

Sustainability Trends in the Asheville Region (STAR) The Asheville-Buncombe Indicators Project

It has been said that a healthy community is one that “knows itself,” and that problems do not get fixed until they are accurately measured. Across the nation and around the world, communities are using indicator projects to evaluate their progress in human, environmental, and economic health.

In the Asheville-Buncombe area, several organizations have come together to launch a broad-based initiative built upon the best ideas and methods from other community projects. This project intends to combine community indicators with extensive community dialogue resulting in proposed action plans.

The Asheville-Buncombe HUB Sustainability Initiative and Leadership Asheville are collaborating on a plan for 2010 and beyond. HUB will focus largely upon the environment, both natural and human built. The Chamber of Commerce will supply economic data, and Leadership Asheville will concentrate initially on civic capacity.

The project will ultimately entail working together with the City, County, the research resources of local colleges and universities, and the expertise of local organizations, to publish regular reports and calls to action.

Leadership Asheville will take the lead in determining both the interpersonal and digital media outreach strategies. A portal will be developed as a comprehensive gathering space, driven by the participation that is both inclusive and diverse, and will be an avenue to inform community decision-making and spark collaborative action.

Leadership Asheville is exploring the work of Boston, as well as other indicator projects nationwide, for guidance in measuring civic capacity. Civic capacity refers to the social infrastructure — networks, organizations, institutions, gathering places, bonds of friendship, civic institutions, and communities — that together create a welcoming, informed, and inclusive society. Teams of the LA 28 class have begun work on specific measurements in the following areas:

- The comparative advantages of our region
- High rates of social capital
- Demographically representative leadership
- High rates of voter participation
- Healthy race and community relations
- Stability and investment in neighborhoods
- Welcoming and inclusive environment
- Access to information
- Strength of the nonprofit sector
- Public support and philanthropy

The LA 28 teams will complete their tasks by June 1, 2010, and there will be an exhibition of their work at the Leadership Asheville Annual Luncheon on September 15, 2010.