

# Tracking Progress, Inspiring Action: The Peg Community Indicator System

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## Abstract

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Peg is a partnership project between United Way of Winnipeg and the International Institute for Sustainable Development. It's an interactive and collaborative web-tool with easy-to-access information on everything Winnipeg related. It's better known as a community indicator system, and it tracks variables that help measure Winnipeg's well-being in terms of a whole variety of factors - from education, and governance, to health, the economy, and the environment. Peg was developed with the goal of tracking progress and inspiring action. But most importantly, Peg is a tool that lets Winnipeg citizens, business owners, and policy makers see the ways Winnipeg is getting stronger as a community, and where change is required. Peg's web-tool allows users to visualize data through both maps and graphs, making it easier for researchers and students to analyze and present data in meaningful ways. Peg provides updates on the city's economic, social, and environmental issues through periodic indicator reports and annual well-being reports. Peg provides citizens with a snapshot of the current situation, inspiring people to ask questions and take action to improve outcomes for all. In recognition of its innovative approach and ability to drive positive community change, Peg received the Community Indicators Consortium Impact Award in Washington, D.C. in 2014, and a Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce Spirit of Winnipeg Award for Innovation in 2015.

## Background

In 1999 – 2000, United Way of Winnipeg hosted a community engagement process to identify Winnipeg’s most pressing social issues. Known as “The Journey Forward”, approximately 3,200 Winnipeggers participated in the workshop.

The participants raised two important questions: how can the community determine whether efforts to address social issues are making a difference, and how could United Way keep them informed about the community’s progress? In response, United Way partnered

Peg is an interactive and collaborative web-tool that measures and reports on economic, social, and environmental issues. Peg integrates, manages, and displays data on a whole range of well-being indicators in an easy to access way. For example, Peg can help us track regions of the city most impacted by anxiety and mood disorder, or how much garbage we send to the landfills.

Peg allows us to move beyond perceptions and assumptions to see a snapshot of how the city is really doing. Peg provides updates on the city’s economic,



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connect human faces with the numbers.

Peg sources its data externally from organizations like Statistics Canada, Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, Winnipeg Police Service, and Economic Development Winnipeg. The well-being of Winnipeg residents is determined based on over 60 different indicators grouped around eight themes of well-being: basic needs, built environment, economy, education and learning, governance, health, natural environment, and social vitality. The key indicators were identified through consultation with experts, paying particular attention to those indicators that best signal the overall status of each of the eight themes of well-being.

Peg was developed through an engaging and participatory process. Peg’s *Steering*



Above: Peg launch event, received from United Way of Winnipeg

with the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) to consider the feasibility of creating a community indicator system (CIS) for Winnipeg that would measure and report on progress (United Way, 2005). Together, United Way and IISD engaged dozens of Winnipeggers in workshops and planning groups to develop what we now know as the Peg Community Indicator System (Peg).

social, and environmental issues through periodic indicator reports and annual well-being reports. It also provides comparisons to provincial or national data.

While community indicator systems that use quantitative measures have been around for several decades, Peg takes an innovative approach by incorporating qualitative data in the form of videos and personal narratives as a unique way to

Committee consists of stakeholders from government, business, education, health, and non-profit sectors.

The *Engagement Committee* is a large group that represents a broad range of stakeholders who helped determine the system's framework and theme areas.

*Indicator Working Groups* were established for each theme area comprised of people with expertise in those fields, and they provided input into the choice of indicators. A *Stories Working Group* developed the framework for the use of stories in the system.

Peg aims to stimulate conversations in our communities, based on what is really happening in Winnipeg. Peg highlights areas where Winnipeg is gaining strength, and where more attention is required. Peg is a mirror that reflects the picture of what is really happening in our city.

## Facts & Outcomes

The popularity of CISs is growing in an effort by communities to improve evidence-based decision-making. By placing data and information in the hands of community members, CISs help build the knowledge and capacity of communities to work together and improve well-being for all. Not only can CISs help bridge the gap between government and citizens, but they can also build new and

important coalitions within communities. CISs represent a key piece of social infrastructure for analyzing and disseminating community well-being trends, and can help shape strategies and the political will necessary to effect real change.

Indicators have always been an integral part of governance. The earliest known example of using statistics to champion positive change goes back to the Philadelphia Prison Reform Movement of the 1810s. In the 1820s, the Temperance Movement used statistics to argue alcohol was the cause of crime, moral depravity, poverty, and economic waste (Cobb and Rixford, 1998).

The earliest known use of social indicators was in 1910, when the Russell Sage Foundation provided a grant to the Charity Organization of New York to survey social conditions in industrial Pittsburgh. As a result, over 2000 surveys were taken that focused on education,



recreation, public health, crime, and general social conditions (Cobb and Rixford, 1998).

The modern-day CIS movement can be traced to the 1960s, when it became clear that traditional economic measures, like the gross domestic product (GDP), did not reflect the real state of communities. There was a push to re-think traditional measures of progress in favor of new indicators that more accurately reflect the values and character of communities. Research that emerged from this period was concerned with collecting social data for policy makers and using it to set policy targets in areas such as health, employment, education, and crime (Besleme and Mullin, 1997). While initially



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many government departments, agencies, and citizens were committed to collecting and using social information for policy targets, the political mood changed in the early 1980s. Eventually the CIS movement re-emerged in the 1990s, which was partly attributable to the sustainable development movement.

The emergence of sustainable development was influenced by the recognition of the costs and benefits of globalization, improved understanding of the interaction between ecosystems and human well-being (particularly poverty), a shift towards quantitative evidence based reports and assessments of the environment, development of the internet, and an increased emphasis on monitoring strategies for sustainable development.

The history of CISs tells us that not only can indicator systems play a key role in sustainability, but they can also raise the profile of priority social issues and provide early warning about imminent trends in society.

Peg externally sources its data, and the system relies on cross-sectoral funding for operations. This approach lends to the system's credibility, because Peg is not seen as the spokesperson for any one perspective. Data sources include Statistics Canada, Province of Manitoba, City of Winnipeg, and Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, among others. While Peg aims

to report data at the finest resolution possible, the system is limited by data availability. Regarding funding, Peg receives support from provincial and municipal governments, the health sector, non-profit sector, and the private sector.

the system remains a credible source of information. This will require maintained support and funding, especially now during the implementation stage.

In 2013, Peg published "Our City", the first annual well-



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## Lessons Learned

The main challenge most CISs face is ongoing maintenance and sustained funding, and this is true in Peg's case. While previously funding was required to develop the system, Peg is now in a transition point where it needs money for ongoing operations.

Peg maintains operations through a collaborative process, in which IISD takes primary responsibility for the data, and United Way takes primary responsibility for engagement, stories, and communications.

A key piece of Peg's success will be keeping the data updated so

being indicator report for the community. The continued implementation of Peg will help us measure the health of Winnipeg year over year – in a meaningful way. The team behind

Peg continues to focus on embedding and promoting the system as an important part of our community's infrastructure. Peg is now focusing on promoting itself as the place to go for data. To this end, Peg's team have been working with Manitoba Education to integrate the system with the school curriculum, and promote it as a resource for both students and teachers. Peg continues to engage, innovate, and inspire action through regular indicator reports, the system's social

“Along with Peg’s award recognition has come awareness about our work from around the world. IISD has been in conversation with organizations from a number of countries about almost every aspect of the work we have done, including the processes we used, the indicators, the website, and the governance structure. We are very excited about this, as community indicator systems can have a major positive impact on communities. It is one thing to implement a community indicator system in Winnipeg – it is another to have the work replicated and the lessons learned implemented by others in dozens, or hundreds, of places around the world. That would be a truly transformative impact!” - Charles Thrift, Project Manager, Knowledge for Integrated Decisions Program - IISD

media presence, and engaging with partners to get the word out.

Peg is also inspiring the development of other CISs. Peg’s team are sharing the process with other communities who are interested in developing similar systems. Currently, indicator systems are attracting attention nationally and internationally.

For example, while cities in the United States of America are collecting and disseminating data through CISs, there is no official “vehicle” for integrating and disseminating these results at the national level. However, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (PPACA, or Obama-care) authorized a commission to oversee the development of a national indicator system for the United States.

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## Conclusion

In addition to providing information and raising public awareness, CISs can help link broad goals to indicators and foster civic engagement. Incorporating public input in the development and use of indicator systems is particularly important, as indicators should reflect community values and aspirations.

However, CISs are a means, not an end. They are tools to help us achieve collective well-being, tackle poverty, and achieve real progress toward positive community futures.

Lessons from Peg are clear: indicators should be simple and directionally clear, the methods of collecting and choosing data should be transparent, and they should indicate trends that are relevant to the community. CISs can help communities monitor progress, establish accountability, and aid decision-making. Furthermore, consulting experts and stakeholders about CIS purpose and design can result in a more relevant and useful system.



Above: 2013 Well-Being report received from MyPeg.ca

## Contributors

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