About our Innovation

The Wellbeing Project – working together to define, measure and actively improve wellbeing in Santa Monica

Challenge

Governments around the world are starting to recognize that the success of a community cannot be determined by economic growth alone – true measures of progress take the wellbeing of people into account. Drawing on data about wellbeing can enable government to make decisions and set priorities to positively affect residents’ wellbeing.

Idea

To create an index of wellbeing and embed it in policy-making. The Wellbeing Index measures economic opportunity, social connectedness, health, education, and usage and quality of local infrastructure and amenities. This is the first initiative of its kind and combines city administrative data, social media sentiment, and public survey data on subjective wellbeing into a combined Wellbeing Index.

Intended impact

- Develop a methodology that can be used to measure wellbeing, and share that with other cities
- Document and share Wellbeing Index results to provide rich insight on community needs at a local level
- Identify ways that city services can be improved to increase wellbeing
- Develop strategies for incorporating wellbeing data and findings into city planning, budgeting and daily operations

Our Journey implementing our idea

Motivating policy change: Sharing Wellbeing Index results as a catalyst

Measuring wellbeing in city government is brand new, so we had to create a new vocabulary for communicating the idea. With initial results published, and final results coming next year, our challenge is to translate that into policy change. Winning over the “hearts and minds” of city employees to use this data is our next challenge.

Building a compelling case for change

At the start of the project our team developed a whitepaper on wellbeing to represent key research in the field. This provided a solid footing to begin the project, and allowed all team members and stakeholders to have a shared understanding of the background and landscape of this work.

Without a roadmap, we wanted the help of outside experts

Engaging busy city officials is fundamental to realizing the impact of the project. To encourage departments to align their work to the index, we have defined concrete relationships between the innovation and the impact others can expect to see in their work as a result.

Bringing core delivery partners with you

We convened an expert panel of 18 scholars and policy makers who met 3 times over the course of the programme to advise on measurement and data collection issues.

Using simple explanations of complex issues

We knew explaining something so unfamiliar would be complicated. Some audiences conflated wellbeing and happiness. We worked hard to make our messages accessible to a wider audience by creating a consistent brand and using data visualisations.

Achievements so far

Initial release of the Index:

In April 2015, we released the 1.0 version of our Wellbeing Index, with data for all 5 dimensions, and from the three types of data (administrative, survey and social media). We shared that with 100+ participants at a public forum and generated dozens of press mentions. We have had over 100 replication inquiries from cities, universities and other interested groups.

Further embedding wellbeing in city operations

Our City Council adopted a handful of top priority strategies for the year, and several align with our Wellbeing Index findings around mobility, housing affordability and development. We launched a pilot project to improve high school wellness, and another to improve access to public assistance benefits at farmer’s markets in neighborhoods with low rates of healthy eating. Already, the farmer’s market project has increased participation of eligible families.