

Cities Taking the Lead on the Sustainable Development Goals

A Voluntary Local Review Handbook for Cities



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Letter from Anthony F. Pipa

At a recent colloquium, a fellow panelist described how cities compete for people, business, and tourism – and how in the 21st century, the basis for that competition is sustainability. At the local level, “sustainability” means the long-term viability and well-being of communities and citizens. Mayors and city leaders intuitively understand this concept.

This imperative is how local leaders come to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a comprehensive agenda agreed upon by all 193 member states of the United Nations to end poverty, achieve inclusive economic prosperity, reduce inequality and ensure peaceful, just and inclusive societies while promoting environmental sustainability and confronting climate change. Although the vision of the SDGs is global and the goals are universal, the action is local.

As the level of government closest to its citizens, city leaders experience and are expected to respond directly to the challenges and opportunities of their communities. They are already taking on the full range of issues captured by the SDGs. The SDGs provide a framework to integrate their work, understand the interdependence of the issues, transparently measure their progress, and coordinate the contributions of many different stakeholders.

In July 2018, New York City became the first city in the world to report its progress on the SDGs to the United Nations (UN). They created the first-ever Voluntary Local Review (VLR), based on the national reviews that countries volunteer each July at the UN High Level Political Forum.

This innovation has sparked an emerging worldwide movement, with many cities and municipalities seeking to develop their own VLRs. They undertake these efforts at different junctures and for different audiences, but with one primary goal in mind: driving progress on ambitious, measurable, and timebound priorities to improve social, economic, and environmental outcomes locally.

To contribute to this movement, a team of students from Carnegie Mellon University’s Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy extracted lessons from the experiences of various cities undertaking a VLR to develop this Handbook. There is no formal template for a VLR and no standard process of producing one. While that flexibility is liberating, the potential ambiguity can also make it harder for cities to get started. This project seeks to change that.

This Handbook will be a resource for cities leading the charge on the SDGs. VLRs are a unique avenue for telling a city’s story on a global stage. While this Handbook proposes a template, the process is flexible, and the path to producing a VLR will unfold uniquely in each case.

Thanks to Niki Deininger, Jason Griess, Yasu Lu, and Robert Santamaria, and the support of Heinz College, this Handbook provides one guide for cities along that path.

Anthony F. Pipa
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Purpose and Aim

Introduction

The goal of this Handbook is to provide guidance, templates, and case studies to cities and local authorities interested in producing a Voluntary Local Review (VLR) or an initial report to stakeholders on how city programs and services work towards the SDGs. This information can help cities decide where to start and which components to include in such a report. This Handbook is not meant to be prescriptive, but to assist cities in using the SDGs as a common language and credibly adapt the global goals and targets to a city's local context. The VLR is about telling a local story in a global context and the *process* provides just as much value as the *product*. Therefore, cities should feel comfortable adapting the Handbook's contents to their needs.

We are a team of graduate students at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy. This Handbook was completed as part of a capstone consulting project on behalf of the Brookings Institution.

Our Advisory Board for this project included:

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This Handbook begins with an overview of the VLR, followed by an explanation of its value as a product and process. We then explore the organizational preparation for producing a VLR, answer key questions about the process, provide general principles, and draw lessons from cities making progress on this work. Finally, we provide suggested building blocks and components for a report to stakeholders on SDG progress.

Methodology

Our methodology consisted primarily of a literature review and semi-structured qualitative interviews with practitioners. The literature review included published Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), the United Nations' VNR handbook, as well as New York City's Voluntary Local Review.¹ These documents provided us with a comprehensive overview of the VNR, NYC's VLR process, and introduced us to current efforts for SDG localization. NYC's VLR was developed based on the framework of the VNR handbook and consequently, the basic structures of these two documents have much in common. Similarly, we used the VNR handbook as a guide for this document, incorporating lessons from and components of NYC's VLR.

We built on the literature review by conducting over 30 interviews with city officials, nonprofit leaders, members of the philanthropic community, and other practitioners. The interviewees provided valuable input on their experiences in areas such as stakeholder engagement as well as SDG research and implementation. Our Handbook is based on their work. Most of the interviewees are city officials, as they are the main audience of this Handbook. We focused on officials in cities that are either making progress on a VLR or have made impressive achievements on SDG implementation. The interviews were recorded and transcribed as a key resource for our Handbook.

We also convened an Advisory Board consisting of experts on the SDGs and city officials who have committed to or made progress on a VLR. We collaborated closely with our Advisory Board members throughout the process of creating this Handbook. In addition to sharing their experiences working for cities, the Advisory Board gave us important feedback on the Handbook's goals, structure, and content.

¹ The UN's VNR Handbook refers to the Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). All the resources are listed in the appendix.

What is a VLR?

A Voluntary Local Review is a vehicle for state and local governments to report their progress on the SDGs. In 2018, New York City created the first Voluntary Local Review as a way to localize the reporting of SDG progress. For them, the VLR is a tangible product for engaging citizens, peer cities, and the global community around the SDGs. However, the journey to the final product was also valuable. Collaboration between agencies on data collection, mapping local progress to global goals, and elevating the issue among city staff created organizational momentum that persisted beyond the completion of the report. Therefore, the term “VLR” simultaneously refers to an ongoing engagement process and a tangible product for cities reporting out their progress. Depending on the particular relationship between the city and the SDGs, a VLR can be a milestone along the implementation journey and an opportunity to set up ongoing partnerships with key stakeholders.

The audience of a VLR can vary. While New York City prepared their first VLR with the primary goal of presenting to a global audience at the UN’s High Level Political Forum, the VLR can be used to communicate progress to government stakeholders, civil society, other cities, or residents. The key is using the SDG framework. The VLR is an opportunity for cities to communicate local progress and stories within a framework that is holistic and salient to a broad audience. A VLR can be used to show residents the progress city officials are making while illuminating areas of overlap between city efforts and those of civil society and the private sector. A VLR can also communicate strengths and weaknesses to other cities, opening opportunities for collaboration and sharing of best practices.

While New York’s pioneering of the VLR has inspired other cities to action, best practices and standards have yet to be established for the reporting process. This Handbook is meant to provide information about how several cities are conducting this work and offer general principles for getting started. How cities ultimately choose to report their progress on the goals will depend on their local context. Regardless, cities will find that both the VLR as a product and the process of producing a VLR are valuable for mapping local strategies and priorities against the global goals and identifying gaps and opportunities to accelerate local progress.

VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEWS	
Process	Product
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging agency staff on data collection • Mapping local needs to global goals • Setting up formal/informal mechanisms for continued integration of SDGs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quantitative analysis on SDG progress • An opportunity to emphasize individual programs or initiatives that tells a story • A narrative that highlights specific local challenges

VNRs Influence VLRs

In the UN resolution to adopt the SDGs, UN member states committed to “fully engage in conducting regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the subnational, national, regional and global levels.”² The Voluntary National Review, or VNR, is the primary method for UN member states to document and share their efforts on implementing the goals. As the name implies, VNRs are voluntary. They serve as a reporting mechanism for both developed and developing countries. Understanding the genesis of the VNR is useful for understanding the current movement to produce VLRs.

VNRs promote mutual accountability and encourage dialogue on shared experiences between countries. The SDGs provide a common language for nations to discuss ongoing efforts and exchange expertise on particular challenges. Upon completion of the VNR, first-time reporters have the opportunity to present their report at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York City. The HLPF is an annual review of global progress towards all 17 SDGs, but each year focuses on a subset of five goals for an in-depth examination of ongoing efforts. To date, 102 countries have completed 111 VNRs.³ The goal is to share progress and address challenges in a collaborative environment. According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs:

² General Assembly resolution 70/1, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/71. October 21, 2015. Accessed at:

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=111&nr=8496&menu=35>

³ Ibid, 47-49.

The process of carrying out the Voluntary National Review should not be seen as separate from implementation of the SDGs. Rather than an end in itself, the VNR is a process by which countries take stock of and assess progress – and shortcomings - in implementation of the goals and targets.⁴

Unlike the VNR, the VLR has no official status at the UN. As such, there are no formal processes or standards in place for producing or reporting one, opening the door for each city to adapt a VLR to its own needs.

Cities Are Acting Locally and Thinking Globally

Although all 193 member states signed on to the SDGs and the goals are measured at the national level, entrepreneurial and innovative cities are taking on the SDGs and applying them to local contexts. In signing the resolution, countries acknowledged that it is important to make progress at the local level and agreed that subnational reporting is valuable. Cities have recognized that much of local government naturally focuses on numerous dimensions related to the SDGs, making the goals a useful framework to measure local progress on a set of priorities and objectives that are meaningful for cities. To that end, several cities have taken the first steps of mapping their activities to the SDGs and using the goals as a comprehensive framework through which to assess their progress. The movement to produce a VLR comes from the desire of cities to report and discuss progress with their residents, other cities, and the global community, regardless of whether this reporting directly contributes to its country's review.

New York City Led the Way

New York City's experience in localizing the SDGs demonstrates how the process might unfold. Since 2015, New York City began using the SDGs as a common framework to discuss sustainability issues. In April 2015, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced NYC's local strategy for sustainability, resilience, equity, and growth called "One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City," or OneNYC. In designing this strategy, the Mayor's Office consulted a variety of stakeholders in the community including 71 city agencies and numerous residents, local

⁴ Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, October 12, 2018. Accessed at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20872VNR_hanbook_2019_Edition_v2.pdf.

businesses, civic leaders, community representatives, and policy experts. The result was a comprehensive plan that emphasized accountability and action, setting specific targets, utilizing metrics, and committing to publishing an annual progress report. Several months after the city unveiled its plan, the UN formally adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with Mayor de Blasio confirming NYC's support for the SDGs by joining "A Declaration of Cities' Commitment to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda."

New York City is host to the United Nations as well as the largest diplomatic community in the world, and international engagement is led by the NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs. Recognizing the similarities between the global goals and OneNYC - including an emphasis on mitigating the effects of climate change and enhancing equitable growth - the Mayor's Office for International Affairs established its Global Vision | Urban Action program. This program aims to facilitate information sharing with other localities and countries using the common framework of the SDGs.⁵ The linkages between OneNYC and the SDGs prompted the city to map its local goals to the SDGs. Doing so highlighted the connection between New York City's local strategy and the broader global agenda. In 2018, Program Director of Global Vision | Urban Action, Alexandra Hiniker, created the concept of a Voluntary Local Review as a way to report this connection and progress more broadly.

With few points of comparison available, Hiniker began by consulting available resources, relying heavily on the UN's VNR handbook and published VNRs from several countries. In addition, she spoke with officials from the UN, policy experts on the SDGs, and authors of VNRs for their input. Given the lack of formal requirements for composing a VNR, and the resulting variety in reports, Hiniker had significant leeway on how to proceed. As much as possible, she utilized pre-existing resources and processes such as data collection, publications, city plans, and relationships with local stakeholders to demonstrate how the work the city was already doing tied back to the SDGs. Chief among these resources was the policy and enabling environment created during the development of OneNYC as well as the ongoing partnerships already established through the Global Vision | Urban Action platform. These working relationships aided the VLR process by facilitating and maintaining dialogue between city officials that ultimately informed the content of the report. For New York City, the VLR is

⁵ Voluntary Local Review: New York City's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs, July 2018, 8-11, https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/international/downloads/pdf/NYC_VLR_2018_FINAL.pdf.

not an isolated tool, but rather part of programmatic work that involves three steps, namely mapping the SDGs to the city's local strategy, implementing programming that shows the practical value of these linkages, and reporting on these activities together with SDG progress in the VLR.

What is the Value of a VLR?

The process of producing a VLR is valuable for several reasons. The salience of these benefits may vary for each city, but they generally point to the value of the SDGs as a global framework informing local action.

The first set of benefits is internal to the city government:

- **Hidden connections.** Interagency conversations on projects and data, site visits across the city, and gathering input from various stakeholders reveal previously hidden linkages among the city's priorities and programs. The SDGs force leaders and policymakers to make progress on multiple dimensions of development at once, without sacrificing some priorities at the expense of others.
- **Common framework.** Solving complex problems across many city agencies requires a common language. The SDGs provide a comprehensive framework across environmental, social, and economic elements of a city's work. A VLR can act as the necessary bridge between city agencies to break down siloes.
- **Link between priorities and data.** The process challenges cities to identify data, indicators, and outcomes that match their priorities. This is valuable because it ensures that data collection is aligned with priorities and enables cities to incorporate methods to measure targeted outcomes.
- **Sustained networks.** These interagency discussions codify informal networks between agencies and individual city officials that enable further information-sharing and comprehensive planning in future iterations.
- **Leave no one behind.** The SDGs' emphasis on reaching the most vulnerable populations first helps officials consider whether any communities are being left behind by the status quo. The VLR is an expression of a new social compact with these communities.

The second set of benefits is external but local to the city ecosystem:

- **Transparent accountability with residents.** A VLR can have many purposes, one of which is as an honest and transparent account of progress to city residents that empowers them with a common language to engage with the city.
- **New cross-sectoral partnerships.** Every city is home to a wide set of civic, religious, philanthropic, and corporate partners. By reporting progress along environmental, social, and economic dimensions, cities are creating a way for these partners to visualize how their work might interact with the city's goals.
- **Building leadership within the community.** VLRs can onboard the city's next generation of problem solvers by drawing on local leaders, university students, and youth through frequent and consistent stakeholder engagement.

The second set of benefits is external, reaching beyond the city ecosystem:

- **Engage with the global community.** A VLR can open cities to networks that can promote tangible change by providing a platform for cities to identify and network with other cities facing similar challenges and learn from one another.
- **Make a case for city leadership on the world stage.** Cities are a critical unit for action on the SDGs, and a VLR is one way local leaders can express solidarity with a global agenda.
- **Elevate city priorities to the global conversation.** The process of producing a VLR may lead cities to suggest additional targets and indicators for the SDGs. The VLR is an opportunity to further enrich the conversation on sustainable development globally and elevate the priorities of individual cities.

Organizational Preparation

Cities across the world vary in their awareness, support, and capacity for voluntary SDG reporting. They also have different organizational structures, differing levels of connection to the global community, and are often dealing with the immediate problems confronting their residents. In that dynamic political environment, producing a 'one-size-fits-all' process and

template for a large set of cities to produce a VLR is fundamentally difficult. Even the cities aware of the SDGs and exploring the VLR as a vehicle for reporting begin this process at different stages.

While the process by which they address the challenges surrounding their data environment, organizational structure, and global position as a city will necessarily differ, the officials tasked with the actual data collection and writing of a VLR all face a common set of questions. These key questions, detailed below, are meant to guide officials toward the production of a “minimum viable product” they can use to engage with their residents, peer cities, and the global community.

Key Questions

How is a VLR different from other reporting obligations?

VLRs are voluntary, integrate city work across siloes, and can serve many purposes.

As the name suggests, a VLR is voluntary and should be perceived as a tool for civic engagement rather than another internal reporting obligation. As such, there are no formal requirements or standard practices. Instead, their voluntary nature marks the VLR as a vehicle for expressing the willingness to lead on a local and global scale simultaneously.

VLRs also provide the opportunity to integrate a city’s work on a larger scale. Due to their comprehensive scope, reporting on the SDGs catalyzes more interagency collaboration than the reporting obligations for individual departments. Strategic plans around sustainability, public safety, or transportation, though they are larger than an individual department, often remain siloed. Taking on the SDGs as an analytical lens encourages policymakers to rediscover the impacts of their work across the economic, social, and political dimensions of their community.

Connecting the Dots Across Programs in NYC

New York City sees the VLR as a way to communicate the connection between its local OneNYC strategy and the SDGs. Prior to creating the concept of a VLR in 2018, New York City's Global Vision | Urban Action program, which was created by the Mayor's Office for International Affairs in 2015, was already helping facilitate information sharing with other localities and countries using the common framework of the SDGs. One of the program's projects included mapping OneNYC to the SDGs. In addition to highlighting the connections between the city's local strategy and the global goals, the mapping also guides programming. For example, the mapping process facilitated site visits for NYC representatives to speak at UN policy discussions and for members of the UN community to visit NYC to see how the city is implementing the SDGs.

Furthermore, the Mayor's Office for International Affairs recognized the critical role that youth play in achieving the SDGs and established the NYC Junior Ambassadors (NYCJA) program in 2015. This initiative focuses on empowering 7th graders (ages 11-13) in all five boroughs of New York City to become actively engaged with the United Nations and its mission of addressing the most pressing challenges in the world. NYCJA also uses the SDGs as the primary lens through which educators and students can understand the work of the UN and related global issues; participants are also empowered to translate this knowledge into community actions. Students also visit the UN and host senior diplomats in their classrooms. Finally, participants are invited to speak at UN events to share their perspective on the SDGs, creating an ecosystem that where students engage with their family, friends, and neighbors about why the UN and SDG-work matters.

For NYC, the VLR uses the common language of the SDGs to connect the dots between the city's local work to a broader, global audience. By monitoring New York's advancement toward the goals through its OneNYC strategy, identifying areas where the city can learn from others, and addressing remaining challenges, the VLR is an opportunity to present the city's work in a format that is accessible both to the UN community and other stakeholders interested in achieving the SDGs.

How does a city organize for the VLR process?

Two models have emerged in the early wave of VLR activity, both with their own set of advantages and disadvantages: the hub-and-spoke model and the commission or working group model.

There are two organizing models that have emerged from the first wave of VLR activity, which are both a function of the amount of resources dedicated to the process. The first is the hub-and-spoke model, and the second is the commission or working group model. There are pros and cons to each, and the nascency of VLRs leaves ample room for new models and mechanisms for organizing the process.

1. **Hub-and-Spoke:** As the name implies, the hub-and-spoke model is characterized by a central staff person coordinating most, if not all, of the VLR process. Designating one person as the lead increases the likelihood that a city can actually fund the work and having an assigned staff member can increase the quality of information sharing across departments. On the other hand, the hub-and-spoke model may create barriers to generating momentum around the SDGs across agencies and within the community, take longer to create a minimum viable product, and not survive political transition.
2. **Commission or Working Group:** The working group model creates an opportunity for momentum to generate around the SDGs and spread quickly throughout a city. Engaging staff in city agencies and directly involving them in the process can catalyze sustained, independent action within an agency. Establishing a working group also empowers integration by getting staff in the same room on a consistent basis. On the other hand, a working group model begs the question of who is holding it all together. Without direct funding for this work, it may be difficult to get staff members engaged with a sufficient degree of frequency. Finally, a working group may not create the optimal environment for information sharing, as it may begin to silo around the passions of individual members.

Who is responsible for leading the process?

Though any staff member can lead this process, those who can coordinate across agencies and have the Mayor's support are in the best position to succeed.

The comprehensive nature of the VLR requires interagency coordination by a staff member capable of leveraging informal networks, generating support and enthusiasm, and framing the VLR within the city's broader strategic plans. While cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Orlando have used the platform of the Mayor's Office to achieve that flexibility, there are multiple paths to achieve the same results. There are plenty of staff members capable of doing the work required to produce a VLR, even if they aren't housed directly in the Mayor's Office.

Many staff members have already laid the groundwork for the required interagency coordination in previous comprehensive plans or reports. These employees may be housed in the Sustainability, Resilience, International Affairs, or Planning departments, among others. While affiliation with the Mayor's Office can empower employees to work across agencies, a different approach may be crucial to creating bottom-up interest among agency staff. The best way to ensure success is to empower an individual who is well-positioned to build relationships across agencies to lead this work.

Resilience and Sustainability in Pittsburgh

In Pittsburgh, the VLR process is spearheaded by Grant Ervin, the city's Chief Resilience Officer and Assistant Director for the Division of Sustainability and Resilience (part of the city's Planning department). Though Ervin is not placed in the Mayor's Office, he is working directly with the Mayor's Office of Equity and Inclusion. He is leveraging the centrality of the Planning Department and previous work on Pittsburgh's OnePGH Resilience Strategy to direct the SDG reporting process.

Since 2016, the Division of Sustainability and Resilience has published comprehensive reports or strategic plans on sustainability, resilience, and climate action. Undoubtedly, these reports required a large interagency effort, led by Ervin's team. "One of the things we've discovered as we've gotten into the SDG space is that our projects have paralleled in the past," he said, commenting on the similarity between the VLR process and their previous work. The partnerships they formed with organizations in the nonprofit, academic, and philanthropic sectors around sustainability and resilience put his team in a great position to embark on a VLR.

Is mayoral commitment necessary?

While any final product needs the mayor's support, the initial groundwork for a VLR process can begin at the staff level.

Mayoral support is one of the most powerful tools staff members have to move an agenda forward. Getting that support, however, may take some work. In Orlando, engaging in the SDGs was not one of the mayor's major priorities, but key staff members worked to elevate the issue. The general approach taken so far is a combination of bottom-up action and top-down support. While the mayor's support is critical to forming partnerships in and out of city government, the actual work must be done at a level closer to the ground.

Mayors can also be the catalyst for this work in the first place, as demonstrated by New York City and Los Angeles. Setting a vision for integrating the city into a global agenda can unify staff around a significant, long-term mission. In other cities, personally invested staff members have found success elevating the SDGs to the Mayor, empowering them to give the green light on a pre-packaged initiative.

Regardless of how and when it is initiated, mayoral support can be a significant accelerant to VLR efforts. Mayors have been crucial in driving the legislative agenda, raising the visibility of their city’s SDG work with their peers, and providing an explicit directive for interagency collaboration. A survey of the city’s political and social environment will be critical to figuring out where to invest time and energy.

Setting a Vision in Los Angeles

The power of mayoral support is on full display in Los Angeles. In 2017, Mayor Eric Garcetti created the Office of International Affairs and appointed former Ambassador Nina Hachigian as Deputy Mayor. Their mission is to focus on international trade and investment, international relations and policy, and explore ways to leverage the 2028 Olympics and Paralympics to dovetail with SDG implementation at a local level. Tasked with tackling the third issue, Erin Bromaghim was hired as the Director of Olympic and Paralympic Development and the Hilton Foundation Fellow on the Global Goals.

Supported by an essential grant from the Hilton Foundation, the momentum of a newly created office, and the gravity of the Olympics and Paralympics, Bromaghim embarked on the SDG mapping process. She soon found herself staring at an array of programs and strategic plans that were relevant to the SDGs but weren’t using SDG language. Like Orlando and Pittsburgh, the task of pulling these programs together and translating them to the SDG framework became an essential part of the VLR process. Unlike Orlando or Pittsburgh, a partnership with Dr. Sanjeev Khagram first at Occidental College and later at Arizona State University, UCLA, and USC allowed Bromaghim to build up a small, rotating team of graduate and undergraduate students to help with that phase of the process.

Though the students provided essential labor in the mapping process, Bromaghim still had to play the role of broker between the students and city staff. In cases where public information on programs was limited, she validated the students’ research and dug deeper with individual staff members, allowing the city to uncover and pursue information gaps while simultaneously continuing the mapping and alignment process with other goals. The Mayor’s public commitment to the SDGs has helped to secure support from across the city, and Los Angeles is poised to expand the scope of their SDG reporting and will share information on all 17 goals.

One lesson to take from Los Angeles is the ability for mayoral support to integrate work and amplify the added value of a VLR. Many city agencies are bound by internal reporting obligations and can shy away from the prospect of stacking the SDGs on top of a growing pile. Bromaghim has a different perspective on SDG reporting, saying “I don’t think our work on the

SDGs is diverting enthusiasm away from an existing channel, it's more like opening it up for another audience.” The mayor's drive to engage with the global community has made it easier to integrate the VLR into his overall strategy, amplifying its value by:

- Establishing a common language for the international work the city is doing, allowing them to compare progress with other cities;
- Helping the city be more data-driven and giving them a more comprehensive look at the current state of affairs;
- Providing a way to express solidarity with the global community;
- Helping the city understand its gaps and identify where to accelerate progress; and
- Promoting transparency, which can mobilize new partnerships across sectors and among peer cities.

What data do cities have and how do they get it?

The specifics of the data environment will determine the scope of the final product. Public datasets should be combined with local program data to paint a complete picture.

Data collection is fundamental to the success of the VLR, but also serves as the first step for setting up a mechanism to coordinate work between agencies. First and foremost, cities need to understand their pre-VLR data environment. Many SDG-related data will only be accessible through the city's different agencies and extracting that data may require personal outreach with appropriate staff members. As mentioned above, previous work around comprehensive strategic plans, sustainability plans, and other large goal-setting efforts can serve as good starting points.

The data collection process will also reveal the possibilities regarding the VLR's scope. In the Building Blocks section of this Handbook, we present a discussion about the comprehensiveness of the VLR, which is greatly determined by the availability, accuracy, and completeness of SDG-related data. Investigating the city's data environment may expose gaps in how data is collected, reveal inefficiencies in the reporting process, and possibly lead to the discovery of previously underutilized datasets.

Data collection presents another opportunity to build enduring partnerships. While one-off data requests between agencies can facilitate SDG-related data sharing, designating a task force for data sharing might be a more sustainable path. Relying on outside academic or civil society partners may be one path to ensure these relationships weather political transitions, staffing changes, or shifting agendas.

An Evolving Process in New York City

Determining which data is complete and updated enough to use, what the scope of the VLR should be, and assessing the city's data environment will likely unveil the opportunities for alignment between local narratives and the global agenda, a key consideration for any city embarking on a VLR process. Understanding the audience and purpose of SDG reporting is crucial to the decisions made at each point in the process.

A key lesson from the New York City VLR process is that data collection is part of an ongoing relationship with staff in other agencies, which includes site visits and policy discussions using the SDG framework. These activities are managed under the Global Vision | Urban Action platform that was established in 2015. The end goal of improved SDG action is built on interagency partnerships, and this data collection process can inform the formal and informal processes for enhanced communication and collaboration, both internally and externally. In New York, the informal VLR data validation process, which involved running existing reporting by relevant agencies, explaining the VLR process, and asking staff for additional input, served to catalyze many staff members into increased engagement in SDG action. In 2019, those newly engaged staff members supported incorporating the SDGs into the city's new comprehensive strategic plan, including a new annual commitment to submit a VLR.

How will cities manage engagement with internal and external stakeholders?

A VLR can be a tool to build ongoing relationships with a wide set of audiences, which often require setting up formal or informal mechanisms for stakeholder engagement.

While determining the VLR's main audience is key to its success, there will be an array of internal and external stakeholders to consider and actively engage during the process. Importantly, each city will have a unique set of stakeholders, which may influence the structure of the VLR process. Several approaches have emerged in this area. In Orlando, stakeholder engagement began years ago, using a nonprofit entity called IDEAS For Us to elevate the SDGs at the community level. In New York City, stakeholders included city staff members and the global community, reflecting the ongoing engagement with private, philanthropic, and academic partners through OneNYC, while Los Angeles and Pittsburgh directly engaged these partners to contribute to their VLR process.

While the comprehensive nature of the SDGs demands a broad set of stakeholders and multiple audiences, expansiveness comes with its own set of costs. Cities must ask themselves what the strategic aim of the VLR process might be, and who the main audience of the VLR product is. As with data availability, this question will become a key part of shaping the scope and tone of the final product, but it also provides guidance on the best ways to engage various stakeholders during the process.

Elevating the Agenda in Orlando

In Orlando, Director of Sustainability and Resilience Chris Castro is experimenting with a model to directly engage residents around the SDGs. Hired by the city in 2013 to develop its first Community Action Plan, Castro has been working to elevate sustainability in Orlando for over 10 years. While a college student, Castro co-founded a community engagement non-profit called IDEAS for Us, aiming to advance environmental action in Orlando. Castro and IDEAS for Us co-founder Clayton Ferrara have pioneered the IDEAS Hive, a monthly “think and do” event that brings members of the community together with practitioners to brainstorm and develop actionable projects centered around one of the SDGs.

Over the years, the IDEAS Hive has inspired and educated two distinct sets of stakeholders. The first is comprised of the community members themselves. University students, community leaders, and other residents have learned about the SDGs and connected the global agenda to local action through monthly projects. The second set of stakeholders is the city staff and officials participating in the IDEAS Hive. The practitioners educate participants on a specific issue each month and collaborate with the Hive to brainstorm action projects. The level of awareness, engagement, and community trust the Hive built up in Orlando made it almost inevitable that the SDGs would be incorporated into their latest Community Action Plan.

A key lesson from Orlando is the power of consistent community engagement. Castro’s work as a passionate liaison between the city and its residents inspired practitioners to action, catalyzed the Orlando community into engagement, and provided both parties a platform and language to communicate. Orlando’s commitment to sustainability and the SDGs has grown due to the persistent, consistent, and action-focused community engagement model led by IDEAS for Us.

The VLR process can create similar positive feedback loops for community engagement in other cities. Staff members can use the data collection and drafting process to set up frequent and consistent community engagement meetings, using SDG language to provide thematic center points to each meeting. As Orlando’s example demonstrates, building trust and momentum may take time, but that trust can make the difference when it comes time to act on the SDGs.

Could universities or civil society help?

Partners in academia and civil society can provide technical support, staff resources, accountability mechanisms, and leadership.

A VLR is one step in a broad effort to build and mobilize partnerships across sectors in each city. Universities and civil society organizations are vital to community engagement and trust. Additionally, universities are home to the next generation of researchers, entrepreneurs, and policymakers that will be crucial to the successful implementation of the SDGs. Academia can therefore play a significant role in supporting local SDG-work. In Los Angeles and Pittsburgh, for example, city staff are working directly with university students to conduct their VLR. In Baltimore, the University of Baltimore partnered with city agencies, residents, and other academic institutions to create localized SDG indicators for the city. The university provided technical expertise to identify 56 metrics - some unique to the city - to monitor Baltimore's efforts to implement the SDGs. Partnering with local universities provides these cities with the technical assistance, specialized expertise, and human resources to expand their work despite limited city resources.

Cities like Bristol in the United Kingdom also demonstrate how universities can play a leadership role in SDG-work. The University of Bristol Cabot Institute, Bristol City Council, and community interest company, Bristol Green Capital Partnership, came together to implement SDG initiatives and enhance collaboration with other sectors and cities across Europe. The University aims to facilitate partnerships between stakeholders to better align local work with the SDGs. For example, the university funds an SDG Research and Engagement Associate position which coordinates strategies and planning between the City Council, university, and Bristol Green Capital Partnership to synthesize local policies with the SDGs under Bristol's One City Plan. By explicitly weaving the SDGs into Bristol's comprehensive plan, the university helps encourage cross-sector work to implement the global goals.

Similar to universities, other essential community groups such as nonprofit organizations, religious institutions, and philanthropies can play a crucial role in engaging residents on specific policy topics. Cities can consider how to collaborate with various local stakeholders to work towards the SDGs.

Leveraging Technical Expertise in Baltimore

Led by the University of Baltimore's Jacob France Institute and Dr. Seema Iyer, the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA) works to collect data about the city's neighborhoods. BNIA's major product is an open-source data portal with over 150 demographic, economic, and social indicators aimed at measuring the overall "health" of a neighborhood, appropriately named VitalSigns.

In 2016, Baltimore was selected to pilot the local implementation of the SDGs by the USA Sustainable Cities Initiative. The BNIA used VitalSigns and other data sources to conduct a comprehensive review of the many programs and initiatives related to the SDGs, including the Disaster Preparedness Project, the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, and Healthy Baltimore 2015. After mapping existing programs to the SDGs, the BNIA began identifying "locally-relevant and useful indicators that could be used to set and track progress toward SDG-aligned targets."¹ The process resulted in 56 proposed indicators that the city could use to track their progress.

While many of these indicators are directly relevant to each SDG, the BNIA did not try to replicate the specific indicators set out by the UN. The partnership created their own set of indicators that were relevant and available to the city and used those as proxies to the SDG indicators. SDG 8 (Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All) is a prime example of adjusting the global agenda to local needs and narratives.

The local indicators for SDG 8 were Median Household Income, Labor Force Participation, and Total Number of Jobs. The report proposed an additional indicator, "Percent of Residents Earning a Living Wage." This indicator more closely fits Baltimore's needs and narrative, but also provides a better picture of progress towards a specific target (SDG 8.5: "achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value"). Baltimore's experience demonstrates the impact of using universities and civil society organizations to scope and measure metrics that fit a local context but remain aligned with the global goals. Beyond the valuable data analysis, BNIA also served as a powerful convener for over 40 cross-sector local partners. Cities with local research institutions can use the VLR process to bolster or begin long-term, reciprocal research relationships.

How should cities balance celebrating victories and discussing gaps or areas of improvement?

Progress requires honesty and transparency. Elevating serious discussions about gaps and weaknesses creates an opportunity for other cities to lend support.

The SDGs are as ambitious as they are comprehensive, and many countries are facing the challenge of reporting progress with the same breadth. Due to the global scale of the SDGs, implementation will be a non-linear path filled with challenges, and transparency in reporting should be an essential best practice.

An honest and transparent accounting of progress at the local level is crucial to gauging success at the national and global level. A VLR must, therefore, include serious discussion about gaps and challenges in SDG implementation and progress. Acknowledgement and analysis of gaps in data collection and implementation comes with its own set of benefits. While there are several ways this might be implemented, one thing is for sure: cities that publicly acknowledge the gaps and continuing challenges open themselves up to new partnerships with peers and experts that may be able to provide help.

Like many aspects of SDG reporting at the local level, there is still plenty of creative space regarding mechanisms of accountability. Though many of the interviewed cities recognize the gaps between their current data environment and one that would allow them to report on all the SDG indicators, a majority adhere to the maxim that releasing something is better than releasing nothing. However, the eventual product will be exposed to the same criticism that Voluntary National Reviews face about governments “cherry picking” data that reflects well, while withholding data that reflects poorly. At the city level, cherry picking will not only damage the credibility of VLRs but will also hinder one city’s ability to communicate with others on the SDGs. This weakens its value as a common language. Solutions to the standardization and cherry-picking issue are still being proposed. However, practitioners have proposed two options:

1. **Standardize a Data Floor.** The data floor concept is straightforward: report on one or a few metrics per goal, but for every goal. This model reduces cherry picking, promotes standardization, and allows local narratives to rise to the top. Cities can report on high-level metrics and spend their time focusing on specific programs and initiatives that contribute to their progress. In 2017, the World Council on City Data (WCCD) released a set of 100 metrics that map directly to SDG indicators and can often be easily extracted

from Census or city government data.⁶ Using the WCCD indicators would provide cities with a vital starting point to engage with national and global peers. Of course, there is a lively debate about using these metrics to focus a VLR process. The pivotal issue, however, is not *which* standard to use, but to use a standard at all.

- 2. Encourage Third Party Leadership.** Another option that cities have explored is leaning on third parties to lead the VLR process. In Bristol and Baltimore, universities are providing significant leadership and technical support for these efforts, which makes them resilient to political transitions. A university or civil society led effort may also increase the convening power of such entities by detaching them from various political associations and may be a better foothold to directly engage youth leaders on the SDGs. Cities can also use this option to begin or strengthen cross-sectoral relationships, which will be key to the success of any VLR.

Building Blocks of a VLR

The following section contains suggested Building Blocks for creating a VLR. These Building Blocks are not intended to be prescriptive but comprise a general framework for the main components of a VLR. They are based on interviews with cities - predominantly in the US - who are working towards creating their own VLR. By drawing from their experiences, the following section aims to lower the barriers for other city officials to enter the VLR space and provides a general framework for getting started.

Opening Statement

The opening statement is the city's public commitment to SDG implementation. It could be a summary of the city's current status on SDG progress, a road map of city's alignment with the SDGs, or an overview of the city's development plan. The opening statement is typically written by the Mayor or a high-level city official who has been designated to report on the SDGs.

⁶ World Council on City Data. *World City Data for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2018*. Accessed at: <https://www.dataforcities.org/publications>

Executive Summary/Highlights

In this section, cities can provide an overview of the institutional mechanisms that enable the VLR process and identify the milestones of creating the report. The Executive Summary should end with a discussion of challenges and areas of improvement, which will be developed in later sections.

The Highlights section is a well-designed one-pager with top-line major indicators of SDG implementation progress. It is a synthesis highlighting the review process and the status of SDG progress.⁷ There are 232 SDG indicators in total, which can be found on the website of the United Nations Statistics Division.

Introduction

In this section, cities introduce the narrative that they will tell throughout the VLR, by giving their own context and overall objectives to localize the SDG agenda and tell their stories. For example: Why is the city committed to this? Are there particular events or conditions that make the community prioritize one or a few of the goals?

This section could outline how the policy architecture reflects the three dimensions of sustainable development (Economic, Social, and Political) and what policy tools have enabled this integration, as well as links to other international agreements such as Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and more.⁸

Organizational Alignment/Institutional Process

Given the interconnected nature of the SDGs, as well as the interagency collaboration necessary for implementation, it is critical that cities examine and strengthen new and existing mechanisms for engaging with and reporting on the goals. Institutional mechanisms - which include the organizational structure and positioning of city departments, data collection and analysis processes, and partnerships within and outside of city government - require coordination across multiple entities and typically involve the distribution of decision-making. When it comes to the VLR process, it is important for cities to consider how work on the SDGs will fare under administration turnover. To address these topics, cities should consider these areas when

⁷ VNR Handbook

⁸ VNR Handbook

composing their VLR. The following questions have been adapted from the UN's VNR Handbook for the local context:

- Do the city's organizational alignment and institutional mechanisms account for the diversity of stakeholders engaged in SDG-related work? Specifically, do these mechanisms consider different actors and their interests, included but not limited to:
 - City departments
 - County and state government
 - Civil society and nonprofit organizations
 - Community groups
 - Philanthropic organizations
 - Private sectors and business
- How would the city characterize the relationship between itself, state, and federal government?
- How do the city's organizational alignment and institutional structures engage stakeholders and mobilize action around the SDGs? Are there examples where multi-sector collaboration contributed to policy change?
- What is the frequency of engagement with key stakeholders?

Structural Issues and Challenges

It is important to consider the structural challenges and their impact on a city's capacity to engage with the SDGs. Challenges can emerge surrounding the political and institutional authority of a department or initiative, constrained budgetary and staff resources, and uncertain program longevity. Although closely related to the previous section, this part of the VLR specifically addresses the challenges that the city could or is facing due to alignment and institutional processes. Thinking through and describing this environment enables cities to account for these challenges in their implementation of and reporting on the SDGs. Cities should consider discussing the following areas in the VLR:

- How would the city characterize the allocation and use of resources dedicated to reporting and engaging with the SDGs? This could include funding levels and sources, staff capacity, as well as executive political support.

- Do relevant agencies, departments, or programs that guide the city's SDG-work have the authority and influence to work across city departments and gather necessary information for the VLR process? Specifically, does the city's organizational structure allow for examination of the interconnected nature of the SDGs?
- Are the relevant agencies, departments, or programs that guide the city's SDG-work positioned to continue beyond the current administration?

Methodology: Metrics and Data

Since there are 17 goals - each with multiple components - city officials have a number of options when considering the scope of their VLR. If cities are inclined to report on all the goals, they are certainly free to do so. Alternatively, cities could opt to focus on a different subset of the SDGs each year, such as the same SDGs highlighted during the UN's annual High Level Political Forum or a handful of goals of the city's choosing. Whichever option a city selects, the VLR should include detailed information on the city's efforts to implement programs that advance the SDGs. By highlighting best practices, challenges, and plans for improvement, cities can learn from one another through the VLR. We recommend that cities consider the following questions - adapted from the UN's VNR Handbook - when composing the Methodology section of their VLR:

- What goals did the city decide to focus on in the VLR and why? If the city plans to publish VLRs in the future, will its selection change?
- Since the SDGs contain indicators that may not apply to cities (for example, due to jurisdictional limitations), did the city adapt any of the goals to its local context? Did this include local indicators and metrics?
- Did the city experience challenges with mapping and/or incomplete or missing data? How did the city handle these challenges?
- When considering the city's commitment to a particular goal, are there differences in how the city prioritizes that goal compared to priorities at the state or federal level?
- Did the city include qualitative as well as quantitative data in its analysis?
- When analyzing progress towards the goals, how did the city establish a baseline?

- Did the city analyze any trends in progress or challenges over time? How can the city address these obstacles or improve/maintain these successes in the future?
- Does the city have an example that would be enlightening for other cities? How can the city tell its local story with data in the VLR?

Policy and Enabling Environment

This section provides an opportunity to integrate the VLR into a city’s overarching story. As mentioned above, many cities have completed SDG-related work, from comprehensive strategies, sustainability, or resilience plans, down to specific programs, initiatives, and partnerships. These plans and previous commitments provide valuable inputs to the actual VLR but can also set the stage for a narrative about why the VLR is valuable to the city. The VLR can and should be a step along the path to the mayor’s overarching policy goals. The VLR can use the SDGs to tell a narrative which connects the dots between the city’s pre-existing strategies.

A review of previous plans can also inform an important discussion about the community environment that allowed the city to pursue SDG reporting, nesting the VLR in a vision for how the VLR can help all of its residents. A central mission to the SDGs is that it “leaves no one behind”. Cities like Los Angeles, New York City, and Pittsburgh have localized and internalized a similar mission, and their VLR efforts will help them understand how the SDGs intersect with their existing social and economic equity priorities.

Review of the Goals

When drafting a VLR, cities must decide how many of the 17 goals to analyze within the report. It is important to note that cities may not be able to report on all the SDGs because of jurisdictional, political, or data limitations. For example, it may be difficult for a city to report on local initiatives to improve public health if the city’s health programs and services fall under the jurisdiction of the county. Likewise, the number of goals a city decides to present and report on may be directly related to the amount of data the city can collect, the specific added value of a VLR to the city or mayor, or the amount of resources the city can dedicate to the project. While there are practical decisions to make on feasibility, cities have three general options for determining the scope of their VLR:

1. **Analyze all the SDGs.** This option involves generating a VLR that reports on and analyzes all the SDG indicators and targets that are relevant to the local context. Cities could examine each SDG using several metrics or select one metric per goal to simplify and standardize the process. There is likely a tradeoff between comprehensiveness and the effort required. A comprehensive VLR would likely require more upfront investment in labor and resources to collect data, coordinate interagency efforts, and begin to set up long-term relationships with a broader set of stakeholders. While ambitious, a comprehensive VLR is a worthwhile endeavor: cities that choose this path demonstrate their commitment to achieving all the SDGs while being transparent with their residents about successes and failures. This element of transparency helps foster accountability between the city and its efforts to further the SDGs. By making the commitment to examine all the SDGs, cities can push themselves to analyze areas that may reveal shortcomings in ongoing efforts. Although cities may be reluctant to showcase their challenges, doing so can signal opportunities for collaboration with various stakeholders such as nonprofits, academia, the private sector, and peer cities. Highlighting areas for improvement can therefore encourage partnerships with stakeholders, prompt information exchange, and boost accountability with city residents. Lastly, to accommodate the heavy lift of preparing a comprehensive VLR, cities could decide to publish their report every two, three, or four years instead of annually. Doing so would help distribute the time and resources needed to prepare a VLR over multiple years and likely make creating a comprehensive report more feasible.
2. **Focus on the HLPF goals.** With this option, cities could report on progress towards all the SDGs, but focus on the goals highlighted at the annual High Level Political Forum in greater detail. Each year, the HLPF selects a subset of the SDGs as the focal point for the forum's discussion among member states. The aim is for countries to offer best practices, share experiences, and identify areas for progress on specific aspects of implementing the SDGs. By analyzing a subset of the goals each year, the HLPF can facilitate deeper conversations between member states on specific SDGs. While the HLPF has its own internal process for negotiating and selecting which subset of goals to emphasize at the annual forum, one of the objectives of highlighting a handful of goals is to ensure that the event adequately examines progress on all 17 SDGs over time. Although some goals may

not be as applicable at the local level, cities can choose to focus on the same set of goals as the HLPF. Recently, New York City committed to doing just that. Following a similar annual reporting schedule as the HLPF is useful for cities because it ensures that they will analyze all relevant SDGs over time. Furthermore, if other cities also report on the HLPF goals, this could spark conversations between cities and encourage a peer learning experience similar to that between member states at the HLPF. Lastly, when cities publicly commit to reporting on the HLPF goals each year, they hold themselves accountable for analyzing goals which could reveal ongoing challenges and shortcomings. Just as committing to a comprehensive VLR pushes cities to report on areas where they may be falling short, doing so can be beneficial for forming relationships with stakeholders as well as upholding transparency with residents.

- 3. Hone in on top priorities.** This option is similar to focusing on the HLPF goals each year, but involves cities selecting their own set of goals to prioritize in their VLR. From a practical perspective, this option provides flexibility because it allows cities to tailor their VLR to address local priorities and use available partnerships and data collection processes. Yet this flexibility also poses the greatest risk of losing the benefits of the VLR process. This is largely because cities could choose to report on the SDGs where they are performing the best. Although this may seem like a safer option from a public relations perspective, reporting on successes while ignoring challenges wastes opportunities for peer learning, provides a distorted representation of progress towards the SDGs, and could divert resources away from areas of greatest need. If cities decide to choose a subset of their own SDGs, we strongly recommend that they consider whether this selection identifies areas for improvement, prioritizes certain initiatives over others, and acknowledges the intersection between different dimensions of the SDGs.

The Review of the Goals section can also be broken into separate, one-pagers on specific policy areas that cities can distribute during community meetings or use as briefing materials. To that end, treating each goal's section as a standalone one-pager may be strategically beneficial. Below, we present a flexible template to follow.

Introduction (for each goal)

- Introduce the specific goal using UN language.
- Tell the city's story around why this goal was chosen or why it is one of the city's policy priorities.
- In closing, address one big challenge to achieving this goal.

Top-Line Indicators (for each goal)

- Pick the dramatic, top-level indicators that tell the most impactful or engaging story around the city's progress.

Progress and Challenges (for each goal)

- Highlight specific achievements the city has made with regards to this goal using quantitative measures of success.
- Describe the policies or programs that drove this progress. In some cases, highlighting specific people, organizations, or communities might be appropriate.
- Dive into an in-depth discussion of the implementation challenges. This can also be an opportunity to make a specific and timely commitment to closing this gap.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Conclusion and Next Steps section is where cities articulate their plans for using the VLR to inspire action. VLRs are about analyzing a city's progress and prioritizing actions for the future. The process can unearth opportunities for collaboration across agency silos, efficiencies from new partnerships, and most importantly, challenges that must be addressed to deliver on the global agenda. The Conclusion and Next Steps section is an opportunity to summarize these findings and how they influence the city's roadmap for the future.

The Conclusions and Next Steps section is also a chance to voice strategies for subsequent reporting. Cities can announce plans for future VLRs and communicate a cadence for status updates. In the spirit of accountability, the Conclusion and Next Steps section is a useful platform for communicating an ambitious reporting goal and committing to action. If cities reported on the HLPF priority goals or a smaller subset, they can use this section to announce plans for next year's focus goals.

Conclusion

The goal of this Handbook is to be helpful without being overly prescriptive. The VLR process is a valuable opportunity for cities to tell their local stories within a global framework. But the VLR is not meant to be formulaic, nor should the process be onerous. The primary value of a VLR is to facilitate conversations and information sharing within and between cities on how to work towards the SDGs. For cities embarking on this process, it is more valuable to have a critical mass of cities reporting and communicating as best they can than to have only a small number of cities producing comprehensive inventories. The initial work of assessing and reporting a city's progress on the SDGs is an investment that compounds with time, beginning a process that participating cities have noted soon takes on a momentum of its own. This Handbook is a resource for taking those first steps.

Annex: Resources & Materials

SDG Education and Advocacy

[UNICEF](#) offers a variety of educational materials designed to teach children and young adults about the SDGs.

[TeachSDGs](#) is an organization that produces educational materials on the SDGs including instructional materials, videos, and publications.

[UNESCO](#) also offers a variety of educational materials on the SDGs and sorts resources by goal.

[SDG Academy](#) offers free online courses taught by faculty and experts from academic, government, and nonprofit institutions that discuss how stakeholders can partner to achieve the SDGs.

Grant-Giving Foundations and Data Sharing

[SDGFunders](#) offers data on domestic and international foundations that provide grants for SDG work. This website breaks down funding by goal and lists the top giving foundations by project area.

[Community Foundations Atlas](#) includes information on domestic and international community foundations including contact information and data on areas of interest.

[Stanford SDG dashboard](#) is a data visualization project by Stanford's Sustainable Urban Systems Initiative along with the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. The dashboard aims to take local data on SDG-related work and transform it into a practical dashboard that can aid decision makers in multiple sectors further implement the SDGs.

Metrics and Technical Assistance

[World Council on City Data \(WCCD\)](#) is a network organization that specializes in providing open data tools and standardization metrics for cities. Working with a wide array of stakeholders including local government, international organizations, the private sector, and academia, WCCD is working to implement the ISO 37120 international data standard for cities.

[International Standards Organization \(ISO\)](#) is an independent international non-governmental organization that develops data standards in various industries including technology, food safety, healthcare, and transportation. Specifically for cities, ISO created the ISO 37120: 2018 data standards to promote effective and consistent reporting across urban areas. The ISO standards explicitly align with several of the SDGs.

[ICLEI](#) is a global network of local, regional, and subnational governments that collaborates to promote sustainable urban development. The organization provides technical assistance and support in responding to and developing solutions for urban challenges. ICLEI also facilitates peer learning and knowledge exchange between cities across the globe.

[Sdg.data.gov](#) is a website created by several US government agencies to provide a single source for US national statistics related to specific indicators for each of the SDGs.

[NYC's 2018 VLR](#) includes a detailed Appendix with information on which indicators the city used for specific goals, which data metrics contribute to those indicators, and where the data came from.

Los Angeles's [Mayor's Dashboard](#) presents indicators and metrics for goals across the city relating to economic growth, equity, sustainability, city services, and safety.

Global SDG Educational Materials

[The United Nations Development Programme](#) offers a resource page including publications and implementation case studies on how different countries and communities are working towards the SDGs.

[The UN Sustainable Development Group](#) provides numerous resources on topics such as programming, financing, operations, and communications materials for countries looking to partner and engage with the SDGs.

[Together 2030](#) published a report on national civil society partnership efforts to engage with the SDGs and discusses different attempts at tracking SDG implementation, reporting progress to the international community, and recommendations for future efforts.

[The UN Institute for Training and Research](#) produces online content for country officials in charge of SDG implementation and reporting. The courses also offer tools and guidelines for stakeholder engagement.