

# Case Study: Berkshire Benchmarks

## FAST FACTS

Website:

<http://www.berkshirebenchmarks.org>

### Background:

Berkshire County is one of seven Massachusetts counties that has no actual county government.

As a result, the community came together to develop ways to track the regional data that will help Berkshire County make strategic decisions for the future.

### Client:

Berkshire Benchmarks is a program created by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) to help define goals and track progress using regional indicators and a data clearinghouse.

### Q Digital Studio:

In addition to having the lowest qualified bid, Q Digital Studio offered a number of ideas to enhance the functionality of the site Berkshire Benchmarks was looking for. QDS was ready and willing to go above and beyond simply meeting the base criteria for their project.

### Goals:

- Easy navigation
- Clean visual style
- Fast loading times
- Dynamic data graphs
- Sense of place

### Results:

- Excellent source for regional data
- Site graphs and displays data
- Visits exceeded expectations
- Received HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grant due in part to the website's infrastructure

## SUMMARY

While seeking qualified bids for a new website, Massachusetts-based Berkshire Benchmarks (BB) was pleased to see that Q Digital Studio (QDS) was ready and willing to go above and beyond simply meeting the base criteria for their project. In addition to having the lowest qualified bid, QDS offered a number of ideas to enhance the functionality of the site BB was looking for. QDS was hired on to design and develop an identity and website for BB.

## CLIENT

Berkshire Benchmarks is a program run through the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC).

Berkshire County is one of seven Massachusetts counties that doesn't have any official government – that means that the role of the BRPC is critical in gathering census data on community conditions. Berkshire Benchmarks is a specialized program that allows the BRPC to interact with the Berkshire community and to track progress on community initiatives and goals.

## PROCESS

Q Digital Studio made sure that Berkshire Benchmarks was involved in every decision and that the designs were aligned with BB's overall vision.

### QDS's role:

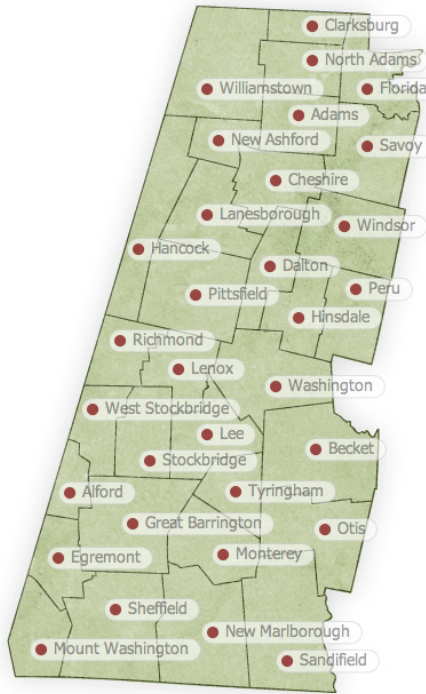
- Translated ideas in formal logo graphic and identity sheet
- Created website designs using elements relating to identity
- Consulted with BB every step of the way
- Developed product that integrated data search and regional progress
- Prepared BB to manage their own content using the ExpressionEngine Content Management System

## GOALS

Berkshire Benchmarks wanted to create a clear identity and a website that was simple to maintain and to update. It was important that the site looked good and functioned well, while being easy to navigate. BB hoped for slow but steady growth in visitors in the first year.

### QDS met the following goals for BB's website's design:

- **Navigation:** Accessible for all levels
- **Search:** Easy-to-find information
- **Performance:** Fast loading times
- **Visual Style:** Organized, clean, clear
- **Visual Theme:** Reflects upward trends and Berkshire hills



**RESULTS**

The reactions to the Berkshire Benchmarks site have been very positive. BB is proud to be filling an essential role as a regional resource, and users seem to particularly enjoy watching how the data is automatically graphed over time.

**The website integrated the following elements:**

- Search feature
- Dynamic data graphs
- Navigation map
- Sense of place

**Target visits exceeded**

Visits to the site have exceeded Berkshire Benchmarks expectations for the first year; impressive, given the fact that they have only conducted limited outreach to date. As BB moves forward with their outreach, they expect that publicity and interest in the site will increase significantly.

**Successful receipt of HUD grant**

Within a year of the website launch, the BPRC applied for and was awarded a HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grant.

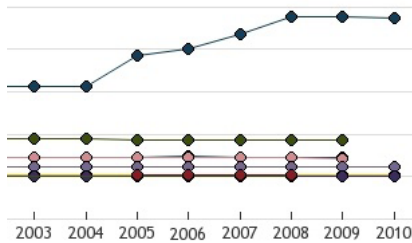
The grant gave the BPRC resources to develop a regional sustainability plan for the Berkshires. The grant application specifically called for indicators to identify and measure progress.

Thanks to the Berkshire Benchmarks website, the BPRC had the data infrastructure they needed to get the grant for their community.

**CONCLUSION**

Berkshire Benchmarks has already proven itself to be an important resource for the region. As outreach increases, BB expects that success and publicity for the website will continue to grow significantly.

For more information on the Berkshire Benchmarks program or to search Massachusetts regional data, please visit the website at: <http://www.berkshirebenchmarks.org>.



ABOVE: The site features an interactive map and dynamic data graphing. The logo reflects the upward trend in growth and the Berkshire mountains.

# Q&A: Berkshire Benchmarks

## **QDS: Why did you choose Q Digital Studio for the website design?**

**BB:** As a public agency, BRPC follows state procurement rules. We issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) and received a number of responses, which were reviewed using a standard set of evaluation criteria. Q Digital Studio had the lowest qualified bid based on what was set out in the RFP, but also impressed us by offering a number of creative ideas to enhance functionality of the site that went above and beyond simply meeting the base criteria.

## **QDS: How did you work with Q Digital Studio to create a design that worked for you?**

**BB:** We had a concept for the logo design that Q Digital Studio was able to translate into a formal logo graphic and identity sheet. The website drew from the logo for its ultimate design. Going into the process we pointed QDS to a few websites with design elements or components that we liked and then let them translate that into a draft page layout.

## **QDS: What was the design process like?**

**BB:** The design process was an iterative process. We were involved throughout the design of the website. Once we had a logo, Q Digital Studio worked to create a home page using concepts we had along with color/text from the logo design. We went back and forth several times until we had something we were happy with and Q Digital Studio responded to our requests and needs throughout the process.

## **QDS: How do you like working with ExpressionEngine?**

**BB:** Q Digital Studio prepared instructions and offered to walk us through editing pages. The program is still under development so we have not yet had much need to edit pages with ExpressionEngine.

## **QDS: What do you hope for the future of the Berkshire Benchmarks website?**

**BB:** The site visitation has exceeded our expectations for the first year; particularly given we have only conducted limited outreach to date. As we move forward with the indicators within our regional planning process, there will be much more publicity for the site and numbers should increase significantly.

## **QDS: What kind of reactions have you heard from users of the website?**

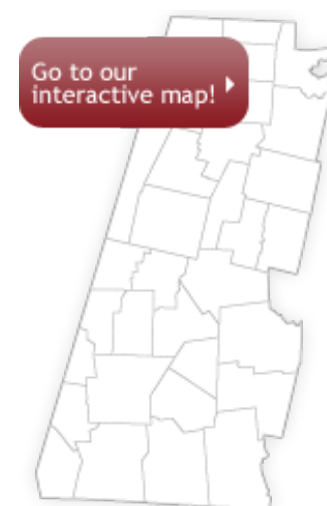
**BB:** The reactions that we have heard so far have been very positive. People are impressed with the website as a regional resource and are particularly pleased that the site automatically graphs the data over time. We have not heard anything specific about enhancements that are needed, but more data is added to the clearinghouse and the indicators are added through a regional planning process about to get underway, we may hear more feedback.

## **QDS: How did the website help the BRPC get a HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grant?**

**BB:** The Berkshire Benchmarks

program contains two basic components: a regional data clearinghouse and regional indicators. Within a year of the website launch, BRPC applied for and was awarded a HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grant to develop a regional sustainability plan for the Berkshires.

The grant application specifically called for indicators to be identified and tracked to measure implementation progress. In our application we were able to point to the existing website to concretely show how our sustainability indicators would be tracked and distributed during and after the life of the grant. The fact that we already had the infrastructure in place to track and post the indicators certainly helped strengthen our proposal. We will now identify indicators based on the goals and strategies developed for the regional plan and use the Berkshire Benchmarks program and website to keep them up-to-date and available to the public on an ongoing basis.



**ABOVE:** The interactive map on the Berkshire Benchmarks site serves as a regional data resource.