

CELL PHONE PLANS IN THE U.S.

Mobile Phone Systems In The USA

By December 2022, all U.S. carriers shut down 2G and 3G networks. You can still use unlocked phones with a physical SIM card, but they must support newer networks like 4G or 5G.

eSIM

You could also get an eSIM which is a digital version of the physical SIM card. Convenient because you can't lose it, and you don't have to wait for it to arrive in the mail.

Most phones are eligible for an eSIM.

Exceptions: Phones purchased in China, [very old phones](#) (link for supported devices), [some MVNO carriers](#) (link for supported MVNO carriers)

Types of Wireless Service Providers

Providers		Comments
Carrier	There are three main carriers that run their own network — Verizon, AT&T and T-Mobile.	More stable in highly crowded areas. But more expensive than MVNOs.
MVNO	MVNOs are carriers that don't have their own wireless network; instead, they piggyback off another carrier's platform for coverage through their cell phone plans.	Cheaper and usually more options for plans. Most of them are fairly stable around campus.

Types of plans

Type of plan	How it works	Advantages	Disadvantages
Pre-paid plan	You "refill" your phone plan monthly, quarterly or annually without which you don't get service.	You don't have to commit to a contract, which means you can stop refilling your plan whenever you are out of the country. You can also change the plan at any time.	Doesn't come with a device.
Individual contract	Usually 1 or 2 year contract with early termination fee, monthly bill, and option to buy phones at discount prices. This is not very common anymore.	Usually cheaper in the long run, you can usually get a device for free or heavily discounted.	You have to commit for at least 12 months, requiring cash flow to pay every month. Devices need to be paid off if you want to change a carrier.
Payment Plan	You pay a monthly bill for access to a certain amount of talk, text and data.	Most of these plans include unlimited talk and text.	You may or may not get the full advantage of the plan depending on how heavy of a phone user you are. Unused data does not carry over to the next month.

Family contract	A group of friends or acquaintances can form a “family” for phone plan services and initiate a group plan together, where you share data.	Generally, the more people you have in the “family” contract, the cheaper it is for individuals.	You rely on friends/acquaintances’ ability to get together and organize, as well as pay bills (except Visible) on time. You also share your data/minutes which can be unbalanced.
Unlimited Plan	You pay a monthly bill for unlimited talk, text and data.	Don’t need to worry about limits.	Expensive. Need to be a heavy phone user to get the most out of this plan.

Plans by Main Carriers /MVNOs

We list the basic plans for you but all carriers have multiple plans that you can choose depending on your needs. Please consult their websites. Plans are prices subject to change by individual carrier

Carriers			
Carrier	Verizon	AT&T	T Mobile
Website	www.verizon.com	www.att.com	www.t-mobile.com
Unlimited talk & text (in network)	✓	✓	✓
International Calls	Requires extra fee	Requires extra fee	Requires extra fee
10GB	\$40	\$33 (8GB)	\$40
unlimited/unlimited plus- 1line	\$50+	\$45	\$50-\$60
unlimited basic-4 lines	\$35 per line (\$140 total)	https://www.att.com/plans/unlimited-data-plans/ (price calculator)	https://www.t-mobile.com/cell-phone-plans?INTNAV=tNav:Plans (price calculator)
unlimited plus-4 lines	\$45 per line (\$180 total)	https://www.att.com/plans/unlimited-data-plans/	https://www.t-mobile.com/cell-phone-plans?INTNAV=tNav:Plans

MVNOs							
MVNO	Consumer Cellular	Mint Mobile	Google Fi	Tello	Boost Mobile	Ting	Visible
Website	https://www.consumercellular.com/	https://www.mintmobile.com/	https://fi.google.com/	https://www.tello.com/	https://deals.boostmobile.com/	https://ting.com/	https://www.visible.com/
Unlimited talk & text (in network)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
International Calls	Requires extra fee	Requires extra fee	Requires extra fee	Requires extra fee	Requires extra fee	Requires extra fee	Requires extra fee
flexible/under 5GB	\$20(1GB)	/	\$20+\$10/GB	\$10(2GB)	\$8.3(1GB)	/	/
5GB	\$25	\$15	/	\$14	\$15	\$25	/
10GB	\$35	/	/	\$19	/	\$35(12GB)	/
15GB		\$20	/	\$24	\$35 (12GB)	/	/
20GB	\$45	\$25	/	/	\$45 (22GB)	\$45(22GB)	/
unlimited/unlimited plus- 1line	\$50	\$30	\$35/\$50/\$65	\$25	\$25/\$40/\$60	\$55 (35GB)	\$30/45
unlimited basic-3/4/5 lines	https://www.consumercellular.com/shopping/choose/plan (price calculator)	/	https://fi.google.com/about/plans/ (price calculator)	/	2 lines-\$80 3 lines- \$90 4 lines-\$180 (35GB) Must be purchased in store	/	/
unlimited plus-3/4/5 lines	/	/	https://fi.google.com/about/plans/	/	/	/	/

Recommended resource: <https://9to5mac.com/2022/07/19/best-phone-carriers/>

Carriers' stores near Macalester (double-check on Google Map)

Carrier	Location	Time
AT&T	1315 University Ave W / 2132 Ford Pkwy	MON-FRI: 10AM - 8PM, SAT: 10AM - 7PM, SUN:11AM-6PM / MON-FRI: 10AM - 8PM, SAT: 10AM - 6PM, SUN:11AM-6PM
T-Mobile	1460 University Ave / 2110 Ford Pkwy	MON-FRI: 10AM - 9PM, SAT: 10AM -8PM, SUN: 11AM- 6PM / MON-FRI: 10AM - 9PM, SAT: 10AM -8PM, SUN: 11AM- 6PM
Verizon	474 Hamline Ave / 2034 Ford Pkwy	MON-SAT: 10AM - 7PM, SUN: 12PM - 6PM / MON-FRI: 9AM - 8PM, SAT: 9AM - 6PM SUN: 11AM - 5PM

*You can also visit Target, Walmart, or Best Buy stores to buy phones, SIM cards, or phone plans.

*You can also purchase a SIM card online, or get an e-SIM card (check the eligibility of your phone first!)

Notes:

1. Don't ask your FLAG host to join their family plan (that's rude). If they make the offer, that's great.
2. Most phones sold in the U.S. are locked to the carrier that sells them, so you couldn't take a GSM iPhone from AT&T and use it on T-Mobile's network unless the phone is unlocked. However, many Verizon smartphones come unlocked.
3. On that note, there is also an option to unlock your phone after a certain period of time (for example, 9 months with AT&T). Consult your phone company for the detailed policies.
4. Each carrier has options for voice, text, or data that gives you a certain amount of usage and fees for when you go over your limits. If you are not on unlimited voice or text plan, US carriers may charge you for outgoing and incoming call minutes or texts.
5. To check a coverage map, enter in Mac's zip code – 55105.
6. Plans change often so check the carrier's website for updated costs and information.
7. Most plans offer the ability to set up autopay to automatically pay for the bill. This typically comes with a discount and means you don't have to worry about remembering to pay every month.