WHERE IS OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA?
YOUR ZIP CODE SHOULDN’T DETERMINE WHERE YOU END UP IN LIFE

Meet Jane and John.

Fayette County, Georgia
$77,146
6.7%

Cecil County, Maryland
$62,696
9.6%

What access to opportunity really looks like

Jane and John were born in two towns of similar size with the same unemployment rate. But that’s where the similarities stop.
We can’t change all the circumstances of Jane and John’s lives, and their talents and ambitions also play a role in how far they will go in life. But shouldn’t all children have access to the same conditions of opportunity that Jane enjoys simply because of where she grows up?

We can’t pick our ethnicity, the family we are born into, or our IQ. But if you work hard and play by the rules, your zip code shouldn’t condemn you to an inescapable economic fate. In a free society, some inequality is unavoidable. But inequality without the chance for mobility is economically inefficient and unjust.
The Opportunity Index is a composite measure of 16 key indicators in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and 2,670 counties.
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**2014 OPPORTUNITY INDEX TRENDS**

- **Overall Opportunity in America** has improved by 6.3% since 2011.
  - 2011: 49.6
  - 2012: 50.1
  - 2013: 51.0
  - 2014: 52.7

- **Poverty Rate**
  - 2011: 14.3%
  - 2014: 14.1%

- **Rate of Youth Disconnection**
  - 2011: 4.79 million
  - 2014: 5.6 million

The indicators that correlate most strongly with the state Opportunity Score are:

- Lower median household income now than in 2011:
  - 2014: $48,781
  - 2011: $51,050
  - -4.4%

- Higher poverty rate now than in 2011:
  - 2011: 14.3%
  - 2014: 14.1%
  - +11.2%

- Higher income inequality now than in 2011:
  - 2011: 14.3%
  - 2014: 15.9%
  - +2.7%

- Youth unemployment is still twice the national average:
  - 2011: 4.79%
  - 2014: 5.6%

**Most of this improvement is due to gains on specific indicators in the economic and educational dimensions. Progress was sluggish for community dimensions.**

But in spite of gains, too many people are being left behind in today’s post-recession economy.
OPPORTUNITY INDEX INDICATORS

ECONOMY
- Jobs
- Wages
- Poverty
- Inequality
- Assets
- Affordable Housing
- Internet Access

EDUCATION
- Preschool Enrollment
- On-time High School Graduation
- Postsecondary Completion

COMMUNITY
- Group Membership
- Volunteerism
- Disconnected Youth
- Community Safety
- Access to Health Care
- Access to Healthy Food
The unemployment rate

**BEST:**
North Dakota 2.6%

**WORST:**
Rhode Island 7.8%

**MOST IMPROVED:**
South Carolina 5%
(7.4% in April 2013)


Youth unemployment drains state and federal resources of $8.9 billion a year.*

The youth unemployment rate is consistently double the national average.
WAGES

Median household income

Falls Church, VA and Chattahoochee County, GA both have the same population (13,200), but Falls Church has a median household income of $116,651 while Chattahoochee’s is $46,230.

BEST:
Maryland
$67,536

WORST:
Mississippi
$35,225

MOST IMPROVED:
Hawaii
$62,918
($59,931 in 2013)

Median household income has declined from $51,050 in 2011.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.
New Hampshire had the lowest poverty rate, but also saw the greatest increase in poverty. The poverty rate is one of the most strongly correlated indicators in state Opportunity Scores and county Opportunity Grades.
New York County, NY has the highest level of income inequality (8.6).

Wyoming saw the greatest increase in income inequality from 2013-2014, an increase of 8.77%.

**BEST:**
Utah 3.9

**WORST:**
Washington, D.C. 6.9

**MOST IMPROVED:**
Idaho 4.0 (4.27 in 2013)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. The 80/20 ratio describes the disparity in the size of the income of the household at the 80th percentile relative to that of the income of the household at the 20th percentile.
Access to banks are critically important for low-income families – they are the best way to avoid exorbitant fees charged by check cashing storefronts and payday lenders.*

Traditional banking can help American families save for college. College savings accounts for low-income children have been shown to increase the likelihood of those children enrolling in college by a factor of six.*

**ASSETS**

Banking institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions and credit unions per 10,000 residents)

- **BEST:** North Dakota 7.9
- **WORST:** Nevada 2.8
- **MOST IMPROVED:** Maine 5.8 (5.49 in 2013)

Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns and Population Estimates Program.
Affordable housing provides stability – children change schools less frequently and perform better in school.*

Only two states saw a decline in households spending less than 30% of income on housing – Alaska and Wyoming.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Households spending less than 30% of income on housing

BEST:
North Dakota 79.5%

WORST:
California 53.2%

MOST IMPROVED:
North Dakota 79.5%
(75.7% in 2013)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

64.1%
NATIONAL AVERAGE

Affordable housing provides stability – children change schools less frequently and perform better in school.*
INTERNET ACCESS

Percentage of households with high-speed Internet for state overall; 5-level categories for counties

BEST: New Hampshire 83.9%
WORST: Mississippi 51.3%
MOST IMPROVED: Hawaii 82.4% (70% in 2013)


71.6%
NATIONAL AVERAGE

264 counties received the highest level (5) for Internet access.

Every state but Alaska saw an increase in high-speed Internet.
PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds in school

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

BEST:
Washington, D.C. 75.9%

WORST:
Nevada 32%

MOST IMPROVED:
Washington, D.C. 75.9%
(69.1% in 2013)

Children who receive high-quality early childhood education are less likely to repeat a grade, require special education, drop out of school or commit a crime.*

Perquimans County, NC has a 100% preschool enrollment rate, making it the only county to reach this goal (population 13,526).
ON-TIME HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years

BEST: Vermont & Nebraska (tie) 93%
WORST: Nevada 60%
MOST IMPROVED: Washington, D.C. 71% (59.9% in 2013)

POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

Percentage of adults 25 and older with an associate’s degree or higher

BEST: Washington, D.C. 56.2%
WORST: West Virginia 24.9%
MOST IMPROVED: Alaska 36.2% (33.8% in 2013)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

By 2020, two-thirds of all U.S. jobs will require some form of postsecondary degree or credential.*

Unless the United States rapidly increases the number of adults with postsecondary degrees, the country is on track to fall short by 5 million skilled workers.*
Civic engagement may help youth, particularly low-income teens and young adults, build social capital and valuable skills that can help them find meaningful education and career pathways.*

Participation in civic or service organizations has a greater correlation with Opportunity Scores than participation in other types of groups.*

Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, DataFerrett, Current Population Survey, Civic Engagement Supplement. Due to limitations of the survey data, this indicator is only calculated at the state level. As a result of the discontinuation of the Civic Engagement Supplement of the Current Population Survey, data for this indicator in the 2014 Opportunity Index are from 2010 and 2011, the same as the 2013 Opportunity Index.

BEST:
Utah 48.5%

WORST:
Nevada 28.1%
The likelihood that a young person is disconnected from school and work drops nearly in half if he or she volunteers.*

Volunteerism has an inverse relationship with income inequality. In places with higher rates of volunteerism, income inequality tends to be lower.*

VOLUNTEERISM

Percentage of adults ages 18 and older who volunteer

BEST:
Utah 45.4%

WORST:
Louisiana 16.7%

MOST IMPROVED:
Montana 33.1%
(29.6% in 2013)

Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, DataFerrett, Current Population Survey, Volunteering Supplement. Due to limitations of the survey data, this indicator is only calculated at the state level.
**DISCONNECTED YOUTH**

Percentage of young adults ages 16-24 neither in school nor working

Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey PUMS Microdata.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>State</th>
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<tr>
<td>BEST: Nebraska</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
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<td>WORST: Mississippi</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOST IMPROVED: West Virginia</td>
<td>13.7% (19.6% in 2013)</td>
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Young adults who are not in school or working cost taxpayers $93 billion annually and $1.6 trillion over their lifetimes in lost revenues and increased social services.*

The number of disconnected youth is one of the strongest predictors of a state Opportunity Score or a county Opportunity Grade.

14.1%

NATIONAL AVERAGE

$93 BILLION

*Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey PUMS Microdata.*
South Dakota saw a 26.6% increase in violent crime.

Fear of crime limits individuals’ mobility, physical activity and social interactions in violent neighborhoods.*
ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Medical doctors per 100,000 population

BEST:
Washington, D.C.
769.6

WORST:
Idaho
160.8

MOST IMPROVED:
North Dakota
240.5
(231.5 in 2013)

Source: Measure of America calculations using medical workforce data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Area Health Resources Files and population data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program.

Statistically, 178 counties did not have a doctor in their community.

Montour County, PA (pop. 18,490) has the highest number of doctors per 100,000 residents – 3,353.2.
23.5 million Americans live in “food deserts” – neighborhoods that are located more than one mile from a supermarket in urban areas and more than 10 miles in rural areas.*

ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

Grocery stores and produce vendors per 10,000 population

BEST:
New York
5.4

WORST:
Nevada
1.2

MOST IMPROVED:
Washington, D.C.
3.2
(2.9 in 2013)

Nevada saw the biggest decrease in grocery stores and produce vendors.

Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns and Population Estimates Program.
Twitter: @OppNation
Facebook: www.fb.com/opportunitynation
Email: info@opportunitynation.org

For more information, and to learn how much opportunity is in YOUR community, please visit
www.opportunityindex.org

*For additional sources, visit www.opportunityindex.org/briefingbook

The Opportunity Index was jointly developed by Opportunity Nation and Measure of America.