



# Gallup's Quality of Community Life Survey

A Joint Project of the Gallup Organization and the College of Education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis

## Partnership and Collaboration for Growth

The independent and individual efforts by the University of Missouri – St. Louis College of Education and The Gallup Organization now provide the opportunity to truly “Create the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” through a unique partnership. Both institutions looked to the future with big ideas and laid the foundation for those ideas in the latter years of the 1990’s.

For the University of Missouri – St. Louis College of Education, the vision was an umbrella entity to coordinate education, workforce preparation, healthy economic growth and quality of life in the St. Louis region. The University of Missouri – St. Louis’ Regional Center for Education and Work, a creation of the College of Education, is now in place. As a result, independent and disjointed efforts can now support one another for common ends.

Gallup’s vision was to impact the study of psychology in positive directions by methodically measuring the quality of life by providing a stimulus for growing a healthier more vital community. A group of prominent psychologists formed a working movement and the “Wellsprings of a Good Life” emerged from many individuals’ efforts, including Gallup’s Chairman Emeritus, Dr. Donald Clifton. Gallup’s mission of allowing people to be heard took on new meanings. A partnership between the University of Missouri – St. Louis’ Regional Center for Education and Work and The Gallup Organization will bring these efforts together to impact the entire metropolitan St. Louis area in positive and profound ways.

A partnership between the University of Missouri – St. Louis College of Education and its Regional Center for Education and Work and Gallup can realize the following results:

- *Annual feedback to the St. Louis metropolitan community from Wellsprings surveys of St. Louis, benchmarked to national surveys;*
- *Yearly summits to put the Wellsprings assessment into positive action through community priority setting and action planning sessions;*
- *Focus the St. Louis metropolitan community to develop specific strategies to positively shape the future of the region;*
- *A meaningful and scientific measurement system that impacts the future rather than looking at the past;*
- *Positive approaches to emphasize strengths, well being and a positive direction for the community, individual by individual and neighborhood by neighborhood;*
- *Integrated database(s) on a web site containing all of the St. Louis data and understandings available at different levels to the general public, in and outside St. Louis, St. Louis metropolitan researchers, the Director of Research and other researchers at the University of Missouri – St. Louis, and Gallup’s researchers and senior scientists from around the world.*

## Background

Invitations went out to leading social scientists around the globe to attend a Positive Psychology Summit in February 1999. As an outgrowth of this meeting, a group of distinguished social scientists defined a working model of human strengths, a taxonomy, considered to be relative descriptors, and likely predictors, of the “good life.”

Ultimately, the goal would be for society to support venues for developing and supporting human behaviors that allow individuals and communities to flourish. To this end, a fundamental task of the positive psychology initiative was to develop a questionnaire that could be administered clinically, as well as be used in research and teaching. Such an assessment would begin to measure the psychological health of individuals, a community, and a nation. It could ascertain the degree to which they possess and can leverage the human capacities that make life worth living.

Subsequently, individual scientists submitted questions related to their field of inquiry and Dr. Donald O. Clifton, The Gallup Organization’s past Chairman of the Board, developed an initial measure of the contributors to a positive life in a survey format. Originally named the “Wellsprings of a Quality Life,” this survey was originally field tested in July 1999. It should be noted that the survey items are based upon constructs postulated by the Positive Psychology group and individual contributors have conducted extensive research into their respective areas. Therefore, the constructs themselves have an existing and extensive theoretical and research base. The survey instrument, measuring those constructs, is a work in progress. Initially tested in 1999, items are examined with each administration.

## Measuring the Core of Community Strengths – Wellsprings of the Good Life

The thrust of the new Positive Psychology movement is to understand, at the level of individual human experience, what characteristics and ways of being constitute a fulfilling life. To this end, a distinguished group of social scientists gathered in February 1999 to define a working model – a taxonomy of human strengths – that are considered to be relative predictors of other indicators of the good life.

They seek to understand whether an individual, groups and communities are suffering, enduring, or flourishing. Further, they seek to discover how positive psychological functioning unfolds and develops over the life span. They also hope to determine how certain character traits and civic virtues buffer against adversity and are correlated to desired outcome measures, both subjective (well being, happiness, life satisfaction, competence, confidence, wisdom) and objective (income, recognition, economic measures, safe environments).

One key goal of the movement’s empiricists is to reliably assess the personality traits and civic activities that make positive subjective experience possible. In effect, they intend to identify a measure of the contributors to a positive life. As a result, a core group of researchers from the Positive Psychology Network and The Gallup Organization created questions that reflected the domains from the taxonomy, and The Gallup Organization conducted a scientifically designed and administered survey, the “Wellsprings of a Quality Life,” in July 1999.

Gallup’s goal is to continue the study of the Wellsprings survey. It is believed that the Wellsprings survey provides a solid measurement instrument of the quality of life within a community. It measures in multiple ways, the effect of education, the impact of leadership in the community, the opportunities for personal expression in work, and the fulfillment individuals gain from aesthetics. As a result, the Wellsprings survey can provide a benchmark, areas for action planning and an assessment of the progress made by a community.

Existing quality of life lists and publications typically calculate values for what might be thought of as “trailing indicators.” These are most commonly reflections of what has been -- such as crime, teenage pregnancy, abortions, school drop out rates, unemployment rates, average home values, and the percentage of persons with different levels of education. As trailing indicators that look to what has happened in the past, they provide little guidance as to what to do in the future.

The *difference* between the Wellsprings survey and mainstream quality of life lists and indexes is important. If the Wellsprings simply measured and stopped there, one could say that it certainly was a unique and different way to assess well being, and it may be more positive in its approach. But it is still begs the question, “So what?” The Wellsprings survey process takes the next step. Wellsprings first identifies how individuals, and in summary the community, see themselves in terms of well being. Survey results and taxonomy then can be used to help individuals and groups think about what the community can be and plan strategies to get there. The action planning coming from community groups is the critical next step.

## Gallup's Survey, Feedback and Action Planning System

Gallup's Quality of Community Life survey is different from most indices in two significant ways: what it measures and how the information is used. In keeping with its mission of “letting people be heard,” Gallup's approach is designed to:

- Identify how individuals, and in summary the community, see themselves in terms of well being
- Use the survey results to help individuals, stakeholder groups and policy makers
  - envision a positive future for the community, and
  - plan strategies to realize a variety of futures depending upon the group's interests.

The goal of Gallup's Quality of Community Life system is to create a broad-based dialogue at a variety of levels within a community. One aspect is to involve leaders of business, labor, education, social services, public and private groups and local government units in the dialogue. A second aspect involves representatives of grass roots stakeholder groups and community residents. In effect, Gallup's approach is a system of measurement and community involvement around the survey results to initiate improvements at both the policy and grass roots levels.

## The Process

**Step 1: The Survey.** One thousand (1,000) randomly selected residents of the St. Louis metropolitan area were contacted in a telephone interview requiring approximately fifteen minutes. The interview consists of slightly over 100 questions built around the thirteen separate constructs. The 2001 metropolitan St. Louis survey was completed in early August and the 2002 survey will be administered (randomly) to approximately 1000 St. Louis metro residents beginning sometime in June, 2002.

**Step 2: Community Awareness.** Once data analysis is complete, the St. Louis metropolitan community will learn of the survey results through a high profile press conference called by representatives of the sponsoring groups. The goal of the press conference is to create awareness of the survey throughout the community and to engage the community leaders and stakeholder groups from the private and public sectors with the power of the information. At this stage, the Quality of Community Life survey serves as a mirror to reflect the current state of the metropolitan area.

**Step 3: Summit of Stakeholder Groups.** A community summit will initially involve 100 ambassadors of key stakeholder groups in a one-day feedback and action planning activity that will be preceded by a

press conference and followed by a half day training session. The summit will utilize a feedback and action planning process used extensively by Gallup. The 100 ambassadors will be presented the survey data, and experience a priority setting and action planning activity that they can then conduct with their own stakeholder group. For example, folks from the arts will be interested in the questions in the “Aesthetics” theme; religious leaders will be interested in the questions in the “Spirituality” theme; business leaders will be interested in the “Workplace Satisfaction” theme. We know all of these themes and questions will be of interest to the participants. At the same time, we think a mix of participants who represent the broadest cross section of St. Louis leaders will make for a more successful seminar.

Additionally, twenty facilitators will be trained at the summit session to assist and support the summit ambassadors in their efforts and to conduct feedback and action planning sessions with additional stakeholder groups not represented at the summit. The trainers will meet after the training session for approximately two hours.

**Step 4: Feedback and Action Planning.** The process of feedback around the results and action planning is then transferred to the groups represented at the summit with action planning conducted within these groups at the grass roots level.

**Step 5: Reporting of Action Plans and Implementation.** Written action plans will be communicated to the Regional Center for Education and Work and entered into a database. This database describes the variety of goals and strategies by policy makers and stakeholder groups across the community. It becomes a commitment for each of the leaders and groups to improving the quality of life in the St. Louis community. Implementation of the strategies and activities occur over a year’s period of time.

The Gallup Quality of Community Life system provides a benchmark, areas for prioritization and action planning, coupled with locally conceived implementation strategies around those priorities, and a subsequent assessment of progress made by a community. While initial survey results will be compared to national survey results, the *real comparison* group for a community is growth in those areas of priority and action planning. Additionally, descriptive statistics of the St. Louis metropolitan community are maintained in the database to explore longer-term changes in these measures of the community.

### **For Additional Information About The Quality of Community Life Project**

If you or your group is interested in participating in the “Community Summit” outlined under item number 3 above, please contact Dr. Charles D. Schmitz, Dean of the UM-St. Louis College of Education, 201 Educational Administration Building, 8001 Natural Bridge Road, St. Louis, MO 63121-4499, 314.516.5109, or email at [Charles\\_Schmitz@umsl.edu](mailto:Charles_Schmitz@umsl.edu).

## Gallup's Quality of Community Life Taxonomy

The Quality of Community Life Survey for the St. Louis MSA addresses the following constructs:

- Aesthetics (experiencing art, music, drama, paintings)
- Civic (volunteer service; improving community or state)
- Courage (taking a stand in the face of resistance; stand up for beliefs)
- Creativity (using imagination; doing something original)
- Discipline (detail-oriented)
- Friendships (best friend; good neighbors; caring for someone)
- Future Focus (goals and plans for the future)
- Learning (learning and growing; always asking questions)
- Principle Centered (principles guide my life)
- Spirituality (prayer/meditation; belief in universal power)
- Subjective Well-Being (satisfaction with one's life; life conditions)
- Wisdom (sense the feelings of others; people seek out for advice)
- Workplace Satisfaction (looking forward going to work)