

Equity and Inclusion

A list of broad social goals has been established as a starting point for the sustainability plan. To achieve these (and environmental and economic) goals, the City and the community have been working for some time to develop and implement a Social Development Strategy. The Strategy complements the sustainability plan in that it focuses on the actions that meet at least one of the Sustainability Plan's goals. This document summarizes our performance, and highlights the links between goals, actions and root causes.

Description

Equity and social inclusion are perhaps the most significant indicators of a just and healthy community. A lack of equity – which is often revealed through high levels of poverty – is at the root of many serious social problems, ranging from high rates of crime, to lower levels of education. At the same time, lack of equity often leads to **social exclusion**, which occurs when certain groups of people have difficulty participating in mainstream society. Race, income level, disability status, and gender are all factors which commonly lead to social exclusion because they imply a difference from the mainstream population.



Social inclusion, on the other hand, is a multi-dimensional approach to address this problem. It encompasses not just anti-poverty programs or community development, but seeks to tackle many aspects of deprivation, including:

- Unemployment
- Poor educational attainment
- Ill health
- Low income
- Lack of access to community services
- Inadequate housing

Equity and inclusion are deeply inter-related concepts that provide a lens for measuring social progress and development.

Status and Trends

According to data from Statistics Canada, 1 in 10 working families in Prince George are considered “low income”. Almost 2% of the working-aged population is receiving income assistance, more than twice the provincial average. Unemployment is also quite high, with 5% of residents receiving EI, compared to 3% in BC.

The factors that lead to social exclusion are often self-perpetuating and inter-related. Poverty and inadequate housing, for instance, are likely to result in lack of opportunities in employment and education that affect several generations. Certain groups of people face more barriers to social inclusion that may not be overt but are nonetheless deep-rooted and systemic. In Prince George, First Nations and youths are particularly at risk groups, experiencing higher than average rates of poverty, unemployment, and homelessness. Women are particularly vulnerable, earning only 56 cents for every dollar that men earn.¹

Performance Measurement

Of the potential measures listed below, which should we use to measure and communicate progress? Would you rather use another one? Why?

The following measures could provide useful data for delving more deeply into the issues facing those who are being left behind.

- Number of people who are **homeless**
- **% of children who live in low-income families:** This indicator measures the proportion of children aged 0-17 who live in families that fall below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) (“poverty line”).
- **Poverty rates by household type, gender and/or ethnicity:** Poverty rates can vary, depending on the composition of the household. For example, female lone-parent and seniors living alone tend to have higher rates of poverty than double-income families with children. In some communities, some minority groups have higher poverty rates.
- **% of working population who are living below LICO:** This indicator measures the number of people who “working poor”: working but unable to meet their basic needs.
- **% of people who rely on food banks:** A household is considered food secure when its occupants do not live in hunger or fear of starvation. People who rely on food banks, however, are considered food insecure. Food banks originally began as a last resort measure, to be used only in rare emergencies. The increasing numbers of people who now rely on food banks is a symptom of a much larger problem –the inability of people to meet their basic needs.
- **Education levels,** comparison between demographic groups (Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, visible minority)
- **% of Councilors who are “diverse”:** This indicator measures the extent to which people in positions of power are representative of the wider community, and the extent to which marginalized groups are able to break through some of the barriers to full participation. The indicator could examine a range of measures of “diversity”, such as Aboriginal status, disability, gender, and visible minority status.
- **% of people taking part in continuing education.**
- **Graduation rates,** again comparing a range of measures of diversity.
- **Adult literacy levels**
- **Active memberships in public libraries**

¹ This is based on 2006 Census data which indicates that the average income for working men was \$45,130, while the average income for women was \$25,715.

Questions for Consideration

- Poverty is seen as the lack of money, but it is actually only one manifestation of the wider problem of social exclusion. What are the root causes of poverty and social exclusion in Prince George, and what can be done to address them?
- Approximately 10% of Prince George's population is Aboriginal, and yet they are disproportionately represented in every measure of social exclusion, such as income, educational status, and homelessness. The reasons for this are entrenched in people's attitudes and social systems. How can the community of Prince George begin to address the social exclusion of Aboriginal people?