

Prince George's County: An Example Of The Shifting Tech Startup Perspective

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It's no secret that tech entrepreneurs have traditionally been drawn to hubs like Silicon Valley and NYC due to the concentration of resources, networks and opportunities, which are both well-established and well-known to everyone in the tech world. These hubs offer access to a talented pool of engineers, designers and other tech professionals, as well as capital and investment opportunities critical for startup success. In addition, the vibrant tech communities in these areas provide a wealth of networking opportunities, mentorship and collaboration for startups.

However, recent events have dramatically changed the landscape for tech startups and have led to a shift away from traditional hubs. The pandemic accelerated the trend of remote work, making it easier for startups to hire talent from anywhere in the world and reducing the need for startups to be physically located in a technology hub. Additionally, lockdowns brought attention to the high cost of living in hubs like the Bay Area, leading many

startups to consider alternative locations with lower costs and a better quality of life.

These changes have opened up new opportunities for startups and have made it easier for entrepreneurs to access the resources and networks they need to succeed from anywhere. This shift has also accelerated a leveling of the playing field for previously overlooked communities, proving to budding business owners they can, in fact, start and grow successful businesses in these areas. Though choosing a historically underinvested community may seem counterintuitive, it can actually offer a number of advantages for entrepreneurs looking to stand out from the crowd.

Just outside of our nation's capital, Prince George's County, Maryland, is one such community that has undergone significant transformation in recent years, making it a great place to start and grow a tech business. When compared to its neighboring counties in Northern Virginia, Prince George's offers a unique and contrasting tech ecosystem for entrepreneurs and innovators. Northern Virginia, often referred to as "[The Silicon Valley of the East](#)," has been known for decades for its thriving tech scene and strong data center presence, making it the obvious choice in the D.C. area when I set out to build a technology business in 2010.

After moving my consultancy several years ago to Maryland, however, I experienced the counter-intuitive reality that the more mature ecosystem in Virginia meant it was both more competitive and more expensive to get off the ground. **In contrast, Prince George's offered a more affordable and supportive environment for my startup, with its heavy emphasis on helping diverse owners of local small businesses succeed and grow.**

Since the start of the pandemic, Prince George's has made significant strides in building a strong technology ecosystem by supporting new industry advocacy groups like the [Prince George's County Tech Council](#) and building partnerships with local universities and research institutions that provide businesses with access to cutting-edge technology, as well as a pipeline of technical talent. Additionally, the county has worked to [attract](#) leading technology companies, helping to create a thriving tech community and providing opportunities for local small businesses to collaborate and network with industry leaders. While Northern Virginia may have a larger and more established tech scene, **Prince George's relatively unsaturated market for technology businesses offers a unique opportunity for them to differentiate themselves.**

Research supports the argument that starting a tech business outside of established tech hubs can be good for growth. According to one [study](#), startups in regions outside of Silicon Valley and other tech hubs have a higher rate of success and growth compared to those located in tech hotspots. The study found that startups in less saturated markets were able to grow faster and achieve better outcomes than their peers in established tech hubs. As an added benefit, by removing the bias and barriers of geography, the outcomes of building a more diverse and inclusive innovation ecosystem are being realized more quickly outside of major metro coastal cities.

Though this shift in landscape is likely to continue to spur more tech growth across the country, **there are several challenges these new businesses will need to confront in order to take advantage of the opportunity.**

- **Location selection:** Though tons of great options outside of major hubs are emerging, not all are created equal, making the job of choosing a location all the more nuanced than it's ever been. **Entrepreneurs need to carefully assess locations for tax incentives, unique access to capital (including government grants,) small business-supporting programs and other variables that may impact the specific type of business they plan to engage in.** While geography no longer dictates some traditional business drivers (such as workforce), many other variables are still constrained by where a business is headquartered (such as tax code and government assistance).

- **Internal infrastructure:** Now more than ever, building a business atop of technology infrastructure that scales and enables secure and productive remote work is key to startup success. Traditionally, startups were able to get by with limited tools and software, shared in a garage or basement and buoyed by old-school whiteboards and sticky notes. **Today's cloud-centric business dynamic requires even early-stage companies to think carefully about the tools they choose to invest in and the platforms that will scale with minimal friction.** Getting started with low-cost small business versions of SaaS services such as Microsoft 365 enables startups to leverage the same software as their large enterprise competitors while avoiding time-consuming migrations as the organization scales.

- **Uncharted territory:** Mature tech ecosystems typically provide entrepreneurs with a proverbial “map” and many sherpas along the path to guide them in their startup journey. **In contrast, going off the beaten path means founders need to be comfortable traveling down avenues that include little guidance and fewer reference points.**

They also need to be open to collaborating with government officials to ensure the outcomes that political leaders speak about (such as workforce development and sustainable business growth), which are necessary for startup survival, are being realized through intentional public policy and targeted government investments.

Although the perceptions and sentiments toward startup geography are clearly evolving at this moment, and this may appear to be a threat to long-established hubs that have benefitted from their legendary allure, the truth is Silicon Valley and other hotspots will continue to receive an outsized share of tech investments for the foreseeable future. That said, **adventurous entrepreneurs will reap the rewards of going against conventional wisdom and choosing localities that provide more practical support—which ultimately can have a greater impact on tech startup success in the post-pandemic world.**