

Here's a \$10,000 offer to leave the Bay Area

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A trio of former Google employees who were drawn to the promise of Silicon Valley have founded a company that will pay Bay Area residents \$10,000 to move away.

Launched Tuesday, San Jose-based MainStreet aims to entice people

frustrated by astronomical housing costs and soul-sucking traffic to places such as Sacramento or Salt Lake City with the promise of rewarding tech work and none of the region's downsides.

"We want to make it possible to have a great career and not be pulled into a certain [geographic area](#)," said co-founder Dan Lindquist.

Here's how it works: A tech [company](#) that doesn't want to or can't afford to pay a Silicon Valley-level salary can hire MainStreet to help find and manage an employee who is willing to move out of the Bay Area to work remotely. For a monthly fee, MainStreet helps train the person on things such as video conferencing so they can be a good remote worker and puts them in a brick-and-mortar MainStreet office with others working remotely to combat the isolation that might prompt people to quit. Companies get talent for a lower price. Workers get good jobs and a lower cost of living. And cities outside the valley get an economic boost.

"It's been an easy sell," said co-founder Doug Ludlow, who added that the startup has secured financial backing but declined to identify the investors.

If everything goes according to plan, MainStreet will have its first office space up and running in Sacramento by early next year.

The \$10,000 incentive is a temporary gimmick, Ludlow acknowledged, and only hits a worker's bank account once they've put in a year on the job. Ultimately, MainStreet would like to connect people who already live outside a tech hotspot with remote work for Silicon Valley companies. And the company wants to expand beyond tech to industries such as finance or law.

Where a company would need more than a couple of people in any given area to justify the expense of renting and operating a physical space,

MainStreet could maintain a space with, say, 20 people working for seven or eight different companies in any given location.

"Long-term, we'd hope you'd never have to leave home to get a good job," said Ludlow, who grew up in Modesto in the 1980s and '90s and recalls watching family and friends leave as factories and other corporations that had provided solid jobs closed or consolidated.

Lindquist, who considers himself a "somewhat disaffected Bay Area resident," agreed.

Right now, the Charleston, South Carolina-native said, many tech jobs require a worker to be in the Bay Area, but "that shouldn't have to be the case." Some people want to stay near family and friends where they grew up, but feel forced into leaving because of a lack of job opportunity.

And, Lindquist added, for mid-size startups and other companies not named Google or Facebook, "It's really getting too hard to hire out here."

But many companies are reluctant to hire someone to work from home unless they have done it successfully before. While some studies suggest remote workers are actually more productive than their peers, other research finds that they're more likely to quit and can feel isolated and disengaged.

MainStreet's argument is that, even if they don't all work for the same company, by gathering workers in an office and offering things like the proverbial water cooler and holiday parties, they can increase retention—and boost their earnings in the process.

To head off workers' concerns about moving to a locale without attractive job opportunities to fall back on in case something goes wrong, MainStreet will offer workers who do lose their jobs a stipend of

up to \$5,000 a month for up to three months and health care benefits for the whole family, along with help finding a new remote job.

If they can demonstrate that their business model works, the company's co-founders hope they can expand into more suburban and rural markets.

Lindquist said he has friends who, even if they can afford to buy a house in the Bay Area, are questioning whether it's the right move. Some are holding off on major life events, like having kids, because they're not sure Silicon Valley is where they want to settle. And they're fed up with the constant traffic and lines at everything from brunch to the movies.

"Why are we putting up with these things?" Lindquist asked.

Although the company is just launching this week, MainStreet has big, long-term goals.

"MainStreet's mission is as simple as it is audacious: to create jobs in suburban and rural communities," reads a recent blog post. "Specifically, we're going to create more than one million great [jobs](#) in these communities over the next decade."

The co-founders started tossing the concept around about six months ago while they were still at Google, eventually deciding to get serious and work on the idea full time.

"I think it's doable," Ludlow said.

Lindquist thinks that as technology continues to advance, more businesses will look for new and creative ways to expand their pool of potential employees with remote work.

"I think we're going to see more and more companies," he said, "dip their toes into the water."

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