

# MEASURING WELLBEING, ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

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## THE VCI PROJECT: WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY WELLBEING INDICATOR PROJECTS?

Community well-being indicators are not performance measures. Community wellbeing indicators, which measure broad trends in community outcomes, are different from program evaluation and performance indicators which measure the effectiveness and efficiency of specific initiatives and programs.

Community well-being Indicators should represent open, value choices.

The community well-being indicators that governments and communities choose to report and measure progress should be those that have a very direct influence on policy and wellbeing of the whole community. They should be

chosen, not just for technical or statistical reasons, but on the basis of the political and philosophical values of those who choose them. This means the choice of community well being indicators should be made as openly and democratically as possible.

Community well-being indicators should be developed from a broad framework.

An effective community wellbeing indicator system is not simply a collection of statistics grouped together by subject matter. It should be developed from a framework that includes social, cultural, economic, and environmental and governance dimensions of wellbeing and clearly identifies the goals and outcomes of

wellbeing in each of these fields.

Community well-being indicators are tools for integrated governance, planning and citizen engagement.

The most useful systems of community wellbeing indicators are those developed as part of an integrated approach to governance which includes: citizen engagement, community planning, evidence based policy making and regular community reporting on trends.

Community well-being indicators require new citizen engagement processes. Citizen engagement in developing and measuring community wellbeing through local

## WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY WELLBEING INDICATOR PROJECTS? (cont.)

community planning processes is a new and important form of local governance and democracy requiring innovative, flexible and properly resourced responses by government.

Community wellbeing indicators should include 'quality' and 'quantity' measures.

There is growing interest in exploring ways to define and measure issues and outcomes important to communities it was previously thought too vague, soft or subjective but now recognised as increasingly important to overall community wellbeing: for example, public and private trust, social capital, community connectedness, inequality, democratic engagement, quality of life, cultural and spiritual wellbeing and happiness).

Community wellbeing indicators are different from widely used indexes.

Composite 'indexes', such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which are usually a 'single number' created from many different statistics will continue to be used but have become increasingly meaningless to individual communities concerned with progress and conditions at a local and regional level. Communities should have access to many different and multi layered measures which collectively give a more com-

plete and nuanced picture of local conditions yet still relate to regional, state and national situations. For example, in environmental health, communities increasingly want to know about local conditions, not just national standards.

Community wellbeing indicators should be comparable across levels of government.

Community wellbeing indicators should, as far as possible, be coordinated and complementary at local and regional, state and national levels. There are real benefits and efficiencies - democratic, planning and policy - when different levels of government, and different governments within these levels, have a common accounting framework and a common language for measuring progress and wellbeing across the whole state or nation.

Community wellbeing indicators need leadership, innovation and coordination in government.

The potential value of community wellbeing indicators for better government is very great; but it is a new idea that challenges many established ways of planning and delivering government (such as the single department or 'silo' model; and the reluctance of governments to give citizens a

greater role in evaluation and decision making). To achieve this idea in practice - and ensure indicators are embedded as a core mechanism for democratic, accountable and integrated policy making - will require strong policy leadership and coordination.