

GUELPH WELLINGTON'S

VitalSigns[®]

FAQ

October 2009

What is Guelph and Wellington's Vital Signs?

Guelph and Wellington's Vital Signs is a community report card produced by the Guelph Community Foundation. It provides a compilation of existing research in 11 areas critical to Guelph and Wellington's quality of life. Hundreds of community graders have graded these findings to provide a snapshot of their view on our city and county's wellness and live-ability.

Why did GCF decide to do Vital Signs?

Measuring our community's vitality in critical areas will increase the effectiveness of our grantmaking, help us to inform our donors about issues and opportunities in the community, and assist us in making connections between individuals and groups to address those issues.

This is an integrative report, presenting key information at a high level in an engaging, independent and accessible manner. It encompasses several key quality of life issues while many other indicator projects focus on one or only a few specific dimensions.

We have consulted with a number of community organizations and leaders, including the City of Guelph, County of Wellington, the United Way, Guelph Police Services, the Local Health Integration Network, Guelph Arts Council, Waterloo Wellington Dufferin Health Unit, environmental groups, and all of these have provided valuable research information.

Which indicators did you measure?

The 2009 report gives us an overview of Guelph and Wellington in 11 areas critical to the quality of life: Learning, Safety, Health and Wellness, Arts and Culture, Gap between Rich and Poor, Getting Started, Work, Housing, Environment, Belonging and Leadership, and Getting Around.

How is Vital Signs different from other indicator initiatives?

Different indicator initiatives exist across Canada. Some track specific issues at a local level, such as a police department monitoring crime levels. Others analyze national data from a particular

perspective, such as sustainability. All play an important role in helping us better understand our communities.

Where did the idea for Vital Signs come from?

Guelph Wellington's Vital Signs is based on the Toronto Community Foundation's initiative which is very successful and is now in its sixth year.

Several other community foundations across Canada are also involved. We are one of 16 communities, from coast to coast, participating this year. Each community has chosen its own indicators, but there are some common themes and core indicators.

What other communities are involved in Vital Signs?

As part of a national initiative led by Community Foundations of Canada, this year's 16 participating communities set to launch on October 6th include: Victoria, Central Okanagan, Sunshine Coast, Boundary Communities BC, Calgary, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Toronto, Waterloo Region, Guelph, Oakville, Kingston, Ottawa, Sudbury, Wolfville, and St. John.

What will you do with the Vital Signs report now?

We hope the report will help focus attention on key areas of importance and that it will encourage community involvement and in time, allow us to track our collective progress and results.

At GCF, we intend to use the report

- To inform our grantmaking
- To inform donors and others on current issues
- To strengthen our community's understanding of itself
- To stimulate public discourse and policy debate

How will Vital Signs add value to current research?

One of the additional benefits of *Vital Signs* is its ability to draw public attention to other (indicator) work already taking place in our community.

By consolidating new and existing data, *Vital Signs* makes a wide range of information easier to access.

Individuals and organizations interested in detailed analysis of particular areas can use our Vital Signs website links to find the in-depth reports they need.

Who did the research?

We collected data from a variety of sources, both local and national. In so doing, we considered four factors:

- Credibility of the source
- Geography – availability of data for Guelph & Wellington, as well as provincial comparators
- Currency of the data, and whether there is the possibility of future updates
- Ease and cost of data collection

The Advisory Committee then reviewed each indicator statement, with consideration to the relationship of the indicators to one another and the issue area.

Hasn't most of this data already been published?

Data from a number of our indicators has been published in different forms. However, this is the first time, it is all brought together with the community survey results, in one document, and that is what makes this report valuable. By reading the Vital Signs report, Guelph and Wellington County citizens can learn about a lot of different aspects of their community.

Who did the grading?

We invited a wide range of people – business and community leaders, charitable organizations and the general public to participate in the grading process. We had almost 400 respondents. Approximately 75% were from the City of Guelph and 25% from the County of Wellington.

Where did the financial support for Vital Signs come from?

We were fortunate to receive funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation for the first two years of the project. In addition, The Guelph Community Foundation, Community Foundations of Canada, and The Co-operators have provided support. Without this assistance, we could not have undertaken this initiative.

Given the economic climate, a concern for sustainability and a general desire to maximize the use of the resources available to us for this project, we did not produce a printed report this year. The (summary) insert in the Guelph Mercury, together with our on-line version of the report was one way we were able to maximize the use of the resources we had available to us for this project.

Can you explain the rating scale? How does the rating scale work? How could someone actually rate something like belonging and leadership?

In late summer, we posted a web-based survey, asking local citizens to grade performance for each of the indicators. Respondents had five letter grades to choose from. Grading is very much a subjective process; it reveals the perceptions of local citizens and indicates areas that require attention.

The scale used by the graders is as follows:

- A. I am very pleased. Guelph & Wellington is leading the way.
- B. I am satisfied with this situation.
- C. This situation is mediocre.
- D. I am concerned. This situation needs attention.
- F. This situation is unacceptable.

The grades in this report reflect the median scores. Median is the middle point– 50% of the respondents to each question chose an answer above or below it.

How is the survey respondent supposed to know if some of the statistics are good or poor?

The intent of the grading process is not to assess whether the statistics are good or bad, right or wrong, but how they make citizens feel about their community. Is this issue something that concerns them, or something they feel proud about? We have no preconceived expectations for how community graders will respond. Each respondent makes his/her selection based on their knowledge, experiences, opinions, and perceptions. That's why we say the survey is very much about taking the pulse of our community.

Ontario Works, EI and unemployment are through the roof. How does this survey help that?

One of our objectives is that the survey builds a greater sense of a community's knowledge of itself. Did we *expect* it to be this high? And if not, why not? We've heard from a number of community stakeholders that we don't view ourselves as a manufacturing city – yet we aren't immune to job loss. We hope the community, employers, and all levels of government use Vital Signs as a springboard for discussion and solutions.

Who do I contact for more information?

For more detailed information about the report and the work of The Guelph Community Foundation, please contact:

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