

Frequently Asked Questions

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What is the Opportunity Index? The Opportunity Index is a unique tool that provides a snapshot of the economic, educational and civic opportunities that are available to Americans at the state and county level. Created in partnership with Measure of America, the Index measures 16 key factors that influence economic and social mobility. Visit www.opportunityindex.org to explore the data and share Index Scores with your community.

Who is Measure of America? Measure of America, a project of the Social Science Research Council, provides easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding the distribution of social well-being and mobility in America and for stimulating fact-based conversations about issues we all care about: health, education and living standards.

How did you pick your indicators? Opportunity can be measured and defined in many ways. The Opportunity Index measures conditions present in different communities. We include indicators at the community level that can be changed to expand or restrict economic health and mobility. The Opportunity Index does not measure individual traits, although these factors do matter. For example, we can't pick our ethnicity, the family we are born into, or our IQ. The Opportunity Index instead measures things like, "are there jobs available that pay family-sustaining wages?" "What percentage of 3- and 4- year olds are enrolled in preschool?" "Is there high-speed Internet access?"

Why is the Opportunity Index focused on geography? The places where people live are pivotal to the opportunities open to them. Neighborhoods and regions matter for employment, education, housing quality and stock, law enforcement and public safety, community organizations and political processes. Some communities have characteristics that open many doors of opportunity for their residents; others do not. The Opportunity Index measures three dimensions: economic, educational and civic health indicators, to produce an overall opportunity score for all 50 U.S. states plus Washington, DC. The Index is also used to grade over 3,000 U.S. counties.

Why did Opportunity Nation create the Opportunity Index? Today, the most commonly discussed measures of economic strength and security are the Dow Jones Industrial Average, gross domestic product, unemployment and the poverty rate. These measures are limited and do not provide communities the comprehensive information they need to understand the progress they can make to

boost economic mobility for Americans.

What are your sources for the indicators used for the Opportunity Index? The data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the Federal Communications Commission, the National Center for Education Statistics, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Justice. All the data is publicly available. You can find each source and download the complete methodology by visiting [“Data and Sources.”](#)

Measure of America did additional calculations for: banks, food stores, group membership, volunteerism, and youth not in school and not working. The “disconnected youth” rate is calculated from the overlap (from Census Bureau data) between those 16-24 who are unemployed/not in the labor force AND not in school.

How do you calculate the number of disconnected youth? Some organizations cite 6.7 million disconnected youth, while the Opportunity Index data refers to 5.8 million disconnected youth. Both numbers come from the US Census Bureau, but represent two different studies. Measure of America prefers data from the American Community Survey, which asks young people if they are employed or have been in school during the past three months, in an effort to weed out students who are on summer break. These surveys are conducted in June and July and found an estimated 5.8 million youth were disconnected. The 6.7 million figure comes from the Current Population Survey, which does not ask whether young people have been in school during the past three months but rather if they are currently in school.

Why are some counties not included? The Index includes 3,034 counties. 113 counties cannot be included due to missing data or data with unacceptably high error margins. The 3,034 counties comprise more than 99 percent of the U.S. population.

Why didn't you include x, y, or z factor? One challenge in creating a composite index is the temptation to include every data point possible. The disadvantages of this are two-fold: 1. unwieldy indexes become difficult to use as an advocacy tool because they are too complex to explain and; 2. you end up measuring the same important goal through multiple measures. We wanted to ensure that the Opportunity Index was both broad and encompassing while also being useful as a tool to create community change.