

Living in Niagara report

Purpose, Format and Construction Methodology

Background

The Living in Niagara report is a triennial measure of quality of life in Niagara, across 12 Sectors that align with the *Social Determinants of Health*¹. The report and its Sectors are described, built and owned by the Niagara-wide community.

Report construction is facilitated by Niagara Connects, a Niagara-wide network of people working together to plan, learn, innovate and lead community action toward a stronger future for Niagara. Niagara Connects acts as Backbone Support, in a *Collective Impact*² approach for engaging diverse players to work together to build evidence-informed action plans for transformative socio-economic change.

The report and its companion tool, www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com (NKE) are cornerstones in building a culture of evidence-informed planning for Niagara. The process of building the report weaves networks among diverse partners working together to intentionally gather, share and record data, information and knowledge. These partners agree on Suggested Action Steps to guide focused planning and decision-making.

Report Sectors

The 12 Living in Niagara quality of life Sectors are described by the Niagara-wide community. The Sectors align with the Social Determinants of Health.

- Arts, Culture and Heritage
- Community Belonging (*formerly Belonging, Volunteering, Giving and Leadership*)
- Crime, Safety, and Security
- Economic Prosperity (*formerly Economic Development, Poverty and Prosperity*)
- The Environment
- Health and Wellness
- Housing and Shelter
- Learning and Education
- People Getting Started
- Recreation and Sports
- Transportation and Mobility
- Work and Employment

Report Formats

- Print (Summary) Version – provides an overview of report findings in and across the 12 Living in Niagara Sectors. The 2014 Print Version can be downloaded at: http://www.livinginniagarareport.com/wp-content/uploads/Living_In_Niagara_2014_summary_booklet.pdf
- Online Version – www.livinginniagarareport.com provides Measures for report Indicators within each of the 12 Sectors, including data, statistics, information, reports and analysis. This information is integrated with the NKE tool, at niagaraknowledgeexchange.com

Delphi Method

When facilitating construction of each triennial Living in Niagara report, Niagara Connects uses a *Delphi Technique*³ for assessing emerging issues in Niagara. The resulting information is organized within 12 Living in Niagara quality of life Sectors, for the purpose of driving community action within and across the Sectors.

The Delphi method is based on a panel of experts making forecasts about the future. The method was originally developed by the US Army Air Corps, and further developed by the RAND Corporation in the mid-20th century. Delphi is named after the famous office of prophecy in ancient Greece.

Though originally developed for the forecasting of technological development, the Delphi method has since been used in many other applications, including policy development, needs assessment, resource management, and more.

Information Gathering

The Niagara Connects *Knowledge Broker*⁴ and data coordination team gather relevant, reliable, Niagara-focused data, statistics, information and evidence of community action in each of the 12 Living in Niagara Sectors, to inform the report. This includes:

- information resources uploaded to the Niagara Knowledge Exchange (NKE) niagaraknowledgeexchange.com platform in the 3 years since the prior Living in Niagara report was issued;
- data, statistics and information released by reliable sources related to the 12 Sectors; and
- regular scanning of work being done by diverse players within Niagara and beyond.

Identification of Community Expert Opinion Leaders (CEOLs)

One of the first steps in the report research process is to identify Niagara community leaders who have a holistic understanding of Niagara, within and beyond the particular Living in Niagara Sector in which they work. These people are called Community Expert Opinion Leaders (CEOLs). These *Experts*⁵ are identified through a *Triangulation*⁶ cross-validation technique. People working in relevant networks, philanthropy, and research in Niagara help to identify CEOLs.

CEOLs have the following qualities:

- Niagara-wide perspective;
- Ability to readily cite front-line examples of what is emerging, now, in the Living in Niagara Sector in which they work;
- Recognized as being credible; and
- Know the evidence and current best practice in the Sector.

CEOL identities are kept confidential, to remain true to best practice of the Delphi method. This is also done out of respect for the individual experts, to keep the focus on the process rather than the individuals.

Identified CEOLs are invited to the table to participate in a facilitated process that includes:

- Reviewing and strengthening the reliability of Sector-specific data and information gathered to inform the report;
- Driving report context through contributing knowledge that illuminates how vital Niagara currently is, according to current and emerging action in the Sector;
- Collaboratively describing Suggested Action Steps for future development in the region; and
- *Reaching Consensus*⁷ on their opinion about Sector-specific rating of 'where that Sector in Niagara is at, now' in terms of contributing to overall quality of life. Using the Delphi process normally takes multiple iterations of the discussion to reach a consensus among the CEOLs.

As the report construction process unfolds, technical steps taken ensure integrity of the modified Delphi method. Validating reliability of report sources supports Niagara Connects' work to build community capacity to use Niagara-focused evidence to inform focused planning and decision-making.

Sector Rating Scales

The first (baseline) Living in Niagara report was built in 2008, by community volunteers working together with Brock University researchers. The 2008 report included 11 Sectors and related Indicators, each of which was informed and ranked on a 5-level scale by 2 to 3 Community Expert Opinion Leaders (CEOLs) per Sector.

- Level 1 – In dire need of corrective action
- Level 2 – Of concern, needs attention
- Level 3 - Progress is being made
- Level 4 – We're doing well and headed in the right direction
- Level 5 – We're doing great – Niagara is a leader

The second report, built in 2011, included a twelfth Sector, Recreation and Sports, added at the request of the community. In 2011, the Sector Rating scale was expanded slightly, for increased specificity. A total of 36 CEOLs (3 per Sector) completed the Sector ratings:

- Level 1 – In dire need of corrective action
- Level 2 – Of concern, needs attention
- Level 3 (a) – A little progress is being made
- Level 3 (b) – A lot of progress is being made
- Level 4 – We're doing well and headed in the right direction
- Level 5 – We're doing great – Niagara is a leader

This same rating scale was used for the Living in Niagara-2014 report. A total of 60 people (5 per Sector) acted as CEOs to inform the Sector ratings in 2014.

For the Living in Niagara-2017 report, the total number of CEOs increased. The rating process was further refined by creating two separate rating scales, and ordering the rating levels to reflect the report's assets-based approach. Thus, CEOs in each Sector are asked to rank 'how Niagara is doing now', overall, in that Sector; and to discriminately and clearly rate the degree of progress currently being made in that Sector.

How is Niagara doing in the ____ Sector?

- Level 1 - We're doing great – let's build on our success
- Level 2 - We're doing well and headed in the right direction
- Level 3 - Of concern, requires attention
- Level 4 - Would benefit from corrective action

AND

Overall, when you think of Niagara's activity in the ____ Sector, **how much progress is currently being made?**

- Amount A - Considerable progress is being made
- Amount B - Moderate progress is being made
- Amount C - Some progress is being made
- Amount D - No progress is being made

Contact:

Mary Wiley, Niagara Connects Executive Director

ed@niagaraconnects.ca

905-688-6236

References

- ¹ **Social Determinants of Health** (SDH) are social and economic factors that influence people's health. (*Commission on Social Determinants of Health, World Health Organization, 2008*)
- ² **Collective Impact** is a framework for tackling deeply entrenched and complex socio-economic challenges. It is an innovative and structured approach to organizing the commitment of diverse players to a common agenda for achieving significant and lasting social change. (*Kania & Kramer, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter, 2011*)
- ³ **Delphi Technique** is a group process used to survey and collect the opinions of experts on a particular subject. (*Linstone, H.A. & Turoff, M., 1975, The Delphi method: Techniques and applications. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company*)
- ⁴ **Knowledge Brokers** link people to people or people to information in order to share learning, better understand each other's goals or professional cultures, influence each other's work, and forge new partnerships. (*Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement, 2009*)
- ⁵ **Expert Opinion Leadership** is achieved and sustained through a person's technical competence, social skills and compliance with values and norms of his or her current social system. Opinion leaders are defined as those individuals from whom others seek advice and information. (*Methods of Measuring Opinion Leadership, Everett M. Rogers and David G. Cartano, Ohio State University, Public Opinion Quarterly, 1962*)
- ⁶ **Triangulation** of data and expert opinion sources refers to the use of multiple methods or sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena. Triangulation is a qualitative research strategy to test validity through convergence of information from different sources. (*The Use of Triangulation in Qualitative Research, Nancy Carter et al, Quality Measurement and Improvement, ONF, 2014*)
- ⁷ **Consensus** is a group agreement that is reached after discussion, to follow a specific course of conduct. The Delphi Technique assists in this agreement; it is a method for gaining judgements on complex matters where precise information is unavailable. (*Skutsch, M., & Hall, D., 1973, Delphi: Potential users in education planning. In J.L. Barnes, 1987, An international study of curricular organizers for the study of technology. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia*)