

DEVELOPED BY



WEST MICHIGAN  
**STRATEGIC  
ALLIANCE**  
AND ITS PARTNERS

WEST MICHIGAN  
**Regional Indicators**

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# Process Guide



## To the Prospective Indicator Team,

The West Michigan Strategic Alliance and our partners published our first set of Regional Indicators called *The Vital Signs* in April 2007. Our goal was to assemble an easily understandable set of indicators to track trends in quality of life in the West Michigan region. Indicators can help to provide a picture of the health and wellbeing of your community. By examining the trends evident through quantifiable details you can see if your area is improving or declining. By bringing concrete data to the table you can help to dispel some of the emotion from the dialog and begin to focus and motivate action toward your most significant challenges.

Whether you are defining community as a city, a township, a county or a region of several counties as we did, developing a project to measure the trends in quality of life is a big undertaking. As we looked around for a model process, the one consistency from project to project was that there was no consistency. Every indicator project will have different dynamics. Every community will have different challenges and geography and participants. This Process Guide is meant to share some of the insights gained during the development of the West Michigan *Vital Signs*.

The West Michigan Strategic Alliance and our partners undertook the development of West Michigan Regional Indicators to help inform the collaborative work going on within our region. This Process Guide provides a sequential template describing the major steps in our process. Please use what makes sense for your own indicator work. I hope that you will share your insights with us as you work through the process. Please contact WMSA, if we can be of assistance in the development of your indicator project.

Sincerely,



Greg Northrup, President  
West Michigan Strategic Alliance



## 1 { Build Community Commitment

Seek out leaders in your community and gauge their interest in developing a collaborative indicator project. Establish goals and objectives for the project.

## 2 { Choose Partners for the Project

The commitment to the project of certain knowledgeable, connected and data savvy individuals and organizations is essential. Partner organizations should represent government, business and institutions as well as various interest areas of the economy, environment and social justice.

## 3 { Find Funding

With the consensus of all partners, develop a proposal for prospective funders. Consider approaching local foundations as well as corporate sources for funding the project. Corporations inherently understand the need for performance metrics and foundations look to link initiatives with community outcomes.

## 4 { Structure Your Partnerships

Use of a simple Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), will help to develop a clear scope of what each partner's involvement in the project will entail and what resources will be shared with each partner. The MOU also outlines how this project is beneficial to each partner around the table.

## 5 { Leadership in the Project

Representatives of each partnering agency form a Steering Committee for the project. The Steering Committee guides the process and serves as staff to accomplish the data collection and publication of the work. Members of the Steering Committee should be familiar with data related to the economy, the environment, as well as social indicators. Perspectives should represent those comfortable with the big picture and future vision as well as those who understand the intricacies of finding and presenting data. The Steering Committee should include members who understand the process of involving a broad set of stakeholders in the work. The Steering Committee can also help to open doors to gain buy-in from government, business and institutional sectors for participation in the project.

## 6 { Establish a Vision of Sustainable Quality of Life in Your Community

The Steering Committee identifies leaders from business, labor, education, civic, and nonprofit entities in the community to participate as an Advisory Committee. The main task of this group of community leaders is to set a vision for what sustainable quality of life in your community could look like. Beginning with a rough draft of statements that describe sustainable quality of life, this group works together to hone and customize these statements to fit your community.

## 7 Identify Contributing Factors

Members of both the Advisory and Steering Committees propose names of statisticians, demographers, economists, GIS practitioners and other experts in demographics, economy, education, health and environmental data to serve as a Technical Committee. Through their understanding of research methodology and data mining, Technical Committee members analyze what contributes to the vision as identified by the Advisory Committee and recommend possible data to measure these factors. Together with the Advisory Committee, they will prioritize a set of indicators.

## 8 Conduct Data Collection

A Data Working Group comprised of members of the partnering organizations collects and analyzes data. It is important that this group includes those who have expertise in economic, environmental and social data. Establish a set of criteria such as: the geography it must cover, the reliability of the source, and the frequency of updates, to determine minimum thresholds for the data. Each potential indicator is then filtered using these criteria to determine if it is a viable measure at this time or if it might be a future measure.

## 9 Field Test the Indicators

Convene focus groups comprised of stakeholders from various disciplines such as business, local government, education and the philanthropic community to gather additional input and act as a check and balance on the process as it progresses.

## 10 Publish the Indicators

Determine who the audience is, how the document will be used and how it will be distributed. Select members of the Advisory and Technical committees to participate in initial reviews of concept and copy. As the print deadline draws near, narrow the final set of reviewers to a small group of Steering Committee members who will consider both the big picture and the tiny details of the publication.

## 11 Publicize the Work

When the project is complete, getting the word out to the public and to the leadership of your community is important. Plan a media release including speaking directly with publishers of any daily or weekly newspapers in your community. Plan an event to convene participants and other community leaders to share the experience of learning about the indicators. Coordinate a speaking tour to bring the indicators to Rotary Clubs, Chambers of Commerce and other groups of community leaders.

