

WICHITA NAMED NO. 1 U.S. METRO FOR AEROSPACE AND DEFENSE INVESTMENT

Wichita's century of aerospace expertise is positioning the region for the next generation of aerospace, defense and advanced manufacturing investment.

For more than a century, Wichita has built an international reputation for making what flies. A new national ranking reinforces the strength of the ecosystem behind that reputation.

Global Location Strategies (GLS) named Wichita the **No. 1 U.S. metropolitan area for aerospace and defense investment** in its 2026 Best Places for Aerospace & Defense report, ranking the region first among more than 300 U.S. metros evaluated.

The ranking comes as the aerospace and defense industry enters a period of increased investment and growing demand for production capacity. According to GLS, announced U.S. aerospace and defense manufacturing investment has more than doubled since 2022, while the number of projects has nearly tripled.

As companies evaluate where to expand production, strengthen supply chains and access specialized talent, established ecosystems are increasingly important. Wichita has built that ecosystem over generations.



A B-1B Lancer takes off from McConnell Air Force Base following a massive structural repair completed at Wichita State University's National Institute for Aviation Research.

CREDIT: U.S. AIR FORCE

An ecosystem built for aerospace

GLS points to several factors behind Wichita's No. 1 ranking, including its more than century-long aerospace history, established manufacturing base, specialized workforce, supplier network, research capabilities and competitive business environment.

The region is home to major aerospace manufacturers including Boeing and Textron Aviation, along with hundreds of aerospace suppliers and specialized manufacturers.

Wichita State University's National Institute for Aviation Research (NIAR) further strengthens the region's capabilities through aerospace research, testing, certification and workforce development.

Together, these assets create an environment where manufacturers can connect with suppliers, research institutions and a workforce with specialized aerospace and advanced manufacturing expertise.

GLS found that the strongest aerospace and defense markets are increasingly competing as integrated ecosystems, rather than on the strength of individual companies or facilities. Engineering talent, advanced manufacturing, supplier depth, research and mission infrastructure all play a role in a region's ability to support long-term production.

Wichita has those pieces in place.



Our team hosted discussions about the opportunities available to companies in the Air Capital of the World during the 2026 Farnborough International Airshow.



More than 145 Kansas suppliers were a part of the Artemis II mission, which launched on April 1, 2026.

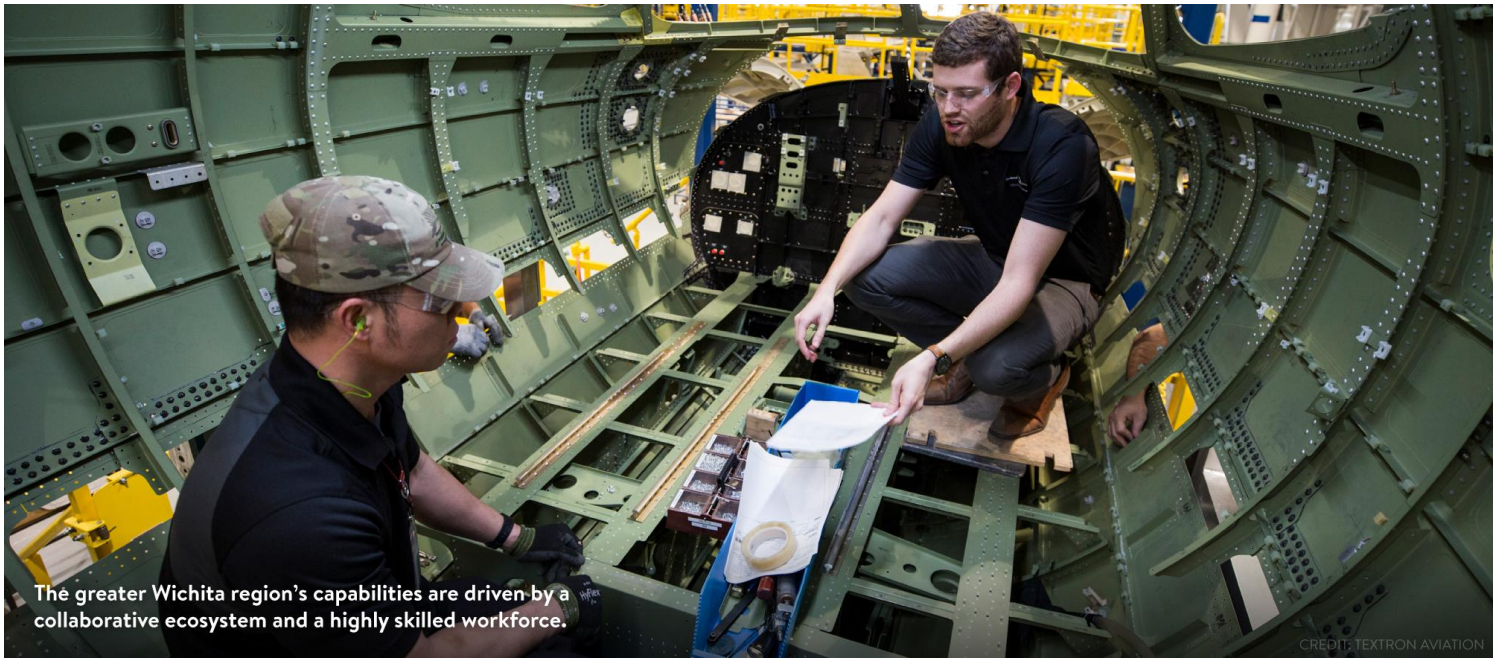
From aviation to aerospace, defense and space

The region's traditional aviation strength also provides a foundation for emerging opportunities in defense, space and advanced manufacturing.

The Partnership has been actively building relationships and pursuing investment opportunities through global industry events, including the 2026 Farnborough International Airshow. There, the Partnership held 122 meetings with companies from more than 11 countries and nearly every major U.S. defense prime contractor.

The Partnership's efforts at global trade shows over recent years have contributed to more than $2.3 billion in supply-chain investment in the Wichita region. The momentum reflects a broader opportunity for the Air Capital.

Wichita's aerospace expertise serves as a platform for companies looking to enter or expand within defense, space and other advanced industries, while the region's existing supplier network and manufacturing capabilities create opportunities for companies across the supply chain.


The greater Wichita region's capabilities are driven by a collaborative ecosystem and a highly skilled workforce.
CREDIT: TEXTRON AVIATION

A competitive place to build

Aerospace and defense companies are making increasingly complex location decisions. They need skilled workers, reliable suppliers, research capabilities, production capacity and infrastructure. They also need a business environment that allows them to compete over the long term.

GLS specifically highlighted Wichita's lower-than-average industrial occupancy costs, utility rates and labor costs as additional advantages.

That combination of quality and affordability helped Wichita stand out among the nation's leading aerospace markets.

The recognition also builds on Wichita's position as the nation's most manufacturing-specialized metro and reinforces the region's long-standing identity as the Air Capital of the World.

As other markets work to establish aerospace and defense ecosystems of their own, Wichita brings more than 110 years of industry expertise, established supply chains and a deep foundation of specialized talent. The Partnership is proud to see GLS recognize that legacy and remains focused on building on it to attract the next generation of investment and opportunity.