



Are you thinking of starting a Community Indicator System?

Essential information to consider before you dive in

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What is a Community Indicator System?

A Community Indicator System (CIS) measures important aspects of a community's social, economic, environmental, political, cultural and physical well-being. By tracking past and current information on these indicators, a CIS provides insight into the overall health and direction of a community. According to the American Planning Association (2003), *"Community indicators are bits of information that, when combined, generate a picture of what is happening in a local system..."*¹

What are the benefits of a CIS?

There are many benefits to having a CIS in your community. A CIS provides local businesses, organizations, schools and governments with the ability to measure and track progress in the community, resulting in more informed decision making and planning. They can also bring groups together reach a goal, help people to understand their community, and inspire change.

While CIS data is best collected at the local level, indicator systems are also used at the regional, national and international level. One of the most universally applied indicator systems is the one used to track progress towards the United Nations *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs). Part of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SDGs are "a call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity"².

¹ Phillips, R. (2003). Community Indicators. Planning Advisory Service Report 517, American Planning Association. Retrieved from <http://docplayer.net/6618460-Community-indicators-rhonda-phillips-american-planning-association-american-planning-association-planning-advisory-service.html>

² United Nations (2017). What are the Sustainable Development Goals? Retrieved from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>



Communities can contribute to the success of the SDGs by ‘localizing’ indicators; tracking indicators set at a larger scale at a local level. One of the key principles of the 2030 Agenda is that countries, provinces and communities set their own priorities and objectives within the broader framework of the SDGs in a bottom-up approach.

By adopting and developing a CIS with localized indicators, you can understand your community’s relative health and progress within a national and global context, while focusing on issues that matter to your community. As the 2030 Agenda recognizes communities and local governments are the catalysts for change. By ‘localizing’ indicators, communities plug into an on-going global effort that is drawing national and international attention and funding. In this way, a CIS allows communities to take an active role in achieving and tracking a larger agenda while addressing key issues at home.

What is IISD’s experience with CISs?

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) has over a decade of experience working with data for decision-making and with CISs. Since 2013, the IISD has worked with the United Way of Winnipeg to develop an award-winning Indicator system, [Peg](#) for the City of Winnipeg that continues to inspire action in the community.

How can your community start a CIS?

A CIS can have many benefits for communities. However, your goals for the CIS will determine the strategies you should take, and the amount of work needed to be successful. If you are interested in starting a Community Indicator System (CIS) in your community, please take some time to consider what you would like to accomplish by having a CIS. Do you want a CIS that:

1. Informs policy and decision making;
2. Sets targets and goals for community improvement;
3. Increases community pride and engagement;
4. Attracts new businesses;
5. Enhances collaboration to address public issues;
6. Provides tools to encourage action; and/or
7. Increases public knowledge about key economic, environmental, social and cultural issues.

While none of these benefits are mutually exclusive, identifying your intentions from the onset allows your CISs and subsequent activities to be tailored to deliver specific outcomes.



Building a Sustainable CIS

A CIS is important for long-term measurement and goal setting in a community. However, to produce long-term results a CIS must be founded on a sustainable basis of resources. There are several criteria that should be considered in this regard.

1. **Human resources:** At least one knowledgeable person who can be assigned to updating data on a regular basis and sharing the information with the public. There are two pillars of a CIS; data and communications. These are two important skill sets to have on a CIS team.
2. **Financial resources:** Ideally there is already a person on staff or funds available to appoint someone or a team to do the work.
3. **Multiple partners:** Having the support of municipal government, citizens' groups and/or a charitable organization is ideal. This will increase the utility of the CIS and improve the odds for on-going funding.
 - a. Local government – planning, economic development, culture and tourism
 - b. Local charity – United Way, Community Foundation, Rotary, Lions Club, Kiwanis, Knights of Columbus etc.
 - c. Chamber of Commerce or business improvement groups
 - d. Local health authority (public/community health)
 - e. Social services and anti-poverty groups
 - f. Local university or college

Community data availability: Access to administrative data from local government is important. Much of this data is shared in annual reports, however having easy access to the information makes the process faster and easier. Other sources of information could also include public transit authority (if you have one), police data, economic development, business improvement, provincial government initiatives, community and seniors' centres, or social services agencies. In addition, data should be available for a range of at least 10 years prior, if possible. While this will not be the case with all data, it is helpful for identifying trends at the onset of the project.

While it is not necessary for a CIS to meet all the above criteria at the on-set, it is important to keep these resources in mind moving forward. This project is aimed at helping communities to develop a sustainable CIS – in identifying areas of strength and potential barriers to success, we can work with communities to build technical capacities as well as develop strategies to overcome any perceived obstacles, be that on-going funding, developing partnership models or community outreach.

Please take the time to fill out this [simple survey](#), it will help you work through some of these questions and help us to tailor workshops and webinars based on your organization's needs.