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**A COMMUNITY INDICATORS CASE STUDY:
ADDRESSING THE QUALITY OF LIFE
IN TWO COMMUNITIES**

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I. INTRODUCTION: Indicators Projects at the Crossroads

THE COMMUNITY INDICATORS MOVEMENT

In the last several years, nearly 200 cities across the United States have adopted the community indicators process to track community conditions, inform policy choices, build consensus, and promote accountability. In some cities, state and local governments have mandated the creation of indicators. In others, businesses, citizens, and social service agencies have launched an indicators process with the general idea of bringing stakeholders together to understand, discuss, and measure key components that define quality of life in their community.

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY INDICATORS, AND WHY FORM PROJECTS AROUND THEM?

Indicators are simply quantitative information, or data, tracked over time. In the context of community indicators projects, they are quantitative information about what has often been considered a qualitative subject: the well-being of communities. Although they are numbers, they tell a rich story about the state of the community. And because they are numbers, they can be measured and compared over time to find trends that tell communities where they have been and where they are likely headed.

Community indicators projects often come about when the multiple needs, purposes, and concerns of individual stakeholders converge into an overarching question about how the community as a whole is doing and whether it is headed in a desirable direction. The spread of indicators projects both reflects and increases (it's a virtuous cycle) a new awareness on the part of diverse interests that the best way to pursue their particular goals, such as attracting business, meeting health care needs, or improving government efficiency, is to pursue the well-being of the whole community.

Indicators projects operate under the assumption that community well-being can be defined and measured, and then managed and preserved. They quantify community well-being in terms of indicator frameworks such as quality of life, sustainability, and health (the three major models in current use) so that they can be measured. And they ensure that it is indeed the well-being of the whole by inviting the community to define those terms through the selection of indicators that reflect its values.

The resulting information guides not only particular constituencies such as government and business in carrying out their tasks, but sets an agenda for improvement for the whole community. Over time, the process of coming together to reach consensus about common values fans the spark of interest in the common good and creates an ever-broadening base of individuals, organizations, and institutions who are committed to the community agenda and connected through the project.

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE INDICATORS MOVEMENT

Many of these projects have been successful in their primary task of gathering, producing, and communicating high-quality information that answers the question of where the community stands according to its own values. And many projects, including those considered in this paper, are beginning to see the fruits of the community-building aspects of the process.

But with this level of maturity has come the realization that if community indicators projects are to reach their potential for improving communities, they must play an increasingly direct role in—and take increasing responsibility for—the use of information to promote change. The question now is how to more effectively translate knowledge and commitment into action.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

This paper documents the experience of two well-established community indicators projects: Quality of Life in Jacksonville: Indicators for Progress in Jacksonville, Florida; and Quality of Life in the Truckee Meadows in Reno, Nevada.

Our purpose in doing so is three-fold:

- to educate the public about what community indicators projects are and how they work.
- to assess the successes, challenges, and lessons learned in indicators so far in order to help orient present and future projects.
- to highlight the ways in which Jacksonville and Reno are moving indicators into action.

WHY THESE PROJECTS?

The Jacksonville and Truckee Meadows projects share characteristics that give them a basic level of comparability. Both projects follow the quality of life model pioneered by Jacksonville. They also share an initial political context of a government consolidation and reform (although Truckee Meadows is considerably closer to that context

both in time and institutional structure). Both grew out of questions from across the political spectrum about the link between economic factors and quality of life.

Both projects are outstanding in their field, and therefore furnish appropriate examples for practical learning. They produce high-quality information that has achieved considerable public credibility, a credibility that tends to enable and support their goals for community improvement. They provide powerful lessons in community-building and in the importance of applying the democratic principles of process, participation, and consensus in setting an agenda for education and change. And they are leading the way in translating indicators into action toward community well-being.

But the two projects differ in many ways, the most essential one being the greater role of government in mandating and structuring the Truckee Meadows project.

METHODOLOGY

Every indicators project interacts with the particular character of the community it serves. A host of factors make communities unique: history, politics, region, demographics, economy, traditions, and influential individuals and groups who have left their mark for good or ill. All of these and more impact a project's formation, successes, and limitations. For this reason, this paper devotes attention to how each project has changed over time—that is, to history—particularly in the case of Jacksonville, which has been so influential in shaping the indicators movement.

It is not within the scope of this paper to develop or test theories of the role of information in producing social change.¹ Instead, we will describe what each project has done to create, maintain, and implement indicators, and provide some examples of the role indicators have played in efforts to improve the two communities. The authors intend for the theoretical apparatus of this paper to be small.

However, we did develop some terminology in order to discuss outcomes, which we here present in order to guide the reader through our discussion of implementation and results. We distinguish among political outcomes, policy outcomes, and change according to the following definitions:

Political outcomes | Political outcomes include raising awareness, shaping perceptions, forging identity, and bringing people together, whether as individuals or as members of groups and institutions. We call these things political outcomes because they are the potential building blocks of a political base. Education is an example of a political out-

1. For theories specific to indicators, see Judith Innes, *Knowledge and Public Policy: The Search for Meaningful Indicators* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990) C.H. Weiss, "The Many Meanings of Research Utilization," *Public Administration Review* (1979) 426–431.

come. Because the media plays a special role in shaping perceptions, political outcomes also include becoming a trusted and regularly used resource for local media, media response, media relations, and media coverage. Other political outcomes include the forging of new coalitions and institutional relations and the creation of credibility, consensus, and legitimacy for the selected concerns. The awareness of being stakeholders in the common good and of sharing common interests and common goals are political outcomes.

Policy outcomes | The creation, modification, or implementation of programs in response to indicator feedback; the incorporation of indicators into a planning process; the allocation of resources to meet needs on the basis of indicators; or changes in individual behavior (for example, driving habits) are all policy outcomes. We call these policy outcomes because they represent concrete steps taken to address an issue raised by indicators. Since moving an indicator in the desired direction usually involves the concerted effect of multiple, repeated policy outcomes (whose individual successes cannot be guaranteed) initiated from many quarters, only rarely does a single policy outcome lead clearly and directly to change—especially in the absence of the political outcomes necessary to keep the goal in place.

Change | Change means movement of the indicator in the desired direction or its maintenance at the desired target level. For those who labor in the fray of community affairs, establishing the cause-and-effect relationships that determine change is usually impractical if not impossible. As with most forms of information, indicators work indirectly. That is, people achieve goals not through indicators but through the steps taken in response to them. Since both indicators and the actions they guide are but single factors in a complex scene, community indicators practitioners must often work according to educated guesses as to whether, how, and to what degree their measurements and actions cause change.

II. QUALITY OF LIFE IN JACKSONVILLE: Indicators for Progress (QLJIP)

THE LOCALE: JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

The city of Jacksonville is the nucleus of a large metropolitan area in the northeast corner of Florida. It has a consolidated city-county government, a population slightly over 700,000, and an area of about 840 square miles. About 27 percent of the population are people of color, all but 2 percent of whom are African-Americans. The poverty rate in 1990 was about 12.5 percent. The five-county metropolitan area has a population of just over one million.

Jacksonville is a transportation hub, with a major seaport, an airport, expressways, and railroads fanning out toward the nation's Northeast, Midwest, West, and South. Besides warehousing and transportation, major industries include banking, insurance, electronic telemarketing and customer services, government, and the military, in addition to a large service sector. Jacksonville is endowed with a rich natural heritage combining Atlantic Ocean beaches, extensive salt marshes and tidal estuaries, the navigable St. Johns River with several large tributaries, and groves of ancient live oaks.

INTRODUCTION TO THE JACKSONVILLE PROJECT

Begun in 1985, Quality of Life in Jacksonville: Indicators for Progress is the oldest ongoing and annually updated community indicators project in the United States. Jacksonville is in many ways the original model for community indicators projects. With its pioneering participation and consensus process, and its annual report reflecting years of patient trial-and-error in working with local data, Jacksonville provides one of the most widely used models in the U.S. and has attracted interest from abroad. Over seventy communities—including the Truckee Meadows, the second project profiled here—have used the Jacksonville model as a starting point.

The QLJIP project does not provide a static model of what indicators projects should look like. Most of the major aspects of the project—from purpose, to methods, to organization and funding, to results—have evolved over thirteen years and continue

to do so. Communities wishing to establish their own indicators projects may benefit as much from understanding principles and history as from emulating a diagram of current structure.

PARTICIPANTS

<p>QUALITY OF LIFE IN JACKSONVILLE: INDICATORS FOR PROGRESS (QLJIP)</p> <p>Organizational Base</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI) and its 650 members <p>Major Institutional Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce City of Jacksonville United Way of Northeast Florida <p>Community Input</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hundreds of individual citizen volunteers on commissions, task forces, and committees Survey conductors and respondents

Coming together for quality of life: the political context

In 1974, a group of Jacksonville community leaders convened a three-day retreat called the Amelia Island Community Planning Conference. Many who attended the conference were veterans of a highly successful government reform movement of the late '60s and '70s that had culminated in the consolidation of the city and county governments. One of the Amelia Conference findings was that the community was in need of a vehicle for citizen involvement in the political process. To meet that need, conference participants founded the Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI), a local, non-profit, civic organization whose mission was—and remains—to improve the quality of life in Northeast Florida through extensive citizen involvement in research and advocacy on community issues.

Among the Amelia Conference founders of JCCI were members and representatives of the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce, the city of Jacksonville, and the United Way of Northeastern Florida. When JCCI began the Indicators for Progress project in 1985, they could call upon a decade of close collaboration with these institutions on community issues.

The leadership of Marian Chambers, executive director of JCCI from 1979 until her death in 1994, was among the strongest forces in shaping JCCI's approach to com-

munity indicators. Chambers was committed to achieving results through consensus decisionmaking on the part of involved citizens, and she applied these democratic principles to the idea—then unheard of at the local level—of assessing quality of life. She did not originate nor was she alone in her dedication to cultivating the relationship among information, participatory democracy, and well-being in local communities. But over the years her leadership ensured the institutionalization of these values in the community indicators process.

Institutional partnership

Jacksonville's indicators project came about as the result of the partnership between JCCI and the Chamber of Commerce. The mission of the Jacksonville Chamber is to improve and expand the local economy by marketing the benefits Jacksonville offers to prospective businesses and by assisting existing businesses to expand and prosper. The Chamber had long used standard economic indicators to document its marketing pitch. But despite some community development activity, it had little quantitative information with which to respond when prospective businesses asked about additional aspects of life in Jacksonville, such as the schools, public safety, and cultural opportunities.

In 1985, Marian Chambers, who was well-versed in both the Chamber's community development activities and its marketing needs, suggested a solution. She proposed convening a large citizens' group to identify major elements in Jacksonville's quality of life, and to define a set of measurable indicators by which the community could understand the status of its quality of life and communicate that status to businesses and others interested in Jacksonville.

Initially, the Chamber pledged \$10,000, which partially funded the creation of the project. Because no dedicated source of funding existed, for several years the base funding came from the Chamber. As the public sector became more interested and involved in the project, the funding source moved accordingly. Currently, the city of Jacksonville is funding JCCI to implement the indicators project, providing about \$15,000 annually. The funding for the project has never covered the full cost (currently about \$40,000 a year), and JCCI's commitment to the project includes providing the remaining funding from its general operating budget.

Involvement of the Chamber has not diminished with the shift in funding. The partnership between the Chamber and JCCI has been solidified by maintaining a tradition of the incoming chairman of the Chamber serving as chair of the annual JCCI volunteer review committee. In this way, the incoming chair of the Chamber receives an education in community issues that helps him or her set the Chamber's priorities for the coming year. And JCCI retains a valuable connection with the influential Chamber on the issues raised by the indicators project.

JCCI was a decade old when the QLJIP project began, and the project is only one among the organization's several activities, which include intensive study and advocacy efforts on community issues, conflict resolution and mediation services, various councils and forums, and a second indicators project on human services, conducted with the United Way (this project, called the Community Agenda, is projected to be merged with QLJIP in the next three years). These activities provide an important context for the project.

GOALS AND PURPOSES

Initial goals

The goal of the Jacksonville project was not, initially, to instigate specific public-policy changes, but simply to become aware of and to understand the elements that determine the local quality of life and to share this understanding with others. The intent of the project was to provide a longitudinal, trend-line motion picture of life in Jacksonville rather than a still-life snapshot.

As the project evolved, so did its goals and purposes. The initial goal of the project involved these tasks:

- To use indicators and the indicators development process to create a measurable definition of quality of life in Duval County/Jacksonville based on community consensus about common concerns.
- To compile, publish, and distribute an annual report consisting of the indicators chosen to represent that definition of the quality of life.
- To inform and educate the public and decisionmakers about the results of the report, highlighting positive and negative trends.

Setting targets introduces more ambitious goals

By 1991 the project had five years of data—enough to give a reasonable picture of the directions the trends were taking. That year JCCI staff and volunteers set targets for the desired level of each indicator by the year 2000. The choice of the year 2000 represented a coincidence of several factors: the symbolic value of the new millennium, the project's possession of sufficient data to identify and project trends, and the readiness of staffers, volunteers, and partners to start making judgments after years of watching the trends.

With the introduction of targets, QLJIP's goals evolved. Now it sought not only to enable citizens and decisionmakers to understand trends in Jacksonville's quality of life, but to lead them towards concrete judgments about what degree of progress was being

made and could be expected for the new millennium. Thus some goals that had been implicit in the project were now articulated more clearly:

- To set community goals for improvement.
- To achieve broad endorsement of community goals.
- To enhance the ability of JCCI and other community advocates to call for action.
- To promote accountability.

Each indicator target represented a goal set for the whole community, goals that enter JCCI’s plans for advocacy but, above all, goals that can guide anyone in the community interested in the issues they address. Although JCCI works towards these goals in its advocacy activities, the goals represented by the indicator targets belong to the whole community—and it will take the efforts of the whole community to achieve them.

HOW THE PROJECT IS CARRIED OUT: STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

THE NINE ELEMENTS OF QUALITY OF LIFE IN JACKSONVILLE	
Education	Social environment
Economy	Government/politics
Public safety	Culture/recreation
Natural environment	Mobility
Health	

One of the most remarkable aspects of Quality of Life in Jacksonville: Indicators for Progress is the degree to which it runs on volunteer power. JCCI’s small staff of ten is simultaneously involved in several research and advocacy projects, and typically one to three staff members are devoting time to the project. Although volunteer power enables JCCI to achieve maximum community presence with a minimum of resources, citizen involvement is a matter of principle, not a matter of resources. It is local citizens who must set the research and advocacy agenda for Jacksonville.

Staff is at the service of citizen volunteers, who gather in task forces to make primary decisions and draft recommendations. JCCI plays the role of facilitator, convening the volunteers, seeing to it that principles and process are followed, and providing the background research volunteers need to make informed decisions. Once the volunteers set the agenda for the annual reporting of indicators, JCCI staff carry it out by gathering the required data, compiling the report, and moving it onto the public scene. But volunteers contribute to every stage of the process, including interpretation of data and implementation.

At JCCI, even research is carried out by volunteer task forces, who reach consensus on findings and recommendations. In this way the authority of “experts” is subject to the deliberations and consensus of informed citizens.

Developing the indicators

Developing the indicators was a multi-step process involving JCCI staff and over 100 community volunteers. Since this was the first experiment of its kind, participants were to some degree developing the process as it went along.

The steps:

1. JCCI advertised widely in the local media and appealed to the membership of institutional partners such as the Chamber of Commerce for volunteers to select and develop, with facilitation and research support from JCCI, the indicators that would define quality of life for Jacksonville.
2. Under the leadership of a project chairman and a steering committee selected from among themselves, participants agreed on an operational definition of quality of life as “a feeling of well-being, fulfillment, or satisfaction resulting from factors in the external environment,” and agreed on nine indicator areas to represent that definition: education, economy, public safety, natural environment, health, social environment, government/politics, culture/recreation, and mobility.
3. The volunteers arrayed themselves in nine “task forces” based on the nine indicator areas (see above figure), each chaired by a steering committee member.
4. The steering committee, with the help of JCCI research, developed criteria to enable the volunteers to select indicators that would accurately measure important aspects of the quality of life; present valid, consistent, and understandable data; and reflect changes in local public-policy actions over time.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATORS

Validity | Does the indicator measure a factor or issue which is directly related to the quality of life? If the indicator moves, would a diverse group of people agree on how the movement affects the quality of life—positively or negatively?

Availability and timeliness | Is the indicator readily available on an annual basis?

Stability and reliability | Can we be confident that the statistic will be compiled using a systematic and fair method and that the same method will be used each year?

Understandability | Is the indicator simple enough to be interpreted by the general user and the public?

Responsiveness | Does the indicator respond quickly and noticeably to real changes?

Policy relevance | Does the indicator have relevance for policy decisions? Is it possible to do anything about it?

Representativeness | Do the indicators as a group cover important dimensions of the element?

The steering committee also asked the volunteers to consider the following factors in selecting indicators:

- Is the indicator leading, coincident, or lagging relative to the occurrence of a problem? Leading indicators are more valuable, since they allow a proactive, rather than a reactive response.
 - Is it preferable to state the indicator as a rate or relative to population, rather than as an aggregate figure?
 - If money is involved, it is preferable to state it in terms of constant dollars, eliminating the effect of inflation?
5. Using the above criteria plus background research provided by JCCI staff and some of the volunteers, the task forces selected up to ten indicators within each of the nine indicator areas. The result was a total of 74 indicators.

HOW JACKSONVILLE CHOSE TO MEASURE EDUCATION
One of the nine elements of quality of life: Citizen-selected indicators

- Public high school graduation rate
- Average of median achievement-test percentile scores in public schools
- Public school educational expenditures per student
- Average public school teacher salary
- Percentage of public school teachers holding advanced degrees
- Percentage of public school students attending desegregated school

Maintaining the core task of the project

Publishing an annual report and executive summary fulfills the intent of providing a longitudinal, trend-line motion picture of life in Jacksonville. This entails collecting and compiling data and reviewing and revising the indicators annually. In addition to the annual review, periodic major reviews overhaul the entire project. The annual review is an integral part of maintaining a living project capable of correcting errors, improving data, and responding to change.

The project publishes two versions of the annual report. One is the reference document, entitled *Quality of Life in Jacksonville: Indicators for Progress*, first published in 1985. This document contains detailed information about each indicator, as well as the methodology used in the project. It is designed for use by researchers, planners, and decisionmakers. The other document is a shorter, more accessible version of the report entitled *Quality of Life in Jacksonville: Indicators for Progress; Executive Summary*. This document is designed for the general public and for use as an advocacy tool.

1991: Major revision includes the setting of targets

The setting of targets mentioned earlier (see Goals) was part of a major revision that took place in 1991. That summer and fall, JCCI invited approximately 140 volunteers to participate in the review of the project, reconvening the original nine task forces (with some new and some old members). Although the project had been reviewed each year, the 1991 review instituted major changes by

- eliminating, revising, and adding several indicators in response to issues such as questionable validity, unavailable data, and the need for greater clarity (see Issues).
- setting indicator priorities, including the identification of one “top-priority” indicator within each of the nine quality of life categories.
- establishing targets for the year 2000.

How the targets were set | JCCI received special funding for the targets process in the form of a HUD Community Development Block Grant. The grant funded JCCI’s facilitation of the task-force process, as well as background research on existing standards and guidelines at the federal, state, and local level. The research consisted of compiling information about authoritative goals or standards already set by others (e.g., in legislation, human services, planning, or law enforcement); gathering comparative data where available; and projecting indicator trend lines according to different possible scenarios. The research was then presented to the volunteer task forces to guide them in selecting targets for the year 2000.

For any particular indicator, the quality of life might be improving or declining. But compared to what? At what level on the indicator graph would the quality of life be acceptable? JCCI staff impressed upon the volunteers that in setting targets they would have to make judgments rather than seek objective perfection. The staff directed the volunteer task forces to make two kinds judgments about targets: the “pie-in-the-sky” or ideal target, and the target based on judgment about what was realistically possible. The task forces then considered all the reference points: the ideal target, the realistic target, the targets or standards others had set, and the projected outcomes for each of these three types of targets. Using that information to inform the deliberation and consensus process, they came up with final targets. (Note that the target is arrived at not by the application of mathematical formulas, but by consensus.)

These judgments have been incorporated into the annual update documents through the assignment of “gold stars” for positively moving indicators and “red flags” for those moving negatively or remaining far from their targets. These have become a feature of the media and publicity aspect of the project, and have appeared in a number of local newspaper stories.

1998: A second major revision

In the summer of 1998, JCCI began a major new effort to review and overhaul its approach to indicators by convening a new Indicators Steering Committee consisting of 25 thinkers and leaders with a variety of experience in public policy and the use of data. To help inform the steering committee's efforts, JCCI also created a high-powered advisory committee whose members include the mayor, the sheriff, the president of the United Way, a member of the city Environmental Protection Board, the chairman of the Jacksonville Economic Development Commission (a city government agency), the manager of Jacksonville's publicly owned utility, the superintendent of schools, a hospital administrator, an insurance executive, the president of the city council, the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, and the chief administrative officer of the city.

By the end of 1998, this committee had developed a vision statement and a long-term work plan for JCCI's work on indicators. Both reflect the committee's emphasis on moving indicators into action.

THE 1998 JCCI VISION STATEMENT:

"By 2002 JCCI's indicators reports will be the premier source of local summary-level information on the quality of life in Jacksonville. Each annual update will be the community's report card containing vital, valid, and relevant information that is actively used to inform the community, guide decisionmakers, ensure public accountability, and promote a continuously improving quality of life for all citizens." (see Goals)

The work plan involves three coordinated work groups:

1. The vision work group will integrate the many vision statements that have been produced by organizations, people, and institutions working for quality of life in Jacksonville into a new statement of community vision. This statement will guide JCCI's indicators work and will be validated annually through surveys.
2. The indicators work group will review and revise the whole set of indicators. In the process, it will also integrate concepts of sustainability into the selection and description of indicators, thereby establishing linkages among indicators and exploring the potential long-term impacts of short-term trends. It will broaden the geographic scope of the indicator reporting to include both neighborhood information and regional information. This will enable users of indicators data to understand issues of distributional equity and the metropolitan context of Jacksonville/Duval County. Finally, the group will also set new targets for the year 2005.

3. The advocacy and marketing work group will strive to get indicators on the desk and in the planning mindset of every CEO and public official. The group will also seek to make information-sharing a two-way street. JCCI's goal is not only to get indicators reports on the right desks, but also to increase cooperation among key local institutions, both public and private, to collect and report data needed for quality of life indicators. The group is currently considering the possibility of identifying and rewarding "responsible organizations," that is, of holding specific organizations responsible for actually changing trend lines by publicly recognizing and rewarding positive trend movements.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Defining quality of life

At the outset of the project, participants had to distinguish between the overlapping ideas of community quality of life and individual quality of life. They resolved to confine themselves to external factors whose impacts were measurable from a community perspective.

Data issues

Balancing the requirements of good data with the goals and values of the project is a recurring issue in annual reviews. Conflicts arise between the criteria for good data and the desires and values of the community. The limitations of available data, and the limitations of data in general, mean that the project can't always answer questions about the things the community wants to know most. The most common data issues are:

Availability | In the first document, produced in November of 1985, the group attempted to report data from 1970 through 1985, but found that such a record did not exist for most indicators.

How the issue has been dealt with. In the first update in 1986, the group decided to report indicators as far back as data was available for all the indicators, which meant that all indicators are reported back to 1983.

Consistency | Because of changes in the methodology of collecting some of the data that the indicators were based on, the Jacksonville project faced inconsistency in their data sets over time.

How the issue has been dealt with. Some indicators have been redefined and recalculated. For example, a measure of the incidence of child abuse and neglect had to be redefined several times as the Florida State Legislature repeatedly altered how child abuse cases are

defined and reported. The indicator was revised most recently in 1998, with consistent data available back only to 1992. Some indicators, to the regret of participants, have been dropped. For instance, an indicator of private philanthropy had to be dropped when the local United Way changed its methods of fundraising and reporting the results. An indicator of youth physical fitness had to be dropped when the local public schools discontinued administering the President's Physical Fitness Test to all students in certain grades.

Uncertainty of interpretation | Questions have been raised about the accuracy and clarity of survey data in measuring certain aspects of the quality of life. For instance, if the number answering "yes" to the question about whether race relations are a problem in Jacksonville increases, has the quality of life increased or decreased? Most have chosen the latter interpretation. However, according to an alternative interpretation, recognition of the problem is the first step toward finding a solution, so an increase could be construed as positive.

How the issue has been dealt with. JCCI's volunteer committee members have grappled with this issue each year, but have not yet crafted alternative questions that more clearly measure this aspect of the quality of life.

Comparability with other communities

Early on the Chamber of Commerce had an interest in comparing Jacksonville's quality of life with that in other cities. Responding to the Chamber's request, JCCI staff spent a year collecting comparative data that could be published with the trend-line data for the Jacksonville indicators.

How the issue has been dealt with. In the end, this effort was abandoned, for three reasons. First, comparable data were found to be available for very few of the indicators. Second, the search for these data led to an understanding of the unique qualities of Jacksonville and the realization that any comparison would inevitably be of apples and oranges. Third, both JCCI and the Chamber came to recognize the value of the project's implicit, initial premise—that the most important comparison was of Jacksonville with itself, over time.

Unsolved problems with targeting

Difficulties have been experienced with some of the ten-year targets. With only two years to go to the target year, volunteers have come to believe that a number of targets were set either "unrealistically" low (and have been met already) or high (and have no chance of being met despite some progress).

How the issue has been dealt with. These perceptions have led to the suggestion that

setting shorter-term targets would be more meaningful for the next time period. A decision has been made to set new targets for 2005, only five years into the future rather than ten.

Participation: achieving diversity and broad representation

How the issue has been dealt with. JCCI has partially relied on the high degree of diversity among participants in its other programs. In addition, staff give frequent presentations to community groups, many targeted for diversity. Nevertheless, young families, people with low income, and minorities still have relatively low participation rates.

MOVING INDICATORS INTO ACTION

At JCCI, there are three basic routes for moving indicators into contexts where they can be used to promote positive community change: (1) publication and distribution; (2) outreach and media; and (3) selection for the intensive, citizen-based Community Studies process, which entails further research, recommendations, and handoff to a volunteer Implementation Task Force for issue advocacy.

Publication and distribution

JCCI publishes several hundred reference documents and several thousand executive summaries. The reports are then distributed free of charge to libraries, public officials and agencies, and planning organizations.

Outreach and media

Press conferences | Each annual update is released at a press conference that is now co-hosted by the mayor of Jacksonville and the incoming chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. Press coverage and use of indicators was initially confined to one-time news reports related this event, though it has become much more frequent and more issue-oriented. The press conferences have helped local press become familiar with JCCI and thus contributed to their tendency to seek reference material from the indicators project.

Providing press with materials and graphics that shape issue coverage | As the indicator trend lines and targets provided more information each year, and as the press became familiar with the presence of indicators on the local scene, the media have increasingly come to JCCI for reference material and graphics relating to ongoing “hot button” public issues such as education, teen pregnancy, or racial relations (see Outcomes for examples).

Presentations | JCCI has a speakers' bureau, which gives some 150 presentations a year to local groups. Each year the Chamber of Commerce gives presentations on Jacksonville's quality of life indicators to the membership of its six Area Councils, as well as to its Board of Governors. Presentations have helped institutionalize indicators within the community.

Research to action: Community Studies and Implementation Task Forces

Jacksonville's Community Studies process, which combines in-depth study with recommendation and advocacy, provides a model with great potential for moving indicators into action. Community Studies predate QLJIP by a decade and are, technically speaking, separate processes. But in practice the two initiatives often inform one another (see Policy Outcomes).

JCCI uses the indicators as a guide for selecting major issues for their Community Studies. Conducted by the volunteer task forces who provide so much power to JCCI, these studies produce reports that delve deeply into all the factors involved in issues such as teen pregnancy, transportation access, the quality of education, and the effects of business incentives. Community Studies reports conclude with recommendations for action. The recommendations are then used by volunteer Implementation Task Forces as the basis of two-year educational and advocacy campaigns (in practice the campaigns often last longer than two years).

Action through other local entities

Other entities in the Jacksonville area also use indicators information as a basis for action. They may adopt an issue as a priority or theme based on indicator trends, or they may use indicator information as a general guide on an issue already of importance to them. JCCI's partners in its indicators work are particularly responsive to the information contained in the annual indicators updates. These partners include the city of Jacksonville, the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce, and United Way of Northeast Florida. Individual volunteers sometimes play the role of catalyst, through some combination of involvement with the indicators and the Community Studies process, stirring up a public activity that would not have occurred without their advocacy (see the example of sign permits below).

POLITICAL OUTCOMES

Community-building

Jacksonville's emphasis on consensus decisionmaking among volunteers brings diverse interests to the table to forge and commit to a clearly articulated and measurable agenda for the community. And when large institutions like the city of Jacksonville, the Chamber of Commerce, and the United Way help support that agenda, real community-building can result.

Community-building is made of many elements. In Jacksonville, most of these can be described as outgrowths of public credibility—or to put it more simply, trust. On the basis of this trust, JCCI can provide information, bring people together, and encourage them to use indicators in decisionmaking.

The QLJIP project is part of years of patient work that have established JCCI's reputation as an honest broker of information legitimately representing the interests of the whole community. Information and agendas produced by a strong, community-based organization with broad, long-standing credibility—as opposed to those produced by an institution such as a university or government, whose interest may be perceived as self-serving or out of touch—will generate their own credibility and community buy-in. The QLJIP project is one way that JCCI has positioned itself as a broad-based convener of interests providing neutral territory where citizens can work on potentially divisive issues such as racial relations, teen pregnancy, and the environment.

The project as a resource

Another outgrowth of public credibility is the project's status as a resource for those seeking relevant, reliable information. When the seeker of information is the media, the potential for political outcome is great.

The Florida *Times-Union* (the major daily newspaper in the area) frequently—at least weekly in the past year—quotes JCCI spokespeople and uses or mentions JCCI data, graphics, reports, and information in their coverage of local issues such as racial relations, teen pregnancy, water quality, and school reform. It also lists and covers JCCI publication releases and events, such as high-profile conferences and forums involving major figures on the local scene (for example, the mayor, the city council, government agencies, prominent business people). The *Times-Union* has referred to JCCI as “the well-respected community think tank.”²

2. Dec. 15, 1996, p. A-1, in a story on the current state of education reform that included quotes from JCCI's 1993 education study, from the JCCI executive director, and from a volunteer who participated in the 1993 study.

The *Jacksonville Business Journal* also carries several in-depth articles a year covering or making extensive reference to JCCI studies—such as those on solid waste, water quality, and business incentives—and has reported QLJIP’s economic indicators. The local public television station has used the nine quality of life elements as a guide for defining the content of local public-affairs programming.

Teaching indicators

JCCI promotes and teaches indicators as a method and recognizes they can be used for many purposes besides QLJIP’s community agenda. What JCCI teaches is the principles behind QLJIP: using indicators developed with community input as a tool for combining analysis of issues with advocacy around solutions. JCCI has conducted additional indicators work with city government, human-service funders, and others.

POLICY OUTCOMES

Policy outcomes have come in the form of the integration of quality of life indicators into institutional agendas in the public and nonprofit sectors and the movement of quality of life indicators into the Community Studies process. The quality of life indicators typically play a background role in the Community Studies; they help suggest the agenda (as one among several factors), continue to monitor the situation, and help shape press coverage as the advocates work. The integration of indicators into these processes has been a gradual, evolutionary process.

Institutional agendas

Indicators are being used to guide planning, decisionmaking, and resource allocation in the public and nonprofit sectors (the city of Jacksonville, the United Way, and the Chamber of Commerce). The city of Jacksonville consults the QLJIP indicators in their performance-budgeting process. For example, it refers to indicators such as “tons per capita of solid waste” and “public park acreage per capita” to help evaluate and plan public service delivery.

In 1994, the United Way of Northeast Florida funded JCCI to develop another, separate indicators project that tracks human-services indicators. That project, called the Community Agenda, has published annual reports since 1995. The United Way and other funders use these indicators to guide funding allocations. Many local human-service agencies use them, along with the quality of life indicators, to guide strategic planning and resource development. JCCI and the United Way have now agreed to a plan in which the two projects will be amalgamated within three years.

Over the years, the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce has actively responded to several specific indicators in its annual work plan. Examples include establishing a stewardship group to improve water quality in the St. Johns River, promoting dialogue around race relations, and facilitating public education reform. In the case of local water quality, for instance, the Chamber attracted a government grant to support an intensive public-information and awareness campaign designed to involve citizens in cleaning up the waters of the St. Johns River. Although the results are not scientifically measurable, the grant seems to have had the desired effect on public knowledge and attitudes about the river. To aid the realization of this new consensus, the Chamber helped establish a new private, nonprofit organization called Stewards of the St. John River, which sponsors a weekend river cleanup effort that has become a major annual event in the community. It is also carrying on the public-information and awareness activities begun under the original grant.

Community Studies: Education, Teen Pregnancy, and Billboards

Education | In 1991 the task forces who developed targets for the indicators had selected education as a “most important” element and the public high school graduation rate as the top-priority indicator for community action during the 1990s. The continued negative trending of the education indicators in the face of the high priority the community had assigned to education soon led JCCI to conduct a Community Study on improving the quality of public education. Released in 1993 and followed up by three years of advocacy, *Public Education: The Cost of Quality* quickly became an important catalyst for the major public education reform process that is still underway in Jacksonville.

The study has received considerable coverage in the local media and was still being mentioned as a reference point at the end of 1998. Many local citizens and organizations have participated in this reform movement, so tracking cause-and-effect outcomes would be difficult. No question remains, however, that JCCI’s recommendations and activities have strongly influenced the content of the movement.

Early in 1997, the Duval County School Board created the New Century Commission on educational reform and began the process of seeking a new superintendent. The commission met throughout 1997, with many opportunities for public input. The commission issued a massive report, which included 155 detailed recommendations to the School Board and community. The appointment of the commission and its subsequent efforts reflected in detail the 1993 JCCI recommendation that the School Board convene a communitywide process to determine a vision for local public education, along with specific goals and objectives and a strong system of accountability.

The story is far from over. As of the end of 1998, a new superintendent was in place, and work was getting started on the New Century Commission’s recommenda-

tions. Tangible outcomes will not become evident for years. When they do appear, the QLIP indicators will be tracking them.

Teen pregnancy | Among the quality of life indicators of the social environment, JCCI monitors “resident live births to females under 18 per 1,000 live births,” i.e., teen pregnancy. In 1995, JCCI released a Community Study on teen pregnancy called *Teenage Single Parents and Their Families* that had considerable results. The Implementation Task Force can point to successfully completed recommendations, including state legislation making it a felony for a man 21 or older to impregnate a girl 15 or under, and passage of a new Duval County Public Schools health curriculum that teaches the responsibilities of parenting and family life, refusal skills, and sex education.

Sign permits (billboards) | An earlier JCCI Community Study entitled *Visual Pollution, 1985* inspired the indicator development volunteers to adopt “the number of sign permits issued” as a quality of life indicator, including it in the Natural Environment element, which includes aesthetic as well as physical indicators.

JCCI lobbied the Jacksonville City Council to reduce the number of commercial signs—both on-site signs and billboards. Members of the city council approved an ordinance eliminating mobile signs and regulating on-site signs. However, they would not pass legislation limiting billboards.

In the spring of 1987, a group of Community Study veterans and other local activists, led by one of the Community Study task force members who had made a personal commitment to the issue (and who also happened to be a prominent local attorney), formed an advocacy group called Citizens Against the Proliferation of Signs (Capsigns). Capsigns organized a referendum to amend the city charter, greatly reducing the number of billboards along local streets and highways. The referendum passed. In 1988, the number of sign permits temporarily skyrocketed from the 2,000 range to the 4,300 range as companies raced to get their signs permitted before the five-year enforcement grace period ended.

In the last decade there have been some difficulties with the accuracy of the sign permit indicator, including inconsistencies in enforcement and the confusion caused when the city began issuing permits for taking signs down as well as putting them up. But the attention it attracted to the issue has nonetheless lead to successful action against the proliferation of billboards.

III. QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE TRUCKEE MEADOWS (QLTM)

THE LOCALE: TRUCKEE MEADOWS REGION, NEVADA

The regional planning area known as the Truckee Meadows is composed of the cities of Reno and Sparks as well as the southern part of Washoe County in Nevada. Washoe County covers 6,552 square miles, but this community of approximately 300,000 is spread on the valley floor covering about one third of that area. Surrounded by mountains but part of the arid West, the Truckee Meadows is a high desert. Nevada is the fastest growing state in the country, and while the majority of growth occurs in the southern part of the state, growth has been averaging 3 percent per year in the Truckee Meadows. Approximately 20 percent of the population consists of nonwhites, and is mostly Hispanic. The poverty rate in 1990 was 9.4 percent of the population.

Nevada's freepoint laws (tax exemptions for goods shipped through or warehoused in the state), abundant transportation options and warehousing capacity make the Truckee Meadows a major gateway to California and the Pacific Rim. Gaming and tourism are the backbone of the economy, but the region is also strong in trade, construction, and manufacturing. The Sierra Nevadas and Lake Tahoe offer an abundance of recreational opportunities. Low taxes and limited government are part of Nevada's conservative, rugged individualism and live-and-let-live philosophy.

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRUCKEE MEADOWS PROJECT

Truckee Meadows is a younger project than Jacksonville, and somewhat different in institutional character. Unlike Quality of Life in Jacksonville: Indicators for Progress (QLJIP), Quality of Life in the Truckee Meadows (QLTM) began as part of a government program aimed at regional planning. Indicators were one of the policy mandates of the local government's 1991 Regional Plan required by state law, and the project thus began under the auspices of the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency (TMRPA). The Truckee Meadows' indicators are more firmly institutionalized in the government planning process than Jacksonville's, although TMRPA built in the processes for public input, credibility, and support early on to ensure that the indicators guiding the Regional Plan truly address citizens' conception of their own well-being.

The QLTM project also differs from QLJIP in that it doesn't have a single organizational base. Though developed and initially maintained by TMRPA, the project is now is carried out by a partnership between TMRPA and Truckee Meadows Tomorrow (TMT), a private, nonprofit "association of associations" founded by the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada (EDAWN) to create and promote public consensus on the concept of quality of life in order to assist in economic development efforts.

Quality of Life in the Truckee Meadows has been largely geared toward providing information that helps the government realize the goals set in the Regional Plan. One of the main mechanisms through which it works is the Regional Planning Agency's process for approving or rejecting significant projects in land development. When these are proposed to the Planning Agency, agency staff are required to assess the project according to its probable impact on the quality of life indicators. Recently, however, the project has made great strides towards improving the community through paths other than government planning.

The recent "Adopt-an-Indicator" program, for example, has begun to extend responsibility for community well-being far beyond the limits of government. Adopt-an-Indicator invites individuals, organizations, businesses, and institutions to take responsibility for an indicator or indicators of their choice, suggests some means of doing so, and encourages discovery of others. Another major path into the community was opened in 1996, when Washoe Medical Center, an early founder and supporter of QLTM, gave a \$500,000 grant to TMT to make grants to collaborative projects which improve community performance on the quality of life indicators.

PARTICIPANTS

<p>QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE TRUCKEE MEADOWS</p> <p>Organizational Base</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Truckee Meadows Tomorrow (TMT) Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency and its Governing Board (TMRPA; RPGB) <p>Major Institutional Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Truckee Meadows Regional Government Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency and its Governing Board (TMRPA and RPGB function as both base and partner to the project) Washoe Health System Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada (EDAWN) <p>Community Input</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of Life Task Force, 100 citizen volunteers 3000 citizen volunteers and survey respondents

Coming together for quality of life: planning consolidation and growth controversy

Many informal approaches to regional planning had been used in the Truckee Meadows with varying degrees of success. In 1989, in response to concerns over infrastructure duplication, the Nevada State Legislature passed a law creating regional planning for Reno, Sparks, and the southern portion of Washoe County. The legislation required that a regional land-use plan be developed by the three local governments within 18 months and charged the newly formed Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency with “preparing a regional plan for the physical development and orderly management of the growth of the region for the next 20 years.”

During the late ‘80s a great deal of the discussion of regional planning in the Reno area centered on questions of growth. Although many people were benefiting from the burst in growth the area was experiencing, conflict was beginning to erupt at the neighborhood level around a number of land development projects. For instance, the residents of a historic neighborhood successfully organized against the Plumas Street expansion plan, which would have expanded and cut down the trees along a street running through their neighborhood. Approval of high-visibility projects, such as the MGM hotel-casino added to some residents’ concerns over limited resources such as water and housing. Much of the debate pitted “growth proponents”—those who felt the need for wider streets—against “no growth” advocates—those who wanted to preserve the historic neighborhood. How should growth occur? Where should it occur?

As the new planning region was being created, Citizens Alert, a grassroots group originally formed to fight the siting of nuclear waste dumps in the area, was circulating a petition for a ballot measure limiting population growth to 3 percent a year in the unincorporated county. Although the proposal never made it to the ballot, it attracted significant political attention and support. As the Truckee Meadows Regional Plan was being developed through a process of citizen input, Citizens Alert lobbied for incorporation of its proposed growth limits. But the many individuals, groups, and interests who strongly felt that growth was good for the region were lobbying, too.

Indicators and the Regional Plan

The consultant to the planning process, who was familiar with efforts like the one in Jacksonville, offered the concept of quality of life indicators as a way of mediating the growth conflict: Regional Planning would define and monitor quality of life. The Planning Commission accepted the idea, and named indicators the “number one major policy initiative” in the first Regional Plan. After all, the community had no clear picture of just what it was that was being compromised by growth, or how much it was being compromised. And if the indicators showed that quality of life could be maintained in the face of population growth, growth in that form would no longer be an issue. The

Commission initially committed to a Regional Plan specifying that if quality of life could not be maintained, population projections would be adjusted downward, thus limiting the projected expansion of infrastructure (roads, sewers, etc.) that development depends on. The pro- and anti-growth lobbies expressed, if not complete satisfaction, at least willingness to take a wait-and-see attitude.

In developing subsequent versions of the Regional Plan, the Planning Commission reasoned that, rather than mandating at the outset strict numerical limits on population growth projections, the Plan would entail watching the indicators to see if critical aspects of quality of life were changing, and if so, whether for better or for worse. If the region were unable to maintain its desired quality of life as measured and defined by indicators, the annual and five-year reviews of the Regional Plan would include consideration of stricter policies or programs (if not by limiting population projections than by imposing limiting conditions on development projects) to address those areas where the region had fallen short.

As part of the first major Regional Plan revision, the Planning Commission dropped the idea of limiting growth, despite the fact that the concept of growth limits had been a critical element of the original compromise. In taking it upon itself to adopt indicators without growth limits, the Commission has in effect carved out a third, middle alternative in the growth debate: neither no-growth nor pro-growth, but quality growth.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE TRUCKEE MEADOWS REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY (TMRPA)

- The Regional Planning Governing Board hears appeals, focuses on policy, and is the final regional planning authority. Four city council members from Reno, three council members from Sparks, and three commissioners from Washoe County compose the Board.
- The Regional Planning Commission makes the more technical land-use decisions and recommendations. The Commission is composed of three commissioners from each of the local planning commissions (Reno, Sparks, Washoe County).
- TMRPA has five professional staff members and interns.

Institutional partnership

As in Jacksonville, questions about the link between quality of life and economic development have been very much on the minds of the institutional founders, partners, and supporters of the project. And as in Jacksonville, representatives of business and government who shared a commitment to residents’ prosperity were responding to years of hearing major companies cite quality of life as a reason why they relocate to the Meadows.

About the time that the Regional Planning Governing Board was beginning the indicators development process, the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada (EDAWN) created Truckee Meadows Tomorrow (TMT), a community-based, private, nonprofit organization whose mission was to create and promote public consensus on the concept of quality of life to assist in economic development efforts. TMT was designed as an “association of associations.” Individuals belong to TMT as representatives of their diverse membership groups. Members include the leaders from a broad spectrum of associations representing ethnic groups, retirees, human service and education providers, environmentalists, arts and libraries supporters, law enforcement, and business (including the gaming industry, a prominent presence on the local scene).

EDAWN is a private nonprofit somewhat comparable to the Chamber of Commerce (with whom it often works) in its interests and constituency. In creating TMT, it played a similar role to that played by the Chamber of Commerce in Jacksonville. As a community-based organization whose quality of life goals developed out of business recognition of the link between economic vitality and community quality of life, TMT has some decided parallels with JCCI.

The Quality of Life Task Force

In 1992, the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency began the indicators process by appointing the volunteer Quality of Life Task Force, representing a broad spectrum of community leaders, to develop the indicators. TMT began to work with the Quality of Life Task Force at the end of 1992, forming the partnership between TMT and TMRPA that continues to carry the project. The indicators project has been a volunteer-driven, public/private partnership virtually from the beginning. In 1993, TMRPA hired a staff person to coordinate the process, representing their first financial investment in the quality of life process. TMT, as a membership organization, had a small budget used to pay for administrative support throughout the year. In addition, Washoe Health System, a regional health care provider, offered substantial in-kind contributions in the form of space and staff support to enable the project to get started.

In 1994, the institutional structure of the project shifted: Truckee Meadows Tomorrow combined with the Quality of Life Task Force under the TMT umbrella. TMT then signed a contract (Memorandum of Understanding) with the Regional Planning Governing Board to continue to provide public input into the quality of life process. In 1996, TMT agreed to pay part of the costs (staff and overhead) associated with the quality of life program, using part of a grant received from the Washoe Health System. Little changed at the planning level at that time, but TMT expanded its activities considerably, particularly in the area of public outreach and education.

As in Jacksonville, the Truckee Meadows indicators process involved a core group of about 100 people, including the twenty members of the Quality of Life Task Force, the thirty or so association representatives comprising TMT, and volunteer and advisory work groups in the different indicator areas. But hundreds of other citizens contributed at various phases (see below), amounting to over 3,000.

GOALS AND PURPOSES

As in Jacksonville, goals evolved. And as in Jacksonville, integration of the multiple goals of participants was an important driving factor. But the goal of planning integration was more specific than in Jacksonville, both because the project responded to a specific need to combine and rationalize the government planning of three local governments and because the initial goals of individual participants were not always well-integrated. Thus, a major challenge was integrating the goals of government planning with wider community goals (see Challenges, below). The goals were as follows:

- To define and measure quality of life in the Truckee Meadows based on residents' values in order to determine if community quality of life is changing for better or worse. "By the end of 1992, the Quality of Life Task Force and Truckee Meadows Tomorrow joined forces to work toward a common goal: to determine what residents of the Truckee Meadows value about where they live and how they live, and to develop a way to measure progress or improvements in these areas" (from *Tomorrow Begins Today; Washoe Health System 1994-95 Community Report*).
- To aid the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning agency in its mandate for "preparing a regional plan for the physical development and orderly management of the growth of the region for the next 20 years."
- To achieve a regional government that would have high levels of citizen participation, anticipate and solve regional issues and problems through coordination, and pursue a regional vision (from a Regional Planning Governing Board retreat). Rationalizing and coordinating the government planning of the three local governments combined into TMRPA was a major priority. The Regional Planning Governing Board, although it had representatives from all three local governments, had not coalesced into a body that worked together at the regional level; elected officials were still representing their local jurisdictions.
- To help integrate citizen participation into regional growth management planning.
- To get quality of life indicators adopted in specific ways as part of the Regional Plan. This goal may sound surprising given what would appear to be the government institutionalization of indicators at the outset. But despite the general mandate for indicators, the government has been slow to actually adopt them in some aspects of the planning process. There was a Regional Plan mandate to do indicators, but no

requirements or specifications for actually putting them in the Regional Plan. The goal of the project therefore soon became improving the integration of indicators into the planning process.

- To improve quality of life in the Truckee Meadows community. This general goal had been one of TMT's from the beginning, but within the project itself, this goal has not always been clearly articulated in relationship to the government goals. Although those government goals were a powerful initiating force, the QLTM project has had more rapid and dramatic successes in its nongovernmental partnerships (with the Washoe Health System, for example), although the integration of indicators into government planning is gradually catching up.

HOW THE PROJECT IS CARRIED OUT: STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

THE TEN ELEMENTS OF QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE TRUCKEE MEADOWS

Arts	Public safety
Education	Land use
Economy	Housing
Environment	Transportation
Health and human services	Government/politics

Developing the indicators

In 1992, the TMRPA took the first step of the indicators process by appointing the broad-based Quality of Life Task Force (see participants above). The Task Force had twenty members from diverse backgrounds: citizens' advisory boards, the arts, gaming (a major stakeholder in Nevada), planning, education, libraries, health care, tourism, seniors, environmental groups, the Hispanic community, the media, human services, and government. The Task Force met for over six months and became frustrated by a perceived lack of direction.

At this point, TMT began to work with the Task Force. At the first combined meeting in 1993, volunteers circulated a copy of Jacksonville, Florida's indicators report, which served as the starting point for the discussion. The two groups then appointed a steering committee consisting of members of the Quality of Life Task Force, TMT, and the Regional Planning Governing Board to design the work program for developing the indicators. While the Truckee Meadows used the Jacksonville model as a reference point, the Truckee Meadows steering committee designed the process to meet its own needs. But they followed the basic principle of getting broad community input in order to generate broad political support.

The Steering Committee designed a four-phase process:

Phase 1: **Brainstorming**

1. Jacksonville's *Quality Indicators for Progress Annual Report* was distributed to all present.
2. The group agreed to criteria for indicators similar to Jacksonville's.
3. The group established work groups according to indicator areas.
4. Each work group brainstormed indicators, resulting in a list of over 300 indicators to choose from.
5. Each work group met separately to narrow the list to 10 to 15 indicators for each area, resulting in the initial list of 300 being whittled down to 100 indicators.

Phase 2: **Public participation**

1. The group developed a process that would give people the opportunity to vote on and rank indicators using play "quality of life dollars."
2. The Quality of Life Task Force/TMT advertised for volunteers to act as facilitators in the public participation process.
3. The volunteers then took the show on the road to broaden the base of community participation to include dozens of community groups such as the disabled, gay and lesbian groups, minority and ethnic groups, veterans, students, and faith organizations. Volunteers made over 100 quality of life dollars presentations, raising awareness of quality of life issues and educating the community about indicators in the process. (Groups ranged in size from 4 to 400, with the average size being 20.) At each presentation, audience members ranked the indicators, using play money, according to their importance for measuring community quality of life. Over 2,000 people participated in this stage of the project and their rankings were compiled to narrow the list of indicators down to about 80.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE DOLLARS GAME

- The audience picks an indicator area of their interest and receives a second one to pair with it. For example, a group might pick the economic area and be assigned the environmental area. The groups have the option of adding indicator areas if they feel critical issues are being missed; these (such as the community appearance indicator) are then offered to subsequent groups.
- Each person receives a dollar for every indicator in the given area. If there are 10 economic indicators, each person gets ten dollars.
- The indicators are written on index cards.
- Participants then divide their dollars among indicators to represent their ranking. For example, they could put all their dollars on one indicator or one dollar each on ten indicators.
- The amounts are tallied for each indicator to produce a weighted priority for each one.

Phase 3: Communitywide testing

1. The next step was a mail and telephone survey of a demographically valid, random sample of 500 residents in the community using the indicators chosen in the dollars game. The steering committee worked with the newspapers to run these surveys as full-page ads in the two local newspapers, generating another 500 responses. The response from the papers generally tracked with the random sample, giving the steering committee a great deal of ammunition to support their recommendations.
2. The survey results were used to select the final 45 indicators in the following categories: arts and culture (ethnic expression, historic preservation, and the fine arts), economy, education (including life-long learning), environment, natural resources, parks and recreation, health, human services, government and politics, land use, housing and transportation, libraries and information systems, and public safety.

Phase 4: Recommendation

In the final phase, the steering committee worked with the community to ensure that the indicators would be adopted as an official part of the regional plan (see Implementation below). The Steering Committee approved a proposed amendment to the Regional Plan and worked together to present and lobby for the amendment before the Regional Planning Commission and Governing Board. TMT and Task Force members brought their memberships to key community meetings in support of the indicators. Volunteers continued to give presentations to community groups educating them about the importance of defining, monitoring, and advocating for community well-being. The indicators were finally officially adopted as part of the Regional Plan in August of 1994.

By the end of the development process, over 3,000 people had participated and the quality of life indicators had a level of community support (see Issues and Challenges below).

Maintaining the core task

Most of the work of gathering the data and compiling the annual report is carried out at the offices of TMRPA by a management analyst, an intern, and community volunteers. TMT organizes promotional events, press releases, and implementation programs such as Adopt-an-Indicator. They also disburse and administer community grants funded by a \$750,000 grant from the Washoe Health System (\$500,000 for grants and the rest for administration and publicity). In general, TMRPA carries out the technical work, while TMT does public outreach, promotion, and implementation. Volunteers help coordinate events, edit publications, and give presentations. TMT members serve on volunteer committees for grants allocations, events, government relations, and promotion of the Adopt-an-Indicator program.

The project publishes three products: *Quality of Life in the Truckee Meadows; Technical Policy Report: A Reference Document* (the complete annual report prepared at TMRPA); *Quality of Life in the Truckee Meadows; A Report to the Community* (the user-friendly summary of the report prepared by TMT, which highlights organizations working to improve quality of life in the region); and *101 Ways to Improve Quality of Life* (a one-time document to help people see the connection between indicators and action, prepared by TMT).

The Regional Government remains responsible for staffing and funding the annual report of the region's performance on the indicators. For three of the last four years, this has included paying for an additional survey on the perceptual indicators. (The perceptual indicators are those indicators among the 45 chosen to define quality of life that have to do with people's perceptions, feelings, and opinions.) In the 1997-98 budget year, the Governing Board voted to conduct the survey every other year, ostensibly to pick up longer-term trends and save money, but perhaps also as an expression of the business community's resistance to perceptual indicators (see Issues and Challenges below).

Maintaining the project also includes the annual and five-year reviews. The annual review is carried out by TMRPA staff through a series of reports in conjunction with the review of the Regional Plan. The five-year review, coming up in 2001, is carried out in public hearings before the Planning Commission and Government Board, and consists of a complete overhaul of the indicators similar to that in Jacksonville. TMT will also reexamine the indicators to ensure that they track whether or not the region is achieving its vision. This ties in with the original expectation that TMT would revisit the indicators every five years or so to ensure a consistent, valid set, much as Jacksonville has periodically revisited their indicator set.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Defining quality of life

The project had to develop a definition and framework for quality of life that would fit with the disparate views and perspectives held by the Regional Planning Governing Board, the Quality of Life Task Force, and Truckee Meadows Tomorrow. It also had to define quality of life in a way that was meaningful to the community. *How the issue has been dealt with.* A steering committee of representatives from Regional Planning, the Governing Board, the Task Force, and TMT designed the process. Continuous communication among the groups through presentations and meeting attendance is a priority.

The charge of the Regional Plan was to develop “quantifiable measures addressing critical aspects of quality of life.” Most citizens, when asked, respond that quality of life is very personal: family and friends, jobs, and daily lives.

It is worth noting the categories which were not included, primarily because the volunteers felt they would be impossible to quantify, such as the value of spirituality or faith. The project does not include measures of how people feel about their families, their professional prospects, or their ability to be self-sufficient; it does not include measures of the strength of informal support networks such as relatives and friends. These things may ultimately be the most important trends facing our communities. For example, a recent survey of American women by *Ladies Home Journal* noted that 66 percent of respondents say they’re lonely. The magazine concluded “this may be one of the greatest—and least noted—changes in women’s lives. Women now say they have no sense of community or belonging.”

Volunteers agreed to define quality of life more broadly—not just in planning terms. And whenever quality of life was presented, it was always framed as “quality of life in the community—the things the people who live here can agree are important for the community as a whole and that they want to protect for future generations.”

Choosing a model

Although there were many other indicators projects in the country by 1993, volunteers and staff on the Truckee Meadows project were only aware of Jacksonville’s. *How the issue has been dealt with.* The steering committee designed the project to meet its own ends. In retrospect, this made the process much stronger than it would have been had the committee simply followed the steps another community used. While it is important to learn from others, it is equally important to challenge all decisions and assumptions to make sure they will meet the criteria and work in the community using them. It cannot be emphasized enough that these processes must be unique.

Participation

Although the Task Force volunteers were from a variety of backgrounds, they really represented the “usual suspects” in community processes: the same church, business, human services, and community volunteers who consistently show up for community affairs.

How the issue has been dealt with. The project strategy is to expand the level of community and institutional support in small measure each year through a variety of programs and outreach efforts.

The goal was to reach far beyond the group that could always be counted on (and thus also ignored) and therefore to generate a larger political base for the indicators.

Again, the concern was with how to reconcile the diversity of goals to be achieved through indicators. This issue was addressed by the phases of the process in which volunteers went out into the community to have groups rank the indicators and narrow the list the core group had selected down to 100, and then using a mail and telephone survey to select the final 45 indicators (see Structure and Process above).

Community support and understanding

Many indicators projects wrestle with the need for community support and understanding. Some volunteers complain that the typical citizen doesn't understand or know about the indicators, but many other volunteers counter that widespread knowledge is not necessary. Lack of understanding of and support for perceptual indicators, particularly among some members of the business community, is a recurring theme, as when for the 1997-98 budget year, the Governing Board voted to conduct the perceptual survey every other year.

How the issue has been dealt with. Presentations to community groups aim to increase community understanding. The Adopt-an-Indicator program and the publication *101 Ways to Improve Quality of Life* also address this issue. The project strategy is the same as that for achieving participation: gradual expansion of awareness through a variety of programs and outreach efforts.

The business community has stressed from the beginning that perceptual, "touchy-feely" concerns have no place in the development process. Any opposition they have to the use of the indicators in land-use decisions begins with this objection. There is a very strong sentiment in the Truckee Meadows community, as in most, that numbers are objective representations of "quality of life." However, numbers are merely abstract symbols used to count things. Every indicator is a very limited glimpse at a much more complex reality. Volunteers are alternately very invested in and very skeptical of different statistics. Part of this process involves the continual education of the volunteers, and also the public, about what numbers can and cannot do or represent.

To address business concerns about "feelings" influencing the development process, reports typically pair perceptual indicators with "hard" indicators. For example, "feeling of safety" is reported with the crime index; community appearance is reported with the air quality and litter indexes.

The role of government vs. the role of the public

Clearly, organizational goals for the indicators will dictate how much public involvement is needed. If the indicators are designed to change individual behavior, a large number of individual citizens must understand them. The political process, however, unfolds in a narrower segment of the community. A select number of people can

influence policy and programming for both nonprofits and businesses.

How the issue has been dealt with. Unlike Jacksonville, the process in the Truckee Meadows was originally designed to influence government policy to preserve quality of life. Political support was a means to that end, yet in many ways, the public has been quicker to respond than the government.

The advantages and disadvantages of being structurally linked to government

Government processes tend to take longer than private projects due to the necessity of meeting notice requirements and other regulations. As a result, it took almost a year to select the indicators and another nine months to get the indicators adopted into the Regional Plan.

How the issue has been dealt with. Building on the project's credibility by reaching out to the community in other ways (the Washoe Health grants, the Adopt-an-Indicator Program) has increased effectiveness. Meanwhile, the indicators were at last adopted in the Regional Plan in 1994 and became part of the annual reporting and planning cycle, thus ensuring their regular role in the decisionmaking process. For example, the Planning Commission now prepares memos on every significant development proposal, detailing the probable impact of the project on high-priority quality of life indicators (see Outcomes).

But the project must continuously work with the fact that local planning departments are already overworked and are not receptive to providing additional information as a part of the development process. However, negotiations continue over the most effective way to use the indicators as a part of the planning process.

MOVING INDICATORS INTO ACTION

In the last several years, Truckee Meadows Tomorrow has used indicators to deliver the message that every individual, every organization, and every business has something to contribute to the region's quality of life. TMT plans to continue to expand the impact and political support the indicators have had.

- In 1997 and '98, TMT produced its first "community report," a user-friendly summary of the indicators process that featured organizations working to improve the quality of life in the region. This report is a powerful tool for economic development efforts for the same reason found in Jacksonville: companies looking to relocate already know how well the community is performing in these areas; it is impressive when a community can outline plans to address weak areas rather than try to minimize the flaws.
- Together with the Regional Governing Board, TMT hosted "Accentuate the Positive,"

a lunch in October of 1997, at which over 80 individuals, organizations, government entities, and businesses were given “Silver Star” awards to recognize their contributions to the community’s quality of life (Nevada is the “Silver State”). Over 1,000 people attended the event, which focused on the positive work being done in the community. The goals of the event included increased public awareness of the indicators as well as focusing community energy toward addressing the remaining “red flag” indicators. This event finally brought the newspaper to the table; as an underwriter they provided not only a financial contribution to the event, but also well over \$10,000 worth of in-kind coverage. All of the local television stations co-sponsored the event and provided coverage as well.

- Drawing on Jacksonville’s “Community Improvement Studies,” TMT intends to create a similar process, using the studies based on its indicators report as vehicle, to expand its involvement in quality of life improvement initiatives and to broaden its purpose beyond the regional planning process.
- In its annual report and executive summary, TMT promotes groups whose activities it judges to be linked with improvements. Since receiving the grant from the Washoe Medical System, TMT has also been able to disburse grants to such groups (see Outcomes).

POLITICAL OUTCOMES

Political support and legislation

The indicator process functioned as a vehicle for generating the political support necessary to ensure that selected indicators would represent the diverse views of the community and ultimately be officially adopted into the Regional Plan. Truckee Meadows Tomorrow and Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency gathered input from over 3000 residents in the region, enabling them to stand behind the indicator set that was officially adopted into the Regional Plan in 1994.

As a result of the quality of life process and reporting in Reno, several Las Vegas legislators introduced a bill requiring Las Vegas and other cities throughout the state to establish similar quality of life indicators projects to promote growth management. Bills requiring indicators per se were not adopted in 1997; however, a committee was created to conduct a two-year study on growth management and quality of life issues in southern Nevada. The study committee will make recommendations for improvements to regional planning efforts in the 1999 legislature.

Community visioning

In the past year, a great deal of enthusiasm has formed around the notion that the region must develop a community vision to guide it into the future. The Economic

Development Authority is developing a vision for attracting new business. The Convention Authority is pursuing a vision to sustain the tourism industry. A grassroots coalition of citizen activists is developing a vision for managed growth. The Human Services Association is updating the community's social services vision. And the Regional Governing Board wants to develop a new regional land-use vision.

The annual indicators report will provide a common information base for the visioning processes underway, and TMT will be a catalyzing organization to bring these visions together. Once a new vision, or set of visions, is developed in the community, TMT plans to reexamine the indicators to ensure that they track whether or not the region is achieving its vision.

POLICY OUTCOMES

The Regional Plan

Truckee Meadows Tomorrow has been successful in using the quality of life indicators to introduce more stringent policies in the Regional Plan. When the Regional Plan was undergoing its first major revision (1995-96) as required by law, TMT worked to incorporate many policies which addressed quality of life issues. For example, TMT recommended adding policies which supported an integrated system of parks, trails, and open spaces. The Regional Plan sections on schools, libraries, and community centers was strengthened. And several new sections were added to the plan: public health and human services, tourism, community appearance, and government leadership.

In 1994, the quality of life indicators were officially adopted as a part of the Regional Plan. This was the beginning of the policy whereby the Planning Commission must prepare memos on every significant development proposal, detailing the probable impact of the project on quality of life indicators. Memos have dealt with proposals such as bicycle paths, new casino complexes, and affordable housing.

Improving quality of life through the adoption of indicators

Like Jacksonville, TMT finds that many businesses and nonprofits use the annual indicator reports for their strategic planning, environmental scans, grant writing, and grant making processes. TMT is also working to improve the community's performance on the quality of life indicators directly. This aspect of the work has evolved a great deal over the years while the policy-level work continues at a slow pace. TMT has developed an Adopt-an-Indicator program as a way to acknowledge that improving quality of life is the responsibility of the entire community. Corporations, nonprofit organizations, and individuals have already adopted indicators and are taking action to improve local quality of life. The Washoe Health System, working in partnership with TMT, has adopted all

of the quality of life indicators related to health care. Other organizations that have adopted indicators include four local television stations (who put out PSAs), the Truckee River Yacht Club (who do river cleanups and seek delineation of a River Corridor), and Join Together (who combat substance abuse).

Washoe Health System has created award-winning advertising and public relations campaigns urging people to wear their seatbelts, stop smoking, and avoid drugs. These campaigns feature billboards and radio spots to drive home these critical messages. Washoe Health System also uses the indicators to monitor the performance of many of their initiatives, including immunizations, prenatal care, breast cancer screenings, and the cost of health care. Over a dozen businesses and organizations have adopted indicators, and TMT continues to look for new partners in this endeavor.

In 1996, Washoe Medical Center gave TMT a \$750,000 gift to create a grants program for the Quality of Life Indicators. From that grant, \$250,000 is available over five years to offset administrative costs of the program in cooperation with the Regional Government. Of the \$500,000 remaining, \$100,000 is available in each of the next five years to give grants to collaborative projects that would demonstrably improve performance on quality of life indicators. To date, fourteen grants have been given to address the drop-out rate, the crime rate, water quality, and arts education, among other indicators.

1997 TRUCKEE MEADOWS TOMORROW GRANTS (FUNDED BY THE WASHOE MEDICAL SYSTEM)

1. The Affordable Housing Resource Council received \$11,000 for a program to provide training in bond financing for Council members and developers to help bring down housing costs through the use of tax-exempt bonds. This project was designed to impact the quality of life indicator "number of households below the median income spending 30 percent or more of their income on housing." Over 260 affordable units were built using tax-exempt financing in 1998, with at least another 400 on line for 1999.
2. The Reno Police Department received \$25,000 for a camp where teens undergo intense physical and mental conditioning to teach self-confidence, discipline, and education. The project was designed to impact the indicators "school dropout rate," "parental involvement in schools," and "crime index." Seventy-five percent of the mentors following the students reported positive changes in student behavior.
3. The Community Chest-Pinon Service Project received \$30,000 for a program to promote community-building efforts by creating a youth voice and mediation services program. The project was designed to impact "school drop out rate" and "feeling of safety in the community." Students in an at-risk high school program who participated in this training designed and implemented a community service project in which high school students visit a nearby day care center and read to children once a week.
4. The Young Masters Chess Club received \$21,440 for a program to start chess clubs in eight elementary schools. The project was designed to impact "Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills scores." Teachers report improvements in achievement among students who participated.

(Each grant recipient is working in collaboration with several other organizations.)

IV. FINDINGS

SUCSESSES

Both Jacksonville and Truckee have created a set of meaningful indicators that communicate what residents value most about their community and monitor progress toward achieving those goals. The majority of our nation's communities continue to be defined and evaluated in terms of average income, the number of new jobs created, and new housing starts, but these measurements say little about how these changing economic, social, and environmental trends are impacting the landscape, faces, and values within a community. Both Truckee and Jacksonville have shown how it is possible to broaden the way a community measures quality of life to reflect social, environmental, and economic concerns.

Expressing quality of life issues in quantitative terms adds richness to decision-making by giving issues often dismissed as “soft” (quality of life) the kind of priority and legitimacy too often granted only to issues typically considered “hard” (e.g., economics), and helps reveal the connections between them. The promise of economic benefits may prove to be a strong selling point even for indicators projects with other goals.

Jacksonville pioneered the quality of life model, developed the criteria for viable data, and established links between indicators, research, and advocacy. For Jacksonville, having a strong, long-standing, community-based sponsoring organization has enabled the project to evolve in accordance with the community's needs and readiness. Out of that base came Jacksonville's commitment to community-based, consensus decisionmaking and research, its power to inspire volunteers and its ability to foster trust. Jacksonville's Community Studies provide a model for moving indicators into action: further research followed by recommendations and targeted advocacy.

The Truckee Meadows is a rare, significant example of how a true partnership between government and nongovernment organizations can lead to creative strategies for motivating action and improving quality of life. The project succeeded in growing beyond its government mandate by reaching out to the community for new institutional partners and community commitments. The Adopt-an-Indicator program and the allocation of Washoe Medical System grants provide further models for moving indicators into action.

The Adopt-an-Indicator program broadens responsibility for change beyond the inner circle of project participants and partners, reaches out to individuals, educates the public, and provides a source of new partnerships and participants. Grants allocation, such as that made possible by the partnership with Washoe Medical, is one of the most promising contexts for indicators. Allocating resources from within a project helps preserve the integrity of the community's goals (grant recipients must demonstrate that their proposal affects a selected indicator or indicators). However, if a project's organizational base is not geared toward grants allocation or has not (yet) secured the resources, strong links with the grants allocation of an institutional partner can also be effective, as in Jacksonville's relationship with the United Way.

Both Jacksonville and the Truckee Meadows have succeeded in developing institutional, organizational, and individual networks. They have helped build community identity, belonging, and commitment; raised awareness about and understanding of the areas they monitor; and served as information resources for media, business, government, and advocacy.

MEETING CHALLENGES AND CONFRONTING LIMITATIONS

Community indicators are a long-term investment. They are iterative and evolutionary by nature. Their ultimate effects—particularly as regards political outcomes—are cumulative, long-term, diffuse, and dependent on the project's constant presence on the community scene over decades of time. Projects must be patient and persistent. Patience should not be confused with passivity. It means maintaining a long-term outlook.

Indicators can put issues on the public agenda, but they don't produce change in and of themselves. Determined citizens produce change—through years of hard political work. Indicators reports themselves are not strategic plans for action. But they can be an effective information resource for such plans, particularly when the indicators process is carried out in such a way as to foster political will.

Increasing the broadness and diversity of participation remains a fundamental challenge, as does integrating the multiple goals of clients with goals of the community, and integrating indicators into institutions, especially government, in an effective way.

The greatest challenge of indicators projects may be in increasing citizen participation, particularly in the area of engaging marginalized populations in the process. These populations often have the most at stake and often do not participate in the discussions. This is one area in which the community indicators movement must create a goal to search for strategies that can more effectively balance representation of the "usual suspects" in community processes with the "unusual suspects" that have an equal stake in the process.

As indicators are not an inherently intuitive concept, projects must continuously work to achieve and maintain public and funder awareness and understanding. Perceptual indicators have often proven to be the hardest to grasp, often perceived as “touchy-feely” considerations with no place in the development process. Projects should be prepared to educate participants and the public at all phases of the project.

Projects have learned that information alone is not enough. High-quality information is not a guarantee that an action taken on the basis of it will be successful, nor is the success of an action necessarily due to good information. Information is, in the terms of logic, necessary but not sufficient. Political action is like anything else in life: there are no guarantees, and many efforts may fail before their concerted, tenacious, persistent combination—or some other factor altogether—produces results.

An indicator may contribute to raised awareness about a problem (a political outcome), coalitions being formed (a political outcome), funding being allocated (a policy outcome), or a program or campaign being launched (a policy outcome). It may be incorporated into government planning. But whether and to what degree our efforts succeed, particularly those aimed at intractable problems with multiple causes, such as poverty, is another matter entirely. We share Judith Innes’s caution that “in the midst of the ebb and flow of a complex world . . . it is impossible to isolate the ‘output’ of a policy except in the most trivial sense. . . .”³

Since indicators cannot in and of themselves effect change, they need to be part of a tool box of community empowerment that includes outreach, research, advocacy, coalition-building, volunteer power, links to resource allocation, and strong institutional relationships with committed members of the government, business, human-services, advocacy, and nonprofit communities. It is our hope that projects use the cases of Jacksonville and the Truckee Meadows to visualize, plan, and create the vital context necessary for effectiveness.

LESSONS LEARNED

Process itself leads to outcomes.

Process is tightly linked to political outcomes, which begin before the first measurement even takes place. The process of indicators development—with its insistence on consensus decisionmaking among volunteers—forces diverse interests to come to the table to forge and commit to a clearly articulated and measurable consensus about what is good for the community.

3. Judith Innes, “Indicators for Collective Learning and Action: Rethinking Planning for Complex Systems” [pending], presented at University of Newcastle, Department of Town and Country Planning, 50th Anniversary Conference, 25-27 October, 1996, UK.

Citizen participation is key in both government-driven and community-based projects.

Citizen participation is definitive; that is, it's the difference between community indicators and other kinds of indicators. Citizens can have more leverage with top government officials since officials (especially elected officials) are ultimately accountable to citizens. If top officials see that members of their constituency have participated in a project, the project might receive more attention and support. Additionally, such a process can bridge communication among government departments and nonprofit organizations, allowing a broader approach to an indicator project from within government itself.

The selection of indicators determines what is meant by quality of life, and therefore sets the agenda for change. Hence the importance of community participation in the process of selecting and developing the indicators. When people set the agenda, they are more likely to work for it. Broad public participation determines quality and legitimacy of the information by ensuring that the project represents the community's values as accurately as possible. Participation also matters because participants are the frontline in implementing change.

Although institutional partnership remains a key factor in both process and implementation, much has depended on the leadership of individuals, whether exercised from within organizations or on the part of individual citizens. Sometimes the power of individual citizens can be surprisingly great, as in the case of one Implementation Task Force member, who happened to be a lawyer, who adopted a decrease in sign permits for billboards as his personal issue, lobbying the city council and even going so far as to initiate legal action against them.

Goals must be clearly defined and redefined as the project progresses.

A clearly stated purpose, which may either be community driven, government driven, or both, helps to define the long-term goals of the project and to engage most effectively members of the community in the process of determining community indicators and achieving community goals. Fundamental questions must be addressed to identify the purpose of the overall indicator process. Will the process and the resulting report stimulate community action around a particular issue that impacts quality of life? Will the process influence public policy? How a community answers these questions will influence the role of public participation in the effort and will determine the role of institutional involvement in implementing local and regional strategies aimed at improving quality of life.

In the case of Jacksonville, JCCI viewed the indicator process as a vehicle for stimulating community action on a variety of quality of life issues. Although questions

about the link between economic vitality and quality of life were on the agenda, they were not expressed in terms of growth as they were in Truckee. Truckee Meadows' goals were framed by the state legislation that created the regional planning agency for the explicit purpose of managing growth.

These organizational settings and institutional purposes can have great influence on goals and purposes. A project hosted or partnered by an environmental or religious organization, for example, might look very different from either Truckee or Jacksonville.

But generally speaking, the indicators process involves diverse participants and clients with multiples goals. Though it can be a challenge, the process of integrating multiple goals of participants has significant benefits. Initial meetings of disparate stakeholders lead to modest expectations that allow the diverse stakeholders to go forward into the process. The shared learning process and interdisciplinary understanding lead to the creation of common-ground agendas and to the gradual and organic growth of goals.

Moving indicators into action requires planning implementation strategies from the outset.

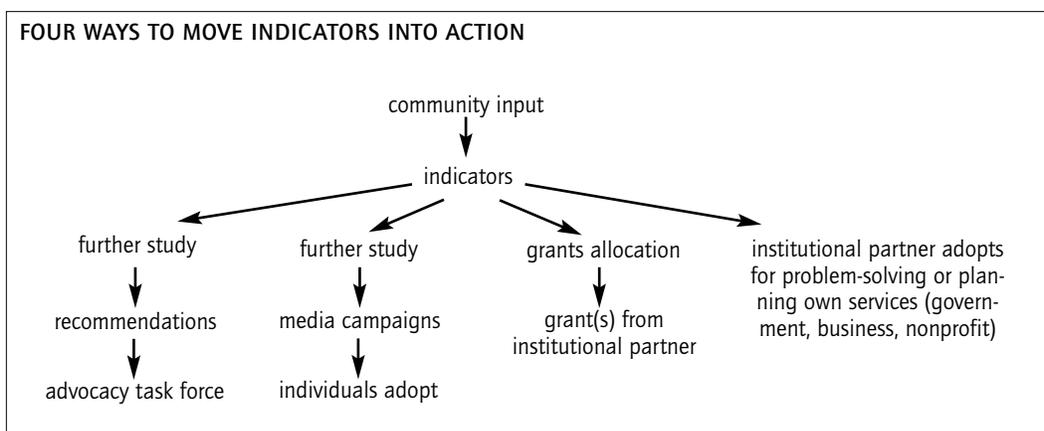
Projects can now benefit from the lessons of early experimenters like Jacksonville and recent innovators like Truckee to plan implementation and advocacy planning from the very beginning. The first step in such planning is continually verifying that indicators meet the Jacksonville criteria (understandability, relevance, accuracy, etc.). These are not simply scientific criteria, although some of them are also that. They are criteria for making information that advocates, decisionmakers, and planners can use. The second step is making sure that potential implementers are in the picture from the outset; this is done through process and participation.

As indicator projects move toward a more active role, they must balance the following considerations:

- commitment to political activism vs. credibility as an honest, nonpartisan broker of information. How a project ultimately balances these greatly depends on what kind of organization is hosting the project, how the project fits into its other activities, and whether or not the project is the organization's first, only, or primary activity. A project hosted by an environmental organization will make different choices than a government-based project.
- the advantages and disadvantages of plugging into given institutional partners and funding sources. It can make a tremendous amount of difference whether these are government, business, foundations, or activist, issue-oriented organizations.
- the need to promote the community vs. the need to constructively engage with its problems.
- working from within the project vs. handing off information to others.

Implementation and outcomes can come from within the organization that compiles the report, from its institutional and individual partners and supporters, or from any individual, institution, or organization that has access to the reports and decides to act on the information.

Jacksonville’s Community Studies process offers one promising model of action from within the project itself, while the Truckee Meadows’ Adopt-an-Indicator offers a promising model for handing information off to others and broadening implementation beyond the frontline of participants. Links to committed institutions and grants allocation are also effective routes to action.



Political outcomes are important, especially public credibility and community self-determination.

Community indicators projects are investments in local empowerment. In the short term, political outcomes are sometimes difficult to specify and grasp. In the long term, they may prove to be more powerful than policy outcomes.

The significance of political outcomes can be summed up by the remarks of Mavis Chidzonga, a member of Zimbabwe’s parliament on a visit to Jacksonville, who brought home a community indicators kit from JCCI to help her promote government responsiveness to citizens. “At least issues like this are on the platform here; people realize they’re there and they realize that it’s important. That’s a very important first step toward making progress. In Zimbabwe, we’re still trying to put many of these issues on the platform.” Or as JCCI executive director Lois Chepenik said of the meeting, “She heard about our ability to bring people and government together for consensus building. People want to be empowered, to have some say over their lives, whether they’re in Jacksonville or Zimbabwe” (Beau Halton, “City draws international attention,” *Florida Times-Union*, 7/9/97, p. B-3).

The general orientation, direction, and awareness of the people who staff the institutions that implement policy outcomes—government, human services, and business—may ultimately be of equal or greater importance for institutions as well as for the public. If a particular policy fails, a persistent vision and commitment to goals will increase the likelihood of further attempts in the desired direction. You don't necessarily need community indicators if what you are interested in is purely technocratic policy outcomes—specialized sets of indicators (e.g., human service) developed without benefit of the community process can work adequately for this. But community indicators are different than other kinds of indicators precisely because they link and deliver both political and policy outcomes.

It would therefore represent a profound misunderstanding of community indicators to rank political outcomes as of secondary importance or merely preliminary to policy outcomes. If the political outcomes we identify here are preliminary to anything, it would be to empowering citizens by giving them greater say in their lives.

The most important political outcome may be one that participants rarely articulate, although the various political outcomes discussed in these cases (awareness, credibility, consensus, identity, common goals, publicity) are its key ingredients: the building of a political base. When people come together to set common goals for their communities, it is the first step towards a new politics that insists those goals be met.

At the Colorado Forum on National and Community Indicators, Jacksonville staffers listed six keys to success they call the six "P" words:

1. **Participation.** Citizens say what is important to measure, and continually review the relevance of the indicators.
2. **Patience.** Indicators are part of a community-building process, and that takes time. Building citizen awareness and understanding is the groundwork for advocacy, and that takes time.
3. **Process.** Process is as important as the product, or rather, there are outcomes at every level of the process. Citizen participation is critical.
4. **Persistence.** Commitment to data collection, to the public participation process, and to the financial and staff resources needed to continue the project year after year.
5. **Pragmatism.** Accept that not all things a community wants to measure can be measured immediately. Stick with those that can be measured meaningfully.
6. **Perfection.** Demand that the research leads to no question about the validity of an indicator. Without unquestionable validity, communitywide buy-in is impossible.