

What is *Vital Signs*?

Since 2006, more than 40 community foundations have experienced first-hand the transformative impact of the *Vital Signs* program. *Vital Signs* is an annual community check-up conducted by community foundations across Canada that measures the vitality of communities in key areas, providing critical information that can help set priorities and identify opportunities for action.

Vital Signs was first started by the Toronto Community Foundation in 2001, after a group of civic leaders came up with a new way to engage their community in understanding and monitoring the health and vitality of Toronto on an ongoing basis. In 2006, *Vital Signs* became a national program and it continues to grow every year, both across Canada and internationally.

Over the years, CFC and over 40 community foundations have worked together to evolve *Vital Signs* from the production of a single report to being a strategic initiative that allows us to gain a better understanding and delve deeper into issues and opportunities that affect our community.

***Vital Signs* Local Reports**

Community foundations develop a broad picture of their community using relevant national data and identifying local research on a wide range of subject areas. The *Vital Signs* report allows foundations to involve their community at every level, from determining the report's indicators, exploring research sources, and assigning grades.

These reports help communities make connections between issues and trends in different areas. The findings are presented in a reader-friendly format that provides a snapshot of quality of life and community vitality. They are also an important touchstone for community leaders, service organizations and funders.

***Vital Signs* National Report**

In addition to local reports, a national report is created each year by Community Foundations of Canada linking data, stories, and expert insight from communities across the country. These reports provide the opportunity to engage Canadians in a deeper discussion about national trends and to explore issues that are key to our shared success in the future.

In 2012, the first issue-specific report was released. #GenerationFlux focused on youth issues across Canada, highlighting key indicators to start a conversation about the problems youth face. This year, the national report will focus on the intersecting issues and momentum surrounding food in our communities.

***Vital Signs* Community Learning Network**

Community foundations have the opportunities to participate in the *Vital Signs* program regardless of whether they produce a local report. The Community Learning Network creates a gateway for the ongoing exchange of knowledge through webinars, data and other information-sharing. *Vital Signs* is about producing community knowledge to improve the way that community foundations make grants, engage donors and build communities.

Why Participate in Vital Signs?

Participation in the Vital Signs program has a number of significant benefits for community foundations:

RESEARCH & DATA	MEDIA EXPOSURE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to national indicator data • Access to local indicator data (where available) • Access to source information for common indicators • Independent analysis and feedback on local reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated national launch of reports on the first Tuesday of October • Release of media advisories and news releases • Promotion via social media networks • Circulation of local impact stories • Exposure on the national VS website www.vitalsignscanada.ca
ONLINE LEARNING	COMMUNITY LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration space for participants • 8 Training webinars • Access to 5 VS Activation Guides: <i>Collaboration; Community Engagement; Research; Community Impact and Special Reports</i> • Access to information on other indicator and community based research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to a network of international <i>Vital Signs</i> initiatives and shared learning • Rights to the <i>Vital Signs</i> brand • Acknowledged as a <i>Vital Signs</i> participant on all CFC material and websites

How to Prepare a *Vital Signs* report

Undertaking *Vital Signs* is an important commitment for any foundation. It requires dedicated manpower and resources for a concentrated period time of at least 6 months. Depending on staffing, sponsorship, partnerships and grants, budgets vary from \$10,000 to \$35,000 to deliver the report. This includes a participation fee to CFC.

Below is a general outline of the key steps toward publishing a *Vital Signs* report:

WINTER	SPRING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit a participation agreement to CFC • Share information and engage stakeholders in the <i>Vital Signs</i> process • Secure funding • Establish an advisory committee or working group • Identify or hire a project coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct community consultations • Work with local stakeholders to identify additional data resources • Confirm indicators for your foundation • Develop and implement a communications strategy or enlist key media partners
SUMMER	FALL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare national indicator data • Conduct a community survey • Write and edit the <i>Vital Signs</i> report and editing of report • Organize the logistics of printing and design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print report and determine plan of how to share it with the community • Organize a launch event and generate media coverage • Prepare a community engagement strategy following the <i>Vital Signs</i> report launch • Release the <i>Vital Signs</i> report on the first Tuesday of October during a the national launch • Conduct presentations following the launch event • Conduct an evaluation of the report's release

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