

Keep Cincinnati Beautiful

# Blight Index



*Building Strong Communities*

# Introduction

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Keep Cincinnati Beautiful developed the Blight Index as a way for communities to visually assess their neighborhood and to measure change over time. This Blight Index is based on Keep America Beautiful's Litter Index, which KCB uses daily to assess the amount of litter in Cincinnati as well as to measure the effectiveness of particular programs and projects. KCB has also developed an Index to monitor the City's street sweeping program as well as to monitor the City's Neighborhood Improvement Program (NIP).

Visually assessing the community is an essential part of the community improvement planning process. The data gathered by conducting the Blight Index will help you determine the types of community improvement plans to implement in your community. It will also help to determine the problem areas within your community, as well as to zero in on what types of blight affect your community.

In these instructional materials, you will learn to use the Blight Index. The Blight Index requires that you look at a map of your community, and divide your community into smaller sub-areas that will actually be scored. In the scoring process, you will bring together community members, train them in the Blight Index scoring system, and then drive or walk through the sub-areas you've selected. When scoring is complete, you will average the scores to achieve a community score.

Because the Blight Index enables you to measure change over time, it serves as a valuable tool to measure and quantify progress. Not only does this help your community identify what works and what doesn't, it provides a quantifiable system of measurement to present to outside sources (grant providers, your municipality, etc.).

# Preparation of Scoring Map

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Three of the key terms used in these instructional materials are “communities”, “areas” or “Police Reporting Areas”, and “Blocks.” These terms are defined as follows:

- **Communities** are the total extent of your scoring jurisdiction. For instance, if you live within the City of Cincinnati this would be your neighborhood, while those outside of the City would likely refer to their entire town or city.
- The community is then divided into about 5-10 **areas**, in order to break down the work into manageable units. For those of you that live within the City of Cincinnati, you should refer to the **Police Reporting Areas** as shown on the map titled “Disorder Hot Spots”. Each number shown in green on the map refers to a Police Reporting Area.
- Areas are then divided into **blocks**, which are the units to be scored using the four-point scale. Examples of a block: Elm from 13<sup>th</sup> St. to 14<sup>th</sup> St., or Hamilton Ave. from Chase to Pullan.
- For those of you scoring your neighborhoods, you could conceivably score every block face in your neighborhood, or you could score a certain percentage. If you do score a certain percentage, you can choose to concentrate on those areas that have experienced more calls for service as shown on both the “Disorder Hot Spots” Map as well as the map listing Blight Indicators.
- For those of you with larger “Communities”, you would likely have to score a certain percentage.

## *Areas*

It is necessary to obtain a map that depicts your entire community, with clearly marked roadways. The goal is to divide the map of your community into 5-10 areas, which taken together, encompass your entire community. If you live within the City, you should use the Police Reporting Areas. If you are scoring a larger community such as an entire town or city, you can look to previously established jurisdictions such as Police Districts, Wards, etc. It is very important that the areas correspond to Police Reporting areas so that the Blight Indicators can be overlaid with crime statistics.

## *Blocks*

Next, divide each area into block faces, which are units that will actually be scored with the four-point scale.

- You can score as many as 100% of the blocks in the area, but you should not score less than 20% of them. The larger the percentage of the number of blocks that you score, the

more accurate the overall assessment will be.

Giving scores to blocks throughout your community serves several functions. First, it helps direct education, beautification, and litter prevention programs. Second, it allows for the compilation and averaging of sub-area scores into areas, providing comparisons between different parts of the community. This process of combining sub-area scores also leads to overall scores for the community. The area and community scores can be used to track overall progress in blight abatement on a schedule designated by the community (month-to-month, year-to-year, etc.).

**The Blight Index can also be used to determine whether improvements in Blight lead to less crime in our neighborhoods.** That is why we ask that you use Police Reporting Areas to conduct your Index. For those of you that live outside of the City, you should also have access to a similar tracking process through your Police Department.

# The Scoring Process

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It is important that scorers all hear the same instructions and that the scorers all have a similar field of vision. A large vehicle such as a van can be used, or scorers can walk the sub-areas. The following instructions apply during scoring:

1. The scoring leader will call “start” for each block to be scored. When the entire block has been viewed, the leader will call “stop.”
2. When stop is called, each scorer will write down a 1, 2, 3, or 4 along with the appropriate block name on the scoring sheet. If a scorer is unsure, s/he might use a 0.5, such as a 2.5 when unable to decide between 2 and 3. The intent, however, should be to normally use 1, 2, 3, or 4 when scoring.
3. Unless instructed otherwise, scorers should look left and right into alleyways, parking lots, businesses, loading docks, residences, etc. to assess the entire block. **Both public and private property should be included.**

Consider the following:

- How visible is the blight?
  - How continuous or frequent is the blight?
  - How difficult would it be to clean up the block?
4. During the scoring process, there should be no discussion among scorers.
  5. Scorers should use the “notable conditions” column on the scoring sheet to indicate specific blight indicators such as graffiti, illegal dumpsites, broken windows, or weeds. **These notable conditions are what Keep Cincinnati Beautiful will report to the City of Cincinnati, so please be as specific as possible. Include addresses whenever possible.**
  6. When all scoring is complete, the scoring leader will check to make sure all scoring sheets are filled in properly and will collect them.

This process can be flexible. Use your best judgment as to what process will work best for your community. Contact Keep Cincinnati Beautiful if you have any questions or concerns.

# Notable Conditions/ Blight Indicators

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Because there are so many indicators of blight, it is best to use the numerical scoring process to get an overall assessment of the blight in the scoring area, and to use the “Notable Conditions” field to notate the exact types of blight that are seen. For instance, an area could be blighted solely because of graffiti, or perhaps there is a mix of broken windows, litter, and weeds.

Examples of Blight Indicators:

- Graffiti
- Abandoned Buildings
- Broken Windows
- Weeds
- Litter
- Boarded Windows
- Illegal Dumping
- Unkempt Vacant Lots
- Junk Cars
- Buildings with Structural Defects

This is not in any way a list of all possible blight indicators; rather it is a list of common ones. There may be other blight indicators that are particular to your neighborhood.

# Data Analysis and Reporting

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## *City of Cincinnati Residents*

### *Data Use*

The primary use of the information obtained using the Blight Index is to assist your local community in directing its blight abatement initiatives to those Police Reporting areas and specific blocks that require emphasis. This data collecting and quantifying process enables your community to measure change over time, which is useful for a number of reasons, including grant reporting, etc.

Your community will also use this information to contact property owners as well as to direct City services to specific problems.

### *Reporting to KCB*

Upon completing the Blight Index, you can report your results to Keep Cincinnati Beautiful using the Form provided. KCB will compile the data that you collect so that we can help communities facing chronic problems with blight find solutions. Those communities experiencing severe problems with blight may be targeted by the City of Cincinnati for heightened levels of service.

# Blight Scale: Written Descriptions

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*Score*

*Instructions for Scorer*

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**1 “No Blight”**

Virtually no blight can be observed in the sub-area. The scorer has to look hard to see any evidence of blight. The entire sub-area has a generally neat and tidy appearance.

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**2 “Slightly Blighted”**

Upon careful inspection, a small amount of blight is obvious to the scorer. While the sub-area has a small amount of blight, items that indicate blight do not continually grab the eye.

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**3 “Blighted”**

Visible Blight can readily be seen throughout the sub-area, requiring an organized effort for removal. This area is clearly “blighted” and needs to be addressed.

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**4 “Extremely Blighted”**

Excessive amounts of blight are one of the first things noticed about the sub-area. There is a strong impression of a lack of concern about blight in the sub-area.

# 1 - No Blight



# 2 - Slightly Blighted



# 3 - Blighted



# 4 - Extremely Blighted





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*This Blight Index was modeled after the Litter Index created by Keep America Beautiful.  
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