



7 most business-friendly cities

More than 6,000 small businesses weighed in on a recent Thumbtack survey of the nation's 40 largest metro areas. Here are the cities that rated highest on hiring, licensing, regulation, zoning and more.

1. Oklahoma City: Great energy

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Coming in first place on small business friendliness, ease of starting a company, hiring, licensing, regulations -- nearly everything, really -- is the capital of Oklahoma.

The city enjoys a relatively low cost of living, and the booming oil and natural gas industries have largely kept Oklahoma City's 1.2 million people sheltered from the downturn. That means small businesses have been helped by consumers who have cash in their pockets.

A steadily increasing proportion of college students is staying after graduation in the area, where the urban core is being revitalized. A decade ago, only 71% who earned bachelor's degrees stayed. Now it's 81%, the state says.

Companies are moving there too, as aerospace giant Boeing is doing with 1,550 employees from other states.

That emboldens entrepreneurs like Keith Paul, who co-owns half a dozen restaurants and catering companies with his wife, Heather.

"People are moving here and staying here. They're not moving to Dallas or Kansas City anymore," said Keith Paul, a Texan himself. "The energy here is great."

The city also boasts a strong support system for entrepreneurs: A nonprofit, i2E, finds them funding. Existing business get help through the state's training system, CareerTech, which offers free education for employees.

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PHOTO: LYNDI GRIFFITH

Keith Paul, co-owner of A Good Egg Dining Group, plans to expand in the city's revitalized urban core.

Source: 2012 Thumbtack.com Small Business Survey, done in partnership with Kauffman Foundation