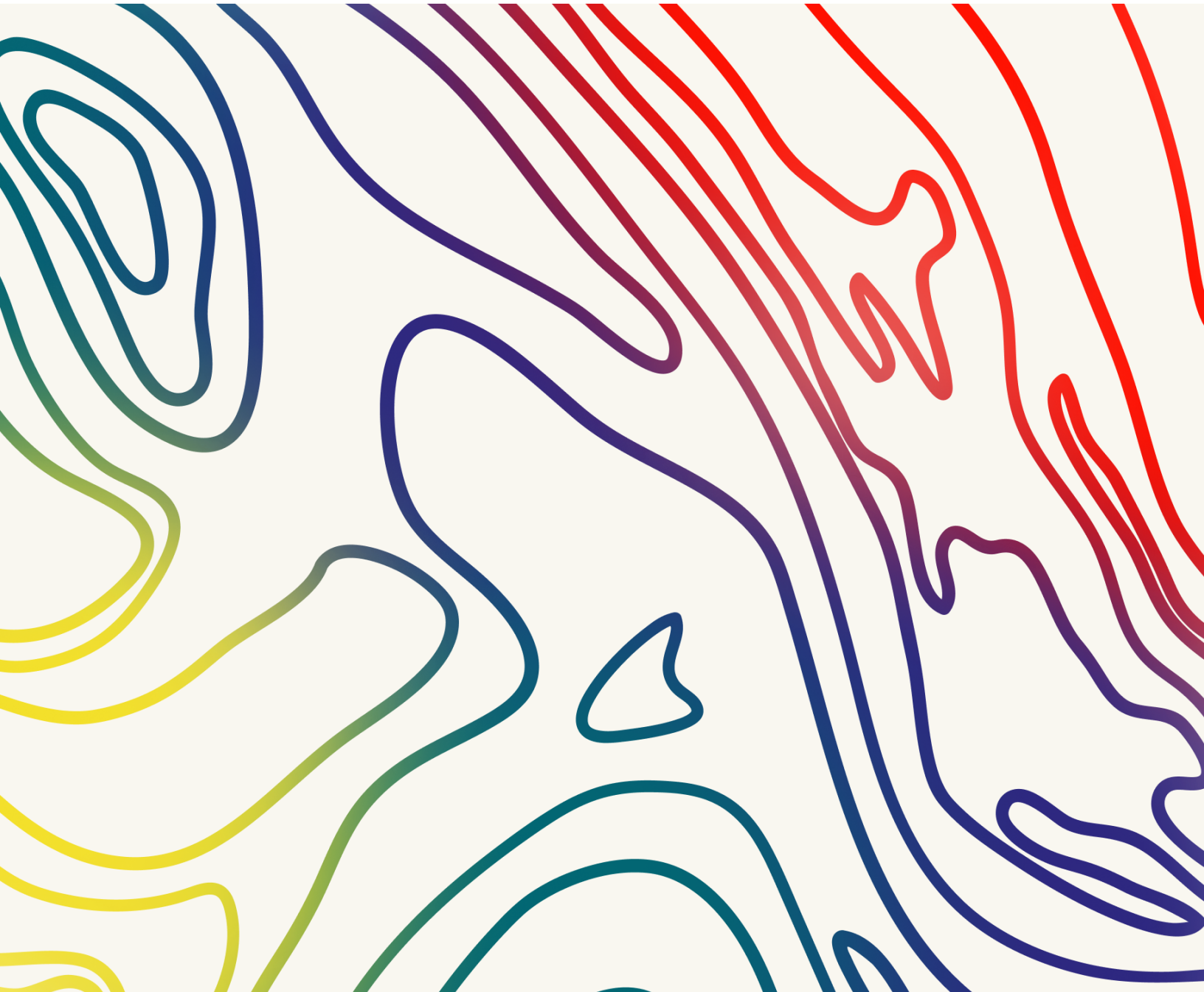


# The changing map of Gen Z jobseekers

Beyond remote, flexibility is top of mind for Gen Z



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# Introduction

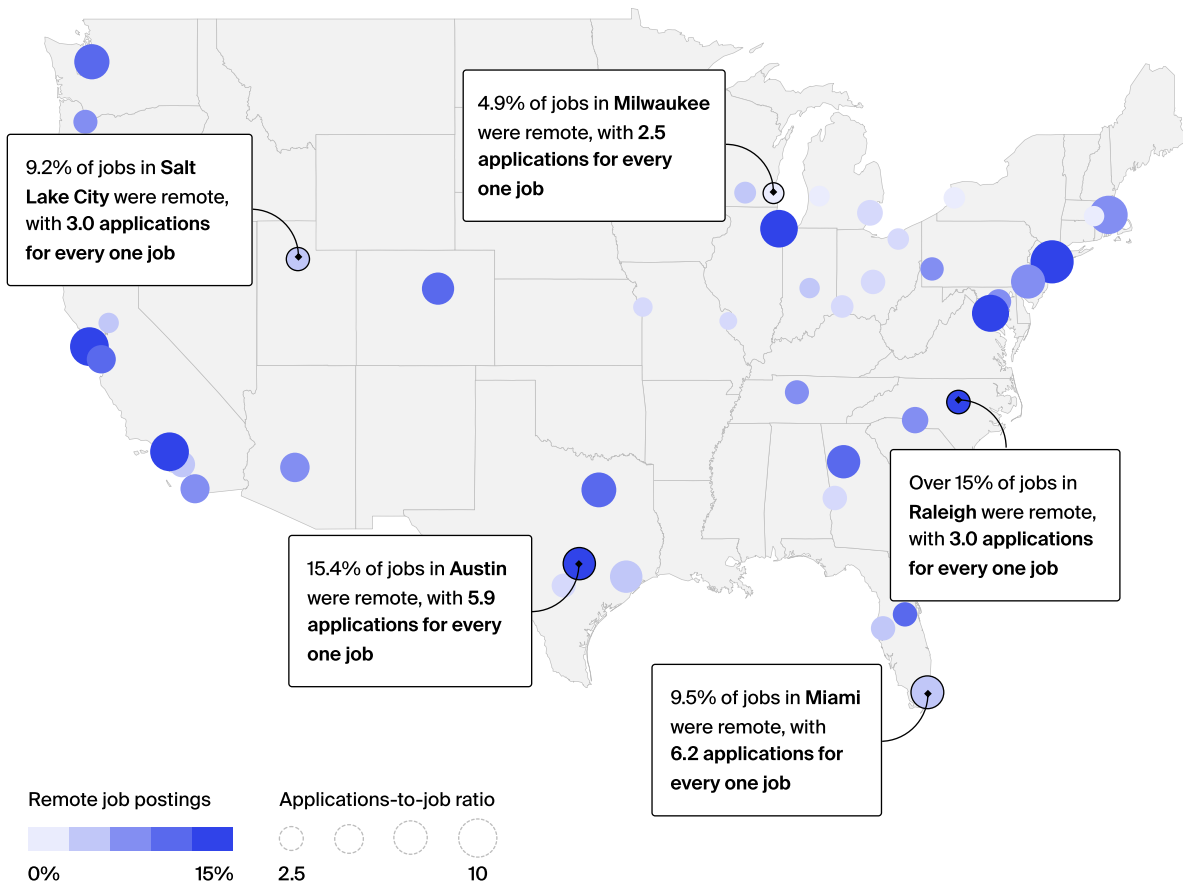
After multiple waves of COVID-19 and the continued delay of return-to-office plans, employers, workers, and the media are still asking, “How long will remote work stick around?” But the dichotomy between “still remote, for now” and “back to the cubicle” is a false one. Flexible work is no longer a temporary compromise—it’s a new reality. In this report, insights drawn from Handshake’s platform show that while remote jobs get nearly triple the applications that non-remote jobs do, Gen Z applicants still care about location and cost of living. These interplaying preferences are reshaping work in real time.

## Key takeaways

- 01 Gen Z wants remote work:** in 2021, remote jobs were almost 3x more popular than non-remote jobs among Handshake users.
- 02 Cities with the most remote jobs are more popular:** the proportion of remote full-time jobs in a city was a statistically significant predictor of its popularity in 2021, with every 5% increase in remote jobs translating to an increase of 1 application per job.
- 03 But Gen Z is not indifferent to geography:** multiple factors play into their career decisions, including a desire for flexibility and a reasonable cost of living.
- 04 Not just tech majors:** 22% of all applications from communications majors, 20% from art and design majors, and 22% from health professions majors were to remote roles (compared to 25% from computer science and information systems majors.)
- 05 Two case studies: Miami and Washington D.C.** highlight how differences in affordability, remote work opportunities, and industry hubs play into applicants’ job decisions.

## The United States of remote work

The percentage of remote, full-time jobs in a city was a predictor of its popularity on the Handshake platform in 2021.



## The continued rise of remote

Although remote jobs made up only 7% of full time job postings on Handshake in 2021, these roles received an outsized interest from Gen Z, accounting for 17% of all total job applications on the platform.

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### Remote jobs got 3x as many applications

The number one keyword for students in 2021 was “remote”, accounting for more than 1.8 million searches, nearly double the next most common search term (“marketing”).

**7%**  
of full time job  
postings in 2021  
were remote

**17%**  
of job applications  
in 2021 were to  
remote jobs

**1.8m**  
keyword searches  
for “remote”  
in 2021

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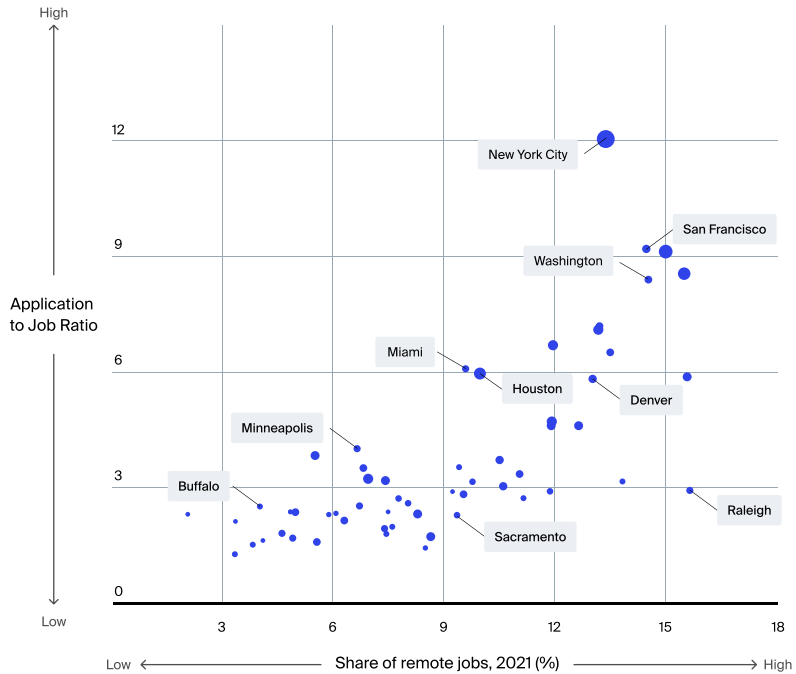
This analysis used two data points (whether a role is remote, and the location where the role is based) provided by employers in job postings to track the difference in total remote jobs across cities. As an example, a remote role based in Atlanta would be open to local candidates as well as remote-friendly to candidates based elsewhere.

When compared with the popularity of a city (the number of applications divided by the number of jobs), there was a strong correlation between a city's proportion of remote jobs and its desirability. Many employers have retained their offices, where employees may be working part time; others have committed to a fully distributed workforce. But no matter how "remote" is defined, it gets significant attention from Gen Z applicants.

It's not surprising that a place like San Francisco, a hub for tech recruiting, is getting attention from applicants because of its outsize number of remote tech roles. And it's true that tech jobs are frequently listed as remote: more than 1 out of 4 jobs in tech and IT were marked as “remote” on the Handshake network.

Cities with the highest proportion of remote jobs are seeing the most interest from job seekers.

In 2021, there was a strong correlation between a city's overall proportion of remote jobs and job desirability (the ratio of applications per job).



Bubble size represents relative city population. Source: U.S. Census Bureau; *Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Incorporated Places of 50,000 or More, July 1, 2019*

But, this trend goes beyond industries. Even when controlling for a city's population and tech sector, **the percentage of remote jobs in a city remained a statistically significant predictor of its popularity on the platform in 2021**, with every 5% increase in remote jobs translating to an increase of one application per job.

Interest in remote work is not limited by an applicant's major.

More than 1 in 5 applications from users majoring in communications, computer science, arts and design, and health professions were to remote jobs.



**25%**  
Technology



**22%**  
Communications



**22%**  
Health professions



**20%**  
Arts and design

## Beyond remote, Gen Z is looking for flexibility

In addition to looking at application data, Handshake surveyed over 1,800 users to better understand their preferences. Their answers hinted at a wide desire for hybrid work. Many mentioned that they crave at least some in-person interaction and opportunities to network, especially in their first roles out of college.

But despite expressing reservations about working remotely 100% of the time, survey respondents consistently mentioned the myriad benefits that remote work offers: greater control (setting their own schedule; less micromanagement), better focus, and improved quality of life (skipping a long commute, taking breaks to exercise, having flexibility to care for a child or older family member).

It may be that jobs marked “remote” send the signal that the employer is open to flexible work arrangements. Employers committed to hiring Gen Z talent should carefully consider which jobs truly need to be in the office, and which can be done remotely. Showing flexibility is an important indicator that a company can respond to their employees’ needs beyond salary.

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“This generation of college graduates is overqualified, efficient, creative, effortlessly tech savvy, and increasingly unwilling to settle for a job that does not give us what we deserve or respects our personal needs. Employers need to know that we prioritize a work-life balance, healthy company culture, and fair compensation for our labor so that we can afford to live comfortably. We can’t afford to settle for less.”

**Anisah**

University of Washington, Class of 2021

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# Remote work reshapes the map: two case studies

The wide availability of remote jobs is transforming cities and creating new hubs of Gen Z talent. **Gen Z is not just optimizing for the best job—they are looking for work-life benefits that come from more affordable living, too.**

Two cities—Miami and Washington D.C.—demonstrate how cost of living, remote work opportunities, and industry hubs play into applicants' decisions.

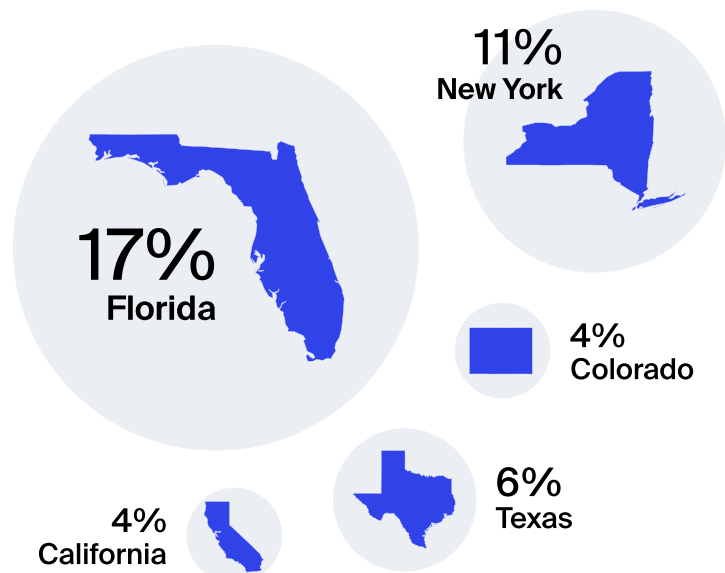
## Miami

**Miami had 2.3x more applications per job than anticipated for a city of its size and demographics.** Miami's cost of living is nearly 40% lower than Brooklyn; meanwhile, it is emerging as a new finance and tech hub.<sup>1</sup> Financial firms, such as Blackstone and Goldman Sachs, have opened offices in Miami, giving applicants an alternative to building their careers on Wall Street while staying in the same time zone. Fintech and crypto companies—like London's Blockchain.com, which chose Miami as its US headquarters in 2021—have also gravitated to the city.

In Miami, the combination of affordability and remote opportunity, as well as new booming industries, contributed to a noticeable interest from Gen Z: Florida was the most searched location on the Handshake network in 2021.

## Top 5 most searched states in 2021

Handshake users searched for "Florida" 1.6x more often than the second highest state search term ("New York").





## Washington, D.C.

D.C. had one of the highest rates of remote jobs on the Handshake Network: compared to Miami, it had almost five percentage points more remote jobs in 2021 (14.4% in D.C., versus 9.5% in Miami).

The remote job gap between Miami and D.C. underscores the ways local labor markets have been transformed over the past two years: during the pandemic lockdowns, more than half of D.C.'s workforce was able to work from home—60% of adults reported working remotely, vs. just 30% in Florida and 36% in Texas.<sup>2</sup>

On Handshake, the shift to remote work was seen across all of D.C.'s industries. For example, 16% of non-profit jobs in D.C. were remote (10 percentage points higher than the proportion of remote jobs posted to the Handshake network.) And 9% of government jobs—D.C.'s largest sector—were remote, 5 percentage points higher than the Handshake network.

These changes go beyond just jobs, transforming cities as Gen Z workers assess affordability, flexibility, and quality of life: census data showed that D.C.'s population shrank in 2021 by around 20,000 residents, or 2.9 percent.<sup>3</sup> The wide availability of remote jobs may be allowing workers to remain in (and get hired for) roles, while giving them flexibility to live in regions with lower costs of living in the wider D.C. metro area (in 2021, D.C. had the second-highest cost of living index in the U.S., after Hawaii).<sup>4</sup>

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“I think that the most up-and-coming cities are going to be smaller cities like Dayton because Gen Z people don't aspire to work in offices as much as past generations. The appeal of cities and apartment living has gone down while housing prices in big cities have skyrocketed.”

**Student**

University of Dayton, Class of 2024

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## Conclusion

The expectations of work have changed. During the pandemic, flexible schedules, work-life balance, and employer sensitivity to individual needs—dimensions of work that Gen Z already valued—became paramount for workers. Gen Z's continued interest in remote and hybrid work will have real economic impact, and employers will have to carefully assess their degree of flexibility in order to attract early talent.

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“I realize that almost anything that is done in person can be done online. I focus much more in the comfort of my home and feel as if I can go at my own pace. Doing a job online allows me to have a balance between work and life. It allows me to feel comfortable and do my job to the best of my ability.”

**Alexis**

Fordham University, Class of 2025

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# Methodology

**Remote work:** In order to understand remote trends, we utilized two key data points submitted by employers when creating a full-time job posting on Handshake: whether the job is remote or remote-friendly (a “remote” flag), and the city where the job was based.

We grounded our analysis in an employer’s remote flag, a clear signal from employers about whether the poster explicitly considered a job open to remote work. This means that jobs that just contained the words “remote” or “telework,” or phrases like “work from home,” were not considered remote jobs in this analysis.

**Remote job modeling:** To understand the relationship between remote jobs and a city’s “popularity” in terms of applications (i.e., the number of applications divided by the overall number of jobs), we created a multiple linear regression model, controlling for factors such as the number of jobs in a city’s technology sector, the total number of applications created in 2021, and the city’s population using recent U.S. census numbers.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Comparison based on The Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER)’s *Cost of Living Index (COLI)*. Accessed in 2022.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau; *Household Pulse Survey, Week 27, Transportation Table 1*. April 2021.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau; *Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for the United States*. December 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Comparison based on The Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER)’s *Cost of Living Index (COLI)*. Accessed in 2022.

## Appendix: full-time remote job percentage and applications-to-jobs by city, 2021\*

City	State	% of Remote Jobs	Apps-to-Jobs
Phoenix	AZ	11.8	4.8
San Francisco	CA	14.4	9.3
Los Angeles	CA	14.9	9.2
San Jose	CA	12.6	4.7
San Diego	CA	11.8	4.7
Irvine	CA	9.3	3.6
Sacramento	CA	9.6	2.4
Denver	CO	12.9	5.9
Washington D.C.	DC	14.4	8.5
Miami	FL	9.5	6.2
Tampa	FL	9.7	3.3
Orlando	FL	13.7	3.3
Jacksonville	FL	8.6	1.8
Atlanta	GA	13.4	6.6
Columbus	GA	7.3	3.3
Chicago	IL	15.4	8.7
Indianapolis	IN	8.2	2.4
Boston	MA	11.3	9.0
Worcester	MA	2.1	2.4
Baltimore	MD	11.0	3.4
Detroit	MI	6.8	3.6
Grand Rapids	MI	4.8	2.5
Minneapolis	MN	6.6	4.1
St. Louis	MO	7.5	2.1
Kansas City	MO	6.3	2.2
Charlotte	NC	10.4	3.8
Raleigh	NC	15.5	3.0
New York City	NY	13.3	12.0
Buffalo	NY	4.0	2.6
Columbus	OH	7.3	3.3
Cleveland	OH	6.7	2.6
Cincinnati	OH	7.7	2.8
Portland	OR	10.5	3.1
Philadelphia	PA	11.9	6.8
Pittsburgh	PA	11.8	3.0
Nashville	TN	10.0	3.2
Dallas	TX	13.1	7.2
Austin	TX	15.4	5.9
Houston	TX	9.9	6.0
San Antonio	TX	6.9	3.3
Salt Lake City	UT	9.2	3.0
Seattle	WA	13.1	7.3
Milwaukee	WI	4.9	2.5
Madison	WI	8.0	2.7

\*Cities with over 4,000 full-time jobs created in 2021

# About

**Handshake is the #1 place to launch a career with no connections, experience, or luck required.**

Handshake's community includes 20 million students and young alumni around the world from 1,400 educational institutions, including four-year colleges, community colleges, boot camps, and 290+ minority-serving institutions. The platform connects up-and-coming talent with 650,000+ employers—from Fortune 500 companies like Google, Nike, and Target to thousands of public school districts, healthcare systems, nonprofits, and even sports teams like the LA Dodgers. Handshake is headquartered in San Francisco with offices in Denver, New York, and London and teammates working globally.

**Learn more at [joinhandshake.com](https://joinhandshake.com).**