Analysis of Madison’s Neighborhood Indicator Data

The city of Madison launched the Neighborhood Indicators Project in 2007 with the goal of helping the city understand its neighborhoods and tailor policies to their particular needs. The project compiles demographic and socio-economic data at the neighborhood and census-block group levels.

We conducted a preliminary analysis of Madison’s neighborhood indicator data to show how it can be used to characterize Madison’s neighborhoods and inform decision-making. We constructed a composite index, the Community Index (CI), to synthesize the neighborhood data into a single measure of neighborhood well-being. The CI incorporates metrics from five subcategories of the data: (1) housing quality and affordability, (2) public safety, (3) health and family well-being, (4) economic vitality, and (5) transportation.

To show how the CI can be used to describe Madison’s neighborhoods, we apply it to areas of the city with Neighborhood Resource Teams (NRTs). NRT neighborhoods have been identified as areas that would benefit from coordinated services aimed at bolstering well-being, so they serve as an insightful case study for demonstrating how the CI can be used. In particular, we show how the CI can be used to characterize the NRT neighborhoods in relation to comparable geographies elsewhere in Madison.

Our analysis of Madison’s neighborhood indicator data was limited by data availability. Much of the data was suppressed for privacy reasons or out of concerns about its accuracy. This prompted us to make the following four recommendation to the city about how it can best use and develop its data:

1. **Strengthen ties with outside organizations to manage and collaborate about data.**
   
   We recommend the city collaborate with researchers at UW-Madison eager to engage in community-based research.

2. **Bolster collection of additional data.**
   
   The city should collect additional data for each of the CI subcategories. Additionally, it should look to gathering data via surveys and qualitative sources.

3. **Look to programs in which other cities have used neighborhood data.**
   
   Numerous cities have used neighborhood data to inform local decision-making. We recommend Madison learn from and model its neighborhood data collection and analysis after such initiatives.

4. **Enhance the quantity and ease of access of data.**
   
   Madison should expand its efforts to make the data publicly available and easy to access online.

We hope that these recommendations will guide Madison’s leaders as they look to promote neighborhood well-being.