

Berkshire Benchmarks is a program of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission that began in 2009 to:

- Provide a central data clearinghouse for regional data,
- Support contemporary initiatives through the preparation and presentation of data and analysis, and
- Track and report on a number of indicators of regional health and vitality.

The program consists of two components:

1. **Data Clearinghouse:** A searchable database of publicly available data points on the region and its municipalities.
2. **Regional Indicators:** Ongoing tracking and reporting on conditions in the region including environment, economy, and social indicators.

To date, the program has enjoyed the support of the Berkshire United Way, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Berkshire Community Action Council, and the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation. In 2012 we are grateful for the continued support of Berkshire United Way, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, and Western Mass Electric (WMECO).

This annual report highlights the major initiatives and accomplishments of the program for the 2011 calendar year. In 2012 we look forward to defining and reporting on economic indicators for the region, further expanding the data points available through the clearinghouse, and continuing our support of community enrichment and education initiatives.

[WWW.BERKSHIREBENCHMARKS.ORG](http://WWW.BERKSHIREBENCHMARKS.ORG)



The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is the regional planning agency for the 32 municipalities in Berkshire County, MA. The BRPC supports municipal

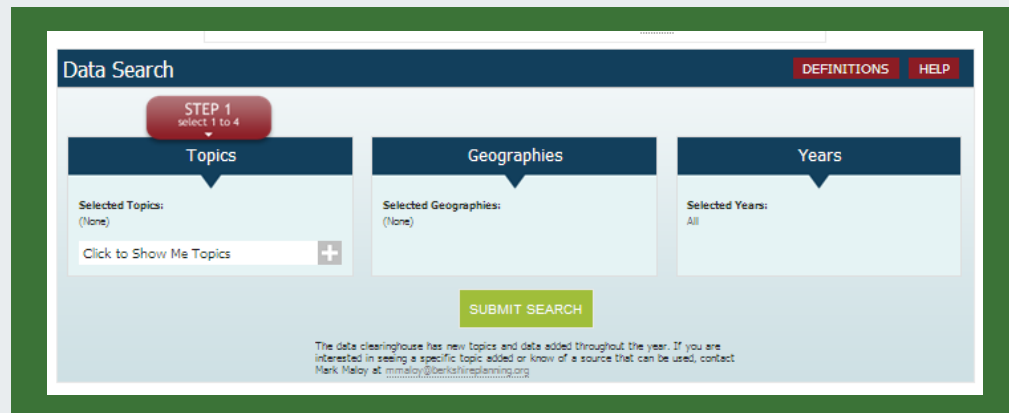
and regional initiatives through short- and long-range planning studies, staff support, and implementation activities related to economic development, transportation, zoning, brownfield assessment and cleanup, environment, historic preservation, municipal efficiency, health and wellness, housing, food security, and social equity.

To learn more about BRPC and our current projects, visit [www.berkshireplanning.org](http://www.berkshireplanning.org).

## DATA CLEARINGHOUSE

In 2011, the Berkshire Benchmarks program added over 20,000 data points, a 200% increase from 2010. The notable addition to this year's data includes the 2010 US Census, providing updated population numbers as well as race, age and household type information. In addition to Census data, additional statistics related to schools, agriculture, the Berkshire County Prevention Needs Assessment Surveys, employment, housing cost and property taxes were also made available through the clearinghouse.

In 2012, a major emphasis will be incorporating data from the American Community Survey, which includes poverty, income, education and housing. Additional data that will be updated includes health care, foreclosure, and crime statistics as well as previously mentioned data.



### Data Clearinghouse Training

While the data clearinghouse is an open public resources that can be used by anyone, there are a few professional groups to whom this resource may be particularly valuable: non-profit agencies and municipalities. Both of these groups develop grants and proposals requiring a substantial amount of data about the region and topic(s) on which the grant is focused such as affordable housing, economic development, early childhood education, youth programming, or health and wellness preventative programming. A one-stop-shop for regional data can make the most of resources and result in a stronger application by facilitating access to a wide range of data.

In 2011, Berkshire Benchmarks held a training to help introduce the data clearinghouse to these two user-groups. Additional trainings will be scheduled in 2012. Anyone interested in attending a free training should contact Mark Maloy (413) 442-1521 x29 or [mmaloy@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:mmaloy@berkshireplanning.org).

### Financials

FY2011:

Berkshire United Way: \$25,000  
 Berkshire Community Action Council: \$12,000  
 Berkshire Regional Planning Commission: \$10,000

FY2012:

Berkshire United Way: \$25,000  
 Berkshire Regional Planning Commission: \$10,000  
 Western Massachusetts Electric Company: \$5,000

This funding allowed Berkshire Benchmarks to provide over 1,300 hours of support to the community by collecting, analyzing, reporting and presenting data.

# REGIONAL INDICATORS

The regional indicators portion of the Berkshire Benchmarks program has two primary functions:

- **Regional Indicators:** A primary ongoing function of the program is to identify a specific set of data points that help gauge the relative health of the region in a number of areas. This includes economy, environment, social, infrastructure, health, and mobility, among other topics.
- **Applied Analysis:** Staff develops tailored data analyses in the form of live presentations and reports to inform and support various community initiatives.

## Indicators

The indicators program was originally designed to identify and track indicators attached to ten goal areas. In 2010 the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission was awarded a HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grant to develop a new regional plan for the Berkshires. A main component of the planning process is to develop and track indicators to monitor implementation success over the long-term. The Berkshire Benchmarks program is now committed to work in tandem with the regional plan to ensure the indicators ultimately reported and tracked through Berkshire Benchmarks are consistent with those identified as metrics in the new plan. The first set of indicators will be developed in 2012 with a focus on the economy.

## Applied Analysis

### Berkshire Priorities

A group of community leaders from business, community-service non-profit, and regional organizations began meeting in 2010 to help champion change in certain community statistics seen as detrimental to the region over both the long- and short-term. The initial list of the group included the rates of poverty, teen pregnancy, teen substance use, and MCAS test scores. After much discussion and evaluation of different community indicators and substantive research, the group identified early childhood education – with a focus on raising third grade reading scores – as its first priority. Berkshire Benchmarks supplied various economic, demographic, and education data to the group over the course of their 2011 deliberations. In the coming year we will continue to provide support to this group as they move forward with championing specific initiatives in this area.

### Early Childhood Education Think Tank

In late 2009 the Berkshire United Way and Compact for Education convened a group of early childhood educators, colleges, and local funders with the aim of helping to improve the visibility and understating of the importance of early childhood education in the region and to help ensure more students enter kindergarten ready to learn. In 2011 Berkshire Benchmarks staff guided the group through a strategic planning process that identifies the full range of action items the group would like to pursue and then assigns priorities for implementation. In the coming year the group will finalize the implementation strategy and pursue actions to bring the strategy to fruition.

### FY 2012 Community Impact Investments Report

Berkshire Benchmarks assisted the Berkshire United Way in processing and reporting on the outputs and impacts from their FY 2010 program investments. In FY 2010 the Berkshire United Way invested \$1,632,307 into 45 programs. Each program partner tracked a number of demographic and program impact indicators throughout the year, submitting final outcomes to the BUW at the end of the fiscal year. This data was then evaluated and processed into a concise report to highlight the major accomplishments of program partners in the community. The 2009 and 2010 reports are available on the Berkshire United Way website: <http://berkshireunitedway.org>.

## Looking Ahead:

In the coming year the Berkshire Benchmarks program looks forward to completing the following projects:

### Benchmarking Pollution and Pollution Prevention Impacts in the Berkshire's Hospitality Sector

In late 2011 Berkshire Regional Planning Commission was awarded an EPA Source Reduction Assistance Grant to benchmark hospitality industry pollution and then provide training to support the pollution reductions over the long-term. Partnering with the Berkshire Visitors Bureau and Berkshire County Boards of Health Association, BRPC will work with a contractor to successfully complete the training and baseline work of this project. The final report and findings will be posted to the Berkshire Benchmarks site.

### Developing Indicators for the Berkshire Economy

In 2006, the Berkshire Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) issued its *Rural Clusters of Innovation: Berkshires Strategy Project* and the subsequent *Berkshire Blueprint* which established a succinct vision for economic progress and identified a number of indicators to track. These indicators were completed once, but due a lack of funding followed by the dissolution of BEDC, these have never been updated. Recently, economic development planning has seen two major milestones: the completion of a federal Economic Development Agency (EDA) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) by BRPC in 2011 which identifies priority economic development projects and objectives and the Sustainable Berkshires regional plan which will set a comprehensive policy framework for economic development for the next 20-30 years. In late 2011 Berkshire Regional Planning Commission was awarded a \$5,000 grant from Western Massachusetts Electric Company to refine and update economic indicators for the Berkshire region. The new indicators will effectively update the Berkshire Blueprint measures and help track progress and success of the economic performance of the region in alignment with the new regional plan and CEDS document.

### Position Papers

Berkshire Benchmarks will develop "position papers", a concise review of the dynamics and importance of a specific topic within the region. This includes a review of current regional initiatives, data trends, and broader research from the respective field to help interpret the data as it relates to conditions in the Berkshires. The first three position papers will address early childhood education, young adult education and work transitions, and financial stability and "living wage" in the Berkshires.

### Municipal Snapshots

Berkshire Benchmarks will begin to develop municipal snapshots that provide community-specific data in a variety of topics for each of the 32 communities in the Berkshires. These will be shared with the communities and made available on the Berkshire Benchmarks website.

## Berkshire Benchmarks Staff Contacts

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### Regional Indicators

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