

CHECK YOUR SUCCESS



A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING INDICATORS FOR
COMMUNITY BASED ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS

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in conjunction with the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency

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Introduction

In many communities throughout the United States, neighbors have joined together to address a wide variety of issues with the hope of making their communities better places. Many times, the initial reasons for forming these groups are based on environmental concerns. However, many groups have moved beyond a strict environmental focus and are approaching community improvement with a wide variety of goals and projects. They have realized that environmental, economic and social health are connected and that they need to address all of these issues. These connections are sometimes referred to as sustainable development. The idea of sustainable development is being promoted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through its Community-Based Environmental Protection (CBEP) Program. EPA is encouraging community groups to expand their environmental protection activities to include economic and social issues.

It is likely that your group is just one of many organizations working to promote environmental quality, economic stability and social health and vitality in your community. Since many other activities generally are taking place within the same region and/or community, it is important for you to realize that your actions occur within the context of a larger picture. For instance, within one watershed several groups may be trying to improve environmental quality. Some of these groups might have an overall goal of improving water quality in the major river of the watershed. However, it is not realistic for each individual group to believe that it will reach this goal alone. Further, while these groups may be working to improve water quality, other organizations may be taking action to address air quality, foster new business development or enhance the social fabric of the region. The combination of all of these individual groups taking action and working on their specific environmental, economic and social projects is what can lead a community toward a more sustainable future.

Who is This Manual For?

This manual is designed to be used by organizations and groups of all sizes that are working on environmental protection at a community level. It will assist you in your efforts to improve your community by helping you develop indicators that measure your success. It also will show you how your group can move beyond a narrow focus and start thinking about how your activities can be used to address the connections between the environment, economy and society.

Learn How to Steer Your Community Group Towards Success

Key terms used in this manual:

Goal: The vision that your group wants to achieve through its projects. For example, a goal could be improving air quality in your town.

Objective: The specific and measurable steps taken towards achieving a goal. For instance, an objective could be to reduce the number of passenger miles driven in your town.

Indicators: The tools you can use to measure your progress. An indicator is anything that helps you and your organization know how far you are from achieving your objectives and whether you are headed in the right direction. An indicator for the above objective would be the number of people who carpool to work.

Evaluation: The process in which you collect information and use it to determine your progress towards reaching goals and/or objectives.

Projects: Activities taken by your group to achieve goals and/or objectives.

Partnership: A union between groups, where the groups provide support to each other.

People in local groups know a great deal about their communities because this is where they live. Being one of those people, you might know that your group is making progress based on your observations and local knowledge. But take a minute and try to answer the next two questions: Are your projects heading in the right direction? How do you know?

Now consider whether other people in your community group would answer those questions the same way. What about potential partners outside the community? How about other community

members that are not involved with your group? These are important questions you should be asking yourself. The purpose of this manual is to help you provide meaningful answers to questions like these and, in doing so, to help your group be more successful in reaching its goals. This manual will help your group work together to choose meaningful indicators to measure your progress.

What to Look for in This Manual:

- What exactly are indicators?
- How can we pick indicators that will check our progress towards achieving our goals?
- How do we figure out what indicators will work for us?
- How will indicators benefit our group?

- How have other groups evaluated their progress?
- Where can we find more information or help on developing or using indicators?
- Where can our group go from here?

Instructions on How to Use This Manual

- The first part of this manual provides information on the benefits resulting from the evaluation process and teaches you what makes a good indicator.
- The second part of the manual presents four case studies that focus on issues related to water and watersheds. The experiences of the groups highlighted in the cases can provide valuable insight into a wide range of community group interests. For example, they can be applied to air quality, waste management and urban redevelopment issues. The case studies illustrate how other community groups have approached the use of indicators.
- The first appendix contains a table of possible indicators and the resource requirements that are needed for each.
- The second appendix contains materials for an Indicator Workshop to help your community group put the knowledge you have gained from this manual into action. These exercises will guide you through a step-by-step process of developing your own indicators.
- The remaining appendices contain lists of places where you can look for more information.

By realizing your community group's need to develop an evaluation process that will help you check your success, you have already taken the first step. This manual will arm your group with the know-how needed to develop good indicators to measure the success of your projects and your progress towards achieving your goals.