

GEO Member Story



How United Way of Winnipeg is using a community indicator system, Peg, to get a better picture of the city's well-being year over year – and the crucial role of community collaboration

In December 2013, United Way of Winnipeg launched Peg, a new community indicator system that helps track eight themes related to quality of life in the city, with indicators that fall into one or more of the themes.

By using Peg, community members can track — and act on — the information that is shared on Peg using interactive maps, graphs and stories.

The inspiration for Peg came about around 14 years ago, when United Way of Winnipeg held consultations with community residents to examine how it could best support the community's well-being in the future.

“One of the questions that came up frequently was, ‘How will we know if all of our investments of time and money and energy and policies are making a difference?’” said Heather Block, United Way of Winnipeg’s director of strategic initiatives.

This question eventually led United Way of Winnipeg to research community indicator systems, and that led to a partnership with the Winnipeg-based International Institute of Sustainable Development. Block said that, to put it briefly, IISD brings expertise on community research and indicators, and United Way of Winnipeg brings expertise on relationships and engagement in the community.

It ended up taking more than five years to develop Peg, due in part to the robust community engagement process that was involved. Block said that IISD and United Way worked diligently with community members to identify what “well-being” actually meant for the community. As the framework came together, experts were brought in to help identify specific indicators — experts on data and also experts with lived experience. Input from more than 800 Winnipeggers informed Peg’s development.

Peg also received support and input from government and businesses, with the intention of ensuring that indicators were informed by input from all sectors present in the community.

“Everything that we did was guided by input from the community,” Block said. “Working collaboratively at this level certainly is not a quick process, but it is the process that will take us the furthest.”

The result is a leading edge system. In the last year, Peg’s development has been presented in Brazil, China, Hungary and Italy.

Beyond just collecting and visualizing data, Peg also provides text and video stories related to themes and indicators. The stories give context and background on the data and its real life impact.

Block shared that the next step is to communicate to the community the information and trends that Peg is capturing. To do this, United Way of Winnipeg is helping to share “indicator report sheets” that are released about once per month. These reports highlight and connect data from Peg, and they can be used to coordinate with efforts by other organizations on a topic. For example, the January report focused on anxiety and mood disorders — sharing that almost one in four Winnipeggers have been diagnosed with an anxiety or mood disorder in the last five years. This was timed to coincide with a larger awareness campaign from Bell Canada focused on mental health issues. The result was an increase in community awareness, through both traditional media and social media, about the effects of these issues on the well-being of the community.



An example of the map feature of the Peg website

“Our intent is that Peg will become a part of the city’s infrastructure, where it will be used by policy makers, educators and our agency partners,” Block said. “The idea behind Peg is not just to provide the information. It’s based on the understanding that caring isn’t enough; we need to measure to see how we’re doing. Once we know how we’re doing — once we’ve measured and we look at our progress or lack of progress — then we know where the places are that we can celebrate and where the places are that we need to, as a city, work together to change.”

She said that there are also plans to offer more in-depth, annual reports based on Peg. These can function as sort of a community “report card” that focuses on two indicators from each of the eight theme areas.

It all hinges on relationships

Block shared that Peg — as well as other initiatives from United Way of Winnipeg — is supported by collaborations and strong relationships with the community.

These relationships have strengthened the United Way’s capacity building and training work, and United Way of Winnipeg has recognized that a key factor in building these strong community relationships is providing organizations with ongoing, flexible funding. Its contracts with agency partners last about three years on average. This type of funding helps its partners to be more proactive and effective in changing Winnipeg for the better.

“A lot of our most important issues related to well-being as a community can’t be solved by one organization or even one sector alone,” Block said. “When we look at the issues we’re facing, it’s going to take all of us working together.”

To find out more about United Way of Winnipeg, including its collaborative efforts around ending homelessness and early childhood development, visit unitedwaywinnipeg.ca.

[Here’s the first Peg report on well-being in Winnipeg, released just before this member story.](#)

To see Peg in action, visit www.mypeg.ca.

GEO resources that relate to the topics covered in this member spotlight

Smarter Philanthropy for Greater Impact



Building Community Capacity for Participation in Evaluation



Widespread Empathy

