

Austin: The Basics

City of Austin: General Information

The City of Austin, chartered in 1839, has a Council-Manager form of government with a Mayor who is elected at large and ten Council members who are elected by geographic district. The elected officials serve four-year staggered terms subject to a maximum of two consecutive terms. The City Manager, appointed by the City Council, is responsible to the Council for the management of all City employees, except Council appointees, and for the administration of all City affairs.

1. What is the basic setup of Austin's local government?

Austin, the capital of Texas, is the fourth largest city in the state (behind Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio) and the eleventh largest in the nation with a September 2016 population of 925,491 according to the City's estimates. Over the past ten years, Austin's population has increased by approximately 26.4% or 193,110 residents. The Austin metro area population is now over 2 million people. Geographically, Austin consists of approximately 326 square miles. The current estimated median household income for Austin residents is \$56,163 according to Nielsen SiteReports. Austin's per capita income is estimated to be \$55,065.

2. What are some key statistics to note about the City of Austin?

Card Sort Directions: After answering the questions above, read, sort and summarize/pick out key facts from the cards on your table, which contain excerpts from the General Information section of the City of Austin's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the Fiscal Year 2016. This section of the report asserts Austin's excellence as a city and highlights strengths, recent developments and recognitions that Austin has received. As you read, think about the main information presented on each card, what you think is most important for people to know about the city of Austin, and how you could sort the cards (economic data, services information, etc.)

After you have finished reading and sorting with your group, you will work together to create a list of ten top facts about Austin—one for each card—to let people know what is going on with the city.

When you have finished, come back and answer the questions below.

3. What categories did you sort your cards into?

4. What common themes/information did you see that led you to choose each category?

5. What were some of the overall trends that you saw happening throughout all of the cards?

6. Do you think that any Austin voices were left out of this report? If so, who do you think was not well represented in this introduction, and why do you think they were left out?

7. List three developments of the city of Austin that you learned about from the cards. For each development you select, list a challenge that might result from that development (for example: more tourists and travelers might lead to security concerns).

Fast Facts: Austin 2017



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Austin is nationally recognized as a great place to live due in part to its diverse and eclectic population, as well as its promotion of a year-round outdoor active lifestyle. Austin draws its special character from its physical setting along the Balcones Escarpment, a city wedged between coastal plains and dramatic cliffs, canyons, and juniper-carpeted rolling hills; it exists as a physical and cultural oasis where talented, entrepreneurial, hard-working people are drawn from all over the world. Austin's quality of life has become its biggest economic development engine, and the City's diverse demographic structure serves to support and enrich its quality of life. The City of Austin has also received a significant amount of recognition for being a leader in numerous areas such as job opportunities, creative economy, health, and business opportunities. Some of this recent recognition includes:

- "#1 Best Cities in the U.S. to Start a Small Business (American City Business Journals, April 2016)"
 - "#6 Best Places to Live and Work as a MovieMaker in Big Cities, 2016 (Moviemaker- January 2017)
 - #5 Top Ten Cities for Creatives (SmartAsset, June 2016)
 - #2 2016 Destination Experience Satisfaction Study (JD Power & Associates, October 2016) o #2 World's Best Tech Hubs to Live and Work In (Expert Market, June 2016)
 - #4 Best Metro Areas for Young Entrepreneurs (Nerdwallet .com, December 2016)
 - #1 Healthiest City in Texas (24/7 Wall St., September 2016)
 - #1 2016 STEM Job Growth Index (RCLCO- Robert Charles Lessar & Co., June 2016)
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The City of Austin is fortunate to offer a host of broad-ranged educational opportunities for those individuals with a desire to learn. Austin is a highly educated city, with 46.9% of adults twenty-five years or older holding a bachelor's or advanced degree, compared to 29.8% for the U.S. as a whole. Higher education is a significant aspect of life in the Austin area which is host to six universities, a robust community college system, and numerous other institutions of higher learning. The University of Texas at Austin (UT), a world-class center of education and research, is one of the ten largest public universities in terms of undergraduate enrollment. In the 2016 U.S. News and World Report Best Colleges survey the national universities, both public and private.

The Austin metropolitan area is consistently recognized among the most inventive, creative, wired, educated, fit, and loved cities in which to live and work. The Milken Institute ranked the Austin metropolitan area number 2 (tie) in its "2016 Best-Performing Cities" report, which ranks U.S. metropolitan areas by how well they are creating and sustaining jobs and economic growth. The index "provides an objective benchmark for examining the underlying factors and identifying unique characteristics of economic growth in metropolitan areas." Citing growth in the technology industry as well as diversification into other sectors such as travel and tourism, health services, and medical research, the report notes that the Austin-Round Rock area, "is rapidly gaining an international reputation as a model worthy of emulation in tech-based economic development policy." In February 2017 U.S. News & World Report ranked Austin as the "2017 Best Place to Live in the USA." The rankings were based on numerous factors such as the job market, affordability, quality of life, desirability, and net migration. In November 2016, the City of Austin was designated as one of the top-ranked U.S. digital cities by the Center for Digital Government and the Digital Communities Program. Austin was ranked fifth in the population category of 500,000 or more in this survey that "recognizes cities using technology to improve citizen services, enhance transparency and encourage citizen engagement."

After several years of booming growth, the Austin area is seeing a return to more sustainable growth rates. At slightly over 7%, the year-over-year annual average percent change in the Austin... was the lowest it has been in five years. The rate of growth calculated by this index has been declining since early 2015, but is still positive and showing signs of relative strength when compared to the state. In 2016, population, employment, retail growth, business growth, housing starts and average wages were all up over the previous year, albeit (although) they grew at a slower rate than prior years. Over the longer term the Austin area population is expected to continue to grow at a rapid pace. Recently the American City Business Journals projected population growth in over 900 metropolitan and micropolitan areas around the country. The study projects that the Austin- Round Rock Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) population will grow by 98% to four million by the year 2040. This would make the Austin MSA the fastest growing in the nation for the twenty- five year period. Austin is joined by three other Texas MSAs, Houston, San Antonio and Dallas- Fort Worth, in the top seven areas that are projected to be fastest growing through 2040.

While the Austin economy has diversified over the last decade, the technology industry continues to play a large role in the City's economic expansion. According to Moody's Analytics, from 2010 to 2015 the number of technology jobs in Austin increased over 37%, the third highest rate in the nation. In 2016 evidence of this growth came in many forms. Apple Inc. expanded its Austin-based workforce and completed a 1.1 million square foot campus in northwest Austin. Oracle is building a new corporate office on a 27-acre site in Austin and will expand its workforce in the area by 50%. Samsung announced plans to invest an additional \$1 billion in, and will hire additional employees, at its Austin manufacturing facility. High rates of entrepreneurship also played a significant role in Austin's economic expansion. The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation annually evaluates startup and entrepreneurship activity in 40 major U.S. metropolitan areas. In 2016, for the second year in a row, the Kaufman Startup Index ranked Austin number one in startup activity and number two in the rate of growth of entrepreneurial business growth in the U.S. In addition during 2016, CNBC recognized Austin as "America's Best Place to Start a Business.

Austin continues to be a destination for both business and recreational activities. Austin is known around the world as the "Live Music Capital of the World" with over 250 live music venues. In "The Economic Impact of Music in Austin, 2016 Update", (based on 2014 data), TXP, Inc. estimates that the collective impact of music and music-related tourism exceeds \$1.8 billion annually, supporting more than 20,000 jobs. In providing a unique convergence of original music, independent films, and emerging technologies and more recently education and sustainability. This year's SXSW core events attracted approximately 88,000 registrants and included keynote addresses by the President of the United States as well as the First Lady. According to an economic impact analysis prepared by Greyhill Advisors, SXSW was responsible for injecting more than \$325 million into the Austin economy during 2016. Other major festivals and events impacting the tourism economy include University of Texas athletic events, Austin City Limits Music Festival, Austin Film Festival, and Fun Fun Fun Fest. In addition, the Circuit of the Americas, just southeast of Austin, is home to the Formula 1 United States Grand Prix, a motorcycle grand prix. event, and other racing and concert events which also contribute substantially to the tourism economy.

The growing local economy in Austin relies on quality air service to foster business, government, and leisure travel. During 2016 Austin's airport, ABIA, set a new record for annual traffic for the sixth consecutive year. In 2016, over 12.4 million passengers passed through ABIA. Air carriers continue to add direct flights to Austin facilitating both domestic and international connections throughout the world. To accommodate the increased flights and passengers, ABIA completed 3 major projects in 2015: an expanded taxiway, a consolidated rental car facility, and expansion of the east terminal, adding over 56,000 square feet including a new Customs and Border Protection area which more than doubles the capacity to process international arrivals as well as adding a new six-lane TSA checkpoint. In 2016, construction began on a nine-gate terminal and apron expansion. This expansion will accommodate approximately 4 million additional passengers annually, an increase of 27 percent. In addition, a new Hyatt Place Hotel, parking facilities, and pet boarding facility are under construction.

The Texas economy has been strong for well over a decade. With a \$1.59 trillion economy, Texas ranks second only to California in gross state product. In October 2016, Forbes listed Texas as one of the top five Best States for Business and ranked the state first for current economic climate. Chief Executive Magazine in its 2016 survey found that CEOs consider Texas as the best state Texas is still held in high esteem by CEOs for its favorable economic reforms." With the current downturn in oil prices, job growth in Texas has been slowing but is still positive. For the year ended December 2016, Texas added 213,500 non-agricultural jobs. This results in a job growth of 1.8 percent, higher than the national employment growth rate of 1.4 percent. All major Texas metro areas had more jobs in December 2016 than in December 2015. Austin area employment growth continued to be solid in 2016. Employment grew by 1.9%, slightly above the Texas average. Austin's unemployment rate was at 3.2% in December 2016, near the 2015 level of 3.1%, and well below the December State and National unemployment rates of 4.6% and 4.7%, respectively.

The City could not achieve its vision of making Austin the most livable city in the country without a highly dedicated and exceptional workforce to support City Council's policies and initiatives. Council's priorities of affordability, equal opportunity for all residents, mobility, health, and safety can only be achieved by partnering with the community in engaging ways. City staff is committed to creating a work environment that fosters creative thinking and innovation throughout the organization, thereby better positioning the workforce to more effectively respond to new challenges as well as new opportunities. City employees take enormous pride in their work. PRIDE reflects the City's core values of public service and how employees relate to customers and each other. The elements of PRIDE include: Public Service & Engagement; Responsibility & Accountability; Innovation & Sustainability; Diversity & Inclusion; and Ethics & Integrity. Reflecting the PRIDE that the City's employees take in their work, Austin ranks 25 percentage points above the national average for large cities for overall quality of customer service. During 2016, Forbes included the City of Austin in the top 25 of its list of America's Best Employers. Austin was the highest ranked governmental employer in this survey of more than 30,000 workers from companies with more than 5,000 employees.

Austin's commitment to sustainability and innovation was recognized by a number of organizations over the last year. In February 2017, Austin was the winner of the Smart Cities Council Readiness Challenge Grant. The City was one of five cities chosen from a pool of over 130 applicants. All the winners "will receive a tailored Readiness Workshop during 2017 to develop a roadmap for applying smart technologies to further innovation, inclusion and investment within their cities." In addition, the City's Neighborhood Partnering Program received an Outstanding Achievement in Innovation award from the Alliance for Innovation. Through this program, the City works with community groups to develop and resource improvement projects on City property or right of way, transforming vacant lots into community gardens and retaining walls into vibrant mosaics. In addition, The City of Austin has long been a national leader in the climate protection arena through the efforts of City leaders, the city-owned electric utility (Austin Energy), and the participation of customers from residential to other governmental entities and private businesses. As a result of these efforts and partnerships, Austin Energy led all public power utilities in the country for sales of renewable energy again in 2015 and ranked third when compared to all utilities both public and private. In January 2016, Austin Energy was awarded a \$4.3 million grant to pilot a platform to promote integrated distributed energy resources including community solar, battery storage, and smart inverter technologies. In September, U.S. Department of Energy SunShot Initiative awarded the City of Austin with a gold designation to recognize the City's work to improve access to solar energy.