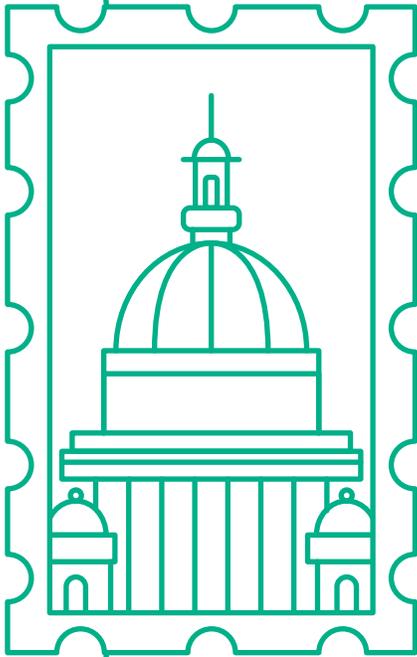


RHODE ISLAND

POPULATION: 1.06 MILLION
COUNTIES: 5



Rhode Island is one of the least populated states and has some of the fastest Internet speeds in the nation.

Compared to other states, Rhode Island has a relatively high level of broadband access, even in rural areas. But broadband adoption remains a persistent problem. The Commission evaluated just over one million Rhode Island residents, finding that 98.6% had access to a fixed broadband connection at minimum speeds of 25/3 Mbps.

In most states, broadband access in rural areas tends to lag behind urban areas, often by a large margin. As [one of the most densely populated](#) states, Rhode Islanders do not experience the same rural-urban disparity that states with lower population density experience. Out of the 98,000 people living in rural Rhode Island who were evaluated by the FCC, 96,000 people (97.6%) had access to a fixed connection at minimum speeds compared to 98.7% of the 961,000 urban Rhode Islanders evaluated.

Rhode Island is frequently listed among states with the fastest Internet speeds in the country. In 2015, the Washington Post found that Rhode Island was in the [top 5 states for Internet speeds](#). By 2017, Fierce Wireless found that Rhode Island's Internet speeds were the [fastest in the nation](#).

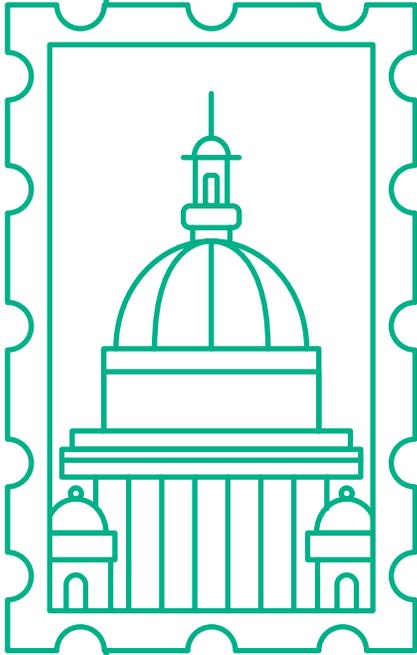
The fast speeds and high levels of access that Rhode Island boast now are part of an ongoing statewide effort to improve broadband access. In 2009, the NTIA awarded the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation an [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant](#) of \$1 million for broadband mapping and data collection and \$500,000 for broadband planning. The data were included in the NTIA's National Broadband Map.

By 2010, Rhode Island was awarded [a total of \\$4.5 million in stimulus funding](#) and [the state matched that amount with \\$1.1 million](#) in state resources. The funding sponsored the [Broadband Rhode Island Initiative through 2014](#), which published a white paper in 2014 calling for the creation of a Governor's Broadband Policy Advisory Board.

As a candidate for governor 2010, [Lincoln Chafee included expanded broadband access](#) in his "Plan for Jobs." As Governor, Chafee's administration worked in coordination with Ocean State Higher Education and Administration Network on a \$21.7 million fiber project which connected state schools and libraries along with other anchor institutions.

Still, the FCC only evaluates levels of broadband offerings advertised by providers, but does not account for actual speeds experienced by users, the number of households that actually subscribe to broadband service, plan pricing information, or address-level service availability. These gaps in information are particularly unhelpful for states like Rhode Island, where the FCC shows that most residents have broadband access.

In July 2020, New Shoreham's (Block Island) First Town Warden [sent a letter](#) to the FCC requesting that it review erroneous data which hindered the Town's plans for connecting schools and libraries that lack service. The letter stated that: "*the loss of possible annual support associated with these locations may jeopardize our community's ability to move forward with this critical project.*"



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Despite the high percentage of residents the FCC considers served, BroadbandNow reports that only 88.5% of residents have access to a wired broadband plan that costs less than \$60 a month. Additionally, Microsoft's data show that [430,000 people](#) in Rhode Island do not use the Internet at broadband speeds, accounting for over 40% of the state's population. With broadband infrastructure widely available in the state, policies are shifting from focusing on increasing access to improving adoption rates, seeking solutions to help connect every resident with home broadband service.

The [Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission](#) is tasked with approving Lifeline providers and makes information about the program available on its website. For people who do not have a home broadband subscription because they cannot afford it, Lifeline has lived up to its name, operating as an essential connection to work, school, and healthcare.

At the state level, [ConnectRI](#), an initiative spearheaded by the Department of Innovation and operated in partnership with nonprofits EveryoneOn and ConnectHome, focuses on improving digital equity in the state by offering home Internet plans, computers, and free digital literacy training. One way ConnectRI accomplishes its mission is by partnering with affordable housing communities to offer disconnected residents lower cost devices and subsidized plans. In Governor Gina Raimondo's [letter of support](#) for the program, she stated:

The digital divide is stifling our students' progress and holding back a significant portion of the workforce. Closing the gap is critical to ensuring that Rhode Islanders can compete in the new skills economy and are prepared for the jobs we're creating. To answer this challenge, and others like it, we need to build on our existing momentum and employ bold solutions that address issues head-on, like ConnectRI.

Additional Resource:

[State of Rhode Island, Office of Innovation](#)