

QUALITY INDICATORS FOR PROGRESS

Jacksonville, Florida

Each year, since 1985, a report on *Life in Jacksonville: Quality Indicators for Progress (QIP)* has been produced in the community of Jacksonville, Fla. The report contains current and historic values for a set of statistical measures that have been selected to reflect changes in the city's quality of life. The information is used to monitor community performance in a number of key areas including: education, the economy, public safety, natural environment, health, social environment, government/ politics, culture/ recreation and mobility. The indicators report is specifically intended as a tool to help in building a sustainable future for the community by informing the public and influencing public policy.

The report's features include:

- data that shows both where the community has been as well as the progress that has been made in moving toward target values for each statistical measure;
- priorities among the statistical measures;
- text that includes explanatory information concerning the significance and the source of data for each measure;
- graphic charts showing trends over time;
- "gold star" indicators for significant progress;
- "red flags" for current or emerging problems; and
- recommended community actions for achieving target levels.

Specific objectives of the Jacksonville *QIP* report include:

- producing an annual report card on community progress;
- highlighting community success stories and giving credit for work well done;
- identifying areas of decline or concern where community action is needed;
- educating residents about their community and the factors that citizens consider important to their quality of life; and
- encouraging citizens to take an active part in addressing community problems.

The target audience for the indicators is broadly defined and its information is used in a variety of ways:

- Citizens use the report card to gain knowledge about their community;
- Elected and appointed officials use the information for planning, legislative, and budgeting activities;
- Professional planners, both in government and private institutions, use the data as reference material to guide their decision-making;
- Journalists and media representatives use the community information in research, reporting, and editorials;
- Business and community organizations use the information for strategic planning and developing annual work plans;
- Foundations use the data to gain understanding of the community needs and to guide grant-making decisions; and
- Local governments and Chambers of Commerce use the data as an economic development tool.

Citizen involvement in QIP

The *QIP* project was initiated by the Jacksonville Community Council Inc (JCCI), a non-profit organization of citizens concerned about the future of their community. At the beginning of the project, initial funding was sought and obtained from the local Chamber of Commerce. A 10-member steering committee was selected whose participants served as the chairs for nine subcommittees organized to develop indicators in specific topic areas. Participation on the subcommittees was open to members of the JCCI and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as to other interested citizens. About 100 people participated. Each subcommittee met four times on a weekly or biweekly basis. Subcommittee members had access to background information obtained and organized by the JCCI staff. This included responses to a questionnaire published in the local newspaper as well as suggestions sent in by community members in response to public interest announcements on the local television stations. The subcommittees selected specific indicators that conformed to agreed upon criteria. Initially, background data for each indicator was collected from the mid 1970s through 1984 or 1985. Once the project was initiated, the data was gathered on an annual basis. Data on personal perceptions was obtained in telephone surveys. The surveys were conducted by AT&T American Transtech from 1985–1992. Beginning in 1993, the surveys were conducted by American Public Dialogue. Both groups donated the costs for these surveys.

Indicator development process

In 1991 an additional 140 citizens were organized into task forces to review and enhance the indicators used in the project. This followed a process similar to that used in 1985. Funding support came from a local CDBG grant. The task forces eliminated several indicators because of questionable validity or unavailable data. For purposes of clarity, several other indicators were revised. New indicators were added, including four new telephone survey questions.

The task forces identified target values for each of the indicators. The JCCI collected and summarized research and reference data on generally accepted standards and goals for each data category. This data was then used in selecting target goals for the year 2000. Task forces prioritized each of the nine subject categories, selecting a key indicator within each category for reference purposes.

The annual compilation of indicators is generally overseen by a citizen Quality of Life Committee. Its members are selected to represent a range of interests and expertise, including members with specific backgrounds in demographics and statistics. The Committee helps oversee the data collection process and provides comments and recommendations on the specific results. Currently, the compilation of the annual report and the work of the committee are being supported by funds from the City of Jacksonville.

What the community learns

A total of 74 indicators in nine categories are included in the most recent November 1994 report. The **main categories**, *the key indicator for each*, and examples of the other indicators in the category are listed below.

- **Education:** *Public High School Graduation Rate*—achievement-test scores; expenditures per student; and participation in higher-education programs.
- **Economy:** *Net Job Growth*—black unemployment; buying income and retail sales; taxable real-estate value; new housing starts; students in free/reduced lunch program; tourism/bed tax revenues.
- **Public Safety:** *People Feeling Safe Walking Alone At Night*—violent and nonviolent crime rate; people reporting being victims of crime; response times for rescue, fire, and police calls; motor vehicle and other accidental deaths.
- **Natural Environment:** *Days Air Quality Index is in the Good Range*—river and stream compliance with water quality standards; water level in aquifer; septic tank permits; tons of solid waste.
- **Health:** *Infant Deaths Per 1,000 Live*

Births—deaths from heart disease and lung cancer; number of packs of cigarettes sold; new AIDS cases; rating of local health-care system; people reporting having no health insurance.

■ **Social Environment:** *People Believing Racism Is A Local Problem*—substance-exposed newborns; child abuse/neglect reports; births to females under 18; employment-discrimination complaints; people reporting they volunteered.

■ **Government/Politics:** *People Rating Local Government Leadership Good/Excellent*—percent 18 and older registered to vote; percent registered who vote; percent of elected officials nonwhite and female; rating of public services effectiveness.

■ **Culture/Recreation:** *City Financial Support of Arts Organizations*—parks and recreation expenditures; public park acreage; public library materials and circulation rate; attendance at museum, symphony, and zoo.

■ **Mobility:** *People Reporting Commuting Time of 25 Minutes or Less*—commercial flights and destinations with direct flights; bus ridership; miles of bus service.

The fact that the *Quality Indicators of Progress* reports have continued to be produced annually for 10 years confirms their usefulness for Jacksonville citizens, government and business. The reports are used by a wide variety of individuals and groups for different purposes. Two specific examples of successful applications are cited here: A continuing decline in water quality indicators from 1983 to 1987 resulted in a city-wide campaign and the establishment of a group, Stewards of the St. Johns River, which worked with local jurisdictions and private citizens to improve water quality; similarly, a decline in high school graduation rates from 1984 to 1989, led to the development of a very successful “Cities in Schools” program in which local citizens and businesses worked with school personnel, students, and parents to improve educational performance.

Today, the *Quality of Life Indicators* program can be adapted by other communities. The Jacksonville Community Council Inc. offers a package for sale, complete with educational video tapes, instructional and guidance materials, and support services. Although this package is not inexpensive, it could prove to be of significant value to communities who want a head start in developing similar programs for themselves.

—Community Sustainability Resource Institute

How To Get in Touch with JCCI

Contact: Lois Chepenik
Executive Director
Jacksonville Community Council Inc.
2434 Atlantic Boulevard, Suite 100
Jacksonville, FL 32207
Tel.: (904) 396-3052
Fax: (904) 398-1469
Email: jcci2@leading.net
Web: www.unf.edu/~clifford/jcci/jccihome.htm

Scope: County, urban
Inception Date: 1985

Participants: Jacksonville Community Council Inc., Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce, City of Jacksonville (City Council, Mayor, government agencies), other small municipalities in the county, local citizens

Project type: Sustainable indicators, public education

Methods used: Multi-stakeholder cooperation; coordination by non-profit organization; citizen participation in committees and task forces; assembly and presentation of data from standard reference sources and a special telephone survey

Lessons learned: The broad-based interest in indicators, including that of the Chamber of Commerce, local government, and a local non-profit, has led to diverse support and funding for the indicators project. The project has a tangible impact on public awareness and understanding, as well as public decision-making.



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JCCI continues to publish its annual *Quality Indicators for Progress* reports, the most recent installment released November 1997.

To augment the QIP, JCCI introduced another indicators report in January 1996, *Community Agenda: Indicators for Health and Human Services*. This report “presents a moving picture of Northeast Florida’s health and human service needs, along with

indicators for tracking progress over time toward meeting these needs.”

The *Community Agenda* report process is one example of how JCCI over its 22-year history has worked with community members to develop reports designed to inform the community and catalyze change. In the case of the *Agenda*, a committee of 120 volunteers, working in nine subcommittees, identified the unmet needs and selected the indicators for the initial *Community Agenda* document. During 1996, an update committee of 40 people made major revisions and improvements for the second report released in February 1997. A third update was completed and released in December 1997 and future annual updates are planned.

JCCI’s well-established indicators programs are entering into a five-year process to evolve indicators of sustainability that will selectively replace measures currently being used. In the process, the two indicators projects will be combined, all indicators will be reviewed, new priorities will be set, and new targets will be established, probably for the year 2005. A major visioning process will precede these efforts, and a “marketing” campaign will follow. The goal is to strengthen the content and raise the status of JCCI’s reports so that these indicators will become the first and most important source of overall community information for local decision makers.

JCCI develops additional reports each year—generally one focused on community improvement, another on human services. The JCCI Board of Directors charges its Program Committee with recommending at least two study issues, ranked in priority order. Committee members review suggestions from the community and issue statements from staff, add issues if desired, select six to eight for detailed consideration, make advocacy presentations on behalf of study issues, and vote to select the best issues in relation to the selection criteria. Each study committee of volunteers, supported by JCCI staff, then enter into a six-month process around its chosen subject(s) that includes a series of weekly fact-finding and study report development meetings. After the reports are released, implementation committees continue a process designed to increase the awareness of both the public and public officials about the studies and they advocate for specific recommendations.

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