

The towns dataset is taken from The New Rating Guide to Life In America's Small Cities written by Kevin Heubusch.

The ten sections used for rating the 193 small cities are:

Climate & Environment

Diversions

Economics

Education

Community Assets

Health Care

Housing

Public Safety

Transportation

Urban Proximity

Each of the sections are divided into five topics and then assigned points on a scale of 0 to 20 for each topic. The higher the score the better for all topics. The five topic scores are then added to receive the city's score for that section.

The overall quality of life score for the community is calculated by adding the ten section scores. The cities are then ranked by their total score.

The topics for each of the ten sections are as follows:

Climate & Environment: summer comfort, winter lows, temperature variability, precipitation, and potential environmental dangers.

Diversions: amusement place availability, shopping availability, food and drink establishment, population density, and local recreation funding.

Economics: per capita income, income change, manufacturing productivity, retail sales, and population change.

Education: high school education, high school dropouts, college education, college influences, and local education funding.

Community Assets: homeownership, newspaper strength, broadcast outlets, arts and learning institutions, and community groups and services.

Health Care: doctor availability, specialist availability, hospital availability, local health funding, and death rate.

Housing: housing age, housing size, housing costs, property taxes, and heating and cooling costs.

Public Safety: total crime rate, violent crime rate, juvenile crime rate, local police funding, and local fire funding.

Transportation: commuting ease, public transit usage, highway availability, local highway funding, and aviation availability.

Urban Proximity: metro center proximity, arts center proximity, retail center proximity, sports center proximity, and television market.

Additional information on scoring:

Climate & Environment

Summer comfort: difference between mean daily temperature in July and 80 degrees

Winter lows: difference between mean daily temperature in January and 40 degrees

Temperature variability: average temperature in January subtracted from the average temperature in July. The smaller the variability the better.

Precipitation: difference between annual precipitation and 38 inches, which is the average precipitation for the nation's small cities

Potential environmental dangers: total number of hazardous waste sites and sites with substandard air quality per 1,000 square miles

Diversions

Amusement place availability: total number of amusement establishments per 100,000 residents

Shopping Availability: total number of retail establishments per 100,000 residents

Food and drink: total number of eating and drinking establishments per 100,000 residents

Population Density: estimates each micro's outdoor recreation potential by considering its population density

Local recreation funding: annual per capita expenditure on parks and rec facilities

Economics

Per capita income: average income per resident in 1994

Income change: measures change in average income between 1990 and 1994

Manufacturing productivity: statistic of "value added by manufacture" divided by the number of production workers, creating a per capita rating

Retail sales: average retail spending per resident

Population change: percent change in population from 1990 to 1994

Education

High school education: percent of residents (25 years and older) who have completed high school

High school dropouts: estimates dropout rates by calculating the share of teens (ages 16-19) that is neither students nor graduates (those in military excluded)

College education: percent of residents (25 years and older) who

are college graduates

College influence: percent of residents who are enrolled in college

Local education funding: per capita investment in education

Community Assets

Homeownership: percent of housing that is owner-occupied

Newspaper strength: percent of residents subscribing to the local daily paper

Broadcast outlets: measures strength of local electronic media, such as local radio, television, and large cable systems

Art and learning institutions: total number of libraries, museums, zoos and botanical gardens, and colleges and universities per 100,000 residents

Community groups and services: total number of organizations such as church groups, business and professional organizations, community service groups and family services per 100,000 residents

Health Care

Doctor availability: total number of active, nongovernment doctors per 100,000 residents

Specialist availability: total number of specialists per 100,000 residents. Those included are allergists and immunologists, internists, obstetricians and gynecologists, ophthalmologists, urologists, pediatricians, and surgical specialists.

Hospital availability: total number of community hospital beds per 100,000 residents

Local health funding: annual per capita spending by local government on hospitals, clinics, environmental health programs, and public health administration

Death rate: annual deaths per 100,000 residents used to measure the strain placed on each area's health care system (smaller death rates receive more points)

Housing

Housing age: percent of houses built in 1939 or earlier (smaller percentages receive more points)

Housing size: percent of homes containing 3 or more bedrooms (larger percentages receive more points)

Housing costs: measure of the median value of owner-occupied housing in 1990 (more points given to cheaper housing)

Property taxes: per capita property taxes (more points given to cheaper property taxes)

Heating and cooling: total annual degree days. (A degree day is calculated by determining the difference between each day's average temperature and 65 degrees for the year. Every degree below 65 degrees yields one heating degree day; every degree above 65 degrees yields one cooling degree day. (more points given to smaller amounts of degree days)

Public safety

Total crime rate: total number of major crimes per 100,000 residents including murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft

Violent crime rate: total number of violent crimes such as homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault per 100,000 residents

Juvenile crime rate: total number of teens arrested per 1,000 teenagers

Local police funding: annual per capita amount of financial commitment by county and city government on police protection. Cities with scores that differ by 8 points or more from its total crime score are adjusted to take in account a smaller need of funds. The difference in scores is divided in half and added to the funding score.

Local fire funding: annual per capita spending by county and city governments on fire protection

Transportation

Commuting ease: average travel time to work for the city's residents

Public transit usage: total number of commuters who use the public transit to get to and from work in a rate per 1,000 commuters

Highway availability: evaluation of area's highway system using a highway index. Determined amount of points are awarded for each main interstate highway, spur interstate highway or four-lane U.S. road, state principal highway, and any other state road

Local highway funding: annual per capita spending by county and city governments for construction, maintenance, operations of roads and bridges, and funding for street lighting and snow removal

Aviation availability: rating index according to a city's assessibility to regularly scheduled passenger air service

Urban Proximity

Metro center proximity: travel distance between city and nearest metro center

Art center proximity: travel distance to the nearest major arts center

Retail center proximity: travel distance to a large city that provides many shopping opportunities

Sports center proximity: travel distance to the closest of thirty-three regional sports centers. (Sports centers are considered to be cities with teams in at least two major sports)

Television market: ranks each area according to the relative size of the larger regional television market (the higher the rank, the greater the choice of stations and better the quality of local programming)