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Washington, D.C., New Orleans, and Springfield, IL Rank are the Best Cities for New Grads, According to Redfin and Glassdoor

From higher starting salaries to affordable starter homes, the companies identify U.S. cities that give young people a serious leg up

SEATTLE — April 14, 2026 — Washington, D.C. ranks as the best big city in the U.S. for recent college graduates, according to new joint [analysis](#) from Redfin, the real estate brokerage powered by Rocket, and Glassdoor, the worldwide leader for worklife conversations and career insights.

The nation's capital tops the list because recent grads earn big paychecks relative to other large cities, there's a lot of career opportunities, and the city offers great work-life balance. Early-career professionals in D.C. benefit from a strong job market alongside housing options that, while competitive, remain more attainable than in many other major coastal metros.

“Where you land after college can shape your finances—and your future,” said Redfin Chief Economist Daryl Fairweather. “Recent grads aren't just chasing jobs; they're chasing cities where their paycheck goes further and life feels exciting. The best places offer strong early-career pay, manageable housing costs and plenty to do on and off the clock, so young people can build their careers *and* enjoy where they live.

New Orleans comes in first for mid-sized cities, largely because starter homes are affordable and early-career wages are growing at a faster clip than rent. Springfield, IL leads among small cities, with recent college grads attracted to its high starting salaries, strong job-growth potential and transit friendliness.

This is according to a Redfin-Glassdoor ranking of the best U.S. metro areas for recent college graduates, broken into three categories: Big, medium-sized and small. For its report, Redfin and Glassdoor refer to metro areas as “cities” and ranked places based on factors related to housing, jobs and quality of life using several different metrics.

The analysis pairs Redfin housing data with Glassdoor salary insights, employer ratings and community sentiment to reflect how early-career workers evaluate their quality of life and how far an entry-level paycheck can realistically go. The approach reflects what young professionals say matters most early in their careers: in a [Glassdoor Community poll, 43%](#) of respondents said career growth opportunities have the biggest impact on their quality of life, followed closely by pay and housing affordability.

“Landing a job is not the only thing early-career workers need to consider when they're starting their careers,” said Chris Martin, senior economist at Glassdoor. “They're evaluating which cities offer the right mix of lifestyle, career growth and ability to achieve their long-term financial goals. Nearly nine in ten professionals aged 20 to 29 say they'd relocate for a job if the pay supported their ideal lifestyle, and 43% say growth opportunities matter most to their quality of

life early on. Cities that support these priorities give new grads a chance to enjoy a rich social life while starting their careers off on the right foot.”

Big Cities

Rank	City	Average annual early-career earnings	Price of typical starter home	Years to save for down payment	Monthly mortgage payment as % of income	Monthly rent as % of income
1	Washington, D.C	\$79,857	\$320,000	4 years, 2 months	31.6%	34%
2	Omaha, NE	\$59,123	\$195,000	3 years, 8 months	26%	28%
3	Boston, MA	\$80,026	\$460,000	6 years, 8 months	45.3%	53%
4	Dallas, TX	\$67,451	\$240,000	4 years, 1 month	28%	26%
5	Chicago, IL	\$72,786	\$202,000	3 years	21.9%	28%
6	Houston, TX	\$65,369	\$215,000	3 years, 7 months	25.9%	18%
7	St. Louis, MO	\$61,834	\$150,000	2 years, 7 months	19.1%	23%
8	San Diego, CA	\$74,053	\$615,000	More than 10 years	65.4%	64%
9	Miami, FL	\$62,748	\$210,000	3 years, 11 months	26.4%	33%
10	Austin, TX	\$72,025	\$276,600	4 years, 1 month	30.3%	35%

Mid-Sized Cities

Rank	City	Average annual early-career earnings	Price of typical starter home	Years to save for down payment	Monthly mortgage payment as % of income	Monthly rent as % of income
1	New Orleans, LA	\$57,414	\$175,000	3 years, 1 month	24%	32%

2	Palm Bay, FL	\$65,010	\$210,000	3 years, 9 months	25.4%	25%
3	Wichita, KS	\$55,285	\$144,535	3 years, 1 month	20.6%	17%
4	Mobile, AL	\$53,030	\$169,900	3 years, 5 months	25.2%	23%
5	Anchorage, AK	\$65,864	\$240,000	3 years, 11 months	28.7%	31%
6	Lincoln, NE	\$53,871	\$212,000	4 years, 7 months	31%	23%
7	Trenton, NJ	\$74,570	\$220,000	4 years, 9 months	23.2%	33%
8	Bridgeport, CT	\$72,503	\$330,000	5 years, 11 months	35.9%	38%
9	Waco, TX	\$50,430	\$180,000	4 years, 9 months	28.1%	31%
10	Lexington, KY	\$52,64 ughhh 8	\$211,000	5 years	31.6%	34%

Small Cities

Rank	City	Average annual early-career earnings	Price of typical starter home	Years to save for down payment	Monthly mortgage payment as % of income	Monthly rent as % of income
1	Springfield, IL	\$59,925	\$128,000	2 years, 3 months	16.8%	16%
2	Santa FE, NM	\$81,848	\$359,950	5 years, 7 months	34.6%	39%
3	Panama City, FL	\$61,160	\$230,000	4 years, 8 months	29.6%	46%
4	Hilton Head Island, SC	\$51,887	\$317,500	More than 10 years	48.2%	60%
5	Macon, GA	\$55,037	\$139,000	3 years, 1 months	19.9%	25%

6	Champaign, IL	\$57,356	\$157,000	3 years	21.6%	24%
7	Greenville, NC	\$52,195	\$187,000	5 years, 3 months	28.2%	26%
8	Columbia, MO	\$51,379	\$199,900	4 years, 6 months	30.7%	28%
9	Bend, OR	\$65,866	\$359,999	8 years, 2 months	43.1%	56%
10	Rochester, MN	\$68,496	\$215,000	3 years, 5 months	24.7%	19%

To view the full report, including a map, more details on each city and a detailed methodology, please visit: <https://www.redfin.com/news/best-cities-recent-grads-2026>

About Redfin

Redfin is a technology-driven real estate company with the country's most-visited real estate brokerage website. As part of Rocket Companies (NYSE: RKT), Redfin is creating an integrated homeownership platform from search to close to make the dream of homeownership more affordable and accessible for everyone. Redfin's clients can see homes first with on-demand tours, easily apply for a home loan with Rocket Mortgage, and save thousands in fees while working with a top local agent.

You can find more information about Redfin and get the latest housing market data and research at <https://www.redfin.com/news>. For more information about Rocket Companies, visit <https://www.rocketcompanies.com>.

About Glassdoor

[Glassdoor](https://www.glassdoor.com) is revolutionizing how people everywhere find jobs and companies they love by providing deeper workplace transparency. Professionals turn to Glassdoor to research ratings, reviews, salaries and more at millions of employers, and to join communities to engage in candid workplace conversations. Companies use Glassdoor to post jobs and attract talent through [employer branding and employee insights products](https://www.glassdoor.com/branding). Glassdoor is part of Indeed, a subsidiary of Recruit Holdings, a global leader in HR technology and business solutions that is simplifying hiring and transforming the world of work. For more information, visit www.glassdoor.com.

Contact Redfin Journalist Services:

Kenneth Applewhaite
press@redfin.com

Contact Glassdoor Journalist Services:

Sang Lee
pr@glassdoor.com

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