

# The Wellbeing Project

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**Organisation:** City of Santa Monica

**Country:** United States

**Level of government:** Local government

**Sector:** General public services

**Type:** Communication, Data, Methods, Public Service

**Launched in:** 2014

**Overall development time:** 3 year(s)

**Link to the innovation's website**

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# Description

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Santa Monica, California is tapping the power of data to better understand and improve community wellbeing. The City of Santa Monica's Wellbeing Project has created a framework to evaluate community wellbeing, developed a Local Wellbeing Index to measure it and is using this data to target its policies, partnerships and programs to help residents thrive. The Wellbeing Project is a groundbreaking new model for city governments, and was the city's winning entry in the 2013 Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge. It is a public initiative that uses the science of wellbeing to better understand the community, by looking beyond traditional performance measures or economic indicators and using a new method to gain an understanding of how multiple factors interact and affect residents' quality of life. The core of the project is the Wellbeing Index, which provides the city with a snapshot of its current wellbeing strengths and needs by analyzing data collected from residents, city departments and social media. The result is a robust understanding of how the people of Santa Monica are doing across multiple measures known to influence wellbeing. Index findings are presented both from a community wide perspective and broken down by demographic categories, allowing the city to develop targeted programming for the residents who need it most.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- Governments around the world are beginning to recognize that economic growth alone does not ensure a community's success. True measures of progress take into account the wellbeing of people, and examines things like: Do they feel empowered to make change? Are they happy, healthy, and connected to the community? Are they able to access opportunities for lifelong learning? Does the economy support residents? Without this information, governments have no way to understand the cumulative impact of their work, and are challenged to manage for better results. Santa Monica has defined six dimensions that contribute to wellbeing –Outlook,Community, Place, Health, Learning, and Economic Opportunity– and is comprehensively measuring how its citizens and communities fare on these indicators. From there, the City is aligning resources, programs and policies to drive improvements.
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## Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Enhance public trust, Enhance transparency, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve social equity, Increase citizen engagement, Support economic growth

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## Main beneficiaries

Elderly people, Ethnic or racial minorities, Families, General population, Government bodies, Government staff, High-risk populations, Low-income groups, People with disabilities, Students, Young people

# Results

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## Efficiency

- After an exhaustive department by department exploration of City data, the Project team conceded that, like most cities, Santa Monica's approach to understanding, collecting, and utilizing data was behind the times. The Wellbeing Project became a catalyst prompting the City organization to catch up by strengthening its data culture and seeking out integrated management solutions.
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## Effectiveness

- The first Wellbeing Index measurement provided a wellbeing baseline for the City. Santa Monica will utilize this information to improve policies, focus resources, and catalyze partnerships to strengthen residents' quality of life. The findings revealed citywide trends, like high levels of wellbeing for seniors and low levels of social connection across all ages, and also provided insights on where targeted actions could improve wellbeing. By looking at factors contributing to high levels of wellbeing among seniors, City staff and its community partners are finding insights that will help address areas of need among other segments of the population.
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## Service quality

### Responsiveness:

- The Wellbeing Index revealed findings by geographic area which led to targeted action. For example, the City found that one neighborhood had higher rates of unemployment and economic worries and a lower median income than Santa Monica as a whole. This neighborhood also had the lowest level of fruit and vegetable consumption. In response, the City partnered with Los Angeles County to increase enrollment in public-benefit programs that help low-income residents meet their nutritional needs, and enrolled in a state program that doubles the value of public benefits at the Farmer's Market.
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## User satisfaction

- The City will use the findings from the Wellbeing Index to guide decision making, policy setting, and resource allocation. The Wellbeing Project also seeks to heighten awareness of community wellbeing, empower citizens to work together, and cultivate cross-sector partnerships. Organizations in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors have found the Index valuable and have adopted the concept of community wellbeing and the wellbeing framework to add deeper meaning to their respective missions.

# Development

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## Design

The Wellbeing Project was inspired by Santa Monica's long history of embracing innovation, from its visionary Sustainability Department 25 years to its Cradle to Career Initiative developed after a string of tragedies involving youth in the community. Each effort embraced principles of collective impact and brought together public institutions, nonprofit service providers, and concerned community members to address data related to key issues to create programs that respond to areas of need. The Wellbeing Project applied some of the principles from this work to inform the creation of a community wide wellbeing assessment. Design time: 1 year(s) 6 month(s)

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## Testing

- The creation of the wellbeing framework was reviewed by an international panel of experts comprised of nearly 20 researchers and practitioners representing various disciplines working to advance core domains of wellbeing, data, and public policy. For a full list of panel members, visit <http://wellbeing.smgov.net/about/partners-and-panel>.
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## Implementation

### Tools used:

- At the core of The Wellbeing Project is the Wellbeing Index, a measurement tool that provides an understanding of wellbeing in our community. The Index provides a baseline for understanding what contributes to wellbeing and how the city and community can work to improve it. By understanding more about what makes us thrive, we can work together on making meaningful changes in our community. The index combines data we have, determines what new types of data we need to gather, and integrates in new ways all of the available information. It brings together a variety of data from City measures, an extensive resident survey and social media in six distinct yet connected categories of what research shows drive wellbeing.

### Resources used:

- Development and implementation of the Wellbeing Project was made possible by a \$1M award from Bloomberg Philanthropies' Mayors Challenge, as well as ongoing financial and inkind support from the City of Santa Monica. Project partners involved include: City of Santa Monica, Office of Wellbeing: Conceived of and implemented the project and oversees project management; Bloomberg Philanthropies: Provided project funding and ongoing guidance; RAND Corporation: Guided development of framework, conducted data collection and analysis; New Economics Foundation (nef): Provided content expertise and technical support; Daylight Design: Engaged end users to assess needs through a human centered design approach; Santa Monica Cradle to Career: Local public/private collective impact collaborative inspired project concept and provides ongoing stakeholder support; We the Creative: Developed graphics and website; MIT: Developed a conceptual framework for social data analysis.
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## Challenges and solutions

- The Wellbeing Project yielded important results on an operational level. For example, the Project revealed functional inefficiencies in the City's data culture within the City organization. This has led to the restructuring of the City's IT Department and the hiring of its first Chief Data Officer. Furthermore, the community wellbeing framework is now seen as the 'operating system' for the City. Community-wide strategic goals are being aligned with the six dimensions of the Index and new performance metrics will be informed by community wellbeing findings. In addition, City Departments must now include strategies to improve wellbeing in their annual workplans and budgets.
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## Partnerships

### **RAND Corporation, New Economics Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Daylight Design, We the Creative, MIT**

Academics and Research Bodies, Civil Society, Private sector

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# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

- Introducing the concept of 'wellbeing' in the context of local government proved to be a challenge. The US is just beginning to embrace research on the drivers of community wellbeing and tends to focus on the end results of positive wellbeing like happiness and good health. Getting people inside and outside the City organization to understand wellbeing on a tangible level and how it relates to them personally and professionally has required continual engagement and reinforcement. Another challenge was found in tapping the potential of social data. Private sector use of social data for marketing and other purposes is commonplace, but use of social data for the public good is an emerging science. Publicly available data from social media sources could provide a vast, continuous stream of insights, but obtaining and using this data presented challenges in access, quality, and public perception. As a result, the social data in version 1 of the Index is a small sampling of what is possible.
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## Conditions for success

- Successful continuation and transferability of The Wellbeing Project will depend on the state of each communities' data culture and systems, and their willingness to embrace the concept of community wellbeing. Supporting infrastructure and services as well as strong leadership and guidance are key to the success of this innovation in government. It is equally important to identify and engage with city and community champions for the project regularly.
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## Other information

Santa Monica's Wellbeing Project may be summed up in 3 words: Define. Measure. Act. • Define: An international, interdisciplinary panel of experts was convened to help identify factors known to influence wellbeing at the community level. This input was used to establish the framework for the Wellbeing Index. • Measure: Objective, subjective, and socially-sourced data was brought together to measure community wellbeing across six dimensions. • Act: Findings from the data are used by City staff to set priorities, establish programs, guide work objectives, form partnerships, and pursue funding opportunities that address needs of community members. Findings are also released through a public information campaign to increase public awareness and empower residents to take charge of their own wellbeing.