

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 2013 we are grateful for the continued support of Berkshire United Way, Massachusetts Department of Transportation and the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation.

This annual report highlights the major initiatives and accomplishments of the program for the 2013 calendar year. In 2014 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

TESTIMONIALS

As one happy user wrote “Just a note of thanks for the Berkshire Benchmarks data-base....OMG, did that ever help me with our recent proposals! The only problem was I couldn’t stop looking up information...it is easy to use and very enlightening...I actually feel much more informed on what’s happening in our community. Kudos to all who made it happen!”

DATA CLEARINGHOUSE

In 2013, the Berkshire Benchmarks program added over 10,000 data points, bringing our total to almost 50,000 data points. The notable addition to this year’s data is the American Community Survey 5-year averages for 2008-2012. In addition, education and economic data was added to keep the data clearinghouse up-to-date. In 2013, there were almost 1,000 visits to the website with around 100 regular users using the data clearinghouse.

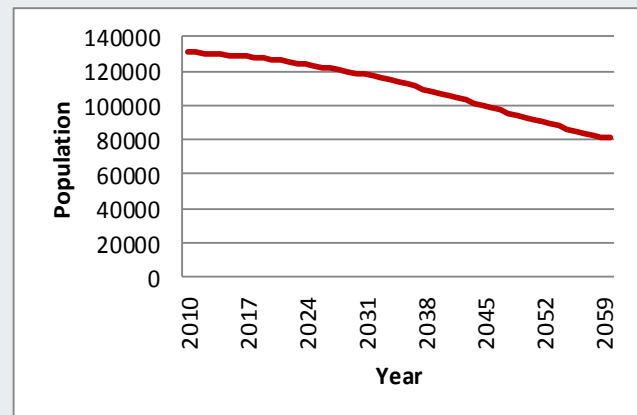
Data Clearinghouse Training

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 2013, Berkshire Benchmarks held a training to help introduce the data clearinghouse to these two user-groups. Additional trainings will be scheduled in 2014. Anyone interested in attending a free training should contact Mark Maloy (413) 442-1521 x29 or maloy@berkshireplanning.org.

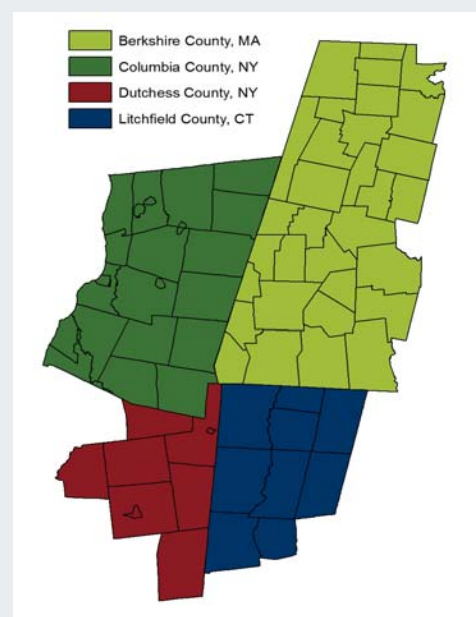
Population Projections:

Berkshire Benchmarks developed population projections for the county in 2013 and has been sharing this information with various groups throughout the year. These projections, which show a continued loss of population, have led to a broad regional discussion on the future of our region and its impact on our economy, education, municipal finance, housing and infrastructure. More information and the impact on the region can be found throughout the Sustainable Berkshire’s Regional Plan.

County Population Projection—2010-2060



BTCF Catchment Area



Data Collection: BTCF

Berkshire Benchmarks collected a wide range of data for the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation (BTCF) to be utilized in its decision making process for grants. Berkshire Benchmarks collected data on poverty, education, employment, and general demographics for Berkshire County, MA, Columbia and Dutchess County, NY, and Litchfield County, CT. Population projections, similar to what was developed for Berkshire County were developed for Columbia County, NY.



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. These include 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. With the completion of the Sustainable Berkshires Regional Plan, new indicator goals have been developed in the following categories:

- Climate and Energy
- Conservation and Recreation
- Economy
- Food and Agriculture
- Historic Preservation
- Housing and Neighborhoods
- Infrastructure and Services
- Land Use

Over the course of 2014, these indicators will be further developed and posted online, where they can be tracked over time to see how the Berkshires are doing as a region.

As an example, for Climate and Energy, potential indicators may include Vehicle Miles Traveled per day, CO2 Emissions, Emissions by Fuel Type, Renewable Energy Production, and communities that have become Green Communities.

As an additional example, Historic Preservation indicators may include number of historic surveys, National Register listings, Community Preservation Act adoptions, communities with a demolition delay bylaw and communities that have a local historic district.

Applied Analysis

Berkshire Priorities and Pittsfield Promise

In 2013, Berkshire Benchmarks continued our ongoing support of supplying the groups with various education data to support their initiative work, including tracking of MCAS scores by school and district, enabling the groups to more efficiently target those schools and districts that need assistance. In the coming year we will continue to provide support to this group as they move forward with their initiatives.

Berkshire United Way

Berkshire Benchmarks has provided data and analysis to the Berkshire United Way throughout 2013 on a variety of issues, including teen pregnancy, financial stability, and early childhood literacy.

Looking Ahead

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

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.

Indicator Development

Berkshire Benchmarks will develop 1-page summaries for each of the indicator goals. These summaries will provide in-depth analysis on the indicators related to each goal, including data tables, graphs, and what it means for the Berkshire region.

Financials

FY2013:

Berkshire United Way: \$25,000

BRPC/MassDOT: \$10,000

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation: \$3,000

FY2014:

Berkshire United Way: \$15,000

BRPC/MassDOT: \$10,000

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation: \$4,500

This funding allowed Berkshire Benchmarks to provide almost 350 hours of support in 2013 to the community by collecting, analyzing, reporting and presenting data.

Staff Contacts

Data Clearinghouse and Regional Indicators

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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.

