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## New Web site helps set community priorities

*Jennifer Leonard and Peter Carpino, guest essayists*

Bookmark this: [www.ACTRochester.org](http://www.ACTRochester.org).

It just may change your life — especially with your help.

Last week, the Rochester Area Community Foundation and the United Way of Greater Rochester unveiled ACT Rochester, an unprecedented joint effort to help our region identify and respond to our most critical issues. ACT Rochester's first offering is this 170-page Web site, a treasure trove of trend data about the seven counties of greater Rochester (Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Wayne and Wyoming).

Topic areas include arts, culture and leisure; children and youth; community engagement; economy; education and environment. Also examined are financial self-sufficiency, health, housing, public safety, technology and transportation. The Web site features more than 125 measurable (and updatable) indicators, 200 downloadable charts and 300-plus links to regional and national resources. The Center for Governmental Research was our invaluable data partner (and will continue to be, through annual and other periodic updates).

The Web site can help policymakers decide where to invest their energies; assist program planners in selecting a focus, setting objectives and identifying model programs; and engage people region-wide in researching on a powerful site that clicks through from global to regional to local data, such as individual school performance.

The data is just the beginning. Spearheaded by a joint United Way-Community Foundation task force, the findings will inform and inspire discussion, debate and, ultimately, more data-driven advocacy and decision making. The Web site already invites comments by topic area, plus periodic opinion polling. ACT Rochester community forums, how-to sessions and partnerships will be facilitated (and tracked) beginning this fall. And if experience can be trusted, much more will come in the future.

ACT Rochester is modeled after the best "community indicator programs" in Boston, Toronto and other cities. A recent GAO study found that these programs enhance collaboration, knowledge, focus and progress toward community goals, and improve policy and fiscal decisions. Moreover, usage and effectiveness grow over time. That's where you come in.

We'll start by thanking the 300 community members who already have helped us shape the Web site. We hope you'll continue to use and promote it.

Now, we'd like to call on all of our neighbors to help organize to address the issues that confront our region. You can start by registering at [www.ACTRochester.org](http://www.ACTRochester.org). Then use it to inform and empower your own efforts for a better future. Thanks for joining us!

*Leonard is president and executive director of Rochester Area Community Foundation, which serves as administrative partner for ACT Rochester. Carpino is president of the United Way of Greater Rochester.*

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