

# UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

***Outreach Scholars Academy 2009  
Mica Stark, Carsey Institute***

## **Final Project Write Up**

1. Title: Manchester Area Community Indicators Website
2. Description: To date, the Manchester area does not have a comprehensive place for citizens and decision makers to access such data and information. The Carsey Institute currently maintains a handful of indicator sites providing access to socio-economic indicators for various places (like the North Country). The goal of this project is to create an accessible indicator websites that allows users to gain a better understanding of important community and socio-economic issues. Informative, interactive, and up-to-date, the indicator sites allow users to search on specific, relevant indicators of well-being, as well as create tables and maps of pre-determined indicators.
3. Background information: Across the country, cities, towns and counties are developing community indicator websites to better understand their communities and provide a central location for important social, civic, and economic data. Community indicator sites are also seen as a way to 'democratize data' – to provide access to information to a range of stakeholders, track progress on shared goals and help inform public policy in critical areas.

Spokane, Washington has developed an impressive indicators site and describes the value of their site this way:

'Democratization of Data' is the core concept at the heart of all these projects. Knowledge is power. As objective data are more easily accessible, civic dialogue becomes better informed, community members are increasingly engaged in decision-making processes, and governments and organizations are held more accountable to their constituents. Communities that work together to define their goals and priorities find that indicators provide an extremely useful roadmap for assessing whether or not the path they are on will lead them to their desired destinations."

***A Community Engaged University  
The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching***

In an effort to provide relevant data to key stakeholders, the Carsey Institute and the University of New Hampshire at Manchester seek to develop a comprehensive community indicators site for the greater Manchester-Nashua metropolitan region. We believe an easy to navigate site, with regularly updated data, would help support informed decision-making by individual citizen leaders, public officials and policy makers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, researchers and the media. It would also allow the greater Manchester-Nashua region the ability to measure our collective progress in core areas and help build a healthier and more vibrant region.

Additional background about the UNHM and Carsey relationship: In late 2007 and early 2008 there arose independent and simultaneous interest by UNHM and Carsey to engage in applied research in the urban environment of Manchester. In July 2008, the Carsey Institute and the University of New Hampshire at Manchester embarked on a new joint initiative to develop an applied research agenda focused on fostering increased understanding of the challenges facing small cities. The current thinking is that research projects will address challenges facing today's small cities, particularly those involving vulnerable children, youth, and families; and sustainable community development. The university-wide effort seeks to stimulate research, provide opportunities for collaborative education, and engage the larger community of practitioners and policymakers around urban issues.

#### 4. PROJECT DETAILS

**Primary Goal:** The primary goal of the project is to provide current and reliable data about the Manchester community to help decision make better informed decisions.

**Target Population/Audience:** The target populations would be decision makers (nonprofit management and boards; public officials; key public employees).

**Methods:** The indicator site would be developed in close partnership with many external partners. We propose creating a community indicators steering committee that would oversee the development of the project. Members of the steering committee would include key Carsey and UNH Manchester researchers, as well as representatives from the Manchester region. Upon the selection of the indicator categories, smaller work teams would be developed in each category area. Each work team would include a UNH researcher as well as 1-2 community partners who work in that particular issue area (UNH students would also be able to serve on the teams). Each work team would be responsible for proposing what actual indicators would be included in their area; what efforts are currently underway to track/record that data; and the availability of data for

the selected indicators. Work teams would submit proposals to the steering committee for final consideration. Carsey and UNH Manchester would be responsible for the technical aspects of the site, including ongoing, regular updates.

**Evidence of External Collaboration and Partnership:** As indicated above, this project would involve multiple external partners ranging from the city of Manchester health department to nonprofits like YWCA and Families in Transition and Heritage United Way. External partners would benefit in this project because the indicators website would contain data that would assist them in grant-making and policy formation. It would also enhance their relationship to UNH which could result in other benefits down the road.

**Expected Impact:** The biggest impact expected for the external partners would be better decision making based on the use of current, reliable, easy-to-use community indicators. We would conduct pre and post surveys, along with interviews, to understand what impact the indicators project has had on the partners.

**Scholarly Connection:** There is a small but growing literature on the use of community indicators. Two important questions for scholarship are: which indicators get selected and are those indicators actually useful in telling something important about the community; and two, who gets to decide which indicators to use? The second question, which is really a question of power and gets at the university-community partnership, would open up another emerging field of research around participatory action research and in the field of deliberative democracy.

## 5. EVALUATION PLAN

Fortunately, Carsey has tremendous expertise around evaluation research. I would work closely with those researchers, along with input from the community partners, to develop an evaluation plan that would try to assess the desired outcomes from the project (both in terms of the usefulness of the indicators data and in terms of the partnership itself).

I am currently working with Dean Woolever and other UNHM based faculty and staff to determine how this urban research agenda fits into the larger picture of outreach and engagement at UNHM. Similarly, I am working with Mil Duncan and Carsey researchers in identifying and prioritizing research areas they would most like to see extended to the greater Manchester region.

I view collaboration with external community partners as a key component to our work at Carsey. In most of Carsey's research, we work with community partners to help identify and shape research questions. For example, we are conducting a youth panel study in Coos County and are working closely with the public schools throughout the county. Carsey recognizes that it is through partnering and listening to key external friends and stakeholders that the relevance and impact of our research is enhanced. Strong relationships with key external leaders and organizations are important in sharing our research findings and laying the ground work to move policy.

Carsey and UNHM are at the very beginning stages of considering two research projects for 2009. One would be the development of a web-based community indicators site for the greater Manchester-Nashua metro region. Across the country, cities, towns and counties are developing community indicator websites to better understand their communities and provide a central location for important social, civic, and economic data. The Carsey Institute currently maintains a handful of indicator sites providing access to socio-economic indicators for various places (like the North Country). Our goal is to create an accessible indicator websites that allows users to gain a better understanding of important community and socio-economic issues. Informative, interactive, and up-to-date, the indicator sites allow users to search on specific, relevant indicators of well-being, as well as create tables and maps of pre-determined indicators.

A second research project under consideration is to conduct a longitudinal youth panel study in Manchester. Carsey is currently conducting such a study in Coos County. The research project would involve collecting and analyzing data about the economic and non-economic factors that contribute to successful outcomes for young people themselves, and to their commitment and investment to Manchester. This research would help leaders better understand young people's decision making.

Both of these projects will not only need to involve faculty and staff at the Carsey Institute and UNHM, but they will require the support and active collaboration of community partners in the Manchester region. For example, in the development of a community indicators site, what indicators should be included around health or housing? What indicators would potential users most like to see? What format should the data be available in? With regards to the youth panel study, we will need to active support and partnership with SAU administrators and teachers. Both of these research

projects are also ripe with opportunity to engage students in the research projects. Carsey has a strong track record of actively involving graduate students in projects and we would seek to extend that to these projects and where we can, to involve UNHM undergraduate students as well.