

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 2015 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 2015 calendar year. In 2016 we look forward to defining and reporting performance indicators for the region based on the regional plan, Sustainable Berkshires, further expanding the data points available through the clearinghouse, and continuing our support of community enrichment and education initiatives.

WWW.BERKSHIREBENCHMARKS.ORG

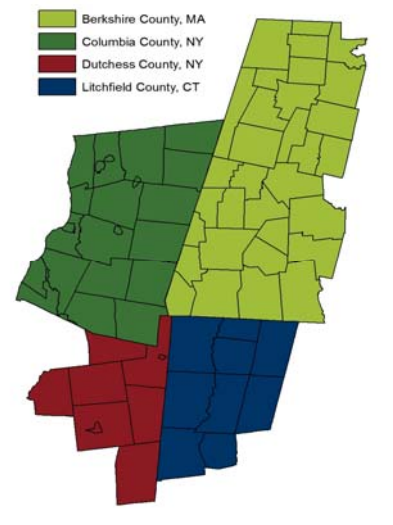
DATA CLEARINGHOUSE

In 2015, the Berkshire Benchmarks program added over 12,000 data points, bringing our total to almost 87,000 data points. The notable addition to this year's data is the American Community Survey 5-year averages for 2010-2014. In addition, education and economic data was added to keep the data clearinghouse up-to-date. In 2015, there were over 1,800 visits to the website with around 400 repeat visits 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 topics 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 2015, Berkshire Benchmarks held a training to help introduce the data clearinghouse to these two user-groups. Additional trainings will be scheduled in 2016. Anyone interested in attending a free training should contact Mark Maloy (413) 442-1521 x29 or maloy@berkshireplanning.org.

BTCF Catchment Area



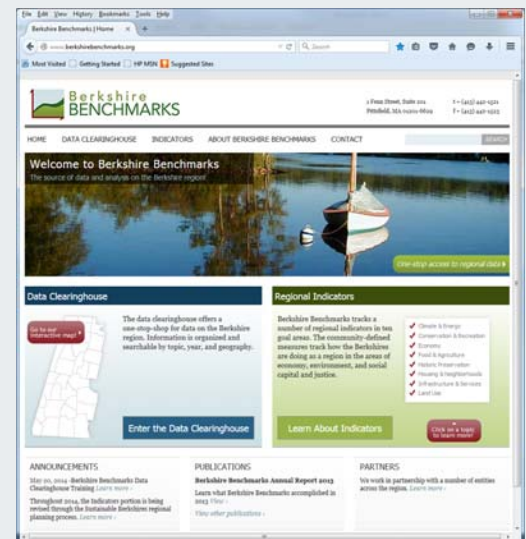
Data Collection: BTCF

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 ad Dutchess County, NY, and Litchfield County, CT..

WEBSITE

Data Cleaning

In response to the survey that was conducted in 2014, substantial cleaning of the data clearinghouse was done in 2015. This included removal of old data that is no longer able to be tracked and modification of data to new sources that provided more consistent data. Additional categories to the clearinghouse were also added to allow easier navigation and searching for particular topics. In 2016, the data will continue to be cleaned and reorganized to better meet the needs of the users.





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 2015, these indicators were developed, but additional work needs to be done to get them online and updated in a consistent manner. This will allow the tracking over time to see how the Berkshires are doing as a region.

As an example, for Housing and Neighborhoods, indicators include housing burden, which is the ratio of income to home value, the number of affordable units, the violent and property crime rates, the percentage of rental and owner units that are affordable to households earning 80 percent of the median family income, and equitable development, which is the proportion of household income spent on housing and transportation costs.

Applied Analysis

Berkshire Priorities and Pittsfield Promise

In 2015, 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. |

Berkshire United Way

Berkshire Benchmarks has provided data and analysis to the Berkshire United Way throughout 2015 on a variety of issues, including teen pregnancy, financial stability, and early childhood literacy.

Berkshire Education Task Force

In 2015, Berkshire Benchmarks developed long range school enrollment projections. These projections have allowed the community to see the impact of our declining population is having on our schools. The projections helped educate school leaders and were a major part of the creation of the Berkshire County Education Task Force.

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 continue development of the indicators, including the development of 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

FY2015:

Berkshire United Way: \$15,000

BRPC/MassDOT: \$10,000

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation: \$3,500

FY2016:

Berkshire United Way: \$15,000

BRPC/MassDOT: \$10,000

Private Individuals (Education Research): \$5,000

This funding allowed Berkshire Benchmarks to provide almost 350 hours of support in 2015 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.

