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20 Brainiest Cities in America

by *Richard Florida*

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Where do the biggest brainiacs in America live? Richard Florida crunches the numbers to figure out the smartest cities in the country.

Boulder, Colorado, tops the list of America's brainiest metros. Boulder is home to the University of Colorado and was recently named by [BusinessWeek](#) as the nation's best place for startup companies.

Gallery: [20 Brainiest Cities in America](#)



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America's Brainiest Metros are a mix of large metros with a significant presence of technology and knowledge-based businesses and the nation's premiere college and university towns. Not surprisingly, the presence of a major research university appears to be one of the most decisive variables. Durham or Durham-Chapel Hill, North Carolina, home to Duke University and North Carolina State, takes second place, with neighboring Raleigh-Cary (home to the University of North Carolina) in 12th. Both are part of the famed North Carolina Research Triangle. Greater Washington DC comes in third, followed by Greater Boston (Harvard, MIT, Boston University), and the Trenton-Ewing metro in Central New Jersey, which includes Princeton University.

The remainder of the top 20 includes large tech metros like San Jose (Stanford), San Francisco, Austin (University of Texas) and Seattle (University of Washington) along with Olympia (the state capital, which is part of Greater

Seattle's expanded metro area), as well as college towns like Ithaca, New York, home to Cornell University (which also topped [our earlier list of best places for college grads](#)), Charlottesville (University of Virginia), Madison (University of Wisconsin), Corvallis (Oregon State University), Fort Collins (home to Colorado State University,) and Ames (Iowa State University) and Iowa City (the University of Iowa). The list also includes the Frost Belt metros of Albany-Schenectady (home to General Electric and SUNY Albany), and Rochester, Minnesota, (home to the Mayo Clinic and IBM's largest global facility and which topped [our previous list of biggest projected job gainers](#)) also make the list.

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Brainy metros tend to have higher incomes, wages, and economic output, higher levels of innovation (measured as patents), more high-tech industry, and higher housing prices, according to an analysis by my research team at the Martin Prosperity Institute. They have also been among the most resilient during the current economic downturn.

Though luring new factories and building new stadiums lend themselves to outsize media attention and ostentatious ribbon-cutting ceremonies, the less glamorous work of building up local knowledge assets and leveraging existing university campuses yields far greater and lasting

economic gains. Unlike incentive packages and new stadiums, which, despite their price tags of hundreds of millions of dollars, too often turn out to provide benefits that are scant or fleeting, knowledge assets like research universities can't move; they are rooted in the local economy. These brainy metros not only demonstrate a better approach to stimulating state and local economic development, they are helping to rebuild the U.S. economy as a whole.

The Brainiest Metros Index is based on three variables: (1) the share of adults 25 years of age and older with a Ph.D., master's or professional degree (from the [U.S. Census American Community Survey](#)), (2) computer scientists and mathematicians as a share of all employment, and (3) scientists (physical, biological, social) as a share of total metro employment (both from [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)). The index weights all three variables equally and covers 362 U.S. metro regions.

[Charlotta Mellander](#) crunched the numbers, based on data from the [American Community Survey](#) and the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

[Richard Florida](#) is director of the [University of Toronto's Martin Prosperity Institute](#) and author of [The Great Reset](#), published recently by Harper Collins.

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