Quality of Life

Quality of Life Indexes
Block & Block Group Scores

Vintage

Release 2026B

Content

The Quality of Life Index (QoLI) database is a census block and higher level database that combines many different sources to show where the best places are to live and do business. The database consists of a main index derived from seven sub-indexes: economic security, health and wellbeing, education and opportunity, built environment and mobility, safety, natural environment, and social capital and civic life. These sub-indexes are based upon specific variables within each category.

For the 2026B release, the QoLI database was completely redesigned. It is now built for every census block rather than every block group. Access to amenities is measured both on foot and by car on the road network, and the sub-index weights are calibrated so that each has its intended effect on the final ranking. Because the methodology and underlying sources have all changed or refreshed, 2026B scores are not comparable with prior QoLI releases.

Base Geography

Census Block

Methodology

The indexes are presented in two separate forms, the first as a 0–1000 score, and the second as a standard 100 based index.

At the block level, each specific variable is ordered and ranked for all blocks and given a score from zero to 1,000. The sub-indexes are averages of the component scores weighted by the importance of each component, and the main index is the weighted average of the sub-indexes as follows:

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Economic Security	28%
Health & Wellbeing	10%
Education & Opportunity	13%
Built Environment & Mobility	13%
Safety	16%
Natural Environment	10%
Social Capital & Civic Life	10%

At higher geography levels, the component scores, the sub-indexes and the main QoLI are all weighted averages based on the populations of the contained blocks.

In the index version, the scores at each geographic level are balanced to a weighted index of 100 nationwide.

Blocks with no residents are ranked at the bottom of the measures that describe the people who live there (income, employment, household composition) rather than having those measures excluded from their averages. Measures that describe the place itself (climate, air quality, hazards, land cover and population density) are ranked normally, since they apply to an empty block exactly as they do to the populated one beside it. Where a measure is only published for the block group, an empty block carries its block group's value.

Economic Security Sub-Index

The economic security sub-index is the weighted average of seven component scores relating to income (QLSCYINCLV), cost of living (QLSCYAFFRD), employment (QLSCYEMPLY), poverty (QLSCYPOVRT), wealth (QLSCYWLTHI), inequality (QLSCYINEQL), and economic mobility (QLSCYECMOB).

- QLSCYINCLV combines the median ratio of income to poverty the share of income from means-tested public assistance and Supplemental Security Income, median household income, the relative change in the block group's median household income since 2017, and the Affluence (Dimensions) measure.
- QLSCYAFFRD combines rent burden (median annual rent against median renter household income), the ratio of median home value to the block group's median household income, the general cost of living index, and the tax burden.
- QLSCYEMPLY combines the civilian unemployment rate total employment within a 60-minute drivetime, the diversity of employment across industry sectors within that drivetime, and an employment stability value computed from national sector growth rates applied to the block group's mix of resident employment.
- QLSCYPOVRT is the poverty rate of the population.
- QLSCYWLTHI is the median household net worth.
- QLSCYINEQL is a Gini coefficient of household income, computed from the block group's households across 26 income brackets. Lower inequality earns a better score.
- QLSCYECMOB is economic connectedness from the Social Capital Atlas (Chetty et al., 2022): the share of high-income friends among people of low income.

Health & Wellbeing Sub-Index

The health sub-index is the weighted average of seven component scores: longevity (QLSCYLONGV), self-reported health, health behaviors, chronic disease, healthcare access, food access, physical activity infrastructure, and chronic disease.

- QLSCYLONGV is life expectancy of the population.

- QLSCYSRHLT combines general self-reported health status and poor physical health days, which are treated as one measure, with frequent mental distress and depression.
- QLSCYBEHAV is a combination of poor health behaviors such as physical inactivity, insufficient sleep, smoking and binge drinking.
- QLSCYCHRON synthesizes twelve age-adjusted chronic disease conditions: obesity, diabetes, coronary heart disease, cancer, asthma, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, stroke, COPD, arthritis, kidney disease and tooth loss
- QLSCYHCACC measures healthcare access from the uninsured rate, cancer screening rates, mental health provider supply, and proximity to physicians, dentists, ambulatory care, hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, mental health providers and pharmacies.
- QLSCYFOODA is proximity to supermarkets, where chain-name matching captures supercentres and club stores that industry codes alone miss.
- QLSCYPHYSA is proximity to fitness facilities.

Education & Opportunity Sub-Index

The education sub-index is the weighted average of five component scores relating to attainment (QLSCYEDATT), schools (QLSCYSCHLQ), childcare (QLSCYECHLD), higher education (QLSCYPSACC) and digital access (QLSCYDIGIT).

- QLSCYEDATT combines the share of adults with a university degree and the share without a high school diploma.
- QLSCYSCHLQ blends a public-school achievement index (50%), the student-to-teacher ratio (25%), and proximity to schools (25%). Achievement is harmonized onto a single national scale anchored to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Schools are the public and private

schools geocoded by the National Center for Education Statistics, excluding virtual schools.
- QLSCYECHLD is a proximity index to childcare centers.
- QLSCYPSACC is a proximity index to community colleges and universities
- QLSCYDIGIT combines the maximum advertised download speed and the number of providers meeting the 100/20 Mbps benchmark available in the block, from the FCC Broadband Data Collection.

Built Environment & Mobility Sub-Index

The built environment sub-index is the weighted average of five component scores: walkability (QLSCYWALK), commute burden (QLSCYCMMUT), vehicle access (QLSCYVEHIC), housing (QLSCYHOUSG) and local self-containment (QLSCYLSELF).

- QLSCYCMMUT combines median travel time to work with the shares of long and short commutes.
- QLSCYWALK aggregates the national walkability index, the smart location index, street intersection connectivity, and proximity to transit stops.
- QLSCYVEHIC combines the zero-vehicle household rate with vehicles per household, blended by walkability: considering the value of vehicles in rural, unwalkable areas versus dense, walkable ones.
- QLSCYHOUSG combines vacancy (50%), housing age (25%) and homeownership (25%). Vacancy excludes homes held for seasonal, recreational or occasional use.
- QLSCYLSELF measures how many of the area's resident workers also work locally.

Safety Sub-Index

The safety sub-index is the weighted average of crime risk (QLSCYCRIMR) and traffic safety (QLSCYTRAFS)

- QLSCYCRIMR combines the personal crime, property crime and social disorder indexes from our CrimeRisk database.
- QLSCYTRAFS is the rate of road deaths per 100,000 residents per year, 2019–2023, from every fatal crash in the NHTSA Fatality Analysis Reporting System.

Natural Environment Sub-Index

The natural environment sub-index is the weighted average of seven component scores: climate (QLSCYCLIMS), air quality (QLSCYAQUAL), hazard exposure (QLSCYHAZRD), noise (QLSCYNOISE), green space (QLSCYGREEN), natural setting (QLSCYNATSG) and population density (QLSCYPDENS).

- QLSCYCLIMS is determined in seven equal parts by the distance of the average annual high temperature from 74°F, the distance of the average annual low temperature from 42°F, the number of days a year reaching 95°F or hotter, heating degree days, the average annual rainfall/snowfall, cloud cover, summer humidity, and the average July dew point. Temperature and precipitation are PRISM 1991–2020 normals at 800 m (Alaska 1981–2010).
- QLSCYAQUAL is an average of the air pollution indexes (ozone, carbon monoxide, lead, NO2, particulate matter and fine particulate matter), the number of days a year under wildfire smoke, and the concentration of toxic industrial air releases.
- QLSCYHAZRD combines earthquake, weather, wildfire, flood, storm surge, sea level, tsunami, drought, landslide and ice storm risk.
- QLSCYNOISE is the share of the block exposed to transportation noise at or above 55 dBA over 24 hours from road, aviation and rail.
- QLSCYGREEN scores public land within reach, park acreage and park counts within walking and driving range, a true ten-minute walk to a park, and tree canopy (at half weight).

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- QLSCYNATSG is the share of land around the block in a natural state/setting, measured from satellite land cover.
- QLSCYPDENS is resident population per square mile of land area, with a lower density earning a better score.

Social Capital & Civic Life Sub-Index

The social capital sub-index is the weighted average of seven component scores: social cohesion (QLSCYCOHES), civic engagement (QLSCYCIVIC), street homelessness (QLSCYHMLSS), and cultural amenity (QLSCYCULT), restaurant & bar access (QLSCYREST), social infrastructure (QLSCYSOCIN), and retail (QLSCYRETL) about 10.6% each.

- QLSCYCOHES combines linguistic isolation with family structure (family stability and married-couple families with children), counted together as one measure.
- QLSCYCIVIC combines the volunteering rate and the density of civic organisations nearby.
- QLSCYHMLSS is the number of people sleeping unsheltered per 10,000 residents, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2025 Point-in-Time count, measured for the Continuum of Care.
- QLSCYCULT is proximity to libraries, museums, performing arts organisations, sports venues and cinemas.
- QLSCYREST is proximity to full-service restaurants, limited-service restaurants and coffee shops, and bars.
- QLSCYSOCIN is proximity to places of worship, civic organisations and social services.
- QLSCYRETL is an accessibility index based on retail employment in proximity to the block.

Accessibility Measures

Every proximity measure is computed twice: what is reachable on foot, from distance rings around the block, and what is reachable by car, from drive-time isochrones computed on the road network. Both count the nearest destinations, weighted by how far away they are, and both stop counting once a household has as many

choices of that kind as it would realistically use (ex: a higher nearby count matters for restaurants than for bookstores). The walk/drive measures are then combined according to how walkable the block is, so that walking carries the weight in a dense, connected neighbourhood, and driving access carries it elsewhere.

Data Sources

AGS Current Year Estimates and Projections, 2026B
AGS Demographic Dimensions
AGS Household Finances
AGS Consumer Expenditures
AGS CrimeRisk
AGS Chronic Disease and Vital Statistics estimates
AGS Journey to Work
AGS Smart Locations (U.S. EPA Smart Location Database)
AGS Environment Database 2026B (PRISM, gridMET, Daymet, NOAA, EPA, USGS, FEMA National Risk Index, U.S. Drought Monitor, U.S. DOT National Transportation Noise Map and other public sources)
OpenStreetMap road network and street intersections, 2026
U.S. DOT Bureau of Transportation Statistics National Transit Map
FCC Broadband Data Collection
NCES EDGE public and private school and postsecondary geocodes, 2023–24 and 2024–25
NCES Common Core of Data, 2022
Stanford Education Data Archive; state school report cards; EDFacts 2020–21
National Assessment of Educational Progress, state results
IPEDS Institutional Characteristics, 2024
U.S. Department of Education Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs
NHTSA Fatality Analysis Reporting System, 2019–2023
HUD Point-in-Time Count, 2025, and Continuum of Care boundaries

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Social Capital Atlas, Opportunity Insights and Meta (Chetty et al., 2022)
USGS Protected Areas Database of the United States 4.1
The Trust for Public Land ParkServe, 2026
USDA Forest Service Tree Canopy Cover; Hansen/UMD Global Forest Change v1.13 (Alaska)
National Land Cover Database 2023; Esri 10 m Land Cover (Alaska and Hawaii)
EarthEnv MODIS cloud frequency (Wilson and Jetz, 2016)
Washington University in St. Louis ACAG PM2.5, 2024

Required Notices

This product uses the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Risk Index dataset API or downloadable datasets but is not endorsed by FEMA. The Federal Government or FEMA cannot vouch for the data or analyses derived from these data after the data have been retrieved from the Agency's website(s).

Climate normals: PRISM Group, Oregon State University, https://prism.oregonstate.edu. The U.S. Drought Monitor is jointly produced by the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the United States Department of Agriculture, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration; map courtesy of NDMC.

Tsunami zones: modified from California Geological Survey, Official GIS data of the Tsunami Hazard Area (2022); Alaska zones derive from Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys tsunami inundation and hazard assessments, modified to census blocks and not approved by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources or DGGS, whose results are intended for emergency planning, evacuation and public education, not for land-use regulation or actuarial purposes.

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Air pollution estimates use GHAP (Wei et al.; ozone, NO2 and CO), Deng et al. (2026) ozone and Washington University in St. Louis ACAG PM2.5 (Shen et al. 2024); Alaska tree canopy uses Hansen/UMD Global Forest Change v1.13 (Hansen et al. 2013); Alaska and Hawaii dew point use Daymet V4 R1 (Thornton et al.) – all under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0, modified by aggregation to census blocks. PM10 inputs credit the IMPROVE network.

The Social Capital Atlas (Opportunity Insights and Meta; Chetty et al., 2022, Nature) is used under its licence, which requires that it be credited and implies no endorsement. Road network and street intersections © OpenStreetMap contributors, available under the Open Database License.

Further Information

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