

Thriving Communities

What is ‘thriving communities’?

A thriving community embodies connection, accessibility, and opportunity for its residents. It fosters a mindset of inspiration and optimism among leaders, prioritizing trust and belonging in everyday municipal decisions.

This vision is achieved through a framework that pursues success across diverse priorities that interconnectedly contribute to a thriving place. Traditional indicators of place-based success are generally siloed and focus exclusively on economic development or population change to determine what makes great places. The thriving communities framework recognizes that success is not defined unilaterally. To support this theory of change, our framework is supported by tools that will assist municipal leaders in defining and pursuing their vision for their community's prosperity in a way that makes sense for their unique context.

Why are we doing this?

The Michigan Municipal League (the League) and Michigan Municipal League Foundation (MML Foundation) believe it is past time to challenge the limited conventional view of a place's success. For too long, the criteria decision makers have used to determine success excludes indicators that evaluate the full human-experience. Thriving communities builds on the League and MML Foundation's placemaking work to explore success holistically and, powered by our application of Community Wealth Building, broadens the discussion to consider all of the ways that place supports individuals' personal well-being and experience.

What does this mean for League members and partners?

This means an opportunity to recognize not only the effectiveness of municipally administered services, but also the active role of our members as conveners of place and stewards of community. Municipal leaders act directly through their policies, budgets, and services but also hold the capacity to set the table for collaborations with all partners who drive a community's success. Likewise, a thriving community is incomplete without the contributions of diverse partners and stakeholders that bring innovation and opportunity to a place. Through these place-based collaborations, communities can achieve broader and deeper benefits across all areas than any one of the stakeholders could realize alone.



Our thriving communities framework will provide members with advocacy to emphasize their importance in this work, data-driven practices and tools to better understand their communities, and support for their role in fostering community partnerships. This work brings together threads of our past work and builds on the foundations our members have already laid. The thriving communities framework takes on in practice our vision of Community Wealth Building.

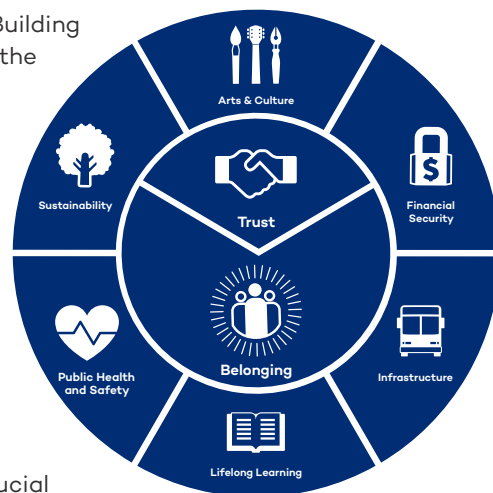
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Defining thriving communities across our focus areas

Our seven focus areas are derived from the original pillars of Community Wealth Building and showcase the interconnected priorities of place. Our metrics base success in the lived experience of community members across the areas of Financial Security, Public Health and Safety, Infrastructure, Lifelong Learning, Arts and Culture, and Sustainability, all anchored together by Trust and Belonging. The focus areas reinforce the perspective that these indicators are interconnected—a single indicator alone is insufficient to determine the success of a place. Individuals’ lived experiences interact with *all* of these areas, and communities must weigh the needs and trade-offs for their residents when prioritizing work.

Importantly, these focus areas represent *outcomes*—what it looks like when a community is working well—rather than the *actions* that municipal leaders take to achieve these outcomes. While these focus areas will rarely line up one-to-one with municipal budget line items, thriving communities tools will empower municipal leadership to map how their actions will touch multiple outcome areas. Additionally, for these actions to be successful across outcome areas, it will be crucial for local governments to rely on and activate local partners who can help drive community engagement, build capacity, and ignite innovation.



The Tools

The Scorecard

The first tool we are developing in the thriving communities framework is a scorecard aimed at broadening state policy conversation beyond traditional economic- or population-based metrics. The scorecard provides a comprehensive view of community well-being across the state.

The scorecard will support legislative decision-making with quantitative metrics that speak to the interconnected role of local government—while many organizations offer deep vertical slices of data to emphasize their interests, we see a need for horizontal measures that show how municipalities bridge and balance multiple priorities to serve their communities, and how these local communities must thrive in order for Michigan to prosper and grow.

The Equalizer

We are developing the “equalizer” as a tool to illustrate the trade-offs involved in municipalities’ decision-making, showing the variety of challenges and opportunities that can limit or accelerate a municipality’s pursuit of their priorities.

The equalizer references the adjustment of different frequencies on a stereo or sound board to achieve a desired mix. Each focus area represents a frequency that can be adjusted to achieve that perfect sound. Just as different artists or listeners prefer different sound mixes, each community will have its balance of priorities. The equalizer is meant to support communities in determining that balance through local discussion.

What’s next?

Much more. This framework is still in its infancy. Through the support of our membership, resources from our supporters, and buy-in from our partners, we will continue to develop our thriving communities lens and work to integrate this approach in our mission, engagement, and advocacy.