



We've included a brief overview on data and security to share externally (on site, in email, etc.) with your audience:

The Broadband Together coalition takes privacy very seriously and actively works to secure your personal information. When you upload your bill, the files will be encrypted to help ensure that the information is protected and secure. Further, our analysis will only record relevant data including price, bundle, speed, zip code, and add-on fees.. Our analytical tools will not record or store personal information from your bill. We will securely delete bills when they're no longer needed.

The following data will not be collected from your bills: your name, phone number, security code/PIN, account number, billing information (other than your zip code), past due amounts or other personally identifying information are not part of our research scope. We will not extract this kind of information from your bill, or analyze any other information that's not specifically needed for our research.

Partner FAQ: How We Handle Participant Data

Partner FAQ:

Questions about accounts	2
Questions about research objectives	3
Questions about data privacy and security	4
Questions about data sharing	5
Questions about ConsumerReports.org	6

Questions about accounts

Why do I need to sign up for a CR member account?

In order to enable participants to share their information, provide the option to return over multiple sessions and upload their bill, and facilitate communications before and after the study, we require participants to create a free CR member account. There's no cost associated with this.

What does a free member account get me?

Consumer Reports is a nonprofit member organization. CR's 6 million members are our guiding force and power our work for a fair and just marketplace for all.

Free membership, also known as "Basic" membership, includes access to information, tools, and opportunities to get involved in CR's marketplace change work. Free members can participate in campaigns and participatory research projects, share their experiences, access CR's Best Time to Buy tool to find best deals on top-rated products by month, register products they own to receive recall and maintenance alerts, and more. For more information on CR membership levels, please visit <https://www.consumerreports.org/membership>.

Will I receive emails?

When you sign up to participate in Broadband Together, you will receive welcome email communications with instructions on how to set an account password. You will also receive periodic emails about the Broadband Together coalition and opportunities to contribute to broadband research and advocacy.

After the study ends, you may receive information, offers, and other periodic email communications for Consumer Reports members. If you do not wish to receive emails for members, you can [manage your email communications preferences here](#). If you do not wish to receive emails about consumer advocacy, [you can opt-out here](#).

Can I submit a bill and not sign up for a free membership account?

In order to submit your bill digitally, participants must create a free member account. If you prefer not to create a free member account, and would still like to submit your bill for this participatory research study, we invite you to mail us a hard copy of your bill to: Consumer Reports % Cody Feng, 101 Truman Ave, Yonkers NY 10703.

Questions about research objectives

Why are you asking for consumers to share speed test, bill, and questionnaire data?

The information volunteered by participants will support research about broadband affordability. Research will be conducted by CR and its trusted research partners.

Why are you asking for a PDF of the bill (as opposed to a picture or a physical copy)?

We're asking for a portable document format (PDF) copy of your bill for maximum readability using our unique technology.

How do you analyze the bill?

We analyze your bills in two ways: 1) We're experimenting with a unique technology that can automatically extract the data values relevant to pricing. Where possible, we will attempt to automatically extract information from your bill; 2) If we're unable to automatically extract the values, human reviewers working for CR will manually extract values from your bill. We will attempt to automatically obfuscate your name and address before humans look at your bill.

What type of analysis will be done with the information submitted?

Access & Choice

By comparing your bill with thousands of others, we will be able to see where prices are higher or lower for the same service. Over time, we hope to determine the factors that explain other factors that account for price differences.

For our initial study, we will only use zip code data, and NOT street addresses, to detect these geographical differences.

Confusing Pricing

Internet service can be bundled with phone or cable TV service, so the cost of internet may not even be listed on the monthly bill. Other bills may not disclose the promised speed being paid for, and the price can vary significantly depending on if a promotional rate is applied or expired.

By studying the thousands of bills we aim to collect, CR will be able to identify these billing practices and determine what steps could be taken to make them less confusing.

Hidden Fees

Bills can be padded with hidden fees made up by the internet service provider that you might not have even known were there. For example, some providers impose a non-optional “network access and maintenance fee” that is not a government fee, but a fee entirely made up by the ISP.

What data is excluded from analysis?

Your name, phone number, security code/PIN, account number, billing information (other than your zip code), past due amounts or other personally identifying information are not part of our research scope. We will not extract this kind of information from your bill, or analyze any other information that's not specifically needed for our research.

Is this study limited to residents of the United States?

Yes.

Questions about data privacy and security

How is data collected?

We enable volunteers to share data about their internet service, and themselves, through the Broadband Together microsite.

Consumer Reports takes privacy very seriously and actively works to secure your personal information. When you upload your bill, the files will be encrypted to help ensure that the information is protected and secure. Further, our analysis will only record relevant data such as price, bundle, speed, and hidden fees for further investigation. Our analytical tools will not record or store personal information from your bill. We will delete bills when they're no longer needed.

What data is collected, and how is it stored?

For the purposes of the study, we collect three kinds of information: 1) speed test results, 2) internet service provider bills, and 3) questionnaire responses.

These files are encrypted and stored in a protected environment, and are not combined with any other data.

Separately, when you create your free member account, we collect data such as first name, last name and email address which is used in accordance with our [Privacy Policy](#).

Finally, ConsumerReports.org uses cookies and other technologies to understand how people use the site, for marketing purposes, and for other reasons as described in our [cookie policy](#).

Will anyone see my bill?

Your bill may be viewed by CR staff and human reviewers working for CR. We will attempt to automatically obfuscate your name and address before humans look at your bill.

What if I feel worried about sharing the personal information on my bill?

Programs like Adobe Acrobat Reader or other PDF management programs allow you to open a document, [black out anything you don't want us to see](#), and then save the pdf again with the blacked-out area in place. Before you upload your bill, please make sure it does not contain any sensitive information like social security number or full credit card number (it probably doesn't).

How long do you keep the data?

We delete the uploaded PDF bills after our analysis is completed and they are no longer needed, in accordance with our data retention policy. We also take steps to de-link the member from the pricing data extracted from the bills, and the data collected as part of the questionnaire.

Questions about data sharing

Will you share my bill?

No. Our process has been designed to ensure that your bill won't leave CR's platform. Select CR staff and human reviewers working for CR will have the ability to view the bill in a controlled environment, but we will attempt to automatically obfuscate your name and address before humans look at your bill. We will delete bills when they're no longer needed.

Will you share data with third-party researchers?

Yes. We may share aggregate data about bills and participant responses with trusted academic and research partners to further the research goals of this initiative. Speed test data will be added to mLab's longitudinal speed test database to support the public interest research goals of the project.

How will you de-identify data before sharing with research partners?

After we extract data from a single bill, this data will be combined into a database that does not include any information that identifies you personally. We may share certain segments of this data with trusted academic and research partners to further the research goals of this initiative. Before sharing data, we will undertake further efforts to help ensure that the data cannot be de-anonymized. If we share individual level bill data, we will redact your name and contact information (excluding ZIP code).

Questions about ConsumerReports.org

Why does the site use cookies?

When you use our websites or other digital services or open our emails, CR and other service providers may collect information through cookies, web beacons and other technologies. This [Cookie Policy](#) explains these technologies and how you can control their use. This policy applies to all Consumer Reports websites and other digital services that link to this policy.

These cookies and other technologies help make our digital services better and enhance the user experience by offering you a more relevant and customized experience. We also use cookies to monitor and stabilize our websites, measure the use and effectiveness of our content, remember you when you log in, and promote Consumer Reports products and services that are relevant to your interests. You can read more in our [Cookie Policy](#).

For more information about CR's privacy practices, please visit our [Privacy Policy](#).