

# Introduction

How do we know if we are improving the quality of life in Washtenaw County? Are some areas, sectors or people making progress while others are being left behind? Do we know if strategic interventions are making a difference? Are there gaps between what county residents perceive as major issues and what indicator data actually show? What data is already being systematically collected and what else would be helpful to know? Where can existing reports be accessed? What do they tell us about key issues and what are the gaps in our knowledge? This report starts to answer these questions. It is a beginning, a work in progress that will be refined over time.

The Washtenaw County Community Needs Assessment Committee (WCCNAC), comprised of eleven representatives from community institutions and facilitated by the Washtenaw United Way, initiated a study of our county's socio-economic health. It is intended to be an on-going project through which we will regularly measure change in the county's well-being as measured by a set of valid and reliable indicators. We hope the information in this report will be used by nonprofits, foundations, local government and community groups for planning purposes. The Washtenaw County Community Needs Assessment is preceded by an Executive Summary and presents:

- ◆ A descriptive profile of Washtenaw County
- ◆ County-wide data for a set of indicators in five areas: community and economic development; health; education; environment; and community connection. Whenever possible, the data is presented by sub-areas of the county as well as the state and nation. Highlights from residents' and community leaders' perceptions of the issues are included in the overview page preceding each of the five areas.
- ◆ Appendix A presents county residents', nonprofit and other community leaders' perceptions of what the County's key assets and issues are and how adequate the existing services and/or resources are to address these issues.
- ◆ Appendix B is a review of existing research and other reports focused on Washtenaw County. This section identifies gaps in what we know.

The Washtenaw County Community Needs Assessment Committee issued a request for proposals and went through a structured proposal review and selection process. As a result of this competitive process, Formative Evaluation Research Associates (FERA) was contracted with to implement this study. FERA is an independent evaluation group located in Ann Arbor that has worked for over 30 years with nonprofits to improve their organizations and programs through evaluation. FERA works at the local, state, national and international levels. The FERA team was directed by Karin E. Tice, Ph.D. (Partner), and included Lisa Dugdale, MSW/MPP, Chantal Follet, Ph.D., and Amy McNulty, M.A. as well as FERA support staff.

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This report presents the highest quality, valid, reliable, and easily-accessible data FERA could find from secondary sources. In many cases FERA depended upon organizations working on a specific issue to determine whether existing data met these criteria. One of the challenges to implementing this study was finding systematically collected, comparable data over time at the local, county-wide, state and national levels.

## Uses for This Report

This report is intended to be useful to the nonprofit, public and business sectors, as well as to citizen groups. It will be especially useful for cross-sector collaborative efforts because indicator and perception data are easily accessible for multiple indicators and are in one place. Indeed, one of this report's key findings is that the collaborative efforts and partnerships in this county are viewed as successful and innovative ways to address major issues. Interestingly, lack of collaborative efforts is viewed as the major barrier to addressing issues county-wide. Clearly we are moving in the right direction, but there is more to do. This report can facilitate focusing efforts and can measure our progress on multiple issues over time. It offers a county-wide picture and perspective on the quality of life in multiple areas. It also highlights differences among communities whenever possible.

Nonprofits can use this report to:

- ◆ identify and prioritize issues
- ◆ access data and demonstrate the need for services in proposals they develop
- ◆ understand how their organization fits into a broader set of issues

Business and local government can use this report to:

- ◆ encourage businesses to relocate to Washtenaw County
- ◆ engage businesses, especially those new to our area, as partners in solving key issues
- ◆ identify and prioritize issues and guide strategic planning

# Introduction

## Uses for This Report (continued)

Foundations and donors can use this report to:

- ◆ stimulate a discussion about opportunities for proactive giving and grantmaking
- ◆ identify and leverage additional needed resources to this county (This is important so that current funding isn't diverted from successful programs.)

Community groups can use this report to:

- ◆ inform their action plans
- ◆ demonstrate the importance of their efforts
- ◆ broaden their perspective to include other issues that might affect the ones they are focused on

Appreciation goes to Dinella Crosby, Senior Director of Community Investments of Washtenaw United Way. Her knowledge of Washtenaw County, insights on the findings, careful reading of drafts, and facilitation of the process have been invaluable. Acknowledgment and thanks go to the United Way of Greater Cincinnati. We have drawn extensively for the layout and format of the indicators section of this report from their report "The State of the Community: A Report on the Socio-Economic Health of The Greater Cincinnati Region" (2004). Finally, this report would not have been possible without: 1) the many community organizations that have shared existing reports and other data to include in this document; 2) the Community Needs Assessment Committee; and 3) the generous financial support from this study's sponsors.

The full report as well as each of its Appendices are available at: <http://ccwc.ewashtenaw.org>

# How To Read This Report

## How This Report is Organized

The Washtenaw County Community Needs Assessment first presents a profile of our county using demographic data. Next county-wide data (2000-2005) is presented for a set of indicators in five areas: community and economic development; health; education; environment; and community connection. At the beginning of each section there is an overview page which highlights any key findings from the indicator data in that section and key findings from residents' perceptions of issues. Whenever available, the data is presented by sub-areas of the county. If local level data was not available or accessible, we obtained state and national level data when available and comparable. State and national data is not always presented throughout the report because a decision was made to track our progress locally instead of comparing Washtenaw County to larger entities. Local, state and national data is very often collected in different ways and represents different contexts making comparisons difficult to interpret.

Each indicator in the report has "stand-alone" value and the set of indicators, taken together, represents the overall socio-economic health of the region. The indicators have strong policy relevance for public and private sector groups concerned about and working on community improvement. Each indicator is accompanied by a brief narrative section explaining its relevance and what the supporting data mean for the county and, where possible, its sub-areas. The report has 13 placeholder indicators of our region's socio-economic health for which no reliable data is currently available.

# How To Read This Report

## How This Report is Organized (continued)

The introduction to each of the five sections is integrated with survey results from three county-wide surveys that were conducted in order to better understand the perceptions of our county about:

1. What are the major issues facing this county?
2. How adequate are the current services and/or resources available to address these issues?
3. What are the existing assets we have to build upon?

Three surveys were designed and implemented to collect data. These surveys represent the community's perceptions. They included:

1. A statistically representative random telephone survey of 402 county residents, conducted by Wayne State University's Center for Urban Studies.
2. A written survey of 65 residents was conducted to obtain input from residents who were likely to be systematically excluded from the telephone survey (e.g., individuals who are homeless, low income and youth who are likely to have cell phones, no land line, or no phone at all).
3. An online survey of 185 Nonprofit, Business, Educational, and Political leaders.

A discussion of what the results tell us is offered at the end of each of the five categories. Where possible, relevant observations are made about: (1) what the data tells us; (2) the differences in perceptions among the three groups; and (3) any disconnects between what the indicator data from the previous section of the report reveals and community perception of the severity of the issue.

Appendix A presents survey results for each of these three groups in detail.

Appendix B is a review of existing research and other reports focused on Washtenaw County. This section identifies gaps in what we know.

# How To Read This Report

## About the Indicators

The indicators were selected by the Washtenaw County Needs Assessment Committee. The criteria used were:

- ❖ Validity and reliability of existing county data
- ❖ Readily available and high quality data
- ❖ On-going data collection

## Process for Selecting the Indicators

Formative Evaluation Research Associates (FERA) reviewed indicator studies across the country to identify commonly used indicators. A draft set of indicators was developed based on this review. FERA consulted with local experts in Washtenaw County to determine whether valid and reliable data existed for many of the indicators. FERA led the Committee through a structured workshop designed to review, add or delete indicators, and prioritize each of the final indicators in terms of its importance (high, medium and low). We realize that there are additional indicators that have not been included, and that there may be disagreement about whether the ones that were selected are the “best” indicators to use. Please consider this study a beginning. The Committee welcomes feedback regarding this report, especially from those of you with specific knowledge about a particular indicator area. The committee would also like to know how valuable this study is to individuals and organizations in our county, and how it is being used.

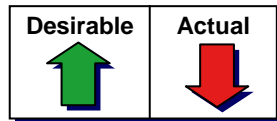
Each of the indicators presented in this report is reported on its own page. A graph showing trends over time is presented for each indicator where data is available. If data is available for the cities and villages in Washtenaw County it will be presented in table format on the right hand side of the page. Each indicator has three sections of text describing: (1) what it is; (2) why it matters – comments about why it is important to measure this indicator; and (3) what it tells us – observations based on interpretation of the available data.

# How To Read This Report

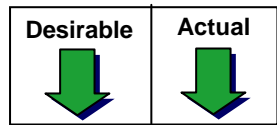
## How to Read the Indicator Arrows

In the upper right-hand corner of each indicator page are a set of two arrows. The left-hand arrow shows the direction most people would agree is the direction in which the indicators “should” be moving. This is emphasized by the green color of the arrow.

The right-hand arrow indicates the direction in which the indicator has been moving overall during the years shown on the graph. If data varies between years, the arrow represents the difference between the last two years of measurement. The color of the arrow reinforces positive (green) and negative (red) trends. For example:



This pair shows that while the desired direction for the indicator is to move up or increase, it actually has decreased in contrast with the desired direction.



This pair, on the other hand, shows that the indicator should ideally be decreasing and the data in the indicator actually is decreasing.

The movement of some indicators is characterized by a yellow arrow going both ways that indicates that the indicator has shown no significant change over time or that the changes in the indicator are both positive and negative.

Some indicators are labeled as “placeholder” indicators, meaning that, while those measures are considered important, reliable and/or valid data measures are not yet available for them.

For each indicator presenting actual data, the source of the data is listed at the bottom of the page.