

# Preface

*Signs of Progress, Signs of Caution* is a tool for local community groups. It will help you to learn more about your community and about Healthy Communities in general. It works best when it is used by a variety of people working together towards a shared goal of making their community a healthier place in which to live.

The healthy communities process allows each individual community and local government to act on issues that it has identified. By working together, community representatives can best determine what makes their community healthy. This process involves more than simply collecting numbers and measuring performance – it is a process that requires a genuine feeling for the soul of a community.

*Signs of Progress, Signs of Caution* will introduce you to the simple elements that make a community healthy. It will broaden your knowledge and appreciation of the components of a healthy community, and will help you look for and monitor these elements in your own community. As a learning tool, this workbook will help to increase your understanding of what a healthy community is and can be. It is not a tool for simply collecting data.

By working through *Signs of Progress, Signs of Caution*, your community will take part in an enjoyable learning experience that will bring you together in a spirit of caring and sharing. Enjoy using it, use it often, and share it with others.

## Acknowledgements

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## Note To Readers

We invite you to view this workbook as a “work in progress”. It will need ongoing refinement as you work with it in your community. Thank you for using it and improving it. We look forward to receiving your comments.

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# WHY SHOULD WE USE THIS WORKBOOK?



The reasons to use it can be summed up in four questions:

- **Is our community healthy and sustainable?**
- **Are we making progress?**
- **How do we know?**
- **How do we turn this information into action?**

If you want to find some answers to these questions, read on.

*“This document is a goldmine of information.”*

Bob Rogers, Sudbury Round Table on Health,  
Environment and Economy

*“A daunting task – and a fantastic tool. ... Not only does it monitor where we are as a community, but it assists in networking and partnerships.”*

Rhonda Lammert,  
Social Planning Council of Niagara Falls

*“A significant catalyst in our community... I like the balance between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and the stressing of process along the way to achieving.”*

Sharon Gow, Elliot Lake Network

*“Although many municipalities do a great deal of excellent work, we never tell anyone about it. We have never [before] had a report card to determine whether we are winning the battle.”*

Gary Michalak, CAO/Clerk,  
Town of Rayside-Balfour

## What Is The Workbook For?

The workbook will help you prepare a “progress report card” to assess the health and sustainability of your community.

A community report card: It’s a simple idea, but it’s been a challenge to create. Why? Because it involves looking at every aspect of our community life and asking: What makes us healthy? What improves our quality of life? How do we consider everyone’s interests?

We hope you find the workbook useful. It’s our first attempt to create a tool for anyone to measure progress in their community. Please test it. Improve on it. And use it to improve your community.

**Note:** While it gives information about community needs, and strengths (or “capacities”), the workbook is not an inventory of either. It is also not a tool to measure your organization’s effectiveness. This is a progress report for the whole community.

## Getting Started Why A “Progress Report Card”?

We’ve called it this for two reasons. First, we want to help you make **progress** in creating a “healthy, sustainable community”. That means progress for everyone: people of all ages, races, abilities, incomes, women and men. Well-being of the environment, the economy, social services and personal health. It’s also about making this progress sustainable – or long lasting.

Second, **how will you know if you’re making progress unless you look at your results?** The “report card” will help you assess both facts, and people’s feelings, about what is happening in your community.

- ✓ What do people value here?
- ✓ How healthy is our community?
- ✓ Are our activities sustainable?  
Will we be able to continue them  
for 10, 20, 50 and more years to come?
- ✓ What are people doing to improve our community?

The idea of a report card can be scary. Few of us – whether we’re in school, business or government – like to be reported on or evaluated. It can hurt to feel we’ve failed.

Instead of looking at report cards this way, let’s try something different.

Suppose you’re a cook – a good one – and you want to open a new restaurant. You want it to be a success. How will you know if it is?

You’ll need ways to measure how you’re doing. For example: Comment cards – to see if customers are happy. Financial statements – to know if you’re making money. Restaurant reviews – to tell you what others think and to let the public know how good you are.

All these are types of report cards. Their purpose is to give you valuable information on what’s working, what’s not, and what you need to do to improve your restaurant and make your business successful.

That’s what this workbook is for: to help you know how your community is ‘cooking’, and discover ways to make it even better.

## How Do We Use The Workbook?

## Getting Started

“What’s our goal?”

To make our community healthier and more sustainable.

“How do we know if we’re making progress?”

Ask, measure and report what’s going on!

The workbook has four sections.

1. **Getting Started** (this section) gives an introduction to the work ahead: what to do, why, how, who and so on.
2. **Doing Your Report Card** describes 12 steps which will help you create your progress report, by collecting information and reporting it to the community.
3. **Understanding More** outlines the philosophy behind the workbook and lists over 200 potential indicators of health and sustainability.
4. **HELP and Resources** lists people, organizations and publications we think you’ll find useful.

### Hot Buttons

To make it easier to find what you’re looking for, we’ve “hot-buttoned” certain information. When you see this symbol [pg.\_\_\_\_] turn to that page to find out more about that topic.

### “12 Steps Seem Like A Lot Of Work!”

You’re right. They are. But you don’t have to do them all!

The workbook was designed so you can choose what you want to do at a given time. The guiding principle is: *Keep it sustainable*

If you only have time for one step, pick the one which appeals to you and do it! Start slowly – and grow when you’re ready. Whatever you learn about your community will be useful. The more you learn, the better.

Another tip for sustainability is: *Don’t do this by yourself*. See the “Who will do the work?” sub-section [pg. 5] for ideas on how to reduce your workload.

### Use It Like A Cookbook

We suggest you use this manual like a cookbook. If you want to prepare something “light”, start with the first two or three steps. If you want a full course dinner, try five or six. And if you want to create a banquet...

This workbook provides a cornucopia of options to choose from. Pick what fits your taste and your budget (time/resources) – and have some fun.

## Getting Started

*What Are We To Do?*

*Be the eyes, ears and voice of your community. See and speak clearly, without prejudging or hiding what you find.*

*Share the good, and the bad. Report the facts and express the feelings. Celebrate the successes and grieve the losses.*

*Heal and grow and love.*

## What Information Will We Be Gathering?

Another way to think of the report card is that it is like a *mirror* or *picture* of your community. Its purpose is to help your community see itself clearly.

**Are we healthy?**

**Are we making progress?**

To create this picture, you will need to act as the eyes, ears and voice of the community. You will be:

- **asking questions** – about peoples' values and feelings, and how they see their community;
- **collecting information** – about local conditions such as employment, income, literacy, garbage, green space and health; and
- **reporting back** – to help people see how healthy their community is.

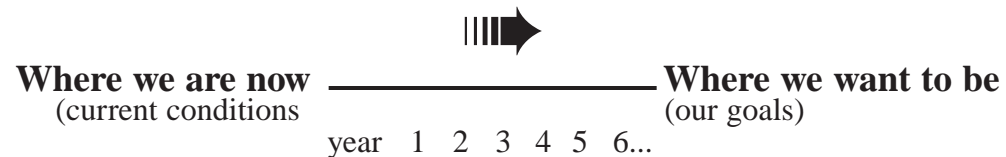
This awareness is an essential step in making progress. It helps people see what's working and what's not. And it enables us to make informed choices – based on where we are, what we want and what we need to do to create it.

**This is more than a data collection project! It is an educational process – leading to awareness, action and progress.**

*The mere acquisition of knowledge received intellectually makes no change in the soul ... It is the change of soul that matters.*

- Emmet Fox

## How Will We Use The Information?



The report card is for finding out whether your community is making progress towards its goals. The information you collect will be used to:

- ✓ see where you are now
- ✓ identify community goals
- ✓ check your past progress
- ✓ monitor future progress
- ✓ find out who/what is creating progress
- ✓ determine how healthy and sustainable your community is

It will also help you identify actions to create more progress, and give you a way to assess whether these actions are making a difference.

## Who Will Do The Work?

This workbook was written for individuals, municipalities and organizations (particularly “multisectoral” – those representing many sectors in the community) which are working to create community health and sustainability.

**We don’t want you to do all the work on your own, however.** The more you can involve others, the better. Here are a few tips on how to do this.

## Community Partnership Approach\*

Identify and contact:

### 1. Organizations already doing community progress reports, assessments or surveys, for example:

- *your local government*

Are they doing a “state of the city” or “state of the environment” report?  
A survey of public opinions?

- *the District Health Council or public health unit*

Ask if they are using the “Community Health Profile”, which is a report card on community health prepared by the Ministry of Health. **The profile is an excellent companion or complementary tool which can be used along with this workbook.**

### 2. Agencies with a direct interest in the information you’re collecting, such as:

- municipal government departments
- economic/employment development groups  
(e.g. the Chamber of Commerce, trade union council)
- social development council and local anti-poverty organizations
- waste management/recycling groups
- the police and community safety groups
- transportation planners
- health organizations
- literacy groups

### 3. Other multisectoral organizations working on health and sustainability.

e.g. local round table

Tell them what you’re doing. Ask for their help. Invite them to participate.

The community partnership approach will reduce your time, energy and costs. Your role will be a community catalyst, bringing together the people who are already doing work in each area. You can build on what’s been done and expand your health/sustainability network at the same time.

(\* adapted from the work of Kimberley, B.C. (1).)

## Getting Started

### How Long Will It Take?

Make no mistake: Reporting on your community can be a major project. The time it will take depends on how many groups are involved and what you choose to do.

Some people will select two or three steps and, working with a few volunteers, do their work over several months. Others will create a more comprehensive picture of their community, with the help of community partners, and take six months or more. And some organizations, which have paid staff, will be able to complete a report card in half this time.

Whether you do a “quick and dirty” report card – or a full and complete one – the choice is up to you. Here are three thoughts to guide you:

- 1) *Keep it simple.* It doesn't have to be perfect. You can't do everything at one time because a community is too complex.
- 2) *You get out what you put in.* Focus on creating the best progress report you can and involving other organizations in the process.
- 3) *Think of this as an ongoing project.* If the information you collect and the network you build are useful...and if you are enjoying the work... then you may want to try more steps and involve more people later on.

The bottom line is: do whatever works for you and benefits your community.

### What Else Do We Need to Know?

Some of the terms used in this workbook will need a little explanation. This includes words like: ‘healthy’, ‘community’, ‘sustainable’, and “indicators”.

These will be explained along the way; at the beginning of each step and in the **Tell Us More** section at the end of each step.

Good luck. Now let's get started...