



# Here Are 20 American Cities And Counties That Could Be The Next Silicon Valley

Zac Northup, NiSi | Oct. 24, 2011, 12:30 PM | 5,441 | 26

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Where will the Internet's next greatest business be born?

While most people immediately associate the phrase "start-up" with Silicon Valley, or New York, the fact is that there are millions of budding entrepreneurs outside of America's existing technology centers.

As broadband spreads into rural areas and small towns across the United States, economies are emerging in places that haven't been considered viable markets by traditional investors and hardware manufacturers looking for areas to expand.

That is about to change.

According to the United States Census Bureau, small towns, cities, and counties with 10,000 to 50,000 residents are considered "micropolitan statistical areas."

Sometimes, these are college towns filled with young Mark Zuckerberg wannabes who have grown up using all of the gadgets that drive today's economy.

These young Turks of suburbia can't remember life without the Internet, and many have viable ideas that, with a little love and mentoring from a tech-savvy angel investor or two, could become successful technology businesses.



Image: J-Fish / Flickr

## Zac Northup



Zac Northup is the founder of NiSi.

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Doubt this? Consider the fact that many colleges and universities with computer science and engineering curricula require students to write mobile applications or develop engineering prototypes for various classes.

Unfortunately, more times than not, all the student is left with at the end of the semester is a good grade and pat on the back.

Science and technology programs at these schools aren't structured to provide institutional help in finding investors or even teach tech students how to market their great ideas.

But the fact is that it's easier to teach a computer engineer how to become a marketer than it is to teach a marketer how to become a computer engineer. All of these dormant apps and technology projects represent a huge untapped market of intellectual property. Investors just need to know where to look.

With this in mind, we have dug deep into the U.S. Census data and discovered 20 micropolitan areas that meet certain demographic requirements for a budding technology economy. These factors include a high level of broadband accessibility, a sizable workforce (in relative terms), a vibrant local economy, and the presence of a small college or university.

Interestingly, all of these locations have unemployment rates as much as five points below the national average, and the top five have a broadband availability rate of 100%. Even though the list is ranked from one to twenty, all things being considered, each of these locations present equal opportunities.

1. Craighead County, AR
2. Fayette County, GA
3. Story County, IA
4. Pottawattamie County, IA
5. Ascension Parish, LA
6. Calvert County, MD
7. Cecil County, MD
8. Saline County, AR
9. Daviess County, KY
10. Lafourche Parish, LA
11. Platte County, MO
12. Madison County, MS
13. Gallatin County, MT
14. Comanche County, OK
15. Roanoke County, VA
16. Ozaukee County, WI
17. Buchanan County, MO
18. Henderson County, NC
19. Grafton County, NH
20. Monongalia County, WV

In today's global economy, companies spend millions of dollars trying to break into emerging markets overseas but are either missing the fact that 15 years into the Internet Revolution, there are still areas of this country that have yet to fully realize the promise of a technology-based economy.

Great ideas don't stop at the edge of Harvard Square and tomorrow's Farmville could actually be written on a farm. The question is who is going to make money when that happens.

BACKGROUND DATA:

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

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County	State	Broadband Rate	Workforce	Employed	Unemployed	Rate	College
Craighead County	AR	100.0%	47,566	44,339	3,227	6.8	Yes
Fayette County	GA	100.0%	49,813	45,723	4,090	8.2	Yes
Story County	IA	100.0%	49,355	47,167	2,188	4.4	Yes
Pottawattamie County	IA	100.0%	48,681	46,120	2,561	5.3	Yes
Ascension Parish	LA	100.0%	50,670	47,081	3,589	7.1	Yes
Calvert County	MD	100.0%	47,564	45,054	2,510	5.3	Yes
Cecil County	MD	99.7%	49,480	45,087	4,393	8.9	Yes
Saline County	AR	99.0%	50,673	47,560	3,113	6.1	Yes
Daviess County	KY	99.0%	49,984	45,822	4,162	8.3	Yes
Lafourche Parish	LA	99.0%	48,395	45,799	2,596	5.4	Yes
Platte County	MO	99.0%	49,330	45,695	3,635	7.4	Yes
Madison County	MS	99.0%	48,140	44,719	3,421	7.1	Yes
Gallatin County	MT	99.0%	46,904	43,511	3,393	7.2	Yes
Comanche County	OK	99.0%	48,162	45,753	2,409	5	Yes
Roanoke County	VA	99.0%	49,053	46,598	2,455	5	Yes
Ozaukee County	WI	99.0%	47,134	44,435	2,699	5.7	Yes
Buchanan County	MO	98.0%	48,582	44,864	3,718	7.7	Yes
Henderson County	NC	98.0%	48,695	44,997	3,698	7.6	Yes
Grafton County	NH	98.0%	47,110	45,155	1,955	4.1	Yes
Monongalia County	WV	90.0%	48,902	46,218	2,684	5.5	Yes

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## The Water Cooler

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**TEP** on Oct 24, 12:42 PM said:

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This is pure pie-in-the-sky; if it was just this easy, via the technology & demographics cookbook analogies, it would have already happened. Many of these places are in states that refuse to give local government home-rule powers, so that distant legislatures micromanage everything. Culture counts as well; check out Geert Hofstede's cultural dynamics analysis of various nations---think this can't be regionalized for the USA?

Yeah, what all those hillbillies in Appalachia need is broadband and a college degree, and it'll be the next Silicon Valley....in a pig's eye.

[Reply](#)

**Zac\_Northup** on Oct 24, 1:47 PM said:

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@TEP: I appreciate the feedback. Home RULe is an issue in some areas, but as the list shows, we aren't just talking about Appalachia. The counties extend from New Hampshire to Montana. Most are college towns that do have the culture you are referencing.

[Reply](#)

**Zac\_Northup** on Oct 24, 2:27 PM said:

7

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@TEP: By the way, you misspelled hillbillies.

[Reply](#)

**kendra Fite** on Oct 27, 5:58 PM said:

6

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@TEP: I live in Craighead County, AR and I can tell you that we are NOT hillbillies. Before you make idiotic statements, you need to do your research. Oh...but I guess you metropolitans know it all. Too bad your unemployment rate is not below 7%. Guess the hillbillies know a thing or two after all...

[Reply](#)

**Jack** on Oct 28, 12:36 PM said:

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@kendra Fite: I think this guy is just mad that his county didnt make the list. He must have a few "apps" or "ideas" that have flopped in the past. It sounds as if he needs to move to Craighead County AR! Great article by the way. Pay no attention to this loser giving you a hard time.

[Reply](#)

**HJF** on Oct 24, 1:20 PM said:

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7

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you forgot the most important 'metric', no one wants to live in any of these places

[Reply](#)

**Zac\_Northup** on Oct 24, 1:53 PM said:

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@HJF: Thanks for the comment. Each location has a employed population base that extends beyond 50,000 - hence the term micropolitan. The median income for each location exceeds the national average, and cost of living is lower. They all have sustainable population bases with an educated workforce. The next Google will not be started in any of these locations, but other viable tech business opportunities do exist.

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**KCRob** on Oct 24, 9:22 PM said:

0 0

@HJF: Can't say that I pay all that much attention to my neighbors in Platte County, MO but it's plausible.

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Over here on the Johnson County Kansas side, we have a decent tech industry that includes biotech and a big avionics presence anchored by Garmin and Honeywell. JOCO is a prosperous area with a couple cities on various "best places" lists.

[Reply](#)

**Zac Northup (URL)** on Oct 26, 9:28 AM said:

0 0

@KCRob: The numbers, and comments like yours, prove my point. I appreciate the feedback. Obviously, HJF was a little off-base with his analysis.

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**Jack** on Oct 28, 12:44 PM said:

2 0

@HJF: I would say that the 67,000+ people that live in Jonesboro AR (craighead county) would say your wrong. Jonesboro is a great place to live.

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[Reply](#)

**Travis Turney** on Oct 24, 2:34 PM said:

0 0

Fayette County is just south of Atlanta, GA so maybe that town could (or already) have some folks who went to GA Tech, founded a company, got some investment capital, and grew into a going concern. I think the key to fostering sustainable start-up communities is attracting investors but also having an environment where it is ok to fail and try again. This is the distinguishing characteristic of SV. Besides Tel Aviv I don't think there are any other areas in the world anywhere close to the innovation generated per capita. The average angel investment in Atlanta (~\$1.6M) is about half of what it is in SV. Partly this is due to fewer interested and accredited investors, fewer opportunities, and less diversity than one might find in the Bay Area.

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**Zac\_Northup** on Oct 24, 2:42 PM said:

0 0

@Travis Turney: Great info Travis. Yes, the demographic data shows that Fayette County could be a great place to grow. With 100% broadband penetration and access to Georgia Tech, you guys are rocking.

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[Reply](#)

**Travis Turney** on Oct 24, 2:55 PM said:

0 0

@Zac\_Northup: I think substantial broadband penetration is certainly a necessarily requirement and perhaps access to college resources too. But, you may want to include variables such as median income, per capita college graduation rates, and transportation efficiency. Successful founders seem to come from families where at least one parent was college educated and overall well to do but this may be purely anecdotal.

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**roscoe p. coltrane** on Oct 24, 5:45 PM said:

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@Travis Turney: now that Boss Hogg's out of the picture, i'm sure the sky's the limit down there in fayette

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on the positive side, the author of this stellar list is clear frontrunner in BI's upcoming list of the top 20 dumbest list of 2011

Reply

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**Jacob (URL)** on Oct 25, 12:48 PM said:

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If Craighead County in Arkansas becomes a Silicon Valley it will definitely be because of RSI (Rural Sourcing Inc). Instead of outsourcing your IT work overseas, you hire them. <http://www.ruralsourcing.com/>

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\*I used to work there\*

Reply

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**Zac Northup (URL)** on Oct 26, 9:23 AM said:

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@Jacob: Interesting. Maybe someone from Rural Sourcing can give me a call sometime?

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Reply

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**Benjamin Williams (URL)** on Oct 25, 2:34 PM said:

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I currently work for Rural Sourcing Inc. <http://www.ruralsourcing.com/> We do SAP development, C# application development, web and mobile development, and database and data warehouse development. Check us out on the web or call 404-873-9513 for more information.

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Reply

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**Free Enterprise (URL)** on Oct 25, 5:15 PM said:

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Thank you, Zac, for posting this article. I work with the Campaign for Free Enterprise, a project of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and we believe tech companies and their innovations are of the utmost importance when it comes to boosting our global competitiveness. The Silicon Valley model has proven that innovation can improve our economy and our lives and I'm excited to see that its one that can be replicated in other American cities. I will be sure to share your article with our fans.

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-Hilary,  
[www.freeenterprise.com](http://www.freeenterprise.com)  
[www.facebook.com/AmericanFreeEnterprise](http://www.facebook.com/AmericanFreeEnterprise)

Reply

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**Zac Northup (URL)** on Oct 26, 9:24 AM said:

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@Free Enterprise: Hilary:

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Thanks for reading the piece. Would be happy to provide any additional info or research you might need.

Zac

Reply

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**shaun** on Oct 27, 5:09 PM said:

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i live in craighead county. jonesboro is the largest town in the county and im

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sorry to say but the census is way off. there are far more unemployed people here than what it says, and the main reason is because in order to get a decent job they require you to have a degree in something. as a computer engineering major and now a factory worker there are not as many opportunities as ppl think here

### Reply

**Nick** on Oct 27, 9:22 PM said:

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@shaun: I happen to live in Saline County, Arkansas. None of the colleges here focus on computer technology. Where do they think they will find qualified people to do the job? I own a web design company and have to outsource some work out of state because I can't find anyone here that can do the job. They obviously didn't do their research. I don't see it happening in Craighead county either. There is absolutely nothing up there.

### Reply

**Denise (URL)** on Oct 28, 2:36 PM said:

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@Nick: Have you tried advertising in Jonesboro? Via the Jonesboro Sun, Kait-8 (local ABC affiliate), or the local Chamber of Commerce?

Jonesboro has a low crime rate, reasonable (much cheaper than most places) cost of living, plentiful housing, and a revitalized downtown area that provides good dining and networking opportunities. There is a local chapter of the .Net users group. In addition to RSI, there are other tech employers, like CUSI (Software developers specializing in Utility Billing). Public transportation, the main campus of the State University, plentiful parks, lakes, and rivers for outdoor recreation, festivals, decent shopping, low taxes. There is camping available at several local state parks as well as several nice hotels, and recently it was announced that thanks to a grant Jonesboro is moving forward with plans for a convention center. We are also close to Memphis, TN for people who want a brighter nightlife. Check us out!

### Reply

**shaun** on Oct 27, 5:10 PM said:

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i live in craighead county. jonesboro is the largest town in the county and im sorry to say but the census is way off. there are far more unemployed people here than what it says, and the main reason is because in order to get a decent job they require you to have a degree in something. as a computer engineering major and now a factory worker there are not as many opportunities as ppl think here

### Reply

**Walter B (URL)** on Oct 28, 7:38 AM said:

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In Saline County, Arkansas you will find one of the oldest Laser manufacturers in the world. Founded in 1969, Power Technology has been a leader in lasers and Photonics for 42 years. Laser were only invented 52 years ago. Power Technology employs AS, BS, and Ph.D level employees in rolls such as electronics engineers, software engineers, laser cavity engineers, and mechanical engineers. Technology companies thrive and succeed in Arkansas

### Reply

**Mark F** on Oct 28, 6:07 PM said:

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One thing that that matters, is do people want to live there. Numerous pieces have been written on quality-of-life elements that attract the younger individual to a community. The problem is these things are difficult to quantify.

Outdoor activities rank high. Is the community bike friendly? Is it jogging friendly? Does it offer interesting hiking and camping opportunities.

An interesting nightlife is important. Are there other people of a similar age and education

### Reply

Randy on Nov 3, 10:27 PM said:

0 0

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This article is not designed to be "why you should move to these areas" it is simply to state "why these areas could hold the next Zuckerberg".

"as a computer engineering major and now a factory worker there are not as many opportunities as ppl think here"  
Stay persistent and don't give up. Tech entrepreneurs breed in these areas. Why? Because people like you have great ideas, but employment opportunities are limited. If you lived in the big city, you'd go work for [insert insanely big corporate america company here], you'd make a decent income, and you'd stop chasing your dreams. Not you. You are insanely talented and pissed off about that 9 to 5. That's a dangerous concoction that, when channeled correctly, can change the world.

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