

Alaska

Vast state, sizable challenges

Spanning two time zones and the largest geographical area in the country, Alaska's sheer size poses challenges for residents and businesses looking to stay connected.

The state — which improved from a Modest Innovator to an Innovation Adopter this year — continues to fall behind the Federal Communication Commission's goal of bringing 25 mbps broadband connections to every American. Alaska's internet connectivity lags most in rural areas, where 65 percent of residents get speeds below 25 mbps.

But groups are turning their attention to the problem: Alaska's largest telecommunications and technology company, GCI, recently upgraded wireless services for a handful of municipalities.

"To deliver service successfully across Alaska, you have to be willing to use every tool in your toolkit — and you need a pretty big toolkit," said Heather Handyside, senior director of corporate communications for the company. "Alaska's tough terrain, vast distances and heavily regulated land require our team to be creative when we upgrade our networks."

Rural residents will likely see improved connections as well, thanks to an expansion by telephone and internet service provider Alaska Communications. The company recently announced plans to expand wireless connections on the Kenai Peninsula over the next eight years.

Sources: (FCC) (GCI) (Peninsula Clarion)

WHAT DID WE DO RIGHT?

Alaska allows self-driving vehicles to operate without excessive rules, and residents to use short-term rentals.

WHAT CAN WE DO BETTER NEXT YEAR?

Alaska can pass bills that give employees the right to work and protect them from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

WHERE HAVE WE MOST IMPROVED?

Alaska legalized ridesharing, bringing its grade in the category to an 'A' instead of an 'F'.

Best & Brightest	D
Fast Internet	C+
Grants Advanced Degrees	B
Tech Workforce	D+
Tax Friendly	A
Attracts Investment	F
Entrepreneurial Activity	C-
Ridesharing	A
Short-Term Rentals	B
Sustainable Policies	B
Self-Driving Vehicles	A
Drones	A



Fast Internet

More than 50 percent of Alaskan households have internet connections of at least 10 mbps, but only 35 percent enjoy speeds of 25 mbps or more.



Entrepreneurial Activity

From Q2/2011 through Q4/2016, Alaska's small businesses added more than 40 jobs per 1,000 people.



Grants Advanced Degrees

More than 10 percent of residents over the age of 24 have an advanced degree.



Tax Friendly

Alaska earned high marks for sales, income and corporate tax rates that are friendly to innovation.

Creating Science and Technology Roles for Girls in the Last Frontier

The Girl Scouts of Alaska is preparing young women for careers in STEM through their annual Women of Science & Technology Day and Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day.

The Engineering Day is a collaboration with ExxonMobil — a major employer in the state — and the Anchorage School District. During the event, professionals in a variety of STEM disciplines mentor more than 100 middle school students with science and engineering projects.

The same hands-on approach is on display during the organization's Women of Science and Technology Days, during which professionals lead scouts through workshops designed to introduce them to a range of STEM-related fields.

The events partner with women currently working in STEM fields to educate and excite girls about new careers such as veterinary medicine and environmental engineering.

Sources: (Girl Scouts of Alaska) (KTUU) (Alaska Journal)

