Community Catalyst

ASSET MAPPING

Story of Practice: Emory Rose Library

Mapping Assets to Celebrate, Connect, & Invest in Local HIV/AIDS Support & Activism

EMORY LIBRARIES & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY | STUART A. ROSE MANUSCRIPT, ARCHIVES, & RARE BOOK LIBRARY

Asset mapping can be an invaluable tool for those seeking to engage with and contribute to their community.

The story of Emory University Stuart A. Rose Library's IMLS-funded project "Revisiting R.A.C.E.: Leveraging Archival Resources for AIDS Education" demonstrates how asset mapping can enable libraries and museums to not only learn the best way to be helpful to their community, but also to fundamentally change their relationship with their communities into one more deeply embedded, mutually supportive and respectful, and capable of sparking truly transformative change.

Asset mapping is practice that emerged from Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and based upon the research of John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann into what everyday residents use to make positive change in their neighborhoods. Asset mapping is a guide building relationships toward activating, connecting and building upon a community's abundant resources and capacities. The mapping process helps reveal what assets and productive activities already exist in neighborhoods and clarify where these assets might be complemented by those of institutions and their paid staff.

The Rose Library project lead staff have modeled a compelling and creative use of this tool by
- internalizing its underlying asset orientation as a new way of seeing their community,
- treating it as a guide for relationship-building,
- including community-members in the process,
- embracing mapping as an ongoing, cyclical, ever-expanding practice, and
- taking action to connect, celebrate and invest in the assets.

This orientation and set of repeated practices enabled project staff to make a profound impact on their HIV-related issues in Atlanta by discovering, connecting, and strengthening the diverse individuals, groups and organizations actively working on that issue locally.

BACKGROUND

In 2017, the Rose Library at Emory University proposed and was awarded a grant through IMLS's Community Catalyst Initiative for the project "Revisiting R.A.C.E.: Leveraging Archival Resources for AIDS Education." Originally, "Revisiting Race" sought to foster an educational collaborative to address the ongoing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Atlanta metropolitan area by forging connections among medical, academic, social service, religious, advocacy, and artistic communities to raise awareness and combat the epidemic. They hoped to partner with the Equality Foundation of Georgia, Emory Center for AIDS Research, and Southern Christian Leadership Coalition Women's Organizational Movement for Equality Now to address and spread awareness of HIV/AIDS in metro Atlanta, including the historical reasons for disparities in diagnosis and care.

The team's ultimate goal was to develop a framework with which institutions could deploy resources to empower communities and connect the stories of different groups. Emory University is known for its early and ongoing medical and public health

research related to the epidemic; Rose Library has been collecting materials that document historic HIV/AIDS activism in Atlanta, but did not have any stature in the activism community.

Courtney Chartier, project lead and Rose Library's Head of Research Services, recalls, "We saw this grant as a great opportunity to pull together the threads of our historical collections to current medical research and community activism."

A BLANK SLATE: PROJECT LAUNCH AND EARLY MAPPING

At project launch, project staff Courtney Chartier and Shenita Petersen were thrust into a challenging situation when the designer of the grant left unexpectedly and each of the three main partners who had committed to pursuing the project with Rose Emory Library withdrew their commitment. The new team had inherited the project with no familiarity with the grant design and very little knowledge or relationship with the local HIV/AIDS activist or service community.

"We tried for some time to continue with the original project concept," they recall, "then chose to reframe the goals of the grant to continue to celebrate their work instead of then partnering to restart their work."

Ironically, this was an ideal situation for beginning an asset mapping and discovery journey. They began with a "blank slate," seeking out new partners and relationships, utilizing ABCD concepts and tools to observe and document the assets, energy, and momentum they found around them, and gradually finding their "niche" based on authentic exchanges and conversations with community activists.

The team first experienced asset mapping when they attended an in-person Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) training in Chicago hosted by IMLS for all recipients of the first round of Community Catalyst funding shortly after the initiative's launch held in early 2018. With the support of consultants from the ABCD Institute and DePaul University, Catalyst grantee teams practiced listing all of the assets, of which they were aware, that may have some connection to their project focus and were within the six categories of assets as defined within ABCD: Individuals, Associations, Institutions, Place, Economy, and Culture/Stories.

Courtney recalls being struck and challenged by the new ways the exercise pushed her and Shenita to think about their community:

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Courtney Chartier,
Head of Research Services at Rose Library

One of the things I remember about it was that it was truly challenging to do, not only because there's always going to be a zillion things you don't know about that you might not know are going on already in your community, but especially because when we say "community" around this project, the community is spread way out. It's not ever going to be just one neighborhood. And so it really was challenging to get in the mindset that you need to for asset mapping.

It is a different mindset than how you might normally approach work in a library or an archives, or museum. We talk a lot about like stakeholders, but that tends to mean people with a financial stake. So I think it's been really impactful in the sense of contributing to how I approach all my other work. And like this idea of stakeholders, not just being like people who are funding streams, but different people who don't even use the library yet, but are potential partners for us.

But it was a real challenge to kind of get in the zone for it that first time because when you haven't ever sat down and explicitly been like, "What are the assets in my community?", it's a real foreign exercise.

USING THE MAP TO GUIDE NEXT STEPS

Once Courtney and Shenita created their initial map based on who and what they knew was active in Atlanta around HIV/AIDS work, they used the map to where and with whom they should build and deepen their relationships and understanding of local around HIV/AIDS activity.

[The map] definitely informed our next steps for the idea of like places that we definitely knew about to get in touch with. But even just making that really explicit list, right, and having this realization, "Oh, so there's the student groups we know about; there's these kind of major organizations in the city we know about; there's certain faculty we know about who are doing this kind of work... How do we -- okay, we have to connect with these people!"

The team began reaching out to groups and individuals they had identified in their map. They reached out to individuals and met with them one-on-one. They also joined a group or organziation's next meeting or event, all with a mind to learn more about who and what was "out there" and happening already around HIV/AIDs. One conversation or event would lead to more contacts, conversations, and opportunities to connect.

During this process, the new PI experienced severe anxiety and panic attacks before some community meetings rooted in perceived imposter syndrome -- a feeling that she did not belong. Luckily, the warmth

and support of partnerships with individual activists helped a great deal and she was able to continue connecting.

As they dove into learning and connecting, the team had the following key insights which caused them to shift their way of seeing their project and the most valuable way to use their time and resources:

- Understanding "assets" in a new way, realizing that "assets could be even individuals within those organizations, connectors, people already doing the work that could partner with the library or connect them to others."

- Rose Library is uniquely positioned to connect the activist community with the arts community.

- Emory was not doing enough to directly support or impact the issue on the ground level. When one of the project staff declared this at a public meeting, it was met with applause and caused a further deepening of trust and solidarity between the team and community partners and groups.

- One of the most powerful contributions Emory can make toward advancing local work around HIV/AIDS play would be to bring together the groups they have built relationships with and to also share their assets (the collection, student skills and leadership in publicity).

CONNECTORS "EXPLODE" THE MAP; MAPPING AS ASPIRATIONAL & CYCLICAL

As the team explored the local landscape by attending meetings and holding one-on-one conversations, they discovered a number of well-connected individuals were more than happy to generously share their knowledge and connections.

Having those folks serve as connectors for us is what really helped the asset map grow, because then, one of the
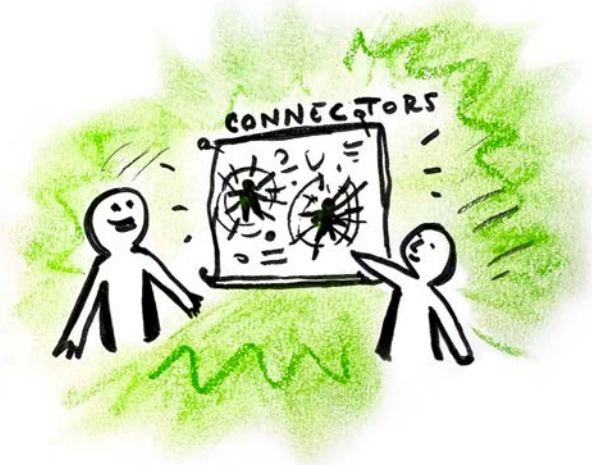
major organizations we knew about is part of a network with tons of really small organizations that don't have nearly the level of funding or they have a really specific service model. That means, you know, they're really tied to servicing one group of people who have HIV.

And so it was like the asset map is cyclical or circular. By having made that really formal list and then starting to work with thinking about those people as assets and reaching out to them, then you're getting connected to all these other assets that they know on the map. So, it just explodes from there out.

The map continued to help guide the team's actions as an "aspirational" roadmap toward

connecting with groups they had not yet connected with completely. They found that the connectors they had befriended became invaluable guides in multiple ways. When asked how the team has used mapping throughout the project, Courtney reflected:

That idea of it [being] aspirational, of being able to look back at it and be like, "You know what? We had originally listed all these churches we know of that are really active, we haven't gotten involved with them. Let's see how we can maybe bring in more partners or talk to those partners we've already made" and [asking partners/connectors], "Can you help us understand the landscape of what these organizations are doing? How do they interact with you guys?" So that we would understand about their roles better, and like what assets they do bring before making any moves to engage that community.

Becoming familiar with and sensitive to the realities of local groups and history became more important as the team's understanding and relationships evolved -- especially as they began to embrace the role of a connector and convener of various groups as a way to support local action.

That was another thing that was really eye opening for us is, you know, not all communities want to be engaged, or not all communities want to be engaged in the same way. And so learning as much as you can from the people you meet who are those community connectors is so valuable, because sometimes you don't know -- there might be 20 years of bad blood between two organizations, right? And you don't want to step in it. And you don't want to come in as, "Oh, I'm Jimmy Carter, I'm here to learn." And nobody wants you to do that, right?

And so I'm having those connectors like the asset map to give you aspirations, but then already having those

connectors on the ground that can help you understand better how all those assets actually already fit together, or how they don't--like if they don't communicate at all, they can give you a real insight into that.

And so that's one of the things that was really valuable about cultivating some key people as consultants for us and as assets because they have so much information.

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ACTIVATING THE MAP:
CONNECTING, CELEBRATING & INVESTING IN ASSETS

The Emory team's work has also embodied one of the core purposes of asset mapping that often gets lost when adopted within institutional frameworks and cultures -- that is, to go beyond mapping and begin actively connecting, utilizing and find ways to celebrate and invest in those assets so they can be even more productive and powerful. The team did this in ways that intentionally "decentered" themselves and their institutions and rather flowed attention, energy and resources toward the groups and individuals themselves.

The work of celebrating, connecting and investing in local assets took many forms, such as simply buying someone lunch and listening to them.

In the in-person sessions, we got to explore this idea of celebrating assets, not just leveraging them. And, especially in our experience, we've met so many people that work so hard for very little tangible return for themselves, and having the opportunity to celebrate them in any way even by, like, bringing lunch can be so significant for relationship building--just showing that you really very much appreciate even the fact that people will sit down and talk to you and fill you in on the history of whatever organization or how policies have developed in the city.

I took somebody from the public health department out to lunch. She's our county's first full-time trans employee, but also first full time youth outreach

employee for HIV. She was able to fill me in on this kind of fraught long history of the county health department. Over omelets! She was so pleased to get lunch provided and have like a tour of the library, just this afternoon away from the office and from, you know, government and going out to high schools. She was just like, "All you wanted was to talk to you?" I'm like, "Yeah, I just want to understand what's going on." And now she's a partner--like, she's spoken at an event for us before and like, is running really amazingly good programs.

And it's so little effort on my part to show appreciation. But it goes so far. And for me and for us, one of the great things we are happy about with this grant is the opportunity to not just inspire new work, but celebrate the work that already exists, And that goes on every day and has been for 30 years. Yeah, that's beautiful.

As more assets emerged, the team began to creatively redirect IMLS grant funds in order to invest in those assets by hiring local activists and other individuals as consultants.

A lot of the people we ended up working with on this grant that we named as consultants are really like young people whose careers aren't completely off the ground yet. And so I told them, like really explicitly, "We want to bring you on this grant, as an official consultant. We are going to pay you and going forward, you can list Emory University, on your CV as that you were consulted for us, you know that you are a paid consultant for us. And I'm happy to be like a reference for that."

And for these young people who are community organizers, in Atlanta, Emory is an enormous well-known, really really well respected organization in a lot of ways and so that's something I wanted to make sure to offer is, as these people--because we

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have one who's just finishing their PhD--and I'm like, "As you go forward looking for work in this area of (he does a combination of community organizing and social work), list us as on your CV, as, you're a paid consultant and a university on on this HIV project." I'm just offering that also as an additional piece of like, "This is professional work, like we consider what you're given contributing to us to be professional and add the level of respect that any other kind of job on your CV should have."

Learning and building relationships about the productive work of local groups and individuals also revealed surprising news about which assets the library possessed which would be most useful to those already active around HIV/AIDS. In other words, learning about local assets also shed new light on those of the team's own organization. It also revealed how a specific project idea they formulated before understanding the local landscape would not be particularly valuable to the community.

When we were developing the grant narrative, we had this idea of creating resource banks. . . of having access to historical archives, materials at these other community health offices and community support group offices, nonprofits, and literally making these resources banks copies of physical materials or digital resources.

And it's not a terrible idea, but we started hearing from people, "Oh, you have all this amazing artwork and photography that addresses HIV and AIDS, that would be so cool to have in our offices for 3 months and then you could take it someplace else." That would be cool to people who work here and every day is a grind, and seeing this really beautiful art could be a motivating positive.
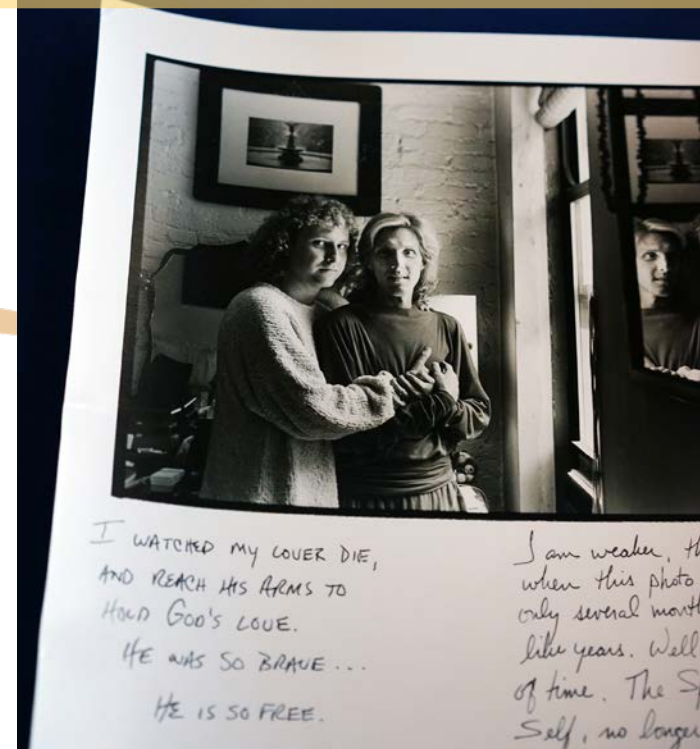
Based on the feedback we got, we thought, "Maybe . . . it's not that these people need to be sitting and doing research, it's that they really have hard jobs and having something inspirational, uplifting and beautiful might actually be a better use of what we have in the archives."

As the many groups and individuals doing important HIV/AIDS work in the community came into focus, the team began to recognize that connecting and celebrating them was one of the best contributions they could make.

"Something we've gotten from other public health groups [is] that a lot of times the activists want an opportunity to come together and celebrate, because that's something that they don't really have a lot of bandwidth to do. For a wealthier institution [like Emory] that's more culturally focused to pull people together and offer this celebration space and connecting people to this long history, there's actually a lot of value in that. It doesn't have to be that we're out there setting up testing days, but that we're bringing attention back to these activists and celebrating their value."

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I WATCHED MY LOVER DIE, AND REACH HIS ARMS TO HOLD GOD'S LOVE. HE WAS SO BRAVE . . . HE IS SO FREE.

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CREATIVE ADAPTATIONS: MAPPING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Once the team had internalized the idea of valuing local assets and using them to inform action, asset mapping became a tool they used in multiple forms throughout their work -- including as a tool they could adapt and share informally when the opportunity arose among partners.

You know, we didn't we haven't done like a formal one. But the last public forum we had, we had, it was a really interesting turnout, because it was a low turnout, but it was all these people from different HIV AIDS or sexual health service organizations, because so many of them have a much broader mandate. And we sort of did an impromptu asset mapping that wasn't formal in any way.

But what we really got started is where the conversation went: this real opportunity to talk about these interconnected networks that aren't explicit. And all the sort of like, I guess it's more like "Associations," all of what is really going on in Atlanta. And what the real scene is for people who are doing this work, and discovering all these places where these different groups, representatives of these different groups were so in alignment, but they didn't know each other, really.

And we had a whiteboard, and we were just putting it up on the board, all these different things. That people were just at a certain point shouting out all the ways that this work is being done in different groups that are doing it in different methods. It was like, "Oh, no, we do this thing that's educational." "Well, we do dances for adults." So it was like all these different approaches to the same work.

It was just a cool thing that coalesced naturally without being like, "Okay, everybody, we're gonna create an asset map, what is an asset map?" It was just sort of like, somebody grabbed, a marker and started throwing it up on the board. And then and then as soon as you had like two things up, somebody else would be like, "Oh, what about this? And all those folks over at SR love who do XY and Z." And so it was really a cool, sort of organic opportunity.

GROWING LOCAL POWER: BUILDING AN ADVISORY GROUP

Midway through their two-year project, the discovery and relationship-building work led the team to find and hire a primary consultant from within the activist community who could help them amplify their work by engaging more directly within the community as an organizer. This allowed them to significantly deepen their engagement with the community and begin building an ongoing structure of collaboration and partnership through which the various activists, groups and organizational partners could act more powerfully together.

We brought our main consultant on who's a community organizer, in order to really think about who we want to invite for the advisory board. Right, and thinking about representation and thinking about getting different voices in the room who are working with different communities. So it was much smaller-scale.

There's kind of this midway point where it's like, "Okay, well, we found our major connector. How do we then figure out who our other residents and connectors and informers and stuff are?" And that process was very much about asset mapping. ("Informer" [is meant to mean] these people that are our oracles of knowledge.)

With the sustained support of the Emory staff team and their organizer, the Advisory Group has become a tight-knit, highly active network. The group enables local activists and groups involved in HIV/AIDS to be in more cohesive relationship with one another, finding ways to complement each others' efforts while seeing more clearly opportunities to create something new together.

SUMMARY

Rather than treating asset mapping as a one-time action step to be done by staff, the Emory Team integrated mapping -- and its underlying mindset toward community -- in ways that "exploded" their map as well as their impact as a community-centered project.

Beginning with assets and maintaining a community-centered mindset allowed the Emory Catalyst team to take on the critical role of connector, investor and celebrator of existing players -- many of whom go unrecognized or under-resourced. It laid the groundwork for them to find and hire a community organizer and form a tight-knit, motivated Advisory Board that is advancing the issues within Atlanta beyond the life of the project grant. In turn, this has fostered a significantly stronger relationship between the university, library and the community as well as fresh momentum and interconnectivity within the diverse HIV support and activism network.

Courtney shares the following thoughts on how librarians--and specifically archive librarians--may use this practice and the mindset-shift it can provoke in their day-to-day work:

It's been really impactful in the sense of contributing to how I approach all my other work. (. . .) I think it's a really great exercise for reframing how you even consider your day-to-day work, not just a special project that you might be doing the asset mapping for.

I really see an amazing opportunity for nonprofits that have always seemed sort of passive libraries and archives to transform themselves to being active. *And this is a great path to do it. That doesn't necessarily mean reallocating $5 million of your budget, radically rethinking how you approach your partnerships. And that it takes a commitment of time, which is money, but it is not going to require you to completely restructure your world. I think it's a really valuable tool for that. It's about restructuring your thinking.*

...Now, when I say "community", I realize, I don't mean the same thing as other people because they haven't had the opportunity to think about it in this way. And I think for any library, or archives or museum that is open to the public, that opens its doors every day and has an expectation that people want to come in those doors, not thinking about community in a really broad way is detrimental to your mission. I really want to to set a challenge for archivists to really reconsider what they think of as community.

The Emory Team successfully catalyzed the Atlanta HIV/AIDS support and activism by combining mapping with learning conversations, blending formal mapping processes with adaptive, ad-hoc sessions, involving community members in the mapping, and thoughtfully positioning themselves as celebraters, connectors, investors in local community-driven work.

When treated as a mindset and ongoing practice, asset mapping can help catalyze powerful, sustainable community-driven change.

. . . .

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TO LEARN MORE:

Asset Mapping User Guide https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/tool-asset-mapping-user-guide.pdf

The Stuart A. Rose Library https://rose.library.emory.edu

IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative   www.imls.gov/cci

ABCD Institute at DePaul University https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute