

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 2012 calendar year. In 2013 we look forward to defining and reporting performance indicators for the region based on the new regional plan, further expanding the data points available through the clearinghouse, and continuing our support of community enrichment and education initiatives.

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.

DATA CLEARINGHOUSE

In 2012, the Berkshire Benchmarks program added over 10,000 data points, bringing our total to over 40,000 data points. The notable addition to this year's data is the American Community Survey 5-year averages for 2005-2009, 2006-2010 and 2007-2011. In addition, education and economic data was added to keep the data clearinghouse up-to-date.

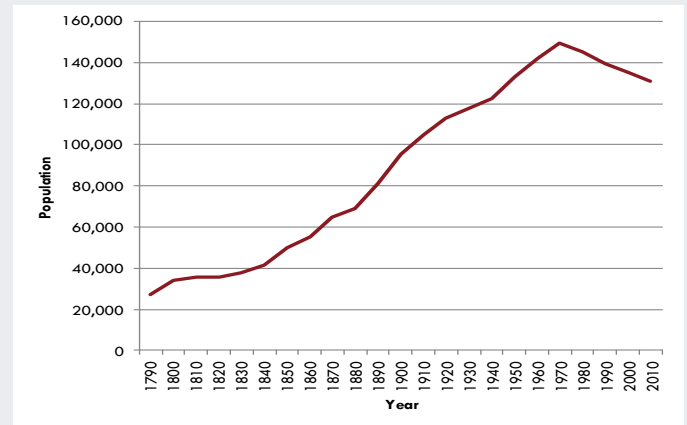
Data Clearinghouse Training

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 2012, Berkshire Benchmarks held a training to help introduce the data clearinghouse to these two user-groups. Additional trainings will be scheduled in 2013. Anyone interested in attending a free training should contact Mark Maloy (413) 442-1521 x29 or mmaloy@berkshireplanning.org.

Data Brief: Population

Berkshire Benchmarks developed a data brief on the current population in Berkshire County which looked at items such as our historic population change as a county and for each municipality, the age of the population, births, deaths, migration and race. The brief also went over the potential for future population change based on the characteristics of the existing population.

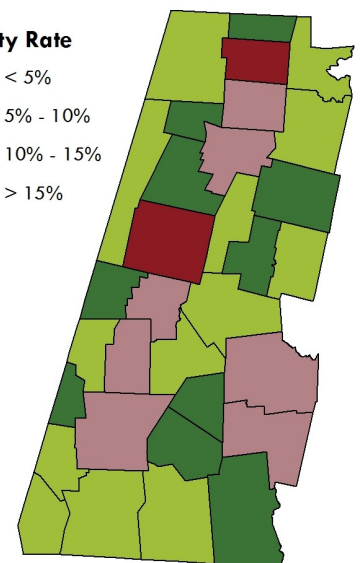
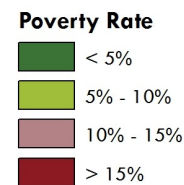
County Population 1790-2010



Poverty by Municipality

Data Brief: Poverty

Berkshire Benchmarks also developed a data brief on poverty, looking at factors such as age, education, race, sex, employment and family composition.



Both data profiles are available to view or download at the Berkshire Benchmarks website.

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

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.

Applied Analysis

Berkshire Priorities and Pittsfield Promise

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 first initiative area being championed by this group is early childhood education, with a focus on raising third grade reading scores. In 2012, Berkshire Benchmarks continued our ongoing capacity of supplying the group with various economic, demographic, and education data to support their initiative work. Data also helped support the group to successfully write a grant to support early childhood initiatives in the city of Pittsfield (Pittsfield Promise). 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

The Early Childhood Education Think Tank is a collaborative of early childhood educators, colleges, and local funders aimed at improving the visibility and understating of the importance of early childhood education. This group also serves as a platform for these entities to convene to share information on trainings, emerging state policy, grant opportunities, and to coordinate collaborative events such as Wee Read and story walks. The group completed a strategic plan in 2011 with the assistance of Berkshire Benchmarks staff and began working towards those identified goals in 2012. This included some committee work, with Berkshire Benchmarks heading up the data and measurement team.

Berkshire United Way Community Impact Position Papers

Berkshire Benchmarks has developed three "position papers", one for each of Berkshire United Way's community goals that guide its grant making and initiative work. The papers offer a concise review of the trends and dynamics related to each goal area: early childhood education, young adult education and work transitions, and financial stability and "living wage" in the Berkshires.. 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. These papers are available through the Berkshire United Way website.

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 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 in summer 2013.

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.



Financials

FY2012:

Berkshire United Way: \$25,000

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission: \$10,000

Western Massachusetts Electric Company: \$5,000

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation: \$8,500

FY2013:

Berkshire United Way: \$25,000

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission: \$10,000

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation: \$3,000

This funding allowed Berkshire Benchmarks to provide almost 1,000 hours of support to the community by collecting, analyzing, reporting and presenting data.

**Berkshire Benchmarks
Staff Contacts**

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