Key Factors in Developing a Community Indicator Report
– Building Best Practice in British Columbia

by

Brent Allan Mueller
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We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

[redacted]

Dr. Warren Magnusson, Supervisor (Department of Political Science)

[redacted]

Dr. Norm Ruff, Department Member (Department of Political Science)

[redacted]

Dr. Rod Dobell, Outside Member (School of Public Administration)

[redacted]

Dr. Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, External Examiner (School of Public Administration)

Supervisor: Dr. Warren Magnusson

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the lessons learned from five community and regional indicator pilot projects funded by the B.C. Provincial Government in 2001-02. These projects were in Alberni-Clayoquot, New Westminster, Powell River, Quesnel, and Sechelt. Only in New Westminster and Quesnel were the projects completed, although significant progress was made in Sechelt and (to a lesser extent) Powell River. It is too early to tell whether the effort at indicator development will bear fruit in improved policy-making, but there is evidence to suggest that the process strengthened relations between decision-makers and clarified thinking on the issues to be addressed and the means to be used in measuring progress. The most successful pilot projects were in communities with strong support from local leaders, significant local research capacity, extensive experience in community development work, good relations between key officials, and a manageable scale to the areas under consideration. Where there was a history of difficult community relations (Alberni-Clayoquot) or where the region was too large and diverse (Powell River - Sunshine Coast), it was difficult to get the process moving. Even under more favourable conditions, local priorities were sometimes at odds with provincial ones – especially the deadlines imposed by the province. The main lessons from these pilot projects are that (1) not all communities are willing and able to develop the comprehensive indicators that would be useful for policy-making, (2) the communities that do have the capacity need to be able work at a pace appropriate to them, and (3), even if the indicators themselves are not put to immediate and extensive use in policy-making, the process of developing them can be beneficial in terms of local capacity-development.

Examiners:

[redacted]

Dr. Warren Magnusson, Supervisor (Department of Political Science)

[redacted]

Dr. Norm Ruff, Department Member (Department of Political Science)

[redacted]

Dr. Rod Dobell, Outside Member (School of Public Administration)

[redacted]

Dr. Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, External Examiner (School of Public Administration)

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As well I need to thank Erik Karlsen, Anthony Hodge and Geoffrey Thornburn for introducing me to the world of indicators and providing guidance and mentoring to me over the years. Much of your teaching and wisdom has been woven into this thesis.

I also need to acknowledge the pilot leaders and community volunteers who worked on each of the pilot projects described in this thesis. In particular I would like to thank Vicki Austad (New Westminster), Maureen Young (Quesnel), Bruce Milne (Sechelt) and Cheryl Wilson (Powell River).

Finally I need to thank my good friend Dan Hare "Pope". We have had many interesting conversations over the years on numerous topics and in many places – often fuelled by the fact that we occupy opposite positions on the ideological scale. These discussions have taught me many things including the need to respect diverse views and the challenge we all need to embrace – in my mind – to find that common thread in our dialogue that we can move forward on.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Audrey Panter and Mackenzie Mueller (my family). My partner and daughter are each a constant reminder of why civil servants and social scientists must explore ways to improve our world so that we can maintain a sustainable environment, an equitable economy and a supportive society.

Preface

In an increasingly complex world, governments, interest groups and citizens continue to struggle over the determination of critical issues and what the public sector, private companies and individuals can do to respond to these issues. In this context, social, economic and environmental indicators can be used to help bring clarity to public debate.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore key conditions and strategies that can improve the development and implementation of a community level indicator project. The major basis for this work is the experience and evaluation of five BC Provincial Government pilot projects launched in 2001 and completed in 2002 in cooperation with the communities.

Along with a review of indicator practice in North America and BC in particular, this thesis will explore community indicator pilot projects in Alberni-Clayoquot, Powell River, Sechelt, New Westminster and Quesnel. As there is continuing interest in indicator development in British Columbia at all levels, the collective experience of these projects may provide important lessons for other communities.

It is unusual for a civil servant to have the opportunity to write a thesis about his work. The author's employer – the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services of the Province of British Columbia (formerly Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers) – needs to be acknowledged for affording the opportunity to work with "real time" subject matter. While this account is based on documentary evidence in the public realm, having ready access to necessary reports and other materials from within the Ministry was of great assistance.

This thesis relied on internal materials prepared by the Ministry during the design and implementation of the pilot projects. Other materials included progress reports prepared by the project leaders along with meeting notes documenting the discussion and key decisions made by the Steering Committees in each of the communities. For the

Quesnel and the New Westminster projects the ultimate outcome of their efforts were indicator reports that became an important source materials to help document those two experiences. While final indicator reports were not completed in Powell River and Sechelt, the Coastal Community Network did provide an exit report to the Ministry outlining the progress of their projects and the reasons why indicator reports could not be completed. That report was also an important resource for this thesis.

Other source material for this thesis included the content of email messages and phone conversations. While these sources did not all deliver direct material for this thesis it should be acknowledged that these exchanges contributed to the overall story developed by the author to document the experience of this pilot initiative. As well, it should be noted that more generally the author's direct participation in the process and activities behind the design and implementation of the initiative provided a range of experience that fed directly into the content of this thesis both in terms of the documentation of events and the analysis.

This thesis also relies to some extent on a limited number of questionnaires that were filled out and returned from Steering Committee members (community volunteers) who participated in the New Westminster and Quesnel projects. It was the author's intention to provide the questionnaires to Steering Committee members from all of the projects once they were completed but given the way the other projects evolved this was not possible in the end.

A final key source of information for this thesis was the record of discussion from a meeting held at the offices of the Fraser Basin Council in June 2002, to explore the outcomes of the pilot projects. The meeting included participants from the New Westminster and Quesnel projects along with representatives from the federal and provincial governments who had been involved in the project. The agenda for the half-day discussion was developed in consultation with Tony Hodge – a consultant who had helped the Ministry develop and implement the pilot initiative. The meeting explored the opportunities, success factors and challenges associated with each of the tasks the

pilot leaders were asked to undertake as part of the development of their indicator reports.

Obviously it has been an advantage for the author to have been involved in the design and implementation of the pilot projects and it must be acknowledged that this unique perspective probably influenced the direction and content of this thesis. But on the basis of the written record that is publicly accessible, others could have undertaken the same analysis.

Finally, the intent of this thesis is not to point out the strengths and weaknesses of individuals, organizations, government or communities, but to identify some lessons about how local indicator reporting can be improved. Indeed one of the purposes behind pilot initiatives is to learn how to do things better. Given the continued interest in indicator development at all levels in the province the author hopes this account of the pilot projects will contribute to the ongoing discussion.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

To indicate generally means to point out, or make known, observable signs or symptoms. These signs or symptoms are called indicators that can provide direction to decision-makers who can use this information to choose between different options. As an example, a person's body temperature is an indicator of health. For the decision-maker – a medical health practitioner – an above average body temperature can help identify the need for medical treatment. There are many different kinds of indicators developed and used by all segments of our society to help us make decisions – including the public sector. This thesis is concerned about whether or not indicators can be developed and used to improve public sector decision-making at the local level. To be clear to the reader, here is a more comprehensive definition for 'indicator':

> An indicator is a signal, typically measurable, that could reflect a quantitative or qualitative characteristic, and that is important for making judgments about system conditions – now, in the past, or in the future. Such judgments are facilitated by making a comparison between existing conditions and an explicit standard, target, benchmark, or some other form of reference. The result is a measure of system performance.[1]

While the development and use of indicators to help in decision-making can be traced back over the past few centuries, significant efforts did not emerge until the later part of the 20th Century. Since the early 1990s, there has been a significant increase in the use of indicators as a management tool in both the private and the public sectors. Private corporations and industry typically use indicator data to measure their performance and to provide direction on how to increase efficiency and reduce costs. In the public sector, indicators are used in many different ways from the very specific application of program evaluation to the broader use of tracking environmental, social or economic outcomes at all levels.

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[1] Anthony Hodge, Community Sustainability Assessment, Final Report, July 2001. p. 22.

Indicator data can also be aggregated into elaborate indexes for comparative analysis to measure differences between places or other things. This is a powerful way to try and bring attention to an issue. In a recent article in the Vancouver Sun, pollster Angus Reid said: "These indexes and measures are more than just statistical trivia. That's because they are used to support a particular position or advance the case for change."[2] Of course indexes are fraught with pitfalls in terms of the judgements needed in their design and the difficulty in translating what they signify into action. Nonetheless, they are used as an analytical tool.

It can be argued that indicator reports can be used to highlight positive and negative trends as a way to encourage action on the part of decision-makers and the public. In theory one might assert that when used in public policy development, indicators can suggest necessary actions to promote positive social, economic and environmental outcomes. Indicators do not necessarily have to reflect a single concern. To be relevant, an assembled group of indicators needs to be driven by a framework that can be expressed in the form of goals and objectives. So in this sense, they can be used to promote many different agendas and values. In sum, advocates would argue that indicators are a re-emerging tool that can help open the policy process and improve government accountability to meet the needs of an increasingly sceptical society.

As part of the accelerating movement in the use of indicators, numerous communities in North America have developed and use indicator reports to describe their local social, economic and environmental conditions. These reports are often developed with the hope they will improve policy decision-making and bring a more reasoned approach to the allocation of public and private resources to improve local conditions.

This thesis will explore effective strategies and methods for developing a community-based indicator report.[3] It will focus on five community indicator and benchmark pilot

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[2] Vancouver Sun, December 21, 2002, p. A19.

[3] As will be explained later on in the discussion, for the purpose of this thesis, a complete indicator report would include a strategic section with goals and specific objectives, outcome-focussed indicators and an

projects undertaken in 2002 by the B.C. Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services.[4] The projects were in Alberni-Clayoquot, New Westminster, Powell River, Quesnel, and Sechelt. The thesis will set these pilot projects in the context of current trends in public administration. Other efforts to develop community-based indicators will be reviewed, but the main objective is to see what lessons can be drawn from this specific experience in B.C. This thesis concludes that while it is too early to tell whether or not the indicator development in these pilot locations has improved or will improve policy making, the evidence suggests that the more successful projects strengthened relations between decision-makers and helped to clarify key local issues. The most successful pilot projects were in communities where there was strong support from local leaders and good relations between key officials, significant research capacity, extensive experience in community development work, and a workable geographic scale to the areas under consideration.

The rest of this chapter is devoted to putting the BC pilot projects into the context of some current trends in public administration, including the growth of indicator development and use in North America. In the past two decades important public sector trends have included the demand for more participatory approaches to policy and program development along with a call for greater accountability on the part of government. It makes sense to the author that along with these trends there has been a significant resurgence in indicator development and use in recent years. In theory, indicators can help facilitate policy dialogue between government and non-government actors in terms of helping to bring clarity to issues and to provide a way of measuring the results or outcomes of policies and programs. The exploration of indicator projects in North America and BC in particular, serves to introduce the reader to the range of experience to highlight how indicators are being used to inform policy and program development.

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action plan with targets and benchmarks to achieve change. This suggested report format is referred to later on in this thesis as a community progress report.

[4] The pilot projects were designed and initiated in the Fall of 2000 by the intergovernmental relations and strategic initiatives branch – with staff support from the Community Transition Branch – under the former ministry of Community Development Cooperatives and Volunteers.

Chapter two of this thesis is a detailed examination of the BC pilot projects. Of the five projects initiated by the government, only two were completed (Quesnel and New Westminster). Another of the five is still underway (Sechelt) while a fourth has a faint glimmer of hope for the future but work is currently stalled (Powell River). The last of the group failed (Alberni-Clayoquot). In comparison to the indicator examples described in this chapter, the pilots do not represent "best practice" and it is unclear as yet whether any of them will directly result in real progress for their host communities. However, there are signs that they have had some local impact and of course as pilot projects their ultimate utility is in helping to advance the practice of indicator development. Taken together as a set of projects launched within a framework and support structure established by a senior level of government, they tell a useful story about developing a local level indicator report.

In sum what that story says is that local indicator projects may not always work in every context. A lot depends on the current situation facing the community, its level of interest and the degree to which community leaders are able to participate and work together on the project. A key to increasing the chance for success is making sure the community is ready and interested in participating. In terms of the role of senior government, an important lesson is that these projects require significant levels of funding and technical support. It was also not an easy task to implement the projects in the exact way that was envisioned by government. Direction given related to timing of project completion or level of detail required in the final report can be easily suggested by senior government, but difficult for communities to deliver. In terms of the final results, it would be a stretch to say that any of these pilots resulted in radical system changes in policy decision-making or program development on the part of local governments and local agencies. But the more successful ones did serve to link community leaders together and help them to develop a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their community. Particularly in the cases of New Westminster and Quesnel, this has provided a platform for strategically advancing specific projects of benefit to the community.

Chapter three of this thesis picks up on the conclusions reached in chapter two to explore further the lessons learned about developing community level indicator reports. While indicator development may seem on the surface to be a rather expensive and laborious undertaking with questionable results, the process and the legacy that can be achieved, under the right circumstances, make the effort worthwhile. Chapter four attempts to wrap up the discussion and pose a few thoughts for further consideration.

THE NEW PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Recent political science and public administration literature highlights a number of governance issues and trends that emerged through the 1980s and 90s to change the nature of public service delivery and the role of public servants, politicians and external actors in the public policy process. These trends include:

- greater financial pressure on governments;
- more aggressive and sophisticated media, interest group and public participation in public policy process;
- more integrated and horizontal approaches to decision-making; and
- increased demand for results-based management and improved accountability.

In response to these trends, government actors – both elected (politicians) and administrative (public servants) – have sought new tools to develop public policy and programs. In essence one could say that taken together these trends amount to the democratization of government decision-making.

Perhaps the greatest pressure exerted on governments today is the emphasis on reducing costs while still delivering high quality services – "less taxes more services" seems to be the battle cry for many citizens today. Governments emerged from the economic challenges of 1980s and 90s – continuing recessions and mounting deficits, among others – with the political pressure of having to find ways to balance their annual budgets and begin to pay down their accumulated debt. At the same time, pressing public issues that demand funding from government continue – like providing public health care, education and social services, ensuring environmental protection, and

maintaining and improving basic infrastructure. In this fiscal environment, governments have sought new tools to help them allocate scarce resources.

Along with the fiscal pressures on government, elected and administrative officials have had to function in a climate of heightened scrutiny and commentary and are even moving into more democratic and shared decision-making approaches to public policy development in some specific issue areas. Today the media, interest groups and the general public play a much greater role in commenting on the policy development process than in the past. They work hard to get their issues acknowledged and addressed and they offer – whether solicited or not – their input on the design and implementation of policies and programs and the evaluation of government activities.

One obvious factor contributing to this trend is the emergence of advanced technology in the 1980's and 90s that has improved the availability and exchange of knowledge – particularly the introduction of high performance computers and the creation of the internet. Another important contributing factor, highlighted by Peter Aucoin, was the widespread criticism of the "administrative state" that emerged out of the 1970s. This criticism was fuelled by the perception that self-interested bureaucrats had the ability to limit the influence of elected officials and the rise in scepticism about the effectiveness of the interventionist-welfare state. Aucoin states:

> Demands for greater public consultation, more transparent government, and increased public accountability constitute a widespread public reaction to the closed character of the modern administrative state.[5]

As a result of these emerging trends, governments today have to pay more attention to developing methods of policy-making that are much more participatory than in the past. Aucoin sums this up:

> The new political dynamics of modern democratic government – more aggressive interest groups, media, legislators, and auditing agencies of various sorts – call for

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[5] Peter Aucoin, "Politicians, Public Servants and Public Management," in Governance in a Changing Environment, eds. Guy Peters and Donald Savoie (Montreal, 1995), p. 119

> greater attention to transparency, communications, and accountability than has been traditionally provided by the partisan dynamics of elections and legislative debate.[6]

As well, new approaches to governance and service-delivery like "horizontal management" and "public-private partnerships" are being implemented so public agencies can achieve their mandates through greater involvement by other parties. These tools reflect both the fiscal pressures governments are facing and the pressure to involve non-government actors in service delivery.

Two other important governance trends are "results-based management" and "enhanced accountability". Results-based management emphasizes that government should focus on the achievement of results (outcomes) not simply the allocation of resources (outputs).[7] Connected to this is the call for greater accountability through regular reporting on the actual results achieved by government. A popularized critique of how governments have functioned in the past and an articulation of the need to focus more on results came in 1992 when David Osborne and Ted Gaebler published Reinventing Government. It became the foundation for significant discussion and change in the United States about how public agencies should function and virtually became a guide for the newly elected Clinton Administration as it embarked on its Reinventing Government Initiative. Osborne and Gaebler rely on numerous state and local government examples to communicate their central message that public services can and should be run more effectively and in a business-like way with management focus on the results of government effort and not simply an accounting of resources expended. This is most clearly explained in section 5: "Results-Oriented Government: Funding Outcomes, Not Inputs."

The authors argue that public agencies often lack a strategic framework – vision, goals and objectives – to guide their activities. Further to this, decision-makers within these

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[6] Ibid., p. 132.

agencies frequently lack objective information as to which programs and policies are successful in terms of achieving their intended outcomes. Through the process of clarifying intentions and developing outcome measures to track progress, problems can be redefined with a focus on achievement. This process is extremely important for public agencies. As organizations that should be improving their capacity and delivery through learning, they require the means to measure their success – feedback on their outcomes – so that they know when they are doing something right and they can take corrective measures to adjust policies and programs that fail:

> Typically, public agencies are not entirely clear about their goals, or are in fact aiming at the wrong goals. When they have to define the outcomes they want and the appropriate benchmarks to measure those outcomes, this confusion is forced into the open. People begin to ask the right questions, to redefine the problem they are trying to solve, and to diagnose the problem anew.[8]

Of course, measuring the results of public agencies is also problematic. Public agencies and initiatives are often politically determined and directed so the communication of bad news can be problematic. As well, multiple goals may be at play and not easily measured. The final dilemma is that some policies or programs may require long-term commitment to achieve results. Measuring progress after year one or two of implementation might not reveal any improvement.

Directly linked to the call for results-based management is the call for greater accountability in public administration. Key proponents in both Canada and the United States for increased accountability in governance include accounting organizations and auditors general. In 1999, the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation released a short paper outlining principles of building a public performance report. Government was the key audience for the report. The report states that an important underlying value in performance reporting is accountability:

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[7] This is not a new concept in Canada. The need to monitor achievement as part of the system of program budgeting emerged at the federal level in Canada in the 1960s. See: Kenneth Kernaghan and David Siegal, Public Administration in Canada (Agincourt, Ontario, 1987), pp. 527-532.

[8] David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, Reinventing Government (New York, 1992), p. 147.

> Accountability – a relationship based on the obligation to demonstrate and take responsibility for performance in light of agreed expectations – is a concept fundamental to our democratic system. Accountability clearly establishes the right of the citizen to know what government intends to achieve on behalf of its citizens and how well it has met those intentions. It means that governments are answerable to their respective Parliaments or Legislative Assemblies for the way in which they manage the powers and the resources entrusted to them for the results they achieve.
>
> Increasingly, both the public and governments themselves are recognizing the need for a full accounting of how governments and their organizations are performing. Not only is this the way to ensure that accountability requirements are adequately and meaningfully met, but such accounting can also help legislators, policy makers and citizens debate and clarify what the role of government in society should be. [9]

In the 1990's the Auditor General of British Columbia delivered a series of reports to the provincial legislature calling on the government to enhance accountability. This was part of an ongoing dialogue during the decade that focussed on trying to move the government towards better reporting on the impact of its programs and policies rather than simply explaining how resources had been deployed. The underlying theme was the right for citizens to understand better what their government was doing:

> When government affects the lives of its citizens in as wide a range of social and economic activity as it does today, citizens have the right to know on a regular basis what their government intends to achieve and what it has actually accomplished.[10]
>
> The time has come for government to focus on reporting on its organizational and program results. This does not mean that government will always achieve everything it plans. But being clear about intentions, measuring and understanding results, and making adjustments where necessary, would help assure taxpayers that their money is being spent wisely.[11]

The Auditor General urged government to describe not just the results of program efforts but to also explain why the results "were as they were" to be clear which activities were

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[9] Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation. Principles for Building a Public Performance Report: A Discussion Paper from Canada's Legislative Audit Community. July 1999. p. 1.
[10] Provincial Auditor General of British Columbia and Deputy Minister's Council, Enhancing Accountability For Performance: A Framework and Implementation Plan, Second Joint Report, 1996. p. 9.
[11] Ibid., p. 10.

successful in meeting program goals and how things could be done differently in the future.[12]

An all-party committee of the legislature also entered into the accountability debate. In their report "Enhancing Accountability for Performance in the British Columbia Public Sector," the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts examined how to improve reporting to the legislature so that members of the assembly would have a better understanding of the performance of the government:

> Information about the intended and actual results of a government's performance is important if the Assembly is to determine what difference government has made in the lives of its citizens. Ideally, this would mean knowing the outcomes that government has achieved through its programs and services as well as understanding how these programs are relevant to the needs of citizens and the overall priorities of government.[13]

Accountability has become an increasing concern requiring government to focus more on reporting on outcomes, the results of its efforts, than on the resources and activities expended in pursuit of its goals and objectives. Telling the public how you spent their tax dollars is not adequate – people want to know the results. This of course assumes that action and consequences can be directly linked. Proving this causal link is the challenge to be overcome for any public policy issue area.

By the end of the 1990s it could be argued that a new paradigm had emerged in public sector governance. Key characteristics of this paradigm included increased fiscal pressure on government; greater interest from the public, media and interest groups to play a role in the public policy process; and continued pressure for governments to improve their reporting to the public on the outcome of public sector efforts as one way to enhance accountability.

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[12] Ibid., p. 35.

[13] Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, Second Report: Enhancing Accountability for Performance in the British Columbia Public Sector, 1996, p. 5.

Some might take issue with this description of the changing nature of public administration and might want to tell a different story. That story would probably suggest that many of criticisms of the public sector levelled over the past decade – financial ineptitude, unresponsiveness, lack of due diligence to outcomes – have been perpetrated by "right wing" actors and commentators as a means to undermine the public sector and to weaken its role in society to the benefit of the private sector. Be that as it may, the inescapable fact today is that the public is said to demand more accountability, openness and clear reporting on the "outcomes" of government intervention in society. In a society that describes itself as democratic, these trends should be embraced whatever their origin. As Guy Peters has said:

> It remains crucial for governments, and the individuals who constitute them, to continue their search for innovative mechanisms for making government work better and to serve society better.[14]

THE INDICATOR MOVEMENT

One aspect of the new public administration paradigm has been the increased use of indicators to report on conditions in society and also aid in the development and evaluation of public policies and programs. Indicators are pieces of information that can help describe what is occurring in a large system. They have been used for decades to better understand and make decisions about different features of our society including the economy, the environment and public health. When grouped together under one or more particular themes – like social, environmental or economic – they can begin to tell a more comprehensive story on the condition of a community, region or nation.

While the history of the indicator movement can be traced back over the past few centuries, significant indicator development did not really emerge until the 1900s. In the 1930s economist Simon Kuznets undertook considerable efforts to develop measures of economic health in the United States. Later on in the 1960's, primarily in the United

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[14] Guy Peters, The Future of Governing, 2nd ed., (Kansas, 2001), p. 2.

States but also in Canada, indicator work would expand to also include efforts to develop social measures as well:

> The call for increased collection of comprehensive social measures dovetailed with increasing public concern in the later 1960's over domestic social problems such as poverty, race, health, environmental pollution, unemployment, and housing. [15]

Evidence of this includes the direction US President L. Johnson gave to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to develop indicators to measure social progress. [16] From the late 1960s and into the 1970s there was considerable social indicators work but this slowed down at about the same time as interest in and development of environmental indicators took off in the early 1980's. The decrease in social indicator development has been attributed to a number of factors in the United States and Canada including: "...tighter government finances; a more conservative ideology adopted by a number of governments; and a perceived lack of usefulness of social indicators in policy making." [17]

Toward the late 1980s and into the 1990s, comprehensive indicator initiatives began to emerge – at all levels – as a way to convey more information and develop responses to environmental, social and economic trends. One of the motivations behind this movement was the concern that established indicators often reported through the media – like GDP, unemployment rate, inflation rate – did not fully describe or explain social, economic and environment problems. At the community level, different frameworks of local indicator reporting developed; the three most frequently used are "quality of life", "sustainability" and "healthy communities". All seek to simultaneously address social,

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[15] Randa F. Gahin, Indicators as a Tool to Help Create Sustainable Communities: A Study of the Outcomes of Five Community Indicators Projects, Presented to the Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Community and Regional Planning (June, 2001), p, 16.
[16] Benoit Godin, "The emergence of S&T indicators: why did governments supplement statistics with indicators?" Research Policy, 32 (2003) 679-691, p. 681.
[17] Andrew Sharpe, A Survey of Indicators of Economic and Social Well-Being – Background Paper prepared for Canadian Policy Research networks, (Ottawa, 1999), p. 8.

economic and environmental issues and emphasize a participatory method to indicator development.

The quality of life indicator framework is primarily concerned with monitoring social conditions within a geographically defined area based on comparison with another area or a desired future state. Projects that use this framework examine quantitative data on local conditions along with qualitative information that explore how people perceive the state of their community. The sustainability indicator movement is concerned with developing measures to help bring clarity to the phrase "sustainable development" that emerged from the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. In general terms sustainable development is meant to convey the concern that human development must not overtake the earth's carrying capacity. Sustainability indicators are supposed to measure relative human system and eco-system health within a community, region or nation and the interplay between the systems. The overall concern is focussed on long-term outcomes. The healthy communities or healthy cities framework emerged out of the World Health Organization's Healthy Cities Project initiated in 1986. This included a Public Health Promotion Conference hosted by Canada on behalf of the WHO that same year. The healthy communities approach recognizes that overall individual human health is determined by a number of external factors including: the local economy, municipal infrastructure, education and social cohesion. Protecting or improving on these key elements of a community will result in better health outcomes for residents.

Along the way, the increase in indicator interest and use has spawned considerable growth in expertise, writing and networking among indicator practitioners and "experts" about best practices in developing progress reporting for all levels of government. In the United States new organizations like Redefining Progress and Sustainable Measures have developed websites, guides and other resources to help communities develop

indicators to measure their progress. [18] In Canada leading edge groups like the International Institute for Sustainable Development in Winnipeg are leading indicator development work.[19] As well, professional consulting companies and other groups have developed elaborate indicator frameworks to help communities, regions and nations broadly communicate the findings of indicator research in a visually appealing way. Frameworks like the "Barometer of Sustainability" the "Dashboard of Sustainability" and the "Compass of Sustainability" have all attempted to aggregate complicated and detailed indicator data in composite indexes so the results of indicator research can be communicated to a wide audience. [20]

Today indicators are widely used at all levels of government to help design, evaluate, and advance public policy. In some jurisdictions they are used as an accounting tool to evaluate the performance of a government. In other jurisdictions, they are used as a way of monitoring progress towards a future desired goal. They are also used by interest groups and other actors to bring attention to key issues to mobilize community resources for change. Generally speaking the benefits to undertaking community indicator development are considered to be:

- Creating an opportunity to improve relationships among community organizations and stakeholders;
- Developing a common understanding of socio-economic and environmental conditions that help identify key community strengths and vulnerabilities;
- Providing insight into the causality of local conditions;
- Helping to set direction on policies and actions that can improve ecosystem and human health.

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[18] For more information on Redefining Progress visit: http://www.rprogress.org/ (April, 2003), and for more information on Sustainable Measures visit: http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/ (April, 2003).
[19] For more information on the IISD visit: http://www.iisd.org/ (April, 2003)
[20] The Barometer of Sustainability is a well-being index system designed by Robert Prescott-Allen, with the advice and assistance of others. Prescott-Allen applied this framework in his recent publication: The Well Being of Nations: A Country-by-Country Index of Quality of Life and the Environment (2001). The Compass of Sustainability was developed by Alan Atkisson and Associates and has been applied to a number of communities and regions. More information on this index framework is available at the Atkisson Inc website: http://www.atkisson.com/ (April, 2003). The Dashboard of Sustainability is being developed by the Bellagio Forum to track the progress of more than 100 countries. It was launched in April 2001 during the 9th session of UN Commission for Sustainable development. For more information see: http://www.bfsd.org/activities/aboutindics.htm (April, 2003).

American and Canadian Experience

Across North America, communities are using indicators to measure their social, economic and environmental progress. This thesis will outline a few examples from the United States and Canada and offer more detailed examination of recent indicator development in British Columbia. The examples from the United States and Canada in this thesis are generally seen by some indicator practitioners and experts to be among the best in North America to date but represent only a small sample. With the proliferation of indicator projects in the last decade it is difficult to exactly determine the volume of community level work. But given that over 200 communities have initiated indicator projects in the United States alone, this author roughly estimates that probably more than 300 examples exist in North America. [21]

United States

Perhaps the most well-known and cited indicator project in the United States is Oregon Benchmarks, an initiative of the Oregon Progress Board that provides guidance to state level agencies that in turn links to local initiatives. The State Governor chairs the Progress Board. The origins behind the creation of the Oregon Benchmarks report began in 1989 with Oregon Shines. This was a process initiated by the Governor with the participation of hundreds of citizens that resulted in a 20-year vision for Oregon's strategic development. To see that its strategies were implemented and monitored over time, Oregon Shines recommended the creation of the Oregon Progress Board, a panel of leading citizens chaired by the Governor. The Legislature created the Board in the 1989 session. In 1997, the Oregon Progress Board became a permanent part of the State government.

The Board created Oregon Benchmarks to translate the recommendations of Oregon Shines into specific objectives (or indicators of progress) that could be measured at regular intervals. The benchmarks would be the state's report card on whether or not it

was achieving its goals. In 1990, with the aid of several citizen steering committees and the involvement of more than 200 organizations and individuals statewide, the Progress Board refined and adopted 160 benchmarks for recommendation to the 1991 Legislature. The 1995 report contained 259 benchmarks or targets focussed on three key areas: exceptional people, an outstanding quality of life, and a diverse robust economy. By 2001, with the creation of the sixth Benchmarks report, the Oregon Progress Board had significantly refined the benchmarks exercise by reducing the number of benchmarks in their report to about 90. There are several different kinds of benchmark measures. Some are based on physical measurements such as ambient air quality, traffic congestion, and water quality. Other measures are based on surveys that test a sample of the Oregon population. The benchmarks continue to place a priority on measuring results and progress toward future desired outcomes; however, some benchmarks are also used to measure program outputs.

In the 1999 and 2001 reports, the Oregon Progress Board reported on trends and progress towards benchmarks in seven key areas: economy, education, civic engagement, social support, public safety, community development and the environment. It aggregated the scores of the individual indicators for each of these categories to arrive at an overall grade for each theme. It then used these scores to generate an overall grade for the state:

Table One: Oregon Benchmarks Highlights, 1998 and 2000[22]

Benchmark Category	**Scores**	
	1998	**2000**
Economy	C+	C
Education	C	C+
Civic Engagement	D	D
Social Support	C	B-
Public Safety	D+	B+
Community Development	C-	C-
Environment	C+	C+
Overall	**C**	**C+**

[21] The Redefining Progress website states that over 200 communities around the United States have developed indicators to track economic, environmental, and social well-being. http://www.rprogress.org/projects/indicators/, (April, 2003)

[22] Oregon Progress Board. Benchmarks Highlights Report. March 2001, p. 9.

In 1991, when the State Legislature adopted the benchmarks, it used them as a guide for legislative proposals. Several important bills were passed for education reform, work force preparation, and economic development that supported the attainment of the benchmarks.

In response to the state governor's urging in 1991, state agencies have developed strategies for critical benchmarks and have planned and adjusted budgets to achieve particular benchmarks. The link between the benchmarks and state agency activity was cemented in 1992 during a budget cutting exercise. As Oregon worked to achieve a 20 percent reduction in its budget, state agencies were given the opportunity to protect their individual budgets by linking their activities to the benchmarks. As noted by community development experts, "in one fell swoop, every organ of government became attentive to the theory and emerging practice of benchmarking." [23] The cementing of this connection between the benchmarks and state agencies continues under the Progress Board:

> As part of its efforts to promote collaboration, the Oregon Progress Board is working with state agencies to tie their efforts to the benchmarks. The benchmarks are used to develop state agency performance measurement systems and form agency policies, programs and budgets. Projects are also underway to create graphical reporting systems for broad-based state initiatives like recovering wild salmon runs.[24]

The Oregon case is instructive in many ways. First is the participatory nature of the project. Oregon Benchmarks was developed and continues to evolve with broad public participation. Second, the indicators and benchmarks used are tied to a value framework – Oregon Shines – that articulates in broad language desired future conditions for the state. This is further defined by the benchmarks themselves that identify in specific terms the degree of progress to be achieved over the short and long term for each measure. Last is the link to decision-making. Oregon Benchmarks continues to have a

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[23] Mike Lewis, Sandy Lockhart and David de Montreuil, The Oregon Benchmarks: Oregionians are getting results from this approach to governance. Can we in B.C? Articled published by the Centre for Community Enterprise, (2000), p. 4.

[24] Oregon Progress Board, Achieving the Oregon Shines Vision: The 1999 Benchmark Performance Report. Report to the Legislative Assembly, (March, 1999), p. 3.

direct influence on the strategic direction of the government and activities and resources expended by state agencies.

Another American example is a relatively new indicator framework and report developed in Southwest Louisiana where ten "parishes" – a parish is a regional level of government that is similar to a regional district in BC – centred around New Orleans got together to track their progress towards improving quality of life in the region. These areas collectively represent the worst-off area in the state. This effort was initiated by the local Chambers of Commerce and facilitated by Atkinson and Associates.
The initiative was called Top 10 by 2010. The purpose of the project is to use the indicator report to strengthen relations between communities in the region and build better understanding of common issues. Thanks to this framework for discussion, critical issues can be identified and efforts taken towards meaningful improvement. A draft report was prepared for review and a final version was completed in January 2003. The development of the report involved a yearlong process that included a public survey, discussion between a diverse group of civic leaders and technical reviews from experts representing a wide range of disciplines.[25] What is instructive about this initiative is the process used to develop the indicators. The starting point was the report from a phone survey of residents to determine their concerns and interests. From this framework, indicators were developed based on iterative input from civic leaders, and technical advisors.

Another regional indicator initiative is the Sustainable Pittsburgh Goals and Indicator Project. The project was led by Sustainable Pittsburgh, a partnership of public and private organizations with a mission to "...educate and engage public, business, and community leaders in incorporating and tracking sustainable development while advancing a vision for the long-term prosperity of south-western Pennsylvania." [26]

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[25] Top 10 by 2010 website: http://indicators.top10by2010.org/execsummary.cfm, (March, 2003)
[26] Sustainable Pittsburgh, Sustainable Pittsburgh Goals and Indicators Project Public Report, May 3, 1999, p. 3.

This indicator initiative involved over 250 community leaders organized into teams to develop goals, strategies and indicators for ten themes that include sustainable communities, conservation of nature, civic engagement, international relations, stewardship, education, economic prosperity and equity. Each team had two months to prepare their material with technical support provided by graduate students from Carnegie Mellon University. The report is being used to build a network of individuals and organizations interested in working on sustainability issues.

At the local level, the longest running and one of the best-known annually updated reports in the United States is Quality of Life in Jacksonville: Indicators of Progress.[27] The report is developed each year by the Jacksonville Community Council Inc (JCCI), a community organization created in 1975 to improve local conditions through "informed citizen participation in public affairs". The indicator project began in 1985, with financial support from the Chamber of Commerce. A large, volunteer group of over 100 people worked with JCCI staff support, to develop the first report that continues to be updated annually. According to the 2002 report:

> The project represents an effort to monitor progress on an annual basis by means of selected representative quantitative indicators. Positive trends can be highlighted, recognized, and actively maintained; the beginnings of negative trends can be detected and action taken to address problems. [28]

The Human Services Council, made up of ten major public and private funders of human services in Northeast Florida, endorses the reports and use them for planning and allocating resources. The report also plays an important role in how the United Way allocates its community funding. According to the JCCI website:

> The JCCI Quality of Life document [is] widely used by public and private decision makers in Jacksonville to inform strategic planning and to guide policy-making. In addition, through media exposure and JCCI presentations, the

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[27] Kate Besleme, et al., A Community Indicators Case Study: Addressing the Quality of Life in Two Communities, Redefining Progress, (March 1999), p. 5.

[28] Jacksonville Community Council Inc., Quality of Life in Jacksonville: Indicators for Progress 2002. p. 1. Report available online at: http://www.jcci.org/newerhome.htm (March, 2003).

> documents have become a major source of public knowledge and awareness about important aspects of the local community.[29]

The important features of the JCCI quality of life project include the longevity of the initiative, its educational role and the influence on private and public decision-making. As identified in a report sponsored by Redefining Progress, the key observations from this indicator initiative, in terms of how the indicators affect decision-making and policy processes, include:

- Its purpose, methods, organization and funding continue to evolve;
- Significant effort is given to publish and distribute not just the report but also reference documents and executive summaries free of charge to libraries, public officials and agencies and planning organizations;
- Every year the mayor and the new Chamber of Commerce president hold a press conference to release the annual report;
- The media increasingly turn to the JCCI for background material on hot issues;
- The report is also used to help identify major issues for further study; and
- Institutions like the City government use the report in their budgeting process.[30]

Canada

Given the sheer difference in size between the two countries, indicator development and use in Canada has not been of the same magnitude as experienced in the United States. Nonetheless there is an advancing practice in Canada that continues to evolve. Headed by Environment Canada with the support of the International Institute for Sustainable Development, a recent initiative has been launched to better link indicator practitioners in Canada. The first meeting of the group was held in Toronto on March 15, 2003.[31]

Much of the current work on indicators stems from international discussion on sustainability started in 1987 when the World Commission on Environment and Development published the report Our Common Future. This led to the establishment of the National Round Table on the Environment and Economy (NRTEE). The NRTEE was created by an Act of Parliament in 1994 to provide advice and recommendations on

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Belseme, pps, 16-21.
[31] The author was made aware of this event via an email message from Dennis O'Farrell from Environment Canada. March 3, 2003.

promoting sustainable development to decision-makers, opinion leaders and the Canadian public.[32] With funding provided by the 2000 federal budget, the round table established a three-year program to develop a " small set of credible and understandable indicators to track whether Canada's current economic activities threaten the way of life for future generations."[33] A final report with a small set of recommended indicators is to be released in the spring of 2003.

In terms of the community initiatives, there has been the Quality of Life Reporting System developed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) in 1999 to pilot indicators in 16 large Canadian urban centres to help those communities monitor quality of life. For each community, data was gathered on indicators for eight themes: population, community affordability, employment, housing, community stress, health, safety and participation. The results were published in a final report. The study was repeated in 2001 with the participation of 18 urban municipalities to develop a picture of quality of life in Canadian cities and to identify and analyze trends that might otherwise not be brought to the attention of decision-makers.[34] There are four main purposes behind the report:

- identify and promote awareness of issues affecting quality of life in Canadian communities;
- better target policies and resources aimed at improving quality of life;
- support collaborative efforts to improve quality of life; and
- establish municipal governments as a strong and legitimate partner in public policy debates in Canada.[35]

This project is useful in that it links together a number of communities to allow for comparison between them. It is also being used to highlight a national concern – the deteriorating condition of urban centres across the country. An important target audience for the report is the federal government. The government caucus in Ottawa recently explored the possible re-emergence of a national role in urban affairs through

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[32] See website of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy: http://www.nrtee-trnee.ca/eng/programs/Current_Programs/SDIndicators/index.html, (March, 2003)
[33] Ibid.
[34] Federation of Canadian Municipalities website: www.fcm.ca/newfcm/Java/frame.htm, (April, 2003)
[35] Ibid., http://www.fcm.ca/scep/policy/policy_pdfs/qol_2001.pdf, (April, 2003).

the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues chaired by York West MP Judy Sgro. There has not been a separate national department for this issue area since 1979.

There have also been numerous reports developed at the local level in Canada. Two prominent examples are projects from the Cities of Hamilton and Calgary. In 1992 the City of Hamilton engaged in a process to develop a vision for the region for 2020. The process involved City councillors, staff and citizens. The result was a decision to create VISION 2020, a "...collection of goals, strategies, actions and measurements..." to focus local activities. As part of this project, a set of indicators was chosen to track progress in each of the themes under the vision. The first report produced in 1995 was based on the involvement of "...over a hundred individuals from a variety of organizations and different sectors in the community..." [36] The report included 29 indicators covering themes ranging from natural areas and corridors to community empowerment. The indicators were chosen based on their relevance to the local community and the availability of data. Subsequent reports were generated annually until 1998. In 1999 changes to the report were made as a result of "...consultation with data providers, community organizations and other government institutions." [37] The report was re-organized into 14 themes. An update of the report was expected in late 2002 using data from 2000-2001.

The indicator reports help guide the activities of VISION 2020 Task Forces – sub groups that work under the VISION 2020 framework. The task forces – that include representation from local agencies, community groups and the public and private sectors – are responsible for developing action plans to address each of the 14 theme areas: Local Economy, Agriculture and Rural Economy, Natural Areas and Corridors, Water Quality, Reducing and Managing Waste, Reducing Energy Consumption, Air Quality, Transportation, Land Use in Urban Areas, Arts and Heritage, Personal Health and Well-being, Community Safety and Security, Education and Community Well-being.

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[36] VISION 2020 website: http://www.vision2020.hamilton-went.on.ca/about/what-is.asp, (April, 2003).
[37] Ibid.

In 1998 a group called Sustainable Calgary produced the State of Our City Report that was updated in 2001. The report is a review of sustainability indicators organized in five areas: resource use, economy, community, natural environment and health and education. Sustainable Calgary – a citizen group formed in 1996 – led the process behind the development of the report and was supported by 300 volunteers. Sustainable Calgary was inspired by Sustainable Seattle and born out of the Arusha Centre – a non-profit society located in Calgary that is dedicated to increasing awareness about international development issues, anti-racism education, and community sustainability. Sustainable Calgary's mission is to: "promote, encourage and support community-level discussion, actions and initiatives that move Calgary toward a sustainable future." [38] The report includes a section on how Sustainable Calgary came together to develop the report and recruit government, private sector and community groups to act as "stewards" of future reports. In a recent article published in Plan Canada, Neol Keough, a cofounder of Sustainable Calgary, explained the different steps of the indicator development process that included research into other community indicator projects, networking with community organizations, public workshops and indicator think tank sessions. [39]

British Columbia

Provincial and Regional Scale Indicator Development

Since the late 1980's, the development and use of indicators at all levels of government in the province of British Columbia has increased significantly. [40] Indicators are being used to increase public awareness of key issues, inform policy discussion and decision-

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[38] Sustainable Calgary web page: http://www.sustainablecalgary.ca, (April, 2003)

[39] Neol Keough, "Calgary's Citizen-Led Community Sustainability Indicators Project," Plan Canada, Vol. 43 No. 1, (Spring, 2003), p. 35-36.

[40] The election of the leftist and activist oriented New Democratic Party in 1991 probably contributed to the indicator development that occurred over the next decade as the government sought ways to bring attention to its key concerns and to focus government resources on achieving positive outcomes. It could also be argued however that as indicator development has occurred in virtually every jurisdiction in North America the political leanings of the government may not have necessarily been an important factor in indicator development in British Columbia over the past decade.

making and improve the development, implementation and evaluation of government programs.

Divisive issues including resource development, environmental protection, rapid urban growth, health concerns and economic improvement have been the context behind this movement towards the increased use of indicators. Through numerous conferences, meetings and other forums, government, the private sector and other actors have explored how BC can improve environmental and human conditions through the use of indicators that clarify negative trends and highlight areas where progress is being made. As part of this "indicator movement" new organizations like the Fraser Basin Council and the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative have played an important role in advancing thinking on "best practices" of indicator use.

In the early 1990's the Provincial Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (PRTEE) – established by the B.C. government to help overcome tension between the traditionally antagonistic environmental and developmental interests in the province – developed indicator reports to highlight environmental trends and to bring attention to key issues like urban sustainability and growth management pressures in the Georgia Basin. [41] In 1992 the Government established the Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE) with a mandate to "...work with the government and the public to develop [a sustainability strategy], oversee continuing progress towards sustainability, and prepare land use plans in regions where [land use] conflict was most intense."[42] For a period of time CORE pursued an active agenda that included the development of a draft *Sustainability Act* with sustainability indicators to create a legislative framework for provincial land use.

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[41] The PRTEE supported the publication of the first provincial state of the environment report in 1993 – a collaborative effort between Environment Canada and the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks.
[42] Commission on Resources and the Environment, Strategy for Sustainability: Report to the Legislative Assembly, 1994-95, July 1995. p.

CORE also initiated the first comprehensive report on BC's "Progress Towards Sustainability" completed and published in July 1997 with assistance from the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks. The report was researched and written by consultants Dr. Anthony Hodge and Robert Prescott-Allen to, "...demonstrate an approach to assessing and reporting on British Columbia's progress toward sustainability." [43] While the report was never fully utilized by the government it is an important reference document that pulled together an impressive array of indicators.

While CORE's advisory work helped advance thinking in the province about the development and use of indicators, the government never implemented the recommendations developed by CORE to enact sustainability legislation. Created under the leadership of Premier Michael Harcourt, who stepped down as leader of the NDP in the fall of 1995, CORE was criticized by some as being overly "process" oriented. Shortly after Glen Clark became the new leader of the NDP and Premier of the Province in 1996, CORE's activities were wound down and the Commission was effectively dismantled.

In 1994 the government established the provincial Georgia Basin Initiative (GBI) in response to a PRTEE report on environmental and social trends in the Georgia Basin. The GBI was a short-lived government project in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs that worked to highlight trends in the region and to promote a sustainable vision for the future. The GBI was discontinued as a separate initiative by the province in 1996 but in 1997 Environment Canada, with the support of the province, established the Georgia Basin Eco-System Initiative (GBEI) with a focus on environmental sustainability. The GBEI has taken an active role in supporting indicator development.

Partly in response to the PRTEE report on rapid urban growth, and the need to improve planning in the province at the regional scale, the province enacted new legislation in 1995 to provide regional districts with the ability to develop growth strategies to

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[43] Dr. Anthony Hodge and Robert Prescott-Allen, Report on British Columbia's Progress Toward

"...promote coordination among municipalities and regional districts on issues that cross municipal boundaries..."[44] Under the legislation regional districts are empowered to develop regional scale plans to "...promote human settlement that is socially, economically and environmentally healthy." [45] Once they have established a regional growth strategy, a regional district is then required under the legislation to monitor and report on progress towards the objectives and actions enumerated in the strategy.

A number of regional districts have established growth strategies and at least two – Greater Vancouver and Nanaimo – are using indicators to monitor the impact of their strategy on the region and the communities within. The Greater Vancouver Regional District's indicator report on regional planning has over 30 indicators to monitor progress in four main areas: protecting green space, complete communities, concentrating population growth, transportation planning and air quality. The Nanaimo report also has over 30 indicators tracking urban containment, land protection, efficient use of infrastructure and cooperation between local governments in the region.

Other regions have also developed indicator reports to track their progress. For the Capital Regional District, environmental indicators are tracked by the Roundtable on the Environment while quality of life indicators have been developed and reported on by the Community Social Planning Council. As well, the Islands Trust – the local governance body for the islands between mainland British Columbia and Southern Vancouver Island – is in the process of finalizing their first progress measurement report with environmental, economic, social and governance indicators.

Throughout the mid to late 1990s there was also concern for developing ways to measure the overall impact of provincial government efforts. As discussed in chapter one, this came about in part because of the advice provided by the Auditor General's

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Sustainability, July 1997, p. 8.

[44] Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services website, "About Regional Growth Strategies," http://www.mcaws.gov.bc.ca/lgd/irpd/growth/about_growth.html, (April, 2003)

[45] Ibid.

office, but there was also interest at the deputy minister level of the public service to explore new ways of public sector reporting. Hodge and Prescott-Allen nicely sum this up:

> In mid-1994, BC's Auditor General and the Deputy Minister's Council came together in an unprecedented non-partisan effort to initiate development of a framework for assessing government effectiveness.[46]

These efforts culminated in new legislation introduced towards the end of the NDP administration. The *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*, passed in 2000, created a new requirement for the government to produce and make public a strategic plan to document the government's priorities, specific objectives and expected results. As well, under the new legislation, Ministries and government agencies are required to develop annual performance plans that identify "specific objectives and performance measures."

In the spring of 2001 there was a change in government in B.C. with the election of the provincial BC Liberal Party that won 77 of 79 seats in the legislature. Indicator development has continued under the new administration and some move towards innovation has occurred. Early on in its mandate (July 2001) the new government established the BC Progress Board that reports directly to the Premier on the outcome performance of the province. Its reports are all made available to the public. The Board has two main functions: measuring BC's progress towards the government's goal of improving the economy and providing advice on how to improve the provincial economy and the well-being of British Columbians.

To date the board has produced two major indicator reports on BC's progress. The Board's first report was published in February 2002 and a second follow-up report was produced later in December. The report's methodology is to compare BC to other jurisdictions in Canada and the Western United States on a range of indicators organized into six themes: economy, innovation, education, environment, health and society. The

Board has also used indicators to highlight the growing economic and social divide between urban and rural areas of the province.

It is unclear as yet as to whether or not the BC Progress Board will evolve to have the same influence over provincial ministries and crown corporations as the Oregon Progress Board has had over state agencies. While the BC Progress Board reports directly to the Premier and has also made presentations to Deputy Ministers on the results of its reports, the mechanisms do not yet seem to be in place to ensure the advice generated by the Progress Board makes it way into the departmental and branch levels of government. For now the Board's mandate is to monitor "...BC's progress relative to other jurisdictions and to provide government with strategic advice on ways to improve the performance of the provincial economy and its social policy supports." [47]

The recent legislative and other changes in BC both under the NDP and the Liberal administrations to institutionalize performance measurement and results-based reporting mirror the Measuring Up initiative in Alberta under the Ministry of Finance that has been in place for several years. Since 1996, the government of Alberta has produced an overall annual report providing social and economic information on the government's progress towards meeting its goals. The Performance Measurement unit of the Ministry of Finance prepares the report. Along with the overall government report, individual ministries are also required to produce annual reports.

Though the B.C. government amended the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*, key provisions requiring the government and ministries to develop service plans with goals, objectives and measures remain. In a recent report, the Auditor General of British Columbia, Wayne Strelioff, reviewed government reporting in 2001 and 2002. While he noted the improvements that had been made and is "...pleased to see the commitment

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[46] Hodge and Prescott-Allen, p. 4.
[47] BC Progress Board News Release, "BC Progress Board Releases 2002 Benchmarking Report; Panel Reports Tabled, "December 12, 2002.

shown by government to provide meaningful performance reporting,"[48] he concluded that significant improvements are still needed:

> On average, government's performance reporting overall and for each of the reporting principles is in the Start-up or In Process stage of development. In my opinion, this means that the annual reports do not yet contain sufficient, appropriate information to allow for a full appreciation or assessment of government's performance.[49]

Environmental trend reporting continues under the new Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. In 2002 the Ministry released its most recent report on the current condition of BC's environment with indicators on species at risk, air quality, water quality and water use, greenhouse gases, and toxic contaminants. The most recent report is part of a continuum of bi-annual reports produced in 1998, 2000 and 2002. The 2002 report will be used by the provincial government to "...identify areas that require more attention and to guide both short-term and long-term policies and priorities." [50] The purpose of the report is to also "...provide information needed by individuals and organizations to make informed choices that support a healthy environment." [51]

Another environmental indicator report produced in 2002 was the first ever cross-border report on environmental trends in the Georgia Basin (BC) and Puget Sound (Washington State) – an ecosystem that spans the borders of Canada and the United States. Developed by a cross-border working group of public servants, the report was developed under the auspices of the BC-Washington Environmental Cooperation Council, an organization established by the Environmental Cooperation Agreement signed by the BC Premier and Washington State Governor in 1992. The primary supporting mechanism for the report is a State of Cooperation between Environment Canada and the United States Environmental Protection Agency. The effort is continuing towards the

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[48] Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia, Building Better Reports: Our Review of the 2001/02 Reports of Government, January 2003. p. 4.
[49] Ibid., p. 6.
[50] State of the Environment Reporting. Ministry of Water Land and Air Protection. Environmental Trends in British Columbia 2002. Opening message from the Minister.
[51] Ibid.

development of second report that will hopefully broaden the range of indicators reported to include social indicators related to environmental conditions.

Also in 2002 the Office of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) released its most recent report on the health of aboriginal people (2002). Since the mid 1990's the PHO has periodically reported on the health of British Columbians using indicators of health outcomes to determine which regions of the province have poorer outcomes. [52] Specific reports on the children, women, and aboriginal health have been published by the PHO identifying negative trends and suggesting solutions.

The 2002 report reviewed over sixty human health indicators and concluded that aboriginal persons living in British Columbia have a standard of living "...20 per cent below the provincial average, based on measures such as income, employment, educational attainment, and housing adequacy." [53] The report also suggested a number of approaches and specific actions that can be taken to improve aboriginal health including early childhood development, reducing drug and alcohol use, increasing primary care and reducing injury.[54] At a recent conference a First Nations leader talked about the importance of using indicators as a tool to move forward on improving the status of aboriginal people in BC and stated that the recommended actions in the Provincial Health Officer's report were supported by aboriginal leaders in the province.[55]

In terms of other social and human health indicators, a number of provincial agencies collect data on crime, health, education and economic hardship indicators. Using these pieces of information, considerable work has also been undertaken by BC STATS to develop a method of tracking socio-economic progress across the province at the

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[52] Changes to the *Health Act* now require the Provincial Health Officer to produce an annual progress report on the health of British Columbians. In the mid 1990s the provincial Cabinet also established health goals and directed the provincial health officer to track the status of the goals. The goals set out the province's vision for a healthy population and provide a framework for action to improve the health of British Columbians and reduce inequalities in the province.

[53] PHO, The Health and Well-Being of Aboriginal People in British Columbia, 2002. p. 1.

[54] Ibid., p. 6-7.

regional level that integrates all of this data into an index. This work began in 1998 at the insistence of senior members of the public service to help better target government spending on the basis of need. Today BC STATS compiles an annual Index of Local Health Areas to determine regions with high levels of socio-economic stress. The index includes measures of economic hardship, crime, health and education outcomes and children and youth at risk. A consortium of provincial agencies provides funding for the initiative and uses the index to help target government resources.[56]

Early in 2003, the Fraser Basin Council released a detailed sustainability report for the Fraser Basin eco-region building on the Council's first draft discussion report released October 2000 and their report card on trends published in 1996. Entitled a "Snapshot on Sustainability," the report highlights issues and trends in the Basin and was released at the Council's third biannual State of Sustainability Conference held in Richmond B.C. on January 23-25, 2003.

There are sixteen different themes in the report including housing, fish and wildlife, economic progress, aboriginal self-determination and energy use. It is hoped that the report will act as a catalyst for change to help the Council in its efforts to collaboratively find ways to improve conditions within the Basin. Responding to the report in a panel discussion, the Honourable Stan Hagen, provincial Minister of Sustainable Resource Management, said he would coordinate with his Cabinet colleagues efforts to develop a response to the report. [57]

The Fraser Basin Council's sustainability charter provided the framework for the report and an external advisory committee was established to help develop the report. Other consultation tools used to develop the report included an on-line and take-home survey

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[55] Comments from Ed John, Grand Chief of the Tl'azt'en First Nation, speaking at the Fraser Basin Council conference on January 25, 2003.
[56] A full description of the index and the individual health area profiles produced by BC STATS can be found on the web at: http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/sep/index.htm, (April, 2003).
[57] Comments from the Minister of Sustainable Resource Management, the Honourable Stan Hagen, speaking at the Fraser Basin Council conference on January 25, 2003.

and eight regional workshops that brought together about 300 people. The Council has said that the indicators it develops will be used in many ways, including:

- Monitoring progress towards sustainability,
- Increasing public awareness of sustainability issues,
- Informing policy development and decision-making,
- Priority setting in addressing sustainability challenges,
- Building partnerships among diverse interests, and
- Identifying information gaps.[58]

Community Level Reporting

At the local level there are a number of reports – a few will be mentioned here. On Vancouver Island, "Progress Nanaimo" is a review of progress towards the goals and objectives of "Plan Nanaimo" the City's official community plan adopted in 1996. The report was prepared by City staff and consultants under the guidance of the Plan Nanaimo Advisory Committee. It is currently being updated.

The report identifies baseline information on land use, heritage, and environmental conditions in Nanaimo and includes 27 indicators. Future reports are intended to determine if conditions are improving or getting worse so that the City and residents can take action towards positive change. The report is useful in that it demonstrates how to better monitor the impact of community planning decisions on the community.

In recent years, the United Way in the Lower Mainland has actively supported the development of socio-economic indicator reports in select lower mainland communities – like Surrey and Delta – so they can better understand local conditions and use their resources more strategically to achieve social improvement. Under their Communities in Action program, the United Way works with community leaders to highlight local trends and develop actions plans towards improving social conditions:

> Communities in Action is an initiative that promotes and facilitates bringing together individuals and organizations from across a community to identify local issues, set goals and targets to improve quality of life, and take action to bring about change. Communities in Action initiatives are directed by locally formed

[58] Fraser Basin Council, Sustainability Indicators for the Fraser Basin Workbook, (October 2000)

> steering committees made up of community members including interested citizens, agencies, government, business and labour representatives.[59]

In May 2000, Surrey Social Futures (a non-profit group) and consultant John Talbot teamed up with a 20-member advisory committee to identify indicators of community well-being for Surrey. The project was funded by the United Way as part of its Communities in Action Program and also received support from the City of Surrey. The goal of the project and the report was to provide a vehicle for cooperative community action towards improving quality of life. Organizations represented on the advisory committee included the province, the City of Surrey, residents and merchant's organizations, the school district, activist groups and cultural societies.

Entitled "Community Impact Profile for Surrey/White Rock," the report took six months to prepare and looks at a number of topics including population, employment and income, children and youth, education, ethnicity and immigration, housing, health, leisure, parks and recreation, and safety. The report provided the basis for further discussion at the community level on identifying priority areas for collaborative action.

In follow-up to the project, a local steering committee established three task groups to work on poverty, homelessness and social planning. As well, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) produced a more detailed report on social issues and action in the highly stressed Whalley and Guilford areas of Surrey and committed funding for community development work to be delivered through Surrey Social Futures.

The United Way has supported the development of indicator reports in other communities including Delta. In September 2002 the Delta Communities in Action Steering Committee released "Delta Community Snapshot." The report was completed in a year and highlights 46 indicators of the social conditions in the community. It was prepared with input from a 40-member Steering Committee that included social

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[59] Lower Mainland United Way website, http://www.uwlm.ca/community/comm_act.htm, (April, 2003).

activists, social service providers, First Nations, staff from the municipality, and police organizations. Issue areas covered in the report include population change, children and youth, the economy, education, health, housing, safety and recreation. The report did not identify priority areas for action but will be used as a resource for a community forum "...for residents and service providers to identify common areas of interest in which to work together." [60]

Indicator work has also been undertaken in the BC north. In the spring of 1997, the University of Northern British Columbia completed an assessment of quality of life in Prince George based on over two years of work "...primarily through the efforts of volunteers who gathered information through surveys, focus groups and informal conversations with numerous people."[61] The purpose of the report was to help policy makers at all levels of government focus on issues that are important to the people of Prince George.

The report was sponsored by the Prince George Healthy Community Advisory Committee, in cooperation with the Community Planning Council, the Child Welfare Research Centre and the Fraser Basin Management Program. Other participants included Human Resources Development Canada, the Healthy Communities Initiative Fund and the City of Prince George. The report covered a wide range of social, economic and environmental topics.

The Healthy Communities Advisory Committee is a local initiative. Residents have identified several indicators that describe the conditions of peoples' lives, and have assembled a great deal of background or "baseline" information that was reproduced in the 1997 Prince George report. According to the key contact for the report, professor Alex Michalos from the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC): " It was a good bonding exercise and among other things, what came out of it was a partnership

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[60] Ibid., http://www.uwlm.ca/community/docs/DELTA.introduction.pdf, (April 2003).
[61] A Report on the Quality of Life in Prince George, http://www.pgweb.com/qualitypg/page2.html, (April 2003)

between UNBC and the city, the regional health board and some others to form the Institute for Social Research and Evaluation at UNBC." [62] Through this mechanism survey reports have continued to be developed to help influence the public policy process in Prince George.

CONCLUSION

The above description of indicator development in British Columbia is not an exhaustive representation of what has occurred over the past decade. It does, however, highlight some of the more high profile and influential initiatives. In the next Chapter, the discussion will focus on the provincial pilot projects. The pilot initiative was designed and implemented in the context of existing and previous indicator work in the province.

This chapter has attempted to provide an overview of the context and experience of indicator use in the public sector in North America and in British Columbia in particular. Along with changes in public administration that have occurred in the last two decades, there has been a proliferation of indicator development and use since the late 1980s. As highlighted in this chapter, a number of high profile indicator initiatives have occurred and still exist at the community level as leaders, residents and experts have experimented with new tools for engaging in public discourse. Chapter two will explore five community indicator projects supported by the B.C. government to describe and analyze the results in each of those communities. These projects were launched with the full understanding that indicator development continues to grow in North America and the acknowledgement that it would be useful to find new ways of monitoring progress at the local level. Chapter three will provide a more detailed analysis on the utility of the indicator exercises and how local conditions and particular strategies might impact on the success or failure of a local indicator project. Chapter four provides an overall summary of the thesis with some closing comments and suggested questions for further analysis.

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[62] Email message from Alex Michalos. February 5, 2003.

CHAPTER 2 – MINISTRY PILOT INITIATIVE

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter introduced a variety of indicator projects in North America to demonstrate the range of experience. What these reports all have in common is a desire to track social, economic and environmental conditions to trigger interest towards making improvements. What makes them different is the process through which they were developed and how they are used. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and evaluate the ministry community indicator pilot projects. This will lead to a discussion in Chapter three about the value and potential use of indicators and the factors and strategies for the successful development of a community indicator report.

CONTEXT TO THE MINISTRY PILOT PROGRAM

In July 1999, the then NDP provincial government created the Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers (MCDCV). The Ministry was formed to help the government "realize its vision for the strengthening of the provincial economy at its most grassroots level."[53] The creation of the Ministry came in the context of social and economic pressures resulting from serious decline in B.C.'s traditional resource industries including forestry, fishing and mining. [54] This decline resulted in several high profile events, including the closure of the Bowater pulp mill in Gold River on the west coast of Vancouver Island, the closure of the Quintette coal mine in Tumbler Ridge, and the collapse of the west coast salmon fishery. Along with these high profile events, analysis within government, built through collaboration with BC STATS and the provision of line ministries' program information, was highlighting growing signs of socio-economic stress in disadvantaged communities along with unequal development in BC's regions.[55]

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[53] Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers, 2000-2001 Performance Plan, p. 1.
[54] CYGNUS Management Consultants Inc., and James Pratt Consulting, Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers, Strategy Context Document, (February 2000), p. 11.
[55] Email correspondence from Rupert Downing, (March 16, 2003). Prior to joining the Ministry, Downing had worked as an executive director with the government's central agency for coordinating policy and communications. Before joining government Downing worked for the Social Planning and Research

As described in this excerpt from the Ministry's 2000-2001 Performance Plan, the role of MCDCV as a new provincial agency was to put a greater emphasis on encouraging local economic development:

> A concentrated focus by the Province on communities, their needs, and their relationships with government policies and programs has largely been missing in British Columbia. While community development activity has been occurring across numerous ministries and agencies, the formation of the MCDCV gives a higher profile to and a lead agency for the Province's involvement in community development.[56]

In 2000 the Ministry released a discussion paper on the development of a policy and legislative framework for regional and community development and conducted a series of consultations that same year to identify obstacles to community development. Out of this targeted consultation the Ministry identified a number of challenges for communities including the need for more local empowerment and the importance of tracking changing socio-economic conditions at the local level.

In follow-up to this consultation, the Ministry began developing draft legislation and initiated a number of other policy efforts. As well, a comprehensive research plan was assembled and coordinated by the Ministry's Intergovernmental Relations and Strategic Initiatives Branch (IRSIB). This plan was reviewed and endorsed by the Ministry's Executive Committee chaired by the Deputy Minister. Each branch within the Ministry helped implement specific elements of the research plan.

As part of this plan and in support of what was termed the Ministry's "Community Sustainability Initiative," a pilot program was launched in the fall of 2000 to enable select rural, coastal and urban communities to develop locally relevant ways of measuring their progress by developing community sustainability reports using indicators and benchmarks. These pilot projects were prioritized to build provincial government and community understanding local conditions as a basis for making public

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Council of B.C. No longer working for the province, Downing is a private contractor working on community economic development.

policy and program decisions to improve conditions based on informed analysis. The communities were to lead and own the indicator development processes as a way to create local partnerships and a broader commitment from the public sector to the public for an "...evidence based approach to dealing with community conditions." [57]

The lead public servant behind this initiative was Rupert Downing, the Executive Director of the IRSIB. The indicator projects were initially funded under his branch until it was dissolved with remaining commitments rolled into the Community Transition Branch of the new Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services. There were three main purposes supporting the development of local level indicator projects:

- To create an evidence and knowledge base regarding the changing socio-economic conditions of BC communities;
- To build on community assets to strengthen ongoing capacity outside of government; and
- To inform [senior] government of the most effective roles and responses in order to champion change to support and invest in communities.

BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PILOTS

The stated purpose of the community indicator pilot initiative was to "learn how communities could use evidence-based planning to enhance local, social, economic and environmental sustainability." Key research questions of the initiative included:

- How can communities use information about their relative socio-economic and environmental conditions to take action to enhance those conditions?
- How can indicators be used to measure change in a community?
- What benchmarks can communities set for themselves that help them target and measure action to enhance community sustainability?
- What are some of the best practices that can be used to engage people in communities to use the information and knowledge from indicators to work together to enhance community sustainability?

The management of the pilot program was supported by an inter-ministerial steering committee that met periodically through the summer and fall of 2000 to help design and

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[56] Ibid., page, 5.
[57] Downing.

implement the initiative. Input from some of the participating agencies was facilitated through email exchange and telephone conversations.

Table 2: Community Indicator Pilot Initiative Steering Committee

Steering Committee – Participating Agencies
• Ministry of Municipal Affairs • Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks • Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security • Office of the Provincial Health Officer • Forest Renewal BC • BC STATS • Green Economy Secretariat • Environment Canada • Human Resource Development Canada

A key area of discussion for the steering committee was the selection of the pilots. There were four basic criteria applied in determining the location of the pilot projects:

- At least one urban, one rural and one coastal community should be chosen and at least one of the projects should be regional in nature;
- The communities should be generally in greater socio-economic stress in comparison to rest of the province;
- There should be a locally positioned organization with the capacity to carry out the project and build partnerships with other organizations; and
- There should be no overlaps with other similar projects.

Tony Hodge, an expert in sustainability reporting, provided advice on the implementation of the community pilots. His main contribution to the initiative was the preparation of a technical guide provided to each pilot leader. He also served as a resource for the Ministry and gave public presentations to help facilitate the community engagement process.

After an initial list of communities and regions was narrowed down to four, the Ministry issued an invitation to quote (ITQ) directly to selected organizations it believed had the capacity to undertake each pilot. The ITQ requested that they provide a project proposal to the ministry outlining how the work would be undertaken. Each proposal submitted had to demonstrate the ability to complete the project, as envisioned by the Ministry, within specified timelines, and to also ensure an appropriate level of public consultation

with a diversity of community interests. Four successful proposals were received and as a result four pilot projects were chosen by the late fall 2000, as listed below. Work began early in 2001.

Table 3: Overview of the Ministry Pilots

OVERVIEW OF MINISTRY PILOTS			
Community/ Region	**General Key Local Issues/Concerns**	**Project Proponent**	**Total Provincial Funding**
Alberni-Clayoquot Sound	Resource-based, relatively remote area trying to cope with changes in forestry and fishing. One of the most socio-economically stressed rural areas in BC. As well, there is historic tension between the two municipalities included in the study area: Tofino and Ucluelet. Study area does not include Port Alberni.	Alberni Valley Community Skills Centre	$60,000 (not all expended)
New Westminster	Urban municipality primarily concerned with economic and social issues. One of the most socio-economically stressed urban municipalities in BC.	New Westminster Community Skills Centre Society	$52,000
Quesnel	Resource-based municipality and surrounding rural area in the interior trying to build a more diverse economy and address social and environmental concerns. Quesnel, and the Interior Cariboo region in general, faces greater socio-economic disparity than many other areas of BC.	Fraser Basin Council	$25,000
Powell River/ Sunshine Coast[58]	Coastal region trying to build a more diverse economy in response to changes in fishing and forestry. In Powel River to the North economic transition is a pressing concern with growth management is a key issue facing communities like Sechelt and Gibsons in the south.	Coastal Community Network (CCN)	$60,000*

The ministry articulated its vision for the pilot projects through two mechanisms: the establishment of a contribution agreement with each project proponent, and the aforementioned technical guide on how to build a progress assessment framework. It was, however, recognized that each pilot community would have to develop its own

[58] Initially the Power River-Sunshine Coast project was launched as a regional pilot but was later separated into two recognizing that geographical and demographic differences between Powell River and the Sunshine Coast (Sechelt) would make it extremely problematic for the project proponents. The strategy of separating the pilot provided a focus for each community while still providing an opportunity to link the two at a later stage. Note: *The Ministry provided $60,000 in total for both projects but the CCN was able to access additional funding from Environment Canada and the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks through the Georgia Basin Eco-System Initiative.

approach to building the assessment framework based on local conditions, values and pre-existing relationships between community groups.

The technical guide, developed by Hodge, described the process and content for building an indicator report. It included a list of the potential "communities of interest" that could be invited to participate on a steering committee along with a list of suggested indicators. Hodge's report encouraged each of the pilot leaders not to jump into a discussion over the selection of indicators but to build the context for the report first. This would include the community's "story", an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and a list of goals and objectives generally reflecting the values held in common by the community.

Hodge's approach to indicator development suggests there should be two overarching themes: ecosystem health and human well-being – to address both the economic and social dimensions of society. Ministry officials discussed with Hodge their preferred approach, which would have included three streams of sustainability – environmental, social and economic. The difference of opinion was never resolved. In the end Hodge decided that it was his professional responsibility to present his " best thinking" on the subject – which he did. The final version of the technical guide reflected the view that there are two systems that need to be studied at the community level – the eco-system and the human system. According to Hodge, to separate the social from economic is simply old thinking.

While the technical guide described "how" to undertake the project, the contribution agreements listed "what" was to be accomplished and served as mechanism to disburse ministry funding to the pilot leaders for their work and expenses. Each agreement set out the specific "deliverables" and timelines expected by the Ministry along with a schedule for dispersing payments. In summary each pilot leader was asked to deliver the following:

- Develop a project description and implementation plan;

- Articulate a working set of goals and objectives to provide a framework for the assessment report;
- Draft a community assessment framework – that includes indicators and benchmarks that will be used to measure progress towards sustainability – to facilitate further public consultation;
- Publish and distribute a final report that includes the progress assessment report, an action plan to achieve change, and the suggested institutional home for the project.

As part of their work, each of the pilots was asked to establish a community steering committee charged with the responsibility of helping prepare a draft report to engage the broader community in consultation over which indicators and benchmarks should be chosen for the community. In terms of the content of their final reports, the communities were asked to assess their overall sustainability based on the indicators and benchmarks they had chosen. They were also asked to prepare an action plan detailing the next steps that would be taken towards improving local conditions. It was also requested that the final report identify the permanent "institutional home" for the progress assessment framework based on the Ministry's assumption that each community would recognize the importance of this work and find a way – beyond the time-limited funding provided by the Ministry – to continue this work.

The initiative was supported by a partnership arrangement with BC STATS to ensure that communities would have access to socio-economic data. The Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, through their environmental reporting web page, made information on local and regional environmental conditions available. Staff from the Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and volunteers were also available to assist.

New Westminster Pilot Project Overview

The proponent for the pilot project was the New Westminster Community Development Society (NWCDS). The project was now completed and resulted in a detailed report encompassing 14 community progress indicators that cover social, economic and environmental themes. To encourage public awareness of the findings of the research,

the full report was accompanied by the preparation of a brochure format "report card" to be more widely distributed in the community.

Early on in the development of the project, the NWCDS collaborated with the City of New Westminster planning department to prepare a draft project proposal in response to the Ministry's invitation to quote. A final proposal was submitted to the Ministry and accepted in December 2000 – a contribution agreement establishing a contractual arrangement would be later signed by both parties on January 9, 2001. By that time the NWCDS had already initiated efforts to build support within the community for the project. As a signal of the growing community support, City Council unanimously voted to endorse the indicator pilot project at its October 30, 2001 regular council meeting.

The first step in the development of the indicator report, initiating community consultation, was the establishment of a steering committee with representatives from 17 "communities of interest" including the City of New Westminster Planning Department, New Westminster School District, Fraser Valley Health Authority, Chamber of Commerce, Police Department and various social and community organizations.

The steering committee was first convened in January 2001 to begin work on the project. To help launch the initiative a workshop was held on February 6th at New Westminster Senior Secondary and facilitated by Hodge. In his presentation, Hodge highlighted the benefits of tracking community progress:

- Continuous learning and improving community decision making;
- Providing early signals for needed changes in the community;
- Recognizing and celebrating success in the community; and
- Identifying and prioritizing gaps in knowledge.

Hodge also outlined a community-based approach to "developing and assessing community indicators" and suggested the steering committee begin the process by thinking about the difficult circumstances facing New Westwestminster.

The first task of the steering committee was to establish the goals for the project – listed below – and to set the strategic framework for the selection of indicators and benchmarks. The committee did this by identifying major challenges facing the community and by identifying suggested goals (listed on the next page).

1. To develop a set of social, economic and environmental indicators and benchmarks that will measure ongoing change occurring in the city to help in community planning and policy making.
2. To identify the best ways to disseminate information on community indicators to the public and to determine best practices to engage residents in using the information and knowledge from indicators to work together in enhancing sustainability and community health.
3. To develop an ongoing mechanism for assessing the progress towards sustainability that will consider both the process (the how) and the substance (the what) of community progress.

Once the steering committee had compiled a suggested set of community challenges and goals, it spent the next few meetings identifying 80 potential indicators for the report. Knowing that this was too long a list for the project to manage, the committee applied three criteria to narrow the list:

- Is the data for the indicator easily available?
- Will the indicator trigger action in the community?
- Will residents understand and care about the indicator?

Applying the criteria above, 35 indicators, covering a full range of social, economic and environmental issues, were included in a draft indicator workbook prepared for distribution over the summer of 2001. A planning student hired by the NWCDS assisted in researching and writing the workbook. The purpose of the workbook was to encourage more broadly based community dialogue, beyond the steering committee, on the development of the progress assessment framework. The workbook included a letter from the mayor inviting residents to "...participate in this exciting and innovative project."[59] A detailed survey form was included at the end of the report for interested residents to fill out.

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[59] New Westminster Community Development Society. Healthy and Sustainable Indicators Project for New Westminster, (Spring 2001).

The NWCDS produced 700 copies of the workbook and distributed it to various public places around the city including Douglas College, City Hall, the public library, Canada Games Pool, and the Youth Centre. Drop box areas were available in the locations where the report was provided to encourage residents to fill-out the feedback forms. The report was also sent directly to steering committee members and other agencies, community groups and organizations including the Greater Vancouver Regional District, the local Food Bank, Residents' Associations, local MP Paul Forseth and the newly elected MLA, and Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection, the Honourable Joyce Murray.

As part of the communication strategy to help bring the workbook to the attention of the general public, a special community report – "City gets a major check-up" – was also published in the local newspaper providing the equivalent of a full page of news coverage on the project. The story detailed the contents of the workbook, indicated where copies of the report could be found and encouraged residents to comment on the draft set of indicators. It also invited residents to attend an open house – the Community Solutions Forum – to be held on October 4, 2001. [60]

Public consultation was also facilitated through scheduled meetings with key agencies to outline the project and solicit feedback on the draft indicators, and through the informal community engagement and networking undertaken by individual steering committee members. The NWCDS and the New Westminster Library also profiled the draft report and information about the project on their websites and encouraged residents to participate in the process. In total, 37 survey forms were returned along with a number of email responses. The feedback from the public indicated support for 19 indicators presented in the workbook and also identified another 40 potential indicators. Respondents also seemed to favour reporting every three years (54%) instead of annually (45%).

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[60] The New Westminster Record, August 26, 2001. p. 9.

Applying the aforementioned criteria for indicator selection the steering committee narrowed the suggested list of newly identified indicators from 40 to 9. The 9 new indicators, along with the 19 from the original group of 35, were discussed at the Community Solutions Forum held on October 4, 2001. About thirty people attended the forum and the result was the selection of 14 indicators for the development of the sustainability report.

The final report was completed February 2002 and was accompanied by a summary "report card" that was more widely distributed to inform residents of the outcome of the project. The NWCDS produced 1,500 copies of the brochure format "Report Card" and about 50 copies of the full reports. Distribution of the full report was primarily accomplished through e-mail and by posting the report on the NWCDS web page at: http://www.newwestced.bc.ca.

To help communicate the results of the project, each indicator in the final report identifies if the community is doing very well in that area (green light), poorly (red light) or if there is insufficient information to know at this time (amber light). Positive conditions identified in the report include lots of green space in the city, clean drinking water, falling crime rate and an increase in average family income over the past seven years. Areas of concern include an increase in waste going to landfills, too much traffic through the city and the need to encourage business development. (See Appendix One for a complete list of the indicators chosen for the final report).

It is worth noting that the NWCDS was chosen to present a paper on the pilot project at a Population Health Conference in Richmond B.C. in April 2002. The conference was sponsored by the Health Association of BC and its aim was to foster activity at the community level towards achieving BC's Health Goals. The presentation was provided in cooperation with the Fraser Valley Health Authority – an agency represented on the steering committee. As well, the NWCDS was asked participate in a panel discussion on

its pilot project experience as part of a workshop on indicators for community economic development at Langara College May 2-3, 2003.

As was intended with all of the pilot projects, it is up to the community to decide if it will continue the initiative and produce follow-up reports. With the relationships that have developed between the members of the steering committee and the enthusiasm of the NWCDS to continue to manage the process, there is a good chance that future reports will be produced pending the identification of a new funding source.[61] On an interim basis the NWCDS has agreed to provide "secretariat" support to ensure the continuation of the steering committee that will meet periodically.

Follow-up action work is still underway by the NWCDS under the guidance of the steering committee. The society is trying to develop an innovative approach to addressing waste reduction and poverty – two "red light" indicators – simultaneously. With funding from Environment Canada through the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative, the society completed a draft action plan in February 2003 that suggested the following:

> ...to reduce the amount of materials/waste that reach our landfills by suggesting possible projects that have community participation as a central focus. New Westminster residents currently in receipt of income assistance will be trained to educate, promote, and encourage waste reduction activities here in the city. [62]

The society's action plan provides a detailed project description, budget and identifies potential funding sources to cover the estimated $60,000 cost of the initiative. The plan was endorsed by the steering committee and particularly favourable feedback was

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[61] For most community development projects finding funding is always an issue. More resourceful organizations are able to find pockets of government or non-governmental funding that may be available from time-to-time if they know where to look, but significant effort and resources can often be expended in the exercise. The province understood that this would be a continuing challenge for communities and strategically designed the pilot approach to encourage the development of relationships between community leaders so that they could then work together to access funding.

[62] New Westminster Community Development Society. Healthy and Sustainable Community Indicators Action Report: Exploring Waste Reduction and Return-to-Work Strategies For Income Assistance Recipients, February 2003. p. 2.

provided by Douglas College, the Planning Department at the City of New Westminster and the Fraser Health Authority.

Powell River – Sunshine Coast Pilot Projects

The proponent for the Powell River and Sunshine Coast projects was the Coastal Community Network (CCN).[63] The CCN is a non-profit organization that facilitates discussion between representatives from community councils, Regional District boards, First Nations bands, tribal councils, business and union leaders and other concerned interest groups and residents on the economic future of all coastal regions of British Columbia.

A contribution agreement establishing a contractual arrangement between the province and the Coastal Community Network was signed on January 9, 2001. Initially the Powell River-Sunshine Coast project was launched as a single pilot that would encompass both sub-regions on the coast. Later discussions with the CCN clarified that the geographical and demographic differences between Powell River and the Sunshine Coast (Sechelt) would make it extremely problematic for the initiative to proceed as a single project.

As a result of the discussion between the Ministry and the CCN, it was agreed that two sub-regions would have separate processes and reports but that the Ministry could not provide extra funding. The province did agree to help secure additional funding through other sources. Under the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative, additional funding was provided by the B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks ($5,000) and from Environment Canada ($10,000).

Neither project has yet produced a final indicator report, but both started the relationship building process and generated draft frameworks that include drafts set of goals for each area that encompass the social, economic and environmental dimensions of

sustainability. The CCN has attributed the delay in progress to the fact that communities set their own pace in community development work based on their capacity.

Sunshine Coast (Sechelt)

Under the facilitation of Bruce Milne, the Mayor of Sechelt and Chair of the CCN, a steering committee of three local governments, the health council and the school board was established and met for the first time to be introduced to the project on May 18, 2001. At that meeting the steering committee decided that it was important to develop goals for the three themes of a sustainable community – economic, social and environmental. The committee was also clear that the project should build on existing efforts and not simply result in "yet another study of community goals." [64]

The first task in the development of the indicator report was a review of previous studies, community processes and agency mandates to identify existing goals. Over 100 references to policy or value statements from 35 different organizations were collected and reviewed by District of Sechelt staff to establish a database of goal statements sorted into social, economic and environmental categories. From this starting point, the steering committee sought opportunities to further discuss these goals at existing and ongoing community initiatives.

In the fall of 2001, a draft set of social goals was discussed at the second annual 'poverty' issues forum held in Gibsons. The Sunshine Coast Community Services Society organized the event that was attended by over 100 people. Attendees were divided into working groups to identify goals, indicators and actions for the following themes: advocacy, families and children, health, food, education, training and volunteering, youth, housing and jobs.

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[63] For more information on the Coastal Community Network (CCN): see http://www.coastalcommunity.bc.ca (April, 2003)

[64] Coastal Community Network, "Indicators and Benchmarks for Sustainable Communities, Sunshine Coast and Powell River Pilot Projects, Final Report," (March 2002), p. 8.

Discussion on ecological goals and indicators was undertaken at a workshop on January 26, 2002, in partnership with the Sunshine Coast Conservation Association – an organization with links to over 75 environmental groups. About 60 people attended the workshop and were divided into three groups – biological diversity, quality of life, and sustainable community and governance – to review draft goals and to identify indicators of progress.

The Sunshine Coast Community Economic Development Partnership (SCCEDP) was recently established as the lead organization for "creating a sustainable economic future for the lower Sunshine Coast." A public consultation process has been initiated by the SCCEDP towards creating an economic development plan for the Sunshine Coast. This plan will be integrated into and provide the economic goals and indicators for the Benchmarks and Indicators Project.

The three streams for a sustainability report card – social, environmental and economic – were discussed at a public forum on October 19, 2002 at Chatelech Secondary School in Sechelt. The Coastal Community Network sponsored the event with support from the Sunshine Coast Community Services Society, the Sunshine Coast Community Economic Development Partnership and the Sunshine Coast Conservation Association. Funding for the event was also provided by Environment Canada through the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative. The purpose of the workshop was to integrate 29 goals and indicators (8 ecological, 12 economic and 9 social) into a final sustainability report card for the community by linking activists and leaders in a dialogue from the three main streams, who had previously not worked together.

About 40 people attended the event – not including event organizers, facilitators and other support staff – representing a diversity of local and regional interests including economic development practitioners, medical health officers, social service agencies local government mayors and senior staff, and environmental activists. As total participation in the previous events had exceeded 250 people there was some

disappointment in the relatively low attendance but it was acknowledged that the forum had coincided with a number of other local events. In this context, having the participation of 40 active community leaders representing all sectors of the community was still seen to be positive.

The forum was facilitated by John Talbot, a well-respected community consultant who has worked on local level planning initiatives in many communities in British Columbia. After a brief introduction, attendees were divided into small dialogue sessions that each reviewed and commented on 10 goals and their associated indicators selected from each of the three streams. Through the process of facilitated dialogue and by allowing the participants to rank their priority concerns, 9 core goals emerged from the discussion identified in the graphic below:

Table 4: Priority Goals Identified at the Sechelt Integration Forum[65]

1. Protection of drinking water sources used for public consumption. 2. Increase public awareness of, and commitment to, sustainability. 3. Access to affordable and adequate housing. 4. Maintain, and where necessary restore, the natural diversity of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. 5. Integration of a thriving economy with protection of our environmental and cultural heritage. 6. Access to an adequate quantity of food. 7. Improvement in local infrastructure to enhance quality of life. 8. Access to rewarding and meaningful work. 9. Coordination of economic development activities with policies and decisions of local governments

At the end of the small dialogue sessions, participants also engaged in a brainstorming session to determine potential funding sources to help in the development of the report card. A summary of the forum discussion was posted on the District Municipality of Sechelt's website under publications: http://www.district.sechelt.bc.ca/publications.html.

On November 15, 2002 a follow-up meeting was held with the steering committee, local facilitators and volunteers to discuss the outcome of the forum. The general reaction to the event was that it was seen to be positive in that it had "...[brought] persons with various perspectives together to work in a non-threatening context on

common issues." [66] But it was also recognized that the event as conceived had been extremely ambitious and that "...more training and better background briefing would have assisted group discussion, especially for those who were relatively new to this project." [67]

While it is anticipated that the report card will be completed within a year, lack of access to additional funding might make it difficult to complete this work. On February 5, 2003, community leaders who participated at the forum met at the Sunshine Coast Regional District office in Sechelt to discuss the format for the indicator report card and opportunities to find funding for drafting and publications costs. A permanent organization with draft terms of reference has now been formed as a result of the meeting. It is called the Sunshine Coast Community Indicators Working Group. Core institutions that make up this group include the Sunshine Coast Regional District, local municipalities, the Social Planning Council, the Sunshine Coast Community Economic Development Partnership, Sunshine Coast Conservation Association, School District 46, Chamber of Commerce, and Community Futures. Working groups have also been established to focus on developing the contents of an indicator report. The basis for this report are the nine priority goals identified at the integration forum and the "Framework for Sustainability on the Sunshine Coast" that emerged based on further discussion about those goals (see Appendix two).[68] Further information sharing and discussion with a wider audience is to be facilitated through a community cable television program and presentations to the municipal councils of Gibsons and Sechelt.

Powell River

The context for Powell River at the time this project was launched was similar to the situation facing other resource dependent communities – population decline and

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[65] Sunshine Coast Community Indicators Working Group, Draft Report on the Indicators Forum, February 2003.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Coastal Community Network, Framework for a Sustainable Sunshine Coast, Submitted to Environment Canada as Final Deliverables For Memorandum of Agreement, March 31, 2003. see pages 7-8.

economic instability. Restructuring in the forest industry would eventually force the closure of the NorskeCanada kraft pulp mill in Powell River late in 2001 resulting in the loss of 280 local jobs and a decrease in the local tax base. To help the community recover from this economic loss, NorskeCanada provided Powell River with $3 million in economic development support. [69]

The pilot project began as a series of discussions between December 2000 and March 2001 with a broad group of community organizations and businesses. While this initial process of community consultation took some time, the CCN saw this as "critical to the community engagement process and the overall success of the project."[70] What emerged from this dialogue with community leaders was a number of clear messages to the CCN about how the project should be undertaken: avoid duplication by integrating this project with existing community efforts, do not produce just another study, and ensure the project has realistic time frames and outcomes that match the community's capacity. Eventually the consultation efforts of the CCN and the assistance provided by a local coordinator led to the establishment of a project steering committee representative of a diverse group of community interests including business organizations, local government, the regional health authority, community groups and others. The steering committee met on a regular basis to assist with guiding and implementing the project.

The Powell River pilot initiative resulted in the development of a draft sustainability framework including goals and objectives. This was to be distributed to the community for feedback and endorsement to form the basis for the development of an indicator report with benchmarks and an action plan but no final report was ever prepared. The Coastal Community Network had attempted to establish a partnership with the Powell River Regional Economic Development Society to see if they could lead the indicator development work and to continue to publish a community report card on a yearly basis. This was communicated to the Ministry in the final report prepared by the CCN in March 2002:

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[69] The Powell River Peak, October 23, 2001. (Online)

> It appears at this time that the Economic Development Society is willing to take the lead on implementing the future steps of this project as well as continue to coordinate and distribute a yearly community report card...It is quite evident that the Powell River community sees value in the sustainability framework and will be continuing to utilize it in the future. [71]

A phone conversation with the President of the Powell River Regional Economic Development Society on February 28, 2003 clarified that no further work has been undertaken in Powell River. [72] Going over the history of the project, the president remarked that what worked against it is that the community did not initiate it. While some people were interested in the project no champions emerged to move it forward. Things may have been different if the idea for the project had come from the community.

Timing was also a factor. The community was focussed at the same time on developing and implementing a grassroots economic development strategy. Local people found it confusing to work on the "abstract" indicator project in parallel to their priority project.[73] As a trade-off, the community decided to engage in the indicator project to take advantage of the community development expertise provided by the CCN project leader. Now that their economic development plan is in place and work is underway to advance particular projects, interest in indicator development may re-emerge but will have to be driven by a local advocate.

By piecing together the story from the bits of information the author has gathered, it can be concluded that while the CCN was actively engaged in Powell River and provided

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[70] CCN. p. 13.
[71] Ibid., p. 21.
[72] Phone conversation with Arlete Drader, President of the Powell River Economic Development Society, February 28, 2003. 2:30pm.
[73] Along with the President for the society, the Economic Development Officer was also contacted and stated that he was only vaguely familiar with the project and had only met once with a representative of the Coastal Community Network. From his perspective he did not see any value in the "benchmarks" project. This particular person had been with the society since March 2002. Phone conversation with Roy McNaughton, Economic Development Officer of the Powell River Economic Development Society. February 27, 2003. 1:00pm.

some expertise to the community, the project itself was not seen by the community to be valuable. At the time the project was initiated, the community was focussed on moving forward with economic development projects as a result of the pressing need to find ways to replace the economic loss associated of the pulp mill closure by using the funding provided by NorskeCanada. The indicator pilot may have been more successful if it had been delayed until it could be positioned as a means to measure the progress and impact of specific development initiatives. Since neither the CCN nor the Regional Economic Development Society are currently engaged in this work any more the only final conclusion that can be reached is that the indicator project and process has come to a close in Powell River.

Quesnel Pilot Project Overview

The proponent for the Quesnel pilot project was the Fraser Basin Council (FBC). The Council is a non-profit, charitable organization working to "ensure the sustainability of the Fraser Basin." A Board of Directors made up of federal, provincial, municipal and First Nation government representatives, along with other non-government interests, govern the FBC.[74]

The FBC was chosen to lead a rural community indicator project given their established relationships and previous project work with interior communities and their progress towards developing a sustainability indicator framework for the Fraser Basin. A contribution agreement between the province and the FBC was executed on January 15, 2001. Unlike the other pilot projects, expenses for the Quesnel pilot were shared equally between the two parties to the agreement, the province and the FBC.

Initially Merritt was considered for the project location but when the community was approached it became clear that this would be a duplication of effort because the community was already engaged in a similar initiative being led by the Centre for

[74] More information on the Fraser Basin can be found at: http://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/about.html

Community Enterprise[75]. After further thought the community of Quesnel was chosen as the location for an interior pilot project.

The FBC launched the pilot on January 29, 2001 by presenting the project to Quesnel City Council. The purpose of the presentation was to gauge local interest and to begin building support for the initiative. Quesnel Council enthusiastically endorsed the project and unanimously passed a motion to provide in-kind support as required. As its first task, the FBC pulled together a local project team representing a diversity of community organizations in February of 2001 to manage the development of the report. The team first met with the FBC on March 14, 2001 in Quesnel City Council chambers.

The project team decided it should play a consultative role and would review and sign-off materials prepared but it directed the FBC to take the lead role in the project's management. It also thought it necessary that a working group of three people be designated to work more directly with the Council to provide guidance on the development of the three main dimensions of a sustainability progress report: community (social), economic and environmental.

At the initial meeting, three key messages were delivered by the project team that set the direction for the pilot. First the project team asked that the pilot build on and help link together extensive work that had already been done in the community. In fact it was the "...concept of bringing all this work together and looking at the community holistically that captured the interest of most participating."[76] Secondly, it was suggested that indicators should be chosen that could be linked to and encourage action. Finally, the group said that face-to-face meetings should be held to a minimum and replaced where possible with email exchanges and teleconferencing.

At the second meeting of the project team, participants reviewed a draft strategic framework prepared by the FBC that would serve to guide the selection of indicators.

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[75] More information on the Centre for Community Enterprise can be found at: http://www.cedworks.com/

As directed by the project team, this framework was based on a consolidation of various local studies and plans completed in recent years including the municipality's Official Community Plan, an Economic Development Strategy and a Quality of Life Survey. Feedback on this initial piece of work was quite positive. For project team members "...seeing the community's sustainability goals, objectives and challenges pulled out of existing reports and put in one place (the Benchmarks Report) was extremely valuable."[77]

Using the strategic framework as thematic guide, along with a set of clear criteria (see Table 5 below), the FBC developed a draft list of indicators in consultation with the project team. To facilitate broader public input on the work that had been completed to date, the FBC published a discussion paper with the strategic framework and potential indicators.

Table 5: Quesnel Project Criteria for Selection of Sustainability Indicators[78]

Available - Data are available and easily accessible
Understandable - Data are easily understood by a diverse range of people
Credible - Data are valid, reliable
Temporal - Data can show trends over time and progress towards targets
Relevant - Indicators reflect community values
Integrative - Data demonstrate connections among key dimensions of sustainability
Comparable - Data can be compared with other regions
Linked to Action - Selected indicators can be linked to concrete actions to help reach community

The discussion paper was made available to the public via the Internet and in hard copy at key locations including the public library, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Municipal Hall. Feedback forms and a drop-box were also available in these locations. As well, a feature newspaper article in the Quesnel-Cariboo Observer provided residents with an overview of the project and information on how to receive a copy of the draft discussion paper to provide feedback. Other consultation was provided through interest group meetings held between September 17-19th 2001 and informal networking by the

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[76] Fraser Basin Council, Quesnel Benchmarks of Progress, Meeting Notes. March 14, 2001.
[77] Fraser Basin Council, Quesnel Benchmarks of Progress, April 25th Meeting Notes.

project team – already active members of their community in organizations like the Child and Family Project and the Community Economic Development Commission.

All of this activity culminated in a community forum held on November 15th, 2001 at the Quesnel Arts and Recreation Centre to further discuss potential indicators for Quesnel. Close to twenty people attended. Following the forum the project team met again on December 11, 2001 to finalize the set of indicators. Work then began on the completion of a final report.

On June 17, 2002 the final report was presented to Quesnel City Council and Council was asked to take on the responsibility of providing a permanent home for future progress reports. After a short debate on the frequency of reporting, Council unanimously passed a motion to continue to report to residents on progress towards sustainability every few years in-between municipal electoral terms. During the meeting the Mayor praised the project as a good start and said that, as noted in the report, air and water quality were priority issues the community will address in the future. (See Appendix Three for a full list of the indicators in the final report). On July 8, 2002, the Mayor sent a letter to staff of the Fraser Basin Council, copied to the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, thanking the FBC for their work and confirming that the Municipality would continue with future indicator reporting:

> On behalf of Council I wish to thank you both, along with the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, for organizing the "State of our Community; Moving Sustainability Forward" report in conjunction with our talented local people. This report should be reviewed regularly over the next couple of years. This report was adopted by Council at its June 24, 2002 regular public meeting, with the City pledging to update and maintain this document as part of its Municipal Report on the middle year of each Council's term, with the first update to be hopefully part of the year-end report for 2003, delivered in the

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[78] Fraser Basin Council. State of Our Community: Moving Sustainability Forward. Final Report. Quesnel, B.C., May 2002. p. 9.

> Spring of 2004. Hopefully we will get some help from the Quesnel Project Team.[79]

It should also be mentioned that along with the final report, a brochure – similar to the one in New Westminster – was produced. To provide some sense as to whether or not the indicators reflected positive, negative or indeterminate trends, a happy, sad or indifferent face was placed beside each indicator to help communicate to the public the significance of the information.

To date Quesnel has used the indicator report to advance a number of initiatives including ones related to energy use, water and air quality. The community recently received an overall sustainability award from the Fraser Basin Council – in part due to their success in developing the indicator report.

Alberni-Clayoquot Pilot Project Overview

The proponent for the pilot project was the Alberni-Clayoquot Community Skills Centre. This pilot was chosen in part because of the relatively high socio-economic stress in the region. The development of a progress report to encompass the entire region – including the municipalities of Ucluelet and Tofino and First Nations – was seen to be an opportunity to overcome the ongoing tension in the region between communities by helping local leaders develop an understanding of the common challenges they face. The project was launched on January 9, 2001.

Of the five Ministry pilot projects the Alberni-Clayoquot project has had the least success and did not produce a final report. From the outset there was local resistance to undertaking the pilot because of the existing tension between the Tofino and Ucluelet and ongoing criticism from local representatives that while there have been numerous studies and reports for the West Coast, none of this work has resulted in improvements to quality of life.

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[79] Office of the Mayor, His Worship Stephen Wallace, Correspondence to the Fraser Basin Council, July 8, 2002.

Late in January of 2001, a meeting was held to introduce community leaders to the pilot. At the meeting about half of the group indicated support for the pilot while others raised concerns. The basic message the group delivered was for the pilot to avoid duplication and to make sure there was no conflict with existing projects. The meeting gave the project leader a clear sense of obvious and potentially divisive tensions between some of the leaders present.

In response to the request from the community leaders to avoid a duplication of efforts, the Community Skills Centre and the UN Clayoquot Biosphere Trust formed a partnership on March 29, 2001 to jointly work on projects including the indicator and benchmark pilot. A regional-indicators-working-group was established to help steer the project. The partnership later evolved to include the Long Beach Model Forest that at the time was working on its own set of indicators primarily on forest related issues.

Through the spring and summer of 2001 a positive working relationship developed between the Community Skills Centre and the Biosphere Trust but on-going consultation with the working group proved to be problematic given the difficulty scheduling meetings and building consensus between the members. On the latter issue the Community Skills Centre warned that indicator and benchmarking work was premature given the "critical groundwork" of building positive relations between the different communities of interest that was needed:

> The community and region is still divided along resource management issues, socio-economic issues and to an extent, cultural issues. While the differing opinions and points of view will always be there, it is difficult, at the present time, to find the right mechanism that will allow the various players to move from promoting self-interest to supporting regional interests. The two communities [Tofino and Ucluelet] see themselves as competing for scarce resources and while there has been some cooperation in the tourism sector, with education/youth and some social issues, there has not been a great deal of sharing. Another complicating factor is the jurisdictional issues related to the levels of government

holding authority in the region – First Nations, Municipal, Regional District, Provincial and Federal.[80]

In their early fall 2001 report to the Ministry, the Community Skills Centre continued to raise concerns that the project would face challenges in generating support from the community. They advised that they had been consistently told by community representatives that the project was seen to be an "...externally imposed, government driven initiative...that is premature, given other projects being carried out by other community agencies." [81]

Efforts shifted to less community based consultation and more focus on developing a draft list of indicators through the partnership. The list of potential indicators in Table 6 below was prepared and contributed to a workshop on the Natural Step[82] held in the community on October 25, 2001.

Table 6: Potential Indicators for the Alberni-Clayoquot Region

Social Indicators	• Level of education • Health outcomes • Crime Rates • Youth/Children at Risk	• Community affordability • Population change • Equality • Dependency on social safety net
Environmental Indicators	• Water quality • Air quality • Soil quality	• Health of land-ecosystem • Health of marine-ecosystem
Economic Indicators	• Employment rates • Family incomes	• Economic growth • Economic diversity

Early in 2002, the Community Skills Centre, the Long Beach Model Forest and the UN Clayoquot Biosphere Trust produced a community survey document to seek feedback from community leaders and organizations on the draft set of indicators listed above. The survey was sent to over 60 contacts representing First Nations government, local and regional governments, community organizations, NGOs, local businesses and

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[80] Alberni-Alberni-Clayoquot Community Skills Centre. Draft progress report to the Ministry, July 24, 2001.

[81] Alberni-Alberni-Clayoquot Community Skills Centre, Interim Report Community Assessment Pilot Project, West Coast of Vancouver Island, September 20, 2001, p. 1.

[82] The Natural Step is a non-profit organization formed in 1989 to provide advice to business and governments to integrate sustainability principles into their operations. For more information please see: http://www.naturalstep.org/ (April, 2003)

others asking them to rank the indicators presented within each category – social, economic and environmental – and to provide up to two additional indicators if interested. The results were to be tabulated and form the basis for selecting a set of key indicators for a final indicator progress report.

By June 2002 the proponent still had not completed a final report and had closed its doors while the Board wound down its operations. The former Executive Director of the Community Skills Centre tried to complete the final report but found it problematic given his relocation to Vancouver. In the end his inability to access key files made it impossible to complete the report. By that point the project leader was continuing the pilot on his own goodwill as he was no longer employed by the Skills Centre. \When the Ministry realized that the Skills Centre's phone line had been deactivated, attempts were made to contact the former Executive Director to find other ways to contact the Skills Centre. Throughout the summer and into the fall 2002 the Ministry tried to maintain contact with the Executive Director but successive emails were not returned. In October 2002 the Ministry sent a final letter to the Community Skills Centre Society informing the board that a final deliverable in their Contribution Agreement with the government had not been met and as a result they would not be receiving a final payment. Correspondence was returned unopened and the final payment was not made.

PILOT PROJECT EVALUATION

This section will focus on evaluating the outcomes of each of the ministry pilot projects along with the factors that affected their progress. The three areas that will be looked at are the role and performance of each of the proponent organizations, an analysis of local factors that either facilitated or impeded the development of a final indicator report and follow-up action and the role of the Ministry in leading the initiative.

This evaluation is based on the degree to which each of the pilots met the requirements set out for them in their contract with the Ministry. It also relied on feedback forms

provided to Steering Committee members from the two projects that completed final reports: New Westminster and Quesnel. As well, it draws on the discussion from a final meeting of project leaders held on June 13, 2002 of the lessons learned from the initiatives along with the observations and thoughts of the author.

In summary, of the five projects that were launched, only two have been completed to date (New Westminster and Quesnel), one continues and shows some promise of downstream success (Sechelt), and two were unsuccessful (Powell River and Alberni-Clayoquot). Table 5 below, provides an overview of the results of each initiative.

Table 7: Pilot Results Overview

	Tasks					
Project	**Establish Steering Committee**	**Develop a draft indicator report/ framework**	**Consult more widely with the public**	**Final Report Completed**	**Action taken as a result of the report**	**Institutional home identified for future reporting**
Quesnel	✔	✔	✔	✔	½	✔
New Westminster	✔	✔	✔	✔	½	½
Sechelt	✔	✔	½	✖	✖	✖
Powell River	✔	½	✖	✖	✖	✖
Alberni/Clayquot	½	½	✖	✖	✖	✖
✔ = full completion ½ = partial completion ✖ = no work undertaken for this task						

Performance of the Pilot Project Proponents

The evaluation of the performance of the proponent organizations will focus on three key activities they were engaged in: establishing and managing a local steering committee, engaging in wider public consultation and completing a final report.

Establishing a Steering Committee

Each of the project leaders was asked to establish a local steering committee to help guide the development of their sustainability report. This section will look at the role of the steering committee in helping to ensure the indicator project reflected a diversity of local values and concerns. Efforts were made in all five of the projects and each met with a range of success. The committees that seemed to function the best were those

established in New Westminster and Quesnel. In Sechelt and Powell River, committees were established but did not seem to play as critical a role in the project work. That appeared to be led more by the proponent organization, although recent events in Sechelt demonstrate that a community steering committee of local people is coming together to move work forward. On the west coast in Alberni-Clayoquot, initial efforts at establishing a broadly based committee with representatives from Tofino and Ucluelet were not successful. It is difficult to tell whether the proponent organization could have used other techniques to bring people together or whether tensions in the region simply made establishing a working committee impossible.

In New Westminster, the local steering committee played an important role in the development of the sustainability report. The project leader held regular meetings so the committee could provide guidance to the project and review materials. Through this process the group helped draft a preliminary report that included goals and indicators; design a public consultation plan; complete a final report, and find ways to communicate the results of the project to the broader community. As well, the steering committee has remained engaged in the development of an action plan to follow-up the indicator report.

One of the outcomes of the New Westminster project was that the process helped to build stronger relations between the local organizations that sat on the committee – including the City Planning Department, the Police Department and the Regional Health Authority. In response to an evaluation form provided to each steering committee member on their perceptions of the project, a number of respondents indicated that the project helped facilitate community engagement and improved relations between local organizations. One person responded that the project helped them to understand "...who the players were and are, [and] what the vision is for this community. It gave me contextual understanding of the city." Strengthening relationships between important local organizations that play a lead role in policy development and the delivery of local services to residents is, in itself, important as noted in recent study of the outcomes of five indicator projects in the United States: "[Indicator projects] can yield many

intangible benefits that provide a foundation for change. They build connections between people, foster discussion in the community, and can be a great education tool to raise awareness."[83]

The feedback received from evaluation forms was not all positive however. Some people felt that the steering committee did not fully represent the entire community. One respondent remarked that the Committee was "...handpicked and a closed group" while another said that a relatively early meeting time (5:00-7:00pm) did not make it possible for neighbourhood groups to participate. On the other hand, others thought the committee was open to anyone who wanted to participate. One person said, "I don't think that there was anyone who wasn't given the opportunity to participate, but I am always dismayed by the disinterest of the community."

This dialogue illustrates an important tension in trying to undertake a local project with the direct involvement of community groups and residents. First, there is always the difficulty in scheduling and conducting meetings in a way that allows everyone to participate fully. With a limited budget and limited time to complete the project – based on Ministry guidelines – the project leader for New Westminster was compelled to move forward with the project with the involvement of whoever showed up for the meetings and based on whatever feedback she received from email. It is inevitable in a situation like this that not all members of the community will be able to participate.

As well, for many of the active steering committee participants, their involvement in the project was somewhat related to their work so they probably could see a direct benefit in their participation. For other organizations that did not participate (like neighbourhood groups) they probably did not see a direct connection to the project and their interests and may not have had the resources and volunteer staff to play a direct role. In leading a community-based project it is always difficult to get everyone involved.

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[83] Gahin, Randa F. Indicators as a Tool to Help Create Sustainable Communities: A Study of the Outcomes of Five Community Indicators Projects. Masters Thesis for the University of Oregon, School of Community and Regional Planning. June 2001.

In the case of Quesnel, the steering committee also played an important role in the development of the sustainability indicator report. But as was noted earlier in this paper, early on in the project they directed the Fraser Basin Council that they did not want a hands-on role, but instead wanted the FBC to do most of the work. They did however establish a working group from within their ranks so that three people on the steering committee could work more directly with the FBC in providing expertise on the economic, social and environmental areas of the report. The minutes from the steering committee meetings indicate that the project flowed very smoothly. The Fraser Basin Council prepared draft materials with direct input from the working group and then circulated via email to all members of the steering committee for their review.

Early on in the project there was disagreement and discussion by the steering committee members as to the preferred geographic scope of the project. While the City Manager was keen to focus the project within the boundaries of the City of Quesnel, other participants argued that for some areas of community health, understanding the conditions both within the city and the surrounding rural area was equally important. The discussion ended in compromise. Generally the committee agreed that Quesnel needed to be defined by the municipal boundary and the area contained within a 50-kilometre radius around the city. However, it was recognized that the geographic scope for each chosen indicator would be determined by the best available data.

In terms of how the Quesnel steering committee members felt about the project, the evaluation forms that were completed indicate that generally the process was seen to be positive in terms of ensuring that all parts of the community had an opportunity to participate including First Nations. While First Nations did not take up the invitation to participate on the steering committee, the project leader met with band chiefs directly so their thoughts and concerns could be incorporated into the report.

For both the Powell River and Sechelt projects it has been difficult to fully understand the interplay between the proponent organization and the local steering committees. To

date no final report indicator report has been produced but the project is still underway in Sechelt. For the Powell River project, a steering committee was established with broad representation from the community. The committee developed a draft set of challenges, goals and indicators that was to be reviewed by a wider public audience. The intention was for this to lead to the development of a final report but it does not appear as though this will occur.

The steering committee established for the Sechelt project was initially made up of mostly local government and provincial agency representatives. Primarily under the leadership of the Mayor of Sechelt, the steering committee helped to organize three community forums on the economy, social issues and the environment for the purposes of building a framework for the regional sustainability indicators report. The final forum held in October 2002 has spun-off a new indicators working group still working hard to draft an indicator report. As off April 2003, that work was still continuing. The success story with this project seems to be that the former Sechelt mayor's approach of carefully guiding the project through dialogue between community leaders has resulted in a common framework that allows all parties (both activists and community leaders) to see the linkages between environmental, social and economic issues. Now that the framework has been built the former mayor seems to be taking less of a lead role.

The project that struggled the most to establish a well functioning steering committee was Alberni-Clayoquot. The vision behind the selection of this pilot entailed the hope that providing an opportunity for the region to develop a common understanding of local conditions could form the basis for overcoming the animosity between the two communities of Tofino and Ucluelet. Unfortunately, early efforts to bring together representatives from a broad range of interest groups failed and forced the proponent organization to develop strategic alliances as a way to move the project forward.

Community Engagement – Getting Wider Input from the Community

This section will look at how the pilot leaders and steering committees engaged a wider community audience on the project and the development of the report including whether

or not they completed a draft report and what kinds of communications tools and tactics were used to ensure consultation beyond the scope of the steering committee. The analysis of each project will include conclusions as to whether or not public input significantly altered the direction and content of the report and whether or not the projects resulted in innovative or typical indicators. In sum, did the projects widen and deepen the kind of descriptors used to depict location conditions based on more open and responsive consultation?

The New Westminster project produced a draft report that was circulated to the public for review. The report included a letter from the mayor encouraging citizens to read the report and to provide their feedback directly to the Community Development Society. To help facilitate public feedback the report included a survey form for residents to fill out. Other mechanisms used to engage in public consultation included newspaper stories, public forums, informal networking and the Internet. In total, 37 survey forms were returned indicating support for 19 of the 40 indicators presented in the draft report. Also identified were an additional 40 potential new indicators. The steering committee used this feedback to prepare materials for review at a public meeting. The 35 people who attended the meeting were asked to review 19 indicators from the draft report along with 9 new indicators to come up with the final set for the report. In the end 14 indicators were chosen all from the initial list produced in the draft report.

The indicators chosen represent fairly standard measures of community social, economic and environmental health. On the positive side, data is more readily available for these indicators so it will make updating the report easier in the future. On the negative side it could be said that standard measures were chosen over other more innovative measures. For example, New Westminster chose to use income assistance rates as a social health measure over reliance on the local food bank. Each of the potential indicators had been identified in the draft report. One could argue that usage rates for the food bank is a better measure of social health as not all people living in poverty are eligible to receive income assistance.

With a population of over 50,000 people, it does not seem significant that less than 40 people participated in reviewing the report through a public forum. Then again, this is better than no public participation, and without the benefit of further funding for other more expensive means of consultation like phone surveys it is important that at least the effort was made and some people attended. As well, now that a final report has been completed along with an easy to read summary brochure that will be widely distributed, future reports may engender more public interest.

The Quesnel project also prepared a draft report with community challenges, goals and indicators that was circulated in the community and available on the Internet. Along with this members of the steering committee consulted with residents through informal networking. A final discussion on the draft material was held on November 15, 2001 with close to twenty representatives from groups including the Quesnel Environmental Society, the City, the business community and health and social service agencies. There is little evidence that the Quesnel project connected directly with residents in the community aside from the informal networking that took place on the part of steering committee members. One response from a steering committee member confirms this: "I also doubt there was much success getting new or broader participation/input from the general marketing (i.e. newspaper ads)." But many of previous local reports the Fraser Basin Council reviewed in developing the draft sustainability framework had dimensions that reflected the views and values of members of the public.

As in the case of New Westminster, the Quesnel project did not seem to generate a lot of public interest and feedback to help shape the development of the report. But now that both of the communities have final reports this may better enable them to animate public interest on issues raised in the reports to achieve local change. As well, when it comes time to review and revise a second edition of the reports it will be much easier to engage the public with a document in hand. As well, both communities prepared an easy to read brochure outlining key indicators that were chosen. The purpose of this brochure is to get more information out to the general public on the results of the project working from

the assumption that while people may not be interested in reading a detailed report; they may glance at a brochure that could stimulate their interest.

For the Powell River project it appears that to date most of the work in developing the draft framework has been by the Coastal Community Network with support from the local steering committee but, as yet, very little input from the public. In the case of the Sechelt project however, the four forums held to date have provided for direct public participation. In total about 300 people have been involved in the process and not all of them have been community leaders – residents themselves have been directly involved.

As for Alberni-Clayoquot, with the inability to maintain a local steering committee, the Community Skills Centre decided to send out a draft outline to numerous community groups to gauge their interest in a possible set of indicators for the region. According to the project manager who was not able to complete the project and did not provide the ministry with the results of the survey, it resulted in very little feedback.

Report Completion and Final Results

This section will discuss the final reports that were prepared along with results of the project including whether or not follow-up action is underway and if there is an institutional home in the community for future indicator work. As well it will look at other legacy factors including whether or not community leaders and decision-makers are aware of the final reports for their community and if a strategy is in place to communicate the results to a wider public audience. Other factors include whether or not the project substantially changed the minds of the steering committee members about their community in terms of identifying weaknesses and confirming strengths and if the project helped facilitate dialogue within the community that would not have normally occurred.

The completion of the indicator report for New Westminster has had a number of positive results. Under the aegis of the community development society, the local steering committee has agreed to stay connected to the project to guide the development

of future reports. So at least for now the report will continue to be updated hopefully with financial support from the City, business community and other groups to cover future research, design and production costs. Perhaps most importantly, the report has helped to develop a common understanding about key issues facing the community. Feedback from the steering committee members indicates that there is some general agreement that key issues facing the community include poverty and traffic volume through the city, while local strengths include parks, water quality and social supports. The strategy of having a steering committee of local leaders for the project means that each of those representatives – who have an interest in the community and access to resources that can effect change – now has some understanding of the key challenges they face.

As well, the local MLA, who is a member of the provincial Cabinet, is aware of the report and provided a letter of support that was included in the final draft copy. Finally, on the issue of raising awareness, the report has come to the attention of the Social Planning Committee of the Greater Vancouver Regional District whose members have indicated an interest in its findings. The result of this interest is unclear at this time, but again at the very least the report has helped raise the profile of issues facing New Westminster.

In terms of action following the report, two initiatives are underway as a result of the report. The key challenges identified in the report – high levels of poverty and increased waste generation – have been examined further with funding from Environment Canada through the Georgia Basin Eco-system Initiative (GBEI) to find local ways to make progress on these issues. As well, a positive condition noted in the report – parks and greenways – has been documented in an almanac prepared by the School of Ecology at Douglas College, also with funding from the GBEI. The almanac, which includes information on local environmental stewardship groups, will help residents and school-age children in particular find out more about their local parks and sensitive ecological areas and activities so they can get involved in projects to enhance these areas.

In sum, while it is too early to tell whether or not the indicator report will result directly in a positive change in local conditions, it has fostered dialogue between key groups in the community on important issues. Now that those links have been made, it may create better opportunities for linking policy and program activities between agencies like the city planning department, the health authority and other organizations that may have common interests or overlapping mandates that could be better addressed through collaboration. Along with this, it has helped raise the profile of local issues with the provincial and regional levels of government.

For the Quesnel project the completion of the sustainability report will help focus attention on key issues facing the community – including poor air quality and low employment diversity. When the report was presented to the City Council on June 17, 2002, the mayor thanked the project team for their work and remarked that air and water quality are key issues that have to be addressed. The project also helped remind members of the project team that they have the benefit of living in a place with a strong sense of community and hard working volunteers. As one steering committee member said, a strength of Quesnel is the "generally collaborative environment." Being involved in the development of the indicator report has helped to instil optimism in some of leaders in the community. While there are no clear outcomes –as yet – that can be anticipated from the project, the City has pledged to "...update and maintain this [project] as part of its Municipal Report on the middle year of each Council's term, with the first update to be hopefully part of the year-end report for 2003, delivered in the Spring of 2004."

To date, the Powell River project has not produced a final report. On agreement with the Ministry, the Coastal Community Network submitted a progress report in the spring of 2002 detailing the work that had been undertaken and reasons why the report could not be completed on time. These reasons will be explored in the local factors section later on in this paper.

While Ministry funding for the project has been expended, the CCN has said it remains committed to the pilot. To date the Powell River project has resulted in the development of a sustainability framework that includes: challenges, goals and potential indicators identified under 12 themes:

- Partnering and Community Engagement
- Education and Training
- Heritage and Landmarks
- Supporting Healthier Communities
- Supporting Safer Communities
- Equity
- Community Attraction and Growth
- Successful Economic Activity and Employment
- Business Diversification
- Awareness and Access to Financing
- Clean Protected Environment
- Management of Renewable Resources

According to the CCN, a local steering committee had been working to determine the best way of seeking input from the community on the draft framework. At the end of this process it was anticipated that a community report card would be prepared including indicators, benchmarks and an action plan. As well the CCN had hoped that the Powell River Economic Development Society would take the lead on completing the project and ensuring the coordination and publication of a yearly community report card. In terms of the future of this initiative, the CCN stated in its final report to the ministry that:

> Many community organizations in Powell River have indicated that they are willing to participate in ensuring the sustainability framework continues through contributing indicator information and/or providing ongoing feedback. The development of the action plan will outline the responsibility and time frame for each next step. It is quite evident that the Powell River community sees value in the sustainability framework and will be continuing to utilize it in the future.[84]

While the CCN had maintained a high level of optimism for the future of the indicator project in Powell River, recent contact with the community suggests that the indicator project has not and probably will not progress any further.

In Sechelt, three separate processes have been completed to independently address the three themes of social, environmental and economic sustainability. Work is still progressing to bring these together based on discussion held at a final forum held in October 2002. The Coastal Community Network has completed a final report on this event and a local steering committee is coming together on their own to move this forward.

Of the five indicator projects, the Alberni-Clayoquot Sound pilot was the least successful in terms of developing a sustainability framework leading to a final community indicator and benchmark report. Evidence from progress reports provided by the project proponent – the Alberni Community Skills Centre – suggests that local factors played the greatest role in the lack of success in the project. As well, the skills centre itself closed its operations before the project was completed and while the out-going executive director attempted to prepare a final report, he did not succeed. To bring closure to the project, the Ministry was forced to send a final letter to the skills centre board informing them that they would not be receiving their final financial disbursement for not complying with the terms of the contract being not completing the project.

Local Factors

Geographic Dimensions of the Project

The combined experience of all the pilot projects suggests that locally focussed projects can be more successful than regional based ones. Both the Quesnel and New Westminster projects have seen the greatest success and were bounded within a relatively small and cohesive community.

In New Westminster it was clear early on that the focal point for the project would be the boundary of the City of New Westminster that also coincides with the local health area and school district. This made it relatively easy to generate data for the project. In

[84] Coastal Community Network, p. 21.

Quesnel, although the project extended out into the rural area, it still was focussed on one main community.

In contrast, the Sunshine Coast and Alberni-Clayoquot projects were at a regional scale. From the start there were problems with the concept of having one report for the entire Powell River - Sunshine Coast area. While the Coastal Community Network was successful in convincing the Ministry that two projects were needed – one focussed on Powell River and the other on Sechelt – these projects were still at a regional district scale and took a lot of time and energy from the proponent. At this time they remain incomplete although work on each continues.

In the case of the Alberni-Clayoquot Sound project, while the vision of developing a framework to help the communities in the region create a common understanding of the challenges they share and opportunities to work together was based on best intentions, the existing tension between conflicting interests made it impossible for much progress to be made. A more effective strategy may have been to focus on working with one community at a time and then trying to find ways to build linkages rather than grouping them together hoping things would sort themselves out.

Existing relations between local leaders

This factor is critical in terms of building the local steering committee. If existing relations between local leaders and interest groups are tense, then obviously it will be difficult to develop a well functioning steering committee. Both the New Westminster and the Quesnel projects seemed to benefit from the fact that many of the steering committee members already knew each other and were comfortable working together. In fact, the leader of the Quesnel project commented at a meeting with other project leaders that this was one of the easiest community based projects she had ever worked on because of the level of trust between the members of the steering committee. While they may not have all held the same views, their level of respect for one another was evident in the way they conducted themselves on the steering committee. including the

comfort they felt having a smaller sub-group of their team take on most of the work on their behalf.

In New Westminster as well there was an existing familiarity between members of the steering committee that helped that group work well together. As the project advanced, the relationships between members of the committee continued to enhance so much so that by the end of the project, the project leaders remarked that the process and the strengthened relations that developed between the participants was, in and of itself, a very useful outcome.

In the Powell River and Sechelt projects, it was pointed out by the CCN that a challenge for them was getting participation and buy-in from "...multiple communities and communities of interest who have traditionally worked proudly and independently at achieving their own goals." In the end they were successful in building local steering committees after a lot of effort, networking and care.

In Alberni-Clayoquot, the tensions within the region still reverberating from the environmental and land-use battles of the late 80s and early 90s made it extremely difficult to build a well-functioning local steering committee of interested leaders and residents. While the pilot project was profiled as an opportunity to overcome divisions and improve local conditions, it was difficult for the project leaders to get interest and support from local people.

Existing local conditions

Local conditions can either act as catalyst for project development or make things difficult. While New Westminster is one of the more socio-economically stressed urban communities in the province, there seems to be an active interest on the part of community leaders and service providers to work together to improve local conditions. This factor made it easier to pull together a steering committee and achieve a final report.

On the other hand, in Alberni-Clayoquot Sound, the depressed economy and lack of opportunities to replace reduced logging and fishing activities continues to be a challenging factor in trying to engage leaders and residents in sophisticated process-type initiatives like an indicator project. While it is the case that some communities in the region – like Tofino – have been able to rebuild their local economy around eco-tourism, the benefits of this development have not been more widely distributed to offset the serious decline in fishing and forestry. According to the latest statistics on economic hardship, health, education crime and other indicators compiled by BC STATS, the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District remains the "worst-off" region, among all regional districts in the province.[85]

Communities will also have greater success in developing indicator reports if they are linked to recent and existing "processes and priorities". In the case of Quesnel, the community saw that the indicator project would add value to their community by giving them a tool to link together various initiatives already underway. Finding these linkages can take time and because of this indicator development needs to progress at a pace that works for the community: "Communities, of course, are natural forces not to be easily tamed by steering committees or planned agendas." [86]

Community capacity can be limited

Especially in smaller communities, community leaders and residents often have limited volunteer capacity. Ensuring their meaningful contribution to a project means setting a pace that works for them and initiating the work at a time when it does not conflict with other local priorities. Once work begins, it is also important to respect the pace set by the community. While this does not always mesh with higher-level deadlines and priorities, ensuring local participation means not forcing a project forward. As the Coastal Community pointed out in their experience:

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[85] BC STATS Website. Alberni-Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Profile. http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/sep/i_rd/charts/rd23.pdf (April, 2003)

[86] Coastal Community Network, p. 8.

> Community attention needs to be nurtured and can only be captured when other community priorities subside. The right time to strike cannot be foreseen in any linear or predictive manner. Rather, community projects need to be developed so they are available for community attention when circumstances allow.[87]

Finding a link with other initiatives can also be an important success factor. If an indicator project can be a catalyst for helping to address other issues in the community or be used in a way to link together various projects the potential for success can increase, as there will be more community buy-in and opportunities to make use of other capacities.

As well, before initiating or supporting a community indicator project it is important for higher levels of government to determine if any related work is underway or has been completed in the past. Especially in communities facing high levels of socio-economic stress the existence or perception of government duplication or waste can seriously reduce local interest and participation.

In Quesnel, the city had an instant interest in the indicator project to help add a dimension to their strategic planning work. And other members of the community saw an opportunity to use the report to tie various local concerns including economic development, air shed management, transit and education together in one framework.

For the Powell River and Sechelt projects, the community requested that the project "avoid duplication and link with and build upon other community processes." In contrast, it appears that local buy-in was difficult to achieve in Alberni-Clayoquot because local participants felt that the project duplicated other government driven initiatives in the region without adding any value.

Role of the Ministry

Generally speaking, the Ministry worked to help each of the community projects succeed and ensure basic requirements were met by each of the pilot projects for the purposes of

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[87] Coastal Community Network. p, 25.

dispersing funding. Along with the technical guide prepared by the Ministry for use by each of the pilot leaders, support was also given to ensure the project leaders had access to social, economic and environmental provincial indicator data necessary for their reports. For both the Quesnel and New Westminster projects, considerable provincial staff time was dedicated to help the communities obtain indicator data they needed. In the case of the Alberni-Clayoquot project, given the unique geographic boundaries for the project, an arrangement was made with BCSTATS to provide the proponent with area-specific socio-economic data.

Notwithstanding the time, effort and resources expended by the Ministry on this indicator initiative, with the benefit of hindsight it is clear that a number of things could have been done differently that may have enhanced success. First, more advance thought could have been given to designing the initiative before it was launched. Perhaps the best evidence of this is the fact that the technical guide developed to assist the pilot leaders was not completed until after each of the pilot projects had been initiated. While the projects were each launched in January of 2001, the final draft of the Community Sustainability Assessment Guide was not completed until that April. This was not the fault of the consultant working on the guide but was an oversight on the part of the ministry in not having had this work completed in advance of the launch of the projects.

Feedback on the report indicated that while it contained useful material it was very detailed and technical which made it difficult to be put to good use. For each of the proponent organizations working on their projects, the development of the sustainability report was not the only activity they were involved in so they did not have a lot of time to read through and fully utilize all of the materials that were provided to them. Perhaps if the Ministry had invested more time and effort in working with the consultant to edit the guide into a user-friendly version, it may have been put to greater use.

The selection of the proponent organizations is another aspect of the Ministry role that needs to be considered. Only one of the four organizations had direct experience and significant capacity in developing comprehensive indicator reports – the Fraser Basin Council. If all the organizations chosen had specific expertise in this area, the work on all the other projects may have been more successful. Having said that, one conclusion from this experience is that a critical success factor is the ability of the lead organization to build a steering committee and communications network from the community to enable the report to be based on local values and perspectives. This may be more important than having technical indicator expertise. In the case of the New West project, the fact that the project leader had no experience in developing indicator reports did not seem to affect the outcome of the project. What was critical in the success of the project was her ability to pull together a well functioning steering committee, her knowledge of the community and her background in community economic and social development. These seemed to have been more important factors than whether or not she had ever participated in writing an indicator report.

A second major factor is that sometimes the rigid deadlines and expected deliverables demanded by the contribution agreements between the Ministry and the proponent organizations did not match up well with the local conditions. Many of the project leaders remarked during the process that their community had to move at its own pace in the development of the report and that building a strong relationship between steering committee members required time and nurturing. Contract extensions were required for all of the projects and in the case of Powell River, Sechelt and the Alberni-Clayoquot Sound projects they were not able to provide their final deliverables to the Ministry. Despite best intentions things do not always turn out as planned and communities are not always able to meet the expectations of higher levels of government – especially when those expectations do not line up well with local conditions.

CONCLUSION

The development of any local indicator project involves a complicated interplay between the different actors involved. Success is dependent on a number of factors – some controllable, others not. Assuming a community is interested in developing a local report, a critical question to ask early on is whether or not relationships exist or can be developed between key organizations in the community. These relationships are key to building a report with accurate and relevant local data. They are also critical to ensuring follow-up and action. Further to this, the community has to see value in the report, which can be assessed by determining whether or not it can support other initiatives. In the case of Quesnel, the indicator report has helped to link together numerous local initiatives so that they can be viewed more holistically – it has also led to follow-up work. In New Westminster the final report has been used as a basis for further work on waste reduction and addressing poverty. Of the other projects that were not completed, the Sechelt initiative has been used to bring together three previously separate factions interested in the discrete social, economic and environmental dimensions of their community. While a final report has not yet been completed, an integrated sustainability framework has emerged and community leaders have reached agreement on the critical issues facing their community. This in and off itself is an important achievement. And even in the case of Powell River, the community used the indicator development process to aid its community development work. So see together, the evidence from this thesis suggests that even if indicators themselves are not put to immediate and extensive use in policy-making, the process of developing them can benefit communities by helping them build local capacity.

For senior levels of government interested in supporting local indicator development there are a number of lessons to be learned. First of all, the best approach might be to not initiate these exercises but to respond to them as they come up with resources and support. Where there is interest in having a program or pilot initiative, this would be best served through careful design and the development of support materials in advance of implementing specific projects. As well, care has to be given to choosing the best

organization to lead the work. Ideally organizations would be placed or at least have a local presence in a community and the capacity and stability to focus care and attention in working with local organizations.

Another key lesson is that success depends on direct engagement on the part of senior governments to monitor and support the efforts of the project leaders. This can take the simple form of coaching and encouragement or may be more elaborate in terms of providing more detailed technical support like statistical analysis, meeting facilitation or other forms of support. There has to also be frequent and open dialogue about the progress of specific projects. Perhaps it would have made more sense to stop work in Powell River and Alberni-Clayoquot earlier on to redirect resources to projects that showed more promise. Then again, the vision for the initiative was to support community development driven in part by the hope that some positive end would result notwithstanding the problems experienced along the way.

Chapter three will turn to a more elaborate discussion of the best way to develop an indicator report along with a discussion about the general utility of undertaking this work that will reflect back on the experience of the pilot projects – is this work worth the effort and the cost?

CHAPTER 3 – ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the lessons learned from the previous two chapters that explored indicator practice in North America and the results of the Ministry pilot projects. To help frame this analysis, a proposed best practice of indicator development will first be described. This will help put the results of the indicator pilot projects into better context.

PROPOSED BEST PRACTICE OF INDICATOR DEVELOPMENT

There are many technical and political considerations that go into deciding on a set of indicators to describe conditions within a community. As different circumstances generally require different approaches, it could be said that there is no right or wrong way of developing a set of indicators for a particular system. But the experience of indicator use provides some lessons to help identify the necessary elements of an indicator report and the most effective way of developing and using indicators. In terms of the elements of a community report, indicators in and of themselves are not useful unless they are part of a framework that includes the intentions of the community and the actions that should be taken to achieve progress. In terms of indicator development, best practice suggests that the development of a community indicator report needs to include the guidance of community leaders, the technical advice provided by experts and the review and input from residents.

Elements of a Community Progress Report

One of the key debates about the presentation and use of indicators is whether or not they should simply be used to describe conditions or if they should go further to suggest actions. Advocates for the use of indicators purely as a descriptive tool hold the view that they should be presented as objective information to avoid the possibility that they might otherwise portray a bias.

The difficulty in maintaining the descriptive argument is that given the virtually infinite ways of gathering and presenting data, some form of judgement has to come into play in the selection of measures that will be chosen. As Randa Gahin points out: "Decisions are made about what to measure (or omit) according to what people value, and performance is assessed with respect to some desired conditions...This makes [indicators] political." [88]

But there are also risks in acknowledging that indicators are inherently subjective. From the perspective of a community organization trying to build relationships between decision-makers to deal with community concerns, it needs to portray the indicator development process as being broadly based, even if there is a particular issue that might be driving the process from behind the scenes. Is there some middle ground in this debate? Most agree that having a framework in place to drive the development process is key – without a set of values the indicator selection process simply becomes a meaningless shopping list effort. The development of an indicator report – regardless of the geographic scale at which it is approached – should include a clear articulation of intentions. This will help participants determine whether or not to buy into the process. In some instances it may be necessary to expend significant energy building this framework prior to the selection of indicators. This could include developing a vision statement complete with goals and objectives or something less elaborate, as long as it provides a foundation to work from. As Cobb and Rixford argued in their paper "Lessons Learned from the History of Social Indicators":

> If you set out to create a good indicator, you need to spend time clarifying exactly what you are trying to measure. If you don't, you may end up with an indicator the measures something other than what you intended.[89]

As illustrated below, there are key elements that make up what could be called a community progress report. In setting out to design a report, these features need to be

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[88] Randa F Gahin, Indicators as a Tool to Help Create Sustainable Communities: A Study on the Outcomes of Five Community Indicators Projects. June 2001. Masters Thesis of Community and Regional Planning. University of Oregon, p. 25.

developed to build buy-in and to create the best possible opportunity for actions to result. The remaining part of this section will provide a description of these elements:

Table 8: Key Elements of a Community Progress Report [90]

INTENTIONS	Vision statement - Ideal community Goals - General statements supporting vision Objectives - Specifics needed to achieve goal
MEASUREMENTS	Indicators - Ongoing measure to track results Benchmarks - Measure for comparison Targets - Interim measure of progress
ACTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY	Action and Evaluation - Allocating resources and reporting results

Intentions

A vision statement, along with goals and objectives that describes an ideal set of community characteristics should frame a community assessment report and the selection of indicators. The vision should be easily understood and relate to the community as a whole and not be specific to any one neighbourhood. In practice, community vision statements often include four broad headings: environment, economy, society, and governance. By establishing a vision statement, a community can identify its key values. From a vision statement, goals and objectives can be developed by residents to identify specific areas for the community to work on in achieving its vision. These are integrally linked together and should directly relate to the vision statement. Goals are broad statements of desired conditions to set the desired direction of progress. Objectives reflect the values articulated by the vision statement but are not specific enough to be measured directly. An objective is a specific achievable condition that will build towards the attainment of a goal. They give direction to the development of existing policies and programs and establishment of new initiatives. Objectives also provide a direct link between measurements and the rest of the system intentions (goals and vision statement).

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[89] Clifford W. Cobb and Craig Rixford, Lessons Learned from the History of Social Indicators, November, 1998., p. 16.

[90] This graphic is based on discussion with Anthony Hodge.

Measures

Once a community has a set of goals and objectives, indicators can then be developed to measure progress towards the intentions. Ideally there would be at least one indicator for each objective. While indicators can be quantitative, there is increasing recognition that qualitative indicators are equally valuable as they convey information, not captured through numbers, which can help reflect other important conditions within a community.

Indicators can be chosen with direct input from the community. Through this process residents can develop a more informed understanding of local conditions. It also helps ensure that the indicators chosen will be broadly understandable. There are challenges to assembling indicators including accessibility of data and linkage back to objectives. Indicator development can be the most controversial part of establishing of a community progress report as indicators can raise questions about causal connections between community conditions and private and public sector actions.

Benchmarks and targets provide the impetus for policy and program development by providing long and short-term timelines for the achievement of objectives. They are specifically linked to indicator data. A benchmark is a reference point to establish the best possible performance for an objective, as measured by an indicator. In this way, benchmarks identify conditions to be achieved in the long-term. Targets are an expression of a desired change to be achieved within a specific time frame. In working towards a benchmark, yearly targets can focus effort towards making intermediate progress. By using this distinction between benchmarks and targets communities can identify the long-term measures they want to achieve and establish shorter-term priorities for action. As an example, a coastal community could decide to identify and track the health of its salmon bearing streams (indicator) as part of its vision for a healthy environment, its goal to protect salmon, and its specific objective to increase local salmon populations. Indicator data would be developed to track progress towards protecting and enhancing existing streams. This would be combined with historical knowledge of the location of historic, non-functioning streams. Based on these reference points, annual targets could be set for projects designed to protect and enhance existing

streams while rehabilitating damaged streams at the same time. In the long-term the community benchmark would be to reverse the damage of past years so that all historic fish bearings streams would function once again. In the shorter term, annual targets would be set to reach this milestone.

Indicators, targets and benchmarks are all ultimate measures of accountability. If a community does not achieve a yearly target, program and policy evaluation can be undertaken and revisions made to ensure better progress in the next year. In terms of the long-run, benchmarks help communities allocate resources depending on how quickly they want to achieve their best possible condition.

Action and Accountability

Once the intentions and measures are identified, a community can then identify a set of actions – policy development, public resource allocation, suggestions for individual behaviour change to generate local improvements. Regular reporting is required to provide an opportunity to circulate information in the community on environmental, social and economic trends and the efforts made to improve on those conditions. This is done through providing a status report on results of program and policies towards the achievement of annual targets and ideal benchmarks. Reports should include a restatement of the community vision statement, goals and objectives, along with indicator data with associated benchmarks and targets. The full list of initiatives underway to achieve the targets that have been set out for the community should also be part of an annual report. Annual progress reports can help the public identify where progress is being made and where more work needs to be done. This feeds into the evaluation and improvement of the report with direct public involvement.

Expert and Participatory Approaches to Development

There is considerable debate as to how to mix expert versus public input into the development of an indicator report. Expert and technical considerations are important to ensure data is available and that the measures chosen make sense in terms of whether or not they can actually help direct meaningful decisions. But it is becoming increasingly

apparent to practitioners that indicator reports have to (at the very least) be communicated to general members of the public, if not developed with public participation. This can help legitimate political decisions made in follow-up to an indicator report. It can also influence changes in individual behaviour – like recycling or the proper deposition of liquid waste materials – that might form part of the required follow-up action to achieve an objective identified in the progress assessment report. In the field of political science there is considerable discussion about the tension between expert versus "democratic" policy development. Those who come down on the side of including the public, argue that democratic policy development processes result in better policy. Udaya Wagle argues:

> Citizen participation in policymaking is important in two different ways. First, citizens possess information that will be valuable to policy experts in policymaking. Second, through participation, citizens will be able to get more information about how policies get made and what particular stakes they will have on different policy options which will in turn be important in policy choice.[91]

And as David Ammons assures us, regardless of the technical rigour that can be applied in developing indicators, in a democratic society decision-making always rests with elected officials:

> Persons who fear that politics will be displaced in local decision making through the rationalizing influence of objective performance measures [indicators] need not be overly concerned. Advances in management practices may, at most, supplement political considerations in decision-making. In a democratic setting, politics can never be displaced – nor should it be. [92]

Not to over-simplify the response to the dilemma, the reality is that any good indicator development process has to include both expert and public input. While it is important for the public to be involved in the indicator development process to lend legitimacy to the project and to help people understand the links to decisions and local outcomes, the goal of reaching consensus may make it difficult to select indicators that can help bring

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[91] Udaya Wagle, "The Policy Science of Democracy: The issues of methodology and citizen participation," Policy Sciences, 33 (2000), p. 218.

about meaningful change. As well, if technical considerations are given greater weight in the process, the end result might be a report that only statisticians and policy analysts can understand. Some rigour is needed to choose appropriate measures but these measures have to make sense to the public. So it is also important to ensure the appropriate blend of good public participation and technical input.

There are a number of approaches through which a community progress report can be developed. Based on the experience of other communities, the best practice seems to be building a process that can include input from community leaders, technical experts and the general public. Resident participation through civic forums, surveys and interaction with neighbourhood groups is instrumental in establishing the system. Institutional input from public agency representatives, business organizations, environmental groups, social advocacy agencies, preservation organizations and heritage societies is also important. The development and implementation of an ongoing system, with annual reports, can encourage the development of a common set of goals and values, raise awareness about local conditions, and identify the actions necessary to bring about positive change.

QUESTIONING THE VALUE OF THE PROCESS

A critic might question the usefulness of the entire community indicator exercise and argue it results in nothing more than expended time and financial resources. In the case of the community indicator pilot projects, none of the projects hit the mark in terms of the best practice previously described in this chapter and only two of the pilots to this day have even completed final reports. It might be said that, although indicator reports can produce interesting information, they do not seem to really influence decision-makers nor do they attract the attention of the public and therefore change individual behaviour. The only impact of indicator work is that it keeps analysts and statisticians employed but beyond that the work has no lasting impact on a community. As the case studies and the ministry pilot projects seem to show, it is difficult to argue that indicator reporting directly results in changes in policy or service delivery. Indicator reports seem

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[92] David N. Ammons. Municipal Benchmarks: Assessing Local Performance and Establishing Community Standards. 2nd Edition, Sage Publications, 2001, p. 19.

to exert very little pressure on the decision-making process. From the perspective of the average citizen then, the question that needs to be asked is: "Why spend money on this when my tax dollars could be better used for health care, education or policing?"

Reflecting back on the experience of indicator development and use across North America, along with the results of the pilot projects, one can respond to the concerns identified above by taking a more detailed examination of how indicators can and have influenced policy development and program spending. As well, it could be argued that indicator reporting for some communities can be a valuable planning tool to help deal with crisis or change. There has been a lot of writing recently on whether or not indicators really make a difference and whether or not more work focus should be given to look at the links between indicators and politics. Clifford W. Cobb has said:

> In the past decade of so, a number of civic groups, business groups, and even some local governments have developed indicators that are intended to measure the quality of life (or social progress, sustainable development, or any other number of terms) in their communities. Those groups have been surprised and frustrated that their efforts did not pay off in terms of significant changes in public life. They learned too late that the world has little use for a set of indicators that lacks connection to political life.[93]

Others might disagree and suggest that even if an indicator report ends up on a library shelf gathering dust, its impact – in terms of the relations it helped build between community decision-makers – is lasting and positive although this may be hard to measure. To again take the middle ground in this debate, the ideal scenario is for an indicator project to ultimately influence decision-making. But at the very least it can be a process for relationship building between key actors in a community towards better collaboration on public issues.

Policy Development

Indicator development can have an influence on policy development. In the case of Oregon, the indicator and benchmark exercise has transformed the operations of the state government and provided a better framework for linking state level resources to

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[93] Clifford W. Cobb, Measurement Tools and the Quality of Life, (San Fransico, June, 2000), p. 18.

supporting local and regional needs. Systems change based on the application of indicator development in terms of how issues are defined, debated and responded to is also evident in Jacksonville. As another example, the "BC Environmental Trends" report has been published periodically for a decade now and continues to inform provincial policy development while also compiling useful local level data on water and air quality and other measures that local governments can use in their planning and decision-making.

In terms of the community pilot projects, local leaders see the Quesnel final report as an important overview of conditions within their community. The newly elected mayor of the municipality has said that while some of the indicators included in the report may not directly correspond to municipal areas of responsibility, it helps inform decision-makers of important local conditions. As well, the report is intended to be a catalyst for a number of important initiatives related to energy use, economic diversification and improving water and air quality.

As for New Westminster, with the support of the federal government, the Community Development Society has used the indicator report as a basis to explore the potential for developing a project that would see income support recipients become actively engaged in programs to help reduce waste generation in the community. If implemented, this project would directly benefit the individual participants and neighbourhoods but would probably not generate immediate significant and reductions in poverty and waste in the community. But the value from Environment Canada's perspective would be the opportunity to showcase a project that directly connects the environmental and social aspects of sustainability into one project. This could in time lead to federal or provincial program development and adjustment and hopefully, as more projects are undertaken in New Westminster and other communities, long-term improvement.

In terms of provincial policy development, the pilot projects provide valuable insight into how a municipality can develop a report to reflect more broadly the status of the

community. This will become important as the government's recently introduced *Community Charter* legislation has a new requirement for municipalities to report annually to their citizens on the progress they have made towards their goals.[94] This accountability measure will help clarify for residents the intentions, actions and results of their locally elected governments.

The results of all the pilots projects – with perhaps the exception of Alberni-Clayoquot – indicate that regardless of the future of indicator work in those communities, bringing the leaders together allowed them to exchange information on their key concerns and resources they control in the community. Unlike a one-on-one exchange perhaps involving a single issue, this process lead them through a series of discussions about their community as a whole and asked them to help identify future intentions and measurements to track their progress. In doing so it helped them see linkages between their mandates and interests so that they will hopefully they will find better ways to work together in the future. As David Swain points out, indicators can influence positive change in a community when they are integrated into other processes:

> ...indicators do not influence public-policy outcomes simply by existing, in isolation of what else is happening in the community. They do so, either directly or, more often, indirectly as an integral part of a complex community-improvement process that operates over long periods and involves many players, public and private. The contributions of indicators are more evident in the planning phase and again in the assessment phase of a community's process of seeking improvement.[95]

Program Spending

While the funding spent on the indicator projects might seem considerable, it is relatively insignificant compared to the cost of actual public dollars spent on providing municipal, health, education and other services. Given the pressure on governments to do more with less and to achieve better outcomes, some due diligence is needed to better target government resources on the basis of need. A useful example of this is the local

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[94] See Division 5, Section 98 of Bill 14, 2003 - *Community Charter*, at: www.legis.gov.bc.ca/37th4th/1st_read/gov14-1-pt04.htm#section098, (April 2003)

[95] David Swain, Measuring Progress: Community Indicators and the Quality of Life, April 2002.

health area index compiled by BC STATS. Described briefly in Chapter one, the index ranks each local health area in the province (78 in total) based on its relative socio-economic stress. Areas with higher levels of stress are at the top of the list (Merritt, Upper Skeena, Hope, Bella Coola Valley) while areas far better off end up at the bottom (West Vancouver, Saanich, Delta, North Vancouver). Ministries like Children and Family Development use the index to help target government resources based on need. Given that the index costs just over $20,000 to prepare it seems to be a reasonable tool to invest in to ensure the best possible outcome from millions of dollars in public spending.

As for the pilot projects, a number of observations are worth noting. In Sechelt, the slow purposeful development of building connections between local governments, key provincial agencies and activists is an initiative by the now former mayor of Sechelt to get the community working together. If the result of this dialogue and the final development of an indicator report helps to alleviate tension and determine areas where collaborative policy work can be pursued then the project will have been well worth the effort and the cost. For example, with this new platform for dialogue, the community might have a better opportunity to resolve issues related to competing land uses and make it easier for municipalities and the regional districts to develop policies.

Planning for Change and Opening up Public Dialogue

Indicators are important tools to help communities anticipate and plan for change. For resource-based communities in a rural and remote location – particularly those whose fortunes rest with one industrial operation (lumber mill or mine for example) – long-term "contingency planning" is critical to "...mobilize an area's resources and inherent capabilities to deflect or accommodate impacts brought on by external forces."[96] Through advance planning, a community can assess its strengths and weaknesses and develop strategies to better prepare for indefinite or permanent closures that can occur, affecting local employment and tax base. A report on the experience of Eilliot Lake, a resource dependent community in Ontario that experienced a mining closure, states that:

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[96] Edward J. Blakely, Planning Local Economic Development, Theory and Practice, Sage Library of Social Research, (1988), p. 84.

> Long before the crisis period of actual or threatened layoffs, communities need to be actively involved in monitoring their employment and resource conditions, reporting to their communities and anticipating potential problems.[97]

Indicator development is an important part of this planning to track the status of financial and economic health (diversity of the tax base, employment by industry for example) and social well-being (crime rates, school enrolment, social service usage rates). An example of this is the Village Municipality of Tahsis on the West Coast of Vancouver Island which is currently in a period of economic and social transition as the result of the closure of the local lumber mill in 2001. Indicators like the percentage of the local tax base tied to industry, population change and school enrolment are important measures the community is tracking to help make decisions about necessary changes to local service delivery and the need for the municipality to act now as a proponent for economic growth.

Indicators that foreshadow weaknesses in a community can stimulate advance action in preparation for crisis or change. The figures on the following page attempt to depict this. Figure 1 illustrates that crisis or change in unprepared communities can delay improvement or stabilization as the leaders and residents struggle to find out how to respond – illustrated by the "crisis loop". While in most cases communities will sort out what to do and bounce back after considerable time and resources have been spent, the diagram also suggests that in some cases, recovery may not be achieved. In contrast to this, Figure 2 portrays communities that have planned for change, are less affected by crisis and are better able to mobilize resources to counter negative conditions. It is reasoned that in the end they will have progressed further along than other communities that did not plan for change. In more urbanized communities, strategic planning may be needed to avoid problems associated with rapid growth and urban sprawl. Planning in this context can allow a

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[97] David Leadbeater, Single-Industry Resource Communities and the New Crisis of Economic Development: Lessons of Elliot Lake, Final Report of the Community Response Sub-Project, Department of Economics, Laurentian University, (August 1998), p. 44.

Figure 1: Community response to crisis in the absence of planning[98]

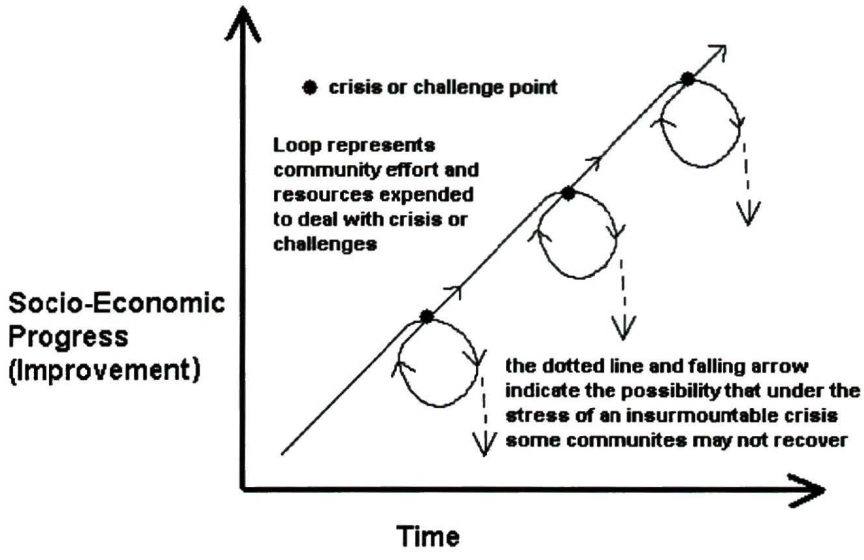
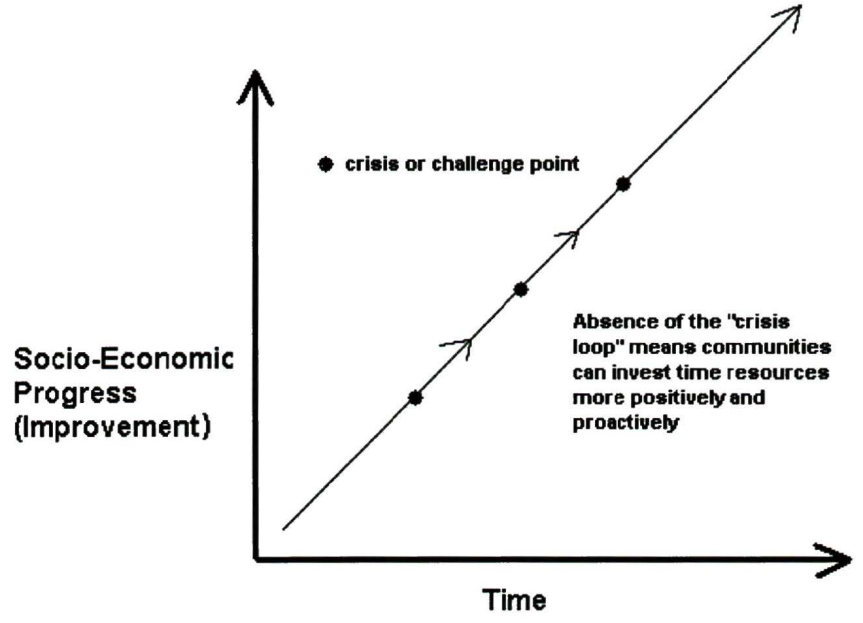


Figure 2: Community response to crisis where there has been advance planning



[98] These diagrams were developed in consultation with Erik Karlsen, MCIP. Karlsen is a now-retired former senior civil servant for the Province of British Columbia. His previous positions included: Executive Director of the Georgia Basin Initiative and Chief Municipal Planner for the Province.

community "...time to organize its capacity to plan for economic development and to accommodate desirable expansion of the economic base properly." [99] Indicators can be used to monitor progress and help direct action. For example, increased school enrolment can trigger the development of new schools or increased population growth more generally provides a signal to a municipality and other government agencies to ensure other amenities and services are available like health care centres, parks and recreation facilities. In the highly urbanized context crime indicators can also play an important role in shaping development to discourage crime and enhance social cohesion.

In terms of the pilot projects, the development of the indicator reports provides those communities with a valuable planning tool to clarifying their strengths and weaknesses. In New Westminster the report helped to clarify a number issues facing the community like poverty. In Quesnel, a primarily forest based community, indicators related to work and air quality highlight ongoing issues that will have to be addressed, particularly as the community continues to build its future around forestry. As for Sechelt, growth management and protecting water quality continue to be key concerns the community will need to track to better manage those issues.

In terms of helping a community plan for change, one might argue that indicator development might not always be used to bring a community together but might instead be used as a strategy to get a particular issue "on the table". The purpose of indicator development is to give community interests an opportunity to raise their concerns and find ways to reflect those concerns with goals and measurements. A properly managed project should open up the decision-making process by providing a framework for common understanding to improve dialogue between decision-makers, advocates and the general members of the public. It is probably better to use an indicator project to allow concerns to be brought forward constructively than to allow continued conflict.

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[99] Ibid. p. 86.

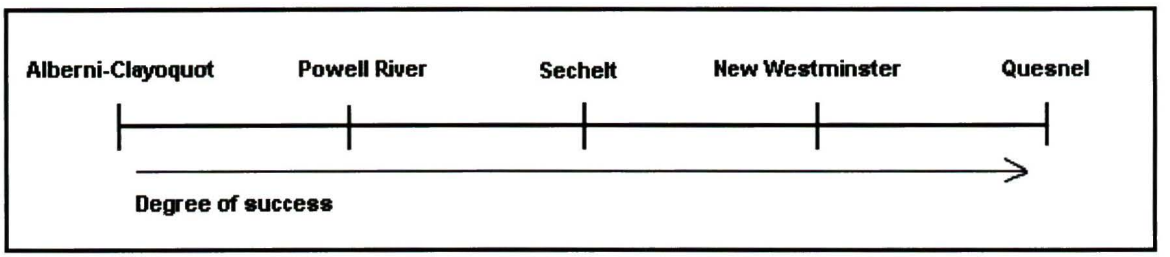
A good example of the positive response of some First Nations leaders' to the Provincial Health Officer's report on Aboriginal Health. [100] Improving the social condition of aboriginal people in British Columbia and Canada continues to be a difficult, costly and contentious issue often fraught with differences of opinion between the key actors. For any policy issue an important first step is finding agreement between government and interests on the best way forward. Developing indicators of aboriginal health with an action plan for improving those indicators has helped bridge the divide between government and the First Nations – hardly a waste of time or effort.

Feedback on indicators can renew a mandate. In our electoral system concerns are sometimes raised that between elections governments often lose touch with the electorate. Developing indicator reports can provide a way to communicate with the public and, in turn, feedback on the report can help a government check its current course. At the recent Fraser Basin Council's conference on sustainability one participant said that the FBC's indicator report should be provided to every resident in the Basin.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting back on the indicator experience around North America along with what might be described as best practice in terms of the content of an indicator report and the development process – one might want to conclude that that provincial pilot initiative was not wildly successful. Only two reports were completed, one report is still underway and two other are clearly "shelved" for now. The graphic below attempts to illustrate the range of success between the pilots:

Figure 3: Range of Success Between the Pilots



[100] Globe and Mail, October 28, 20002, (Online edition).

What is important to keep in mind is that indicator development and deliberative community initiatives take time and nurturing. It is probably too early to tell right now the ultimate legacy of the pilot initiative. Looking at the experience of Jacksonville, it has taken the community over a decade to fully develop their indicator report but it is now institutionalized in the community as an important tool for facilitating public debate and policy development on a full range of issues. But there is strong evidence from at least New Westminster, Quesnel and Sechelt to suggest that the reports helped to strengthen relations between community leaders while also helping them to reach some common understanding of key issues facing their communities.

So what are the conditions for success and what are key considerations for senior levels of government who want to support community level indicator development? The current thinking on indicator development suggests that the best indicators are those that measure outcomes (results) and not outputs (efforts). The Achilles heel of this notion is that outcome measures do not always align nicely with political and bureaucratic processes. Governments still tend to find it easier to measure what they do and not what the results are. Given the causality dilemma it is problematic to either take responsibility for negative conditions or credit for positive results. For this reason it was not surprising to see that the communities struggled in developing detailed action plans that clearly identified who was responsible for taking action to improve local conditions.

As experienced in the case of Alberni-Clayoquot, the process does not always work. Ideally it could be hoped that indicator development and use could occur in any community, but we do not live in an ideal world so the reality is that an understanding of local conditions, matched with particular strategies and activities, is critical to ensuring project success. In the case of the Powell River and Sunshine Coast projects, the vision and intentions of the Ministry were not well matched to local conditions, or the capacity of the proponent organization. It was overly optimistic to assume that the project could complete the full cycle within a year given that community animation was needed to help people understand the utility of the project and to also allow the necessary relationships to be developed to help a steering committee function effectively. As well, while the

Coastal Community Network had networking abilities to bring groups together, they seemed to lack the infrastructure of the Fraser Basin Council, with regional staff and stronger administrative resources to draft material, gather data and develop written indicator reports.

In terms of the provincial government – the lessons should be clear. In hindsight and in the author's mind, the design and implementation of the pilot projects proceeded too rapidly. More thought and care should have been given to the development of the guidebook, the identification of communities and proponent organizations. It may have been better in fact to limit the number of communities to three for example, to focus more resources on achieving better results. As well, the timelines for the projects – given local conditions and resources provided to the communities – were too tight. There are examples of projects in North American that have been completed in a matter of months, but those required full time expert support and facilitation. In the case of the Ministry pilots, neither the proponent organizations nor Ministry staff dedicated to the projects were working full time on the pilots.

It is difficult for higher levels of government to steer and not row when communities and regions lack resources and expertise for sophisticated planning work and when the issues they raise can often require provincial/state or federal involvement. If senior levels of government choose to support projects, the best approach is ensure proper planning up front so that when the project is launched government is ready to work with the community in a substantive way if that is what they request and need. An almost unavoidable challenge is in aligning the timelines demanded by senior government for deliverables with the pace of a community to undertake the work. If the intention is to generate a product or process that works for the community – then the community has to set the pace.

The criticisms of indicator work are valid and are important to keep in mind to help describe the local conditions and strategies necessary to ensure the success of a community indicator project. But, contrary to the waste argument, indicator reports are

useful and the pilots have been valuable learning for other communities in helping to determine how to ensure success. Should we expect communities to always be able to develop the best possible form of an indicator report to leads directly to action? Probably not. But hopefully they can achieve something reasonable that works for them that they can then build on.

CHAPTER 4 – SUMMARY THOUGHTS AND A FINAL WORD

SUMMARY THOUGHTS

In a world that continues to grow more complex, and with pressing issues reflected in alarming global trends and changing local conditions, governments must function in an environment where they are highly scrutinized and face a greater demand on achieving direct results from their efforts. And citizens demand more opportunities to participate in helping to define and respond to issues. In this context, new public policy tools are needed to facilitate reasoned dialogue between people to result in better decision-making. The evidence from this thesis suggests that while the indicator development of the pilot projects has not resulted in immediate change in policy development, for most of the communities the experience strengthened relations between decision-makers, clarified thinking on key local issues and supported the exploration of how to improve local conditions.

In the past decade, there has been an accelerated trend towards the use of indicators in a wide-range of settings. At all levels of government they can be used for evidence-based policy development and resource allocation to ensure greater accountability and transparency in governing. As a policy tool, indicators can:

- Help monitor changing conditions and identify emerging public policy issues;
- Provide information to guide decision-making on policies and programs;
- Raise public awareness of environmental, social economic trends;
- Help develop and improve relations between community leaders.

At the community level, indicator reporting can help public agencies, community groups and residents work together to improve socio-economic outcomes and environmental conditions. Indicators provide a tool for the public to develop, implement and revise a value-based framework for informing policy development and resource allocation. Indicators provide the bridge between the need for economic, social and environmental improvement and the need to give citizens a greater sense of efficacy in public affairs.

Indicators create a mechanism for mobilizing government, local groups, business and residents towards collaborative action on community problems that they identify. Indicators can help support a planning framework by measuring success towards stated goals and objectives to prioritize the allocation of public resources and hold actors – government and the private sector – accountable for community conditions. By being proactive they may also help communities avoid the "crisis loop" that can drain precious resources and energy.

A properly designed and implemented indicator project can renew residents' sense of involvement and investment in their community. This can lead to a better understanding of conditions in an area so that a consensus can begin to develop as to what decisions need to be made. Local indicator projects can help individuals attain a degree of control over their community and help provide for evidence-based approaches to allocating public resources.

While it is difficult in all circumstances to achieve best practice, getting close will help a community plan for and respond better to change. One of Hodge's key points of wisdom is "Don't let trying to be perfect be the enemy of the good." What is key is developing a process for indicator development that can bring together technical experts, community leaders and members of the general public. An indicator report has to have broad appeal but it also needs to be technically accurate and linked to decision-making.

Projects seem to work best when there is a demand or need in the community and some ability on the part of leaders and interest groups to come together to participate in the process to make it work. The lead organization in charge of the work needs to be positioned within the community to bring people together so it must have credibility, capacity and facilitation expertise.

If senior levels of government choose to support projects, the best approach is to ensure proper planning up front so that when the project is launched government is ready to work with the community. An almost unavoidable challenge is aligning the kinds of

timelines generally demanded in providing project deliverables with the pace of a community to undertake work. These do not always align nicely. If the intention is to generate a product or process that works for the community – local people have to set the pace.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS

Hopefully this thesis has shed some light on how to successfully undertake community indicator development. But there are still unanswered questions that need further analysis to help advance the "indicators movement." While this thesis has looked at the potential for indicators to influence policy development and decision-making, it is too early to tell whether or not the most successful initiatives – Quesnel, New Westminster and Sechelt – have significantly influenced decision-makers. The projects did manage to bring community leaders together and helped to create better linkages between core community institutions like local governments, school districts, police departments, health authorities and other organizations. From the observations of the writer this did help community groups to see the linkages across their interests, mandates and activities to hopefully lead to more integrated approaches to addressing local issues. But the hard evidence that the reports have directly influenced policy-making and resulted in improved conditions is not yet clear. Further analysis a few years from now might shed more light on whether or not policy change has occurred. Following this line of thinking then, while the last decade has seen significant advances in indicator development, more effort needs to be spent on linking indicators to decision-making.

Another issue – one that this thesis did not explore – is the linkages in indicator use and development between levels of government (i.e. linking projects at different geographic scales). If we can envision in the future the improved development and use of indicators, targets and benchmarks, that are tied to decision-making – at all levels of government – we may have the face the issue of congruity. How will these different levels of activity be tied together? Do they need to be? Assuming that the overall goal in these efforts is improved economic, social and environmental conditions, some linkages may have to be made so that different levels of government are not working at cross purposes. In British

Columbia for example it is unclear how the numerous indicator initiatives at the federal, provincial, regional and local levels inter-relate. Of course many who are engaged in these various indicator projects and programs are well aware of the "universe of activity" within the province, but there are no formal mechanisms in place to link these disparate efforts. This is a question that needs to be explored. Does it make sense to develop a seamless web of indicator development to tie together all levels of activity? Should some standard measures be created that could be reported on at all levels? Perhaps it is better to allow indicator projects to simply run their own course?

The last issue to touch on is access to data. Generally speaking it can be said that an important criteria that has been used in indicator selection has been the availability of data for the chosen measure. In place of the 'perfect measure,' proxies can be chosen but are often not as closely connected to what that the indicator is trying to measure. If indicator development is to be more precisely connected to decision-making, more care will have to be given to making sure that the best measures are in place. As communities develop better and more stable indicator reporting systems they may need new sets of data to generate more precise indicators. This new imperative may collide with the more recent trend in senior levels of government to reduce costs and to focus more on results and not 'process' oriented activities. Data gathering can be the victim of provincial or federal budget tightening. Senior levels of government may need encouragement in realizing that improved local decision-making, through the use of indicators, will require access to new and better data.

A FINAL WORD

As a final word it can be said that in the early 1990s British Columbia was seen as a leader in the field of thinking about how to work towards sustainability at the provincial level. This included the development of new measures to track environmental and human conditions. This energy applied to measurement development subsided somewhat towards the end of the decade but has been renewed recently through a number of initiatives including the creation of the BC Progress Board, along with the publication of

new reports by the Fraser Basin Council and the BC-Washington cross-border indicator working group.

All effort should now go into further development of economic, social and environmental outcome measures that can be tied to decision-making – for all levels of government. This will help to bring clarity to public policy debate by giving everyone a clear sense of whether or not progress is being made at all levels of society. What will be key to this is the establishment of a Centre of Excellence in the province to link efforts and collectively move the indicator movement forward.

At all levels and in most every region of the province there is an emerging discussion about the need to create a permanent, continuing mechanism to better link indicator practitioners to exchange methods and information. The context for this is increasing indicator development work in communities and regions, industry sectors and business, and government that is not always well linked with best practice and lessons learned from work already completed or underway. The rationale for developing a Centre of Excellence could include:

- Improving the development and use of indicators;
- Sharing best practices and guiding others to avoid reinventing the wheel;
- Organizing and showcasing data and data providers so practitioners can better access the information they need;
- Pooling of resources to develop new data sets to fill gaps; and
- Developing a core set of indicators that can be used at all levels to better link local initiatives and progress to regional, provincial and federal efforts.

If a general agreement can be achieved on the need to create a Centre of Excellence, thinking could then turn to identifying the most appropriate institutional home to encourage the free exchange of knowledge and the development of strategic pilot initiatives to help improve the development and use of indicators. Potential homes for the centre could include but would not be limited to:

- Government (federal, provincial, local or First Nation);
- Post Secondary University, College or Technical School;
- Professional Organizations (Association of Professional Engineers); and
- Civil Society (Fraser Basin Council)

BC can be a leader once again in the field of indicator development. Achieving this goal will require the collective efforts of indicator practitioners, end-users (like communities) and advocates.

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APPENDIX ONE

Overview of New Westminster Indicators

Indicator	Status	Description
Theme: Environment		
1. Parkways and Greenways	Green Light	There is lots of green space in the city.
2. Waste Diverted from Landfills	Red Light	Amount of waste going to landfill needs to be reduced.
3. Transportation Modal Share	Green Light	New West residents are walking, cycling and taking the bus more.
4. Traffic Volume	Red Light	There is too much traffic moving through New Westminster every day
5. Drinking Water Quality	Green Light	Very clean drinking water.
Theme: Social		
6. Education Level	Amber Light	New West citizens don't seem to be staying in school long enough – more information needed to clarify.
7. Income Assistance Participation Rates	Red Light	Too many citizens currently receive of income assistance
8. Housing Affordability	Amber Light	Many citizens may not have affordable housing. More information needed to clarify.
9. Accessibility for People with Special Needs	Amber Light	More information needed on the accessibility of public space for people with special needs (measured in numbers of curb cuts and audible traffic signals).
10. Crime Rates	Green Light	Crime Rates are going down significantly
Theme: Economy		
11. Unemployment Rate	Amber Light	More information needed but current data seems to suggest the New West unemployment rate is comparatively high.
12. Jobs-to-Employable Ratio	Green Light	The New Westminster "jobs to employable adults" ratio is the 5th best in the Lower Mainland
13. Economic Activity: • Number of Jobs • Number of Business Licenses • Value of Building permits	 Amber Light Amber Light Red Light	 Census 2001 information needed to clarify job creation trend. Further information needed to establish trend. Value of building permits decreased between 1995-98.
14. Average Family Income	Green Light	From 1989 – 1996, the average family income in New Westminster rose 12%.

APPENDIX TWO

Framework for Sustainability on the Sunshine Coast

	Sustainability Themes		
Goals	**Social**	**Economic**	**Environment**
1. Protection of water for public consumption.	Equitable and collective access to water ensures social well being.	Stable supply of water for consumption is essential for economic development.	Protection of water sources enhances ecological stability and maintains diversity
2. Increase public awareness of, and commitment to, sustainability.	Shared vision of community commitments and common goals strengthens social ties.	Ensures that decisions regarding economic issues support sustainability.	Public commitment will provide assured protection of environment.
3. Access to affordable and adequate housing, with choices of tenure.	Housing is a basic necessity for healthy individuals living together in community.	Ensures economic resources are well allocated. Positive impact on population.	May reduce industrial impact on environment; will reduce unsustainable demands on environment.
4. Maintain and restore the natural diversity of our ecosystems.	Natural context for living will influence social capital.	Natural capital provides the foundation for economic activity.	Ensures sustainability of environment.
5. Integration of a thriving economy with protection of our environment and cultural heritage.	Ensures that economy supports existing social forms and protects cultural heritage.	Sustainability of economic activity is built upon existing environment and culture	Ensures that environment is unharmed by economic activity. Integration supports sustainability.
6.Access to an adequate (and nutritious) food supply	Ensures good health and community well being.	Ensures appropriate allocation of economic resources and healthy working population.	Reduces negative impacts of agriculture and industry devoted to consumption of junk food.
7. Improvement in local infrastructure to enhance quality and sustainability of life.	Infrastructure directly enhances community life and strengthens social ties.	Improved infrastructure enhances economic activity and may attract new resources (people & investment)	Improvements to infrastructure will reduce existing negative impacts on environment (road use, liquid and solid waste, operation of community facilities).
8. Access to individually rewarding and meaningful work	Improves mental and physical health of community members, will reduce social stress	Ensures optimal productivity of workforce, and optimal allocation of human resources.	Reduced social stress and optimal economic allocation may reduce 'attacks' on natural eco-systems; i.e., random vandalism, garbage and trash disposal, pollution.
9. Coordination of economic development activities with policies and decisions of local governments.	Coordination will reduce social dissonance and misplaced social capital	Ensures appropriate economic development and optimal use of economic resources.	Coordination will reduce demands on environment and ensure that environment is protected to levels of sustainability set by community.

APPENDIX THREE

Overview of Quesnel Indicators

Indicator	Status	Description
Theme: Community		
1. Percentage of Renters Paying 30% or More in Rent	☹	More than 40% of renters spent more than 30% of their income on housing in both 1991 and 1996.
2. Crime Rates by Age and Classification	☺	The crime rate, property crimes and mischief offences peaked in 1992 and have been decreasing since then.
3. Government Funding for Healthcare per Capita	😐?	Don't really know. Better information will be available in the future, as all the Quesnel programs will fall under one administration.
4. Life Expectancy at Birth	😐	Life expectancy has steadily increased by about 5 years since 1972 but still is two years below the provincial average for life expectancy
5. Post-Secondary Participation Rate	☹	The local college participation rate was one third of the overall provincial population rate in 1997.
6. College Funding Per Capita	☹	Quesnel college students receive 38% of the funding per capita that the average BC student receives.
7. High School Completion Rate by Gender and Ethnicity	😐	The Completion rate has increased overall in recent years, however there is a wide gap between completion rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.
Theme: Environment		
8. Water Quality	☺	Water quality is tested regularly in Quesnel, and all regulation criteria have been met in the past three years.
9. Water Use	😐	Quesnel's average water use per day has decreased since 1998, but it is still twice the Canadian average.
10. Surface Water Quality Monitoring	☺	Decreasing trends for AOX, chloride, and fecal coliforms at the monitoring station at Marguerite on the Fraser River.
11. Particulate Matter in the Air	😐	Levels of particulate matter show neither a significant increase or decline over the past six years in Quesnel. But in 1998 air quality in downtown Quesnel was the worst of 28 residential continuous monitoring locations in B.C.
12. Waste Diverted from Landfills	😐	The percentage of waste diverted from the landfill has fluctuated since the recycling program began, and has increased in the last couple of years.
13. Total Residential Energy Consumption per Capita	☺	Electricity use per household has shown an overall decreasing trend, while gas use decreased very slightly in 1999 and 2000.
14. Status of the Bull Trout	☹	Bull Trout populations declining in Cottonwood, Narcosli, and Quesnel Rivers.
14. Pulp Mill Emissions	☺	Emissions from Cariboo Pulp and Paper of AOX Discharges have decreased significantly since 1991.
16. Protected Space	😐?	Information about total protected space and percentage of land protected for biodiversity in the municipality and region is not currently available.

17. Percentage of available Timber Harvesting Land Base	😐	The total crown productive forest was reduced (about 36,000 Ha) between 1996 and 2001, but the reduction in the timber harvesting available land base was not as big (about 7,000 Ha).
Theme: Economy		
18. Economic Diversity Index	☹	Between 1991 and 1996 there were increases in forestry and transfer payments.
19. People on Basic BC Benefits and Employment Insurance	☺	The number of people on employment insurance and income assistance decreased between 1999 and 2000. The number of youth on income assistance is higher than the rest of the population.
20. Jobs by Sector	😐	Manufacturing and accommodation increased slightly, while the number of jobs in retail trade, logging and forestry, educational and other services decreased.
21. Percentage of New Businesses	😐	While the total number of business licenses decreased between 1995 and 2001, the number of new licenses remained quite high, which means that while many new businesses are being licensed, a large number are closing each year.

VITA

Surname: Mueller Given Names: Brent Alan

Place of Birth: North Vancouver, British Columbia Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1997 to 1993
Simon Fraser University	1987 to 1994
Kwantlen College	1986 to 1987
Cariboo College	1985 to 1986

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. (Honours)	Simon Fraser University	1996

Professional Experience:

Senior Policy Advisor, Intergovernmental Relations and Planning Division, B.C. Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, 2003-

Manager of Policy Development, Community Transition Branch, Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers, 2001-2002

Issues Manager, Communications Branch, Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 1999-2000.

Provincial Legislative Intern, 1995

Publications

Building Community Sustainability Indicator Reports. Paper Presented at the Georgia Basin Puget Sound Research Conference. Session 3A: Regional Ecosystem-Sustainability Indicators. April 1, 2003. To be part of an upcoming proceedings publication for the conference.

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Author 

Brent Alan Mueller
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