



# Stakeholder and Public Consultations on The Canadian Index of Wellbeing

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Submitted to:

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## Objectives and Approach

The aim of the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) is to account accurately for changes in Canada's human, social, economic and natural wealth through a new index that can best capture the full range of factors that determine wellbeing in Canada. The CIW encompasses seven areas (or domains) which are at different stages of development: Living Standards, Healthy Populations, Time Allocation, Educated Populace, Ecosystem Health, Community Vitality, and Good Governance (Civic Engagement).

In order to achieve this aim, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation wanted to ensure that the CIW captures what really matters to Canadians. To this end, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, with the support of the United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada and their local agencies and CIW project partners, obtained the input of a broad range of stakeholders by means of a national consultation. Approximately 215 people from across Canada, representing diverse perspectives, including three levels of government, business, the media, academia, and a wide range of local and national NGOs participated in 19 focus groups and 14 one-on-one interviews conducted from November 2005 to April 2006. Some of the key issues addressed in the consultation included:

- Perceived challenges and opportunities;
- Validation of key aspects of the CIW work completed to this point;
- Identification of gaps; and
- Suggestions for promoting/marketing the CIW and communicating with various audiences.

## Key Findings

The CIW project was not well known by consultation participants, though most had at least a moderate level of familiarity and experience with economic and social progress indicators. Based on what they read in a pre-consultation briefing package and what they heard from others around the table, most described the Index as an excellent and timely idea, and a needed alternative to traditional economically-based ways of measuring progress. Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to comment on the CIW and indicated a strong interest in remaining involved in its development.

Participants also thought that the Index had a great deal of potential to serve as a catalyst for bringing together disparate indicator projects underway in Canada. While it was often difficult for people to fully grasp the CIW as a finished product, particularly with respect to technical issues (e.g., data sources, aggregation, weighting, etc.), participants were able to quickly grasp the basic premise of the Index.

The Index was also thought to have the potential to be highly relevant and useful to a range of stakeholders. In the shorter term, it was expected that the CIW would facilitate the development of policy and the evaluation and effectiveness of programs. In particular, people were hopeful about the contribution that the CIW might make to better understanding “causality” (i.e., the main determinants of wellbeing). Community advocates expected that the Index could provide them with credible information with which to influence policy and program funding decisions. Media representatives expressed interest in covering the CIW, particularly with respect to the gaps in wellbeing across provinces, communities and population sub-groups it might uncover.

The CIW appeared to many to be a very ambitious and large-scale undertaking, leading many to express concern that its size and complexity could lessen the chances of success. Others acknowledge this risk, but also felt that the CIW's large size and scope was key to allowing it to become an integrated progress measurement tool.

Many of the most experienced and knowledgeable participants felt that the CIW's greatest value was in providing longitudinal data, thus reiterating the importance of sustainability and longevity. Developing the Index's potential for becoming relevant to the general public, and for promoting an evidenced-based decision-making culture, were thought to be worthy, but longer-term objectives.

CIW developers are cautioned against pursuing “perfection” to the detriment of timeliness and practicality. Participants also felt that openness and transparency about the empirical assumptions underpinning the CIW should characterize communications, thereby making it easier for stakeholders to provide continuous input into its development.

The CIW Steering Committee and the National Research and Development Working Group were seen as being of a very high calibre from a leadership and technical standpoint. Some felt it was important to see greater diversity in their make up, particularly with respect to average citizens and equity groups (e.g. Aboriginal peoples, persons with a disability, immigrants, etc.).

The role of governments, especially at the federal level, and the impact this could have on the objectivity and credibility of the Index was discussed at length. Some saw the role of the federal government (e.g., funding, promotion, use/incorporation) as key to the Index's success, particularly over the long term. There was excitement about the potential involvement of Statistics Canada, an agency that was viewed as a well-funded, knowledgeable, objective, non-political and thus credible source of data. Others, however, stressed the importance of maintaining complete independence from government in an effort to promote maximum credibility.

The seven domains that currently make up the CIW were seen as poised to provide a strong measure of wellbeing, though a number of suggestions were made for inclusion in the Index. *Healthy Population* was the most familiar and resonant domain, along with the *Living Standards* domain. *Community Vitality* was seen as encompassing many crucial indicators that have traditionally been overlooked and which are particularly relevant to community-based organizations. Given the fact that the *Good Governance*

domain was presented only as a concept, the domain was seen as vague and sparked debate on whether it should focus on broad community engagement or the quality and efficacy of government. The *Time Allocation* domain was viewed by some as the least intuitive and lacking in coherence. It was felt that *Ecosystem Health* was a very important domain given the obviously key role the environment has in determining wellbeing, but its title was criticized as esoteric. The Educated Populace domain was well received, but many stressed the importance of measuring access to post-secondary education.

Communications and marketing were judged to be vital to the ultimate success of the CIW. Most envisioned the development of a two-pronged communications strategy: one aimed at opinion leaders, including the media, devoted to garnering maximum attention, and another, long-term strategy aimed at building an interactive "community of users".

The title "Canadian Index of Wellbeing" was well received by participants. In French, *L'indice Canadien du mieux-être* was preferred. The potential tagline "Measuring the things that matter" resonates, but many people preferred "Measuring what matters". The current CIW logo received mixed reviews. Some found it bland and many did not appreciate the significance of the checkmark.

## Recommendations

1. It is recommended that the CIW consider creating a detailed long-term schedule of activities and milestones in order to impose discipline on the development and roll out of the Index. This schedule can be used internally, but should also be shared with the community of stakeholders.
2. It is recommended that the CIW focus first and foremost on communicating with and meeting the needs of stakeholders. This was seen as essential in building knowledge transfer and usage that would ultimately lead to public discourse.
3. It is recommended that the CIW consider obtaining the input of the general public through the creation of a Citizen's Advisory Group. This group of 10 to 20 people could be composed of members of the public from across Canada who are involved in their community, but who will bring a lay/public perspective to the issues. Advisory group members should represent a diversity of backgrounds, including newcomers to Canada, Aboriginal people, youth, seniors, disabled persons, etc. Among its major activities, members of the advisory group could be tasked with conducting consultation sessions with members of the public in their community, and to feed this information into the CIW development process. Priority should be given to obtaining the public's perspective into the development of the *Community Vitality* and *Good Governance* domains.
4. It is recommended that the CIW be transparent and forthcoming in communicating with its community of stakeholders regarding gaps and current limitations on a go forward basis.

Moreover, stakeholders should be encouraged to share their experience and expertise on these issues with the CIW.

5. It is recommended that communications materials clearly explain the role of government vis-à-vis the CIW (e.g., funding, partnerships, use of federal government/Statistics Canada data, etc.).
6. It is recommended that the *Ecosystems Health* and *Good Governance* domain names be re-titled to something that is clearer and more meaningful, such as Environmental Health and Civic Engagement respectively.
7. It is recommended that the following most noteworthy participant suggestions for data additions to the CIW be considered:
  - Personal income to debt ratio;
  - The rate of personal bankruptcies;
  - The proportion of the workforce that qualifies for Employment Insurance (EI);
  - The quality of employer-provided benefits;
  - Access to childcare;
  - Access to health care;
  - The measure of control that one has over his/her life;
  - Time devoted to caring for family members who are ill;
  - Time spent commuting to work;
  - Time spent being physically active;
  - Access to public transportation; and
  - Access to post-secondary education.
8. It is recommended that a two-pronged approach to marketing and promotion be developed based on opinion leaders and grassroots target audiences. Generally, communications should convey momentum and progress in the CIW's development.
  - The opinion leaders strategy should focus on generating a "splash" or "buzz" and capitalize on the strengths of the CIW Champion Roy Romanow, who people saw as highly credible, well known, knowledgeable and well respected by the country's political leaders.

- ◇ Ensure that the “CIW story” be communicated in a manner that is easily understood by the public and supported by data and analysis that has integrity whether the CIW is reported as a single aggregate number or as a cluster of indices.
  - ◇ Develop a media strategy that can respond to the media’s likely desire to report on “winners and losers”.
  - ◇ Ensure that the CIW’s focus is on Canadians’ commonalities and what ties us together.
- Promotion of the CIW at the grassroots level should be based on a systematic, long-term and sustained approach to developing a “community of users”. The following approaches should be considered for reaching the grassroots segment:
- ◇ Identify “Local CIW Champions”. These could be community leaders with some knowledge and expertise in the development and use of indicators. Their role could include promoting the CIW, obtaining community input into the Index’s continued development, and serving as the local CIW resource person.
  - ◇ As part of the roll out strategy, consider developing workshops/seminars that could be delivered in communities by local champions.
  - ◇ Use the Internet to build a community of CIW users and develop an excellent website that will appeal to a range of audiences.
  - ◇ Work with educators to develop a learning module for use in the classroom.
  - ◇ Communicate how the CIW can be used by businesses and business groups/associations to attract investment and employees (e.g. based on a city’s wellbeing index score).
  - ◇ Clearly address issues around community-level information (e.g., current and expected future availability of local-level information, rationale, limitations, etc.).
  - ◇ Devote sensitivity and care to presenting and discussing gaps in wellbeing between communities (e.g. regions, cities, neighbourhoods, population sub-groups, etc.).
  - ◇ Consider including case studies and “success stories” in reports or information packages to illustrate how various groups can use the CIW.
9. It is recommended that the current title be retained and that *L’indice Canadien du mieux-être* be adopted as the French version of the title.

10. It is recommended that “Measuring what matters” be adopted as the CIW tagline.
11. It is recommended that the logo be redesigned around a universally meaningful symbol.