

Methodology

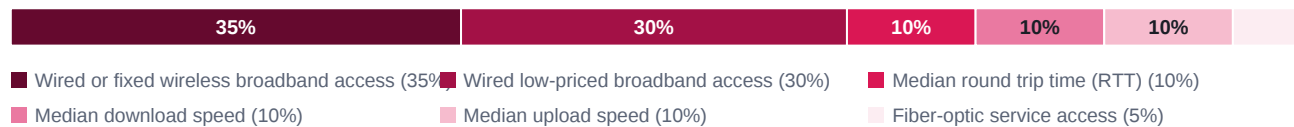
The Best & Worst States for Broadband, 2026, and The Best & Worst Cities for Broadband, 2026

Overview

Each year, BroadbandNow Research scores every U.S. state on broadband access, affordability, and performance. The 2026 edition covers all 50 states and Washington, D.C., and introduces a companion study covering 150 of the nation's largest cities across 39 states and Washington, D.C. Both studies use the same methodology: each geography receives a score from 0 to 100 in six weighted categories, and the weighted sum produces an overall score from 0 to 100 and a letter grade. New for 2026, letter grades include plus and minus distinctions, from A+ through F.

Scoring categories and weights

The six categories fall into two groups. Access categories describe whether service is available and affordable. Quality categories describe how well the networks actually perform.



Access (65% of the overall score)

We measure three access metrics: access to wired or fixed wireless broadband, access to wired low-priced broadband, and access to fiber-optic service. The first two are the most heavily weighted elements in our methodology, together making up 65% of the total score, because both serve as a prerequisite for everything else. If broadband is available only to a select few, or is so cost prohibitive that only a few can use it, network quality matters considerably less. We also consider access to fiber-optic service because it is the fastest and most reliable internet technology available today. Access figures come from BroadbandNow's proprietary availability and pricing data, which covers internet providers nationwide.

Quality (30% of the overall score)

We assess network quality using three metrics: median download speed, median upload speed, and median round trip time (RTT), a measure of latency. Depending on how you use the internet, any of the three could matter most to you. Competitive online gamers may care most about latency, live streamers and business owners often prioritize upload speed, and households that mostly stream video are usually best served by strong download speeds.

We analyzed more than 160 million speed tests from the M-Labs NDT Data Set collected between January 1 and June 15, 2026, for upload speed, download speed, and round trip time. Results are aggregated to the state level for the states study and to the city level for the cities study.

Scoring and normalization

Every geography receives a score from 0 to 100 in each of the six categories. The three access categories are percentages that already range from 0 to 100, so we use them directly. The three quality categories are linearly mapped onto a 0-to-100 scale using fixed anchor points: for each metric, we set the value that corresponds to a score of 100 and the value that corresponds to a score of 59, and scale intermediate values proportionally. Category scores are bounded at 0 and 100.

QUALITY METRIC	VALUE SCORING 100	VALUE SCORING 59
Median round trip time (RTT)	10 ms	20 ms
Median download speed	130 Mbps	110 Mbps
Median upload speed	35 Mbps	28 Mbps

The overall score is the weighted sum of the six category scores. Letter grades are assigned from the overall score using consistent grade bands across both studies.

Definitions

Wired or fixed wireless broadband: service delivered over a terrestrial wired connection, such as cable, fiber, or DSL, or over fixed wireless. Satellite and mobile wireless service are excluded from these access figures.

Low-priced broadband: a residential plan that delivers broadband-level service at or below the price threshold our research team sets for the study period.

Affordability gap: the percentage-point difference between the share of households with broadband available and the share with a low-priced plan available. A large gap means networks exist but affordable plans do not.

Median round trip time (RTT): the time, in milliseconds, for a signal to travel to a server and back. Lower is better.

Limitations and data notes

Speed test results reflect user-initiated tests on the M-Labs platform and are reported as medians for each geography. Availability and pricing figures reflect provider-reported and BroadbandNow-collected data as of the study window. Where a figure is pending verification at publication, it is marked with a dagger in the published tables and noted in the accompanying text. City-level medians are based on smaller samples than state-level medians and can be more sensitive to outliers.

How to cite

BroadbandNow Research. "The Best and Worst States for Broadband 2026."

BroadbandNow Research. "The Best and Worst Cities for Broadband 2026."

For media inquiries, data requests, or questions about this methodology, visit broadbandnow.com/research.