

## TRIANGLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

### **Apple, Amazon, Google among tech giants flooding NC with lobbyists**



*Google is one of the big tech firms boosting its lobbying efforts in North Carolina. Jason Henry/The New York Times*

By Lauren Ohnesorge – Senior Staff Writer, Triangle Business Journal - Jun 30, 2021

Technology giants are boosting their lobbying efforts in North Carolina.

A look at the latest lobbying directory for the state paints a clear picture: major technology companies have added to their lobbyist rolodexes over the past two years.

Amazon (Nasdaq: AMZN) for example, had two lobbyists registered in North Carolina in June of 2019, according to the Secretary of State's Office. But in a report this month, the company has a total of six lobbyists in the state.

Apple (Nasdaq: AAPL), which had five lobbyists on the list in 2019, now has nine after announcing its 3,000-job campus in Research Triangle Park. And Google (Nasdaq: GOOG), which in March announced plans for a 1,000-job operation in Durham, went from two lobbyists in 2019 to six today.

Mike Walden, an economist and professor emeritus at N.C. State, isn't surprised to see an increase in lobbying by technology companies. He said the state is "flush with money" thanks to federal programs.

"So the governor and General Assembly have new money to spend – or tax cuts to enact," he said, noting that, with the bigger state budget, "companies want to make sure their views are known and positions protected."

In terms of technology, recent economic development announcements such as those of Apple and Google show the sector is growing in importance in the state.

"That alone would imply more focus by the companies on state affairs," he said, adding that some states are also considering restrictions on tech company operations, particularly regarding content on platforms. "That would also motivate companies to increase their relationships with state political leaders so as to protect the companies' operations.

John Boyd, a site selection consultant in New Jersey, said politics are an increasing piece of economic development.

"Major employers and job creators in N.C. want to feel they have a seat at the table in terms of policy," he said.

With Apple, lobbyists came into play in a big way when the company was negotiating with state officials over incentives. Records show Bruce Thompson, a registered lobbyist with Parker Poe, was an extremely active go-between when it came to communicating with state officials working to reel in the project as a win for RTP. But it's not just players with major project announcements that are increasing their lobbyist count in the state.

Several technology companies that had no one lobbying for them in the state three years ago have advocates on the books today, such as Waymo and Square (NYSE: SQ), which both went from zero to two lobbyists, and Expedia Group (Nasdaq: EXPE), which went from zero to three. DraftKings (Nasdaq: DKNQ) went from two lobbyists to three.

In total, 1,054 lobbyists were registered in North Carolina in June 2019. Today, 1,098 are listed in the registry. And technology players are hardly the only firms increasing their lobbyist counts. Raleigh-Durham International Airport, for example, has been aggressively lobbying for funding – both for its Covid comeback and its ongoing Vision2040 plan. And it shows in the lobbying numbers as, in 2019, RDU Airport Authority listed five lobbyists. Today, that total is eight.