-19)	1.1%	64th
Wage growth (2014-19)	32.5%	15th
Wage growth (2018-19)	5.6%	31st
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-3.3%	58th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	25.6%	84th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	8.5%	32nd
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.81	24th
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	7	2nd
Households with broadband access (2019)	90.5%	9th
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	63.8%	187th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	65.6%	187th

Assets

» Bellingham possesses a highly-diversified high-tech industry, with a strong base of manufacturing jobs.

Liabilities

» A lack of affordable housing could damage the economy in the long-run.

13

BEND

OREGON MSA

After being named the No. 1 Best-Performing Small City in the 2020 rankings, **Bend, Oregon,** has dropped to 13th this year. While still scoring highly on jobs (third), wage (second), and high-tech GDP growth (fifth) over the five-year indicators, Bend has lost ground in the one-year indicators. The biggest drops were in one-year high-tech GDP growth (158th this year versus 10th last year) and short-term job growth (145th this year versus 16th last year).

Bend also lost some ground in high-tech GDP concentration (from fifth to 31st) but gained in the number of high-tech industries (14th). Bend also does very well on households with broadband access (third) but scores poorly on affordability (179th and 169th over one- and five-year indicators, respectively). The broadband and affordability indicators are likely both influenced by Bend's popularity as a destination (both recreationally and as a commuter town) for those from the West Coast's tech hubs.[116]

Formerly a logging town, Bend has become well known as an outdoor recreation hub. Bordered by natural beauty on all sides, including several Environmental Protection Agency-designated ecoregions, Bend's tourism industry is significant, and it is a popular destination for mountain biking, hiking, skiing, golf, rock climbing, and more. Tourism makes up 16 percent of the city's employment as of 2018,[117] and the industry's decline in 2020 helps explain some of the dramatic drop in short-term jobs growth, as 17,000 residents filed unemployment claims last year.[118]

Dropped 12 ranks	Indicator	Rank
Job growth (2014-19)	25.3%	3rd
Job growth (2018-19)	2.4%	18th
Wage growth (2014-19)	53.7%	2nd
Wage growth (2018-19)	6.7%	14th
Short-term job growth (10/2019-10/2020)	-6.6%	145th
High-tech GDP growth (2014-19)	83.7%	5th
High-tech GDP growth (2018-19)	1.8%	158th
High-tech GDP concentration (2019)	LQ: 0.75	31st
Number of high-tech industries (2019)	5	14th
Households with broadband access (2019)	92.2%	3rd
Households with affordable housing costs (2014-18)	65%	179th
Households with affordable housing costs (2019)	68.9%	169th

Assets

- Access to an enormous array of recreational opportunities provides for a high quality of life.
- The city it known for its quirkiness and unique edge, such as hosting the last Blockbuster store in the world.[115]

Liabilities

- High dependency on the tourism industry makes it more susceptible to economic fluctuations.
- Housing costs are high.

COMPLETE RESULTS: 2021 BEST-PERFORMING SMALL CITIES*

TIER 1 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Idaho Falls, ID	1	7	6	5	6	64	10	1	36	111	9	44	7	56	35
Logan, UT-ID	2	3	1	23	19	7	12	9	41	39	12	5	18	126	110
The Villages, FL	3	5	2	1	2	92	11	13	10	17	151	131	19	93	20
St. George, UT	4	4	0	6	1	13	1	14	117	12	80	167	15	119	132
Daphne, AL	5	14	9	7	5	2	6	45	104	54	164	74	58	64	71
Coeur d'Alene, ID	6	5	-1	11	10	10	4	66	139	20	71	44	34	108	148
Sioux Falls, SD	7	24	17	59	50	26	31	79	25	27	56	131	8	43	24
Sebastian, FL	8	9	1	45	16	19	20	40	42	35	50	74	108	122	136
Gainesville, GA	9	8	-1	48	7	22	5	38	170	75	141	74	4	72	116
Charlottesville, VA	10	11	1	28	26	91	29	72	47	31	28	24	79	95	104
Punta Gorda, FL	11	39	28	19	18	8	14	4	114	11	170	167	37	140	146
Bellingham, WA	12	10	-2	64	24	31	15	58	32	84	24	2	9	187	187
Bend, OR	13	1	-12	18	3	14	2	145	158	5	31	14	3	169	179

TIER 2 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Jonesboro, AR	14	52	38	21	13	17	26	7	29	129	181	167	73	123	76
Hilton Head Island, SC	15	22	7	20	9	16	22	31	71	7	138	131	188	120	177
Lake Havasu City, AZ	16	48	32	27	21	68	45	54	22	59	152	74	109	77	107
Auburn, AL	17	23	6	15	15	33	21	41	142	65	135	74	98	134	149
Mount Vernon, WA	18	15	-3	38	34	5	8	149	16	8	122	74	40	162	168
Lebanon, PA	19	40	21	47	73	20	52	136	11	37	4	5	130	133	85
Grants Pass, OR	20	2	-18	36	12	6	9	167	5	29	63	44	77	196	190
College Station, TX	21	16	-5	14	20	43	33	27	38	49	59	131	146	188	184
Missoula, MT	22	17	-5	63	46	60	23	28	86	34	74	74	21	171	172
Fargo, ND-MN	23	91	68	62	82	49	81	53	72	95	42	24	59	91	75
Morristown, TN	24	86	62	25	47	55	55	25	65	56	185	167	165	21	47
Prescott Valley, AZ	25	18	-7	79	22	69	16	16	115	48	142	74	53	147	159
Staunton, VA	26	57	31	31	69	97	70	5	140	117	48	14	145	59	92
Fond du Lac, WI	27	76	49	70	127	90	65	46	92	40	30	24	129	10	42
Albany, OR	28	19	-9	91	17	85	13	91	52	16	137	24	23	150	171
Tuscaloosa, AL	29	41	12	13	38	29	80	76	2	1	150	167	123	142	123
Chambersburg, PA	30	51	21	61	71	67	61	122	50	90	62	74	61	41	44
Columbus, IN	31	63	32	139	79	77	43	61	57	192	70	44	13	2	10
Longview, WA	32	60	28	32	58	120	77	35	27	21	81	44	48	176	160
Walla Walla, WA	33	84	51	43	70	100	85	65	15	36	118	74	28	63	142
Madera, CA	34	20	-14	24	29	24	25	116	19	128	147	74	68	174	185
Decatur, AL	35	105	70	26	66	3	96	34	151	109	161	131	192	31	8
Kankakee, IL	36	72	36	55	88	18	78	82	20	44	15	44	171	160	138
Mankato, MN	37	33	-4	86	61	112	44	106	85	53	19	5	55	110	99
Bloomington, IN	38	69	31	53	85	25	36	105	44	191	6	44	30	163	164
Sherman, TX	39	30	-9	44	43	94	75	29	69	63	41	131	169	152	56
Yuba City, CA	40	44	4	3	8	65	37	198	7	100	88	5	65	183	186
Janesville, WI	41	27	-14	93	49	21	30	157	77	91	44	44	92	121	88
Abilene, TX	42	100	58	9	62	9	91	50	112	144	116	131	83	137	98
Blacksburg, VA	43	128	85	132	120	53	72	17	94	68	43	5	103	82	78
Burlington, NC	44	46	2	34	55	59	35	103	159	155	29	14	159	62	124

TIER 2 CITIES

	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Carson City, NV	45	21	-24	16	28	99	40	74	131	108	75	24	110	185	163
Hinesville, GA	46	124	78	12	45	4	168	11	28	152	159	131	14	167	182
Appleton, WI	47	139	92	95	86	83	57	160	12	127	94	74	29	8	9
Wenatchee, WA	48	13	-35	118	14	147	41	150	14	2	83	74	67	89	57
Dover, DE	49	118	69	41	84	39	101	52	67	46	157	74	26	191	166
Harrisonburg, VA	50	92	42	35	44	96	53	125	31	71	104	131	172	27	120
Columbia, MO	51	93	42	131	108	23	48	49	98	116	35	24	87	154	135
Pueblo, CO	52	99	47	74	60	73	66	48	81	70	64	44	135	166	170
Valdosta, GA	53	53	0	108	101	81	71	2	119	9	18	24	199	145	152

TIER 3 CITIES

	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Greenville, NC	54	71	17	72	83	41	64	153	60	26	3	74	86	130	189
Midland, TX	55	32	-23	2	4	1	7	190	141	149	200	167	154	149	32
Rochester, MN	56	58	2	75	53	176	34	113	161	181	38	44	42	30	15
Grand Junction, CO	57	81	24	57	80	37	90	12	59	160	154	167	32	156	158
Cleveland, TN	58	186	128	4	98	11	124	71	43	200	191	167	136	20	65
Pocatello, ID	59	77	18	22	56	103	63	119	124	134	171	131	31	80	49
Dothan, AL	60	138	78	30	75	63	68	37	190	164	190	131	150	46	33
Sheboygan, WI	61	62	1	144	92	82	60	108	63	113	140	74	43	22	21
Tyler, TX	62	65	3	85	68	46	112	21	200	83	101	44	138	106	117
Redding, CA	63	35	-28	46	35	32	24	142	118	110	110	74	115	175	196
Oshkosh, WI	64	123	59	169	118	36	74	83	127	66	57	24	99	60	83
Winchester, VA-WV	65	25	-40	39	31	109	50	159	108	64	146	167	140	4	73
Yuma, AZ	66	64	-2	29	40	42	42	73	195	170	132	131	142	135	125
Jefferson City, MO	67	144	77	71	139	98	115	30	75	136	60	131	160	9	2
Corvallis, OR	68	42	-26	90	27	135	46	181	97	67	1	1	1	177	178

TIER 3 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Eau Claire, WI	69	80	11	140	105	126	56	110	70	103	51	24	20	45	95
Rome, GA	70	73	3	78	78	113	107	15	107	102	66	44	120	127	137
Lafayette, IN	71	75	4	49	54	76	27	139	106	167	100	24	117	155	127
Sebring, FL	72	78	6	104	32	156	73	8	55	69	173	167	185	38	62
Lawrence, KS	73	116	43	142	111	30	69	172	91	6	21	44	10	104	175
Warner Robins, GA	74	90	16	17	30	128	119	100	125	138	91	74	69	138	97
East Stroudsburg, PA	75	133	58	76	51	38	54	188	24	157	20	131	16	180	183
Gettysburg, PA	76	94	18	136	134	62	94	22	123	112	99	24	90	113	70
Yakima, WA	77	61	-16	111	41	145	51	84	23	76	129	131	41	132	144
Athens, GA	78	34	-44	192	48	51	18	64	154	78	93	74	78	181	169
Sioux City, IA-NE-SD	79	122	43	127	149	47	92	24	134	93	169	131	151	14	4
Hot Springs, AR	80	85	5	52	93	119	100	23	62	162	121	131	158	71	101
Napa, CA	81	29	-52	67	37	27	17	183	144	107	107	167	11	193	192
San Rafael, CA Metro Division	82	38	-44	115	81	138	38	175	61	18	2	5	2	201	197
St. Cloud, MN	83	104	21	101	96	165	58	67	80	156	115	74	81	13	91
Joplin, MO	84	121	37	83	140	122	134	26	99	174	120	14	89	40	38
Florence, SC	85	26	-59	65	39	153	113	87	111	15	125	74	187	79	84
California, MD	86	112	26	8	64	168	142	156	78	159	7	24	84	55	106
Hattiesburg, MS	87	50	-37	100	57	179	103	19	51	32	162	44	181	103	114
Cheyenne, WY	88	154	66	58	152	89	150	47	103	82	96	74	96	81	90
Medford, OR	89	12	-77	122	23	161	32	109	49	57	77	74	97	178	195
Barnstable Town, MA	90	49	-41	103	76	137	76	192	30	42	22	24	5	141	188
Jacksonville, NC	91	183	92	50	145	54	139	20	96	154	136	74	6	184	180
Cape Girardeau, MO-IL	92	103	11	80	123	72	126	179	37	88	78	44	111	66	63
Elizabethtown, KY	93	135	42	116	72	107	170	138	33	74	98	74	113	12	40
Lewiston, ME	94	107	13	98	106	35	99	151	100	28	139	167	51	48	141
Brunswick, GA	95	31	-64	152	36	104	28	196	120	14	87	44	193	36	128
Las Cruces, NM	96	102	6	66	94	28	97	158	138	148	37	5	179	109	156
Billings, MT	97	145	48	133	100	45	67	42	157	153	123	131	75	146	115
Bangor, ME	98	136	38	54	136	58	89	134	149	50	117	131	121	61	112
Wausau, WI	99	79	-20	121	114	111	104	117	64	43	168	131	105	16	26

TIER 3 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Sierra Vista, AZ	100	161	61	94	173	136	182	6	76	118	27	44	132	23	89
Carbondale, IL	101	114	13	105	129	118	105	77	79	33	105	74	143	83	113
Hammond, LA	102	132	30	119	77	52	181	92	68	3	114	131	137	87	119
Santa Fe, NM	103	166	63	40	104	61	167	182	9	25	82	44	125	168	153
El Centro, CA	104	125	21	37	87	40	83	161	13	52	177	167	106	198	194
State College, PA	105	28	-77	106	74	117	93	169	66	80	14	5	124	170	147
Champaign, IL	106	101	-5	68	132	84	127	51	180	140	40	44	112	148	140
Springfield, IL	107	159	52	181	155	79	128	121	4	13	26	131	162	34	46
St. Joseph, MO-KS	108	111	3	137	137	127	131	39	105	186	39	14	186	75	17
Ames, IA	109	55	-54	175	117	123	79	3	133	81	67	44	189	97	167
Rapid City, SD	110	89	-21	128	97	101	87	120	40	123	131	74	93	151	100
Amarillo, TX	111	127	16	81	125	80	106	104	194	125	109	131	24	128	79
Johnson City, TN	112	96	-16	82	90	188	120	96	168	92	47	24	173	58	74
Muncie, IN	113	184	71	141	146	15	110	148	53	94	86	74	131	124	109
Kingston, NY	114	54	-60	168	115	132	82	97	48	60	54	24	49	186	193
Bowling Green, KY	115	108	-7	84	52	154	62	176	58	173	194	167	54	47	61
Texarkana, TX-AR	116	178	62	42	119	70	135	18	162	188	188	167	183	78	82
Burlington, VT	117	106	-11	149	107	78	108	180	73	58	10	2	80	173	176
Lewiston, ID-WA	118	68	-50	146	91	152	88	135	189	41	103	74	126	29	36
Morgantown, WV	119	66	-53	143	103	184	109	60	173	124	69	74	52	99	52
Lawton, OK	120	163	43	110	174	129	180	99	1	4	92	131	60	76	93

TIER 4 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Dubuque, IA	121	120	-1	130	124	86	114	115	156	166	144	74	62	85	28
Cumberland, MD-WV	122	140	18	114	162	108	137	170	146	22	17	14	170	51	51
Wichita Falls, TX	123	108	-15	120	128	48	132	88	193	147	46	74	149	94	122
Hanford, CA	124	74	-50	87	42	12	47	143	199	187	196	167	102	189	174
Kokomo, IN	125	126	1	184	153	155	164	36	90	198	68	44	74	7	22
Homosassa Springs, FL	126	151	25	123	102	151	153	127	56	79	126	74	76	102	81
Altoona, PA	127	119	-8	155	156	124	136	118	87	115	16	74	107	74	67
Great Falls, MT	128	175	47	107	158	34	84	95	113	176	163	167	152	114	87
Elkhart, IN	129	45	-84	199	25	201	39	137	174	182	158	44	50	107	12
Macon, GA	130	97	-33	148	131	71	98	63	197	168	73	24	147	153	155
Owensboro, KY	131	168	37	129	99	173	146	131	3	55	182	167	44	100	31
Jackson, TN	132	67	-65	77	63	144	102	89	136	86	187	167	155	136	134
La Crosse, WI-MN	133	131	-2	164	141	183	122	124	6	72	113	74	47	92	77
Lynchburg, VA	134	113	-21	97	135	110	129	152	188	175	61	24	177	32	48
Odessa, TX	135	47	-88	10	65	95	178	186	102	114	198	167	180	96	29
Panama City, FL	136	117	-19	201	154	93	86	43	128	178	79	74	27	161	154
Sumter, SC	137	83	-54	160	116	141	148	107	101	47	65	44	184	44	126
Lima, OH	138	173	35	147	147	194	145	141	46	62	112	74	35	11	66
Jackson, MI	139	59	-80	159	89	146	95	165	175	61	145	44	94	52	80
Bloomsburg, PA	140	158	18	126	150	157	144	33	82	132	90	131	168	90	53
Albany, GA	141	160	19	73	126	131	152	86	116	73	53	74	197	195	157
Topeka, KS	142	137	-5	161	159	180	156	62	83	23	106	74	190	35	55
Michigan City, IN	143	182	39	117	165	121	163	101	132	141	133	24	114	67	60
Beckley, WV	144	165	21	69	187	66	186	85	130	183	160	167	174	5	3
Chico, CA	145	36	-109	197	67	102	19	184	148	89	108	131	17	182	199
Ithaca, NY	146	56	-90	187	130	140	59	93	165	165	23	14	63	194	181
Casper, WY	147	177	30	60	200	88	200	144	34	139	192	74	70	88	41
Elmira, NY	148	187	39	162	190	181	194	80	8	77	36	24	118	49	96
Racine, WI	149	129	-20	165	133	182	165	32	163	24	124	74	36	125	131
Longview, TX	150	149	-1	33	184	75	196	154	184	135	89	74	175	37	58
Parkersburg, WV	151	189	38	113	196	177	192	59	45	158	84	74	156	26	19

TIER 4 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
New Bern, NC	152	176	24	56	95	106	179	111	110	122	148	131	164	139	133
Midland, MI	153	43	-110	166	166	199	138	146	26	163	49	74	71	6	18
Dalton, GA	154	82	-72	196	138	172	169	81	147	98	25	74	128	18	37
Florence, AL	155	173	18	88	148	130	154	44	181	97	186	167	198	57	30
Manhattan, KS	156	156	0	150	151	50	123	178	93	87	119	44	66	172	173
San Angelo, TX	157	130	-27	134	143	44	151	133	198	193	128	131	46	50	105
Johnstown, PA	158	191	33	171	195	125	187	155	74	119	11	14	144	39	14
Binghamton, NY	159	148	-11	173	169	114	125	132	164	131	5	2	100	143	118
Iowa City, IA	160	150	-10	156	110	170	116	56	183	190	111	74	33	164	139
Grand Island, NE	161	134	-27	185	176	133	130	57	176	45	180	74	141	129	11
Mansfield, OH	162	157	-5	190	178	171	157	70	109	189	45	24	134	33	68
Bismarck, ND	163	170	7	109	170	160	183	98	179	185	127	74	85	42	5
Ocean City, NJ	164	95	-69	99	113	74	111	126	185	137	178	167	38	192	198
Fairbanks, AK	165	194	29	92	172	87	158	90	84	151	184	167	12	179	165
Lake Charles, LA	166	37	-129	200	11	198	3	200	172	161	193	167	133	69	34
Anniston, AL	167	164	-3	125	142	57	149	130	192	143	149	167	176	70	54
Atlantic City, NJ	168	147	-21	51	161	105	159	194	166	85	102	44	22	199	201
Flagstaff, AZ	169	87	-82	89	59	186	117	199	88	104	76	131	157	157	150
Niles, MI	170	141	-29	96	109	134	133	168	135	133	155	74	194	105	94
Springfield, OH	171	179	8	158	189	143	143	55	18	201	197	167	56	98	59
Monroe, LA	172	155	-17	179	164	193	173	10	167	10	34	74	195	158	103
Danville, IL	173	190	17	157	193	162	190	69	39	194	166	74	167	25	16
Glens Falls, NY	174	143	-31	174	167	149	140	177	121	99	32	44	64	118	143
Terre Haute, IN	175	171	-4	183	168	148	171	114	187	199	52	14	101	73	43
Norwich, CT	176	146	-30	153	122	195	176	162	153	96	8	14	25	165	161
Pittsfield, MA	177	142	-35	154	160	169	141	185	35	105	33	44	57	190	162
Kahului, HI	178	88	-90	151	33	187	49	201	145	38	189	131	116	197	191
Gadsden, AL	179	115	-64	188	144	178	161	146	95	30	165	74	161	65	27
Rocky Mount, NC	180	180	0	112	171	116	160	163	186	130	13	5	178	159	151
Vineland, NJ	181	110	-71	124	112	185	166	112	143	19	130	74	104	200	200
Saginaw, MI	182	169	-13	172	157	150	121	173	178	106	72	74	91	115	108
Waterloo, IA	183	162	-21	163	180	175	172	75	169	145	172	131	72	28	45

TIER 5 CITIES	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Change	Job Growth 2018-19	Job Growth 2014-19	Wage Growth 2018-19	Wage Growth 2014-19	12-Month Job Growth	High-Tech GDP 2018-19	High-Tech GDP 2014-19	High-Tech Concentration 2019	LQ Count 2019	Broadband Access 2019	Housing Affordability 2019	Housing Affordability 2014-18
Houma, LA	184	201	17	102	201	167	201	102	137	195	179	74	119	84	13
Grand Forks, ND-MN	185	192	7	189	186	163	147	68	171	121	143	131	45	131	130
Weirton, WV-OH	186	195	9	135	192	159	177	123	126	177	195	167	148	3	6
Monroe, MI	187	152	-35	186	177	142	174	197	160	51	97	131	122	68	50
Goldsboro, NC	188	188	0	170	179	115	162	174	177	179	95	44	82	144	145
Alexandria, LA	189	198	9	145	183	158	185	78	129	180	176	167	166	53	102
Victoria, TX	190	185	-5	138	197	56	198	140	201	169	174	167	196	54	64
Wheeling, WV-OH	191	70	-121	195	175	200	118	195	89	101	183	167	182	1	1
Muskegon, MI	192	98	-94	182	121	190	155	189	122	126	167	74	163	101	72
Bloomington, IL	193	199	6	176	185	189	184	128	150	120	175	167	127	15	25
Williamsport, PA	194	153	-41	178	194	166	195	191	54	146	55	44	139	117	111
Bay City, MI	195	197	2	167	191	164	193	193	196	196	58	131	39	17	69
Battle Creek, MI	196	181	-15	180	163	191	175	187	17	142	156	167	95	111	121
Charleston, WV	197	193	-4	193	199	197	197	129	182	150	134	131	153	19	7
Watertown, NY	198	172	-26	191	182	139	191	171	191	171	85	131	88	112	129
Decatur, IL	199	167	-32	198	181	196	188	164	152	184	153	74	191	24	39
Farmington, NM	200	196	-4	177	198	192	199	166	21	197	201	167	200	86	23
Pine Bluff, AR	201	200	-1	194	188	174	189	94	155	172	199	167	201	116	86

**MSA unless otherwise noted.*

Source: *Milken Institute analysis (2021)*

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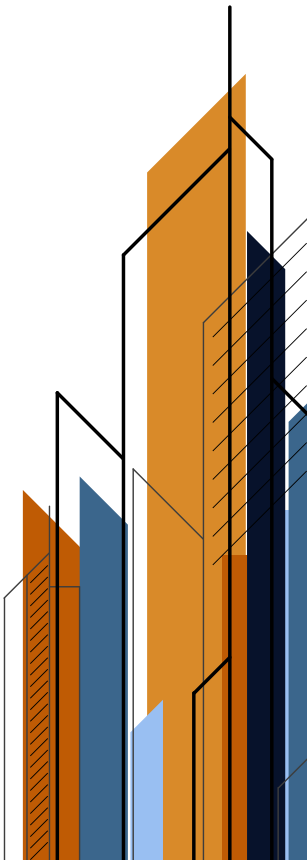

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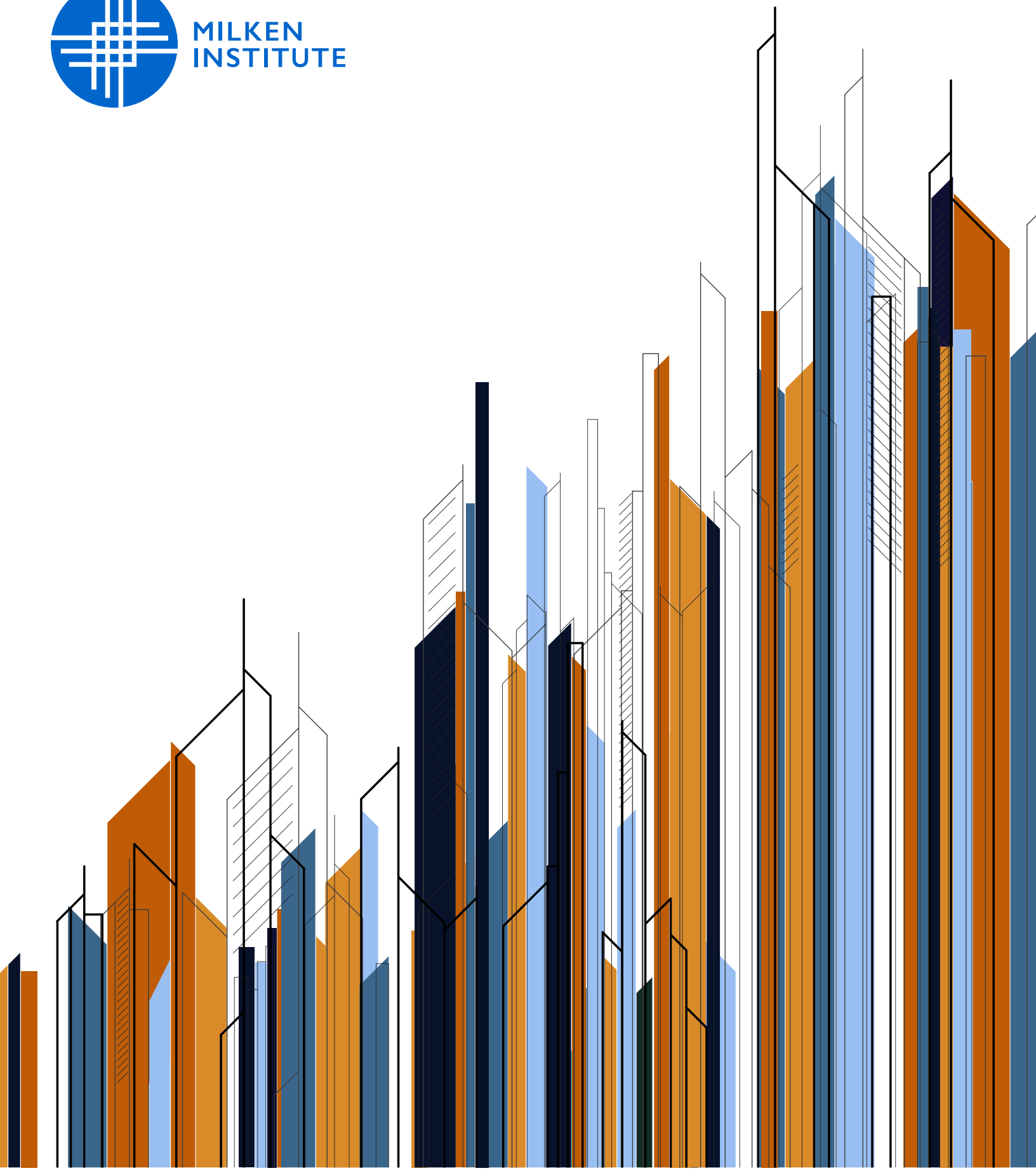

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