

MEASURING WELLBEING, ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

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THE VCI PROJECT: A PROGRESS REPORT TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Governments around the world are striving to improve the way they measure progress and plan for change. Central to this endeavour is the development of indicators.

Indicators of economic, social, environmental, cultural and democratic progress have become a complex science. But indicators are not dreamt up out of thin air nor are they simply a white-board, theoretical or technocratic exercise.

Indicators reflect the values of the communities they serve. For this reason good indicators are built from the bottom up.

There are some indicators that will be common to all communities; ones like personal safety, housing or health status, for example. But there are others that reflect different priorities in different communities, such as preservation of open



Community wellbeing indicators tell us about the overall health and development of a community, in all areas that matter.

space, access to specialist health services or availability of public transport. The Victorian Community Indicators Project (VCIP) brings together an experienced team from two universities, local government and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to develop indicators that will work for Victoria, starting with local governments.

The project is funded by VicHealth and is being undertaken with ten local government partners: Bendigo, Hobsons Bay, Knox, Maroondah, Moreland, Port Phillip, Surf Coast, Wellington and Wodonga.

The VCIP has contacted all State Government departments, mapped out current indicators in use in Victoria, undertaken a stocktake of Victorian

A PROGRESS REPORT (CONT)

local governments' visions, directions and indicators and identified the best international websites. All of these are available on the VCIP website www.communityindicators.net.au.

For those wanting to stay abreast of developments, the VCIP has also just produced a Discussion Paper and Framework Document for establishing and using wellbeing indicators (also on the website).

The document asks the question "what are community wellbeing indicators and why do they matter?" In answering its own question the document goes on to say,

"Community wellbeing indicators are statistical tools for translating broad community goals into clear, tangible and commonly understood outcomes and for assessing and communicating progress in achieving these goals and outcomes.

The importance of community wellbeing indicators lies in their capacity to be:

i) A democratic tool for engaging citizens and communities in informed discussions about shared goals and priorities.

ii) A policy tool guiding evidence based planning and action to address the issues identified as important by communities.

iii) A reporting tool tracking and communicating progress towards agreed goals and outcomes."

There is no doubt that indicators increasingly will underpin policy and reporting by all levels of government. What indicators and how valid they are is a work in progress and VCIP is helping both to lead the way and to pull existing work into one framework.

Indicators also play a significant role as a bridge between elected governments and the communities they serve. They provide a vehicle

for community engagement and constructive dialogue. They strengthen democratic processes and help in the difficult task of managing community expectations and setting priorities.

It is important that you stay abreast of these developments and not be left behind, if for no other reason than they will be significant in resource debates. If you cannot demonstrate progress, funding will be short-lived and others with the evidence will jump ahead.

It is recognised that not all local governments have the staff or readily available skills to tackle some aspects of community engagement and indicator development. To this end the VCIP is considering options for providing these resources. This is another reason not to hang back and be left behind at this formative stage.

Visit the website, contact one of the team or attend one of the upcoming information forums...but whatever you do, don't be left behind.

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