Community Indicators Victoria
...for informed, engaged and well planned communities

A Resource Guide
Using CIV as a Tool for Council Planning
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Foreword

Community Indicators Victoria was established as a result of the recommendations of the Victorian Community Indicators Project, commissioned by VicHealth and the Department of Human Services from 2005-2006 (January 2005 to July 2006). Its goal was to establish a sustainable system for the development and use of local community wellbeing indicators in Victoria.

Community Indicators Victoria is a collaborative project, funded by VicHealth and hosted by the McIaughey Centre, School of Population Health, at the University of Melbourne. The McIaughey Centre works in partnership with a wide range of government, community, and academic organizations to make sure that Community Indicators Victoria stays in touch with the needs of its users.

The aim of this Resource Guide is to provide introductory information about the practical use of community wellbeing indicators and the ways in which Community Indicators Victoria can support local government and local community organisations to use them.

This Resource Guide was developed by the Centre for Regional Development, Swinburne University of Technology in partnership with the McIaughey Centre, on the basis of conversations with local government in regional workshops across Victoria.
I. Introduction

Community wellbeing indicators provide information about a broad range of social, economic, environmental, cultural and governance issues that are important to local communities and citizens.

Community wellbeing indicators can be a useful focus for community discussion. They can paint a picture of the strengths and challenges of a community, and they can help that community track trends in local wellbeing over time.

They are:

- A **democratic tool** for engaging citizens and communities in informed discussions about shared goals and priorities;
- A **policy tool**, guiding evidence-based planning and action to address the issues identified as important by communities;
- A **reporting tool**, tracking and communicating progress towards agreed goals and outcomes.

Community Indicators Victoria has been established to provide a community wellbeing indicator framework and to support local communities in the use of these indicators for planning and priority setting.

The framework is based on a set of approximately 80 community wellbeing indicators, covering the broad spectrum of local community life. The five domains in Community Indicators Victoria, under which all the indicators are grouped, are:

- Healthy, safe and inclusive communities;
- Dynamic, resilient local economies;
- Sustainable built and natural environments;
- Culturally rich and vibrant communities; and
- Democratic and engaged communities.

This set of indicators is intended as a starting point for local governments and local communities so that they can identify the issues and indicators which are most important to them.
At its core, Community Indicators Victoria aims to provide a basis for informed, engaged and integrated community planning and policy making. It will be a useful resource for a wide range of people:

- Local citizens interested in the wellbeing of their community,
- Local government mayors and councillors,
- Local government policy and planning staff,
- State government policy and planning staff,
- Non government agencies.

2. Why Community Wellbeing Indicators are important

Community wellbeing indicators can help local government to govern better. They can improve Councils’ knowledge, responsiveness, effectiveness and accountability. They can provide the basis for engaging key partners in dialogue and action for improving community outcomes. They can strengthen local communities in direct and practical ways.

Community engagement and community strengthening:
Community wellbeing indicators provide a concrete focus to engage local citizens and strengthen communities in discussions about what matters to them. The process of developing community wellbeing indicators and community plans is an excellent way to inform and involve local people and organisations, and a meaningful task for citizens. It enables them to identify key issues, discuss priorities, and plan future directions for their community.

Support for Council decision-making:
Community wellbeing indicators help ensure that the decisions Councils make about policies and budgets are based on the best local evidence. This includes evidence on community priorities, as well as the key social, economic, environmental, cultural and governance trends in their community.

Integrated policy and planning:
A community wellbeing indicator framework is an integrated map of key community priorities. It shows how different issues fit together and how progress in one key area of concern to local communities is related to another. This makes it a powerful tool to support an integrated or ‘triple bottom line’ approach to policy development, program implementation and evaluation.
A focus on results:
Community wellbeing indicators will help Councils and their key partners to shift the focus from inputs (for example dollars spent on recreational facilities) and outputs (e.g. new parks and sporting facilities) to outcomes and practical results for their communities (e.g., improved participation in sporting and recreational activities, health benefits).

Better reporting and accountability:
A good system of local community wellbeing indicators will give Councils the basis for better informed and more comprehensive reporting, and promotes increased accountability and transparency. This has both administrative and democratic benefits. Examples include: better council reports to local citizens; better policy; and good local data to attract state funded programs or meet state reporting requirements.

Community wellbeing indicators will add value to local government. Collected and maintained over time they will provide a real measure of the progress being made in strengthening local communities and building local resilience and capacity.

3. What is available through Community Indicators Victoria

The Community Indicators Victoria data on local community wellbeing trends is available through the new interactive web site www.communityindicators.net.au.

The website provides indicators of wellbeing for each local government area in Victoria. It houses up to date data at the local government area (LGA) level, as well as at state and regional levels.

Visitors to the website can generate automated Wellbeing Reports for each local government area in Victoria. Visitors can also create their own reports by selecting from a comprehensive list of indicators for their local area, and they can compare local results to other local government, state and regional results.

The website also includes:

- An online tutorial to guide users through the mechanics of the website,
- Opportunities for users to request research and consultancy,
- Frequently asked questions (FAQ’s), and
- Links to other indicator sets and links to Australian, International and Global initiatives related to community sustainability, community wellbeing or quality of life.
As Community Indicators Victoria grows, capacity building toolkits, links to training programs and the outcomes of research will also be added to the website.

Community Wellbeing Reports
When you open the Community Indicators Victoria website, you will see a map of Victoria. If you click on this map in your local area, you will be able to generate an automated Wellbeing Report. This report will contain a select number of community wellbeing indicators to highlight important trends and issues in your community.

Below is an image of the front page of the Community Indicators Victoria website – you can see the map that will lead you directly to Wellbeing Reports for all local government areas in Victoria.
If you want to generate a more detailed report, you can become a member of Community Indicators Victoria by sending us your email details. Becoming a member will allow you to use the flexible reporting features of the website. This means that you will be able to generate your own reports, according to your own planning and reporting needs.

If you want to develop your own customized reports, information will be accessible by two routes – geography or topic. The site’s “geography” is based on local government areas and regions, while “topic” is based on the five domains and the various policy areas that make up the Community Indicators Framework of wellbeing indicators. You will be able to make your own customized reports by choosing indicators of interest for a particular region or area.

Data display options include:

- Comparisons of selected indicators to the state, other regions or other local government areas,
- Gender, age or population group will be available for some data sets over time, and
- Bar charts, pie charts, or tabulated data.

**Capacity Building: Training and Tool Kits**

Ensuring that Community Indicators Victoria is relevant and useful to local communities is key to its success in the long term.

Prior to the launch of the new Community Indicators Victoria website and data, workshops were held in each region of Victoria to provide information on the project and to strengthen the capacity of local government and key community partners to use the indicator framework and data.

These workshops also provided important feedback on the ongoing support needs of Councils. To meet this need, other workshops will be conducted over time and resources such as tips sheets and tool kits will be developed.

**Research**

An important goal of Community Indicators Victoria is to understand the ways in which community wellbeing indicators can make a difference to communities. To find this out, the Community Indicators Victoria team plans to design and implement research projects to strengthen knowledge about the development and use of local community wellbeing indicators. For example, Community Indicators Victoria plans to document case studies to illustrate the use of indicators by local government and community partners in Victoria and the lessons learnt along the way.
The team at Community Indicators Victoria welcomes enquiries from government, community groups and others on how we might work together to improve our understanding of community wellbeing indicators.

Links to National and International Indicator Research
As a resource to local government, policy makers, researchers and community members, the Community Indicators Victoria website includes a series of web links and reports relevant to community indicator development and measurement, sustainability, quality of life and well being.

Consultancy Services
The Community Indicators Victoria team and partners provide a range of consultancy services to support the development and use of indicators by government and the community.
4. How the indicators and measures were chosen

There are a large number of indicators that could potentially be part of a framework of community wellbeing indicators. Choosing the indicators that would finally be included in the framework was a task that was undertaken by Victorian Community Indicators Project, the initial research project that led to the establishment of Community Indicators Victoria.

In order to be included, the indicators were assessed using a filtering tool including the following criteria:

- Will it measure what is valued?
- Is it conceptually sound?
- Does it make sense and will it be useful to citizens and policy makers?
- Is it relevant and measurable at the local level?

The filtering tool used was informed by:

- A review of Australian and international policy and practice,
- Victorian local government plans and visions,
- Feedback from local governments, state government departments and the community sector.

The Community Indicators Victoria indicators and measures will help each Council get a clearer picture of its community and how the community is tracking in key areas. In some cases, the picture presented will challenge existing wisdom and assumptions about specific issues. For this reason, the indicators include a mix of subjective and objective measures, allowing perceptions to be considered alongside objective measures.
5. Where the data has come from

Data for the Community Indicators Victoria framework comes from a range of sources, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics, existing administrative data, existing surveys and the new statewide Community Indicators Victoria Survey (2007).

Existing administrative data sources include Victorian Government departments such as the Department of Victorian Communities, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

A new data set has also been developed from the Community Indicators Victoria Survey (2007), which surveyed 300 residents in all 79 local government areas across Victoria. A weighting system has been used in the analysis of this statistically relevant sample of residents to correct any potential bias. This ensures that Councils and community members can have confidence in the results. The Survey was developed by the Community Indicators Victoria team in consultation with key stakeholders and was specifically designed to fill the gaps between existing administrative data sources and the need for new measures of community wellbeing.

As an extension of the core Survey, local governments in Victoria were offered the opportunity to purchase additional questions in the Survey. The data collected will support the use of indicators that are of specific interest to an individual Council and their key partners.

Case Study:

Additional sampling and questions for the Ballarat City Council

The Ballarat City Council was one of 16 Councils that purchased additional questions in the Community Indicators Victoria Survey (2007). As a pilot project, Ballarat Council also purchased additional sample.

Together with their Municipal Public Health Plan partners, Ballarat City Council selected additional health related questions such as physical activity, fruit and vegetable consumption, alcohol consumption and smoking to be included in the survey. Because they were also interested in sub-LGA level data and older people, they purchased an additional sample of 1,500 respondents to enable a more detailed breakdown of survey for both the core survey modules and their additional questions.
6. How local government can use the framework and data

First steps: co-ordinating, partnering and engaging
The Community Indicators Victoria framework and indicators are an important tool for Council planning and policy making. However, they will only have an impact if they are integrated with existing Council processes and knowledge. In many cases this will be fairly straightforward as the framework and indicators were chosen based on feedback about what local government in Victoria said was needed. In other cases, more work may be needed to ensure that they become a core part of Council business.

Through the Community Indicator Victoria workshops ideas were gathered on potential first steps for integrating the framework and indicators. Three key areas were identified: strategic planning, partnering with stakeholders and engaging communities. In addition, workshop participants explored the issue of responding to indicators that are tracking below average.

Better indicators lead to better information and a better understanding of issues - this will help us all make better choices about where to place our efforts.

Strategic planning
All Councils have existing strategic planning processes in place. Community Indicators Victoria provides Councils with an additional planning tool and data for integration into those existing processes. It may also provide you with an opportunity to think differently about how your Council plans. In particular, community wellbeing indicators provide the basis for a “whole of Council” approach to planning for and with communities.

A first step in using the Community Indicators Victoria framework and data is to ensure that Councillors, the executive management team and the staff are fully briefed about the framework and data. With a renewed understanding of the wellbeing of the community, Council can decide how indicators will be used in a “whole of Council” approach.
Workshop participants made the following suggestions:

- Consider how the framework and the five domains relate to Council activity. In strategic planning it is important to take a holistic view of each of the five domains by assessing the overall performance of a selected suite of indicators within that domain. Individual indicators however, may be of particular concern in a community or sector of the community and can act as a catalyst for action and a nexus for community engagement,

- Determine which indicators are most relevant to your Council and align indicators with strategic and Council plans,

- Identify other sources of information related to the indicators to provide background and context. The inclusion of contextual information and background data will enrich the value of each indicator so that links and impacts on other indicators can be understood. For this reason the Community Indicators Victoria website will include a direct link to the Australian Bureau of Statistics “Quick Stats” which can provide comprehensive demographic data for each Local Government Area,

- Identify gaps and develop local indicators to address the shortfall if required,

- Determine which benchmarks are the most appropriate,

- Formulate strategies for ‘negative’ indicators and how to deal with them (see below),

- Anticipate selective use of indicators by interest groups,

- Manage the way the media reports the indicators,

- Understand Council’s role in addressing the indicator. Will Council take a lead role, form a partnership or simply be an advocate?

Workshop participants reported that an important step for the integration of the Community Indicators Victoria framework and data is to ensure that training and support is provided for staff.

Partnering with stakeholders
Responsibility for improving community wellbeing belongs to many stakeholders: all levels of government; non-government; private and community based organisations. Workshop participants reported that building and maintaining links between key partners, with a focus on improving local community wellbeing, is a critical role for local government.
It is important to remember that indicators are markers of community progress, not of Council responsibility or performance.

Community wellbeing indicators are a tool that will add strength to Council’s leadership role in partnering and for clarifying the priorities and main objectives of these partnerships. They will also provide Council with evidence to support the development of new partnerships.

**Engaging communities**

Indicators are able to increase the level of public impact when Councils work with the community to understand their concerns and aspirations and partner with the community to identify solutions and participate in decision making. This means moving beyond simply providing balanced and objective information to engaging communities in discussions about what matters and what actions are needed.

Workshop participants suggested that an important first step for using the framework and indicators in community engagement processes is to undertake an initial analysis of the data. This analysis should distil simple and clear messages about the strengths and challenges facing the community and can be used to facilitate conversations with residents about:

- Whether the indicator data matches ‘local wisdom’ and knowledge about community wellbeing,
- What other data is needed,
- What the priorities are for change,
- What actions are needed.

Community wellbeing indicators will assist Councils to move beyond anecdotal information to a discussion grounded in evidence about how the community is tracking and changes needed for the future.

**Dealing with indicators that are tracking below average**

Indicator results can often be like the canary in the tunnel historically used to warn of dangerous gases in the mine. Sometimes rather than being dead, the canary may have decided not to sing, or the canary may have fainted and can be revived. In other words, a challenging indicator result needs a closer look. Whatever the situation, a below average result should be further investigated and understood.

The most important consideration when dealing with indicators that are tracking below average is that the system and the relevant benchmark need to be fully understood.
60% of people in the State on average feel that they have an opportunity to have a say on important issues and only 37% of people in your municipality feel that they have this opportunity?

• Is this a concern for Council?
• Are there certain demographics or socio-economic factors that influence this indicator?
• Is this an indicator that Council wants to address? If so, will Council take a leadership role, advocacy role or partner with stakeholders to address this?
• Is more research needed to understand the underlying factors? When was the data captured? What was in the media at the time? What do local residents understand is “an opportunity to have a real say”?

7. Where to from here?

As indicators become cornerstones to planning and policy development, Community Indicators Victoria will continue to develop resources to support this process including:

• Regular data updates – as new data comes in it will be available through the website,
• Policy and research partnerships,
• Capacity building tools, and
• Ongoing development of the framework in particular areas, for example cultural and governance indicators.

The Community Indicators Victoria team welcomes feedback from local government, key partners and the community on the use of community wellbeing indicators, what works and what resources are still needed.

Further information
Enquiries about Community Indicators Victoria should be directed to The McCaughey Centre on (03) 8344 9101 or info-mccaughey@ unimelb.edu.au
CIV is hosted by the McCaughey Centre: VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing.

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