

## THE OPPORTUNITY PROJECT

2022 PROBLEM STATEMENT

## Developing Community-Informed National-Level Indicators of Well-Being

U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of the Treasury & New America

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**THE CHALLENGE** – Use existing well-being frameworks, along with input from people with lived experience and federal data, to create national-level indicator(s) of well-being that better capture individuals' and families' overall sense of economic stability, economic opportunity, health, dignity, agency, and community.

**EXECUTIVE CHAMPIONS** –

Don Graves, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce  
Janis Bowdler, Counselor to the Secretary, US Department of the Treasury  
Chike Aguh, Chief Innovation Officer, US Department of Labor  
Elizabeth Garlow, Director, New Practice Lab, New America

**THE PROBLEM** – Resiliency among households and communities requires more than economic means. Weathering an unprecedented disruption to everyday life like the COVID-19 pandemic has required strong social networks, stable housing, healthy food, access to outdoor recreational space, mental health resources, and other social infrastructure, which many have not had access to. At the same time, the [OECD's better life index](#) gives the U.S. low marks in several areas of well-being despite the U.S. leading the entire OECD in household income. Americans work longer hours, have lower life expectancies, and are exposed to more air pollution than most other OECD nations. The pandemic has also underscored how the impacts of crises are felt unevenly across the U.S., particularly amongst different racial and ethnic groups and in communities of color, and how individual stressors can compound within communities.

However, these resources, challenges, and disparities are not captured by macroeconomic measures such as the unemployment rate or GDP, and traditional measures of economic progress fail to account for the multiple dimensions of well-being that matter to individuals, families, and communities. Furthermore, little is done to understand the shared experiences of people across the nation. Some communities, like [Santa Monica, CA](#), have developed new well-being measures to assess progress at a local level. This is a promising step forward but has not changed the national narrative about equitable social and economic progress.

The cross-sector community focused on well-being in the U.S. does not currently have agreed-upon measures of the economic, cultural, social, natural, and other forms of well-being that contribute to a flourishing life. Yet the presence of national-level indicators is critical because the federal government, along with local stakeholders, is currently making significant investments in infrastructure and other pillars of recovery with the aim of enabling all Americans to fully participate in the economy. These investments have the potential to advance the resilience and well-being of families and communities across the country if they start with what matters most to people in their communities and the foundational aspects of well-being such as belonging, stability, meaningful access to resources, and

more. This requires being in dialogue with households and communities, centering their lived experience, and seeking their input into the development of indicators to evaluate and report on well-being.

**THE OPPORTUNITY** – To truly prepare ourselves for future events that will disrupt society in similar ways to COVID-19 and to build a more equitable and inclusive economic future, we must build infrastructure that prioritizes more holistic well-being. To get there, we see an opportunity to create new national-level indicators based on input from individuals and community leaders, existing research and frameworks, and data. Such indicators, shaped by the lived experiences of people and communities and what matters most to them, will help focus policymaking and other efforts aimed at improving quality of life. They will also offer common ground for states, localities, and others seeking to create equitable access to well-being. Many countries and some U.S. localities are already embracing this approach, but there is still much to be done – especially at the national level. Local stakeholders, researchers, and government agencies will have to cooperate to identify important facets of well-being to define meaningful indicator(s) and corresponding data. Federal agencies need help surfacing existing data sets that could be used to establish well-being metrics and identifying where current data collection is insufficient.

**VISION FOR SPRINT OUTCOMES** – Through the use of data and community input, federal and local policymakers can begin to identify new indicators that capture dimensions of well-being beyond traditional economic indicators. Doing so will help elevate the things that matter most to households and communities, and in turn shape policy priorities. For example, it may help policymakers select infrastructure projects that go beyond refreshing aging roads and instead target well-being goals holistically: such as new economic opportunities for residents, public spaces that contribute to good mental and physical health, and/or investments that prioritize equity.

**TARGET END USERS** – Federal, state, tribal, and local policymakers; communities interested in aligning public spending and policymaking priorities with contributors to well-being.

#### RELATED DATA SETS

- ↳ [Community Development Financial Institutions Fund](#) (CDFI), US Department of Treasury
- ↳ [Financial Well-being Data](#), Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
- ↳ [American Community Survey](#), US Census Bureau
- ↳ [Household Pulse Survey](#), US Census Bureau
- ↳ [Build Back Better Challenge](#), Economic Development Administration
- ↳ [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#), US Department of Education
- ↳ [National Indian Education Study](#), US Department of Education
- ↳ [American Time Use Survey](#), Bureau of Labor Statistics
- ↳ [National Compensation Survey](#), Bureau of Labor Statistics
- ↳ [Medical Expenditure Panel Survey](#), US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- ↳ [Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems](#), HHS
- ↳ [National Health Interview Survey](#), HHS
- ↳ [Santa Monica, CA's](#) indices that combine objective and subjective measures of well-being
- ↳ U.S. Department of Commerce [steps towards better measuring economic well-being](#)

#### SPRINT LEADERS

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