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

Meet Jane and John.

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.

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The Opportunity Index is a composite measure of 16 key indicators in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and 2,670 counties.
Oppportunity Index Indicators

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

Education
- Preschool Enrollment
- On-time Graduation
- Community Safety
- Healthy Food

Community
- Group Membership
- Volunteerism
- Disconnected Youth
- Access to Health Care

2014 Opportunity Index Trends

- Overall Opportunity in America has improved by 6.3% since 2011.

The indicators that correlate most strongly with the state Opportunity Score are:
- Poverty Rate
- Rate of Youth Disconnection

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

Effective Indicator Changes:
- Youth disconnection has fallen below its level in 2013.
- Median household income lower now than in 2011.
- Higher poverty rate now than in 2011.
- Higher income inequality now than in 2011.
- Youth unemployment is still twice the national average.

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

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Economy
- 2014: 48,781
- 2013: 51,050

Education
- 2014: 15.9%
- 2013: 14.6%

Community
- 2014: 14.1%
- 2013: 14.6%

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The unemployment rate

The youth unemployment rate is consistently double the national average.

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

**BEST:** North Dakota 2.6%

**WORST:** Rhode Island 7.8%

**MOST IMPROVED:** South Carolina 5.0% (2.4% in April 2012)


The youth unemployment rate is consistently double the national average.

**BEST:** Maryland $67,536

**WORST:** Mississippi $35,225

**MOST IMPROVED:** Hawaii $62,918 ($52,201 in 2013)

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

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New Hampshire had the lowest poverty rate, but also saw the greatest increase in poverty.

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%.

The poverty rate is one of the most strongly correlated indicators in state Opportunity Scores and county Opportunity Grades.

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.*

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 – Wyoming and Alaska.
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% (92% in 2013)

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

**BEST:**
- Washington, D.C.: 75.9%

**WORST:**
- Nevada: 32%

**MOST IMPROVED:**
- Washington, D.C.: 75.9% (55.1% 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.*

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

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

EDUCATION

100%
ON-TIME HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years

BEST: Nebraska & Vermont (tie) 93%
MOST: Nevada 60%
MOST IMPROVED: Washington, D.C. 71% (58.3% in 2013)

Five states saw a slight decline (<1%) in on-time high school graduation.

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

POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

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

BEST: Washington, D.C. 56.2%
MOST: West Virginia 24.9%
MOST IMPROVED: Alaska 36.2% (23.9% in 2013)

Four counties reported a 100% graduation rate – Oklahoma has three of them.

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.*

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

100% first time over 80%

100%

100% graduation rate – Oklahoma has three of them.

100%}

WORST:

Nevada 60%

WORST:

West Virginia 24.9%

WORST:

Alaska 36.2% (23.9% in 2013)
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.*

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.*
South Dakota saw over a 25% increase in violent crime.

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

Source: State data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics (www.ucrdatatool.gov); county data from the County Health Rankings analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation Criminal Justice Information Services; county data from the County Health Rankings and Roadmaps. County Health Rankings are from the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute in collaboration with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. County Health Rankings.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Violent crime rate per 100,000 population

BEST: Maine 122.7
WORST: Washington, D.C. 1,243.7
MOST IMPROVED: Hawaii 239.2 (287.2 in 2013)

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

COMMUNITY SAFETY

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

BEST: Nebraska 7.9%
WORST: Mississippi 19.4%
MOST IMPROVED: West Virginia 13.7% (16.8% in 2013)

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

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.

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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.*

Source: Measure of America analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns and Population Estimates Program.
The Opportunity Index was jointly developed by Opportunity Nation and Measure of America.