



Measuring
Rural Community
Vitality



DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS SUMMARY

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RURAL ONTARIO
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I INTRODUCTION

The **Rural Ontario Institute (ROI)** launched the **Measuring Rural Community Vitality (MRCV)** initiative in 2015 with financial sponsorship from the **Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs**. The MRCV is a three-year applied research and analysis initiative focused on civic engagement, social capital and community well-being. Through this initiative, ROI seeks to assist rural stakeholders through information sharing, documenting practitioner insights and lessons learned, and facilitating peer exchange of emerging practices.

This report is a product of MRCV's focus on deepening understanding of emerging practices to quantify rural community well-being. As part of this component of the MRCV initiative, 30 rural communities expressed interest in working together to share experiences and learning in the area of measuring hard-to-measure outcomes. Eight of these communities were selected to collaborate with ROI by evaluating a community project in 2016. The eight communities selected across Ontario were: Baldwin, Centre Wellington, Dufferin County, Huron County, Northern Bruce Peninsula, Northumberland County, Oxford County and West Carleton. These eight communities received ROI support in the form of ongoing collaboration and knowledge transfer along with a \$15,000 grant for consulting services in support of their project. The community projects were divided in two groups: rural case studies and demonstration projects.

The **Rural Case Studies of Social Return on Investment and Community Impact** projects focused on a community project addressing a specific issue of community vitality. They sought to collect and share best practices regarding measurement of community impact among rural municipal stakeholders.

The 5 case study communities were:

- **Baldwin Township:** Let's Talk
- **Huron County:** Huron Healthy Rural Policy Lens
- **Northern Bruce Peninsula:** Schools as Anchors for Rural Community Vitality
- **Northumberland County:** Specialized Rural Transportation Pilot
- **West Carleton:** Aging in Rural Community

The **Demonstration Projects** involved rural communities using well-being indicators, including the **Canadian Index of Wellbeing** and Community Foundation **Vital Signs** reports. These projects used these frameworks as lenses for measuring and evaluating rural community wellbeing.

The 3 demonstration project communities were:

- **Centre Wellington:** Vital Signs Community Well-Being Assessment
- **Dufferin County – Headwaters:** 2015 Community Well-Being Refresh Project
- **Oxford County:** Canadian Index of Well-Being Community Assessment

This summary report focuses on the **three demonstration projects**, with the intention of sharing insights and best practices gleaned from these projects. Companion reports discussing each project in more detail are included as appendices to this document, and are also available at www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca as individual reports.

DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS AT A GLANCE

Brief descriptions of the three demonstration projects follow:

Centre Wellington: Vital Signs Community Well-Being Assessment

In 2015, **Centre Wellington Community Foundation (CWCF)** joined 23 Community Foundations across Canada using the **Vital Signs tool** to measure rural community vitality and improve wellbeing. The CWCF produced a report exploring three main themes: 1) gap between rich and poor; 2) leadership and belonging; and 3) arts and culture. After publishing this report, CWCF initiated a community consultation with funding support from the MRCV initiative. This consultation focused on further developing indicators of community wellbeing to deepen our understanding and to build upon those identified in the 2015 report.

Dufferin County – Headwaters: 2015 Community Well-Being Refresh Project

Headwaters Communities in Action (HCIA) launched their **2011 Community Well-Being Report**, which focused on three areas of collaborative action: 1) food and farming; 2) trails; and 3) rural transportation and the non-profit sector. To follow-up and update the findings, HCIA undertook their 2015 Community Well-Being Refresher through community consultations and surveys to produce a new report. This initiative drew ideas from many frameworks analyzing community wellbeing, including Vital Signs and the Canadian Index of Well-Being to develop a homegrown framework for the Dufferin-Headwaters region. This framework focused on five main pillars for wellbeing: 1) healthy people; 2) dynamic economy; 3) sustainable environment; 4) vibrant culture; and 5) engaged citizens.

Oxford County: Canadian Index of Well-Being Community Assessment

In 2015, Oxford County approved the “**Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan**”, which looked at three areas of community well-being: 1) community; 2) environment; and 3) economy. In order to follow through on the priority areas identified in the plan and measure progress, the county engaged the **University of Waterloo’s Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW)** to develop baseline metrics. Community consultations were accomplished through surveys addressing the CIW’s eight domains: community vitality; democratic engagement; education; environment; healthy populations; leisure and culture; living standards; and use of time. A CIW final report was published summarizing the data gathered through the community surveys.

| COMMUNITY ASSETS

While each setting and project undertaken was unique, several community assets emerged as necessary and predictive of success in the case studies. The following were essential:

Existing Wellbeing Frameworks

Existing wellbeing frameworks, particularly the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and Vital Signs were foundational to the success of each project.

Canadian Index of Wellbeing staff were commended for the support they provided in making the tool easy to navigate. CIW staff encouraged Oxford County leaders and residents to recognize existing expertise and assets available to support work being done. CIW guided the steering committee while allowing the group to identify indicators to focus on given their knowledge of the community. CIW staff's wrap-around support throughout the consultation was a key success factor for the project. Using the CIW tool also served to establish a common language for Future Oxford and other stakeholders to discuss wellbeing.

The Community Foundation of Canada's (CFC) Vital Signs framework was reported to be cost effective and easy to use. CFC staff were also supportive in providing the guidance project leaders needed. The Vital Signs framework laid out a roadmap for measuring rural vitality and outlined a process and framework for the report. At the publishing stage, the national campaign was supportive in raising the profile of the report. In light of CFC's support for CWCF and Centre Wellington, stakeholders felt as though they belonged to a larger, need-fulfilling network of rural communities across Canada.

External Communication & Engagement

Projects had a wider reach and impact when existing communication strategies and apparatus supported their efforts. Headwaters Communities in Action and Centre Wellington Community Foundations both capitalized on their own existing networks to reach out to participants, engage volunteers and form partnerships. This resulted in varied perspectives and high participation rates within each project.

Future Oxford enjoyed a particularly strong communications campaign due to county support through their Public Relations and Marketing departments. This was crucial in promoting the consultation to residents by obtaining coverage in the local newspaper, sending invitation post cards to randomly selected households and making paper surveys available at county offices.

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing and Vital Signs also supported Future Oxford and Centre Wellington Community Foundations with promotional materials.

Momentum of Previous Initiatives

Previous community work by these organizations served to support institutional memory, tap into stakeholders, and gain traction in the community.

In Oxford County, the initiative built on the momentum of the recently completed “Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan.” The CIW project was a direct follow-up to the sustainability plan, and previously engaged stakeholders were readily drawn into the consultation. As a result, the **Canadian Index of Well-Being Community Assessment** received substantial political support to ensure its success.

Headwaters Communities in Action garnered momentum from their organization’s legacy of community development work and from their 2011 report experience. This bolstered HCIA efforts to connect with over 300 residents in developing a framework true to the emerging needs and evolving realities of the community.

| BEST PRACTICES

Best practices and lessons learned in key areas include:

Assess Community and Organizational Capacity

In each of the three projects, sponsoring organizations assessed their internal resources and capacity prior to engaging in evaluation work. This was essential in recognizing their strengths and identifying areas where external support would be required.

- Evaluate community readiness and identify potential allies. Build cross-sectorial partnerships to bring in more resources.
- Check for and leverage current initiatives within the organization or general community that could help promote consultation.
- Assess internal capacity, including staff support and available funding to adopt evaluative frameworks.
- Garner political support by forming and strengthening relationships with councils. If possible, partner with counties' public relations and marketing divisions to capitalize on their capacity for communication.

Make Tools Relevant Across Sectors

Community wellbeing is an insight-rich, intersectional concept relevant in every sector. As stakeholders make connections between their work and community wellbeing they are more likely to feel increased ownership in the consultation and act upon a report's recommendations.

- Dedicate time to increasing community awareness of the relevance of well-being work across all sectors. Help organizations in a wide variety of sectors, including business and finance, to connect with the work and make the tool relevant in their context.
- Provide examples of how to use the tool. Publish articles, blogs, videos and other forms of accessible media to educate residents on how to apply or benefit from the tools and results. For example, community wellbeing indicators can be used to support grant applications and to structure grant selection processes.
- Share results widely for other organizations to apply knowledge, build databases, and invent new applications.

Use Existing Wellbeing Frameworks

Project leaders identified existing tools and resources in the community to support their initiatives. This was a critical strategy in ensuring the success of their three projects. By informing themselves and adapting the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and Vital Signs tools, project champions accessed tried, tested and recognized methods and frameworks in their consultations.

- Recognize that each community is unique. Wellbeing tools can serve as guidelines and are to be tailored to the specific needs and realities of each community.
- Research before deciding on one particular framework. See what works best for your community, timeline and budget.
- Use resources, timelines, work plans and promotional materials provided by University of Waterloo's CIW and Community Foundation of Canada's (CFC) Vital Signs. Both staff are highly supportive throughout the evaluative process and make the tools easy to navigate.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In summary, these demonstration projects show there are a variety of ways to measure community wellbeing. It is important to select tools and frameworks that will work for each community. When none of those match a community's needs exactly, they can inform the development of locally tailored tools. Having strong engagement strategies and building on the momentum of previous community work can help consultations gain increased traction. These projects can serve as examples to other communities considering similar initiatives, recognizing each community is unique. Some of the best practices used by these three communities included capacity assessment prior to framework selection and efforts to make community wellbeing relevant across sectors to garner cross-sectorial support.

Community members, partner organizations and each of the project leads emphasized the value these community wellbeing evaluations had in their area. While evaluating and developing indicators for hard to measure concepts such as rural vitality and wellbeing require a lot of work, they are important investments in the prosperity and vitality of community.

The Rural Ontario Institute is grateful to Centre Wellington, Dufferin County – Headwaters, and Oxford County for participating in this knowledge transfer opportunity. Thank you to all who were involved.

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CENTRE WELLINGTON

COMMUNITY VITAL SIGNS INITIATIVE



I INTRODUCTION

It is a challenge for rural centres to undertake data collection to understand issues in their community. The **Vital Signs** tool is a potential solution in that it helps communities take a snapshot of their demographic reality for insight on key issues. Vital Signs is a national program led by community foundations coordinated by **Community Foundations Canada**. It leverages local knowledge and measures the vitality of communities (Community Foundations of Canada, 2017).

In 2015, the **Centre Wellington Community Foundation (CWCF)** joined the 23 Communities Foundations across Canada using the Vital Signs tool in releasing its first **Vital Signs report**. This initiative sought to harness local knowledge, measure rural community vitality and improve wellbeing. The report was designed to engage the Centre Wellington community to identify key areas where action and attention is needed most. The community decided on three main themes: 1) the gap between rich and poor, 2) leadership and belonging, and 3) arts and culture (Centre Wellington Community Foundations, 2015). Data collected on the three themes provided service providers and other stakeholders a snapshot of the opportunities and challenges in Centre Wellington. The next step required building on this information to develop indicators of community wellbeing in key areas through community consultation. In 2016, the CWCF Community Vital Signs project was selected by the **Rural Ontario Institute** to participate in its **Measuring Rural Community Vitality Initiative**, which offered funds to facilitate the community consultation.

I NEEDS ADDRESSED

Centre Wellington has been experiencing significant growth in the last few years, and anticipates 79% further growth between now and 2041. In 2016, Centre Wellington reported a population of 29,800, however, projections estimate that a 79% growth in community population could bring a resident total up to 52,300 by the year 2041 (Stantec, 2017). Community leaders have struggled with collecting data to aid in their discernment of a variety of subjects, including 1) the gap between people who are rich and poor, 2) belonging and leadership, and 3) arts and culture. Lack of data was acknowledged as a barrier for stakeholders and local government in making informed decisions on policies and programs based on residents' felt needs. Increasing understanding to inform planning in those three areas was important to solidify wellbeing during growth. To this end, the 2015 Vital Signs report presented a snapshot of the community's thoughts for these three areas of focus.

| SOLUTIONS PROPOSED

Prior to sponsoring the 2015 Vital Signs report, CWCF found it difficult to assess the community's pulse on these three areas. They put Vital Signs to work due to its low cost, high value methodology suitable for data collection in a small rural area. While the resulting report gave important insight, it did not offer tools to measure progress on the three areas. Consequently, CWCF decided to conduct a community consultation to further elaborate on the three themes of the Vital Signs report and used 3 out of the VS 11 indicators to track progress.

A Community Leadership Advisory Committee (CLAC) was formed to lead the community consultation. The CLAC involved high level stakeholders to gather resources in the three focus areas. The committee included the CWCF CAO, an artist, the Elora Arts Council Director, a youth leader and counsellor, staff from the local newspaper, among others. The CLAC's purpose was to serve in an advisory and support role to the Vital Signs project. A big responsibility taken by this group was to develop a survey in the community and host issue-based workshops. Members drew on networks to identify and connect with other key stakeholders to provide additional data, and met at least 10 times during the project (Centre Wellington Community Foundations, 2015).

The following methods were used to engage the community and collect data:

1) Community survey and key informant interviews

A 'Community Voices' survey was developed to gather views on the three topics. Community members were invited to fill out a short survey on the three issue areas for six weeks from May-July 2015 (Centre Wellington Community Foundations, 2015). 446 people responded to this survey.

Interviews were offered to community experts to gather further in-depth data and to 10 residents willing to share their experience on The Gap between Rich and Poor. Community leaders and experts identified key data sources, provided context on issues, and helped raise the profile of the Vital Signs project. Resident interviews offered participants a more comfortable setting to share their experiences. Confidentiality was ensured and interviewees were compensated with gift cards for their time (Centre Wellington Community Foundations, 2015).

2) Issue Area Workshops

Three meetings were held on each of the three topics to generate in-depth discussion and data. Key stakeholders such as the Food Bank, faith groups, financial institutions, student programs, arts organizations, sports clubs, and seniors' centers were divided into separate committees for each of the three themes. An additional workshop was held to bring stakeholders together across issue areas.

The purpose of these meetings was to:

1. Seek input from stakeholders about a specific issue and its key indicators
2. Identify potential data sources in the community and decide what data was still missing
3. Provide a forum for stakeholders to network (Pratley, 2015)

3) “Vital Conversation”

CWCF held a “Vital Conversation” on food insecurity as a special topic, facilitated by a guest speaker. 65 people from the community responded to the invitation to join the discussion and share experiences.

Timeline

Community Foundations of Canada provided a sample timeline, which served as a guide for its local implementation. The Community Foundation of Canada provides local foundations a plan and timeline to support the project. The CWCF project followed these guidelines and the project manager supported the team in meeting deadlines and adjusting directions when required. Challenges to be overcome included establishing and maintaining momentum and distributing reports. These were solved through focused efforts and social media outreach.

Project milestones leading up to the program evaluation include:

- **November 2014**
Determine issue areas, establish Community Leadership Advisory Committee, and develop workplan.
- **January-February 2015**
Identification of project staff, volunteers, and project resources. Start scan of available existing information (i.e. Stats Canada, County and Municipal databases)
- **March 2015**
Arrangements confirmed with local partners and consultants. Communications activities, and community and media engagement activities begin.
- **April-May 2015**
Community consultation
- **June-July 2015**
Selection of Vital Signs community wellbeing indicators.
- **October 2015**
Local launch for community and media activities.
- **November 2015**
Program evaluation

Budget

CWCF had a \$35,000 budget for this project, including the \$15,000 from the Rural Ontario Institute grant. Other organizations that contributed funding for this project were Waterloo Wellington Community Futures, Middlebrook Social Innovation Fund, BDO, John E. Morris Law Office and Athol Gow & Jason Thompson. Approximately \$25,000 was spent in three key budget areas: hiring a project leader, graphic design, and printing. Public meetings were fairly inexpensive as gathering spaces, supplies, and snacks were either donated in-kind or minimal in cost.

The local newspaper, The Wellington Advertiser, distributed the report with their paper across Wellington County and printed the report for a substantial discount. They were important partners for raising awareness about the report and its findings.

Centre Wellington is a township of about 29,000 residents in south-central Ontario, Canada, located in Wellington County. The primary communities are Elora, Fergus and Belwood. The area is agricultural but also includes industries such as manufacturing and tourism.

The **Centre Wellington Community Foundation (CWCF)** is a public, charitable foundation created by the people of Centre Wellington. Its mission is to strengthen the Centre Wellington community by helping donors achieve their giving goals, and by helping local registered charities organizations find resources to support their work (Community Foundations of Canada, 2017).

Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) is the national network for Canada's 191 community foundations. From large cities to small towns, more than 95% of Canadian communities have access to a community foundation. CFC has worked with and invested in Canadian communities for the past 94 years. They run the national program Vital Signs for rural communities (Community Foundations of Canada, 2017).

| COMMUNITY ASSETS

The following are some of the community assets that contributed to the success of the project:

Community Foundations of Canada – Vital Signs support

The Community Foundation of Canada's Vital Signs framework was cost effective and easy to use. The processes and instructions are clear, explaining how to use the framework and develop a report. CFC members were supportive in providing guidance as needed. The Vital Signs framework laid out a roadmap for measuring rural vitality and outlined a process and framework for the report. At the publishing stage, the national campaign was supportive in raising the profile of the report. CFC's support for CWCF and Centre Wellington left stakeholders feeling a part of a larger network of rural communities across Canada.

High community engagement

The high engagement rate of community members and stakeholders is evident in the 446 survey and interview participants. 15-20 community groups were engaged during the workshops producing key information to increase understanding on the three areas of focus.

Volunteers

Aside from two hiring a project manager and graphic designer, everyone in the project worked on a volunteer basis. Volunteers played an important role in organizing and implementing the engagement strategy. They represented key sectors including health centers, senior groups, youth committees, local government and service providers. They offered first-hand community expertise and provided greater exposure for the project to attract a larger audience for engagement.

Strong research support

CWCF hired Dr. Erin Pratley as project manager. As a local PhD researcher, she brought expertise that ensured the project methods and data were sound and effectively communicated. This supported strong leadership and quality research. Dr. Pratley surveyed national and provincial data to find relevant information for Centre Wellington. She also played a significant role in liaising with Community Foundations of Canada.

Leadership and partnerships

Aside from the project manager's leadership contribution to this project, other committees supported the success of this work:

- **Steering Committee** encompassed influential people in Centre Wellington including the former hospital CEO, engaged community members, and the Board of Centre Wellington Community Foundation.
- **Board of Centre Wellington Community Foundation** included municipal councilors, the head of Human Resources for the Centre Wellington Township, among others.
- **Community Leadership Advisory Committee (CLAC)** included stakeholders of various sectors.

Leadership in this project was grassroots and community-based, involving many community stakeholders. It created ownership and built on the theme of belonging. It tapped into community expertise and strengthened leaders. A noteworthy example of this is Raymond Soucy coming on board the CWCF team as Executive Director while first being engaged as a residents engaged in the consultation.

| RESULTS

The Vital Signs report met its goal of providing more community data and gave Centre Wellington a platform to engage in meaningful conversations about the three areas of focus. It produced greater understanding and a sense of belonging, which serves as a core value and guiding force for the CWCF.

Other communities have also benefited from the CW Vital Signs process and report. Examples include:

- **The Arts Council** used report findings to improve their communications by hosting networking events. Quantifying the value of arts in the community has always been a challenge, and the arts community is now taking steps to gather information at events. As a result, key statistics and baselines are available to give a sense of the economic impact of art events in the community.
- **Elora Cataract Trailway Association** used the report to work towards great public trails and to demonstrate the importance of a trail network for both as a sense of belonging and the economic impact of an extensive trail network.
- **Bungalow 55's** community lunches are a good example on local activities directly stemming from the Vital Signs report that are making a positive return on social capital. These community lunches tap into the stakeholders from the Vital Signs consultation.
- Various organizations such as **Big Brothers and Sisters** and the **Children's Foundation of Guelph and Wellington** are using the report to structure funding applications for their organizations. The CWCF uses the same to identify grant recipients. The Vital Signs report has become a benchmark of excellence for local organizations as they plan their work.

Internally, the Vital Signs report and project supported the CWCF to leverage increased partnerships and funding, and to raise the profile of community initiatives. This has led to additional volunteers stepping forward, and to a more cohesive community working together. The findings from the VS Report have been presented to the community in efforts to broaden the reach of the report and to engage more people and organizations.

The Vital Signs report and the CWCF connection to Community Foundations of Canada has opened doors to further potential partnerships. Although the CFC does not have endowment funds for specific areas, they do have access to utilize some national or special funding. CWCF sees this as potential areas of partnership with other agencies to create a bigger impact.

CWCF has also offered grants of up to \$1,000 to local community groups working toward the three main focus areas: 1) the gap between rich and poor, 2) leadership and belonging, and 3) arts and culture.

LESSONS LEARNED & ADVICE TO OTHERS

CWCF was impressed and satisfied with the overall process and achievements of the Vital Signs project. Their lessons learned and advice to others include:

- Vital Signs can be a big task for volunteer-based groups. Hiring a professional to spearhead the project was key to its success.
- Recognize skill gaps and use your resources to bring various skillsets into project leadership. Having leaders from many sectors form part of the Community Leadership Advisory Committee was a great asset to the project.
- Reports that seek to promote community wellbeing need to be written in accessible language. The CWCF Vital Signs report's accessibility was helpful both for people familiar with this type of data and to others for whom this was new.
- Engaging partners in the process is crucial to maintaining momentum. When the community feels ownership of the report, they are more likely to apply the information.
- The structure provided by Community Foundations of Canada was significant in the process of developing the Vital Signs report. Use as guideline and make accommodations when required.
- Find support in good partnerships. ROI understood the need for data in rural communities and were willing to support this endeavour financially. The CFC offered strong technical assistance from beginning to end. All organizations involved in the project contributed to the project's success.
- Advertise and raise awareness through mixed media, including: local newspaper, social media, word of mouth, community groups, and websites.
- Ensure follow up by doing more consultation, keeping up the conversations, supporting partners and comparing results to baseline data.

CONCLUSION

The Vital Signs report was the first initiative to produce significant Centre Wellington community data and a 'snapshot' of the most important issues for residents, by residents. Community consultations not only enhanced the data but built bonds in the community. The report provided an indicator of community wellbeing and a framework for future direction and initiative. This is particularly timely given the community's expected growth and change over the next few decades. Using a community-based approach was crucial in the success of this project. Engaging stakeholders from various sectors brought invaluable local expertise into the project and helped others make connections that continue to grow. While the Community Vital Signs initiative met its direct project goals, the process and report have produced many other positive unintended consequences in the community that generate further momentum. CWCF intends to continue building upon the work of the Vital Signs report and sees value in spearheading future reports to continue developing and updating local data.

| CHECKLIST

Key Ingredients for Success

Considering doing a similar project in your community?

It may work well if your county/organization...

- ☒ Can find key partners who understand your mission, can support it financially, and are willing to share their knowledge.
- ☒ Have hard-working and dedicated volunteers invested in the project.
- ☒ Is willing to be reflective and respond to community needs and any obstacles that may arise.
- ☒ Is willing to provide ongoing support and engagement in the community.

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The Rural Ontario Institute provided information gathered and summarized by Dr Suzanne Ainley of Ainley Consulting to Platinum Leadership to describe the community projects. All such descriptions have been reviewed and approved by the relevant community contacts.

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DUFFERIN COUNTY

HEADWATERS COMMUNITIES IN ACTION INITIATIVE

INTRODUCTION

Headwaters Communities in Action (HCIA) has long recognized the value of engaging the citizens of Dufferin County and the Town of Caledon in reflection on the wellbeing and needs of their communities. Over the past twelve years, HCIA has developed a reputation for being a credible community agent that shares, communicates and demonstrates expertise and knowledge through information sessions, research and community programs.

Beginning in 2005, HCIA began developing ideas around social prosperity and community wellbeing. Through extensive citizen engagement a model was developed and tested for Foundations of a Healthy Community. The model became the foundation of the community wellbeing work (CWB) for a resident survey and report. In 2011, HCIA formalized this reflection in its release of the **2011 Community Wellbeing Report**. The report helped the community identify three areas for collaborative action: 1) food and farming; 2) area trails; and 3) supporting the non-profit sector, specifically around rural transportation (Cheuy, Fawcett, Hutchinson, & Robertson, 2017). Publishing the report and deciding on a 'community development' or program delivery direction formed Phase One of Headwaters' CWB journey. Phase Two began with grants from the **Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF)** and **United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin** to help build a better quality of life together through citizen education and engagement, and a collaborative action program.

From 2012 to 2015, the projects matured and developed into **Headwaters Food and Farming Alliance (HFFA)**, **Citizens of Headwaters for Active Transportation (CHATT)** and **DC Moves** (formalized in 2016). The Rural Transportation project was supported through community consultations and resource asset mapping. During this phase, it was transferred to Dufferin County as moving forward required further investment.

With the three projects maturing and new projects emerging, Phase Three began with the launch of the Community Wellbeing Refresh (CWBR) project in 2015 to update CWB results from 2011. In addition, HCIA sought to examine more closely the relationship between CWB and community development with support from the **Rural Ontario Institute (ROI)**. As part of the ROI's **Measuring Rural Community Vitality Initiative**, the 2015 CWBR project hosted community consultations, enhanced the survey used to generate the initial 2011 report, conducted a new survey, analyzed data, and released a new, updated community wellbeing report.

| NEEDS ADDRESSED

Through the 2015 CWBR project, HCIA examined how measurements of community wellbeing could be translated into concrete community projects that improve community wellbeing. By doing so, HCIA focused its time, energy, and resources on projects that respond to the communities' needs. As is true for many doing rural community work, it is important that funders see how the organization meets real needs.

At a broader level, one of the project's desired outcomes was to develop best practices to share with other rural areas developing community wellbeing programs. While there are some existing frameworks for measuring community wellbeing, some rural communities may not find them well suited to their needs. For example, accessing such frameworks may be cost-prohibitive or they may not capture the unique ways that rural communities respond to change. Additionally, research at the intersection between community wellbeing and development is still in its infancy. This project contributed to that research with a special focus on best practices for rural communities.

| SOLUTIONS PROPOSED

In order to examine the relationship between community wellbeing and community development, HCIA built on the foundation of community wellbeing work they had started prior to the release of the 2011 Community Wellbeing Report. Prior to the release of this report, the Community Wellbeing Report Working Group considered a number of existing frameworks for community wellbeing before establishing their own definition based on five pillars, namely: 1) Healthy People; 2) Dynamic Economy; 3) Sustainable Environment; 4) Vibrant Culture; and 5) Engaged Citizens (Cheuy et al., 2017). The working group then developed and conducted a citizen survey to obtain community members' input on what they valued and were concerned about in the community and how best to measure indicators of community wellbeing. HCIA subsequently held sector-based focus groups to further dig into and interpret the results of the citizen survey (Cheuy et al., 2017).

At the same time, HCIA's working group investigated other frameworks for community wellbeing that aligned with Headwaters residents' priorities to identify topic areas and indicators useful for their own report (Cheuy et al., 2017). Additional frameworks included the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW), first published in 2011 and Vital Signs through the Community Foundations of Canada, first published in 2001. Both were developing and/or maturing at the same time. HCIA drew ideas from these frameworks but did not adopt them wholesale. Vital Signs was particularly helpful in providing examples of report design and layout (Cheuy et al., 2017). At the time HCIA was developing its homegrown framework, CIW had only been developed for the national level, although it has since been used in local community projects (Cheuy et al., 2017). Furthermore, the CIW tool was perceived as comprehensive and extensive, but somewhat cost prohibitive, especially for rural communities. While HCIA did consider the possibility of using the Vital Signs framework, the option was not viable for the Headwaters region, as Vital Signs is a trademarked process of

Community Foundations and there was not a local Community Foundation established in the region (Cheuy et al., 2017). Using insights from these frameworks and input from the citizen survey and other community consultations, HCIA developed its own framework, uniquely suited to the needs and values of the Headwaters community, based on the five pillars of wellbeing initially identified.

While many rural communities have not engaged in the work of measuring CWB, those that have done so have typically used the CIW or Vital Signs frameworks. However, by developing their own framework HCIA focused on the intersection and integration of community wellbeing measurement and development, a point they described the other frameworks lacking. HCIA's goal was not only to measure community wellbeing but to take action based on the measurement and to learn how to integrate measurement into projects the community was already doing.

To understand how the CWB of the Headwaters region had changed since the release of the initial 2011 report, HCIA conducted an updated citizen survey which included new questions in the spring and summer of 2015 (Cheuy et al., 2017). Besides launching a citizen survey, HCIA hosted a CWB Summit on February 24, 2017 to engage community partners about their collaborative projects. Project groups such as the HFFA gave presentations about how their projects related to community wellbeing both qualitatively and quantitatively (Headwaters Communities in Action, 2017). They discussed how to integrate indicators of wellbeing into their specific projects. HCIA hired an external consultant to guide the summit. HCIA used data from the 2011 report and the 2016 report which included results from the 2015 survey, along with secondary data sources such as Statistics Canada, provincial, municipal and community data (Cheuy et al., 2017).

For its 2016 CWBR, HCIA kept the same five pillars of community wellbeing that it had developed for the 2011 report and added a sixth pillar: Community Assets. By taking the community's human, social, natural, and financial/built assets into account, HCIA sought to understand and improve the community's resilience for the future. The addition of the Community Assets pillar was congruent with national recognition of the need for broader definitions of societal wealth with the release of the National Index of Comprehensive Wealth in December, 2016.

Timeline

While the initiative's work plan provided a starting point and direction for the project, it required recalibration in response to emerging realities from the outset. The team pushed timelines back when necessary while accomplishing essential work. They adjusted to allow for more research and data collection than originally thought necessary. In the meantime, HCIA's work with other partners advanced, particularly with the DC MOVES program. This was an unforeseen benefit to timeline changes. Overall, HCIA adjusted the project's timeline as needed by rolling out work in a more phased approach.

September 30, 2011

Community Launch event to release initial Headwaters Community Wellbeing Report (Cheuy et al., 2017).

2012-2015

Work on community projects around trails, food, supporting not-for-profit sector and rural transportation, with funding from OTF, United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin and other partners. These projects developed into: Headwaters Food and Farming Alliance or HFFA (food) including the Farm to School Program; Citizens of Headwaters for Active Transportation and Trails (CHATT) and DC Moves.

2014

HCIA recognized need to refresh the Community Wellbeing Report (Cheuy et al., 2017).

October 9, 2014

HCIA AGM and community consultations at its annual general meeting to gauge enthusiasm for addressing wellbeing priorities.

Spring/Summer 2015

Dissemination of an updated citizen survey (Cheuy et al., 2017).

2015 to 2017

Formal and informal community engagement at events sponsored by HCIA partners and projects to deepen conversations around CWB and community development.

August 25, 2015

Collective Impact Session with Sylvia Cheuy of Tamarack Institute and HCIA to engage the community leaders in using a collective impact model to deal with our complex problems and issues.

October 28, 2015

HCIA AGM examined community priorities and ideas to drive community development.

June 1, 2016

Measuring Community Vitality and ROI Project launch with Bryan Smale, CIW

- **October 28, 2016**
HCIA AGM with Paul Born on deepening community engagement and CWB survey results.
- **October 28, 2016**
Online release of “Community Priorities in Headwaters 2016: Increasing Community Wellbeing and Resilience,” (Headwaters Communities in Action, 2016).
- **February 2017**
Handbook of Community Wellbeing Research released including HCIA’s contribution in Chapter 8 “A Citizen-Led Approach to Enhancing Community Wellbeing”
- **February 24, 2017**
Community Wellbeing Summit to engage community partners on the intersection between community wellbeing and their projects currently underway in the community.
- **May 11, 2017**
Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition for an on-line webinar with Rural Ontario Institute (Mark Cassidy), HCIA (Karen Hutchinson) and Huron Healthy Rural Lens (Sheila Schuehle) on “Measuring Rural Community Vitality”.
- **June 12, 2017**
2017 CIC Community Indicators Symposium by Community Indicators Consortium in Winnipeg by HCIA (Karen Hutchinson and Sylvia Cheuy) on “Deepening Community Wellbeing and Engagement in Headwaters Region”.
- **Spring 2017**
HCIA held a number of strategy sessions build on the February 24th partner session. HCIA re-defined its vision, mission and activities in light of a number of factors including: funding and opportunity shifts; evolving issues; and, the emergence of new issues and information.

Budget

The project’s budget was \$25,000. Of that budget, ROI provided \$15,000, which was allocated for staff. HCIA used additional funding from the OTF grant that had supported the 2012-2015 community building work and subsequent projects. The United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin also contributed to the project budget. Additional assistance was provided through project and partner resources.

Expenditures for the project included staff, costs for three events, and report design and printing. Community partners contributed time spent participating in meetings, ongoing engagement in project commitments, and additional in-kind contributions.

Headwaters Communities in Action (HCIA) is a charitable organization that was formed by volunteers from many sectors of the Headwaters Region communities. The organization is a “convener of community conversations,” that provides citizens with information about community issues and provides support for collaborative projects to improve community wellbeing.

Headwaters Region is a rural area located north-west of the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario. It includes Dufferin County, the Town of Caledon and sometimes parts of the Town of Erin. The population of the region is approximately 128,271. Residents value the region’s many watersheds and rural landscapes (Cheuy et al., 2017). For the purposes of the CWB Reports, statistical information only from Dufferin and Caledon was included.

| COMMUNITY ASSETS

The following are some of the community assets that contributed to the success of the project:

Past Community Work

Community assets were central to the success of the project. HCIA built on the legacy of community wellbeing and development work that preceded the project. The 2011 report provided solid foundations for framing community wellbeing that could be modified in light of emerging needs and evolving realities. At the report session, John Tory, former Headwaters Member of Provincial Parliament, recommended that the community should pick a few priorities to start working on. The community projects (food, trails and not-for-profit sector including transportation) that emerged and developed from the 2011 report became a critical part of HCIA’s work and a basis for the 2015 CWBR project. These projects included the **Food Program and Headwaters Food and Farm Alliance (HFFA)**, HFFA Farm to School (F2S), **Trails and Citizens of Headwaters for Active Transportation Team (CHATT)** program, and the Not-For-Profit Capacity-Building program, which encompasses **DC Moves**.

Partners

HCIA’s organizational structure lends itself to the mobilization of community assets. HCIA understands itself as a ‘backbone organization’, serving an important function for achieving collective impact across sectors (Cheuy et al., 2017). A backbone organization’s role is to support collaboration between partners across sectors by guiding “vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement practices, building public will, advancing policy, and mobilizing resources,” (Tamarack Institute, 2017). As such, HCIA supports partners doing different types of work in the community on an ongoing basis. These partnerships have become extensive and include citizens at large, Dufferin County Social Services, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, Dufferin Board of Trade (and local businesses), the municipalities (both upper

and lower tier municipalities), Caledon Community Services, Upper Grand District School Board, Dufferin Caledon Separate School Board, Peel District School Board, County of Dufferin, and so on. For this project, HCIA capitalized on these partnerships to dig deeper into the relationship between community wellbeing and community development. For instance, in discussion with its partners, HCIA considered what indicators of community wellbeing might be measurable in each of their particular projects. Establishing these links grounded their measures in concrete action. Partnerships were enhanced throughout the project by the opportunity to provide input on the future direction and strategic plan for HCIA.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders supported the project on a strategic level by participating in the Community Wellbeing Summit on February 24, 2017, and on an ongoing basis through their shared work with HCIA on the Food Charter and Action Strategy. While doing so, HCIA engaged their stakeholders, observing and understanding how the various groups worked. Some new community projects also evolved over the course of the wellbeing project. For instance, HCIA's non-profit initiative coalesced within 'DC MOVES', a program connecting Dufferin County social service agencies. In 2016, HCIA took a backbone role as lead applicant for the Partnership Grant Program to revitalize the Dufferin volunteer sector through the redevelopment of **Volunteer Dufferin's** website, resources and processes.

Community Members

More than 300 community members contributed to the successful outcome of the 2015 CWBR project by reflecting on their experience and knowledge through the citizen survey. An additional 200 engaged in community conversations to add their input to the CWBR,

Regional Connections

Dr. Bryan Smale's expertise was another notable asset to the project. Dr. Smale, Director of the CIW at the University of Waterloo, provided advice on the project and advocated for the addition of the Community Assets pillar. The project also benefited by tapping into assets of the broader, regional community. Specifically, staff from HCIA participated in **Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO)** and the **2017 CIC Community Indicators Symposium** and the **Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition** webinar conference. This facilitated shared learning opportunities between the ROI's Measuring Rural Community Vitality Initiative projects and HCIA's use of ROI data in their research.

| RESULTS

The 2015 CWBR project achieved valuable concrete and difficult to measure results. The citizen survey garnered over 300 responses, allowing for comparison with data from the 2011 report. Budget constraints limited the level of engagement from various groups and the ability to create certain customized data reports available through frameworks such as CIWB. In addition, community conversations in conjunction with partner projects increased participation and community input to 500 persons.

The survey results stimulated further community engagement. After results were released, HCIA engaged in discussion with 73 community members and organizations through their Community Wellbeing Summit. The research and data collection took longer than anticipated, and HCIA adjusted its timeline accordingly. First, a number of opportunities appeared that were not in the original project vision, including attending conferences and writing a chapter in the handbook. Second, the depth of the work was unknown as it is iterative. Third, the new projects were part of the emergence that occurred during the project. Fourth, HCIA's Leadership Council and project managers embarked on a deeper strategic planning process than anticipated. This was another iterative result of the MRCV project to engage stakeholders and the February 24, 2017 strategy session served as a culminating/development event. As a result, the project developed interconnecting streams: CWBR, community development lens to CWB, individual project development (existing and new) and overarching development of CWB indicators for the project in development. An unintended benefit of these changes was that all partnerships advanced their work over the duration of the project. This included DC MOVES, HFFA development and launch of food charter, Farm to School expansion with an OTF grant, and the Volunteer Dufferin re-boot.

In 2016, HCIA released a document on their website summarizing the project's findings, entitled "**Community Priorities in Headwaters 2016: Increasing Community Wellbeing and Resilience**," (Headwaters Communities in Action, 2016). The addition of "resilience" to the community wellbeing framework reflected HCIA's research on community assets and comprehensive wealth.

One aspect of the project that HCIA found challenging was linking the 2015 CWBR with Dufferin County and the Town of Caledon's strategic plans. Dufferin County's strategic plan calls for conservation promotion and environmental sustainability along with initiatives that improve the social determinants of health. County Warden Laura Ryan spoke to this at the 2016 HCIA AGM. While municipalities have embraced environmental and social goals and sustainability objectives, integrating CWB into strategic plans will take a longer phased approach. Going forward, partners could work on this approach in conjunction with HCIA and the CWB program.

Timing was a challenge in beginning this engagement. While HCIA normally reports to municipal councils each winter, it prioritized its food charter presentations to all councils in early 2017. Not wanting to overload Councils with presentations, HCIA scheduled their updates for autumn 2017. Logistics became another challenge in discerning where community wellbeing measurement could fit into municipal strategic plans. While the municipalities had done work around sustainability, other factors of community wellbeing had yet to be integrated into their strategic plans. Methodology changes also presented themselves. For example, the Town of Caledon moved from a Community-Based Strategic Plan (CBSP) to a Council Work Plan to guide their work until 2020.

Imbedding CWB in municipal strategic plans will take time and sustained effort. HCIA continues to explore how it can partner with Dufferin County and the Town of Caledon, knowing that participation from municipal staff on HCIA committees has been vital. Both municipalities have dedicated on-going staff time and funding for this on-going work.

Overall, the project achieved its desired outcome, which was to examine the intersection of CWB measurement and community development. The project allowed HCIA the time and space to reflect on the impact community projects were having on CWB. It also facilitated a deeper examination of the intersection between community wellbeing measurement and development. For instance, HCIA and its partners thought through which indicators of community wellbeing they could measure for each of their community projects, and how they could integrate the work of measurement and development. Further, the project afforded HCIA the opportunity to engage in shared learning with other groups doing similar work through ROI and PRO conferences, as well as with groups using the CIW and Vital Signs frameworks.

In the process, HCIA and its partners enhanced their relationships by discussing how best to support one another and by building trust through engagement. The Community Wellbeing Summit on February 24th, 2017 was particularly impactful in giving community partners the opportunity to shape HCIA's strategic plan for 2017-2022. In the past, HCIA's Leadership Council typically engaged in strategic planning without this level of community consultation. One of the unintended benefits of the project was the engagement and contribution of partners in the strategic planning process. The process is moving toward conclusion, and will likely bear fruit in HCIA's 2017-2022 strategic plan.

Enhanced community partnerships are just one example of the project's social return. According to Hutchinson, the social return on the project is "an increased opportunity and capacity for the information, mobilization, and engagement of people." The 2016 report can increase residents' understanding of the community and its future direction and can encourage them to make connections between community wellbeing and their own work.

On the whole, the 2015 CWBR project allowed HCIA to evaluate the impact of their community wellbeing work and understand how it can move forward. The project reaffirmed the centrality of community wellbeing work for the organization. HCIA can broaden the impact of its work by leveraging the knowledge and experience gained through the project in developing and writing best practices for integrating community wellbeing and development work in rural areas. They have plans to do this in the future. The organization's leadership is passionate about the importance of focusing on rural wellbeing, and cognizant of the contribution rural regions make to all Ontarians.

| LESSONS LEARNED & ADVICE TO OTHERS

The 2015 CWBR project was a fruitful learning experience for HCIA, their partners, and the Headwaters communities broadly. Lessons HCIA learned throughout the process include:

- Spend sufficient time in research. Dedicate more time in the basic research phase of the project, thinking about the relationships and links between the pillars of a healthy community, their indicators, and community development work.
- Look for connections between current and ongoing community projects, no matter how small, and see how they connect to community wellbeing.
- Focus on both CWB and community development. This project reinforced a definite connection between these two elements of community work.
- Develop a stable, established work plan and be prepared to be flexible. While the work plan helped frame the project, the plan needed to be responsive to emerging realities as the project unfolded. Community building work is iterative and needs to be flexible.
- Community wellbeing work is always evolving! The 2011 report was rich in detail and inclusive, while the 2016 report was more focused. This reflected an evolution in understanding how community wellbeing work can be carried out in the Headwaters communities.
- For communities embarking on a CWB journey, existing community wellbeing frameworks, including the CIW and Vital Signs should be examined and can be used to some extent. Although small communities may not have the budget for all of the measures and data associated with these frameworks, they may be able to link with them in helpful ways. They may also use national, provincial and regional reports as comparisons or for some data. In addition, the ROI provides data reports that are very useful. Ultimately, rural communities can make important links between their on the ground projects and overarching community wellbeing goals.

| CONCLUSION

The 2015 CWBR project took HCIA's community wellbeing work to the next level by intersecting it with community development. The initial 2011 report served as an impetus for concrete community projects, and the 2016 report allowed residents and stakeholders to see how these projects affected community wellbeing. Further, the CWBR project linked indicators of a healthy community with current projects, creating ways to ensure community work responded to real needs on an ongoing basis. The 2015 CWBR project reaffirmed and reinvigorated the importance of CWB work for HCIA, shaping the direction of the organization's future work in service of Dufferin County and the Town of Caledon.

| CHECKLIST

Key Ingredients for Success

Considering doing a similar project in your community?

It may work well if your county/organization...

- ☒ Has/is a trusted organization that can serve as a “backbone” to bring community partners from different sectors together to embrace collaboration and a collective impact model
- ☒ Has community partners engaged in ongoing community development projects (large or small).
- ☒ Has a relatively small core group of community leaders (~20) willing to commit time and energy to the project.
- ☒ Has passionate engaged citizens willing to work on community priorities.
- ☒ Does not have/is not a community foundation, in which case an existing framework like Vital Signs could be used, or does not have the budget for a framework like CIW.
- ☒ Has funding support for staff, events, and publications.

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The Rural Ontario Institute provided information gathered and summarized by Dr Suzanne Ainley of Ainley Consulting to Platinum Leadership to describe the community projects. All such descriptions have been reviewed and approved by the relevant community contacts.

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A large white wind turbine stands prominently in the foreground, its three blades reaching towards a clear blue sky. In the background, several other similar wind turbines are visible, scattered across a flat landscape. The foreground is a golden-brown field with numerous round hay bales. A line of green corn crops runs horizontally across the middle ground. In the distance, a small cluster of farm buildings with green roofs is visible. The overall scene depicts a rural landscape integrated with renewable energy infrastructure.

OXFORD COUNTY COMMUNITY WELLBEING SURVEY

I INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Oxford County created and approved a remarkable community based vision entitled the “**Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan**” (CSP). The plan set specific community, economic, and environmental goals for 2020 and 2030. Oxford subsequently harnessed the University of **Waterloo's Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW)** to establish a current baseline of wellbeing in the county and to inform what their priorities should be to achieve their vision. This was an important step in moving the aspirations captured in the CSP to concrete action in the community. The **Oxford County Community Wellbeing Survey**, based on the CIW was launched in March, 2016, having been selected by the **Rural Ontario Institute** to participate in its **Measuring Rural Community Vitality Initiative (MRCV)**. The MRCV initiative offered funds to support the survey, and this report examines the impact of that investment.

The working definition for wellbeing as adopted by the CIW is, “the presence of the highest possible quality of life in its full breadth of expression focused on but not necessarily exclusive to: good living standards, robust health, a sustainable environment, vital communities, an educated populace, balanced time use, high levels of democratic participation, and access to and participation in leisure and culture” (Ibid, pg.1).

I NEEDS ADDRESSED

Communities spend significant time and resources developing plans to help their communities achieve their vision. In many cases, however, communities do not develop sufficient baseline data or key progress indicators to evaluate impact of actions and goals outlined in community plans. This often results in a lack of follow-through or an inability to monitor progress and accomplishment. Oxford County leaders recognized the need for a community based vision, as evidenced in the CSP, and acknowledged the need for baseline metrics in their quest to achieve that vision. To do this, the County engaged in a Community Wellbeing Survey to collect such data.

| SOLUTIONS PROPOSED

The Oxford Community Wellbeing Survey was developed with the support of the CIW to gather data on residents' quality of life in Oxford County and to assist leaders in measuring progress on the CSP. The goal of this data collection was to increase understanding of current wellbeing measures in the community and help county leaders and local service agencies work towards improving the life of current and future residents. The survey gave information on current levels of wellbeing, providing insight to local decision makers as they developed priority actions to advance toward the CSP vision.

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing is a national initiative supported by an independent, non-partisan group of national and international leaders, researchers, organizations, and community members. It supports grassroots efforts to conduct research and mobilize knowledge leading to enhanced wellbeing outcomes for all Canadians (Future Oxford, 2016). Oxford County became one of nine in CIW's community of users. In partnership with Community Oxford, CIW took the lead in developing and conducting the survey as well as in evaluating and reporting on the results.

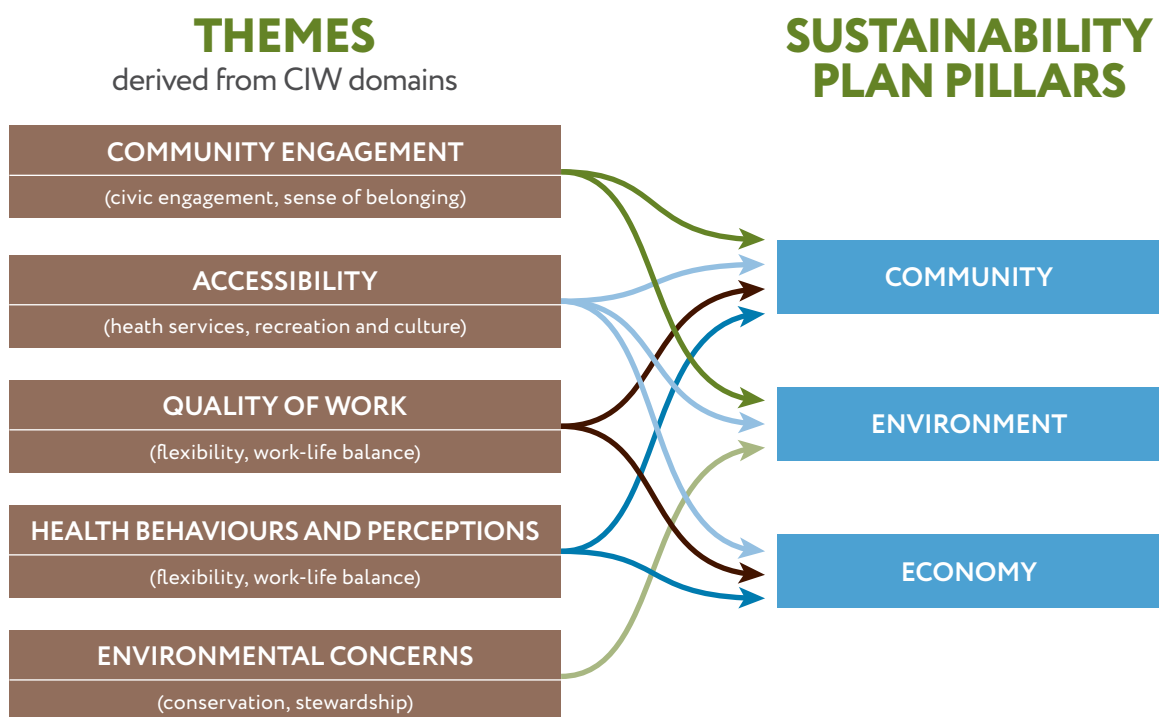
The Community Wellbeing Survey was administered to 11,335 randomly selected households in eight geographic areas, representing 25% of all households in the County (Hilbrecht & Smale, June 2016, pg. 3). This also included an oversampling of the rural areas within the County to ensure adequate representation of this demographic (Ibid). One person in each household, aged eighteen years or older, was invited to complete the questionnaire (Ibid).

The survey focused on eight domains measured by the Canadian Index of Wellbeing:

- Community vitality
- Democratic engagement
- Education
- Environment
- Healthy populations
- Leisure and culture
- Living standards
- Time use

These eight domains helped inform specific targets for the goals, objectives, and actions outlined in the Sustainability Plan. These included ensuring high quality health care and social programs, improving access to education, developing intercommunity transportation, promoting volunteerism, and increasing voter participation. The chart below shows the relationship between the CSP pillars of sustainability and the CIW domains (Hilbrecht & Smale, September 2016, Figure 1, pg. x)

Figure 1: Relationship of CIW-derived Theme Areas to CSP Pillars



From these eight domains, CIW worked in consultation with the Community Oxford Committee for further analysis: community engagement; accessibility; quality of work; health behaviours and perception; and environmental concerns (Hilbrecht & Smale, September 2016). These were areas specific to the needs identified in Oxford County.

Timeline

The project included the following milestones:

September 9, 2015

Council approved the plan and established the **Future Oxford Partnership** – a voluntary team of community members to oversee the implementation of the CSP.

Spring 2016

Survey conducted over an eight-week period.

July 13, 2016

First report entitled “**Oxford County Community Wellbeing Survey: A Profile of the Wellbeing of Oxford County Residents – a preliminary report for the Community Oxford Committee**” published and received by Oxford County Council.

Fall 2016

Second report titled “**Oxford County Community Wellbeing Survey: A Comparison of Oxford Residents on Selected Aspects of their Wellbeing**” published.

December 14, 2016

Future Oxford presented full report on Community Wellbeing Survey to Oxford County Council to help define goals and targets of the Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan.

February 22, 2017

Special event report-back of findings to more than 100 community agency stakeholders, including roundtable discussion on desired next steps.

June 12/13, 2017

Community Indicators Consortium’s (CIC) symposium “Engaging Values/ Effective Metrics: Rooting Indicators in Community Aspirations” held in Winnipeg, MB.

Budget

The \$100,000 Oxford Community Wellbeing Survey budget was underwritten by the County of Oxford and further supported by a \$15,000 ROI MRCV grant, \$10,000 from the Oxford County Community Health Centre, \$5,000 from Community Employment Services Oxford, and \$5,000 from United Way Oxford.

Project expenditures included survey and workshop costs, quantitative statistical analysis, the CIW tool and promotional material, and hiring individuals to focus on the priorities identified. Community partners participated on the project steering committee and contributed toward project costs in various ways. For example, the **Fusion Centre**, a youth skills training centre, provided meeting space and catering, and an epidemiologist contributed expertise in public health.

Oxford Community Employment Services is a not for profit corporation that delivers employment and training for skilled workers. Their goal is to create employment for individuals to contribute to society and to ensure that community needs are met.

United Way Oxford is a not for profit, volunteer driven organization that aims to promote community resources. Their goal is to help communities solve problems and to discover the root causes of issues that create distraction in people’s lives and communities.

Oxford County Community Health Centre works with people to create healthy communities throughout Oxford County, by providing health care, education and support to improve people’s lives.

| COMMUNITY ASSETS

Canadian Index of Wellbeing

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing was a major asset in the success of this initiative. The University of Waterloo staff working with CIW were highly supportive throughout the process and made the tool easy to navigate. CIW staff shared responsibility and helped Oxford County residents recognize their community expertise and assets to support the work being done. CIW provided guidance for the steering committee while encouraging them to self-identify the indicators most fitting for their community. The tool aligned with the CSP goals of community, economic, and environmental wellbeing by going into further detail through eight domains. Using the CIW tool also served to create a unified language for Future Oxford and other stakeholders to discuss wellbeing. Their wrap-around support was a major contribution throughout the consultation.

Momentum from “Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan”

This community consultation built on the momentum gathered through the “Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan”. This plan started a process of community consultation to set goals for the county’s wellbeing. By implementing their sustainability plan with a variety of stakeholders, Oxford County cultivated the political support necessary to develop a “grass roots based” sustainability plan.

County Support

County Council allocated funding to undertake the Oxford Community Survey, to support Future Oxford Partnership operations, and to provide logistical and communications support. This support was vital to engage the community through various media including paid advertisements, post cards, successfully obtaining survey coverage in the local newspaper and radio and reaching out to residents through social media. The resulting community awareness level alleviated concerns about response rates. Project leaders look forward to building stronger relationships with smaller townships and municipalities in addition to harnessing County support.

Funding and Partners

Partners were significant contributors to the success of this project. United Way Oxford, Community Employment Services, Oxford County Community Health Centre, and Oxford County Council were primary partners for the Oxford Community Wellbeing Survey. These partners contributed skills, time and financial resources.

| RESULTS

The Oxford Community Wellbeing Survey achieved significant response rates and community support. Data collected from the surveys was analyzed in two reports. The first Wellbeing Survey report entitled, “A Profile of the Wellbeing of Oxford County Residents: A Preliminary Report for the Community Oxford Committee”, presented a snapshot of the County’s status on wellbeing. It focused on the eight CIW domains, while making intentional links to the CSP (Hilbrecht & Smale, June 2016; Oxford County, 2016).

The second Wellbeing Survey report entitled “A Comparison of Oxford Residents on Selected Aspects of their Wellbeing” was done in collaboration with the Community Oxford Committee. This report sought to provide a deeper understanding of five CIW-derived theme areas in relation to CSP (Hilbrecht & Smale, September 2016). The five themes were: community engagement; accessibility; quality of work; health behaviours and perceptions; and environmental concerns (Ibid, pg. 3). This report focused on the five themes and population subgroups, identified by the Committee, as priorities in relation to CSP wellbeing goals (Ibid). Breaking down population subgroups was an important step towards better understanding the needs of marginalized populations in the County (Chessell, 2016). This report provided an in-depth analysis of Oxford’s wellbeing with the intention of supporting County leaders and local service agencies in making informed decisions to move their community towards CSP’s vision of wellbeing (Canadian Index of Wellbeing, 2016; Oxford County, 2016).

Overall, the project lead stated that survey results validated existing sentiments among stakeholders while challenging assumptions about community wellbeing. The survey was viewed as an energizing experience for many, generating excitement for the future of Oxford County. The data produced was deemed relevant for many groups and organizations in addition to county leaders. The project as a whole underscored that sustainable wellbeing involves everyone in a community.

LESSONS LEARNED & ADVICE TO OTHERS

Several members of the Community Oxford Committee documented their reflections on the project. The following list includes some of their thoughts and lessons learned from the project:

- Staff at the Canadian Index of Wellbeing offer significant support in helping make the tool manageable and easy to use. Nurturing an ongoing relationship with CIW opened other doors and created new opportunities in Oxford County. The CIW is a highly recommended tool for assessing community wellbeing.
- Developing data to compare against baseline measures in a sustainability plan is most effective when a group builds on momentum gained through a sustainability plan's development and promotion.
- Support from County Council is imperative if a plan is to be adopted and implemented. Working with council members throughout the process facilitated their engagement and ownership.
- Ensure communication strategies are clear and convey a broad definition of sustainability. Many residents relate sustainability to environmental concerns without understanding the concept's application to community vitality.
- It is important to include all voices in a stakeholder consultation, including youth and a variety of marginalized populations.
- Establish a Steering Committee including leaders from existing partnerships before beginning work on a sustainability plan.

CONCLUSION

The Oxford Community Wellbeing Survey allowed the County to take initial steps moving forward aspirations of wellbeing to action. The survey supported the community based vision presented in the Future Oxford Community Sustainability Plan. While the CSP provided direction for the County, the survey offered baseline data on the current quality of life and identified priority areas for advancing towards CSP's vision of community, economic and environmental wellbeing (Hilbrecht & Smale, September 2016).

The CIW tool was used to develop and conduct the survey, as well as to analyze results through CIW's eight domains for wellbeing. The data collected has been praised as relevant and beneficial to all community stakeholders as it gives a comprehensive understanding of residents' insights, desires and ambitions for the community (Chessell, 2016). The experience from this survey will inform future consultations, including a potential follow-up project to follow-up on CIW metrics expected in 2021.

| CHECKLIST

Key Ingredients for Success

Considering doing a similar project in your community?

It may work well if your county/organization...

- ☒ Has internal capacity including staff support and funding to adapt the Canadian Index of Wellbeing.
- ☒ Is willing to engage cross sectorial partners and leverage skills and expertise.
- ☒ Is able to advocate for an intersectional understanding of sustainable community wellbeing.
- ☒ Has county financial, staff and communications support.
- ☒ Can develop a dedicated committee with staff support that can invest significant time and effort.
- ☒ Has or is able to hire staff with research and data analysis skills.
- ☒ Recognizes residents as experts of their own community and provides them with opportunities to share opinions and insights to inform the work through surveys, interviews and direct participation.
- ☒ Uses a common language to facilitate the engagement of agencies across various sectors.
- ☒ Is willing to invest time to deliver a final product that is useful to the community.

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The Rural Ontario Institute provided information gathered and summarized by Dr Suzanne Ainley of Ainley Consulting to Platinum Leadership to describe the community projects. All such descriptions have been reviewed and approved by the relevant community contacts.

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