



Mad River Valley Community Indicators Project

Table of Contents

Background	2
<i>Current Work & Needs</i>	<i>2</i>
Opportunity.....	3
<i>Proposed Work.....</i>	<i>4</i>
Goals & Outcomes	4
Project Implementation	5
<i>Framework.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Definition of Community Wellbeing</i>	<i>8</i>
MRV Community Indicators Project.....	8
MRV Community Vision & Goals.....	10
Indicator Development.....	11
<i>Measurement of Community Wellbeing</i>	<i>13</i>
Data Collection.....	13
Data Analysis.....	14
<i>Improve Community Wellbeing.....</i>	<i>14</i>
Data Communication & Engagement.....	14
Potential Project Partners	15
Resources	16

Background

Community Indicator Projects have been gaining steam in towns, cities, and regions throughout the country since the 1980s, as a way for communities to take control of their story and make data-driven decisions. The work of the Mad River Valley Planning District – the annual data report in particular – has laid a solid foundation to build a Community Indicators Project here in the Valley, which could add stronger community engagement and communication elements to existing efforts.

“Community indicators” are data points used to measure community wellbeing, often within a specific framework (e.g. “Quality of life” or “Sustainability”). Individual indicators are usually separated and aggregated into domains (“Environment” or “Population”) to provide a clearer understanding of trends and progress. A major component of community indicator projects is the effort made to translate data into action, highlighting the importance of accessibility and on-going communication. The success of a community indicators project requires community ownership, including the involvement of stakeholders through the process of identifying priorities and selecting indicators. A community indicators project is several things:

- An iterative, community-based process and plan for achieving community wellbeing;
- A set of indicators, benchmarks, and goals used to track progress;
- A system of communication, engagement, and collaboration;
- A venue for a collective approach to building community resilience.

Current Work & Needs

MRVPD’s programmatic work is supported by three critical areas: the annual data report, the MRV Vision Statement, and effective communication. Challenges within these areas have been experienced by staff and shared by community partners.

- Annual Data Report
 - Created to fulfill MOU requirements, though recent expansions aim to include MRV Vision and increase relevance.
 - MRVPD has worked to share widely, but there is still limited use by local stakeholders.
 - Need: a more dedicated evaluation of the purpose and potential of the Data Report.
- MRV Vision Statement
 - Developed five years ago; Update should include “new” community needs and identity post-COVID.
 - Limited use outside of MRVPD, though community members have expressed interest in shared, guiding vision.
 - Need: Platform to revisit and refine shared community vision.
- Communication
 - Many community members (including municipal officials, local organizations, businesses, and residents) still lack knowledge of MRVPD’s role, as well as previous planning and research efforts.

- o Need: Strengthened communication networks, feedback loops, and potential collaboration.

Opportunity

As MRVPD marks its 35th year serving the Mad River Valley, the community is faced with a number of pressing and complex challenges, including the sale of Sugarbush Resort amidst a changing climate, a lack of affordable housing, workforce challenges – and most recently, a global pandemic. Questions of community wellbeing and resilience are more urgent than ever: *Who are the most vulnerable community members? What are the greatest risks we face? How do we rebuild stronger, more equitably, and sustainably?*

The role of MRVPD in response to COVID-19 and other disruptions can be seen as:

1. Helping to shape and maintain a positive community narrative and understanding of the MRV’s identity and values.
2. Focusing on the big picture by building and maintaining systems of support.
3. Continue to build and support civic infrastructure, including community connections, communication, and funding opportunities.
4. Capitalize on the current urgency to support the most vulnerable by bringing new energy and awareness to the work of MRVPD and community partners.

Within the roles listed above, MRVPD has several notable strengths that can be used to take advantage of current opportunities. The table below shows how the MRV CIP could connect the work and strengths of MRVPD with external opportunities.

	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual Data Report - Experienced staff - Existing relationships and networks - Existing connections to resources and financial support
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growing consciousness of community vulnerabilities - Shared appetite to take action - Potential funding for community resilience efforts - Demand for data and more effective communication - Need for community solidarity in face of disruptions (threat → opportunity) 	<p>Opportunity-Strength Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revisit and refine MRV vision through MRV CIP - Prioritize and create an engaging and shared space for indicator data and goals, so all community members can tell the same story - Strengthen existing data work by broadening its relevance, communication strategies, and community participation

Proposed Work

To fulfill its charge to “carry out a program of planning for the future of the Mad River Valley...directed toward the physical, social, economic, fiscal, environmental, cultural and aesthetic well-being of the member Towns and its inhabitants,” MRVPD is seeking to support MRV municipal officials, non-profits, businesses, and community members through enhanced data collection, dissemination, and communication. Since MRVPD began the annual MRV Data Report as part of its 1998 Memorandum of Understanding, the breadth and depth of the data report has expanded to strengthen its applicability. MRVPD aims to continue this effort while increasing community engagement and action-oriented partnerships through the MRV Community Indicators Project.

The Community Indicators Project builds on existing work to:

1. **Revisit the MRV Vision Statement.** While this is especially timely given the current upheaval, staff had multiple conversations with partners before the virus who expressed a desire for an updated vision to collectively work under. An updated vision connected to the Indicators Project would also include goals, to aid in tracking progress toward the vision.
2. **Introduce a participatory process.** Engaging community members in the process of setting goals and indicators will provide a positive platform for community action following a period of stress and uncertainty; will increase knowledge of the existence and content of the Data Report; and will foster buy-in and ownership of the Project, leading to the incorporation of indicator data in decision-making and policy.
3. **Transform data to indicators.** While the current data report provides trends, the CIP connects these trends to goals. This has been shown to be critical for communities to transition from data collection to data driven decision-making and policy.
4. **Increase accessibility and usability of data.** A big component of the CIP is more accessible communication of the indicator data, which would be done through an interactive online dashboard that tracks indicator progress toward shared goals and invites people to join the conversation. MRVPD may also work with individual partners to develop strategies to work toward goals.

Goals & Outcomes

Short term outcomes:

1. A platform to engage community members in action steps and stimulate shared ownership of the MRV story.
2. A refined community vision and identity post-COVID.
3. Collaboration among stakeholders and unlikely partners.

Long term outcomes:

1. Improved relevancy, usefulness, and accessibility of Data Report.
2. Increased use of data in local decision-making.
3. A Valley-wide understanding of community vulnerabilities and wellbeing.

- 4. Strengthened communication networks and feedback loops among stakeholders.

Project Implementation

The following project implementation proposal is based on research conducted by staff utilizing existing community indicator guides and best practices. However, we recognize that several limitations exist in our current reality, resulting in several unknowns and require flexibility for any such plan.

This proposal begins with an overview of the guiding framework that will be used for the project process and ongoing work, and then presents the goals and tasks of each component of the project implementation. The project components are presented linearly (as shown in the figure below); see the project timeline (*MRV CI Process Steps.xlsx*) for a better understanding of the time estimates.

Figure 1 below provides a visual representation of the project implementation process. Circles lined with darker shades of blue indicate greater community or stakeholder input; the larger the circle the more resources and/or time is needed.

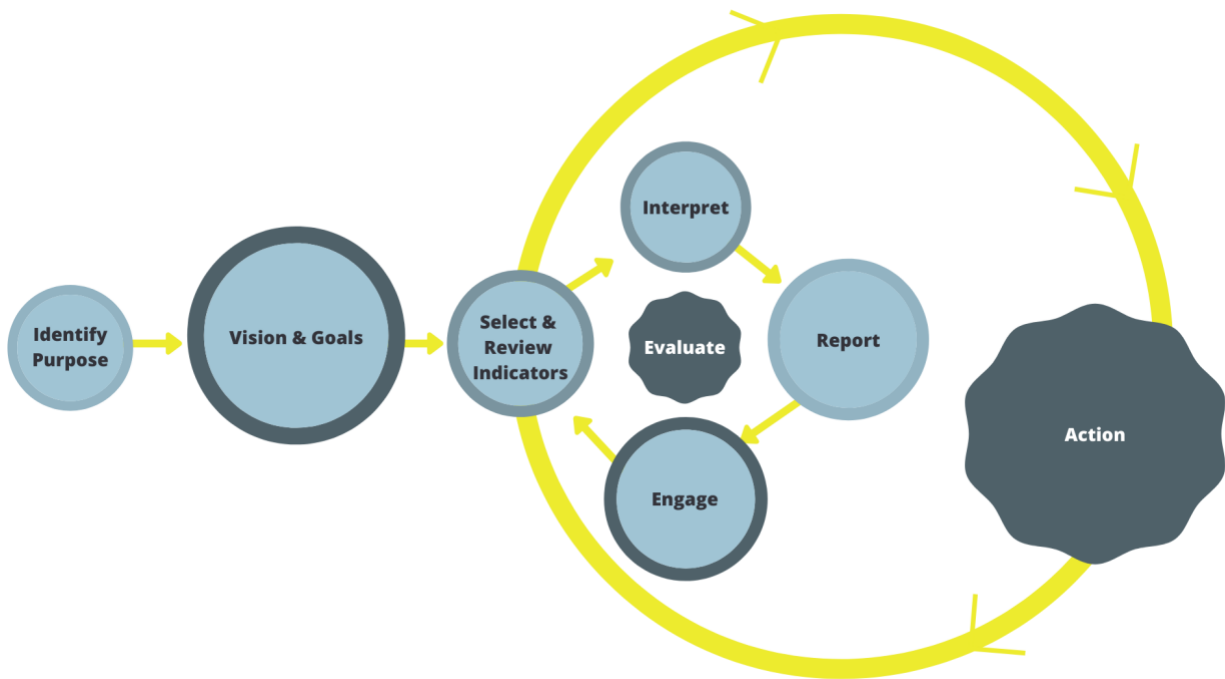


Figure 1. MRV Community Indicators Implementation Process

Framework

The MRV CIP is based in and guided by a framework of “wellbeing.” A framework is a “system for organizing the indicators under a set of domains.”¹ Domains are developed based on the themes that arise from community visioning and goal-setting. The framework provides structure through an overarching objective (community wellbeing) and connecting the different domains; see Figure 3 on page 11 for a visual representation of this relationship.

The wellbeing framework was chosen because of its representation of multi-dimensionality, which fits neatly with the work and charge of the MRVPD. A general definition and conceptual framework of wellbeing is provided in the figure below (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). The process of updating the MRV Community Vision will refine this definition and help to narrow the specific dimensions that make up individual (and community) wellbeing in the Mad River Valley. MRV residents will further contribute to our understanding of what matters most via responses to a subjective wellbeing survey; subjective data is particularly informative in communities with small populations.

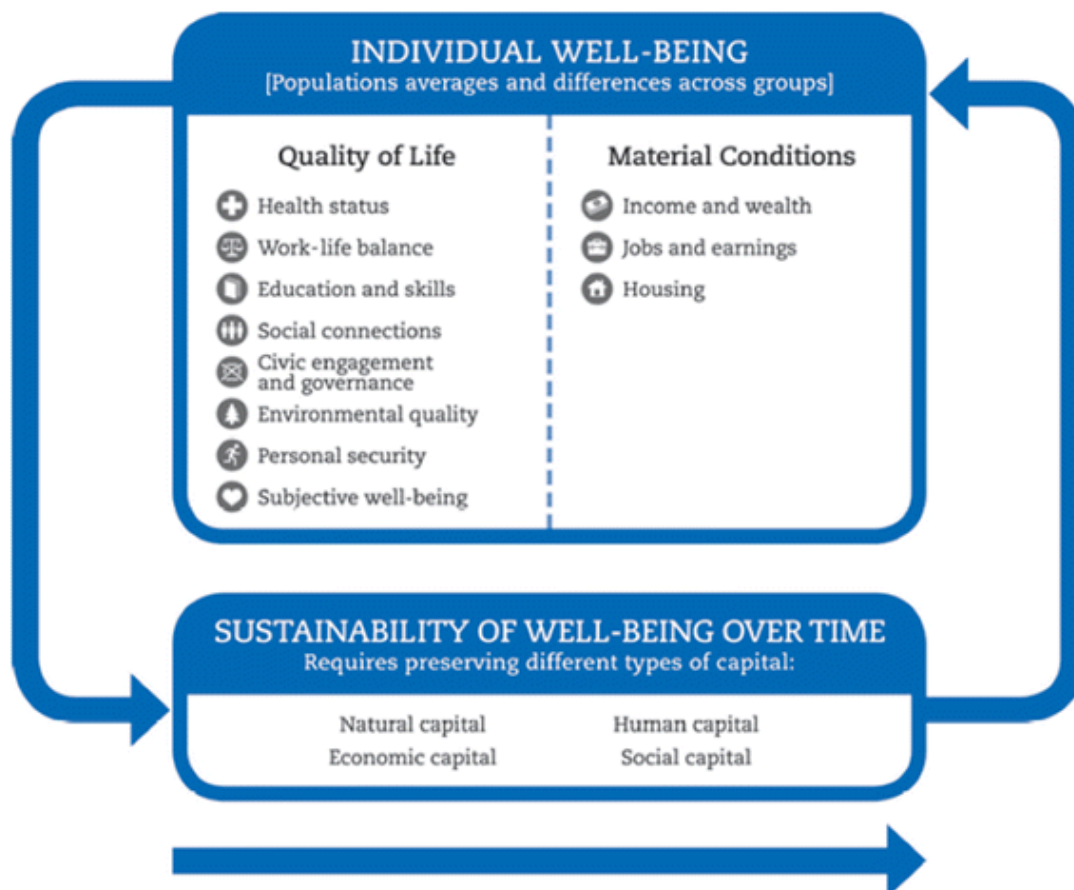


Figure 2. OECD well-being conceptual framework. OECD (2011), *How's Life? Measuring well-being*

¹ Stevens, DeBlois, Hamberg & Baldwin (2018), *Community Indicators Project Development Guide*

The dimensions described above cover outcomes at the individual, household or community level, and relate to:

1. Material conditions that shape people's economic options;
2. Quality-of-life factors that encompass how well people are (and feel), what they know and can do, and how health and safe their places of living are; and,
3. How connected and engaged people are, and how and with whom they spend their time.²

This framework also connects the point-in-time measurement of wellbeing (quality of life and material conditions) with natural, economic, human and social capital; the capitals can be thought of as the broader systems that MRVPD aims to build, maintain or adjust through its ongoing work.

The use of a wellbeing framework also aims to provide a focus on outcomes, such as how a change in policies or programs impacts the Mad River Valley community and ecosystem. An overarching objective (wellbeing) may also support the alignment of outcomes among local decision-makers and organizations through the breaking down of silos. More robust indicators, including subjective indicators, provide additional insight on the *quality* and sustainability of economic growth and other wellbeing factors.

More about the definition and measurement of wellbeing can be found in the "Resources" section.

² OECD Better Life Initiative (2020), *Measuring well-being and progress*

Definition of Community Wellbeing

MRV Community Indicators Project

Primary Goals

- Confirm project purpose, resources, and roles.
- Recruit inclusive and dedicated community members to Leadership Committee.
- Kick off planning process and momentum.

Overview of Tasks

Task	Responsible Entity
Confirm project purpose, as proposed by MRVPD Staff.	MRVPD Steering Committee
Commit to provide on-going project leadership and resource contribution, as proposed by MRVPD Staff.	MRVPD Steering Committee
Discuss Leadership Committee make-up and confirm MRVPD representatives.	MRVPD Steering Committee
Confirm project framework.	MRVPD Steering Committee
Initiate Leadership Committee (LC).	MRVPD SC Representatives to the LC

Task Details

1. MRVPD Steering Committee confirmation of project purpose.
 - Purpose: To build community resilience and support the ability of the Mad River Valley to work together toward its shared vision.
 - Guiding Principles:
 - Mission: Provide the Mad River Valley with a community-informed and accessible tool for data-driven decision making, collaboration, and collective action.
 - MRV community members and stakeholders are committed to making data-driven decisions.
 - Community input is critical to the effectiveness of the MRV CIP, including 2nd Home Owners.
 - A Wellbeing Framework provides a balanced and comprehensive structure for organizing a system of indicators.
2. MRVPD Steering Committee commits to providing on-going project leadership and resource contribution.
 - Resources:
 - Staff time
 - Community Planner: increase time to 8 hrs/week, from 11 to 30% of total time.

- Executive Director: increase time to 1.5 hrs/week, from 2 to 5% of total time.
 - Project scope:
 - Bulk of additional work in first year.
 - In subsequent years, additional time will be spent on data communication and engagement.
 - A qualitative survey component would require more time, though would be a good opportunity for interns or volunteers. Could also be conducted every couple of years.
 - Role: MRVPD serve as the “backbone” organization of the CIP, continuing existing role as reinforcer of the shared vision, data manager, and convener.
 - MRVPD Steering Committee (SC) sub-group forms basis of Leadership Committee (LC), with staff providing active guidance throughout process.
 - MRVPD Staff:
 - Provide overall project strategic coherence
 - General logistical and administrative support
 - Management and facilitation of Leadership Committee
 - Identify and raise issues with LC
 - Assist with meeting logistics and agendas
 - Maintain high-level perspective to guide and participate in SC meetings as necessary
 - Follow up and manage next steps that come out of SC and sub-committee meetings, as necessary
 - Serve as neutral convener and coordinator among stakeholders
 - Support indicator research and development
 - Manage data collection, analysis, and communication
 - Explore and apply for potential funding
3. MRVPD Steering Committee discussion of Leadership Committee make-up and criteria. *(Could alternatively be called an “Advisory Committee” or similar)*
 - Nominate 3+ MRVPD Steering Committee members, one of which to serve as Co-Chair (second Co-Chair nominated by Leadership Committee members).
 - Identify other potential committee members, such as representatives of business; Sugarbush; environmental; social services; seniors; education; agriculture.
 - Prioritize diversity; committee should be a reflection of community.
 - Use as opportunity to build a broad, lasting coalition. Potential criteria includes:
 - Passion for the project, commitment to outcomes and experiential diversity among committee members is crucial for long-term sustainability and translating data to action.
 - Main Responsibilities of Leadership Committee:
 - Leadership Committee Co-Chairs:
 - Organize outreach and on-boarding of committee membership;
 - Actively provide direction for any established sub-committees and volunteers;

- Ensure actions, messaging, and decision-making adhere to the Guiding Principles and follow the Theory of Change (as laid out through this proposal).
 - Create and execute plan for organizing community visioning event(s).
 - Spearhead on-going community engagement process, including creating sub-committees as needed.
 - Summarize and share visioning event results.
 - Conduct analysis of community vision and goals to define indicator domains.
- 4. Confirm “wellbeing” framework. (see Framework section above, page 6)
 - Framework: The MRV CIP and ongoing work will be organized and guided by a multidimensional framework of “wellbeing.” Our understanding of “wellbeing” is grounded in internationally-recognized definitions (e.g. the OECD) and refined through community input.
- 5. MRVPD Steering Committee Representatives initiate Leadership Committee.
 - Recruit members, ensuring dedication to project and availability for one year.
 - Provide and explain guiding documents, drafted by MRVPD Staff.
 - Schedule regular meeting time and benchmarks.

MRV Community Vision & Goals

Primary Goals

- Update the 2015 MRV Vision Statement.
 - Bring together community members in the wake of COVID-19, the sale of Sugarbush, and other recent disruptions to look toward the future.
 - Include goals and benchmarks to provide context and track progress.
- Vision and goals created through a participatory process support the MRV CIP by:
 - Setting project direction;
 - Reflecting community priorities; and
 - Fostering a shared sense of ownership about the project outcomes.
- Educate stakeholders and public of CIP purpose, goals, and how they can provide input.

Overview of Tasks

Task	Responsible Entity
Create and execute plan for organizing and holding community visioning event(s).	Leadership Committee.
Spearhead on-going community engagement process, including creating sub-committees as needed.	Leadership Committee.

Task Details

1. Leadership Committee (or sub-committee) creates and executes plan for organizing visioning event(s).

- Organize:
 - Select tools for community input (e.g. surveys, meetings, focus groups)
 - ID tools & places to advertise effort
 - Develop background information/messaging
 - Design criteria for evaluation of engagement process
 - Review progress and make recommendations
 - Include:
 - Event(s) should address questions such as: *What does the community need to thrive? Where do we want to be? What matters to the community?*
 - Assess community needs and strengths.
 - Focus discussion toward community goals and/or priority areas; use as foundation for indicator selection.
 - Use existing data and knowledge of “forces of change” (i.e. climate change, demographic shifts) to inform discussion.
 - Incorporate existing visions and goals as appropriate.
2. Spearhead on-going community engagement process.
- Identify potential participants to provide input on developing domains/dimensions and indicators, including:
 - Community members (“regulars” and those less involved);
 - Stakeholders (including funders, legislators, those regionally connected);
 - Subject matter experts (important during indicator selection process.
 - Create, recruit and manage sub-committees/task-forces, as deemed necessary.
 - Maintain ongoing community conversation surrounding shared relevance and benefits of the project.

Indicator Development

Primary Goals

- Develop foundation for scientifically-sound, locally relevant, and reliable indicators.
- New and existing indicators measure progress toward community-determined goals.
- Provide framework to organize indicators, goals, and context that is shared among and understood by stakeholders.
- Secure broader community buy-in and on-going interest in indicator results.

Overview of Tasks

Task	Responsible Entity
Summarize and share visioning event results.	Leadership Committee
Conduct analysis of community vision and goals to define indicator domains.	Leadership Committee
Research and select indicators to be used.	MRVPD Staff

Task Details

1. Leadership Committee (or sub-committee) summarizes and shares results of visioning event.
 - a. Determine appropriate avenue to share the final vision statement and goals (e.g. webinar, written report, etc.).
2. Leadership Committee conducts analysis to define ‘domains’ and ‘dimensions’ based on the themes and goals identified through visioning.
 - a. Domains can be stated as broad themes (“Environment”) or goals (“Ecological Diversity & Resilience”). Dimensions can be thought of as sub-categories within each domain. An example of the relationship between a framework, domains, dimensions, and indicators can be found below.
3. MRVPD staff develops list of indicators based on existing data report and research.
 - a. Build on existing database and consult topic-specific stakeholders for additional insight and indicator suggestions.
 - b. Begin identification of potential new indicators based on what town officials and local organizations want to measure, to be workshopped following first round of indicator project.
 - c. Screen indicators based on criteria, including relevance, strength & reliability, data availability.
 - d. Evaluate relevancy of existing MOU data requirements and propose changes as needed.
 - e. Work with Leadership Committee and MRVPD Steering Committee to confirm list of indicators adequately measures community goals, meet indicator criteria, and conforms with MRVPD MOU requirements.

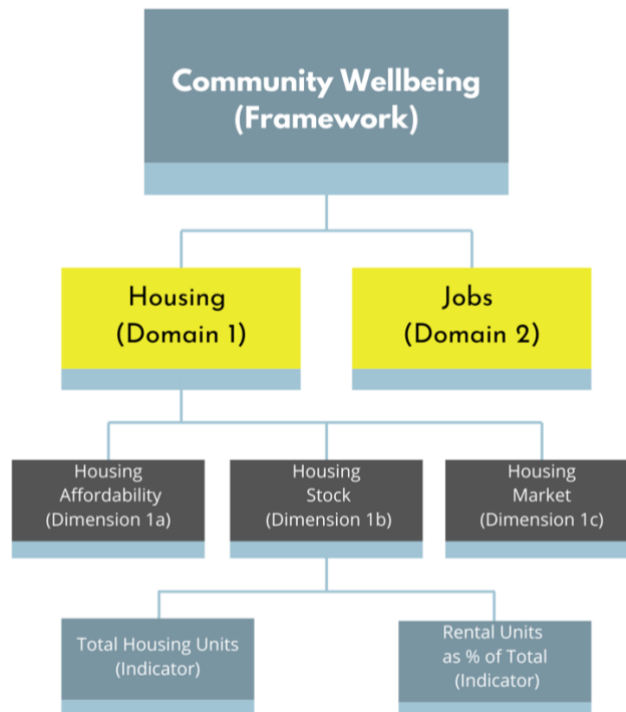


Figure 3. Example of a Community Wellbeing Framework

Measurement of Community Wellbeing

Data Collection

Primary Goals

- Indicator data is collected and organized in a way to support high-quality analyses.
- Create a simple and accurate system for collecting and analyzing data to allow for tasks to be shared.
- Foster relationships with data partners (town clerks, survey takers, non-profits, etc.) through data collection process.

Overview of Tasks

Task	Responsible Entity
Secure quantitative and qualitative indicator data.	MRVPD Staff
Prioritize relationships with data partners through data collection.	MRVPD Staff

Task Details

1. MRVPD Staff secures chosen quantitative and qualitative indicator data, including recording metadata.
 - a. Subjective Wellbeing Survey³ (online)
 - i. Refine survey questions, language and format as needed.
 - ii. Manage survey dissemination, collection and organization.
 1. Gather email list (voter registration, other)
 2. Outreach plan directing to survey page (FPF, VR, social media, etc.)
 3. Point person for survey questions, reminder email, etc.
 4. Organization of survey data in Excel, other.
 - b. Quantitative data
 - i. Collection from Census/ACS; town data*; state agencies; local non-profit organizations* (* indicates communication, greater lead time required)
 - ii. Organization of data in Excel (currently exists), other.
 - c. Metadata: explanation of why each indicator matters; how it relates to the goal/domain; source details; data timing; relevant strengths/limitations
2. MRVPD Staff prioritizes relationships with data partners throughout the data collection and analysis process.
 - a. Ask data partners for relevant data in a timely manner to provide enough time for them to collect and share the data and for follow-up questions.
 - b. Include written acknowledgement of partners in data communications.
 - c. Provide update of findings following analysis.

³ Questions will be pulled from existing, tested survey instruments.

Data Analysis

Primary Goals

- Ensure meaning and context of indicator data is connected to goals.
- Create simple and accurate system for collecting and analyzing data.

Overview of Tasks

Task	Responsible Entity
Analyze and interpret data trends in relation to community vision and goals.	MRVPD Staff
Incorporate new platform for data aggregation, analysis, and communication.	MRVPD Staff

Task Details

1. MRVPD Staff analyze and interpret trends.
 - a. Provide context and evaluation of each indicator, incorporating data partner input.
 - b. Aggregate indicators into dimensions and domains.
 - c. Connect indicators to goals and benchmarks.
2. MRVPD Staff incorporates new platform for data aggregation, analysis and communication into data collection and analysis process.
 - a. Research software and platform options, pricing, and strengths and weaknesses.
 - b. Write how-to guide for using platform in conjunction with MRV indicators.

Improve Community Wellbeing

Data Communication & Engagement

Primary Goals

- Improve accessibility and usability of data.
 - Increase use of data in local decision-making.
- Promote Valley-wide understanding of community vulnerabilities and wellbeing.
- Strengthen communication networks and feedback loops among stakeholders.

Overview of Tasks

Task	Responsible Entity
Share and communicate data findings.	MRVPD Staff

Engage and coordinate stakeholders to take action based on data findings.	MRVPD Staff
Conduct on-going evaluations to assess project successes and challenges.	MRVPD Staff

Task Details

1. MRVPD Staff shares and communicates data findings.
 - a. Explore existing and new communication strategies: summary report; Tri-Town Meeting presentation; Valley Reporter; “Data Day,” etc.
 - b. Manage online dashboard.
 - i. Upload data, respond to questions, review functionality
1. MRVPD Staff engage and coordinate stakeholders to take action on what needs to be improved.
 - a. Keep stakeholders up-to-date to maintain interest, foster feedback loop.
 - b. Explore options to stimulate action among community partners.
 - i. Example: “Adopt an indicator” program could facilitate voluntary, topic-specific action.
2. MRVPD Staff conduct evaluations every few years to assess project success, identify --- challenges, impacts on the community, etc.⁴

Potential Project Partners

Organization	Area(s) of Support	Project Phase
UVM CDAE	<i>Surveys, data collection, communications</i>	General
UVM Center for Rural Studies	<i>Indicators, data, surveys</i>	Indicator development
UVM Center for Research on Vermont	<i>Communications, research, project support</i>	General
UVM Internship Programs	<i>Communications, research, project support</i>	General
UVM Spatial Analysis Lab	<i>GIS</i>	Data communication
CCRPC	<i>Indicators, data</i>	Indicator development
VCRD	<i>Community engagement</i>	Vision & Goals
Stone Environmental	<i>GIS</i>	Data communication
ACCD	<i>Data</i>	Data communication

⁴ Stevens et al. (2018)

Resources

- Community Engagement
 - [Community Tool Box](#)
- Community Visioning
 - [A Guide to Community Visioning](#) (UW Extension)
 - [Community Heart & Soul](#)
- Indicators
 - [Indicator Explorer](#): an online data tool that provides the level of academic research and popularity of common indicators.
 - [Community Indicators Consortium](#): resources, research, and links to community indicator projects.
 - [OECD Better Life Index](#): see the indicators that make up the OECD Better Life Index domains (national-level data)
 - [AARP Livability Index](#)
- Wellbeing Measurement
 - [What Works Centre for Wellbeing](#) (United Kingdom)
 - [Santa Monica Wellbeing Project](#)
 - [Canadian Index of Wellbeing](#)
 - [OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Wellbeing](#)
- General Community Indicator Projects
 - [ACT Rochester](#), NY
 - [Chittenden County ECOS Project](#) & [Scorecard](#)
 - [Madison, WI Neighborhood Indicators Project](#)
 - [Spokane, WA Community Indicators Initiative](#)
 - [VNRC Resilient Communities Scorecard](#)