

Community Asset Mapping

MEETING ENGAGEMENT TOOL

Description

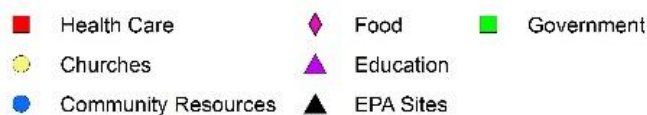
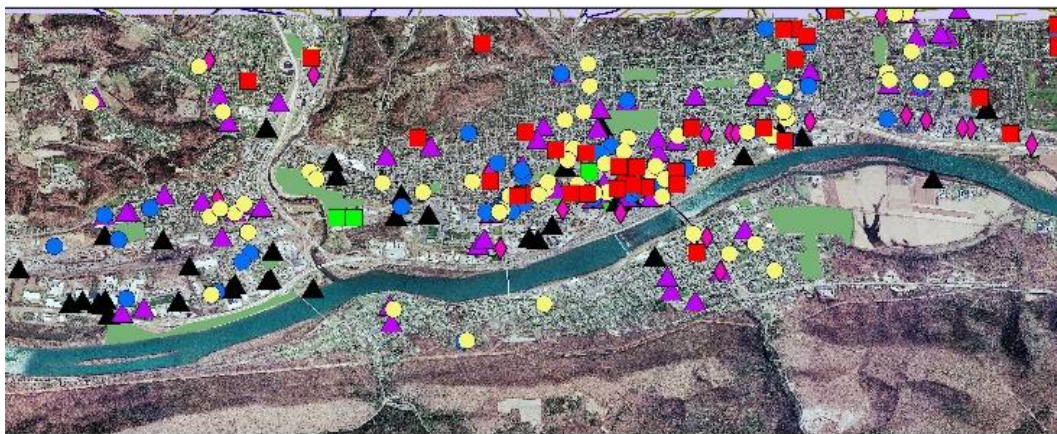
Community asset mapping is a process for identifying and mapping the assets of a community. Assets are the things that are important to the members of the community (people, things, services, resources, and connections) and that the community wants to keep, sustain, and build upon. Assets can be physical things or intangible things and fall into six general categories: political, built infrastructure, human, natural, financial, and cultural and social networks. Systematically assessing important assets creates a baseline for defining a path for change and improvement.

Participants

Organizations as well as communities can use this process. It can be used for small groups as well. The larger the group, the more time it will take to identify and develop agreement on the important assets.

Process

There are many ways to approach asset mapping. All approaches should produce a map of assets, as identified by the people intimately involved in the landscape. The output may look like a real map, an assets chart or wheel, or simply a list of assets.





Three possible approaches:

- The **Whole Assets Approach** takes into account all the assets that are part of people's view of their immediate community. It is a systematic and balanced way to assess all the assets from natural, social, economic, and service components of the community system. Whole asset mapping is comprehensive and, although it takes longer, can provide a complete map of the community and its support system. Participants begin by listing assets by category—and then discuss the importance of these assets, threats to them, and how to sustain and build upon their collective value.
- The **Storytelling Approach** produces pieces of social history that reveal assets in the community. It identifies how assets that are often hidden or dormant can be combined with other assets to produce additional assets. For this approach, the facilitator asks each community member to share a story about a successful project that portrays how and why people come together to develop their community. The goal is to highlight stories where two or more assets came together to make a third (e.g., abandoned trails + sponsorships = trail for hiking, bicycling).
- The **Heritage Approach** produces a picture (map or list) of those physical features, natural or built, that make the community a special place. Assets include natural heritage (e.g., rivers, parks), as well as built features. Almost anything on the landscape can be part of a community's heritage if the people who live and work there feel it is significant to them. Meeting participants are asked to draw the most important features of their community on cards that are then shared. Once the information is compiled, participants discuss and agree on 'key assets.'

Steps:

1. **Define your community.** For example, choose a specific group of people, or base it on geographic boundaries.
2. **Define what you want to do with the information collected.** For example, create a community resource guide or a searchable database of organization resources.
3. **Select what assets you want to identify.** How you plan to use the information should guide what assets you want to identify.
4. **Identify if an asset-mapping activity was already done.** Will it provide the information you are looking for? What did or did not work well?
5. **Develop a plan to collect the information.** When do you need the data? What methods will you use to collect the information? What resources (people, copying, database work, facilitators) do you need to collect the information? Who is going to do what and by when?
6. **Collect data on your assets,** including resources that support assets, threats to assets, opportunities associated with assets, and strategies to sustain assets.
7. **Map the assets of your organization or community.** Use an actual map (e.g., GIS mapping software) or other representation that displays the assets and relationships among the assets.
8. **Evaluate the process and your results.**

Tips

- Sometimes people are reluctant to share sensitive information. Be clear about what you intend to do with the collected information so you can develop the trust needed for active participation. Do not limit what people think of as assets (i.e., all assets are equally important).
- A large, visually striking map that individuals can add their ideas to increases ownership of the information.
- An asset map is a work in progress, and providing ways to add or update over time is as important as the initial creation.

Benefits

- Useful when people need to identify assets they can use.
- Provides a positive starting point for change.
- Highlights achievements and available resources and talent.
- Empowers groups.

Considerations

- Not useful when there is no common focus for the group as a whole.
- Requires time to collect, compile, and evaluate the asset information.
- Asset mapping can uncover overlooked resources and assets.

Debrief

- What could have been done differently to collect this information?
- After completing this effort, do you have a better understanding of existing assets?
- What other information could have been collected about these assets?
- Does the graphic do a good job of displaying assets and how they relate to one another? If not, is there some other approach that could be used?
- How can we use this information to develop strategies for moving forward?

Resources Needed

- Dependent on the scale of the effort, but could range from two hours to multiple days.
- Flip charts and pens, sticky notes, and large-size asset mapping template.
- Ability to map the information once you have collected. Can be done on a paper map or using a program such as Google maps.

Additional Information

- “Watershed-Based Community Assessment Toolkit: Section D” (Social Mapping) by Iowa Learning Farm at iowalearningfarms.org/files/page/files/WatershedAssessmentToolkit_D_Social-mapping.pdf.
- *Mapping Community Assets Workbook* by Diane Dorfman at Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory at resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/resources/Documents/DorfmanMappingCommunityAssetsWorkBook.pdf.
- “Clients to Citizens: Asset-Based Community Development as a Strategy for Community-Driven Development” by A. Mathie and G. Cunningham at coloradocollege.edu/dotAsset/27454fab-98e8-4d89-80a0-044837593aa0.pdf.
- *Community Tool Box*, Chapter 3, Section 8, “Identifying Community Assets and Resources” by the Kansas University Work Group for Community Health and Development at ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/identify-community-assets/main.