

The Process of Indicator Development

In 1996, then City of Boston Environmental Services Chief Cathleen Douglas Stone proposed to then Director of Sustainable Boston Geeta Pradhan that Boston undertake a project to develop indicators of sustainability. This was based in part on a recent conversation Ms. Stone had had with Vice President Al Gore, whose office was coordinating the President's Council on Sustainable Development. Ms. Pradhan solicited the partnership of Charlotte Kahn, Director of the Boston Community Building Network at the Boston Foundation, because of its history in working with large groups and in developing new data resources.

The project would engage the community in creating ways to track and measure progress on a range of indicators. Based on information about Boston and its neighborhoods, the indicators would monitor progress toward sustainability by measuring natural assets, economic well-being and human development. It would also link to the National Neighborhood Indicators Project at the Urban Institute in Washington DC, in which the Boston Community Building Network was participating, along with initiatives in six other cities.

The Boston Indicators Project began in early 1997. From the beginning, it acknowledged Boston's strong social and intellectual capital. It developed an open approach toward participation, soliciting the ideas and knowledge of practitioners, academics, policy makers and leaders across sectors. The process evolved organically, incorporating opportunities and learning from exemplary projects and practice.

Since then, the project has encompassed five distinct stages:

1. **Conceptualizing a framework for progress**
2. **Identifying indicators and measures**
3. **Gathering and analyzing data and report preparation**

4. **Refining and incorporating input and producing a final report for dissemination**
5. **Promoting change through informed civic action**

1. Conceptualizing a framework

- Convening practitioners across sectors
- Building on existing work and best practices
- Random assignment to small groups
- A focus on shared values and hopes as residents and workers
- Adoption of an asset-oriented framework

A meeting at the Boston Foundation on January 23, 1997 included about a dozen people representing organizations and agencies engaged in trying to measure complex change in urban communities: the Codman Square Health Center; the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI); the Urban Edge Community Development Corporation; and the Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH). Also participating were analysts from the Boston Redevelopment Authority, City development agencies and environmental organizations such as Second Nature, Inc. Participants discussed the need for a clear vision for the project and ways it could be used to further their goals. Reviewing traditional indicators in use to assess change in urban communities, they quickly acknowledged the need for a more multidimensional approach and the importance of building on local efforts.

Other agencies and groups engaged in new approaches to measurement were invited to subsequent meetings: the Boston Police Department's researchers presented the results of their Public Safety Survey, reinforcing the link between public safety rates and social, economic and quality-of-life issues in Boston. These discussions were enriched by the involvement of additional disciplines, including researchers from the Boston Public School Department and staff from Boston's Community Centers and environmental organizations such as Boston

Natural Areas Fund and Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE). Participants emphasized the value of working across sectors.

By late spring, the group had developed a broad framework for the project, including a vision, goals and a process for developing indicator categories. By then, the number of participants had grown to about 75. Staff from the regional offices of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had joined in, as well as representatives of a number of community-based organizations. Participants were asked to leave their expertise aside at first and were randomly assigned to small groups to consider the question of shared values and priorities as residents. Out of these shared values and concerns emerged a list of potential indicator categories.

2. Identification of indicators and measures

- Expansion of the group to 150
- Development of visions and goals in ten indicator categories
- Formation of a steering group to guide the process
- Subcommittees draw on sector expertise; small groups explore links across sectors
- Refinement/reduction of proposed indicators and measures

The process of identifying indicator categories and measures took about six months, and involved more than 150 people. General discussions in large-group settings resulted in goals and a vision statement for each of the ten proposed indicator categories, followed by small-group discussions across sectors to explore linkages. Subcommittees drew on participants' particular expertise; small-group sessions explored links across sectors; and then large-group discussions refined the work, with comments on the more technical aspects of data use and availability.

The process of developing indicators in each category continued through the summer of 1997, beginning with sessions to identify and refine specific indicators in the proposed areas of Economy/Jobs, Civic Health, and the Environment, and later, Public Safety and Public Health. Participants talked about what they valued and/or wished to change and debated the merits and demerits of specific indicators and measures. Several interns from the Kennedy School helped to staff the group sessions and to capture the results. In the course of these conversations, participants identified criteria: selected indicators and measures would have to be relevant, meaningful and understandable to the Boston community, and create the momentum for constructive change.

With the body of work and number of participants growing, a steering group was set up to develop structures to guide the work. People volunteered to be on sub-committees and delved into conversations outside the regular meeting process to engage others, and to begin to identify data sources. A June meeting involved a review of indicators previously discussed and proposed indicators and measures for the Transportation, Housing, and Arts/ Culture/Leisure categories, followed by Education and Technology/Communications/Media. In October, 1997, meeting every week, participants refined and sharpened the indicators and measures in view of the criteria they had identified.

The Project also invited similar projects to share their lessons. The City of Boston's Office of Budget Management presented their "Improving Management Project," aimed at encouraging City departments to move from measuring inputs such as the number of miles of roads cleaned, to measuring outcomes — such as the number of miles of clean streets. The Boston Public Health Commission presented the "Health of Boston," a status report on health conditions in Boston's neighborhoods. The Boston School Department presented efforts to measure school reform and student achievement. The Boston Foundation's Community Building Network presented an approach to community change based on building on community assets such as social and family networks to strengthen a community's

problem-solving capacity — in contrast to the traditional approach of seeking first to reduce deficits such as school drop-out rates. Indicators Project participants decided to adopt an “asset-based” approach as the best way to promote constructive change. Participants decided that each of the indicators would be expressed as a positive goal, with measures highlighting progress or the need to augment efforts.

3. Draft report preparation

- Narrowing the number of proposed indicators
- Research to identify data sources
- Gathering and analyzing data

By early 1998, more than 150 preliminary indicators had been identified, and more than 500 measures proposed. The focus then turned to narrowing the number of proposed indicators and measures and to identifying data to support them. The process of gathering data proved to be difficult and time consuming. Some potential data providers were concerned that data could be misused; others raised questions about data reliability, consistency, and validity, as well as about issues of confidentiality. This process forced the tightening of indicators, removing duplication and focusing on measures ideally related to more than one issue. Because there was often no existing source of baseline data for Boston, the decision was made to provide an historic context and baseline information in this first report, with future reports becoming more streamlined.

In late 1997 and early 1998, subcommittee presentations were again followed by large-group dialogue. The Massachusetts Technology Collaborative was invited to present its “Massachusetts Innovation Index,” a set of 33 indicators, the result of a similar process. Encouraged by their success, the Boston Indicators Project made the decision to identify six to ten core indicators in each category to “tell the story of Boston.”

To ensure relevance and consistency across the different categories, the group sought to identify indicators that “defined, measured and monitored those things that strengthen the core health and well being of communities.” This concept

was combined with a challenge posed by James Howell, former Chief Economist at the Bank of Boston, at a Boston 400 Forum, “Linking People, Opportunity and Place: Economic Vitality for Boston’s Neighborhoods.” He had stated that, “Boston is poised for success in the global economy of the 21st century; our challenge is to push this prosperity into the neighborhoods of Boston.”

To understand the relationship of the global and regional economies on local issues, participants decided to look at three critical levels: the neighborhood; citywide; and metropolitan levels. They also invited international and national indicator experts Alan Atkisson and Maureen Hart to present and to reflect on Boston’s approach to indicators development. In the spring of 1998, the Boston Indicators Project presented its “draft” neighborhood and citywide core indicators to members of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP), which was holding a day-long workshop in Boston with representatives from twelve cities.

The project completed the bulk of initial data gathering and analysis by the fall of 1998, and planned for release of a draft report for review in the spring of 1999.

4. Dissemination and comment

- Release of a draft for review and comment
- Major event to solicit feedback and build a constituency
- Building capacity to use data

On June 3, 1999, the draft Boston Indicators of Progress, Change, and Sustainability report was released at a Boston Citizen Seminar hosted by Boston College. The event, attended by over 250 people from across Boston’s neighborhoods and sectors, included a keynote address by Mayor Thomas M. Menino, a video by WCVB-TV 5 about Boston’s progress following the first Boston Citizen Seminars in the 1950s, a panel of Boston’s civic leaders, and a presentation on the indicators. Participants also engaged in facilitated table conversations, identifying the top

three priorities for Boston as education, collaboration and equity.

Subsequently, more than 700 copies of the draft report were sent out to senior government officials, state legislators and interested organizations and individuals for review and comment. Comments and suggestions received at the event and from individuals, organizations and public agencies were incorporated. In addition, the draft report was presented at the request of several local and regional groups, including the regional office of the Environmental Protection Agency. It was also presented at international conferences on community building and sustainable development issues in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Seoul, Korea, Lisbon, Portugal, and in Vienna, Austria.

The draft document contained a blank Cultural Life section labeled "Under Construction." After release of the draft, a number of special sessions were held to focus on indicators and measures in this area. This process also benefited from participation in Arts and Culture Indicators work undertaken by the Urban Institute.

A conference, "Using Data to Drive Community Change" was held in February, 2000, at Northeastern University, attracting 150 community-based organizations for skill-building workshops and the sharing of recent work and best practices. It was coordinated by the Boston Foundation's Community Building Network and Northeastern University in partnership with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the United Way of Massachusetts Bay, Action for Boston Community Development, UMass/Boston, Northeastern University and the City of Boston's Data Roundtable. Several community-based organizations, particularly the Codman Square Health Center and the Allston-Brighton CDC, began to test, tailor and use the indicator categories and measures at the neighborhood level.

A number of groups, including the Boston Redevelopment Authority, Action for Boston Community Development, the United Way of Massachusetts Bay, the Harvard School of Public Health, the Boston Foundation and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council met at the invitation of staff from the Center for Survey Research at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. Facilitated by the Boston Foundation, the group worked to design and collaboratively fund an Annual Boston Survey designed to produce qualitative data to support measures in areas in which consistent data is not generally available. The first survey was conducted in the summer of 2000 in the metro region, citywide, and in four Boston neighborhoods.

5. **Using the indicators to promote civic dialogue and action**

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- Development of a collaborative survey to support qualitative measures
- Release of the report at a Boston Citizen Seminar
- Development of a process to create a civic agenda informed by the indicators

The 2000 report, *The Wisdom of Our Choices*, is being released at a Boston Citizen Seminar sponsored by Boston College with the Boston Foundation, the City of Boston, FleetBoston Financial and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. As soon as is feasible, the indicators will be made available on line to ensure their general availability and use. It is hoped that through active engagement with the indicators and measures, they will be honed and narrowed further.

Boston is now seen as doing breakthrough work in developing neighborhood indicators of community well being within a citywide and metropolitan context. Local groups and academic institutions have begun to actively use the indicators to guide and evaluate their work. This new knowledge has enriched the methodology in Boston for assessing, tracking and promoting change.

The Boston Indicators Project has exceeded its early goals. Project participants have begun incorporating the indicators in their own work at the community and institutional levels, and have developed relationships across sectors. Efforts are now underway to identify civic and community leaders who will work together over the next two years to generate and advance civic agenda; using the indicators as a point of departure.

List of Participants

Thank you to the many people who participated in developing the framework for this report, who refined the indicators and measures at numerous working sessions, who contributed data and ideas, who reviewed and commented on draft materials, and who helped to organize and facilitate the release and review of the draft report. A complete list follows.

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Cultural/Ethnic Group Populations in Boston

Note: Residents and researchers in Boston often wonder what the population figures are for the many cultural/ethnic groups in the city. The question is difficult to answer. The 1990 U.S. Census measured population figures in four different ways: 1) *race*; 2) *ancestry*; 3) *place of birth for foreign-born residents*; and 4), *Hispanic origin*. Census data, while providing helpful information in answering this question, has a number of shortcomings. Not all cultural/ethnic groups were measured in all categories, and many cultural/ethnic groups were not counted at all. Also, the Census allowed individuals to respond and be counted in more than one category. In addition, Boston has welcomed large numbers of newcomers since 1990, whose arrival is not reflected in the data. Such new data will not be available until results of the 2000 Census become available at the city level in 2002. We present the data below with an awareness of their limitations in an effort to begin to chart the diversity that makes Boston so culturally rich, and with the expectation that new data will more accurately reflect Boston's cultural/ethnic diversity in the coming years.

Cultural Group	Race	Ancestry	Place of birth of foreign born residents	Hispanic origin
African				
Cape Verdean		6,140	3,906	
Egyptian		306	375	
Ethiopian		465	447	
Ghanian		144	179	
Kenyan			55	
Moroccan			215	
Nigerian		607	639	
Senegalese			35	
South African			219	
American Indian	1,838			
Asian/Pacific Islander				
Burmese			182	
Cambodian	1,052		841	
Chinese(inc. Hong Kong)	16,263		9,748	
Filipino	1,212		741	
Guamanian	210			
Hawaiian	44			
Indian	1,948		967	
Indonesian			167	
Japanese	1,675		1,278	
Korean	1,368		996	
Laotian	396		334	
Malaysian			158	
Pakistani			294	
Samoan	12			

Cultural Group	Race	Ancestry	Place of birth of foreign born residents	Hispanic origin
Taiwanese			726	
Thai	358		418	
Vietnamese	4,812		4,398	
Caribbean/West Indian		26,546		
Antiguan			225	
Bahamian		32	113	
Barbadian		1,805	2,511	
Cuban			1,451	2,483
Dominican (Dom. Republic)			5,731	
Granadian			164	
Haitian		12,438	10,407	
Jamaican		5,869	4,715	
Trinidadian/Tobagonian		1,712	2,823	
Puerto Rican				25,767
Central American				
Belezian		39	120	
Costa Rican			468	
El Salvadoran			2,761	
Guatemalen			2,038	
Honduran			1,699	
Nicaraguan			221	
Panamanian			476	
European				
Albanian		659		
Armenian		1,190		
Austrian		2,013	161	
Belgian		416	71	
Croatian		311		
Czechoslovakian		516	169	
Danish		1,089	22	
Dutch		3,339	290	
English		38,385		
Estonian		132	47	
Finnish		843	38	
French		16,045	538	
German		34,054	998	
Greek		6,007	1,768	
Hungarian		1,802	119	
Irish		128,602	6,497	
Italian		60,178	5,107	
Latvian		845	351	
Lithuanian		5,163	364	

Cultural Group	Race	Ancestry	Place of birth of foreign born residents	Hispanic origin
Norwegian		2,411	71	
Polish		17,009	1,656	
Portuguese		5,108	705	
Romanian		1,033	113	
Russian		13,756	3,811	
Scandinavian		772		
Scottish		9,675		
Slovak		1,118		
Spanish			490	
Swedish		5,373	157	
Swiss		993	224	
Turkish		373	359	
Ukranian		1,780		
Welsh		1,761		
Yugoslavian		343	115	
Middle Eastern				
Afgan			20	
Iranian		623	579	
Iraqi		54	115	
Isreali		384	331	
Jordanian		41	162	
Lebanese		2,817	906	
Palestinian			127	
Syrian		1,018	333	
North American				
Canadian		5,105	3,360	
Mexican			898	2,179
Oceanic				
Australian		151	202	
New Zealander			14	
South American				
Argentinean			267	
Brazilian		1,541	2,172	
Bolivian			213	
Chilean			318	
Columbian			1,790	
Equadorian			288	
Guyanese		267	446	
Peruvian			715	
Uruguanian			40	
Venezuelan			393	

Source: 1990 U.S.Census

Data Resources

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Boston Globe Online: Provides access to current and previous articles through a key word search function and an archives search (1979-2000). Charge for archives search. www.boston.com

Boston Herald Online: Provides access to daily news and to recent articles through a key word search function. www.bostonherald.com

Boston Online: Boston statistics from public and private sources and links to neighborhood sites and resources. www.boston-online.com

Boston Public Library: Provides access to reference documents and resources, books on all subjects, government documents and databases, and several on-line links. www.bpl.org

Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA): Provides access to economic data at the national, state and regional levels. www.doc.bea.gov

Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS): Provides access to labor statistics at the national, state and local levels. www.bls.gov

Center of Regional and Urban Planning (CURP): Based at Northeastern University, CURP has information about Boston area policy and planning issues, organizations, documents and a Greater Boston Resource Kit. www.curp.neu.edu

Chemical Scorecard: Chemical information service from the Environmental Defense Fund, which provides data and action tips on chemical pollution for communities. www.scorecard.org

City of Boston: Links to all City departments, including the Boston Redevelopment Authority and profiles of neighborhood services, department reports and contact information. Boston information and resources can also be found at the Boston City Hall. www.ci.boston.ma.us

Commonwealth of Massachusetts: Provides access to data and to government branches, offices and departments in every city and town in Massachusetts. www.state.ma.us

Division of Employment and Training (DET): Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training provides labor market data for Massachusetts. www.detma.org

EconData.Net: A guide to regional economic activity, with more than 400 links to data sources. www.econdata.net

Massachusetts Electric Atlas: Provides layered maps representing compiled statistical measures from independent organizations. (A Boston Atlas is in progress.) icg.fas.harvard.edu/~maps

Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER): U.S. Census Bureau data on Massachusetts. www.umass.edu/miser

MassCHIP: An online data resource service by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. www.state.us/dph.ose/mchphome.html

MassINC. – Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth: Publishes two magazines and many reports to inform and promote policy development in Massachusetts, www.massinc.org (617) 338-8900

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC): Offers a broad range of demographic and economic information on 101 cities and towns in Eastern Massachusetts. www.mapc.org (617) 451-2770

U.S. Census Bureau: Demographics statistics for every neighborhood and census block, as well as mapping software. Year 2000 Census results for Boston will become available in 2001-2002. www.census.gov

List of Acronyms

ACE: Alternatives for Community and Environment

ATM: automated teller machines

BBJ: Boston Business Journal

BIIS: Boston Immunization Information System

BNN-TV: Boston Neighborhood Network TV

Boston CMSA: Boston Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (the area surrounding Boston to Worcester, Massachusetts, York, Maine, Nashua, New Hampshire, and parts of Connecticut, with a total population of about 5.6 million people)

Boston PMSA: Boston Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (including 129 towns in Eastern Massachusetts and two in New Hampshire, for a total of about 3.2 million people)

BPFSS: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey

BPL: Boston Public Library

BPS: Boston Public Schools

CDC: Center for Disease Control

CDC: community development corporation

City of Boston: Boston's municipal government

CMM: Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries

COPD: chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

CTC Net: Community Technology Center Network

DDT: Dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane

EMS: Emergency Medical Services

EPA: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

EQUIP: Boston Education Quality Improvement Project (coordinated by Associated Day Care Services)

ESL: English-as-a-Second Language class or course of study

EZ: Empowerment Zone, HUD designation of area with more than 30% poverty for human development and economic revitalization.

FIRE: Finance, Insurance and Real Estate

GBIO: Greater Boston Interfaith Organization

HMO: health maintenance organization

HOPE VI: HUD program to upgrade the nation's most distressed public housing

HUD: U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development

ICIC: Initiative for a Competitive Inner City

MA: Massachusetts

MAC: Metropolitan Affairs Coalition

MAPC: Metropolitan Area Planning Council

MassINC.: Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth

MBTA: Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority

MCAS: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

METCO: Metropolitan Council for Education Opportunity

Metro-Boston: the 101 cities and towns in Eastern Massachusetts included in the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's state-mandated planning area

NIH: National Institutes of Health

PIC: Private Industry Council

USDA: U.S. Department of Agriculture

WEIU: Women's Education and Industrial Union

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Authors' Note

This report represents our best effort to offer clear, up-to-date information to enable you to develop a multidimensional understanding of conditions and opportunities in Metro-Boston, Boston and its neighborhoods. However, it is a first effort. As such, it has limitations of which we are very aware.

We rely on your engagement with this report and the data and concepts in it as the best way to guarantee its improvement. We welcome your comments, corrections, and suggestions. (Please see next page.)

We are hopeful that this report will mark the beginning of a 30-year commitment in Boston to create sustainable prosperity and a high quality of life for all residents. We are also hopeful that in the course of attempting to achieve that goal, Boston will fulfill its potential to lead the way regionally, nationally and globally.

We would like to thank personally the hundreds of people with whom we have had the privilege of working on this project. We particularly thank Cathy Douglas Stone, Bob Consalvo, Deborah Jackson, and Peter Rollins, without whose support and encouragement this report would not have been possible. Finally, thank you to our families and friends, for all of the hours devoted to this work that took us away from family life.

We hope most of all that the lives of Boston's children will in some way be touched and improved by our effort.

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