



**The Alliance to End Homelessness**

**Report Card Methodology and Indicators:  
Development of the Report Card  
on Homelessness in Ottawa**

**Prepared for:**

**The Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa**

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August 2004

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# **Part I – Review of the Literature**

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Prepared for The Alliance to End Homelessness  
August 2004

# Part I – Review of the Literature

## I. Brief Background Description

- Based on a review of relevant literature, this overview of the methodological aspects on the development of report cards was undertaken as the preliminary work for the development of the report card on homelessness in Ottawa.
- The purpose of this report is to provide a brief overview of the literature on report card methodology, including the history and current status of report cards, the purposes and processes of developing and formulating report cards, the dissemination and translation of report cards, and suggestions for the Ottawa report card on homelessness in light of the findings uncovered in the literature review.
- The work for this report was undertaken by Julie Beaulac and Laura Goodine, graduate students at the Centre of Research on Community Services (CRCS), as part of their practicum training under the supervision of Tim Aubry, Director of CRCS.
- Although the literature review was not exhaustive, the following databases were searched for relevant peer-reviewed articles: CINAHL, EMBASE, ERIC, HealthSTAR, Ovid MEDLINE(R), Econlit, PsycINFO, and Soc Abs. In addition, an Internet search for grey literature was conducted using Google.

## II. History of Report Cards

- A report card can be defined as:
  - “A regular effort by an organization to collect data on two or more other organizations, transform the data into information relevant to assessing performance, and transmit the information to some audience external to the organizations themselves.” (Gormley & Weimer, 1999);
  - A report that provides “information about key social, health, economic, or environmental conditions in a community,” and presents “a compelling snapshot of a community’s status.” (United Way of America, 1999);
  - “An integrated, comprehensive set of quantitative indicators, covering critical aspects of performance of a program or system being monitored, that reduce to a simple, face valid score or set of scores.” (Teague, Ganju, Hornik, Johnson, & McKinney, 1997).
- Report cards when produced more than once allow changes or trends to be tracked over time (United Way of America, 1999).

- Not surprisingly the report card phenomenon came from its use in measuring scholastic performance. The beginnings of the organizational report card in the United States appear to be in the mid 1800s with the advocacy of organizational performance assessments for hospitals and schools. The organizational report card is a similar tool to the scholastic report card in that it allows interested parties to assess the performance of multiple programs or organizations. The political and social acceptance and widespread use of such report cards came much later, arriving in the United States around the 1970s. An era of growing concern over the quality and cost-effectiveness of public services has led to a rising trend towards the use of report cards. Moreover, report cards have become more influential in the political arena since the 1970s (Gormley & Weimer, 1999).
- The report card is one of many tools that are used to measure organizational performance. They are closely related to performance monitoring systems, but should be distinguished from other performance measures such as program evaluation and benchmarking. Several key criteria established by Gormley and Weimer (1999) help distinguish report cards from several other commonly used tools (See Table 1).

**Table 1. Comparison of Performance Monitoring Systems with Report Cards**  
(Taken from Gormley & Weimer, 1999)

	Organizational Focus	Regular Data Collection	External Assessment	Data Transformation	External Audience	Multiple Organizations
Report Cards	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Internal Performance Assessments	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no
Benchmarking	yes	maybe	maybe	yes	yes	yes
Balanced Scorecards	yes	yes	no	yes	maybe	no
Program Evaluations	maybe	no	maybe	yes	maybe	Maybe
Social Indicator Reports	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Reporting/Disclosure Requirements	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes

### III. Current Status of Report Cards

- Reports cards, also referred to as status reports, profile reports (Fielding, Sutherland, & Halfon, 1999), and community indicator reports (United Way of America, 1999), appear to have increased in popularity in the past decade. Three quarters of report card projects surveyed in a national survey of report cards in the United States were first conducted in the mid 1990s (Fielding et al., 1999).

- Changes in society, such as an increased public interest in report cards for hospitals, schools, and other public organizations, combined with the existing atmosphere of accountability and political will for report cards, have led to their popularization (Gormley & Weimer, 1999).
- Report Cards are typically conducted annually, and in many cases quarterly or more frequently (Wholey & Hatry, 1992, cited in Gormley & Weimer, 1999).

#### **IV. Purpose of Report Cards**

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- Report cards provide an overview or snapshot of a particular system or program and permit others to assess its performance (Simmes, Blaszcak, Kurtin, Bowen, & Ross, 2000). The main goal of a report card is to lead to a positive impact on an organization or system (Gormley & Weimer, 1999). Although the primary purpose of report cards is to inform people of the current conditions within a community or domain above and beyond one program (United Way of America, 1999), report cards are used for many purposes, including:
  - Defining community problems
  - Monitoring and tracking changes
  - Setting priorities (Fielding et al., 1999)
  - Evaluation (Pineno, 2002)
  - Identification of underserved areas and needs (Rosenheck & Cicchetti, 1998)
  - Providing feedback to service providers (Gormley & Weimer, 1999)
  - Encouraging collaborative problem-solving (United Way of America, 1999)
  - Facilitating public education
  - Public awareness
  - Social marketing
  - Advocacy efforts by local groups (Fielding et al., 1999)
  - Initiating improvements in systems or promoting action more generally (e.g., Davies, Washington & Bindman, 2002)
  - Accountability (Schriefer, Urden, & Rogers, 1997; Gormley & Weimer, 1999; Lied & Kazandjian, 1999)
  - Supporting continued or increased funding for a service or system (Rosenheck & Cicchetti, 1998), and,
  - As an information tool to facilitate informed decision-making (Simmes et al., 2000).
- In a survey of community health report cards, Fielding and colleagues discovered that the majority of report cards explicitly stated their intended purposes (Fielding et al., 1999).
- The difference between a “community status report” (i.e., the intention of the Ottawa Report Card on Homelessness) and a “targeted community intervention” (i.e., the City of Ottawa’s “Community Action Plan to Prevention and End Homelessness”) is primarily one of action. The former serves to report and monitor conditions in the community whereas the latter targets community interventions, develops an action plan and considers the achievement of outcomes (United Way of America, 1999).

## V. Methodology

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### 1. Development

- The process of developing and formulating report cards appears variable and not standardized. Indeed, in the US national survey by Fielding and colleagues, less than half of the report cards surveyed had used a pre-existing format. In addition, the majority of report cards surveyed were given a rating of poor or fair on quality, based on a set of defined criteria (e.g., organization of report, presentation of data, interpretation of report findings, conceptualization of indicators).
- It is recommended that the development of report cards and other performance monitoring tools be based on a set of explicitly identified values (Rosenheck & Cicchetti, 1998; Teague et al., 1997), from which the purposes of the report card would follow.
- Once the principles have been defined, the stages of report card development that have been described in the research are variable, but include such steps as (Fielding et al., 1999; Rosenheck & Cicchetti, 1998; Teague et al., 1997):
  - Planning,
  - Staffing,
  - An evaluation of other report cards,
  - A literature review,
  - Information gathering in the community,
  - Identification of existing data,
  - Indicator selection,
  - Data collection,
  - Data analysis,
  - A review of report card components by community experts and advisory groups,
  - Report preparation
  - Final approval by the key report card team members, and
  - Dissemination and translation of findings into action
- The indicator selection process is a critical step that should remain at the core of the development of report cards (See Part II, the Homelessness Indicator document; United Way of America, 1999).
- The indicators selected for use should be relevant and useful to all intended users, such as, community organizations, community members, consumers, decision-makers, and politicians (Santiago, 1999).
  - For example, The Toronto Report Card gathered their indicators from public, institutional and community sources. Thus far, the indicators used in the Toronto Report Card (recently completed its 3<sup>rd</sup> report card) fall in four areas (Shepherd, July 2004):
    - ◆ Income Security and Economic Well-Being

- ◆ The State of Toronto's Housing Market
- ◆ People at Risk of Losing their Housing and,
- ◆ People who have lost their Housing

In addition, there is currently a move to develop indicators on episodic use of the emergency shelters and new users for the next version of the Toronto report card (Low, August 2004).

- Two types of questions must be asked for the design of scales to measure performance:
  - How will the outcomes of a program or system be assessed (i.e., selection of indicators)?
  - How will the rating or ranking of programs or systems be determined (Gormley & Weimer, 1999)?
- Gormley and Weimer (1999) suggest three types of report cards:
  - Scientific report cards – based on data, methodologically strong, comprehensive, and valid
  - Popular report cards – communicate relevant information clearly and effectively
  - Hybrid report cards – combine scientific rigour with effective communication
- Gormley and Weimer (1999) have established six criteria for exemplary report cards: validity, comprehensiveness, comprehensibility, relevance, reasonableness and functionality.
- Some report cards assign grades; others use graphical depiction with symbols (Orleans, Gruman, Ulmer, Emont, & Hollendonner, 1999).
- The core of the report card is typically a table or chart or, more typically, a series of tables or charts (Gormley & Weimer, 1999).
- The time to produce report cards required, on average, one year of combined paid and volunteer personnel time, and ranged from one to 58 months of personnel time. The average cost to produce a report card was \$60,934 (US), with a median cost of \$19,000 (US) and a range of \$0 – \$1,000,000 (US; Fielding et al., 1999).

## **2. Facilitators to Report Card Development**

- A key component reported in the success of the San Diego Community Report Card was the involvement of the community, including the involvement of local data experts, professionals, community groups, and local advocacy organizations, to ensure that the final report card reflected the political and social realities of San Diego (Simmes et al., 2000). Fielding and colleagues agree that the participation of a variety of community group and organizations is a critical factor in a successful development of a report card (Fielding et al., 1999).

### **3. Obstacles to Report Card Development**

- Problems with data collection and the lack of existing data were the most frequently identified barriers to report card production (Fielding et al., 1999; Teague et al., 1997).
- The Toronto experience with developing a report card on homelessness (Shepherd, July 2004; Low, August 2004) indicates that ultimately available data is a limiting feature.
- Verification of the accuracy of reported data, in particular for a voluntary report card system where an agency has little formal authority over organizations which report data (Teague et al., 1997).
- Introduction of new data collection across a variety of reporting agencies may result in varying compliance and accuracy (Steinwachs et al., 1994, cited in Teague et al., 1997).
- Concern regarding the average consumer's ability to process a large amount of information (Gormley & Weimter, 1999).
  - Both empirical research and decision-making theory indicate that consumers make less than optimal choices when they have too much information (Hibbard et al., 1997, cited in Gormley & Weimter, 1999).
  - Further, research indicates that consumers complain about getting either too much or too little information (Hanes & Greenlick, 1996 cited in Gormley & Weimter, 1999).

### **4. Diffusion/Dissemination**

- Report cards must reach three target audiences: consumers (public at large), decision-makers, and service providers. Report cards tend to go through an organization or a group of individuals before reaching the intended mass audience. In order to reach the mass audience, there are some barriers that must first be overcome, such as, inadequate funding, time, and data on the part of the report card development group. Other barriers include inadequate education, time, knowledge, access, and interest on the part of the mass audience. The best method of disseminating information contained in the report card remains unknown (Gormley & Weimer, 1999).
- Successful dissemination and translation of the report into action is more likely if the community has been involved in the development of the report card and the content of the report card has been made relevant to all key audiences (Simmes et al., 2000).
- Report cards are political and may receive public scrutiny. In order to survive this scrutiny, report cards should be constructed to be as valid, relevant, comprehensive, comprehensible, reasonable and functional as possible (Gormley & Weimer, 1999).

- Consumers want a mid-sized report – not too long, but not too short. The inclusion of an informative table of contents may allow for the selection of more relevant material within the report card for each audience member (Gormley & Weimer, 1999).
- Presentation is important in terms of a "catchy jingle" or slogan that can attract interest among the different targeted audiences.
- Use of the Internet can facilitate dissemination as well as provide a frequency of the number of individuals accessing the report card by counting the visits per site. Further articles and charts may be generated from journalists and others to reach consumers.
- Use of a range of formats are suggested from visually simple schemes (e.g., like those found in Consumer Reports) to more sophisticated but user-friendly presentations where further analyses may be done by the reader (Teague et al, 1997).

## 5. Limitations of Report Cards

- Some report cards do not go beyond a snapshot of a program or system (United Way of America, 1999). The report card is only the first step toward change.
- Concern regarding who ultimately will access and use report cards, (e.g., those who have less education and resources may not have access report card information) (Gormley & Weimer, 1999; Davies et al., 2002).

## **VI. Implications of the Literature for the Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa**

1. Involve the community in the development and dissemination of the report card for greater success (Simmes et al., 2000).
2. Ensure that the scope of the measures planned is achievable and accessible (Santiago, 1999).
3. Provide a concise summary in the report card to allow greater accessibility of the findings (Schriefer et al., 1997).
4. Adapt the content of future report cards to reflect current social and political situations (Simmes et al., 2000).
5. Create a functional yet comprehensive report card that survives public and political scrutiny (Gormley & Weimer, 1999).
6. Data sources should be included in appendices to enable readers to obtain this technical information should they so desire (Shepherd, personal communication, July 2004).

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7. Given the complexity of the issue under investigation, a hybrid report card is recommended in order to best capture our intended audience (i.e., the general public, decision-makers, and service providers; Gormley & Weimer, 1999).
8. The dissemination stage will be critical, as it is not the production of the report card that will create change, but the public's reaction to the report card that will produce action (United Way of America, 1999).
9. The report card should consider setting goals for the community of Ottawa to reach (e.g., increase social housing by a defined percentage; United Way of America, 1999).
10. Consider innovative ways of disseminating the report card, e.g., Internet (Gormley & Weimer, 1999).

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## **Part II – Indicators and Canadian Report Cards**

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August 2004

## Part II Indicators and Canadian Report Cards

### VIII. Brief Background Description

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- Part II was prepared for the Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa as part of the preliminary development of the Alliance's first Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa to be released in January 2005 with the support of the United Way of Ottawa.
- The purpose of this report is to look at the various reports cards done in Canada and first isolate the possible indicators that might be used to assess homelessness in a community and then provide an analysis of those Report Cards to create a picture of the range of possibilities the Alliance might consider in its report card.
- Using sources available on the Internet, the work for this report was undertaken by Michael Cairns, as part of his internship under the direction of Diane Urquhart of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa.

### IX. Indicators of Homelessness

This section provides a breakdown of some of the indicators that have been used in the building and analysis of the different report cards. Rather than create a list of every indicator used in each report card, the indicators have been grouped into similar conventional categories. They are as follows:

#### 1. Housing Supply

- Vacancy rate: rental and homeownership (trend and projected)
- Geographic location of homeownership, rental, public, and social housing units
  - Density
- Inventory of Housing
- Changes in Housing Stock: (universe and trends)
  - Changes in the number of rental units: (universe and trends)
  - Changes in the number and capacity of shelters, public housing, social housing and subsidized housing units: (universe and trends)
  - Changes in the number and capacity of accessible and special housing:(universe and trends)

#### 2. Housing Demand

- Changes in rental and owner households
- Shelter Use (length of stay) (number of refusals)
- Public housing, social housing, subsidized housing use.
  - Waiting lists (number and length of time on list)
- Number of people accessing permanent housing

#### 3. Support Services

- Rates of individuals and families on OW or ODSP

- Capacity (depth and breath) of support services for those in need
- Use of services
- Changes in the use of food banks
- Changes in the use of services to access identification

#### **4. Affordability**

- Income ranges
- Rental ranges
- Average rent compared with average income
- Tenants and homeowners paying more than 30% of income in housing costs
- Households receiving social benefits paying rent in excess of shelter benefit
- Cost of utilities as a proportion of income

#### **5. Action Plan on Homelessness**

- Funding

#### **6. Other**

- Removal of constraints on housing construction
- Changes in standards for determining suitable housing
- Access to transportation

In addition to the above, the committee may wish to look at developing the following indicators:

- Responsiveness Indicators: How do we determine the needs and the aspirations of citizens?
- Consensus orientation Indicators: How do we involve the poor communities and disadvantaged groups in decision-making?

### **X. A Matrix of Indicators and Data Sources by Report Card**

A matrix was constructed of indicators and data sources by report cards in the communities reviewed (Table 2). It is important to note that the choice of indicators is usually driven by the availability of the data, methodological concerns and the overall framework and focus of the report card. (See the next page.)

### **XI. A Review of Canadian Report Cards**

The Canadian reports were analyzed to provide an overview of the range of different choices that might exist in developing a report card on homelessness in Ottawa (Table 3). Each review offers the following information:

- Name and Location on Internet
- No. Pages
- Lead Organization
- Contributors
- Source Authority
- Frequency
- Continuity
- Format
- Purpose
- Note

**Table 2: Matrix of Indicators and Data Sources by Report Card**

<b>Indicator</b>											
	<b>Halifax</b>	<b>Peel</b>	<b>Niagara</b>	<b>Sudbury</b>	<b>Lower Mainland</b>	<b>Richmond</b>	<b>London</b>	<b>Hamilton</b>	<b>Hamilton SPRC</b>	<b>Toronto</b>	<b>Calgary</b>
<b>1. Housing Supply</b>	X	X	X			X			X	X	X
<b>2. Housing Demand</b>		X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
<b>3. Support Services</b>		X	X			X			X	X	
<b>4. Affordability</b>		X	X						X	X	X
<b>5. Action Plan</b>	X	X	X			X		X	X	X	X
<b>6. Other</b>					X			X	X		
<b>Data Source</b>											
<b>Census Data</b>		X	X		X	X	X		X	X	
<b>Local Data</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
<b>Survey Data</b>			X					X	X		
<b>Interview Data</b>		X	X						X		

**Table 3: Review of Canadian Report Cards**

<b>Name + Web Location</b>	<b>No. Pages</b>	<b>Lead Organization</b>	<b>Contributors</b>	<b>Source Authority</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Continuity</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Calgary Homeless Foundation www.calgaryhomeless.com/bs_home.html	Web Page	City of Calgary	Research	City of Calgary	Variety of reports on Homelessness	Continuation of research no report card	Qualitative and quantitative research	Inform	
Halifax Report Card www.region.halifax.ns.ca/planning/Homelessness/HomelessnessInHRM-Portrait.pdf	45p	Community Action on Homelessness	Chaytor Consulting Services	Local and Regional Gov.	One evaluation 2006	Information updates on Web	Text: Action Plan: activities and outcomes	Setting the stage for an evaluation	Appendix has an inventory of shelters and services
Hamilton Homelessness Report 2002 www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/reportcard02.htm	10p	Community Advisory Board Hamilton	Pat Harkness and Community Support and Research Branch Hamilton	Review of homelessness initiatives in Canadian cities	One time report	Determination of a homelessness plan for Hamilton	Text some quantitative data	Review of shelter systems in other cities	Determined which cities had evaluation plans
Hamilton Community Trends (2003) www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/homelesstrends.htm	12 p Exec. Sum 105p report 70p Append.	Community Agency	SPRC and community homelessness network	Census data Civic data Data from local organizations Survey and interviews	Annual report	2003 available	Text with tables Qualitative and quantitative data	Report Card and recommendations.	Notes on methodology in the appendix and full range of indicators in the report.
London ON www.investinginchildren.on.ca/Resources/reportcard/longreport.html	2p and other web pages	Community non-profit Organization	N/A	Data from civic and national census	Annual report on a variety of subjects	Continuity in main thematic areas	Text some quantitative data	Snapshot of various concerns	Focus on poverty and children
Lower Mainland BC www.tenants.bc.ca/newsletters/report%20card.pdf	6p	Lower Mainland Network for Affordable Housing	Local organizations	Tenants Right Action Coalition	One time report	None	Text with some quantitative data	Grade on a number of municipalities	Secondary suites, standards in housing %of pop. at risk

**Table 3: Review of Canadian Report Cards (Continued)**

<b>Name + Web Location</b>	<b>No. Pages</b>	<b>Lead Organization</b>	<b>Contributors</b>	<b>Source Authority</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Continuity</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Niagara Housing Report Card and Update <a href="http://www.niagaradhc.on.ca/HousingReportCard2001-02.pdf">www.niagaradhc.on.ca/HousingReportCard2001-02.pdf</a>	21p Report 9p update	Niagara District Health Council	The Niagara Mental Health Coalition	Health Council & Mental Health Study	Annual Updates	One update available	Text with indicators in update	Report creates action plan.	Survey, interview of MH clients, some housing indicators
Peel Report Card (2001)	9p report 26p appendix	Local Government departments	Local organizations	Regional Government	Yearly	2003 N/A other reports (youth and homelessnes s)	Text and appendix with data	Eval. of situation	Quick facts generated for council
Peel Report Card (2002) <a href="http://www.region.peel.on.ca/housing/homeless/reportcard2.htm">www.region.peel.on.ca/housing/homeless/reportcard2.htm</a>	28 p	Local Government departments	Local departments	Regional Government	Yearly	Building on year one	Text with some quantitative data	Trends and solutions	Appendix: rent vs. income gap
Richmond BC Homelessness Needs Assessment <a href="http://www.city.richmond.bc.ca/planning/housing/homeless/docs/finalreport.pdf">www.city.richmond.bc.ca/planning/housing/homeless/docs/finalreport.pdf</a>	66 p	Local Government and Community Agencies	City Space Consulting Ltd.	Local Government	One time report	Council adopts report in 2003	Text Some quantitative data	Building a strategy for affordable housing	Some indicators and stories. Identified partners & monitoring system.
Sudbury Municipal Report Card (2004) <a href="http://laurentian.ca/government/Municipal%20Report%20Card%20Feb%2004.pdf">http://laurentian.ca/government/Municipal%20Report%20Card%20Feb%2004.pdf</a>	47p	Laurentian University	Student Research	Healthy Community Model of Sudbury	One time report	None	Text with some quantitative data	Argue for yearly report cards on health	Small section on measuring homelessness as part of health assessment
Toronto Report Cards 2001 + 03 <a href="http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/homelessness">www.city.toronto.on.ca/homelessness</a>	62p	City of Toronto	Community Agencies	Toronto Action Plan	Annual	2001 to 2003	Quantitative data with analysis	Report on progress and new challenges	Indicators of homelessness.