

# Community Information Toolkit

**Building Stronger Communities  
Through Information Exchange**

## ***From the Knight Commission\****

**The United States stands at what could be the beginning of a democratic renaissance, enabled by innovative social practices and powerful technologies.**

**With multiple tools of communication, dynamic institutions for promoting knowledge and the exchange of ideas, and renewed commitment to engage in public life, Americans could find themselves in a brilliant new age. People would enjoy unprecedented capacity to fulfill their individual aspirations and to collectively shape the future of their communities. Community discussion, collaboration and accountable public decision making could make life better in every neighborhood, town and city.**

**To thrive in a democracy, America's local communities need information ecologies that support both individual and collective community life. They need accurate, relevant news and information to fuel the common pursuit of truth and the public interest. Improving local ecologies requires public policies that support the production and dissemination of relevant and credible information, enhance the capacity of individuals to engage with information and promote people's engagement with information and with one another. *Informed communities require well designed strategies to make these objectives a reality.***

\* Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*, Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, October 2009.

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Version 1.0

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To download a copy of the report, as well as all the templates and tools please visit the project website [www.infotoolkit.org](http://www.infotoolkit.org). The website includes also the primary research instruments and additional background materials.

Welcome,

The importance of local news and information has grown in the public mind in recent years, as a new digital age of communication has brought about what scholars call the “creative destruction” of traditional mass media.

Philosophically, it is easy to see why a quality supply of free flowing news and information is essential to the healthy functioning of communities. It is like an intellectual food supply for democracy, an energy supply for people’s engagement. You can’t fix or improve anything unless you know what’s falling short, or how or why life can be better.

But what does this mean, in practical terms? How does a community begin to care about news and information as a local issue? How do you get started in understanding the dizzying array of news and information options — and whether they are augmenting, partnering with or replacing traditional media? And how does all this uncertainty affect the issues people care about?

A high level inquiry that we launched four years ago — the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy — looked at these questions. The commission concluded that leaders and the general public needed more concrete ways of assessing the flow of their local news and information to understand its connection to improving their community and to take action to improve it.

So we asked ourselves if we could create such a tool. What you have in your hands is our first draft of a “Community Information Toolkit” designed to help you determine whether your media ecology is healthy and to understand why that matters to your work. It contains a simple, easy-to-use set of tools for community leaders who want to harness the power of information in identifying their communities’ strengths and in planning to address challenges.

Our partner, the Monitor Institute, with advisory support from the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project, built this starter kit after looking at what others have done to map their community information systems and testing various approaches in a few different communities.

The Toolkit is designed to be a community-driven process, not a detailed research exercise. With everything from a scavenger hunt to community discussions focused on news topics, it offers ways you can take stock of your local news and information environment. After laying the groundwork, there will be myriad ways communities can act to strengthen themselves by improving their information flows.

And there's so much that obviously needs to be done. The information explosion has brought us a world in which great details of faraway coups and disasters are available at the touch of a button, yet an understanding of local school board issues evades us. Even today, amid our relative national richness, whole segments of our population remain disconnected, with limited or no broadband access.

Since it's a work in progress, we've named this Toolkit Version 1.0. We invite you to take up this issue and innovate with us. We hope you will be inspired to test the tools in your community and share your feedback and experience to create improved Toolkits 2.0 and beyond.

***Alberto Ibargüen***

***President and CEO***

***John S. and James L. Knight Foundation***

## Overview

# Community Information Toolkit

### What's in the Toolkit

In our dynamic and increasingly digital world, the availability and use of credible news and information is one of the most powerful elements of community change. It underpins our ability to build strong communities and to achieve results we want to see in education, public safety, environmental protection and other important areas. Yet how do we take stock of our community news and information flows? How do we assess the health of our media environments, its strengths and weaknesses, and the impact it has on our work? This “Community Information Toolkit” is designed to do just that — to help you better understand your local information ecology and take action to improve it. It offers a point of view, a process and a simple, easy-to-use set of tools to help you advance your priorities through the lens of information — its availability, accessibility, quality and exchange. ***In short, this Toolkit will help community leaders like you harness the power of information to advance their goals for a better community.***

This toolkit is designed for the community foundation executive who wants to build his or her community's civic infrastructure; the local crime watch group that sees how improved police accountability is tied to freedom of information; the community development association trying to strengthen neighborhoods by giving residents a voice in local affairs; the nonprofit addressing issues from workforce development to women's rights and whose work depends on how socially connected its clients are.

The tools are intended to be straightforward, modular and versatile. You and your fellow local leaders can launch a project centered on information. Or you can use this Toolkit to incorporate dialogue and action about local information into almost any effort for community change.

To create the Toolkit, we first looked at other efforts to assess community information systems, and incorporated those lessons into our own testing in three very different cities:

- ***Macon, Georgia***
- ***Philadelphia, Pennsylvania***
- ***Greater San Jose, California***

In each pilot community, we tested a range of methods for gathering insights about the local news and information system. Workshops brought local leaders together to discuss their community's challenges and opportunities, interpret research findings and determine the relevance of information to their goals and vision.

The tools and guidance we offer here are distilled from those three rich experiments and specifically designed to support a community-led process, to be simple to use and to cost very little — provided the leadership and coordination is in place.

**With these aims in mind, we have not created a detailed research methodology to scientifically measure and index a community's complex media environment. Instead we provide a framework and guidance for strengthening your community by strengthening its information ecology.** And by "your community" we mean the community as you define and experience it — by geography, population, issue, area of interest or a blend of any of these.

**We hope that you will be inspired to test the tools and provide feedback on how they can be improved. We look forward to hearing your stories of building stronger communities through information exchange.**

## What's in the Toolkit

The **Community Information Toolkit** will guide you through the process of assessing and improving essential components of your community's information ecology. The Toolkit contains a set of resources to help you clarify your objectives for this initiative, collect relevant information, analyze the findings and incorporate them in a plan to strengthen your community by improving your local information ecology.

The Toolkit contains four sections, which are modular and built to be used at your own pace. You can follow the process in its entirety, or you can use the individual components and combine them with other planning or community change efforts.



### **Part One: Getting Started**

Will help you explore the role information can play in addressing local opportunities and challenges and for advancing your goals for a stronger community. Based on our pilot research, this chapter suggests a framework for describing a community's information ecosystem. Using the **Getting Started Template**, you will be guided through a process to help you identify a set of local issues and brainstorm the ways information affects these efforts.



### **Part Two: Designing Your Community Information Assessment**

Offers guidance for gathering data about your local information ecology. Here, you will be introduced to two, new easy-to-use research tools: the **Community Information Checklist** and the **Community Information Scavenger Hunt**. This section discusses the benefits of each tool and provides guidance for implementing them to collect data about your community. The tools are designed to be robust and reliable, affordable for local communities and easy to accomplish with volunteer support rather than expensive external consultants.



### **Part Three: Creating Your Information Scorecard**

Suggests methods for analyzing and making sense of the data you'll collect about your community's information ecology. You'll be introduced to a new reporting tool called the **Community Information Scorecard (Scorecard)** designed to help you visualize and communicate your findings. The Toolkit will explain the layout and underlying logic of the Scorecard, before walking you through the process of creating your own.



### **Part Four: Planning for Action**

Prepares you to take next steps based on the insights you've gathered.

This section guides you through the development of a **Planning for Action Template**, which helps you use the findings to inform your organization's works and improve your community's information landscape. Together the Scorecard and Action Plan will help create momentum and monitor progress toward strengthening your community by supporting a healthier information ecology.

### **Appendix**

The appendix contains several additional resources:

- *Getting Started Template*
- *Planning for Action Template*
- *Running a Successful Workshop, which offers best practices for engaging your community*
- *Workshop Facilitator's Guide*
- *Overview of the Scorecard Metrics and Analysis*

***We invite you to use the Toolkit to strengthen your community and innovate with us!***

### **Tips**

- A skilled facilitator for the workshops is a plus if you can afford one.
- Reserving funds in your budget for data entry is recommended. It can be hard to find volunteers to fulfill the job.

### **Time and Cost to Implement**

**The cost of implementing the Toolkit will vary. For example, communities must decide:**

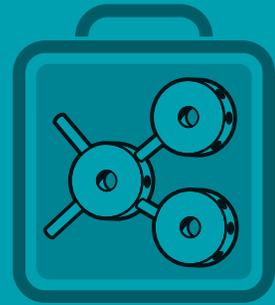
- *Will the work be carried out by volunteers?*
- *Will the leadership be paid?*
- *How will the plan be implemented?*

Assuming the use of volunteer researchers and leadership, you can follow the recommended process from start to finish for **under \$5,000**. If you decide to pay a research team to help you collect the data and analyze it, the additional costs could range from **\$7,000 to \$10,000**.

This Toolkit is flexible and can be used to probe issues large and small. Depending on how you define and set the parameters of your "community," the process could take six weeks or six months. It's purposefully designed to be adaptable and modular. Essentially, you decide the pace and the level of investment.

Part One

# Getting Started



▶ **Putting the Information Spotlight on Your Community**

▶ **A Community Information Ecosystem Map**

▶ **Working with the Getting Started Template**

Getting Started will help you explore the role information can play in addressing local opportunities and challenges and for advancing your goals for a stronger community. Based on our pilot research, this chapter suggests a framework for describing a community's information ecosystem. Using the ***Getting Started Template***, you will be guided through a process to help you identify a set of local issues and brainstorm the ways information affects these efforts.

## Putting the Information Spotlight on Your Community

Information is as vital to the healthy functioning of communities as clean air, safe streets and good schools. If the news and information ecosystem is in trouble, so is civic life. Lacking accurate and timely information, a citizenry is neither truly free nor empowered to make change. The best programs available are of no effect if the people they exist to serve are unaware of them, just as problems will go unsolved if those with the resources and the will to engage are unaware of the need.

Think about how our efforts to reform education systems suffer when parents make choices about where to send their children without quality information about school performance; how governance and public accountability deteriorate when there is limited transparency and local reporting processes; how our public health suffers when people lack the digital skills to find online medical information. Many of our community challenges are exacerbated when information on the issues we care about doesn't exist, or if people can't easily access or engage and share that information.

Many leaders across the country are working to improve their communities' well-being by strengthening their supply of credible information, and people's ability to share and access it. For example:

- *In the Los Angeles-area, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and Voto Latino - with assistance from the California Community Foundation - launched an Internet-mobile phone application to encourage Latino Youth to participate in the 2010 U.S. census.*
- *Community leaders in New York have sought to curb youth violence by disseminating youth-created videos on gun violence to improve awareness and prompt discussion.*
- *In Columbia, the University of South Carolina, Benedict College, the community foundation and media experts collaborated to increase the digital literacy of senior citizens by partnering them with college students. As a result, elderly residents use new media to express themselves in community affairs.*

## Local Perspective — Insights from the Pilot Communities

In formulating and testing the ideas in this Toolkit, we sought the insights of a diverse group of community leaders. In Macon, Philadelphia and greater San Jose, individuals from different sectors — including education, government, media and social services — were brought together to explore how information can strengthen their communities. Here are some of the ways these leaders envisioned that information can serve their strategic agendas:

### ***Education***

- Public data about individual school performance relative to local and national averages can highlight challenges that need to be tackled and be a tool for reform. Posting volunteer opportunities for parents can rapidly increase resources available to schools and teachers.
- A web-based database of curriculum can help communicate best practices and raise the bar on quality classroom instruction.

### ***Local Economy***

- Accessible, online resources on available training opportunities can help diverse communities build their pool of employable adults.
- Centralized and up to date listings of job opportunities can reduce the time it takes people to do job searches, putting people back to work more quickly.
- Local career-support resources listed and rated by users can reveal the most effective programs and best resources.

### ***Health***

- A centralized and trusted database of emergency services can reduce the time needed to find critical assistance.
- Mobile updates on infectious diseases can help families make good, timely decisions about prevention, avoidance and care — reducing community health-care costs.
- A trusted and neutral online resource can help people make sense of complex insurance plans and make better use of their benefit dollars.

### ***Public Safety***

- Publishing crime rates by neighborhood can help put pressure on government and local law enforcement to address these issues.
- Published opportunities for community members to get involved in neighborhood watch groups can increase the resources available for making communities safer.
- An online platform for anonymously reporting crimes can help solve problems and keep those who participate safe — particularly in immigrant communities.

## A Community Information Ecosystem Map

Our community information systems are made up of a vast web of interrelated elements, including:

- *Quality journalism*
- *Vibrant public libraries*
- *Accessible online government information*
- *Opportunities for individuals to freely express and exchange their views*
- *The availability of high-speed Internet*

To help communities take stock of their news and information ecology, we developed a simple way of describing it built on the Knight Commission's conclusions,<sup>1</sup> and refined through pilot site testing.

We see three broad elements of a community information ecosystem:

1. **Supply** — the availability of news and information in a community wanted and needed by citizens and residents, and the institutions that serve them.

This includes the robust supply of information in three main areas:

- *Government services and information*
- *Community news*
- *Quality of life issues such as health, education, employment, social services, arts and culture, public transit and emergency services*

2. **Skills** — individual and institutional skills, ranging from digital and media literacy to the ability to engage others, for accessing and exchanging information.

This includes the community skills that enable healthy flows of information, such as:

- *An individuals' ability to find information (including via the Internet)*
- *An individual's and the government's ability to exchange information with others and the community*

<sup>1</sup>See the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*, Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, October 2009, Appendix I 'Taking Stock: Are You A Healthy Information Community'.

3. **Infrastructure** — our community information systems are made up of a vast web of interrelated elements, including, among other things, the quality of local journalism and reporting, the vibrancy of public libraries, the accessibility of online government information, opportunities for individuals to freely express and exchange their views, and the availability of high-speed internet.



*Community Information Ecosystem Map*

These elements overlap and interact with one another to create a community’s information ecosystem. We will refer to these elements throughout the Toolkit — they will provide the basis for understanding and later scoring your local news and media environment.

## Working with the Getting Started Template

Now it's your turn. We created the **Getting Started Template**, a simple, visual tool you can use to facilitate an initial dialogue about your information ecosystem. It will help you define your community, describe your information opportunities and challenges and identify additional community champions you might want to engage in the work going forward. Completing this module will help you explore how information exchange affects your goals for a stronger, better community.

Before you begin the template, you should think about specific people and institutions from across different sectors whose collective experience could bring additional insight and resources to the table. While it's possible to use the Toolkit by yourself — as an individual leader or single organization — we strongly recommend you see this as a community-driven process and engage others who can share the work, enrich understanding and marshal support around common goals.

Similarly, we encourage you to identify an organization or association who can anchor the process of exploring your information ecology. The role of this “convener” will be to enlist others to support and participate in the project, oversee the data collection, use the research findings to create your information scorecard, host a workshop to interpret the results and help develop and oversee a plan of action. Ideally, this convener should be a highly regarded and trusted member of the community, connected to a broad and diverse set of leaders and able to encourage and motivate others and access resources as needed. The best convener in your community might be a neighborhood association, the community foundation or a community development institution.

**“Philadelphia and all communities are created and recreated every day by the practices we engage in. Information and community engagement are keys and they are also worsening. The question of the information economy, information flow, technology access for our citizens, and tools to recreate our economy are critical. We have no choice if we care about this city but to ask these questions.”**

— Philadelphia workshop participant

**Getting Started** A Community Information Toolkit

**Our Community**  
[ People and place ] 1

**Opportunities/Challenges Facing Our Community**  
2

**How Information Affects these Opportunities/Challenges**

**Supply**  
Strengths  
Weaknesses

**Skills**  
Strengths  
Weaknesses

3

**Infrastructure**  
[ Public, private, media and nonprofit sector leaders? Academia? Other? ]  
Strengths  
Weaknesses

Appendix: Getting Started Template

## What the Template Captures:

### 1. *Defining Your Community*

In exploring your local information ecology, a critical step is to define what you mean by “community.” This will help focus your inquiry on the part of your community’s information ecosystem that ties directly to the issues you care about. It will also help you better shape the role you can play in improving the free flow and exchange of information when you come to develop your **Plan for Action** in Part Four.

## Tips

- Print the Getting Started Template found in the Appendix on 36” x 48” paper.
- Make a copy for each group of five to six participants and take notes directly onto the template to record the dialogue.
- Use the template to describe and capture insights. Don’t worry about prioritizing and sorting them; this can be done later.
- Avoid trying to problem solve at this stage.
- Be as specific as possible and complete the whole template.
- Treat this as a brainstorming exercise rather than a debate; there’s no need to argue or defend a point of view.

We suggest you define your community through one of following lenses, or a blend of them:

- **Geography:** *a neighborhood, city, county (referring to ZIP codes can be helpful in defining geographic boundaries)*
- **Demographics:** *all residents or certain racial or ethnic communities and/or particular age groups*
- **Issue(s) of interest:** *such as education, public safety, health, environmental protection, workforce development or public infrastructure and transportation*

For example, you might decide to take stock of the information needs of immigrant communities or specific neighborhoods. Many decisions and actions will necessarily flow from the description of your community (what to research, who to involve in the process, etc.) so it's worth spending time on this at the beginning.

## **2. Opportunities and Challenges Facing Your Community**

All communities face multiple challenges and opportunities. Describing these — or even simply naming them — is an important step in focusing your efforts. You are not yet trying to problem solve, you are simply creating a preliminary inventory of opportunities, challenges and needs. Some of these may be drawn from previous or ongoing efforts in the community, recent research findings or things that you're working on. Capture what you can now; sort and prioritize a bit later.

## **3. Your Perceptions about How Information Affects These Challenges**

Once you've identified your specific opportunities and challenges, it's time to explore your initial assumptions about the strengths and weaknesses of your local information environment and how this might affect your community.

Refer to the elements in the community information ecosystem map and brainstorm how the strength of each element affects your work and the issues you care about. Below are a few questions to help prompt your thinking:

**Supply**

- *What is the level of local coverage on the issues you care about? Is this shrinking or expanding?*
- *How does the supply of information affect people's awareness and engagement?*
- *What sources do individuals rely on to access information about education and are these credible?*
- *How abundant and readily available is information about employment services, public transportation, emergency services, health?*
- *What are the bottlenecks in your community that affect people's ability to access information and make informed decisions?*

**Skills**

- *Are the people you work or serve with able to access valuable online resources?*
- *What are the opportunities for people in your community to express themselves and voice their concerns with others?*
- *How open are local government agencies and how effectively do they share information about the issues you care about?*

**Infrastructure**

- *What is the level of broadband penetration in your neighborhood and how does this affect residents?*
- *If the youths you work with in your community don't have Internet at home, are they able to readily find online information in their schools or in public libraries?*
- *How strong are the civic intermediaries and community organizations in areas you fund? Are they providing the basis for constructive deliberation and dialogue?*

Now that you've described your community, identified specific opportunities and challenges and laid out your assumptions about how this relates to the exchange of information, the next section of the Toolkit will help you gather data to test those assumptions and improve your understanding of your local information ecology.

## Part Two

# Designing Your Community Information Assessment



## Understanding the Research Tools

## Gathering the Data

Designing Your Community Information Assessment offers guidance for gathering data about your local information ecology. Here, you will be introduced to two, new easy-to-use research tools: the ***Community Information Checklist*** and the ***Community Information Scavenger Hunt***. This section discusses the benefits of each tool and provides guidance for implementing them to collect data about your community. The tools are designed to be robust and reliable, affordable for local communities and easy to accomplish with volunteer support rather than expensive external consultants.

## Understanding the Research Tools

When people work well together, it's generally because they trust one another and share a common understanding of the challenges they face and how to address them. Testing your assumptions and collecting data to develop a common understanding of your information ecosystem is the foundation upon which you will be able to build and execute a plan for meaningful action.

This part of the workbook offers guidance on how to document your assumptions about the current state of your community information system, and how to test those assumptions through targeted research. In this section you will find two research instruments (a **Community Information Checklist** and a **Scavenger Hunt**) along with instructions for using them.

There are many possible approaches to mapping the information ecology of a community. In our pilot process, we tested four. However, two research approaches stood out, based on their ability to improve the community's understanding of its information ecosystem, and their low cost and simplicity.<sup>2</sup> These two complementary tools (described in more detail in the next section) are the **Community Information Checklist** and the **Scavenger Hunt**.

## Gathering the Data

### The Checklist

#### **What Is It?**

- The **Checklist** is a list of simple, mainly yes-or-no questions that explores the **supply** of information in your community, and the **infrastructure** that supports the flow of information. The questions in the **Checklist** will prompt you to record the availability and prevalence of critical parts of your information ecosystem.

<sup>2</sup> We tested four approaches in the pilot communities: a Checklist, Scavenger Hunt, a resident telephone survey and a content analysis exploring online news and information in each community. For more detail on the resident telephone survey and the content analysis, please see [www.infotoolkit.org](http://www.infotoolkit.org)

**What Does it Assess?**

- The **Checklist** evaluates your community's information **supply** and **infrastructure**. The research tool assesses the availability of Internet access, information about government services and activities, digital support in libraries and schools, and civic intermediaries.

**What does it involve?**

- The **Checklist** is designed to be completed by (volunteer) researchers and will take three to five hours to complete. Each question can be answered by browsing the Internet, or by calling or visiting the local office of your school, government or library — so you just need a phone and an Internet connection to fill it in. To simplify the work, your (volunteer) researchers could also call people who are particularly knowledgeable about your community's information system, such as a librarian or reporter.
- To help make the process easier, the **Checklist** provides advice and hints, as well as a list of secondary databases that can be consulted along the way to help your researchers answer certain questions. For example, in the media section of the **Checklist** there are a few references to media watchdogs and newspaper industry websites. These will help give you information on the availability and density of media sources in your community.

**Example Questions:**

- Q. *Can you access information online about the following government services and information? For each service, tell us whether or not it is accessible and the site that provided the information.*
- Q. *How many daily newspapers are devoted primarily to providing information about your community?*
- Q. *Do your local libraries provide professional assistance for using the computer and Internet?*

**Tips**

- Only a few (volunteer) researchers need to each complete an individual *Checklist* as the results tend to be consistent and robust.
- Two to three (volunteer) researchers are sufficient to return reliable results.
- Where responses do differ, it is important that the researchers discuss why they got different results, and document this for discussion.

## The Scavenger Hunt

### Tips

#### **What Is It?**

- The **Community Information Scavenger Hunt** is a simple way to understand how people in your community experience and navigate their community's information ecosystem.
- It is a form that sets out several tasks that have people access, find, use and share certain pieces of information. Volunteers are asked to complete a set of tasks, and record whether they were able to find or share information, what sources they used and evaluate how difficult they found this process – with attention to frustrations and surprises – as well as to what they found. For those curious about research methods, the **Scavenger Hunt** is part usability study and part diary study.
- The research will go beyond the basic understanding of what information exists, and provide you with insights about how people are, or are not, finding and using information.
- In the pilot communities, individuals found the **Scavenger Hunt** to be fun and engaging, and an easy and affordable way to reveal how community members find and use information.

#### **What Does it Assess?**

- The **Scavenger Hunt** provides insight into people's experience with the information ecosystem of a community. In some sense, it doesn't matter how good the sources of information are, or how strong the infrastructure is, if people cannot navigate the system. Data from the **Scavenger Hunt** will help you understand how accessible certain parts of your information system are and individuals' skills in accessing and exchanging information. As research participants report on their experience finding the next three government meetings, sharing their opinion with their community or finding newspaper coverage of the recent budget plan, this tool shows whether people were able to find the information, how long it took and how challenging it was to do so.

- When recruiting Scavenger Hunters, think about the community you want to understand and recruit participants who represent a diverse cross-section of that community.
- Whether you define your community in terms of geography (e.g., Philadelphia), demography (e.g., elders), or issue area (e.g., at-risk teens), be sure to recruit participants who reflect the different ages, ethnicities, education levels and socioeconomic groups within your community boundaries.
- The key is to get input from the different perspectives of the sub-groups that make up your community.

### **What Does it Involve?**

- The **Scavenger Hunt** should be filled in by individual members of your community. It will take each participant about two hours to complete. The subjective nature of the tasks requires participation from a larger set of community members, so aim to have 12 to 15 completed **Scavenger Hunt** forms. The more people fill it in, the more reliable the overall results.
- When recruiting *Scavenger Hunters*, think about the community you want to understand and recruit participants who represent a diverse cross section of that community. Whether you define your community in terms of geography (e.g., Philadelphia), demography (e.g., elders) or issue area (e.g., at-risk teens), be sure to recruit participants who reflect the different ages, ethnicities, education levels and socioeconomic groups within your community. The key is to get input from the different perspectives of the subgroups that make up your community.

### **Example Questions:**

- Q. *Choose a recent event in your community that was widely reported in the news and find three news pieces that each reported different information about the event.*
- Q. *Imagine you just heard some important information about your community and you want to share your opinion about this information. Hypothetically, where would you share your opinion so that the most people would hear it?*
- Q. *Find a place online that provides instructions on how to renew your driver's license.*

## **Some Research Caveats**

*Our goal was to build tools to easily and affordably evaluate a community's information ecosystem. What you have here are tools that are easy to interpret and will work in different types of communities and across a range of environments. But we admit that one area of measurement challenged us. We have not yet come up with a quick, clear way to verify the quality of local journalism. The Knight Commission, scholars and community leaders all recognize the importance of quality journalism. Yet there isn't an efficient, agreed-upon way to measure it. Definitions are too varied; content audits too costly; journalism awards too narrow. So we are, for now, depending upon the more measurable metric of media density: how many media outlets report on the local community – from daily and weekly newspapers to radio stations, and from blogs to television.*

*This measure of density is a first indicator of the strength of the media system, and helps communities determine whether or not key media outlets exist. We encourage leaders to expand on this measure by discussing their own experience with the quality of these outlets: How well do they cover the news that matters to you? How accurate, fair and contextual is their coverage? How timely, relevant and useful? In what ways could it be improved? These complementary approaches will enable communities to build a robust understanding of the quality of their local media providers.*

## Other Research Tools

**We recommend that communities complete the *Checklist* and *Scavenger Hunt*. If you have additional appetite and budget, feel free to augment this basic research as you see fit.**

***Other research tools include:***

- *Interviews with subject-matter experts about specific aspects of your community information system*
- *Interviews with a diverse set of community members about their information experience, either through a series of one-on-one conversations or through a formal survey*
- *Focus groups on a particular aspect of your community information system or involving a particular subgroup of individuals.*

In our pilot project we developed a phone survey to understand residents' attitudes toward and behavior within their community's information system. We launched this survey via landline and mobile phone and reached over 500 community members in each pilot city. (We used a telephone rather than an online survey to avoid excluding key subpopulations that may not have easy Internet access.) This survey returned interesting insights about the sources community members use and trust, how connected they are to one another, how well they think their government and schools are performing, and much more. We chose not to recommend that every community use this tool and have not included it in the Toolkit because of the feedback we received about the limited usefulness of the data. In addition, the high cost (around \$15,000 per community) involved in conducting the research, we found was not worth the additional benefit; in many cases the survey confirmed information gathered in the ***Checklist*** and ***Scavenger Hunt***. However, if you would like to see the full set of questions we used in the phone survey and learn more about how to use this tool, please visit [www.infotoolkit.org](http://www.infotoolkit.org).

## Other Efforts to Assess Community Information

**In creating this Toolkit, we looked at previous efforts to assess community information systems. Their research methods varied in type, scope and cost. We have drawn on the valuable lessons learned; however, because our focus was on developing a simple set of tools that could be inexpensively replicated to understand the skills, infrastructure and supply of information, the approach we have developed differs from previous studies.**

Some of the main, recent studies are listed below – for more information see [www.infotoolkit.org](http://www.infotoolkit.org).

- The Chicago Community Trust and the Community Media Workshop conducted a survey of online information in the city, capturing data on popular news and audiovisual sites and the most common types of online content. In addition, they conducted a resident survey and several focus groups, and gathered input from local leaders on information needs.<sup>3</sup>
- The Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism coded the flow of content from all local news outlets in Baltimore over a one-week period. The research found that the city’s news landscape had rapidly expanded, but newspapers were still the predominant source for “news.”<sup>4</sup>
- The New America Foundation looked at the information health of five American cities: Washington, D.C.; Seattle, Wash.; Scranton, Pa.; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.; and the Research Triangle in North Carolina. Each community report was developed by researchers who extensively examined secondary sources and local websites, conducted interviews and undertook some content analysis.<sup>5</sup>
- In Wisconsin, the Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County hosted a workshop in which 100 residents discussed their information needs and assessed the health of their community’s information ecology.

<sup>3</sup> <http://communitymediaworkshop.org/newnews/category/about/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.journalism.org/analysis\\_report/how\\_news\\_happens](http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/how_news_happens)

<sup>5</sup> <http://mediapolicy.newamerica.net/dashboard>

Part Three

# Creating Your Information Scorecard



## Analyzing Your Data

## Community Information Scorecard Overview

## Building Your Community Information Scorecard

Creating Your Information Scorecard suggests methods for analyzing and making sense of the data you'll collect about your community's information ecology. You'll be introduced to a new reporting tool called the **Community Information Scorecard (Scorecard)** designed to help you visualize and communicate your findings. The Toolkit will explain the layout and underlying logic of the Scorecard, before walking you through the process of creating your own.

Once you have the **Checklist** and **Scavenger Hunt** results in hand, then what? You didn't start down this path just to amass data; you're in pursuit of insights. Ultimately, you want to use those insights to create action and strengthen your community. This section provides guidelines and tools for reviewing and generating insights from the data you collected.

## Analyzing Your Data

Possessing a rich set of data can feel like a blessing and a curse. You know there are treasures to be unearthed, but digging for these treasures can seem daunting at first. Here are some suggestions for analyses — gleaned from our experiences in the pilot communities — to get you started:

- **Pay Attention to Sources:**

The **Checklist** and **Scavenger Hunt** will tell you the sources people in your community rely on for their news and information. Make a list of these sources so that you can see where people go to find information and where gaps in the supply, diversity and accessibility of information may exist.

- **Identify Information Bottlenecks:**

After gathering insights about the supply of information in your community, look for the places where the flow of information gets stuck. Review the **Scavenger Hunt** results to see where your hunters faced difficulties navigating their information landscape. Which resources did they find difficult to locate and use? What challenges did they fail to complete? The **Checklist** answers will also help reveal infrastructure and connectivity challenges in your community.

- **Dive into Demographics:**

Aggregated data (summaries and averages for the whole community) can hide meaningful underlying stories. Take a look at your results based on participant demographic information and geographic indicators to see how different people experience their information ecosystem. Do certain ethnic groups indicate a better supply of community news? Do some age groups voice more skepticism about infrastructure or exhibit greater digital media literacy skills?

- **Benchmark Your Data:**

A number is meaningless without context. Start by comparing your results to your own expectations. What surprises you in your findings? As others start testing these tools, you'll be able to share your data and compare your results with those of other communities'. And, of course, if you repeat the **Checklist** and **Scavenger Hunt** exercises in future years, you'll be able to see how things are changing in your community and refine your own plans accordingly.

## Community Information Scorecard Overview

If a picture is worth a thousand words, a scorecard is worth a thousand insights. A *Scorecard* is a type of report used to communicate data simply and visually. *Scorecards* can be a powerful way to help stakeholders build a common understanding of a community, an issue or a set of challenges.

We developed the **Community Information Scorecard** to help you understand, interpret, visualize and communicate the responses collected from the **Checklist** and **Scavenger Hunt**. The **Scorecard** converts the raw data you collected and displays color-coded tiles that rate the strength of each component of your community's information system. One important caveat: the ratings are indicative, not absolute. In other words, rather than seeing these ratings as akin to scores on a test, you should view them as sign posts showing opportunities where a community might want to focus its efforts to more deeply understand and act.

The **Scorecard** addresses the three elements of a community information ecosystem: the **supply** of information, the **infrastructure** for delivering information and the **skills** needed to access that information and engage with the community. It shows the current state of the individual components that make up each of these three elements:

- **Supply: Availability of information in a community**

The three components of supply related to the availability of:

1. *Government services and information,*
2. *Community news*
3. *Self-improvement and quality-of-life information*

- **Skills: Individual and institutional skills for accessing and exchanging information**

The community skills that enable a healthy flow of information include:

1. *Individuals' ability to access information,*
2. *Individuals' ability to exchange information, and*
3. *Governments' ability to exchange information.*

- **Infrastructure: Existing channels to deliver and exchange information**

The six components to a healthy information infrastructure relate to the existence, strength and relevance of:

1. *Media*
2. *Broadband Internet*
3. *Libraries*
4. *Schools*
5. *Civic intermediaries*
6. *Government*

An example of a completed **Scorecard** is presented on the following page. The left side of the **Scorecard** shows the high-level concepts and questions that comprise the ratings. The boxes on the right show the overall results for each component. The strength of each component is calculated based on specific set of metrics collected from **Checklist** and **Scavenger Hunt**. The metrics used in the **Scorecard** are explained in the Appendix.

The **Scorecard** is a Microsoft Excel workbook that analyzes and visualizes the data from the **Checklist** and **Scavenger Hunt** collection tools. It compiles raw data from the **Checklist** and **Scavenger Hunt** and provides color-coded composite scores:

- **Red = Comparatively Poor**  
Indicates a problem and that substantial improvement is needed
- **Yellow = Fair**  
Indicates the need for some improvement
- **Green = Comparatively Good**  
Indicates a strong part of the information ecosystem to be sustained

Your completed **Scorecard** will give you a simple, intuitive way of communicating the challenges and opportunities present in your information ecosystem. It will show you and others at a glance where your information system is strong and needs to be sustained, and where it is weak and may be in need of improvement. It also provides a baseline record of where you are today to help set benchmarks for improvement and to track progress.

Community Information Scorecard

COMMUNITY

DATE

In a healthy information ecosystem, information **supply** is robust in four areas: government services and information, community news, citizen information exchange, and self-improvement and quality of life. These components are scored based on the following questions:

- Is relevant information about the government activities and services widely shared?
- Is there information available about community news and events?
- Do citizens have access to information shared by their peers?
- Is there quality of life and self-improvement information available to these community members (e.g., health, recreation, adult education, etc.)?

**Supply**

<p>Government Services and Information</p>  <p>Fair</p>	<p>Community News</p>  <p>Fair</p>	<p>Self-improvement and Quality of Life</p>  <p>Good</p>
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The skills that enable healthy flows of information include individuals' ability to access and exchange information, and institutions' ability to exchange information. These components are scored on the following questions:

- How do individuals use digital and traditional media to access information?
- How do individuals exchange information with each other?
- How does the government solicit feedback and exchange information with the community?

**Skills**

<p>Individuals' Ability to Access Information</p>  <p>Fair</p>	<p>Individual's Ability to Exchange Information</p>  <p>Fair</p>	<p>Government's Ability to Exchange Information</p>  <p>Poor</p>
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The six indicators of a healthy information **infrastructure** are high-speed internet, schools, libraries, government, civic intermediaries, and media. The score for each component is based on its existence and relevance to your community, and evaluates each along the following questions:

- Is internet accessible?
- Are schools providing digital curriculum and performing well?
- Do libraries provide access and support to use digital media?
- Does the government share information and provide outlets for community members to share their feedback with local officials?
- Do civic intermediaries connect and support the community?
- Does a variety of media outlets provide news about the community?

**Infrastructure**

<p>Internet</p>  <p>Good</p>	<p>Schools</p>  <p>Poor</p>	<p>Libraries</p>  <p>Good</p>
<p>Government</p>  <p>Fair</p>	<p>Civic Intermediaries</p>  <p>Fair</p>	<p>Media</p>  <p>Fair</p>

## Building Your Community Information Scorecard

Once you've completed the research tools, you'll be ready to build your own **Community Information Scorecard**. The scorecard compiles data from the **Checklist** and **Scavenger Hunt** and highlights initial findings about the information ecosystem of your community. The **Scorecard** document contains detailed explanations to guide your interaction with the tool. Take the following steps to create your own **Scorecard**:

- **Download the Scorecard Template**  
The **Scorecard** is an Excel workbook available at [www.infotoolkit.org](http://www.infotoolkit.org). Download and open the file titled "Community Information Scorecard."
- **Input Your Data**  
In the workbook, you will be instructed to input (paste) raw data from the responses you collected to each question on the **Checklist** and **Scavenger Hunt** into select worksheets.
- **Data Analysis**  
The workbook is programmed to perform automated calculations based on the raw data you enter. It takes the individual responses you collected and then averages, scores, weights and aligns them with the relevant elements of your community information ecosystem map (e.g. Internet access).
- **Data Visualization**  
Based on this analysis, the **Scorecard** will score your community's performance for each indicator using the color-coded system. These summary scores will appear on the first worksheet in the workbook.

### Inputting Your Data into the Scorecard Template

- When you open up the **Scorecard Template** Excel workbook, input the data you collected into the last two worksheets in the document. To access these worksheets, find the tabs along the bottom of the workbook named "**Checklist**" or "**Scavenger Hunt**." If you're having trouble finding these tabs, go to bottom of the main worksheet and move all the way to the right.
- The worksheets contain one row for each respondent (i.e., the individuals who filled out the **Checklist** or the **Scavenger Hunt**), with each column corresponding to a question posed in the research tools. For each respondent, move across the row and enter their answers in the corresponding cells.

You began this process by identifying questions about information needs and opportunities in your community. You then collected data to address these questions and summarized your insights from the research into a **Scorecard** that communicates the strengths and weaknesses of your community's information systems today. You're now ready to move into the next part of the Toolkit — **Planning for Action** — to convert your findings into concrete steps for improving your community.

Part Four

# Planning for Action



## Engaging Local Leaders

## Working with the Planning for Action Template

Planning for Action prepares you to take next steps based on the insights you've gathered. This section guides you through the development of a ***Planning for Action Template***, which helps you use the findings to inform your organization's works and improve your community's information landscape. Together the ***Scorecard*** and Action Plan will help create momentum and monitor progress toward strengthening your community by supporting a healthier information ecology.

**“Today we’re going to build our understanding of the importance of information vitality for communities, consider how we can strengthen our community through information exchange, plan projects that will strengthen our efforts through the strategic use of information, and see who wants to be involved moving forward.”**

— David Sawyer, workshop facilitator

Quality news and information is required if people are to participate fully in the lives of their communities. Accurate and timely information shared in a way that’s accessible — and that flows easily from its sources to where it’s most needed — is a hallmark of a transparent and accountable government, a central feature of an effective nonprofit sector, and an essential component of a successful, ethical private sector.

Time and time again, better information is essential to community change. A community faces problems if information on the issues it cares about doesn’t exist, or if people don’t know about or can’t get at or use the information. Whatever the challenge or opportunity that your organization or community faces, there’s undoubtedly a role for higher quality and better information exchange.

- *Local activists confronting hate crimes turn to information to better understand crime rates and patterns.*
- *Parents concerned with their family’s education and well-being look at graduation rates and test scores across schools to advocate for improvements in their children’s classrooms.*
- *Workforce development agencies collect and share valuable information about employers’ growth plans to predict training needs and improve skills in their community.*

The **Scorecard** is a hook for engaging community leaders and starting a conversation. It will both surprise and galvanize by offering a new way of looking at the strength of your community through the lens of information — its availability, accessibility, quality and exchange.

**There will be myriad ways communities can act to improve their news and information flows to strengthen their community — and we fully expect those to vary from community to community.** In this section, we offer a simple set of ideas for how to use the **Scorecard** to involve others in conversations about the issues you identified.

## Engaging Local Leaders

Working with a group of interested individuals and local leaders, start by showing them the **Scorecard**. Ask them:

- *Are the findings better or worse than you expected?*
- *What surprises you?*
- *Where are the obvious areas requiring attention?*

The goal is to examine the findings from the **Scorecard** and return to the opportunity or challenge you identified at the beginning of the Toolkit and ask what can be done.

In our pilot process, we gathered a diverse group of 20 to 30 local leaders in each community — men and women of all ages from the public, private and nonprofit sectors, including representatives from local government, media and academia, etc. We found that discussions about local information systems provided a unique and compelling entry point for individuals to think about their community's openness, culture, values and aspirations.

**“What struck me most about the two days together is how it got folks thinking about how we can improve our community. The process really got my group focused on the most important issues for this community. That is huge. And they are excited about reconvening. In all my work over the years, the *Scorecard* process was probably the most meaningful environment to bring folks together to envision the common good. The process helped me understand that everything we do (whether it's Knight Foundation or anything else here) is based on the free exchange of timely and accurate information.”**

— Beverly Blake, Knight Foundation Program Director for Macon, Ga

## Working with the Planning for Action Template

Moving efficiently from identifying problems and analyzing data to proposing solutions is critical. Capturing new ideas in real time is one way to sustain the momentum of the changes that people want in their communities. Tabletop templates can be effective tools for helping people reflect new thinking, because they appeal to those who are verbal as well as those who have a visual orientation. The **Planning for Action Template** is an accessible, easy-to-use frame for planning.

**Planning for Action** A Community Information Toolkit

**1 Our Vision**

**2 Challenges / Barriers** **3 The Role of Information**

**4 Action Plan**

What	Who
1. ....	1. ....
2. ....	2. ....
3. ....	3. ....
4. ....	4. ....

**5 Needed Resources (Finances, Leadership, Partnerships)**

**6 Immediate Next Steps**

Appendix: Planning for Action Template

### What the Template Captures:

#### 1. **Vision**

The Template begins by asking participants to set out a vision. What are the changes you and your fellow community champions want to see? Note the similarities and differences in the group's thinking as you plan ahead to specific action steps. In the vision discussion you should be looking for individuals who might be willing to lead specific initiatives.

The vision statement needs to be inspiring but also specific enough to focus the discussion. It might have something to do with your aspirations for community economic development, for example:

- *We will have a vibrant urban core, supported by sustainable practices and entrepreneurial activity, with neighborhoods where people want to live, work and play.*

Or it might focus on a specific group of people in your community, for example:

- *We seek an education system that puts children at the center and provides opportunities for all students to be engaged, and develop their individual skills, knowledge and confidence.*

## 2. **Barriers and Opportunities**

After forming a vision, you'll need to identify the barriers to as well as the opportunities for change.

When you discuss barriers, lack of funding will come up without fail on everyone's list. Money always seems too limited, but it's never the only barrier. Acknowledge the issue of limited resources, then try to help the group move quickly to a deeper discussion of what underlies the lack of resources and what other barriers there are in the community.

In thinking about opportunities, consider the partners that have an interest in the issues you care about and whose networks and relationships will be able to foster new thinking, enhance your knowledge and create momentum in the community.

## 3. **The Role of Information**

The next step is to brainstorm. Thinking back to the *Getting Started Template* you completed at the beginning of this Toolkit, where you discussed how information relates to your community's needs. With insights from your research and your new **Scorecard**, refresh that thinking. For each barrier and opportunity identified, come up with at least one way in which information can be part of a solution.

#### 4. *Action Plan (What and Who)*

The next question is what to do about it all. There may well be more ideas for action than resources or leadership needed to make them a reality. If the set of ideas you've brainstormed amount to an overwhelming level of effort, you'll need to prioritize. If all the action steps seem urgent and important and the leadership is clear, consider a phased approach to implementing your plan.

As you discuss what might be done and who might lead the effort, ask yourself these questions:

- *What is most urgent?*
- *What will have the greatest impact?*
- *What is affordable given our resource constraints?*
- *Where is the leadership apparent?*

#### 5. *Resources Needed*

Hopefully, some of the things you want most to pursue seem feasible. Use this area of the template to estimate the resources needed to take on those high priorities. By resources we mean things like money, people, time, expertise and knowledge.

#### 6. *Immediate Next Steps*

What will it take to get you started? Next steps might be anything from presenting the **Scorecard** findings to elected officials or fundraising to address needs. Be as specific as possible about the specific stakeholders and the roles they'll need to play — who, what, and when.

Bottom line: community processes are successful when they encourage the richest possible dialogue among participants. Quality exchange will create better outcomes for your community.

On the next page is one example of how community leaders in Wisconsin are using insights about their local information system to strengthen their work. We hope it provides you some inspiration as you think about how to harness the power of information to advance your goals for a better community.

In the Appendix, you will find notes about how to run an effective workshop. ***Now all that remains is for you to take action to build a stronger community!***

## Changing the Community Conversation

Inspired by the Knight Commission, the Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County (Wisconsin) conducted workshops and focus groups to better understand their community's information ecology. Separately, as part of 'Workforce Central', the local National Fund for Workforce Solutions project, the foundation surveyed service providers — including public agencies, faith-based groups, job centers and technical colleges — to identify redundancies and opportunities for collaboration. The two efforts converged in unexpected ways.

Both revealed the lack of information flow among the more than 50 service providers supporting dislocated workers and the underemployed. Each organization was collecting duplicative information about their clients, even though they had many clients in common. Their conclusion: If they could more effectively exchange information, they could improve services in their community.

The Community Foundation approached the MIT Center for Future of Civic Media with a guiding question: What if you designed information flows around the individual client? The team spent time understanding clients' needs — where they got information and how they connect to resources. The research revealed a reliance on informal personal networks, and clients' feelings of being marginalized in a system they viewed as overly burdensome.

The solution now being prototyped and tested in South Wood County: One.me, a platform like Facebook and LinkedIn for clients where they can enter their personal data and choose to share it with multiple agencies. This information sharing across multiple agencies is controlled by the client and potentially transformational.

**“Understanding more about our community's information ecology and our relationship with MIT shifted people's thinking completely. Now the conversation is about how clients can be supported to own and share their information. It's an experiment at improving the effectiveness of our workforce efforts and the individual empowerment of dislocated workers by supporting better information exchange in our community.”**

*— Kelly Lucas, CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County,*

Version 1.0

# Community Information Toolkit: Appendix

**Getting Started Template**

**Planning for Action Template**

**Running A Successful Workshop**

**Workshop Facilitator's Guide**

**Overview of the Scorecard Metrics and Analysis**

## Getting Started

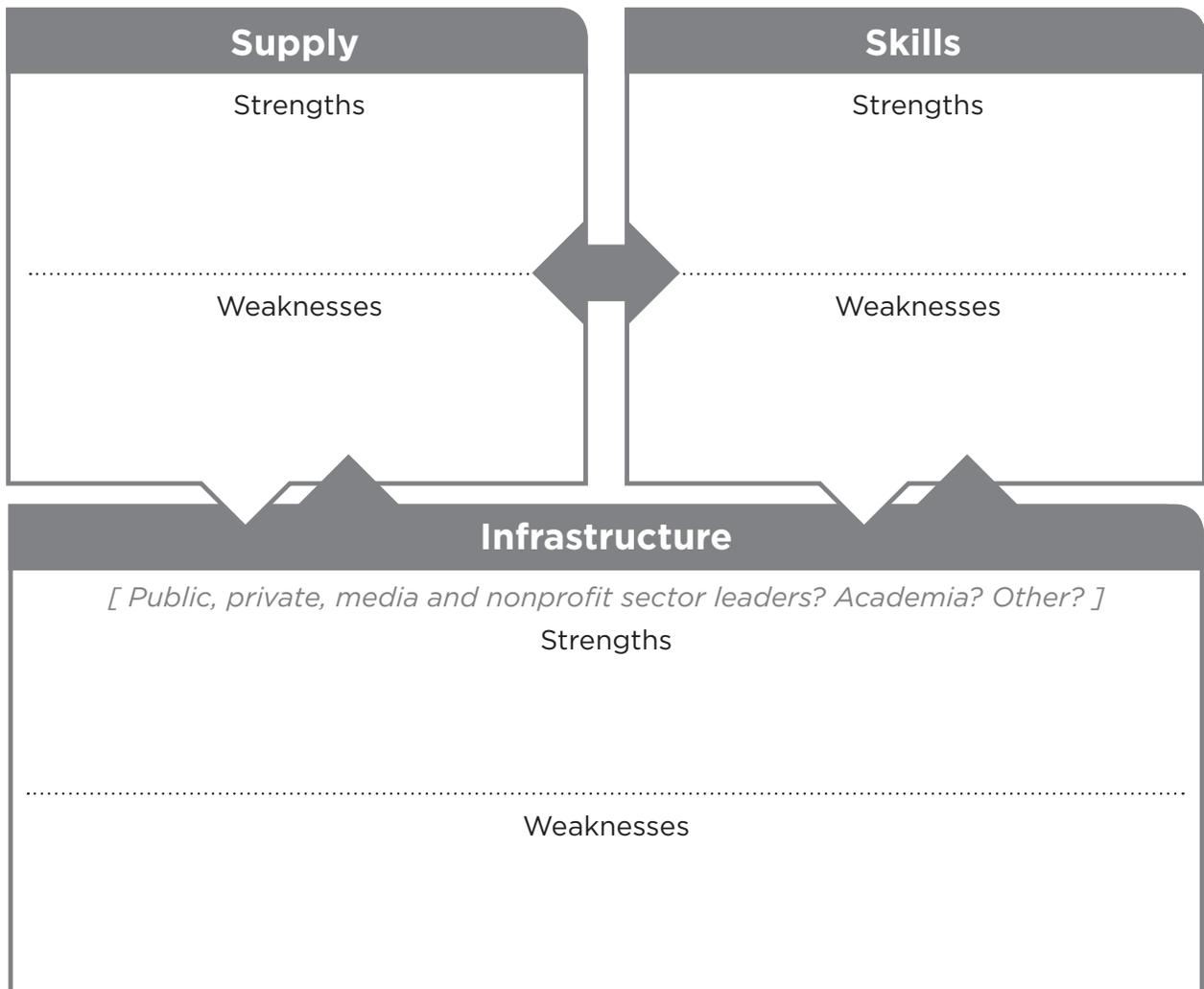


## A Community Information Toolkit

**Our Community**  
*[ People and place ]*

**Opportunities/Challenges Facing Our Community**

### How Information Affects these Opportunities/Challenges



**Planning for Action**



**A Community Information Toolkit**

**Our Vision**

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**Challenges / Barriers**

---

**The Role of Information**

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**Action Plan**

What	Who
1. ....	1. ....
2. ....	2. ....
3. ....	3. ....
4. ....	4. ....

**Needed Resources (Finances, Leadership, Partnerships)**

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**Immediate Next Steps**

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## Running A Successful Workshop

The Community Information Toolkit lays out an approach to building stronger communities through information exchange. This section offers tested guidelines for a successful, workshop-based community engagement process along with a sample agenda, and a detailed guide for facilitators.

In the pilot communities, we experimented with the alternatives of a single day workshop (to accommodate busy schedules) and two workshop days held several weeks apart (to encourage deeper connections among participants, and to offer time to reflect on the research findings.) Based on the experience with the pilot communities, we believe either can work. If you have the luxury of two days, consider accomplishing the first three modules on Day 1 and modules four and five on Day 2. Only you will know whether your community is primed and ready to move from analysis to action in a single day or if you need to bring people together several times over a period of weeks or even months to develop the understanding and commitment that will allow them to act collectively. Note: the workshop modules mirror the Parts of this Toolkit and the Table Top Templates are called back into action to help you with the task of organizing and facilitating meaningful dialogue.

### Sample Workshop Agenda

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>Module I:</b>   | <b>Forming the Community (est. 45 – 60 minutes)</b><br><i>Welcome, Introductions, Review of Goals and Agenda</i>   |
| <b>Module II:</b>  | <b>Identifying Challenges and Articulating a Vision (est. 60 – 90 minutes)</b><br><i>Working with the Getting Started Template</i>   |
| <b>Module III:</b> | <b>Understanding the Context (est. 60 - 120 minutes)</b><br><i>Presentation and Discussion of Research Findings and Scorecard</i>  |
| <b>Module IV:</b>  | <b>Developing a Plan (est. 120 – 180 minutes)</b><br><i>Working with the Planning for Action Template</i>  |
| <b>Module V:</b>   | <b>Surfacing Commitments and Closing the Workshop (est. 60 minutes)</b><br><i>Gauging the Commitment of the Group</i><br><i>Reflecting on Lessons Learned and Hopes Moving Forward</i> |

### Small Group Work

Workshop modules two, three and four all recommend small group work. Here are a few tips for making small group work successful.

- *Ask for a volunteer to take notes and for a reporter to summarize the dialogue later for the full group.*
- *Remind your participants of the rules of good small group work — keep the conversation moving, involve everyone, listen well, ask questions, honor diverse perspectives, enjoy the dialogue, record highlights of the conversation.*
- *If you're using templates, encourage participants to take notes directly on the template so that you have a good record of the dialogue.*
- *Ask the small groups to post their notes or completed templates on the wall once completed so that everyone can see the work of the other groups.*

## Workshop Facilitator's Guide

### **Module I: Forming the Community (est. 45 - 60 minutes)**

*Welcome, Introductions, Review of Goals and Agenda*

**Welcome** - Framing the event as an engagement and strategy project is both accurate and compelling, and signals to participants the aspiration to have rich conversations but also to plan for action. If you're holding an all day workshop covering all five modules of work, in kicking off the day, you might want to say something like this:

*Today we're going to build our understanding of the importance of information vitality for communities, consider how we can strengthen our community through information exchange, plan projects that will strengthen our efforts through the strategic use of information, and see who wants to be involved moving forward. That's the way the agenda flows and I'll explain each section in more depth as we move along. But first let's get a sense of who's in the room and start the process of building our community. We'll begin with two short exercises are helpful and fun and that will quickly connect our group with both the topic and each other.*

Ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way is essential to any community engagement process. Two techniques, Stand Up/Sit Down and Pair and Share provide participants with personal reference points to better understand and appreciate the comments made by others in the room. This connection is especially helpful when, later, you call for commitments to action.

**Understand who's in the room: *Stand Up/Sit Down*** is a quick way for group members to learn who's in the room without investing a lot of time in lengthy self-introductions. Simply ask people to stand up for a couple of seconds if a category applies to them (e.g. media representative, nonprofit leader, academic...) Include one or two categories that are off-topic and offer an opportunity to get to know the personal side of participants (e.g. pet owner, parent, or native Spanish-speaker). This exercise also signals that the meeting will be dynamic and participatory.

**Connect participants to build a strong learning and planning community: *Pair and Share*** consists of five very short conversations with five different people to build trust and connect participants to the work of the day. Invite participants to stand and pair up with someone they don't know, or don't know well, then pose a question. Give pairs about two minutes, then ask folks to find a new partner, and give them a new question.

Example ***Pair and Share*** questions:

- *Why are YOU here today?*
- *Where do you get most of your information these days?*
- *Why does a free flow of information matter to a community?*
- *How would better information improve how your organization functions?*
- *What are your hopes for today? What is success from your perspective?*

After all five pairs have shared, take the next 10 minutes to go through each question as a whole group and ask a few people to share what they heard so everyone can get a sense of the discussions.

## Workshop Facilitator's Guide Continued

As this module ends, people have a good sense of who else is in the room and feel connected to the purpose and the other participants. The final question about hopes and success for the day gives you a good sense of the expectations of participants and provides a segue to the next module.

---

**Module II:**                    **Identifying Challenges and Articulating a Vision (est. 60 - 90 minutes)**  
*Working with the Getting Started Template*

Before you'll know what to do — or what can be done — you need a compelling vision linked to known challenges and opportunities. The **Getting Started Template** is a simple, visual protocol designed to help you facilitate this opening dialogue. It will focus the discussion and reduce the facilitation burden.

**Small Group Work** — Allow for at least 45 minutes for each small group to work with the *Getting Started Template* to describe the community they most want to serve, identify opportunities, needs and challenges and begin to think about how information can help address these.

**Whole Group Work** — Reserve 45 minutes or so for the small groups to report out and for the whole group and to discuss areas of alignment and differences across the groups. Be clear that you want a summary report out — not a full recount of each small group discussion. It helps if you ask the reporters to share only a few highlights or insights from their group so that there will be time at the end of this module for a broader dialogue in plenary.

It's good to capture notes on this final discussion as inputs to the action planning that comes a bit later.

At the end of this module, you will have a good record of the participants' points of view on the challenges facing their community and they will have a greater understanding of how information might help address those challenges. You'll also see where the assumptions and aspirations of participants are aligned or not which will help in creating meaningful action plans

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**Module III:**                    **Understanding the Context (est. 60 - 120 minutes)**  
*Presentation and Discussion of Research Findings and Scorecard*

**Present Your Findings** — This is a critical part of the process. In fact, the first two modules are largely preparation for this central piece of work where workshop participants engage with data about the strengths and weaknesses of their community's information supply, skills and infrastructure. This is where participants develop a common understanding of how their community information system works today so that they can make judgments about what needs to be done to sustain what's good and build what's weak.

Bring the results of your **Community Information Checklist** and **Community Information Scavenger Hunt** to this module. If you've already analyzed the data and developed your **Community Information Scorecard**, pass it out and let participants follow along as highlights from the research are explained. The presentation should take no about 20 minutes - 30 if you take questions during the presentation.

## Workshop Facilitator's Guide Continued

*Don't forget to thank those present who might have participated in helping complete the **Checklist** and **Scavenger Hunt**.*

**Small Group Work** — Again, working in small groups, give participants about 45 minutes to deeply consider, react to, and understand the research findings. Provide each participant with copies of the **Scorecard** and any other summary of your research that you want to share.

Ask each group to focus on the following questions:

- *Does this story of our community ring true for you? Why or why not?*
- *What else do you wish you knew about information vitality in our community? How might you find out?*

**Whole Group Work** — Rather than have small groups report out table by table, simply engage the whole group in discussion (30 – 45 minutes depending on time available) using the focusing questions. Take notes on highlights and insights. No doubt some ideas will emerge here about what to do about the state of information in your community. You're not quite ready to plan — that's the next module. But take note of ideas so that you don't lose them and can refer to them later.

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### **Module IV:**                    **Developing a Plan (est. 120 – 180 minutes)** *Working with the Planning for Action Template*

**Set the stage** — As you transition from discussing data to planning, ask workshop participants these two questions:

- *What are the most successful community initiatives you have participated in?*
- *What made them successful?*

*(FYI, Successful community initiatives almost always have committed leadership, and pursue goals that are SMART - Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic and Timely. Other elements of success might include the support of policy makers and/or funders, partnerships among organizations who share a common goal, a strong plan, capable management and/or good media coverage.)*

Take notes on this conversation on a flip chart and post the list of success factors visibly in the room. You may want to make reference to it later, as you assess the strength of various ideas for action.

**Small Group Work** — In this module, small groups work with the Planning for Action template to suggest ideas that will improve or enhance the information ecosystem in their community and that are tied to broad community improvement goals. If the community opportunities, needs and challenges identified in the earlier module fall into themes or issue areas, divide participants into groups to work on specific issues (e.g. youth, immigrants, elders.) Or you might divide up around issues (e.g. public safety, transportation, housing or economic development.)

## Workshop Facilitator's Guide Continued

Give the groups 45-60 minutes to work through the questions on their template with the frame of their focus issue. Remind the groups that this is high level planning, and to try not to get too deep into the details. Encourage small groups to work their way through the template. Monitor progress and offer suggestions if they seem stuck. Ideally, each group will come up with 3-5 potentially powerful initiatives.

**Whole Group Work** — Ask each small group to share highlights from their discussion. To keep these report-outs from becoming unnecessarily long and repetitive, ask for each team to report on only one or two potential actions or initiatives. And ask them to specifically choose initiatives where they believe information has a powerful role to play. In a sense, the small groups are advocating or “selling” their favorite initiatives to the full group. Allow about 10 minutes per small group for their presentation and advocacy.

**Setting Priorities** — At this point, it may be possible to synthesize or cluster ideas and initiatives. Great minds do often think alike. If different small groups have developed similar initiatives, they should be joined under a single banner. If the clustering of issues has clearly defined three or four areas of focus, your work is done for the day. If there are eight, ten or more proposed initiatives, it will be necessary to help the group narrow the list. One way to do this is a straw poll. Name each distinct initiative, post the names on a flip chart and give people two or three votes each to place anywhere they wish. Tell participants they can put all their votes on one idea or split their votes among two or three.

Again, remind people to focus on those initiatives where they believe information has a powerful role to play.

The result should be some clear “winners” — initiatives that make sense and where there is passion and leadership in the room. Congratulations. Now all that's left to do is secure the commitment to follow through. That's the goal of the next and final module of work.

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**Module V: Surfacing Commitments and Closing the Workshop (est. 60 minutes)**

*Gauging the Commitment of the Group*

*Reflecting on Lessons Learned and Hopes Moving Forward*

**Straw Poll** — In advance, prepare a flip chart or handout explaining five levels of commitment:

- *Five*            *Yes, and I'll take a leadership role*
- *Four*            *Yes, and I'll support the leaders*
- *Three*           *Yes, and I'll be a solid team player*
- *Two*             *Perhaps, if something solid gets rolling*
- *One*             *Not likely*
- *Zero*            *No*

## Workshop Facilitator's Guide Continued

Distribute simple paper ballots — even blank sheets will do and tell the group:

*We want to anonymously gauge your level of ongoing interest. Don't sign your name and don't feel badly if you don't have the time or energy to stay involved. You've already made a huge contribution by being here today. We just want to see which of you honestly wants to continue with these initiatives moving forward.*

Collect the anonymous submissions and have someone ready to tabulate the votes while you lead a whole group discussion around these questions:

- *What common themes did you hear today? What differences?*
- *Why does this matter for our community?*

Once tabulated, share the results of the straw poll. In our pilot communities we saw the power of the conversation to move people to action through this process and it meant that all participants left the workshop with a real sense that something would happen and that the leadership was ready.

**Next Steps and Final Thoughts** — Before you close the workshop, share your thoughts about how the project might unfold in the future. If you — as convener — can make a commitment, state it now. Even if your commitment is simply to produce notes from the workshop and call a follow-up meeting, you will be continuing the momentum. Ask if people would like to share their contact information with each other (if not already done).

**Optional:** If time permits, bookend the day with two quick Pair and Share rounds. Encourage people to pair with someone they might not have spoken with during the workshop. Ask two questions, aiming for about one minute total per question.

- *The most important things you learned today?*
- *Your hopes for the project and for our community?*

Facilitator and then the organizers do a final thank you to the group. Aim to end right on time.

## Overview of the Scorecard Metrics and Analysis

While there are rich qualitative insights contained in the individual responses to the *Checklist* and *Scavenger Hunt* (which we encourage you to explore), the *Scorecard* provides a simple, visual way of analyzing the data you collected. The *Scorecard* is built to automatically aggregate and analyze the quantitative data from your research, and score each component of your community's information ecosystem. For each indicator (e.g., Internet infrastructure, government information supply, etc.), the *Scorecard* aggregates, averages and scores the data from each relevant research question. The unique scores for each question are then weighted and averaged to produce an overall score for each indicator.

The thresholds for scoring each question are determined on a one-by-one basis. But there are four general types of thresholds for repetitive question types:

- **Existence questions** evaluate whether or not something is available, or whether or not the scavenger hunt participant was able to complete a task. For these questions, Yes is signified as a 1, and No is signified as a 0. If the average answer is above 0.8, it is scored as good; if the average answer is between 0.5 and 0.8, it is scored as fair; and if the average answer is below 0.5, it is scored as poor.
- **Level-of-difficulty** questions evaluate how challenging scavenger hunt participants found a particular task. For these questions, Very Easy is signified as a 1 and Very Difficult is signified as a 7. For these questions, if the average answer is 3 or below, it is scored as good; if the average answer is between 5 and 3, it is scored as fair; and if the average answer is above 5, it is scored as poor.
- **Time-to-complete** questions evaluate how long a *Scavenger Hunt* task took to complete, in minutes. For these questions less than 3 minutes is scored as good, between 3 and 7 minutes is scored as fair, and more than 7 minutes is scored as poor.
- Finally, **value** questions evaluate not just the existence of certain aspects of the information ecosystem, but also the prevalence of these factors. For example, the *Scorecard* analyzes the number of daily and weekly newspapers, and the libraries per/capita in a given community. Each of these questions is each scored using unique thresholds customized to the community needs.

Once scores have been assessed for each question, they are weighted and averaged to produce an overall score for the indicator. This weighting scheme is different for each indicator and based on the relative importance of each question. For example, to score the health of Internet infrastructure, the scorecard uses the following weights:

- (60%) *Percent of the community with broadband coverage*
- (5%) *Existence of government initiatives to increase broadband coverage*
- (20%) *Number of publicly available Wi-Fi hotspots*
- (15%) *Number of Internet service providers*

We developed the scoring thresholds and the weighting mechanisms based on our research experiences in each pilot community. We expect these numbers to change over time as more communities test this tool, and engaged community leaders provide suggestions for how to update our approach. You can find additional information at the project website on how we weighted and scored each question. On the following pages, you will find the specific questions we have used to score the indicators within each component of the *Scorecard*.

## Scorecard Analysis: Infrastructure Component

INTERNET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent of community with broadband coverage [Checklist]</li> <li>• Existence of government initiatives to increase broadband coverage [Yes/No] [Checklist]</li> <li>• Number of publicly available Wi-Fi hotspots per capita [Checklist]</li> <li>• Number of Internet service providers [Checklist]</li> </ul>
LIBRARIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of public libraries per capita [Checklist]</li> <li>• Percent of libraries with computers and Internet access [Checklist]</li> <li>• Average number of computer terminals in each library [Checklist]</li> <li>• Existence of professional assistance with computer access [Yes/No] [Checklist]</li> <li>• Existence of traditional media sources for patrons in the library [Yes/No] [Checklist]</li> </ul>
GOVERNMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of notification channels for public meetings [Yes/No] [Checklist]</li> <li>• Existence of a central Internet portal to provide all government information [Yes/No] [Checklist]</li> <li>• Existence of other, non-Internet based resources that provide government information [Yes/No] [Checklist]</li> <li>• Community members ability to find the next three upcoming government meetings open to the public [Yes/No] [Scavenger Hunt]</li> </ul>
SCHOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent of schools providing computers and high-speed Internet access [Checklist]</li> <li>• Existence of digital literacy training [All Schools, Some Schools, No Schools] [Checklist]</li> <li>• Existence of classes to teach students to understand the validity and credibility of online materials [All Schools, Some Schools, No Schools] [Checklist]</li> </ul>
CIVIC INTERMEDIARIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of civic intermediary groups in community per capita [Checklist]</li> <li>• Number of Internet meet up groups per capita [Checklist]</li> <li>• Use of outlets by community members to share information with one another in the community [Checklist]</li> <li>• Community members' ability to find five civic intermediaries in their community [Yes/No] [Scavenger Hunt]</li> <li>• Relevance of community groups to community members [Ranking] [Scavenger Hunt]</li> </ul>
MEDIA	<p><b><i>In the scorecard, each media source above is measured and weighted independently.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall number of [Checklist]: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Daily newspapers</li> <li>○ Weekly newspapers</li> <li>○ Publicly available television stations providing local news</li> <li>○ Privately available television stations providing local news</li> <li>○ Radio stations providing local news</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Number of each media source above available in [Checklist]: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ English</li> <li>○ Spanish</li> <li>○ Other languages</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Overall number of [Checklist]: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Blogs</li> <li>○ Community newsletters</li> <li>○ Listservs</li> <li>○ Traditional media online (e.g., the local newspaper)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Scorecard Analysis: Skills Component

### INDIVIDUALS' ABILITY TO ACCESS INFORMATION

*Using the Scavenger Hunt, assessed how easily community members can access the following types of information:*

- Online information about renewing drivers license
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
  - Level of clarity [Ranking]
- How to request absentee ballot
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
- Online coverage of mayor's last comments
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
- Three different news perspectives of a recent community event
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
- Three cultural events taking place over the weekend in the community
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
- Local school district budget
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
- Highest paid government officials
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
- Coverage of recent local government budget process
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
- Mayor's email address
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]

### INDIVIDUALS' ABILITY TO EXCHANGE INFORMATION

*Using the Scavenger Hunt, assessed how easily community members can access the following types of information:*

- Find mayor's contact information and email address
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
- Share opinion widely
  - Level of confidence that you could reach abroad group of people if you needed to share your opinion widely [Ranking]
- Find five civic intermediary organizations
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
  - Appeal of these groups to community members [Yes/No]
- Opportunities to buy and sell goods and services informally in the community (Find a place to sell a couch locally)
  - Have they used it before [Yes/No]
  - How confident are they that this service will enable them to successfully sell their couch [Ranking]

## Scorecard Analysis: Skills Component Continued

### GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO EXCHANGE INFORMATION

*Using the Scavenger Hunt, assessed how easily community members can access the following types of information:*

- Highest paid government officials
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
- Three upcoming government meetings
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
- Mayor's contact information and email address
  - Minutes to complete task
  - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
- Sunshine Transparency Review grade [Checklist]
  - The Sunshine Transparency Review is a government watchdog group that evaluates how well governments share information about their activities. For more information on the methods they use, visit:  
[http://sunshinereview.org/index.php/Transparency\\_Checklist](http://sunshinereview.org/index.php/Transparency_Checklist)

## Scorecard Analysis: Supply Component

### GOVERNMENT INFORMATION AND SERVICES

- The existence of the following kinds of government information and services online [Yes/No] [Checklist]:
  - How to register a vehicle
  - How to obtain a driver's license
  - Property and payroll tax
  - Tax incentives and government support for starting a business
  - Information regarding who is qualified for, and how to receive, social services (e.g., unemployment protection, food assistance, etc.)
  - General information about the school district (e.g., the names and contact information of staff members, calendars, etc.)
  - General information about particular schools (e.g. locations, enrollment information, sporting events, etc.)
  - Information about the performance of schools in your school district
  - Information about applying for a license to start a business
  - Information about obtaining the permits you need to build or renovate a home
  - Names and contact information for the leaders of your local government (e.g., the mayor, city attorney, board of supervisors)
  - Budget of government revenue and expenditures
  - Voter registration information
- The existence of information online, as well as mobile alerts, for the following kinds of government information and services [Yes/No for existence and Yes/No mobile alerts] [Checklist]:
  - Announcements of upcoming government meetings (of all levels and located in one location)
  - Alerts about upcoming transportation projects and road closures
  - Public transportation information and services
  - Police department contact information and reports on activities
  - Fire department contact information and reports on activities
  - Disaster warnings and emergency information

## Scorecard Analysis: Supply Component Continued

## COMMUNITY NEWS AND EVENTS

*Using the Scavenger Hunt, assessed how easily community members can access the following types of information:*

- Local school district budget
    - Ability to find information [Yes/No]
    - Minutes to complete task
    - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
  - Highest paid government officials
    - Ability to find information [Yes/No]
    - Minutes to complete task
    - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
  - Online information about renewing drivers license
    - Ability to find information [Yes/No]
    - Minutes to complete task
    - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
    - Level of clarity [Ranking]
  - How to request absentee ballot
    - Ability to find information [Yes/No]
    - Minutes to complete task
    - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
    - Community News and Events
  - Media - density of media sources (Same as in Supply)
- 
- Coverage of recent local government budget process
    - Ability to find information [Yes/No]
    - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
  - Online source covering mayor's last comments
    - Ability to find information [Yes/No]
    - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
  - Three different news perspectives of a recent community event
    - Ability to find information [Yes/No]
    - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
  - Three cultural events taking place over the weekend in the community
    - Ability to find information [Yes/No]
    - Level of difficulty [Ranking]
    - Self-Improvement and Quality of Life Information
  - The existence of the following kinds of information [Yes/No] [Checklist]
    - Local hospital providing information about local community public health matters (e.g., updates on viruses in the community, how to stay healthy during flu season, seasonal allergy information, etc.)
    - Local health information, provided by a source other than the local hospital
    - Information about opportunities for adult education opportunities (e.g., night classes, nondegree classes, vocational classes, etc.)
    - Information about job opening
    - Assistance with job searches
    - Public recreation such as sports leagues or public park use
    - News about public events, such as concerts, art openings or sporting events
    - Opportunities to buy and sell goods and services informally in the community

## SELF-IMPROVEMENT AND QUALITY OF LIFE INFORMATION