

Tucson State of Reading 2026 Findings and Reporting Guide

BASELINE EDITION • **WAVE 1**

Key numbers, correct framings, and what this study does not say

This guide accompanies the *Tucson State of Reading™ 2026: Baseline Edition*, published 29 September 2026 by The Place & Page. It is for journalists and for anyone else describing these findings — in a newsletter, a presentation, a grant application or a council briefing. Every figure here comes from the full report, which is published openly alongside its methodology.

IN ONE SENTENCE

A weighted survey of 511 Pima County adults finds a reading life that happens mostly at home, and only occasionally becomes something shared.

WHAT WAS MEASURED

The Tucson Reading Health Index™ is a 0–100 composite of five weighted components. Wave 1 scored **39.70**, in the Emerging band (20–44). The survey was fielded between July 30 and August 14, 2026 through an online panel and weighted to Census benchmarks for age, education and Hispanic origin. Unweighted, the index is 39.69.

THE FIVE COMPONENTS

COMPONENT	WEIGHT	2026 SCORE
Reading Frequency	35%	46.13
Reader Identity / Relationship	25%	54.15
Social Reading	15%	29.41
Ambient Cultural Engagement	10%	24.65
Local Ecosystem Participation	15%	20.94
Population index	100%	39.70

Components use different question structures and scoring rubrics, so the distances between them are not psychometrically equivalent and should not be read as precise comparisons. Weighted means across all 511 retained respondents.

THE FOUR FINDINGS MOST LIKELY TO MATTER

- **Private reading is common; public participation in reading is rare.** 84.2% of adults read or listen to something by choice. 19.3% of readers took part in any organized literary activity in the past year — an author event, a book festival, a community reading program or a book club. 59.2% of readers name home as their only listed setting for reading.
- **More than a third of county adults are neutral on whether Tucson values reading.** Asked whether Tucson is a city that values reading, 46.7% agreed and 17.3% disagreed. The largest single group, 36.0%, landed in the middle.
- **Time dominates as a barrier to reading, and younger adults feel it far more.** 47.7% of adults name time as a barrier to reading more. That pressure is sharply age-shaped: 64.9% of adults under 35 name it, against 57.4% of those 35 to 54 and 28.6% of those 55 and older. Voluntary reading rises across the same groups, 74.9% to 82.4% to 92.1%, as does the index, 35.41 to 39.57 to 42.94. Wave 1 cannot tell whether that is a life-stage effect or a generational one.
- **Education is the sharpest divide.** The index runs from 30.82 among adults with a high-school education or less to 48.86 among adults with a bachelor's degree or higher — an 18-point spread, more than twice any other subgroup difference. Voluntary reading itself runs 73.1%, 85.2% and 96.2% across those groups. Time does not explain it: adults name time as a barrier at 47.9%, 46.7% and 48.3% respectively — effectively the same rate at every education level.

OTHER NUMBERS, WITH THEIR BASES

All figures are weighted estimates describing Pima County adults age 18 and older, N=511, unless noted otherwise.

- 63.2% of readers visited a bookstore or a library in the past year. Separately, among *all adults*, 42.4% used the public library in person in the past 12 months — the largest single source of reading material, ahead of used bookstores (32.5%) and online retailers (29.4%). These two figures come from different questions and use different bases; they are not comparable to each other.
- Other than time, no barrier comes close: cost 16.4%, lack of interest 7.3%, lack of nearby access 3.4%. Time is named nearly three times as often as cost, the next highest. Respondents could name more than one barrier, so these shares do not sum. Separately, 28.4% say nothing is stopping them — they already read as much as they want to.
- 9.2% read only what is required of them. 6.7% say they do not read or listen at all.
- Among households with a child aged 12 or under (n=206), 58.2% report an adult reads or shares stories with the child daily or a few times a week; 27.2% occasionally; 14.6% rarely or never. This is one of the highest raw rates in the report. It is self-reported, socially desirable behavior, and there is no clean national comparator.
- Reading behavior is more widespread than reader identity: 84.2% of adults read by choice, but 55.4% describe reading as a regular or prioritized part of their life and 52.7% agree that people like them are readers, with 32.5% neutral and 14.8% disagreeing.

- Asked in their own words what would make Tucson a stronger reading city, 479 of the 511 wrote something. Among the responses containing a substantive suggestion, the leading themes were libraries 22.0%, events 19.1%, motivation and reading culture 13.9%, education and literacy 13.6%, bookstores 10.3%, and free or affordable books 9.5%. Of all non-blank responses, 20.0% offered no suggestion — mostly a short “I don’t know” or “not sure” — 7.7% said existing assets are already adequate, and 4.6% were off-topic.

SUBGROUP FINDINGS YOU MAY ENCOUNTER

Table 7 of the report shows a descriptive difference by Hispanic origin: a TRHI of 35.10 among Hispanic-origin adults against 42.19 among non-Hispanic adults, and 75.9% reading by choice against 88.6%. These are real differences in the Wave 1 data and they are published in full. The study does not establish that ethnicity explains them. Age, educational attainment, income and language spoken at home all overlap with Hispanic origin in this sample, and a single cross-sectional survey cannot separate those effects. The report also notes that its weighting does not correct undercoverage of Spanish-dominant adults. Treat this as a recurring equity indicator to watch across waves, not a finding about ethnicity. “Tucson’s reading gap is an ethnic gap” is wrong.

WHAT THIS STUDY DOES NOT SAY

- **It is not a literacy assessment.** Nothing here measures whether anyone can read. It measures whether people choose to, and what they do with it.
- **39.70 is not a percentage and not a grade.** “Tucson scored 39%” is wrong.
- **There is no ranking.** This report found no comparable community measurement to compare against, so nothing here is being compared to anywhere else. “Tucson ranks” is wrong.
- **There is no margin of error.** This is a non-probability online panel sample, so no design-based margin of sampling error applies. The report and methodology carry two orientation benchmarks showing what random sampling error would look like at this sample size: about ± 4.8 points for a single percentage near 50%, and about ± 2 points for the index, which is a weighted composite and varies less than any one proportion. Both are scale references, not uncertainty intervals, and neither captures panel self-selection or coverage error. “TRHI 39.7 ± 2 ” is wrong.
- **“Emerging” is this project’s band, not a national standard.** The five bands are interpretive civic ranges chosen to make the score legible. They are not clinically validated or normed against any other community.
- **The education gap is descriptive.** A single cross-sectional survey can show that things occur together, not that one produces the other.
- **84.2% does not mean “84% read books.”** The measure is deliberately broad and includes articles, audiobooks and scripture.

DISCLOSURE

The Place & Page is a forthcoming independent bookstore in Tucson and shares an interest in the ecosystem this report describes. The index architecture, weights and routing were fixed before fielding; weighting, quality control and coding were documented and dated before any finding was written. The report stops short of recommending solutions, including any that would favor a bookstore. No respondent's own words appear anywhere in the published series; respondents were told before the first question that results would be reported only in the aggregate.

USING THE FIGURES

All fourteen figures in the report are published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). You may reproduce or adapt them, including commercially, with the line: *Source: The Place & Page, Tucson State of Reading 2026*. No permission or request is needed.

SOURCES, CORRECTIONS AND CONTACT

The full report (65 pages) and the methodology documentation are published in full at theplaceandpage.com/tsor/2026. The methodology carries the instrument architecture, quality-control protocol, weighting mechanics and a dated decision record. Corrections after publication are logged in a public errata and version log.

Questions, corrections and interview requests: tsor@theplaceandpage.com. Available to discuss the findings and the methodology.

Recommended citation. The Place & Page. (2026). *Tucson State of Reading 2026: Baseline edition*. doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22714565

Edition page: theplaceandpage.com/tsor/2026