



**Community vitality:
Some conceptual considerations**

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“Contributing to the well-being of small towns and rural communities.”

DRAFT

Community vitality: Some conceptual considerations

'Community vitality' may mean different things to different scholars and practitioners. Dictionary definitions of vitality use descriptors such as 'enduring,' or 'vigor.' Early literature from the field of community psychology referred to 'competent communities' (Cottrell, 1976), and the importance of developing/possessing a collective capacity to solve problems. Competent communities could:

1. collaborate and work effectively in identifying the problems and needs of the community;
2. achieve a working consensus on goals and priorities;
3. agree on ways and means to implement the agreed-upon goals and priorities; and,
4. collaborate effectively in the required actions.

Bowles (1981:60) added the dimension of 'political efficacy,' which he refers to as the ability to 'organise, mobilise resources and act in an effective manner in dealing with internal problems or external centres of power which take actions having consequences for the community and its members.' Luloff and Swanson (1994) attribute this capacity to 'community agency,' and point to 'disaffection' and dysfunctional power structures as serious impediments to its achievement.

Other authors have emphasized the persistence or sustainability factor, with respect to institutional linkages and relationships, group and individual interaction within the community, locally-owned business, and community membership or social citizenship (Smailes, 1995). Land Grant Institutions in the United States have recently embraced the idea of community vitality. Increasingly, economists, rural sociologists and community development scholars have emphasized the importance of building local capacity—e.g., human, financial, social, and natural capital—in ways that enhance communities' long-term economic prospects. Vitality is increasingly portrayed as a complex, multi-dimensional concept that, though it may defy easy definition, lends itself to list-making. Flora et al. (2001) offer a community-generated view of vitality that includes the following:

1. increased use of the skills, knowledge and ability of local people.
2. strengthened relationships and communication.
3. improved community initiative, responsibility and adaptability.
4. sustainable, healthy ecosystems with multiple community benefits.
5. appropriately diverse and healthy economies.

Cornell University's Community and Rural Development Institute (CaRDI) assigns the following principles to its community and economic vitality initiatives:

1. broad-based participation of community members in development
2. informed citizenry with respect to issues, impacts and potential alternatives.
3. acceptance of the diversity of ideas, cultures and interests represented by a community in the development process
4. enhanced leadership
5. long-term sustainability
6. implication of community members in defining success and formulating a plan to evaluate progress

Desirable outcomes include new or value-added business, greater entrepreneurial activity, increased local investment and consumption, partnering with public and/or private entities, enhancement of local workforce skills.

Other authors have emphasized the economic dimensions associated with the concept of vitality. Shaffer and Summers (1988) offered an institutional economics perspective on vitality, defining it as ‘the capacity of a local social system to generate income and employment in order to maintain, if not improve its relative economic position.’ This definition equates vitality with economic development. While recognizing the difficulties of predicting success in community development, pointing to the importance of ‘soft’ variables that are difficult to measure, they cite adaptability and maintenance of the local resource base as key factors.

Blishen et al. (1979) and Coakes et al. (1999) addressed the locus of economic dependence (e.g., external vs internal), emphasizing the local, and also emphasized the importance of inhibitions to local economic initiatives (similar to Luloff and Swanson’s notion of disaffection), as well as perceptions of opportunity (Coakes et al., 2000). The importance of people’s perception of opportunity has been addressed by other authors. Fallows (1989) contended that local economic ‘rules of development’ must be accessible to all (he referred to people’s belief that they had some ‘control over their destiny’), and that rights are accompanied by duties to the community. He pointed to the importance of trust, and of people’s expectations of receiving ‘decent’ treatment (Fallows, 1989:26). The ‘radius of trust’ referred to the extent which this notion of mutual respect and consideration is experienced among various social categories or groups within a community.

The Sustainable Community Roundtable (1998) refers to ‘fairness’ or equity of opportunity. Fairness is seen as ‘the key indicator for the economy, reflecting a belief that the ultimate purpose of the economy is to provide for everyone.’

There has also been an effort to explicitly incorporate agriculture into discussion and research agendas addressing community vitality (e.g., Ikerd, 2001). The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (2000) lists vitality as one of its research priorities for the future, citing the role of agricultural science in developing human capital, facilitating access to and application of new technologies, addressing risks facing rural populations, and enhancing the competitiveness of commodity-based and product-based enterprises. The concept of sustainability is becoming more mainstream in discussions of agriculture and vitality as well (e.g., Flora, 2001).

While the concept seems to be maturing, the inclusion of so many variables as indicators of vitality also threatens to render it irrelevant as a useful conceptual tool for social scientists concerned with community-level problems. In addition, there are other literature traditions, each of which overlap somewhat with some of the core vitality issues. These include:

1. Sustainable community development (e.g., see Audirac 1997);
2. Community resilience (e.g., see Resilient Communities Web site at <http://www.resilientcommunities.org/>);

3. Regional country towns/rural stabilization (e.g., see Keller, 1998);
4. Livable communities/smart growth (e.g., see Local Government Commission/Center for livable communities at http://www.lgc.org/ahwahnee/econ_principles.html; see Ahwahnee principles at <http://www.sustainable.doe.gov/landuse/luahwane.shtml>);
5. Smart growth (see <http://www.smartgrowth.org/index.html>);
6. Rural revitalization (e.g., see Murray and Dunn, 1996);
7. Community viability (e.g., see Farm Foundation Web site at <http://www.farmfoundation.org/ruralcommunity.htm>);
8. Healthy communities (e.g., see Darling and Randel, 2000).

Some common, interrelated themes run through the vitality literature:

1. **Change.** Many perspectives on community have moved beyond the notion of ‘stability’ as anything more than historical artifact. Plant, animal and human communities change over time, especially as their connections with the broader, ‘outside’ world expand and intensify. Vitality may refer to the collective capacity of communities to respond to change, especially economic change. Thus the terms ‘resilience,’ ‘sustainability,’ and ‘adaptability’ are commonly used. Authors have addressed the sorts of resources and capacities hypothesized to enhance a community’s ability to respond to changing conditions. These include development of human capital (workforce skill development, leadership, decision making capacity, entrepreneurship), physical capital (health care, education and information technology infrastructure, affordable housing), social capital (capacity to ‘network,’ establish partnerships both within and outside of the community), and natural capital (sustainable, diverse and economically viable use and development of agricultural and natural resources). Emphasis on change also suggests that community vitality as a concept implies both structure and process.
2. **Opportunity.** Several authors stress the importance of people’s perception of opportunity structures as being equitable. Whether referred to as ‘fairness,’ ‘control over destiny,’ ‘equity,’ ‘self-determination,’ etc., the notion that individuals, groups and communities believe they have some latitude to pursue their aspirations is recognized.
3. **Agency.** Perhaps agency can be thought of as the engine of community vitality. Luloff and Swanson (1994: 352) refer to this as ‘the capacity for collective action.’ Within the business community, the Floras (1991) suggest agency can lead to *community entrepreneurship*. A factor limiting community agency is disaffection, which in the political sphere may refer to power structures that close off opportunities for individuals, groups or communities (see also Cox, 1995). Flora et al. (2001) stress the importance of community self-awareness and responsibility in enhancing its capacity for collective action. Community agency is key to a notion of development as an ongoing and reflexive process with no end point or ‘climax’ state.
4. **Diversity.** Diversity is addressed in at least two ways. First, it is seen as an attribute that enhances adaptability. A diverse economy with multiple thriving sectors is more likely to withstand a regional, national, or industry-wide economic downturn. A locally diverse agricultural sector is less susceptible to fluctuations in commodity markets. The role of biological diversity in maintaining healthy ecosystems that yield economic resources and perform critical biophysical functions is well-known (e.g., Wilson, 1992). Another aspect of diversity is that which enhances the participation of individuals and groups in community development, at the grassroots level as well as in leadership

positions. Emphases on strengthened relationships and communication (Flora et al., 2001), 'radius of trust' (Fallows 1989), or fairness (Sustainable Roundtable, 1998) also imply that no groups are excluded from the process because of race, ethnicity, gender, faith, age, or other distinguishing features. Diversity is perceived as a necessary strength for vital communities, and respect for diversity as a prerequisite to open communication, democratic participation, and collective mobilization and problem-solving.

5. **Economy**. There is broad recognition among authors that the health of the local economy is central to notions of community vitality. Communities build capacity for economic development within the public, private and non-profit sectors. The importance of economic diversification is a recognition of the need to respond to change. The perception that opportunity exists is key to community residents realizing their productive potential.
6. **Politics**. Economy may be the driving motivation behind vitality initiatives, but their relative successes will depend on the distribution of power and resources and the extent to which they enable the above factors and processes.

In a sense, community vitality can be thought of as a process of capacity building toward the goal of economic development, the latter incorporating both issues of growth and distribution. A host of interrelated factors are considered important in this process (but difficult to sort out from broader literature on economic development):

- Affordable and diverse housing opportunities
- Agricultural viability
- Sustainable use of natural resources
- Employment creation and business creation, attraction, retention and expansion
- Expanded, diverse educational opportunities, in K-12, post-secondary, private and non-institutional settings, that respond to economic conditions
- Local investment
- Retention of youth
- Access to local government, decision making processes

Capacity building addresses the development of various forms of capital. The following are some of the areas that seem to attract the most attention from scholars and practitioners (which is not exhaustive):

- Leadership
- Decision making, conflict management
- Workforce development
- Strategic planning
- Information technology and telecommunications infrastructure
- Creation of information networks

From a researcher's perspective, it is equally important to identify indicators of disaffection (e.g., Luloff and Swanson, 1994) that can impede the process of community development.

One point stressed by multiple authors is the importance of local participation in the goal-setting and evaluation processes. According to Flora et al. (2001), measures of success must not only be readily understood by community members, but local residents should play important roles, in terms of input and leadership, in determining what measures of success will be identified as goals. This renders problematic the identification of specific measures, however the preceding discussion should make clear that there is some agreement over the more global indicators of community vitality. Defining sustainable development has at times seemed like a cottage industry, yet this hasn't prevented a fertile discussion and development of the ideas, concepts and general state of knowledge within the subdiscipline—sustainability has hardly receded from the conceptual map of development, whether at the level of community, the state, or globally.

In any case, the concept of community vitality is likely to mature, and is one that lends itself to multiple theoretical perspectives, interdisciplinary examination, as well as appealing to a diverse range of methodologies.

Web sites, resources of interest

Selected Web Resources (other resources exist on funding, workforce development, leadership, information technology, agriculture, change)

NCRCRD Workforce Preparation Curriculum Database
http://www.idea.iastate.edu/wfpdata/
Center for Applied Rural Innovation (John Allen, director)
http://cari.unl.edu/
University of Minnesota Community Vitality page
http://www.extension.umn.edu/capacity/cv/
Community and Rural Development Institute (CaRDI at Cornell)
http://www.cardi.cornell.edu/index.cfm
New Rural Economy Project (Canada)
http://nre.concordia.ca/
Farm Foundation community viability page
http://www.farmfoundation.org/ruralcommunity.htm
Aspen Institute
http://www.aspeninst.org/policy/index.html
Appalachian Regional Commission
http://www.arc.gov/
Community Development Society
http://comm-dev.org/
Center for Community Development
http://www.communitychange.org/default.asp
Communities of the Future (digital economy)
http://www.communitiesofthefuture.org/
Ford Institute for Community Building
http://www.fordinstitute.org/
Kellogg Foundation Leadership Program
http://www.wkkf.org/Documents/CCT/Leadership/KILPeval/kilpl.asp
Florida Sustainable Communities Center (decision making and design tools)
http://sustainable.state.fl.us/fdi/fsc/news/state/0004/toolsind.htm

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program
www.sare.org
USDA Farm Direct Marketing
www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing
Farm Options (University of Wisconsin—Extension)
www.uwex.edu/ces/agmarkets
Community Alliances for Independent Agriculture (CAIA)
http://www.caia.net/
Smart growth network
http://www.smartgrowth.org/index.html
Social Indicators (Web resources):
Measuring Community Success and Sustainability (NCRCRD) (a practical guide for communities)
http://www.ag.iastate.edu/centers/rdev/Community_Success/about.html
Albuquerque 2000 Progress Report
http://www.cabq.gov/progress/goalist.html#ECONOMIC VITALITY Goals and Progress Indicators
Sustainable Community Indicators Database (Canada—publications for order)
http://www.ec.gc.ca/scip-pidd/English/IndicatorInfo.cfm?IndicatorName=39&=Display+Record
Maine Economic Growth Council, Measures of Growth
http://www.mdf.org/megc/growth98/home.htm
Oregon Benchmarks
http://www.econ.state.or.us/opb/
Vermont Economic Progress Council Report
www.thinkvermont.com/taxes/pdf/99_report.pdf
Compendium of SD Indicator Initiatives (joint project of World Bank, UNDSO, Environment Canada, Redefining Progress, IISD)
http://iisd1.iisd.ca/measure/compindex.asp
Social indicators (community and regional indicators)—annotated bibliography on trends, sources and development (from Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station)
http://www.ag.iastate.edu/centers/rdev/indicators/VIIIa-biblio90s.html
Sustainable Measures Web page by Maureen Hart
http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/
References to the following can also be found on the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development Web site (http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/indicators/entry2.html) as most relevant to the community vitality literature:
Diener, Ed. 1994. "Assessing Subjective Well-being: Progress and Opportunities." <i>Social Indicators Research</i> 31: 103-157.
<i>This psychological approach to subjective well-being (SWB) proposes that SWB should be assessed with a multi-method approach in order to achieve more credible data and to understand more about these indicators and group differences in well-being. Moving beyond simply compiling responses from survey respondents on expressed happiness or unhappiness, the author suggests incorporating assessments of actions and reactions to various events. He states that we need to better understand researchers' examination of the role of memory and perceived memory in shaping perceptions of happiness and SWB.</i>
Hart, Maureen. Sustainable measures. http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/
<i>This is a Web site that includes a wealth of information concerning sustainability, communities, and social indicators. The site includes training materials, a database that includes rankings of indicators and indications of their use by communities, as well as an introduction to using social indicators, and information on the concept of sustainability and its uses and applications.</i>
<i>Kline, Elizabeth. January 1995. Sustainable Community Indicators. Medford, MA: Consortium for Regional Sustainability, Global Development and Environment Institute, Tufts University. (37 pages).</i>

<p><i>The conclusion asserts that: 1) sustainable community indicators are tools rather than end products; 2) that indicators must be developed through engagement with the community; 3) that developing indicators can be empowering for the community; 4) that sustainability is about enhancing all living things rather than reducing negative impacts; and 5) that sustainable community indicators should be based on developing common agendas and respecting individual and common rights and responsibilities. Sustainable community indicators should also point to a complex understanding of the community, measure a sense of place, and document trends and directional changes. (For a more detailed case study see Kline, February 1995, under Community Level Indicators IV-C).</i></p>
<p>Redefining Progress, Tyler Norris Associates, Sustainable Seattle. 1997. <i>The Community Indicators Handbook: Measuring Progress Toward Healthy and Sustainable Communities</i>. San Francisco: Redefining Progress. (155 pages).</p>
<p><i>This is a guide to help communities in developing new measures of overall health and well-being. The book explains indicators and their relationships to goals and visions for the community. It then takes community activists through the process of forming a locally-based sustainable community effort, drawing on case studies from around the U. S. and Canada. Chapter VIII is devoted to the development, implementation and use of indicators--with several of the case studies drawing on social indicators, such as education levels, to prompt social action. The appendices include an annotated bibliography, glossary of terms, and a listing by state, along with brief descriptions of community indicator projects around the U. S., India and New Zealand. Important organizations in the movement are also listed.</i></p>
<p>Smith, George, R. 1998. "Are We Leaving the Community Out of Rural Community sustainability? An examination of approaches to development and implementation of indicators of rural community sustainability and related public participation." <i>International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology</i>, Vol. 5: 82-98.</p>
<p><i>This article critically reviews the development and implementation of community indicators of sustainable development indicators (SI) from the perspective of rural communities in Canada. With the context that the advocated process of development and implementation of SI would significantly benefit from effective stakeholder involvement, it is suggested that the SI development must be stakeholder-driven and that the facilitation of information sharing is an integral variable within the process. Therefore, a proposal is put forth that includes an approach to stakeholder participation and information sharing.</i></p>
<p>Alliance for Community Education. 1998. <i>This Place Called Home; Tools for Sustainable Communities</i>. New Haven, CT: New Society Publishers.</p>
<p><i>CD-ROM resource library to stimulate ideas for positive action in home places everywhere. It includes video, still photographs, audio, and hundreds of pages of text from books, articles, interviews and speeches. This multimedia resource sheds light on the kinds of leadership driving change, the methods and tools being used to achieve new goals and designs, and obstacles to implementation by focusing on innovative community projects around North America, interviews with national leaders on sustainability and grassroots people actually forging the change. Featured stories explore ways that communities are working to become compatible with natural systems and issues of place, scale, diversity, history, leadership, education and change. Social indicators show up in the methods for monitoring the relationship between people and nature in a given place and in the tools for monitoring the impacts of actions taken by the communities.</i></p>
<p>Corporation for Enterprise Development. 1993. <i>The Regional Performance Benchmarks System: Policymaker's Guide and User's Manual</i>. Washington, D.C.: Corporation for Enterprise Development. (39 pages).</p>
<p><i>This report looks at the methodological aspects of the development of regional government performance benchmarks and indicators based on specified economic, environmental, and social visions, goals and activities. Examples of indicators for particular types of development strategies are given. Specific cases where this strategy of developing benchmarks was applied are cited from Florida, Indiana, Maryland, Minnesota and Texas. Mostly state-level, but useful.</i></p>
<p>Ayres, Janet, Robert Cole, Clair Hein, Stuart Huntington, Wayne Kobberdahl, Wanda Leonard and Dale</p>

Zetocha. 1990. *Take Charge: Economic Development for Small Communities*. Ames, IA: North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.

This workbook for county extension staff and community leaders attempts to initiate an educational program in rural revitalization. Indicators (including social indicators) are used in assessing the current state of community, the desired state of the community, and developing plans of how to get from one to the other.

The workbook is broken up into three major sections with appendices attached. "Where Are We Now?" walks through the collection of pertinent data for assessing the current state of the community. This includes community economic data, population data, farm data, school enrollment data, education level, labor force and employment data, income estimates by sector, and business economic data. The authors suggest comparisons to national statistics and trends for analytical purposes and possibly to help identify the options available for the community.

"Where Do We Want to Be?" takes the community through the process of developing and evaluating feasible economic development alternatives and assigning goals and objectives.

"How Do We Get There?" outlines the process of bringing about this change, from organizing and mobilizing the community for action, to managing the effort over time, to monitoring the change and its impacts. The assumption is that the process is iterative and the monitoring, evaluation and innovation will need to be continuous.

Van Dijk, Frans. 1997. *Social Ties and Economic Performance*. Dordrecht: The Netherlands. (211 pages).

This author argues for the inclusion of measurements of social ties (social capital) and related indicators, such as migration or measures of social cohesion, in models of economic performance. He uses standard mathematical economic analysis to show the importance of including these social indicators in economic analysis and planning.

Waddell, Steve. 1995. "Lessons from the Healthy Cities Movement for Social Indicator Development." *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 34 (2): 213-235.

The article investigates emerging developments of social indicators through the experience of a health planning initiative begun in 1986 under the coordination of the World Health Organization ([WHO] Europe). By 1993, 400 plus municipalities in first world countries had voluntarily committed themselves to participation.

The author uses interviews and reviews of participant programs and materials, with significant reliance on material from Canada and the coordinating WHO office, to divide indicator development into political and technical components, stressing the former.

He stresses nine principal conclusions relating to indicators' success: (1) three stages of indicator development are understanding, consensus and commitment; (2) indicators must be grounded in target population's reality; (3) indicators are historical artifacts; (4) programs must be in place that make indicator need apparent; (5) process is product; (6) new skills must be supplied; (7) indicators are client-driven; (8) good process protects indicators' integrity from inappropriate influence; and (9) quality is a culturally derived value defying aggregation. 29 References. Adapted from the source document. (Copyright 1995, Sociological Abstracts, Inc., all rights reserved.)

Selected social indicators (under construction)

Indicators of community vitality (From Main Economic Growth Council, 2001, 'Measures of Growth')

<p>Population of service center communities (spatial efficiency?)</p> <p><i>Measure:</i> the percentage of [Maine] people who reside in service center municipalities (Service centers are measured according to: level of retail sales; jobs to workers ratio; amount of federally assisted housing; volume of service center jobs).</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Maine State Planning Office</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> closer proximity to service centers implies more efficient delivery of services, less travel, lessened environmental impact. Sprawl essentially increases public costs.</p>
<p>Family income disparity (income inequality, middle class status)</p> <p><i>Measure:</i> the ratio of the average annual income of the wealthiest 20% of families to the average annual income of the poorest 20% of families.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Corporation for Enterprise Development, Development Report card for the States, 1991-2000. (state-level variable) based on 3-year analysis of US Census CPS.</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> indicator of status of middle class. Decreases may affect tax base, investment, affordable housing supply. They are <i>not</i> suggesting that the state would benefit from fewer wealthy people.</p> <p><i>Comments:</i> possible measure: gender labor force participation by sector</p>
<p>Gender income disparity (opportunity structure)</p> <p><i>Measure:</i> ratio of women's to men's full-time, full-year median annual income. Compares wages earned based on equal time worked. Women generally work fewer hours/wk and fewer weeks/yr than men, resulting in even greater disparities.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> US Census, Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) <i>Status of Women in the States</i> report, November 2000.</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> disparities create disincentives for women to contribute to labor force.</p>
<p>Workplace discrimination (opportunity, 'fairness')</p> <p><i>Measure:</i> percentage of people who believe their employers maintain an equal opportunity environment (w/ respect to race, gender, ethnicity).</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Maine Development Foundation Annual Surveys.</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> work environments that afford equal opportunities for growth and advancement are critical to long-term economic growth.</p> <p><i>Comments:</i> This is similar to Fallows' (1989:26) idea of 'control over destiny.' Also, concept of 'fairness' from the The Puget Sound—Sustainable Community Roundtable. Both address equality of opportunity</p>
<p>Employment of disabled (opportunity structure)</p> <p><i>Measure:</i> percentage of non-institutionalized, disabled people of working-force age, that are employed.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> US Census Bureau CPS; Analysis by Maine Development Foundation; based on report by Cornell University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Economic Research on Employment Policy for People with Disabilities, 2000.</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> underutilized skills, abilities, human capital.</p> <p><i>Comments:</i> communities that put more effort into employing disabled individuals may be qualitatively different. How to measure disability? Broader measure might be 'accommodation of the disabled' (e.g., in CTCs).</p>
<p>Multiple job holding (quality of jobs, human/social capital potential)</p> <p><i>Measure:</i> percent of people holding multiple jobs (in Maine, it was 8% in 1999).</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Maine Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Information Services, Nov 2000.</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> people holding multiple jobs have less time for families, community involvement, education. Also an indirect indicator of quality of jobs.</p>

<p>Voter turnout (political participation)</p> <p><i>Measure:</i> percent registered voters who voted in previous election(s) (Maine uses presidential election). <i>Source:</i> Maine Office of Secretary of State. <i>Rationale:</i> broad political participation may be related to community activism, volunteerism, collective activity, etc. <i>Other possible measures:</i> other possible measures might include attendance at town meetings, use of e-government Web sites, voter turnout for local elections.</p>
<p>Citizen participation in community activities</p> <p><i>Measure:</i> percent of people who devote time outside regular family and work activities to community organizations. <i>Source:</i> MDF (data from MDF Annual Survey of Maine Citizens, 1995-2000). <i>Comments:</i> respondents were asked if they devoted time out of regular schedule for following: public schools/related activities; community organizations that help youth (e.g., little league, Big Brothers/Sisters, Scouts); organizations assisting underprivileged; organizations assisting elderly, homebound, those in poor health; activities sponsored by environmental organization. Simple yes/no response—possible to ask for hour estimates ('0' being 'no')?</p>
<p>'Mainstreet vitality'</p> <p><i>Measure:</i> percentage of store fronts that are vacant. After a careful definition of 'downtown' sections of the County's largest towns; based on annual 'drive by.' The same defined areas are assessed each year and numbers examined over time. <i>Source:</i> Freshley, C. 1998. Listserv posting. Then-director of Maine Development Foundation's Economic Indicators Program. Available online at: http://www.rprogress.org/resources/cip/cinet_archives/Indicators/Indicators24.html</p>
<p>Business involvement in communities and schools</p> <p><i>Measure:</i> percentage of for-profit businesses that participated in school and civic events. <i>Source:</i> Maine Development Foundation (2001). Data source: MDF Annual Survey of Maine Businesses, 1995-2000. <i>Rationale:</i> partnerships can benefit schools or other community groups, indicates investment in community. Businesses were asked the extent to which (not well, well, very well) they 'take an interest and get involved in local school and civic events.' <i>Comments:</i> could attempt to identify percent of businesses involved, and average dollar amount invested (among those involved).</p>

Development capacity: basic educational skills proficiency, workforce development

<http://drc.cfed.org/?section=measures&page=human>

EDUCATION-RELATED

<i>K-12 achievement/attainment</i>
<i>Secondary/post secondary education attainment: High school education attainment</i>
<p><i>Measure:</i> Percentage of heads of household with at least 12 years of education, 1997-1999. <i>Source:</i> Jon Haveman, Purdue University. Calculations based on merged U.S. Current Population Survey data tapes from 1997, 1998, and 1999.</p>
High school dropout rate
<p><i>Measure:</i> percent of public high school students who drop out of grades nine through twelve in any given year (benchmark 22) <i>Source:</i> Oregon Progress Board (2001). Data from Oregon Dept. of Education, School Level Fall Report. <i>Comments:</i> does not count GED students as dropouts. http://www.econ.state.or.us/opb/2001report/2001new.html</p>
High school completion
<p><i>Measure:</i> percent of population over 25 with a high school diploma, over time (benchmark 12) <i>Source:</i> Maine Development Foundation. Measures of Growth, 2001. http://www.mdf.org/megc/growth01/intro.htm <i>Measures:</i> annual and cohort dropout rates <i>Annual dropout rate:</i> percent leaving high school each year without obtaining a secondary school credential or without enrolling in another educational program (Students dropping out during one year but returning the next year are still counted as dropouts for that one year). <i>Cohort drop out rate:</i> measures single group (or cohort) over a specified time period, in this case four years (Includes those who have left school but achieved a GED and not those who are suspended). <i>Source:</i> Albuquerque Indicators Progress Commission (2000) http://www.cabq.gov/progress/HF02DROP.html</p>
<i>Reading and math achievement</i>
<p><i>Measure:</i> percent of public school students (grades 3-8) with scores at or above grade level on city-wide (district) reading and math tests; grade level performance is defined as 50th percentile score for national norm group in last year for which a national norm was set (1991 as of publication of Hoffman, 2000)—percent of students who attained score at least equal to national norm. See discussion in Hoffman (2000:104) with respect to potential problems with base selection. <i>Source:</i> 1996. Reading 1995-1996: Preliminary citywide test results in reading: A report on the results of the CTB Reading Test Administration in New York City Public Schools. (Spring) (discussed in Hoffman, 2000). <i>Rationale:</i> designed as a measure of sustainability <i>Comments:</i> potential problems due to changes in achievement tests.</p>
Adult populations
College education attainment
<p><i>Measure:</i> Percentage of heads of households with at least four years of college, 1997-1999. <i>Source:</i> Jon Haveman, Purdue University. Calculations based on merged U.S. Current Population Survey data tapes from 1997, 1998, and 1999. <i>Measure:</i> Percent of adults 25 or older who have bachelor's degree (both Maine [#14] and Oregon [#22] Benchmarks); other measures include associate degree in profession-technical education (potentially useful for measuring IT training, from Oregon Benchmarks [#25]). For Oregon, 1990-2000 data from Oregon Population Survey. For Maine, U.S. Census CPS (associate's degree data from Maine State Dept. of Education, IPED Survey, 1979-99) http://www.mdf.org/megc/growth01/intro.htm (Maine Dev. Foundation)</p>

http://www.econ.state.or.us/opb/2001report/2001new.html (Oregon Benchmarks)
Lifelong learning
<p><i>Measure:</i> percent citizens attending educational seminars, programs, courses, over time <i>Source:</i> Maine Development Foundation (2001), benchmark #16; data from MDF Annual Survey of Maine Citizens, 1995-99. http://www.mdf.org/megc/growth01/intro.htm</p>
Adult literacy
<p><i>Measure:</i> Percent of adult citizens with intermediate literacy skills [Oregon Benchmark# 27] <i>Source:</i> Oregon Dept. of Community Colleges and Workforce Development; most recent adult literacy data are from 1992 Department of Education National Adult Literacy Survey. http://www.econ.state.or.us/opb/2001report/2001new.html (Oregon Benchmarks)</p>
Employee-sponsored training
<p><i>Measure:</i> percent of ‘front-line’ employees who attended an educational seminar, program or course through their place of work. <i>Source:</i> Maine Development Foundation (2001), benchmark #18; data from MDF Annual Survey of Maine Citizens, 1995-2000).</p>
Average teacher salary (from cfed, used at state-level)
<p><i>Measure:</i> Average teacher salary, adjusted for cost of living difference among states, 1997-1998 <i>Source:</i> Schneider and Nelson (1999), Nelson (1991). Index values for Alaska, Hawaii, and Washington, D.C. come from the American Chamber of Commerce Researchers Association, Intercity Cost-of-Living Index, Louisville, Kentucky: ACCRA.</p>
Other indicators
Perception of educational opportunity
<p><i>Measure:</i> no. of citizens who agree that there are adequate public and private programs available to those who want to train for new jobs or acquire new skills. <i>Source:</i> Maine Development Foundation (2001); data from MDF Annual Survey of Maine Citizens, 1995-2000). <i>Comments:</i> potentially interesting indicator of perception of educational dimension of <i>local</i> opportunity (unclear how item was worded in Maine survey).</p>
Student teacher ratio
<p><i>Measure:</i> index created by dividing actual teacher student ratio for first and second by ‘ideal’ teacher student ratio of <i>one teacher to 19 students</i>. Source: <i>from Hoffman (2000);</i> <i>Data from NYC Board of Education, Student Information Services (date not provided) ‘October official class audit form C file: Report of average class size (level 110). 1990-96.</i> <i>Rationale:</i> designed as a measure of sustainability (from ROOTS index); graduation rates don’t reflect learning achievement while in school, possible lag time differences (reflecting early indication of potential future problems). Boyd-Zaharias (1999) found significant improvements in performance for students who had small class in grades K-3). Class size reduction programs can create problems (flush of inexperienced teachers, outmigration of more experienced teachers to suburbs). Factors such as language diversity would likely affect results.</p>
Stability of school funding over time (haven’t seen this, but sure it exists somewhere, somehow)
<i>Measure(s):</i>

Economic Indices	
Wealth index	<p><i>Measure:</i> ratio of county per capital wealth to state per capita wealth. Per capita wealth is estimated by summing appraised values of residential property, mobile homes, and motor vehicles used for personal use (in this case reported by Kansas Dept. of Revenue), dividing by county's population, comparing to state measure.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Reddyreddy and Darling (2001)</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> used to measure relative wealth of county residents</p>
Employment index	<p><i>Measure:</i> proportion of population actively participating in the labor force.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Reddyreddy and Darling (2001)</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> relatively stronger economies will have higher proportions; those with lower rates will have either unemployment or large percentage of elderly.</p> <p><i>Comments:</i> problem with how to handle active duty military (authors allocate them to counties based on unspecified criteria)</p>
Personal income index	<p><i>Measure:</i> ratio of county over state per capita income.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Reddyreddy and Darling (2001)</p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> measure of income levels (relative to state averages)</p>
Strength index	<p><i>Measure:</i> Sum of the above three indices, measure of overall county prosperity.</p>

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