



EXPLORING YOUR COMMUNITY SCORES

When I'm overseas, I'm constantly looking at different communities and comparing them to where I live and thinking about assets like bikeability and walkability, which are high in Bend, Oregon, and something I love about my community. I like access to nature, cool downtowns with vibrant culture, and of course, good weather. I really love Bend for so many of these assets, including a river that runs by my house, a nearby ski area, mountain biking trails, and a community that's boosted by its tourism; we have some really cool aspects like events, festivals, and eateries that might not be found in towns without the tourist-dollar bump. I also am realizing how important it is to me to experience four seasons. Bend is technically a high desert, which is surprising to many people since we have such massive ponderosa trees dominating our vistas. But these trees grow slowly, with very little water. At the top of the Cascade Mountains, which are west of our city by thirty-plus miles, the trees are different because they get over 140 inches of precipitation per year. Meanwhile, in the rain shadow of Bend, we only get fourteen inches, thus ponderosas instead of Douglas firs. We have milder but typically excellent winters, and because we lie in a rain shadow of sorts, there will be tons of snow west of us but not much in town, which has its benefits. There is a trade-off from the winters that I'm familiar with from my time on the Western Slope of Colorado. And the trade-off is that the Colorado summers are divine, and the summers in Bend are still great but much hotter and have been a bit smoky lately because of wildfires.

In my previous story about my winter-2026 trip to Europe, I explored personal satisfaction using questions modeled after those in the World Happiness Report. Let's stay on that topic and use the same 0–10 scale (0 = low, 10 = high), but this time think less about you and more about the world you're operating in, namely your community. I'll score myself like I did last time.

1. Trust in Your Community: How much do you trust the people in your local community—neighbors, businesses, and even strangers—to act with honesty and good intentions?

Anthony's Score (February 2026): 9.0—I do lock my doors and have experienced petty theft a couple of times in nearly six years. I do generally trust my neighbors and community members, and in a pinch, I think I'd get support from random strangers.

2. Perceived Fairness & Integrity: To what extent do you believe systems around you (government, business, institutions) operate fairly and without corruption?

Anthony's Score (February 2026): 8.0—This is a good community with some diversity in political leanings when you get outside of Bend, and we have a mostly decent political climate on the county level, though the infighting is real at the commissioner level, but the process seems sound and transparent. Things are better at the city level. I don't feel like businesses are out to get me.

3. Sense of Belonging: How strongly do you feel a sense of belonging in the places you spend time—your neighborhood, workplace, or social environments?

Anthony's Score (February 2026): 9—This score has evolved and created depth and richness as my time in Bend has increased. I feel like I fit almost entirely, except that I am not wealthy. But I can afford to live here, and that, in part, is because of the modest housing choices I've made and that I make money outside of this community. I don't think I'd be making nearly as much relying on the local wages. I give and I get from my community by volunteering, producing, and performing in comedy shows and attending our myriad of event offerings.

4. Generosity & Prosocial Culture: How often do you observe or experience acts of kindness, generosity, or people helping others in your day-to-day environment?

Anthony's Score (February 2026): 7.0—I'd rate this higher, but I don't always see generosity directly in play. Through my interactions with nonprofits, I do see examples of altruism and generosity, but I don't observe it daily. Our houselessness issue comes to mind as a societal ill that we've not truly said, "This is not acceptable for members of our community," but I've seen community support for long-term solutions.

5. Safety & Stability: How safe and secure do you feel in your daily environment—physically, economically, and socially?

Anthony's Score (February 2026): 9.0—This mirrors question 1 a bit, but I generally feel very safe, even with petty theft. I walk outside at night a lot with zero concerns, but I'm also a tall (attractive) man. Economic stability has only come to me lately, but programs exist to support me (food banks, rent assistance, health care subsidies) if things go sideways.

6. Shared Quality of Life: How satisfied are you with the overall quality of life in your community—things like public spaces, infrastructure, health care access, and general livability?

Anthony's Score (February 2026): 9.0—Bend has been called a "summer camp for adults," and it holds up. We have twenty-three breweries, great access to the outdoors in all seasons, good trails, a solid hospital, and some affordable options for housing if you're making a decent salary.

A few follow-up questions for you, dear readers.

- Where does your environment support your happiness without you realizing it?
- Where is your community quietly draining you?
- What's one way you could contribute to improve the community around you?
- If you changed nothing about yourself but changed your community, what would you change?

Anthony's reply: Anthony Poponi thinks a lot about his alter ego, Tony Poponi, who never left New Jersey in 1990 at age seventeen, and who he would be today. I think there would be

a Camaro or even a Pontiac Firebird (not a nice one), and similarly, Tony would have involvement with the justice system but different from Anthony's current facilitation and speaking services offered to law enforcement professionals. LOL, I kill me.