

THE OPPORTUNITY PROJECT

2024 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Empowering Community-Led Wellbeing Measurement

Institute for Business in a Global Society at Harvard Business School,
U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) & The National League of Cities (NLC)

THE CHALLENGE – Local policymakers need high-quality data to make informed policy decisions, but existing measures of policy success at the national level often fail to measure what matters most for communities. Many local governments and communities lack the resources and capabilities to develop an actionable wellbeing data solution that can be adapted to their context.

EXECUTIVE CHAMPIONS –

Drew Keller, Director, Institute for Business in a Global Society, Harvard Business School

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THE PROBLEM – The measures that guide our current policy conversations often fail to measure what matters most for human flourishing. For example, while key indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP), the unemployment rate, and inflation play an important role in macro policy, they do not always capture a detailed picture of the lived experiences of individuals and families. For example:

- ↳ Rising GDP fails to capture how the share of [wealth is falling for the bottom 90% of Americans](#);
- ↳ Record low unemployment rates hide the number of workers who have [left the labor force](#) due to a [lack of care infrastructure](#) or other disproportionate barriers; and,
- ↳ Falling inflation rates mask vastly [differing distributive impacts](#) at various income levels.

In contrast, wellbeing exists as an alternative and underutilized north star for communities and policymakers. In contrast to the approaches described above, community wellbeing focuses on the greatest contributors to quality of life for individuals, households, and neighborhoods. These measures take an integral and comprehensive view of the human person, using a multidimensional approach that captures both the material components of human flourishing (e.g., housing, nutrition, etc.) with immaterial yet essential inputs to quality of life (e.g. social connection, sense of purpose, etc).

Community-led measures of social progress provide a context-specific approach to data-informed policymaking. Local wellbeing indices are better adapted to what thriving looks like in a particular community, geography, and economy, given its unique history and resources, and provide an opportunity to engage residents in defining wellbeing. Despite the upside of community-led wellbeing measurement and the exemplary leadership of places like [Tacoma, WA](#) and [Brown County, WI](#), elected leaders and community members have highlighted four primary barriers to local action, including insufficient data infrastructure and technical expertise, inadequate staff capacity, the inaccuracy of one-size-fits-all solutions, and inefficiencies caused by an absence of replicable methods, processes, and tools.

THE OPPORTUNITY – Adopting a community-led approach to measuring wellbeing can enable communities to more accurately measure what matters and facilitate a [catalytic process](#), aligning stakeholders to better coordinate effective policy actions. In 2022, we conducted an initial TOP sprint on [Developing Community-Informed National-Level Indicators of Well-Being](#). The 2022 sprint built a nationwide cross-sectoral network of practitioners who demonstrated the transformative power of community-led wellbeing measurement and uncovered persistent barriers to widespread adoption.

This year's sprint aims to address those challenges and empower community-led wellbeing measurement. Communities will benefit from digital tools and guidance that help them increase their capacity to develop a local wellbeing index, provide access to an organized library of wellbeing indicators and data sources, and cultivate new indicators through the collection of community data.

TARGET END USERS – Local government leaders and community members, with a particular focus on officials from under-resourced cities, historically disadvantaged communities, and places that could not otherwise develop meaningful measures of individual and family wellbeing.

SAMPLE DATA SETS

- ↳ [American Community Survey](#) (Census Bureau)
- ↳ [American Housing Survey](#) (Department of Housing and Urban Development)
- ↳ [American Time Use Survey](#) (Bureau of Labor Statistics)
- ↳ [Community Resilience Estimates](#) (Census Bureau)
- ↳ [Environmental Justice Index](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- ↳ [Household Pulse Survey](#) (Census Bureau)
- ↳ [Survey of Income and Program Participation](#) (Census Bureau)

SPRINT LEADERS

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