

## **Megawatts and Machine Minds: How Oklahoma's Data Center Boom Is Rewiring the 2026 Economy**

**In February 2026, Oklahoma's economy is running on a curious split screen:**

headline growth is clearly slowing, yet a powerful new engine is humming beneath the surface in the form of multibillion-dollar data-center build-outs and a global boom in **AI-driven wealth**. From Google's planned 9-billion-dollar AI and cloud expansion in Pryor, Stillwater, and Mayes County to dozens of data facilities clustered around Tulsa and along key transmission corridors, server halls, substations, and high-voltage lines are becoming as much a part of the landscape as pump jacks and grain silos. These facilities are voracious, drawing hundreds of megawatts of power and forcing utilities to propose more than a billion dollars in new generation and grid upgrades—costs they are already moving to recover through higher bills, even as lawmakers weigh a three-year pause on new centers to study impacts on water, rates, and nearby communities. Yet that same infrastructure wave is pulling Oklahoma into the heart of a national AI cycle that analysts say could add up to half a percentage point to U.S. growth, fueled by tech giants that poured hundreds of billions into AI and data-center capacity last year and by infrastructure stocks riding that surge. For Oklahomans—from electricians and coders to filmmakers, cafe owners, and tribal nations—the question in February is no longer whether AI is coming, but how this convergence of megawatts and machine learning will reshape who gets opportunity, who pays the true cost of the boom, and who is ready to claim their place in the state's next economic chapter.

### **Key grants and incentives up for grabs**

Oklahoma Innovation Expansion Program (OIEP) – State program making around 15 million dollars available to Oklahoma companies investing in high-impact expansion, machinery, and technology. Awards can reach 150,000 dollars per company, focused on projects that create or retain good jobs and expand capacity (manufacturing, tech, data-center support vendors, etc.)

### **OCAST Industry Innovation Program –**

Grants of 10,000 to 500,000 dollars in 1:1 matching funds for companies commercializing tech in priority sectors like aerospace, energy diversification, autonomous systems, and biotech, which can include AI-driven solutions. Projects must complete at least 51% of work in Oklahoma and align with the state's 2021–2026 Science and Innovation Strategic Plan.

### **OCAST SBIR/STTR support and state resources**

Oklahoma offers technical and match support to help small firms win federal SBIR/STTR R&D grants in areas like energy, defense, and healthcare—fertile territory for AI, analytics, and automation tools.

### **Tech and small-business grant portals**

Aggregators list technology and innovation grants (often 2,500–30,000 dollars) for software, AI adoption, and digital infrastructure upgrades that Oklahoma firms can tap, sometimes on a quarterly cycle.

### **Film and media incentives (state + local)**

*Oklahoma's state film rebate* offers up to around 30% back on qualified in-state spend for projects with at least 25,000 dollars Oklahoma spend and budgets of 50,000 dollars or more.

*Tulsa's new film incentive* (launching with a 400,000-dollar annual cap) opens February 1, 2026, offering quarterly awards to productions filming within about 30 miles of City Hall and using local crew, vendors, and music.

*Cherokee Nation, Broken Arrow, and other local programs* layer additional rebates (often 10–20% on local spend or hotel nights), letting savvy producers stack incentives.

### **Creative and independent film grants**

National programs like the Roy Dean Grant (spring 2026 round now open) offer about 3,500 dollars cash plus in-kind services to socially impactful films, series, and web projects budgeted under 500,000 dollars, which Oklahoma creators can pursue.

## **1. How to apply, step by step**

### **State innovation and expansion grants (OIEP, OCAST)**

- Go to the Oklahoma Department of Commerce's OIEP page, download the current program rules and the "Agreement for Potential Participation," and review eligibility (Oklahoma location, job impact, capital investment, reporting).
- Prepare a short project description: what you're buying or building (e.g., AI-enabled post pipeline, server capacity, production gear), how many jobs it supports, and expected economic impact; gather financials and quotes for equipment.
- Complete the online application form through the Commerce portal and upload the signed participation agreement and required attachments by the listed deadline (applications typically open in early spring, but 2025 rules remain the template).
- For OCAST Industry Innovation, go to the OCAST "Funding Opportunities" page, open the Industry Innovation solicitation, and register on their funding portal. Craft a brief commercialization plan (product, market, IP, revenue path) and match-funding proof, then submit before the call closes.

## **2. Federal SBIR/STTR with Oklahoma support**

- Check OCAST's SBIR/STTR support section, then go to the national SBIR.gov site to identify open topics that match your AI, media tech, or infrastructure idea.

- Register your company (SAM.gov, SBA Company Registry), then draft a concise Phase I concept (problem, innovation, work plan, team); use state resources or SBIR consultants if offered.

### **3. Film and media incentives (state, Tulsa, tribal, local)**

For the state Filmed in Oklahoma rebate, confirm your project meets the 25,000-dollar in-state spend and 50,000-dollar total budget minimums, then contact the Oklahoma Film + Music Office and begin the pre-approval process before principal photography.

For Tulsa's film incentive, visit the Film, Music, Arts & Culture (FMAC) incentive page:

- Verify your locations fall within the "Tulsa Production Zone" radius.
- Build a budget clearly separating Tulsa-area spend (crew, vendors, hotels, music).
- Complete the online application when it opens February 1, attach script, schedule, and proof of financing, and be ready for quarterly review.

For Cherokee Nation and other local programs, request guidelines directly (e.g., minimum 50,000-dollar Oklahoma spend with at least 25,000 dollars inside the Cherokee Nation reservation) and submit a combined plan showing how your production will meet each program's thresholds.

### **4. Smaller tech and small-business grants**

- Use curated portals listing Oklahoma technology and innovation grants, filter by "AI," "technology upgrade," or "media/creative," and note deadlines and award sizes (often up to 30,000 dollars).
- Prepare a lean proposal: problem, your solution, budget, timeline, and local impact (jobs, training, inclusion), then follow each funder's online submission process.