



SUSTAINABLE CINCINNATI: A Regional Indicators Project

Sustainable Indicators for the Cincinnati Region

Sustainable Cincinnati defines a sustainable community as “a sustainable community meets its present needs without sacrificing the ability of others, now and in the future, to meet their own needs.” These needs include economic prosperity, quality of life, and healthy, functioning ecosystems. The foundation of sustainability is ensuring that economic prosperity, quality of life, and healthy ecosystems are enduring values for our region.

Economic Prosperity

1. Entrepreneurial spirit as measured by new business starts

An entrepreneurial spirit is considered essential for wealth creation and the long-term health of the economy. Although it is understood that many new businesses fail in the first few years, the number of failures or the net number of businesses were seen as less important measures. The key indicator is whether there is a steady stream of new ideas and new enterprises, some of which will be successful.

2. Percent of workforce between 20 and 35 years of age

This indicator measures our ability to attract new technology workers and keep our own children in the region when they graduate. Our ability to attract young people to the region is highly influenced by cultural and quality of life issues. Economic development professionals consider the ability to attract a qualified workforce essential to keeping the region competitive. As our population ages, young workers are essential not only to meeting the needs of employers but to providing support for older and younger people who are dependent on their wages and other support. This indicator is a measure of what might be called the “vitality” of a community. Information on trends for this indicator will be most useful.

3. Cumulative percent of students who finish high school and are “work ready” or prepared for higher education

The percent would be cumulative, considering dropouts, students going directly into the workforce, and those going on to higher education. Whether students were work ready or prepared for college would be measured by the need for remedial education by employers or colleges. This indicator measures the effectiveness of our K-12 education systems. An adequate workforce is essential for the economy.

4. The percent of the eligible workforce earning enough to be self-sufficient

This indicator takes into consideration both unemployment and the working poor. It combines economic and social concerns. Self-sufficiency is the amount of income needed in the region to meet basic needs without public assistance. While it is assumed that every economy has some jobs that are low-skill and low pay, the goal is to minimize the percent of the workforce not earning enough to support themselves and their families. This indicator will help the region

focus economic development efforts on attracting higher paying jobs and providing the education and skills needed to prepare people for those jobs.

Healthy Ecosystems

5. Percent of land in the region devoted to people habitat, car habitat, wildlife habitat, and agriculture

This indicator measures the balance of land uses. While no ideal balance was identified, it is important to monitor trends. Land is a finite resource; increased use for one purpose means a reduction for other uses. It is expected that this indicator will be shown as a pie chart. Car habitat includes roads and parking lots. It gets at flooding and water quality problems caused by impervious surfaces; loss of greenspace; air quality problems created by auto emissions; increased commuter times that impact on civic and family life.

6. Pounds of waste per capita sent to landfills or other disposal

This indicator includes residential, commercial and industrial solid waste, plus construction and demolition debris. The trend could be reduced by either producing less waste or by recycling efforts.

7. Number of days that air quality is unhealthy based on national standards

This indicator combines environmental and health concerns. An air quality index is used nationally to rate the air as “good”, “moderate”, “unhealthy for sensitive groups”, “unhealthy” or “very unhealthy (alert)”. It is defined and reported for the Cincinnati region on a daily basis on the Internet at www.hcdoes.org/airquality/webpages/aqindex. This indicator is affected by energy use, both in automobiles and in electricity generated by burning coal.

8. Percent of stream miles meeting State water quality standards

The Cincinnati region is focused on the Ohio River and its several tributaries. We are a River City. The health of our rivers is key to wildlife, drinking water, tourism, and our quality of life.

Healthy People and Healthy Communities

9. Healthy People Index, with the following specific conditions monitored in our region:

- Percent of population that is overweight
- Suicide rate
- Infant mortality rate
- Asthma rate
- Blood lead levels in children
- Teenage smoking rates
- Number of people without public or private health insurance
- Perceived availability of affordable, quality health services (measured by surveys)
- Immunization rates

A Healthy People Index and statistics are maintained by the national Center for Disease Control.

10. Sense of Community measured by the social capital index

The Cincinnati region is one of several metropolitan areas involved in the Social Capital Benchmark Survey. The Greater Cincinnati Foundation sponsored the survey locally. The survey measures various aspects of civic ties and community connections, including social trust,

political participation, civic leadership and associational involvement, giving and volunteering, faith-based engagement, and informal social ties. This indicator will also report the percent of eligible voters that actually vote.

11. Violent crime rate in the region

Citizens will not stay in a community if they do not feel safe. Although violent crime rates have been going down and the Cincinnati region is better than other urban areas, safety is such an essential need of the community, it needs to be watched and measured. Crime rates affect, and are affected by, economic and social issues. Although crime rates are generally reported by jurisdiction, it was felt important that attention be focused on a regional measure. Violent crime affects more than the people who live and work in certain high-crime neighborhoods. It has a negative impact on the entire region.

12. Number of people using public transportation

This indicator is affected both by the existence (or lack) of public transit systems and by how accessible the existing systems are to the population. The use of public transportation reduces air pollution from automobiles, reduces energy consumption, and reduces the need for more and larger highways. Public transportation is also important in connecting potential employees to jobs and housing throughout the region.

...and Justice for All

13. Percent of population that feels treated with fairness and respect in public interactions, reported by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability status

This information would be opinion through opinion surveys. Public interactions would include interactions with the police, with shop clerks, on buses, etc. African Americans make up 12% of the region and have historically been treated as an underclass by the white majority.

Perceptions of fair treatment are a good indicator that we are healing the racial divisions. At the same time, it is important that diversity in all aspects is respected.

14. Racial and income segregation in the region measured by the Index of Dissimilarity

Both concerns about racial segregation and the need for mixed income communities kept coming up in discussions of housing, regional cooperation, and diversity. There is a strong sense that a region with concentrations of poverty and isolated communities of the wealthy is not sustainable. Using this indicator does not assume that a total mix of races and incomes is possible or even desirable. It does assume that extreme segregation by race or income is not healthy for the region. The Index of Dissimilarity is also called the Tauber Index and is a commonly used measure of residential segregation based on Census data.

Note: Suitable indicators for regional cooperation, availability of housing, and energy are not yet fully developed. The Sustainable Cincinnati Steering Committee recommends that the project move forward using the indicators listed above with the idea that additional indicators may be developed for these areas in the future.