

WELL BEING LEGACY

Executive Summary

Well Being Legacy launched in 2017 as an inquiry for reimagining and shaping equitable and intergenerational well-being. Our focus has been to engage a diverse mix of community change-makers, leaders of influential networks and organizations, subject matter experts, and journalists in collective discovery, discernment, and direction-setting. Our efforts were organized around four questions:

1. How is our well-being affected by the legacies of policy and investment choices made by prior generations and leaders?
2. What can we learn from community efforts that are creating the vital conditions for equitable health and well-being?
3. What are the collective choices—policies, practices, and investments—that will help us ensure greater health and well-being for all community members?
4. How might we harness our collective wisdom, assets, and influence to shape well-being across generations and for generations to come?

Over the past year, through a variety of formative activities, thousands of local, state and national leaders have shared in our collective process. *The following summarizes what we are hearing and learning.*

This is a pivotal moment

America finds itself at a critical juncture, fraught with mounting challenges, partisan gridlock, and deep despair among many. But there is also hope—and a deep reservoir of good will and good work underway across the country—much of which seeks to strengthen community connections and enhance well-being in its broadest sense.

The power of place: Localism is ascending. At local level, real people are working together to create the vital conditions for well-being. States, cities, counties, neighborhoods, and socially responsible businesses are frontiers for positive change.

Seeking pragmatism: There is deep-seated skepticism, if not overt mistrust, of institutions, “experts,” and “evidence.” People believe what they experience for themselves and the lived experience of others like them. Consistent with the shift toward localism, pragmatism calls for experiential learning, practical action, reflection, and community-generated insights. There is a thirst to discover what works, for whom, and in what contexts.

Major formative activities

MARCH 2017 – JULY 2018

- Developed framework for community health and well-being, and narrative framing
- Interviewed selected thought leaders
- Profiled selected spotlight sites
- Conducted survey of Community Commons users
- Convened exploratory dialogues, with follow-up surveying
- Developed primers for each Vital Condition, using commissioned subject matter expert papers
- Analyzed and visualized national datasets and crafted data stories
- Reviewed relevant literature and amassed knowledge-base
- Designed and convened inaugural gathering of community change-makers, national networks/orgs, subject matter experts, and journalists

“Legacy” and “Vital Conditions” provide a welcoming frame

Framing in terms of “vital conditions” and creating “legacies” for well-being is resonating. In dialogues, “vital conditions” and “legacies” provide a surprisingly fast and engaging way to unpack complexities and deepen shared understanding about the drivers of well-being. The framing helps establish a long-term, systems view, and points to a values-based agenda.

Surfacing shared values: The vital conditions are proving to be intuitive and compelling. They are quickly accepted as things we all depend on. Our early work suggests that framing in terms of vital conditions for well-being may be helpful to understand complex issues and focus public judgment.

Engendering the long view: The frame of legacy enables us to consider what is needed for well-being for future generations. Creating legacies of well-being requires systemic, sustained actions over years and decades. Legacies provide a useful frame for norming around the kind of long term, structural changes we seek.

Recognizing multiple legacies: Our “well-being legacies” are plural and contested: everyone has their own story. The framing of “legacies” enables us to hold multiple truths and honor the unique experiences of people and communities.

Moving forward by facing our past: “Legacies” provides a lens through which to unpack the ongoing and historical traumas incurred by design in many communities. Many communities struggle to move forward because the past is not dead; it isn’t even past. The framing of legacy helps us look backward and forward—providing a vehicle through which to acknowledge context and historic injustices, while positioning such conditions as movable.

We have a real opportunity to influence intergenerational change

Hard-won experience has taught us much about improving our vital conditions, yet we are far from assuring them for all. A long history of flawed policies, disinvestments, and inhumane indifference toward each other threaten our vital conditions. Maintaining the status quo is not an option. We possess enormous capacities to rethink our trajectories. Moving forward together requires that we talk about why our legacies matter and how each of us can advance the work ahead. Forward momentum in many issue areas and through ongoing movements could bolster a vibrant living legacies agenda.

Distilling practical priorities: To improve the chances for intergenerational health and well-being, our policies, practices, and investment priorities must fulfill four practical tasks: protect past gains; restore vital conditions that are eroding; nurture neglected or untapped potential; and leave behind things that are no longer tenable.

Working at multiple levels: Change takes place at multiple levels and in different ways—in places, organizations and broader economic, political, and social systems. Achieving deep and lasting change will require distilling priorities that fit these different levels and contexts.

Building on a robust network of assets: There are many existing local, regional, and national efforts that well align with Well Being Legacy. Leaders point out that it will be critical to leverage and find ways to add value to these different efforts, and to support existing leaders and champions.

Moving forward together: Stakeholders engaged through the various formative activities consistently pointed to the need for an infrastructure to advance collective learning and action, and maintain momentum sparked by conversations and convenings during this first year. There’s palpable energy to do something together.