

## In Summary

*Now that you know about the evaluation process...where do you go from here?*

By reading the four case studies, you should now have a better idea of what others did and how some of their experiences can be used to measure the success of your community-based environmental project. As you went through their background, goals and projects, you may even have found that the case study groups have things in common with your organization.

To make your measures more effective, link your indicators to established goals and objectives. When you choose indicators, make sure they will measure your goals and objectives. Otherwise, the information from an indicator may lead your group away from what you really want to achieve. Remember indicators are a tool, not the intended goal.

The four categories for indicators we outlined were: environmental, economic, social and organizational. Some of the case studies had an impact in all of these categories while others focused their efforts on only one or two of these categories. However, even those that were limited in scope contributed to broader sustainable development initiatives in their communities. Each of the case studies in this manual took a different approach to evaluate their outcomes, either directly or indirectly with indicators. Two of the groups developed indicators to measure their success.

- The Guest River Group's primary goal is to improve water quality in the watershed. Two examples of projects they did to address this goal were illegal dump clean-ups and restoring streambanks. Indicators they developed to measure the success of these two projects included the number of dump-sites cleaned up, tonnage of trash removed from dump-sites and number of miles of restored streambanks.
- The Alexandria Seaport Foundation's main goal is to help at-risk youth become productive members of society. A project they have to address this goal is an environmental apprenticeship program. An indicator to measure the success of this program is the number of former apprentices with a high school diploma or equivalency.

Two of the groups discussed in this manual did not develop indicators to evaluate their success. They did, however, use intuitive indicators to know when they were being successful. For these two case studies, the authors of this manual have suggested indicators the groups could use.



- Stop TOxic Pollution's (S.T.O.P.) goal is to raise awareness of environmental problems in the neighborhood. One of the projects they accomplished was the creation of a community environmental library. A possible indicator they could use to measure the success of this project is to track the number of visits people make to the library each year.
- One of the goals for St. Paul Tomorrow is to promote nature-based tourism in St. Paul, Virginia. They created the Clinch River Days Festival to achieve this goal. An indicator they could use to measure the festival's success is to count the number of people attending the festival each year.

In each of these four cases, indicators can be directly linked to objectives, which can then be directly linked to the goals of the organizations. Each group is important to the overall sustainability of a larger watershed and a larger region. As you work on your projects, think about how you can link your goals to economy, environment and society, and how you can contribute to the sustainability of your community.

Use your creativity, refer to the resources in the appendices of this manual and look for other resources in your community. You will find the right indicators for your own project!

<b>Do</b>	<b>Don't</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Measure many indicators</li> <li>✓ Pick relevant indicators</li> <li>✓ Make indicators easy to understand</li> <li>✓ Make indicators easy to use</li> <li>✓ Show linkages between goals and indicators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Choose only one indicator</li> <li>✓ Pick indicators you can't measure</li> <li>✓ Pick indicators you don't understand</li> </ul>

## **Planning Ahead**

Do you want to plan ahead? Do you want to manage your projects better by knowing what to expect? And above all, do you want to make your community-based organization yield more effective outcomes? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then here is how you can start:

1. Pick indicators that will directly measure your objectives and, ultimately, your goals. Your group's achievements can be more convincing with relevant indicators.

2. Learn from other groups. Reach out, see what others have done, and see if it applies to you.
3. Include volunteers, staff, community and partners in your projects.
4. Collect baseline data. This is key to knowing and showing your group's progress.
5. Create a working schedule for data collection and stick with it.
6. Be realistic. You will be much more likely to monitor your group's progress if you have understandable indicators that you are able to measure.

## **In Conclusion**

Evaluation is an investment that can consistently produce benefits. Initially the evaluation process may seem costly and time-consuming. However, with effective planning and management, your time and resources will be used more wisely and provide your projects with valuable results. In fact, the process of developing indicators may help you clarify your objectives and goals as well as help you strengthen ties within your organization. So get out there and have some fun, but don't forget to record your progress and look at what you have done. The rewards will be that much better!

Now that you understand the importance of indicators and know what others have done, it is time for you to try it out. The Indicator Workshop in Appendix 2 guides you through the process of choosing and using indicators for your group.