



## **OPPORTUNITY INCREASES NATIONWIDE SINCE 2011, YET MANY AMERICANS ARE STILL LEFT BEHIND**

*In spite of gains, poverty and income inequality have increased over the past four years and there are currently 5.6 million young adults ages 16-24 neither in school nor working*

BOSTON, MA – For the fourth consecutive year, Opportunity Nation, a bipartisan national coalition, released today the annual Opportunity Index, a composite measure for all 50 states and over 2,600 counties of 16 key economic, educational and civic factors that expand or restrict upward mobility for Americans. The Opportunity Index was jointly developed by Opportunity Nation and Measure of America.

According to the 2014 Opportunity Index, access to opportunity has increased by more than 6% nationwide since the first iteration of the Index in 2011, as the nation continues to recover from the Great Recession. Much of this growth is due to large improvements on specific economic and educational indicators (such as the unemployment rate, Internet access and on-time high school graduation rate). There was less robust improvement on civic indicators such as access to healthy food, volunteerism, and access to healthcare.

In spite of gains in opportunity overall, the Index also shows that this progress is not enough to ensure that all Americans, particularly teens and young adults, get their fair shot at the American Dream.

One of the indicators that correlates most closely with Opportunity Scores is the number of young Americans ages 16-24 who are neither in school nor working, our nation's "disconnected youth." While this number has dropped significantly since 2013, from 5.8 million to 5.6 million in 2014, the four-year trend is more modest – there were 5.66 million disconnected youth in 2011.

"The Opportunity Index shows us that when young adults do well, our communities are more likely to do well," says Mark Edwards, founder and co-chair of Opportunity Nation. "That's why it's so critically important for all sectors and political parties to work together to help teens and young adults succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy."

"The decline in the youth disconnection rate is encouraging, but we are still not at pre-recession levels," says Sarah Burd-Sharps, co-director of Measure of America. "We have to do more to help at-risk young people transition to a productive, rewarding adulthood."

### **Inside the 2014 Opportunity Index:**

Despite gains in opportunity overall (+6.3% since 2011), there are critical areas for improvement:

- Median incomes are lower now than in 2011: -4.4% (\$48,781 in 2014; \$51,050 in 2011)
- Poverty rate is higher since 2011: 11.2% increase (15.9% in 2014; 14.3% in 2011)
- Income inequality is greater since 2011: 2.7% increase (4.9 in 2014; 4.79 in 2011)

- And 5.6 million young adults are still disconnected from school and work

State Rankings:

<b>TOP 10</b>	<b>2014 RANK</b>	<b>BOTTOM 10</b>	<b>2014 RANK</b>
Vermont	1	South Carolina	42
Nebraska	2	West Virginia	43
Massachusetts	3	Arizona	44
North Dakota	4	Georgia	45
Connecticut	5	Louisiana	46
Minnesota	6	Alabama	47
New Hampshire	7	Arkansas	48
New Jersey	8	New Mexico	49
Maryland	9	Mississippi	50
Iowa	10	Nevada	51

Visit [www.opportunityindex.org](http://www.opportunityindex.org) to explore the complete dataset.

#### **About The Opportunity Index:**

The Opportunity Index is an annual composite measure at the state and county levels of 16 economic, educational and civic factors that expand or restrict upward mobility. The Opportunity Index ranks all 50 states plus Washington DC and grades more than 2,600 counties A-F, and is designed to help identify concrete solutions that expand opportunity to more Americans. The Index was jointly developed by Opportunity Nation and Measure of America.

#### **About Opportunity Nation:**

Opportunity Nation is a bipartisan, national coalition of more than 300 businesses, nonprofits, educational institutions and community leaders working to expand economic opportunity. Opportunity Nation seeks to close the opportunity gap by amplifying the work of its coalition members, advocating policy and private sector actions and releasing the annual Opportunity Index. Visit [OpportunityNation.org](http://OpportunityNation.org).

#### **About Measure of America:**

Measure of a America, a Project of the Social Science Research Council, provides easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding well-being, opportunity, and inequality in America and for stimulating fact-based conversations about issues we all care about: health, education and living standards. Visit [MeasureofAmerica.org](http://MeasureofAmerica.org).

#### **CONTACT:**

##### **Opportunity Nation**

Cara Willis  
Director of Communications  
978-502-0910  
[cwillis@opportunitynation.org](mailto:cwillis@opportunitynation.org)

##### **Measure of America**

Eric J. Henderson  
Chief of Advocacy & Media  
718-517-3606  
[eric@measureofamerica.org](mailto:eric@measureofamerica.org)

###