The Way Forward

- Address demographic change
- Privilege social justice
- Foster greater inclusion

- Improve access to healthy foods for all
- Improve neighborhood conditions
- Reduce inequality

- Expand access to early childhood education
- Tackle the high school dropout crisis
- Make educational equity a reality

- Create good jobs
- Help working families build assets
- Expand affordably priced housing options
- Connect communities and expand public transport options
Introduction

On many levels, Marin County offers California strong examples of healthy communities, a high-performing education system, and an economy that has weathered the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression with relative resilience. But not content to rest on these overall successes, the Marin Community Foundation and leaders in the community seek to ensure that the benefits of these strengths are more widely shared. The Foundation has identified the human development approach as a tool for exploring well-being in Marin through a more holistic lens, using official data and a simple and transparent measure, the American Human Development Index. The statistics used to construct the Index are chosen to tell the story of Marinites from every neighborhood and each major race and ethnicity as well as for women and men.

Closing the human development gaps that separate different Marin County communities will not be easy—but doing so is certainly possible. The county has the financial resources, the know-how, and the commitment of key players necessary to ensure that all Marinites have the chance to realize their full potential and live freely chosen lives of dignity and value. This report has identified several specific priorities for improving the health, educational outcomes, and living standards of those whose human development lags; they are summarized below. In addition to these sector-specific recommendations, the analysis suggests that three cross-cutting issues are also critical to improving the well-being of everyone in the county: addressing demographic change, making trade-offs that privilege social justice, and fostering greater social inclusion.

Address demographic change.

Marin County’s population is already significantly older than that of the rest of California; 16.7 percent of the population is 65 or older, compared to 11.4 percent for the state as a whole. And the share of the population over 65 will increase significantly in the coming decades. As Marin’s population ages, more services will be needed—frequent, convenient bus routes that allow older adults to retain autonomy and independence, for instance, or housing options that enable longtime Marinites to “age in place” on fixed incomes. Significantly, public transportation and low- and moderately priced housing are among the very social services that residents of Novato, West Marin, and other parts of the county need today. Investing in these services in the short term will address today’s urgent concerns while also laying the groundwork to meet the needs of a larger share of the population in the near future.
Though Marin’s population is predominantly white today, the fastest-growing segment of the population is Latino. Today’s Latino children are Marin’s adults of tomorrow. Their start in life matters to them, but it also matters to the county as a whole—to the quality of the workforce, to the tax base, and to economic competitiveness. Latinos today score 5.17 on the Index in Marin, compared to 8.44 for whites and 8.88 for Asian Americans. Closing the well-being gap, especially in educational attainment and incomes, is thus critical to sustaining Marin’s high levels of human development into the future.

Privilege social justice.

The people, institutions, and government agencies of Marin are pursuing a host of socially valuable ends; commitment to public lands and green space, innovative public health initiatives, and an improved climate for small business creation are some examples. Fortunately, Marin’s relative affluence affords sufficient resources to pursue many different aims simultaneously. But in some cases, budget shortfalls limit action; in such cases, even in a county as resource-rich as Marin, trade-offs are then required. Improving human development requires that the needs of people to secure basic capabilities take precedence. This might mean, for instance, that zoning laws that limit certain kinds of development (and thus help maintain a neighborhood’s character) be suspended for the construction of a multifamily complex with units for low-income families and older adults. This approach is particularly appropriate where the zoning laws were originally designed to maintain racial segregation. It might mean choosing to invest in an art or music program for children in a poorly served community, rather than offering an additional after-school activity in a community that already has several enriching options. Addressing affordable housing, residential segregation, and educational and other inequalities have been on Marin’s to-do list for some time. Marin has sufficient resources to address these long-standing gaps while also maintaining excellent levels of service to communities with high human development scores.

Foster greater inclusion.

The pattern of residential segregation by race, ethnicity, and income coupled with significant disparities between communities, families, and individuals in access to resources impedes the development of an inclusive, diverse civic life. A vibrant community in which everyone may be represented, heard, and part of the mainstream is in everyone’s interest. When extremes in income inequality are accompanied by inequality in access to the other basic building blocks of a good life—such as a first-rate education, a rewarding job, a valued place in society, and the real freedom to further personal goals—frustration, powerlessness,
lowered expectations, and hostility find easy footholds, benefiting no one. In addition to these cross-cutting priorities, closing the county’s life expectancy, educational attainment, and earnings gaps will require concerted effort in a number of areas. In the health, education, and income sections earlier in this report, these specific areas were identified. They are summarized below. As discussed earlier, these areas are those that scholarly research and well-documented experience have shown to be particularly instrumental in improving people’s health, boosting educational achievement, and bettering living standards.

A Long and Healthy Life

Improve access to healthy foods for all.

Regulations, such as prohibiting fast-food outlets within a half mile of a school or limiting the concentration of liquor stores, help to combat the obesogenic environment common to food deserts. Public education campaigns, school gardens, and nutrition classes can empower people with the knowledge they need to make healthy choices, and incentives and supports for full-service grocery stores and community- and school-based programs put healthy eating within everyone’s reach.

Improve neighborhood conditions.

Health is not just the absence of disease; it is the state of physical, mental, and social well-being. Achieving this state requires an environment that reduces health risks and makes healthy choices possible. In the Marin neighborhoods with the shortest life expectancies, urgent priorities include reducing exposure to chronic stress, crime, toxins, and asthma triggers; strengthening social bonds; improving transportation, education, and health services; increasing access to good nutrition; and increasing access to green space and places to exercise.

Reduce inequality.

Taking action to reduce not just income inequality but also inequality in other basic capabilities can have an important impact on health. And mitigating the effect of existing inequalities through expanding options for housing and a renewed commitment by the most affluent to collective social investments can contribute to longer lives in Marin.
Access to Knowledge

Expand access to early childhood education.

High-quality early childhood education is the most effective educational investment society can make, one that not just allows disadvantaged children to enter school on an equal footing but also has positive impacts throughout life. Marin County has a high proportion of three- and four-year-olds in center-based preschools, but those who would benefit most are the least likely to be enrolled.

Tackle the high school dropout crisis.

Dropout warning signs are well known and easily spotted; measurement of the problem has improved. Using this copious research to take action, targeting highest-risk groups including African American and Latino boys and young men, offers a tremendous opportunity for Marin to make progress in this area.

Make educational equity a reality.

More must be done to ensure that the education pie is sliced in more equal pieces. Currently, the Marin high schools with the highest per-pupil expenditures are also enrolling the fewest low-income children.
A Decent Standard of Living

Create good jobs.

The polarization of the job market, in which highly skilled workers enjoy good salaries and benefits and less skilled workers endure poverty wages, insecurity, and no benefits is not inevitable. Marin County can improve the prospects of everyone by prioritizing the creation of good jobs through vocational training, policies that support decent wages and benefits, small business creation, and more substantial community benefits agreements from new big-box and other businesses.

Help working families build assets.

Helping working families build assets is vital for low-income Marinites to achieve economic security and reduce the transfer of poverty from generation to generation. Approaches range from private-sector programs such as automatic enrollment in retirement plans and employee-matched savings accounts to public programs such as children’s accounts established automatically at birth and greater asset protection, particularly related to housing.

Expand affordably priced housing options.

To ensure that essential workers can live in Marin and longtime Marinites can stay in their homes after retirement, promising steps include expanding the number of homes affordable to people with lower incomes, enforcing the rights of renters, and supporting increased first-time homeownership.

Connect communities and expand public transport options.

More public transport options for all neighborhoods will reduce car congestion and pollution, and reforming transport routes and traffic patterns to enhance communication among communities will help overcome barriers to a sustainable, inclusive Marin County.
While many measures tell us how the county’s economy is doing, *A Portrait of Marin* tells us how ordinary people are doing.

The Human Development Index score is higher in Ross than almost anywhere else in the United States.

An Asian American baby born in Marin today can expect to live, on average, over eleven years longer than an African American baby.

Three in five white and Asian American Marinites have bachelor’s degrees; only one in five African Americans or Latinos do.

Median earnings in the Canal neighborhood are comparable to those in Arkansas and Mississippi.

Map over 30 indicators for Marin County at [www.measureofamerica.org/maps](http://www.measureofamerica.org/maps)

**ABOUT THE REPORT**

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To obtain copies of this report, visit [www.marincf.org/portraitofmarin](http://www.marincf.org/portraitofmarin) or call 415-464-2500.

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**ABOUT THE PROJECT**

The American Human Development Project of the Social Science Research Council provides easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding the distribution of well-being and opportunity in America and stimulates fact-based dialogue about human development issues in the United States.