

Municipal Indicators Review Project (Phase II)

Proposed Terms of Reference – DRAFT

BACKGROUND:

The Municipal Indicators are a set of financial, community, governance and performance indicators to be used to better understand the challenges facing Municipal Units in Nova Scotia.

In the past, there have been multiple reviews conducted for the Municipal Indicators Program. Each of these reviews has provided suggestions for improvements to the program, in hopes to enhance the usability and dependability of the municipal indicators.

The initial Municipal Indicators Report was presented in August, 2002. A review of the Municipal Indicators followed in July 2007 prepared by internal staff and users. Another review was conducted by Ryan Piccott, MPA candidate for the AMA, and was finalized in May 2009. Most recently, a joint committee (AMA and SNSMR) prepared a report presented in June 2010.

All the reports provide recommendations for changes to the data to improve the indicators as well as other items to better educate Municipal users and encourage more timely reporting. The recommendations in the latest June 2010 report included SNSMR to provide a dedicated resource to the project to move forward with implementation of other recommendations.

In October 2010, a letter was received advising that a dedicated resource could not be provided at this time; however, SNSMR would continue to partner with the AMA to implement project recommendations.

The Town of Amherst and Municipality of Cumberland County have since agreed to dedicate resources to move the project forward.

COMMITTEE PURPOSE:

The Municipal Indicators Committee will be responsible for:

- Discuss and recommend changes
- Ensuring the vision of the indicators is maintained
- Develop an implementation plan – i.e. for updating the indicators, educating Municipal Users and/or Council, etc...
- Identifying ways to improve data collection
- Explore the possibility of Green indicators

The committee will ensure that both the municipal and provincial points of view are represented in the intended improvements to the municipal indicators program.

The Committee will document the vision of the Municipal Indicators vision, the pillars, to ensure the goals of the indicators for the future is not lost.

A work plan will be created to provide an outline and timelines for completion.

Accepted changes will be implemented by SNSMR staff upon approval of the AMA Board and SNSMR.

OBJECTIVES:

- Establish agreed upon vision for the municipal indicators program
- Establish an agreed upon work plan for changes to the indicators data
- Accept/Reject any proposed changes
- Prepare a report for SNSMR and AMA Board
- Ensure approved changes are implemented

DELIVERABLES

- Proposed Recommended changes to the indicators and Implementation report for SNSMR and AMA review

MEMBERSHIP

The committee will be composed of representatives from AMA (2), a UNSM board member (1), SNSMR (3), and someone from the academic community (1). A representative from AMA will serve as the Chair of the committee.

MEETINGS

Meetings will be held at a frequency that is needed to conduct the business of the committee. It is estimated that the committee will meet every 4 weeks

The committee will present its work to date at the 2011 spring AMA workshop.

Any items of disagreement will be resolved at the committee level.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- AMA
- UNSM
- Municipal Units of Nova Scotia
- The Province of Nova Scotia
- The general public

- College of Continuing Education of Dalhousie University

SUCCESS FACTORS

The committee will be successful if there is a final implementation plan or similar deliverable produced by the committee that clearly outlines: (1) where improvements can be made to the existing Municipal Indicators Program; (2) how relevant information will be collected and managed at the municipal level, and (3) the assignment of municipal roles and responsibilities regarding data/information collection.

The objective of the committee's final deliverable is to enable municipalities to make improvements to their current system of recording and measuring progress, through the use of indicators, with the aim of understanding and improving:

- Financial management, performance and efficiency
- Progress towards achieving sustainability goals, as outlined in ICSP documents
- General efficiencies in the area of municipal operations
- Strategic decision making based on broad based community indicators identifying demographics, opportunities and challenges external to the corporate municipal unit

In addition:

- To increase the understanding and application of the concepts of performance measurement at the local government level, and help explain how they contribute to stronger accountability and improved delivery of services.
- To provide a forum for sharing information and best practices on the use of performance measurement as a tool to enhance local government service efficiency and effectiveness.
- To demonstrate the evolving and beneficial application of performance measurement through the use of indicators from a broad range of settings.

RISKS

- Achieving buy-in from staff who will be asked to perform regular operational requirements and complete work for the indicators project. There may be push back depending on staff perspectives of the value of indicators and depending on their current work load.
- Staff involved in program evaluation or performance management initiatives may feel that their work is being criticized or unnecessarily judged. Thoughtful presentation of the value, purpose and uses of the data collection and analysis is required to ensure staff understand the importance of, and do not feel threatened by, the initiative
- Ensuring that the accurate data can be collected for the current and any new indicators. This is key to the value indicators will have for Municipalities.
- Maintaining the workplan timeline. It may be difficult to maintain the work plan timeline as other priorities may easily justify pushing aside indicator project work.

- Achieving buy-in from Municipalities. With upcoming pressures for government to get back to a balanced budget, Municipalities may not be able/willing to participate or see the value in Municipal Indicators until more prosperous times emerge.
- Having all stakeholders agree on what are meaningful indicators may also be a challenge.