

# COMPOSITE INDICATORS OF COMMUNITY VITALITY

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## Background and Rationale

Under the *Official Languages Act*, the Government of Canada is committed to “supporting the development and vitality” of Canada’s Official-Language Minority Communities (OLMCs).

Community vitality is a complex phenomenon, encompassing the characteristics and practices of individuals as well as the collective capacity for community action. It is commonly understood as a process as well as a state of being. Promoting growth and sustaining long-term vitality is the goal of governments and community networks.

Policy makers, researchers and community leaders recognize that the OLMCs experience a wide range of local and regional circumstances. Some communities are large in size accounting for hundreds of thousands of individuals while others are small in number. Across other key dimensions of community vitality (institutional presence, socio-economic status, language practices, etc.), Canada’s OLMCs display highly diverse circumstances and experience different trends. The complexity of communities has rendered the measuring of their vitality problematic which the current research project is intended to address.

Building on its “Communities in Context” research initiative, which presents demo-linguistic and demographic data in a series of relative indices, the Research Team of the Official Languages Branch of Canadian Heritage has undertaken work on composite indicators which draw on data from geographic, demographic and institutional sources.

While the development of composite indicators represent high potential for policy making, it should be remembered that, while they “can summarise complex, multi-dimensional realities with a view to supporting decision-makers”, composite indicators may also “send misleading policy messages if poorly constructed or interpreted”. (OECD, 2008)

It should also be noted that the inclusion of composite indicators in the policy planning and evaluation cycle is complementary to other sources of information about OLMCs and that there are important dimensions to community vitality that are not easily measured but are nonetheless crucial.

## Methodology

### Characteristics and Dimensions

To prepare for the development of composite indicators, data was assembled and grouped into a series of dimensions organized under the broad themes of population characteristics and community resources. Certain criteria (useful level of geography, replicability over time, cost/effort feasibility) were considered before items were incorporated into the composite.

### Population Characteristics

Drawing on the Census and National Household Survey, more than 100 variables and measures have been calculated and grouped into geo-spatial, demo-linguistic, demographic, socio-cultural and socio-economic dimensions. Where possible, data for these dimensions is presented as values (numbers and percentage) as well as through the prism of relative indices in which minority-language populations are compared to the majority with whom they share a territory, other OLMCs at various levels of geography; and to themselves at different points in time.

### Community Resources

Data from institutional datasets has been organized to illustrate the presence of institutions and organizations which serve the interests of OLMCs and their proximity to the members of the community.

### Ranking, Quintiles, Weighting and Composites

Following the compilation of data for the variables, a series of rankings and quintiles were developed for the various territories at each geographic level (census division, economic region, province/territory). The rankings for each variable and measure contributed to an aggregate ranking with the individual rankings being assigned varying weights according to their relative importance.

## Potential Applications

The Composite Indicators of Community Vitality can be used to support differential policy orientations and community development strategies. If successfully developed and implemented, they can support asymmetrical, evidence-based policy development.

When applied, the Composite Indicators will display the relative vitality of OLMCs across the country thereby contributing to the identification of communities with very low or very high vitality in various dimensions.

For communities which show high vitality in various dimensions, it is possible to seek explanations for their status and potentially foster development in other communities which may show lower status.

For communities which display low vitality in various dimensions, we can identify the factors which have a negative impact on vitality.

Once this has been accomplished, it may be possible to ascertain which actors, if any, can play a role in influencing an indicator such that the vitality of a given community is improved.

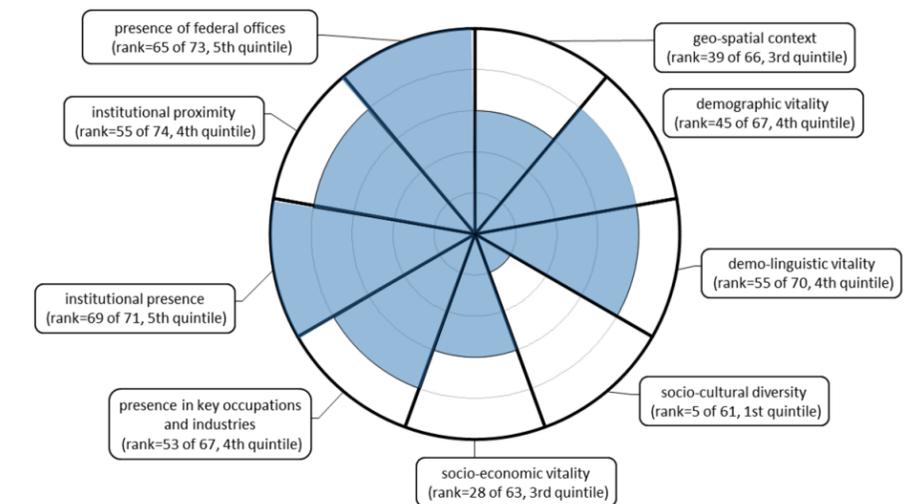
## Results to Date

Based on the work accomplished to date on the Composite Indicators of Community Vitality, we can state that:

- There are important sub-provincial differences in the vitality of OLMCs.
- The level of vitality within the key dimensions can vary in important ways. For example, some communities display very high demo-linguistic vitality and very low socio-economic vitality.
- The history and settlement patterns of OLMCs appear to influence their vitality, as does their rural/urban status.

In this document, the reader can find an output from the composite indicator project. The following graph shows the various vitality dimensions for a sample region.

Composite Indicators of Community Vitality  
Economic Region of Northeast (ON)  
(relative to other O.L. minority communities)



## Status and Next Steps

In the fall of 2017, a series of Composite Indicators have been developed and underwent a process of internal and external validation. In the spring of 2018, those documents will be made available for researchers and other interested parties through an electronic platform.

## Source and Notes

The Composite Indicators of Community Vitality Initiative is a long-term research project of the Research Team of the Official Languages Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage. For further information please use email to contact the members of the research team:

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