

Regional Indicators Kick-Off Table Conversation Themes

January 14, 2010, Portland State University

Benefits of Regional Indicators p. 2

- *Indicators can provide the region a greater clarity of purpose, a shared system of measurement, comparator data, greater accountability, more informed investments, and a tool for collaborating across barriers.*

Choosing Indicators p. 2

- *For the broadest buy-in, the process needs to be inclusive and embrace diversity.*
- *There needs to be broad agreement on indicators, but participants were not in consensus on whether and in what order the agreements should be forged: goals first vs. indicators first vs. strategies. What are the right questions to ask?*
- *Some participants requested specific indicators.*

Measuring Indicators p. 4

- *We want/need local data.*
- *Measuring indicators should make the most of the data we already have through collaboration and quality control.*

Communicating Data p. 4

- *Reporting should be done in a way that leverages technology, informs policy decisions, shows the relationships between variables and engages citizens.*

Using Data p. 5

- *We need to want this data. Businesses, funders, city planners, advocacy groups and people who are trying to collaborate see a variety of uses for regional indicators.*

Moving Forward p. 5

- *How do we sustain this effort?*

Benefits of Regional Indicators

Indicators can provide the region a greater clarity of purpose, a shared system of measurement, comparator data, greater accountability, more informed investments, and a tool for collaborating across barriers.

- “This will make our job easier.” The indicators process will help stakeholders find common ground, create a shared system of measurement, agree on data collection and improve government accountability.
- The data will help us understand where we have a competitive advantage as a region.
- The data will help us invest resources where there is the greatest need.
- The process will help us coordinate and align data investments, prevent unnecessary purchases and reduce data conflicts and redundancy. Two examples: 1) Metro had data that Greenlight Greater Portland purchased for \$10K from a third party. 2) Beaverton could have saved thousands in data expenditures for their planning process.
- The data can break down boundaries between local jurisdictions and help them see that what happens in one city often affects another.
- County government officials believe indicators will help address the needs of the community more proactively. The project could provide data in a way that allows jurisdictions to compare themselves.
- With budget cuts, the indicators could provide a cost-effective data for prioritizing needs.

Choosing Indicators

For the broadest buy-in, the process needs to be inclusive and embrace diversity.

- There is a concern about which indicators are chosen and whether they will provide the best picture of what is going on in a community. The challenge is to describe the community but be inclusive of the diversity of the community. Need to be inclusive to be real. Diverse populations want different things, with an emphasis on providing services.
- What is the region? Indicators describe “us.” How do we describe our community with the fewest number of indicators?
- This project needs to be owned by everyone and have community buy-in.
- Who is involved will influence the measures chosen. We need grassroots neighborhood activists and the faith community involved from the very beginning. *Counter comment:* Do we really want to start something new again? We have so many groups already.
- Impact of indicators will depend on how they are formed. They need to reflect community values, including values of the younger population and coalitions of color. There is deep anger in the African American community on North Portland infrastructure investments; the values of community were not assessed first. No people of color are in this room.
- Conversations with our customers may lead to different indicators than what we have in mind. If we don’t study the diversity of community members, we could miss out.

We need broad agreement on indicators, but participants were not in consensus on whether and in what order the agreements should be forged: goals first vs. indicators first vs. strategies. What are the right questions to ask?

- This has to have goals, action plans, and demand. It's great to have data, but if there is not a goal or shared vision for it, why study it?
- Decide to develop goals first, then indicators. *Counter comment:* Decide on the indicators first, then strategies.
- The idea is that the project will provide a repository of data – assigned under topic areas. We need to agree what's important to track under each one.
- We should start by aligning goals from jurisdictions across the region – that way we can begin to categorize our data.
- Decide what we want to know together, because the data should reflect the questions we are asking. "Everything is about the front-end question. What are the right questions?"
- Let's get a quick win – pick one area and move forward. Let's pick one big question we are trying to solve and assemble data around it. How do we fit all partners into one question?
 - ✓ *Counter comment:* It seems to me it would be really hard to get partners to agree to one issue / question. Let's just look at the areas and ask whether we are getting better or worse.
 - ✓ *Counter comment:* I don't think we should ask questions that embed value choices. That approach may force us to pick the data that we want to show (i.e. good results)
- We need shared indicators we can all work toward.

Some participants requested specific indicators, including:

- Crime, public health, spiritual well-being and happiness issues ("Costa Rica is the happiest place.")
- Transportation, population mobility and density, and car ownership
- Housing affordability, homelessness, family income, school mobility, and something that measures deferred maintenance (which leads to health issues)

Measuring Indicators

We want/need local data.

- We hope to collect data that can be disaggregated down to local levels.
- I don't feel like we have enough data, especially at smaller geographies. It is hard to look at smaller areas with comparable data.

Measuring indicators should make the most of the data we already have through collaboration and quality control.

- Make sure data and analysis is solid.
- Data is expensive and hard to compile. Example (funder viewpoint): Health and human services data is cumbersome and inefficient.

- Big regional data sets are stale by the time they are assembled. How can we share administrative data that is more geographically focused and current?
- How often will this be updated?
- Let's not reinvent the wheel. We need to coordinate and consolidate instead of recreate.
- We need to agree on common nomenclature and process. If we can work together, we'll be better, stronger.
- Other indicator efforts in region include: 1) the City of Portland; 2) the Port of Portland (data that are used for export/wealth creation); 3) the PSU/Leaders Roundtable education framework with standard measures like readiness for school; 4) Metro already consolidates a lot of data, but it is not always clear on how to plug it in.

Communicating Data

Reporting should be done in a way that leverages technology, informs policy decisions, shows the relationships between variables and engages citizens.

- Communication is incredibly important. Example: Mammogram research findings polarized the community.
- How will expectations related to the data be managed?
- What will this look like? Maybe it will look like the Coalition for a Livable Future atlas online? Cascadia is one model in the way they use regional environmental indicators against targets.
- It would be good to be able to graph, search and interact with user groups online.
- Use narrative to talk about quantitative data. Use both quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative is really important. The risk is providing too much data in a dashboard approach.
- It would be extremely useful to house all of the data collected in a universal location where a variety of actors can access this information. Accessibility and easily understood interpretations of the data are key.
- Show relationships between variables, such as between crime rates and education. With a rich database, this takes us closer to wisdom (as opposed to data and information).
- Data needs to be for policy makers *and* for average people (even though some may not care) – showing how they are doing and how it is being done for their benefit. “Connect to the citizenry. Distrust is high.”

Using Data

We need to want this data. Businesses, funders, city planners, advocacy groups and people who are trying to collaborate see a variety of uses for regional indicators.

- So what? How can you use data to change things and actually make a difference?
- Use data to find out if we moved the needle.
- Use data to focus on relative strengths (vs. fighting). See who is doing well and go talk to them.
- Use indicators to promote collaboration. If people see the benefit, they can have a better conversation. “It blows me away that Twin Cities does revenue sharing.”

- Use data to gauge the effect of UGB on land values and whether we are using our land the best way for the community.
- Use data to inform investment, policy and other kinds of decisions. It is challenging to identify at which level it is best to intervene with the most benefits and fewest resources. Use data to understand larger trends and how to redevelop the local community.
- If data is better defined, we can move to more data-based policy making. Elected officials need the data to be relevant to their decision processes.
- Use data to help articulate needs as basis for investing in a community. Many hospitals invest in communities with no evidence that the investment has benefits.
- Use data to inform public and private partners and for advocacy. Existing economic reports comparing counties are used by many groups.
- Use data to better understand and meet needs. Indicators of success or failure on a broad spectrum can inform policy that benefits citizens. For example, underutilized infrastructure will raise utility rates.
- Metro would use the data for long-range planning decisions. Indicators would provide a way to track trends and project into the future.
- Funders live or die by quality of data and want a finger on the pulse of community needs.
- Don't freeze because you feel you lack data. Figure out how to use what exists.

Moving Forward

How do we sustain this effort?

- How does this effort differ than the Progress Board? How can it stay alive and relevant?
- Once the indicator system is initiated, how will it be sustained?
- What are next steps?

Thank you to volunteer note-takers Radcliffe Dacanay, City of Portland; Paul Reise, Greater Greenlight Portland; Sharon Meross, Portland Development Commission; Janet Hammer, PSU; Jessica Schmidt, PSU; and Deena Platman, Metro.