Florida ranked first in the nation for startup density last year and was in the top five large states for overall startup activity, according to a recent Kauffman Foundation survey. Florida’s growing network of incubator and accelerator programs, close connections to world-class research universities, and deep connections to international business have all contributed to the state’s reputation as a startup haven.

No matter where you are in Florida, you’re likely to find a wealth of resources dedicated to helping entrepreneurs. Co-working and incubator programs like Domi Station in Tallahassee and ones connected with universities like University of Central Florida (UCF) and University of Florida provide startups with inexpensive office space, consulting support, and both peer and customer networking opportunities. Those resources have “been instrumental in helping startups like ours be successful,” says Patel, who relied on UCF’s technology incubator to support each of his startups.

Florida also boasts unique resources for startups in specific industries, including aerospace, biotechnology, and engineering. One example is the internationally-recognized University of Florida’s Sid Martin Biotechnology Institute in Alachua, which provides biotech startups with low-cost access to state-of-the-art lab equipment and facilities. “Whatever it takes to make you successful, we’ll do it,” says director Mark S. Long.

Biotech is now one of Florida’s top industries, with many of Sid Martin’s 70 alumni staying in the area, including Nanotherapeutics, Inc., Applied Genetic Technologies Corp., and RTI Surgical, Inc.

By virtue of its geography, Florida is a prime location for launching a global business. “People often don’t realize that Miami is the capital of Latin America,” says Susan Amat, founder and CEO of Miami-based accelerator program Venture Hive. Many large corporations with operations in Latin America, including PepsiCo Inc. and Visa Inc., have offices there.

Raw Shorts founder Antonio Otalvaro has benefited from such global contacts while developing his text-to-video platform at Venture Hive. “When it came to customer development, we were able to tap into our community to get a wide variety of different mindsets,” says Otalvaro. Raw Shorts, a three-year-old company, already does business in 35 countries.

There are also a growing number of high-tech communities in nearly every part of Florida. These include South Florida Technology Alliance, Refresh Miami, and Orlando Tech Association. They offer entrepreneurs informational workshops, networking opportunities, and, in some cases, funding. Innovation Coast, a collection of about 20 technology organizations, recently awarded $250,000 in prizes to local startups through a business plan competition. Business leaders see this kind of funding as just the beginning. As Innovation Coast’s Chair Jim McClellan puts it: “We’re trying to show angels and VCs there is a reason to look down here, so that it becomes automatic.”

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“With its pro-business climate, exceptional resources, and unmatched quality of life, Florida is proving to be an ideal location to start a business.”

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