Telecommuting Trends in the United States

Telecommuting can be defined as those that regularly work at home instead of driving to an office, but are not self-employed. According to GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com\(^1\), telecommuting has grown over 159 percent since 2005, and over 4.7 million employees (3.4 percent of the workforce) now work from home at least half the time. Many workers who choose to telecommute have grown tired of big city living and prefer a more rural setting. This article identifies common jobs that can be performed by telecommuters, provides examples of what some states are doing to attract telecommuters and lists site location considerations that communities should be aware of.

Jobs with a high number that telework

Relative to the total population, a disproportionate share of employees in the following occupations telecommute (in order of largest disproportion to smallest):\(^2\)

- Military
- Computer and Mathematical
- Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations
- Farming, Fishing, and Forestry
- Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations
- Legal Occupations
- Community and Social Service Occupations
- Architecture and Engineering Occupations
- Business and Financial

Some careers offer more remote jobs than others. The following occupation or career categories have seen high remote job growth in 2018\(^3\):

1. Math and economics (actuarial analyst, mathematical programmer, data scientist)
2. Insurance (loss control specialist, premium auditor, claims representative)
3. Nonprofit and philanthropy (program director, policy manager, major gifts officer)
4. Mortgage and real estate (senior loan officer, director of sales, real estate valuation manager)
5. Marketing (associate product manager, marketing specialist, digital marketing analyst)
6. Engineering (solutions engineer, software engineer, automation expert)
7. Product management (business process consultant, engagement manager, project manager)

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\(^2\) Ibid

\(^3\) Cornfield, Jill, Remote Jobs are Exploding and Salaries Can Top $100,000 6/24/2019. [https://www.cnbc.com/2019/06/21/remote-work-doesnt-mean-you-have-to-give-up-a-great-salary.html](https://www.cnbc.com/2019/06/21/remote-work-doesnt-mean-you-have-to-give-up-a-great-salary.html)
According to Virtual Vocations, the top industries for telecommuting jobs include:

1. Information Technology (examples: Remote Cloud Architect, Telecommute Lead Software Engineer, Work at Home Programmer Analyst)
2. Sales (Remote Account Executive, Telecommuting Inside/Outside Sales Representative, Telework Regional Sales Manager)
3. Healthcare (Partial Telecommuting Field Medical Case Manager, Virtual telephonic Nurse, Work at Home Physician Reviewer)
4. Account Management (Telecommuting Account Manager, Virtual Strategic Account Manager, Remote Billing and Payments Client Executive)
5. Education (Virtual University Department Director, Telecommute School Educational Program Manager, Telework High School Counselor)
6. Project Management (Partial Telecommuting Clinical Project Manager, Virtual IT Project Manager, Work at Home Strategic/Implementation Project Manager)
8. Teaching (Online Faculty Instructor, Virtual High School Teacher, Telecommuting Elementary School Teacher)
9. Management (Home-Based Program Director, Partial Telecommute District Manager, Telecommute Business Manager)
10. Customer Service (Telecommuting Customer Care Representative, Virtual Customer Care/Technical Support Specialist, Work at Home Customer Service Agent)

What are communities doing to attract telecommuters?

In 2018, the Utah Legislature approved two programs to build a strong network of telecommuters in remote areas. “The Rural Online Initiative (ROI) is designed to provide Utah’s rural workforce and businesses with education, training, and services for online opportunities in remote employment, freelance work, and e-commerce.” The Legislature also approved spending $1.5 million for the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), which is meant “to incentivize businesses that create jobs locally, remotely, online, or in a ‘satellite hub’ in counties of the fourth, fifth or sixth class (populations of less than 31,000).” Businesses can get an incentive of $4,000 to $6,000 per employee for each new high-paying position created in rural (nonmetropolitan) areas.

According to the State of Utah's website “The Rural Online Initiative is a catalyst for capacity building in Utah’s rural communities. This pilot program collaborates with public and private sector partners to facilitate education for online opportunities in remote employment, freelance work and e-commerce.”

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6 Ibid
The program is offered through Utah State University and provides training modules to adults and high school students. The Utah State Legislature appropriated $2.272 million for the program.

In addition, Utah State University Extension offers a Master Remote Work Professional Certificate, combining online work with interactive workshops. The program is designed to provide workers with the tools and skills needed to transition from on-site work into a virtual career.\(^8\)

**Wisconsin** is recognizing and incentivizing telework programs through legislation. A new law passed by the Wisconsin state legislature established a process for certification by the Public Service Commission of a political subdivision as a “Telecommuter Forward!” community. To earn the certification, a city, town, village or county needs to pass an ordinance that covers a few key requirements outlined in a statute passed by the state. Telecommuter Forward! communities must establish a single point of contact for any broadband infrastructure permitting projects, adopt clear timelines for processing project applications, and set reasonable fees for applications.\(^9\)

The legislation\(^10\) makes no mention of what broadband is required. They do not recommend any specific type of broadband technology, speed threshold, or have any minimum requirements. “Underserved regions” have less than two companies providing broadband service at 25 Mbps for downloads and 3 Mbps for uploads.

**Vermont** will pay a remote worker up to $10,000 in moving expenses and other costs to move to Vermont.\(^11\) They are hoping to entice out-of-state workers, so current residents are not eligible. The remote worker must be employed by a company that is based outside the state. Eligible expenses include moving expenses, membership fees for a co-working space, and the costs of computer software and hardware and broadband access. The first round of applications attracted 33 remote workers from a variety of industries including software, insurance and media.\(^12\)\(^13\)

The Tulsa Remote program will pay remote workers $10,000 to move to Tulsa, **Oklahoma** for a year. The program offers other incentives including a membership to the 36 Degrees North co-working space, up to three months of discounted rent in furnished apartments, plus events to help workers get settled. Nearly 10,000 people applied, and the organization selected 100 individuals.\(^14\)\(^15\)

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\(^8\) Master Remote Work Certificate website [https://remoteworkcertificate.com/mrwpc](https://remoteworkcertificate.com/mrwpc)

\(^9\) Supporting Work Flexibility Helps Rural America Thrive, 1 Million for Work Flexibility blog [https://www.workflexibility.org/supporting-work-flexibility-helps-rural-america-thrive/](https://www.workflexibility.org/supporting-work-flexibility-helps-rural-america-thrive/)

\(^10\) Wisconsin State Legislature [http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/196/5045](http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/196/5045)


\(^12\) Vermont Official State Website, Remote Worker Grant Program. [https://www.thinkvermont.com/remote-worker-grant-program/](https://www.thinkvermont.com/remote-worker-grant-program/)


\(^15\) Tulsa Remote website [https://tulsareMOTE.com/](https://tulsareMOTE.com/)
TechHire Eastern Kentucky is a public private partnership which pays candidates to learn various coding languages and then take paid internships at technology companies with the goal of employment in the digital economy. Google, Apple and Salesforce could hire developer talent in Appalachian states that would work remotely. TechHire Eastern Kentucky also has a program designed to create a pathway into remote medical careers.  

Site location considerations

Despite the growth in telecommuting, not all telecommute jobs can be performed from any U.S. location. “Telecommute jobs provide numerous benefits for individuals and businesses alike, but companies can’t always offer employment to out-of-state workers. Sometimes, telecommute jobs are restricted by geographic location for legal, financial, or operational reasons.”

Some considerations for communities include:

Internet - communities should have high internet speeds and robust, reliable and affordable broadband connections. High speed broadband is defined as 25 megabits per second download speed and 3 megabits to upload.

Favorable labor laws – each state has its own set of requirements and can affect minimum wages paid, The Family and Medical Leave Act, workers’ compensation and background checks.

Tax policies – hiring out-of-state employees creates more work for companies to set up correct tax withholdings and accounts.

Health insurance – some companies do not qualify for group plans if their workforce is scattered across the nation.

Professional Certification or Licensing Requirements – Certain occupations require workers to pass a state exam and become certified to work in that state. Licenses and certifications do not always cross state lines.

16 Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program website https://www.ekcep.org/techhire
