Measuring Community
A Newsletter of Spokane's Community Indicators Initiative (CII)

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Drilling Down
Interested in city level data? Now you can follow trends in economics, education, transportation and more for the City of Spokane and the City of Spokane Valley. In some cases, the trends of the two cities match those of the county. More often than not however, trends diverge. To see a complete list of the more than 60 indicators with city level information on the CII website, go to Indicators at a Glance

The "Now What?" Factor
We have the data... now what? That's the question community indicator groups across the country have asked after their data work has been made public. Locally, people are asking a similar question: for Spokane County as a whole, what are our goals and how do we know if we're reaching them? At the CII conference last April, 83% of evaluation respondents said goal-setting around this information is either extremely or very important for Spokane. In response, the Inland Northwest Community Foundation is leading a local effort to develop community-wide goals. Once established, the goals will be measured using indicator data from the Spokane CII. The goal setting process will involve broad community participation and last about 12 months. At the end of this period, category-specific goals, strategies and measures will be announced and presumably adopted by several organizations and government agencies.

Current Trends
How Affordable is Spokane for First-Time Home Buyers?
In early 2007, a typical first-time home buyer household in Spokane County had 71% of the income to quality for financing for a typical starter home. A first-time home buyer household is one with household income at 70% of the median. Compared to Washington State, where first-time home buyers had only 52% of the income, things appear positive for Spokane. But compare this to 1998, when Spokane’s first-time home buyers had 95% of the income required to purchase a typical starter home. The ratio of income to house price has slipped consistently since then. Homeownership? one path to wealth and housing security for lower-income and minority Americans? has become less attainable for Spokane residents. A related question involves the national sub-prime lending crisis. Sub-prime mortgages are home loans offered at a rate above prime or with easy initial terms to individuals who wouldn’t otherwise qualify for prime rate loans. A national crisis has arisen as these initial terms now face rising interest rates, resulting in foreclosures, declining home values, and a cohort of borrowers walking a financial tightrope. The question is, will Spokane be impacted? And if so, to what degree? This is one area, however, where current local data are not readily available. View the First-Time Home Buyer Affordability indicator. To find out what affordable housing organizations are doing in Spokane visit the Spokane Low
Does Spokane Vote?

Voter turnout is an important measure of citizen engagement, and Spokane's election season is in full swing. So how are we doing? In last year's election, 67% of registered voters cast ballots in Spokane County compared to 65% in Washington State. Over time, Spokane County's voter turn-out in November elections has consistently mirrored that of the state of Washington, usually exceeding it by 1-2 percentage points. How will voter turnout look in the general election this November? It typically peaks in presidential election years and hits lows in odd-numbered years when no mayoral races are present. How engaged are we at the ballot box, (er.. envelope)? Check the website after November and we'll let you know! View the Voter Turnout in November Elections indicator.

Earnings in Spokane: Still Not Keeping Up

The indicator Average Annual Wage measures the wages and salaries of individual residents and provides insight into the well-being of Spokane's regional economy. In the past ten years, the gap in average annual wage between Spokane and Washington State increased substantially. In 2006, Spokane's average wage was $34,004; 79% of Washington State's ($42,881). In 1996, it was 85% of Washington's level. To grasp a little more detail of what's happening, consider the indicator Average Annual Wage in the Top 4 Sectors. Manufacturing jobs generated an average wage of $58,206 in Washington compared to $42,823 in Spokane. Or, Spokane County's industrial workers earned 25% less than their Washington counterparts in 2006. Smaller differences exist for the remaining top three sectors, but the manufacturing data help explain why the gap between Spokane and the State average has grown over the years. View the Average Annual Wage indicator.

Indicators in Action - Interview with Mark Hurtubise, President and CEO of the Inland Northwest Community Foundation

Interview with Mark Hurtubise

Q: How do you use community indicators at Inland Northwest Community Foundation? A: I don't see indicators as a series of numbers, but to me every indicator is a measure of human successes, endeavors, and frailties. If you look at indicators in that context, you begin to see a snapshot of various conditions in our community - not based on data but on the human condition. I also see indicators as an opportunity to determine what we're doing well, and what, potentially, we need to improve upon. At the Community Foundation, we're utilizing the information to look at trends. What are the issues, and concerns, where are the gaps? These are questions indicators can answer. Q: What can indicators do for a community? A: They can give visibility to the challenges we face as a community. They also give us a valuable tool to enter into dialogue with diverse constituencies throughout the region. From that dialogue we can prioritize community issues, values, and goals. We can be focused about where we want to go as a community. Q: In your view, what are the top two issues that need attention in Spokane? A: What's paramount are healthy family issues. That's a pretty broad topic, but when you look at all the indicators you begin to visualize the underbelly of the our family issues. Early learning, high school graduation, nutrition, single parenting, and safe homes are healthy family issues. Where are we on readiness to learn? What about high school graduation? Our high school graduation rate has to be improved and young people need to understand that a high school degree is a tremendous accomplishment. It's also a piece of paper that can take you to the university, to long-term employment, and to financial independence. Preventing teen pregnancy is another healthy family issue. How can we equip young people with the understanding that they can control the destiny of their lives? Safe homes is another one? we no longer have a society where moms are home at 3:00 p.m. How, as a community, do we create an environment where kids have safe places to go after school? All of these healthy family issues are tied to economic vitality. If these issues
are improved upon, it greatly enhances our chances of long-term economic viability. Q: How well are Community Indicators catching on in Spokane? A: We have such phenomenal educational institutions in this region - not to mention the health care, government, business, finance, and non-profit sectors. But when you look at the diversity and breadth of education institutions, you see how fortunate we are. To have Eastern Washington University step forward as an applied research university and partner with the community on this initiative is commendable. It's a proactive step that changes people's lives and it's a privilege for us to be associated with that goal. President Ar?valo and Doctor Jones should be commended for integrating this initiative into the community. Q: Any other thoughts on community indicators? A: Indicators are valuable for shaping our future. They also help us identify best practices. As a community foundation, we can use indicators to highlight community needs, and help guide nonprofits to embrace those needs, using indicators that apply specifically to their work. So they're not working at it alone, but together we're pushing the needle in a positive direction. Together we can ask: what are measures of success? From this effort we'll find a common purpose that will bring people together. There we can accomplish more than if we try to do it alone. Indicators has been a catalyst to start those dialogues.

Reports from the Field

Early Learning Insights
These days, most people understand that what happens during a child's early years greatly impacts his or her ability to be successful in the future. A toddler's experiences and environments influence the development of language, reasoning, problem solving, social skills, behavior, and emotional health. That's one reason to care about early learning. Another reason is economic. What's becoming clear to national economists is the correlation between a community's ability to achieve key early learning outcomes and its future economic vibrancy. Two reports address both sides of the equation. The League of Education Voters Foundation 2007 Citizen's Report Card on Washington State Education uses six indicators to measure Washington's progress on early learning. The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, through a series of papers and reports, has documented the high return on investment in early education. Both reports are worth a look: View the League of Education Voters report. View the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis paper.

Indicator Insider

Moving on...
Lisa Capoccia, CII's first project coordinator, begins a new position with Kauffman and Associates, Inc. in October. She told us she'll miss her colleagues but promises to maintain data-geek status by frequenting the CII website and searching for bonus data. Good luck Lisa!

Looking beyond Spokane...
Sightline Institute, a Northwest sustainability think tank, just released the 2007 Cascadia Scorecard. The Scorecard tracks the region's performance on seven key social and environmental trends - from sprawl and pollution to energy. Check out the Cascadia Scorecard.
Walla Walla measures...
Walla Walla is launching its own community indicators effort and asked Spokane to help. This Fall, EWU's Institute for Public Policy & Economic Analysis will partner with the Port of Walla Walla and other local groups to develop measures for key community priorities.

Focus Group wrap-up...
Spokane CII will conclude its second round of community focus groups October 31st, wrapping up with Culture and Recreation. Over 150 people representing health, education, economics, environment, transportation, public safety, and housing participated. Some were also involved in the original focus group series three years ago. Focus group recommendations are used to update and improve the indicators on the website.

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