



ASSET MAPPING

tools for discovering

INSTITUTIONAL ASSETS

In every community, a wide range of businesses, non-profits, and government agencies are actively contributing to the well-being of the community and its residents. In an asset-based community-building framework, these institutions represent the third of six local community assets which, when well connected with the other assets (individuals, associations, place, economy/exchange, and stories/culture), can spark new possibilities for local resilience, creative problem-solving, and well-being.

We can think of institutions as great “treasure chests,” full of wealth that communities can use to realize their aspirations and solve local challenges. This wealth includes the assets (goods, services, and resources) that are currently being utilized as well as the potential assets that could be contributed as the institution becomes more involved and invested in local change efforts.

As your library or museum works to catalyze community-driven change, it can be helpful to intentionally take stock of your organization’s assets.

Knowing what your institution “brings to the table” can help you show up in community spaces with greater confidence and readiness to contribute meaningfully to the local change efforts you will discover there. And, as you form and deepen relationships, knowing your assets can enable you to find new, creative ways to nurture and invest in what residents want to do—or may already be doing—to make their community better.

Associational Discovery Tools in this document:

1. Institutional Asset Inventory
2. Mapping Partner Organizations
3. Mapping Employee Assets
4. Mapping Who We Know: Six Degrees of Separation





Finally, mapping your own institution's assets can help you and others at your organization strengthen your practice of seeing yourselves as well as your community through an "abundance lens." This shift in mindset can often be the most important adjustment to make toward effectively catalyzing community. It can bring fresh energy, optimism, and pride as well as a renewed sense of possibility and creativity to your team, organization, and partnerships.

In this toolkit, you'll find tools for exploring the gifts of your own institution, as well as those of your present and potential partners. We also explore the common assets of institutions, compare the qualities of institutions and resident-led associations, and examine the roles institutions can play to grow local resilience and self-determination.

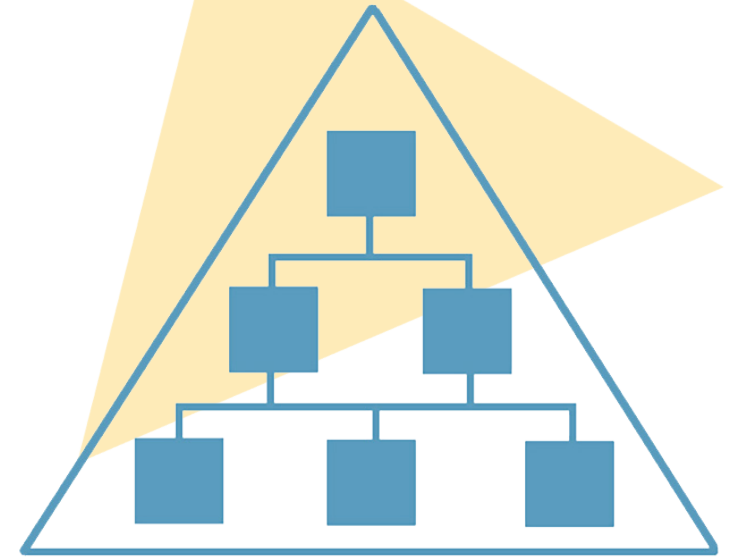
QUALITIES AND ASSETS OF INSTITUTIONS

Institutions can be defined as "groups of paid people in formal, hierarchical organizations."

They take three forms: for profit, non-profit, and governmental. Examples of institutions include:

- *Service providers*
- *Nonprofits*
- *Private business*
- *Schools*
- *Libraries*
- *Parks*
- *Law enforcement*
- *Colleges, universities, trade schools*
- *Health and human services agencies*

"Institutions are triangular constructions because their essential purpose is to provide a means by which a few can control many. This control function is valuable whenever we need uniformity and standardization as in mass production."



Institutions can be symbolized as a triangle.

ABCD co-founder John McKnight (2019) explains, "Institutions are triangular constructions because their essential purpose is to provide a means by which a few can control many. This is why most institutional organization charts have one person at the top and many people at the bottom. This control function is valuable whenever we need uniformity and standardization as in mass production. The 'glue' that holds the people in institutions together is money."

In many ways, institutions' hierarchical nature is a strength. This hierarchy enables institutions to reliably produce goods, services, and resources that people need, at consistent standards of quality. We can generally count on restaurants and caterers to serve us safe food and on local ambulances and firefighters to arrive on time and with the equipment and skills to address an emergency. Their hierarchies also allow institutions to survive and maintain their work even when the individuals working within them depart or change roles.

Some of the valuable assets institutions possess include:

- *Facilities*
- *Equipment*
- *Materials*
- *Purchasing power*
- *Employment capacity*
- *Training and development capacity*
- *Employees*
- *Financial resources*
- *Political clout*
- *Good connections*

As mentioned, an institution's assets or wealth includes the assets (goods, services, and resources) that are currently being utilized as well as the potential assets that could be contributed as the institution becomes more involved and invested in local change efforts.

Sometimes, potential assets are different than the assets institutional staff or leaders imagine to be their most valuable offerings! For instance, library staff may think their greatest offering is access to books and digital

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Source: Jason Hill

"A central component of our work at the Museum is building meaningful relationships that strengthen the bridge between art and community. This guiding principal has been at the core of an ongoing partnership with The Numberz FM, a community-based radio station that identifies with the taglines 'Liberated Black Media' and 'The Black Music Experience for Black Portland.'"

The Museum and The Numberz first worked together during the exhibition Hank Willis Thomas: All Things Being Equal... in 2019, where The Numberz was a community partner in residence, conducting interviews, broadcasting on-site, presenting playlist workshops, and more. After the exhibition, the Museum stayed connected with The Numberz, investing in the station with advertising to encourage visitation and making plans for the future.

When the pandemic struck, followed shortly thereafter by the murder of George Floyd, the moment was ripe for urgent change. As the Museum's galleries closed to the public, we used this rare moment of literal open space to continue activation and engagement with The Numberz through a long-term residency. The station's offices were closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, and they were without a space from which to operate. In August 2020, The Numberz moved into the Museum's 4th floor, which was shuttered at the time, [where the] team was reunited in a physical space. Since the Museum has reopened, the station team is now working out of the top floor of the Jubitz Center for Modern and Contemporary Art."

Adapted from "Listening to Community" (PAM)

"Honestly, the museum has done a really good job of letting us spread our wings. We're a Black radio station in the whitest city in America with our own art gallery in the Portland Art Museum. I mean, that's it." DJ Ambush, Numberz FM

"Inside the Portland Art Museum's Aux/Mute Gallery"
(Portland Monthly)

media, while a local group of residents organizing around youth success may find greater value in being able to use the library's meeting rooms and printing equipment. As you go about mapping your own organization's assets, think of it as the first in a step of an iterative process of learning, which will deepen as you strengthen ties with community groups and members and invite them to reflect back to you what they see as the assets of your institution.

INSTITUTIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS: A GEOMETRY LESSON

Institutions are fundamentally different in their form, function, and assets than another kind of organization found in neighborhoods and communities: associations.

Associations are voluntary groups formed and driven by community members. They can vary widely in their structure, from a loose, informal women's walking club in one neighborhood block to something more formal like the Kiwanis Club, Alcoholics Anonymous, or a labor union.

One of the defining features that distinguishes associations and institutions from one another is that, **unlike an institution, the work of an association is driven primarily by the interests, energy, leadership, and capacities of its members who are not paid.**

Additionally, associations typically make decisions based upon consensus and are bound together by the trust and shared interests of their members. **Associations are represented by a circle.**

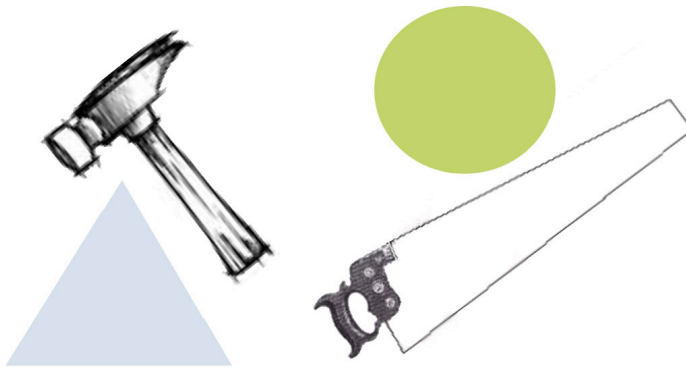
The unique assets of associations include:

- *The individual capacities of members*
- *The power of relationships*
- *Shared interests*
- *Common goals*
- *Local connections*
- *Employment leads*
- *Leadership potential*
- *Energy*
- *Local knowledge*
- *Commitment*



"Associations are represented by a circle."





INSTITUTIONS

Control
Production
Goods
Services

ASSOCIATIONS

Choice
Care
Contribution
Trust

While fundamentally different in nature, associations and institutions can be thought of as two tools. Each of these tools is essential to the work of building stronger, healthier, and safer neighborhoods—especially when it comes to both understanding and solving complex local problems.

As you seek to activate and mobilize the assets of associations and institutions, it is critical not to mistake the function of one tool for the other. If you try to cut wood with a hammer or pound a nail with a saw, the results would be at best unsatisfactory and, at worst, counterproductive or damaging.

Successful community change can come about when both institutions and associations are doing what they do best.

Mapping institutional assets is one key step in determining what institutions like libraries and museums can contribute. This activity will have its greatest impact when it's done with the aim to support and strengthen residents (and their associations) as the primary definers and drivers of community improvement efforts—with institutions and their assets playing the role of supporter or “second investor.”

“REFUNCTIONING” THE ROLES OF INSTITUTIONS, RESIDENTS, AND ASSOCIATIONS

Over the last several decades, many institutions have taken on the functions once played by community members and their associations. Responsibilities such as protecting and caring for young people, elders, the environment, or the economy have become increasingly “outsourced” to institutions and their paid staff—many of whom do not reside in the neighborhoods they serve.

For instance, we tend to view schools as the sole educators of our children despite the fact that every neighbor can contribute to helping young people learn and succeed. Neighbors can also do a great deal to address issues of economic disparity, safety, environmental health, and the well-being of vulnerable or marginalized individuals.



“Citizen leaders are not demanding a seat at the institution’s table; they want to set the table.”

They want to influence the research that defines their communities’ problems and devise the solutions right alongside the experts who march into their communities, claiming to know the answers. These citizens are committed to mobilizing themselves through neighborhood associations to regain control of their communities, though they seldom have all the money or volunteers they need, or all the required technical expertise. They certainly welcome those resources from the nearby university or any other institution, but they want to determine where those resources go.”

from: *“Navigating the Power Dynamics between Institutions and their Communities”* by Byron P. White

This “outsourcing” has a negative impact on communities, residents, and institutions alike, including:

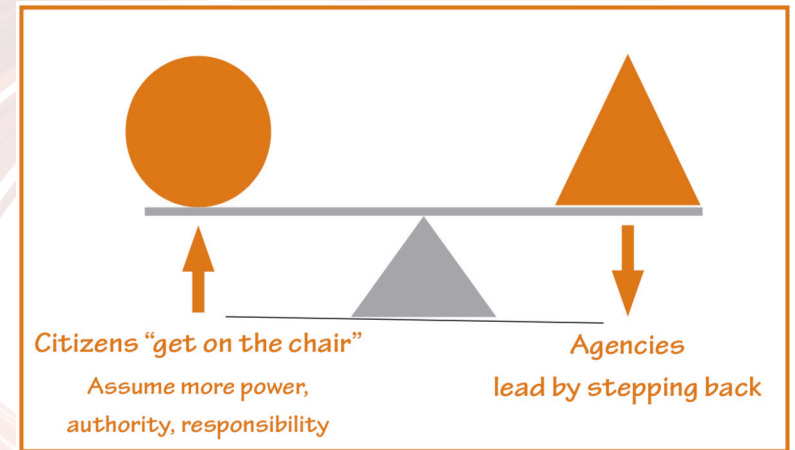
- *reducing the resources available for solving complex local challenges (by ignoring what residents themselves can offer)*
- *creating a sense of helplessness and frustration among residents*
- *flowing resources into outside agencies rather than directly into communities*
- *placing the burden on institutions to perform beyond their natural capacities*

Outsourcing functions of community to institutions is also problematic because the capacities of residents and their associations are unique and irreplaceable. What neighbors can offer to each other and their community cannot be replaced by the most well-staffed, resourceful or efficient institution. This is due in part to the trust and care that flourish naturally in the associational space where residents gather and act on what they care about. Even the most dedicated case worker cannot replace the freely given care, support, and sense of belonging a struggling single mother can find among other mothers in her book club.

An asset-based, resident-centered approach calls upon both institutions and community members to “refunction” and recalibrate these roles, placing residents and their associations as the core decision makers, contributors, and drivers of change-making effort, with outside institutions and paid professionals playing a supplemental, supportive role.

Institutions like libraries and museums can play a pivotal part in this refunctioning by simultaneously “stepping back” while “lifting up”: “stepping back” from some of the functions and authority they currently hold that can be better performed by residents and actively “lifting up” (using their resources to support) the capacity that residents have to offer. Paid professionals can think of this as the work of “coming alongside” residents and their associations to learn, encourage, and support the work that residents do, and want to do, to make their communities better.

Many libraries and museums are already doing this work and are well positioned to play this role powerfully and creatively. Libraries often provide space free of charge to many resident-led associations, from chess clubs to cultural groups. The Portland Art Museum offered a portion of its building to The Numberz, a community-based radio station, as a way of supporting their work and mission. The possibilities for ways that institutions can support resident ideas and energy are nearly limitless!



Source: Mike Green, *When People Care Enough to Act*, p. 86

TOOLS FOR DISCOVERING INSTITUTIONAL ASSETS

The tools on the following pages can help you gain a more concrete awareness of your own institution so that you can better play the role of convener, facilitator, activator, and investor in ways that grow resident power and creative, community-centered change.

1. *Institutional Asset Inventory*
2. *Institutional Partners Strategy Map*
3. *Mapping Employee Assets*
4. *Mapping Who We Know: Six Degrees of Separation*

We encourage you to adapt and adjust these tools to your own unique context and to work creatively with other staff, residents, and organizational partners to make them fun, inclusive, and meaningful!

INSTITUTIONAL ASSET INVENTORY

Source: [The Engaged Library](#)

Use this tool to take stock of the many assets your library or museum has to offer the community.

You can use the following process first with a small team of other community-oriented staff or partners.

Give each person 10-15 minutes to fill it in on their own, then compare and discuss the maps.

Next, use a large flip chart to draw a large map with same boxes and categories, then spend 10-20 minutes filling it in together as a group.

Spend 10-15 minutes reflecting and brainstorming. Possible questions:

- *General reflections or impressions of the activity?*
- *How do you see, feel, or think about our organization differently after this activity?*
- *How has this shifted the way you think about engaging with our community?*

After completing this process with a core group, repeat it with others: staff, board members, residents and their associations, and organizational partners.

A WINDOW INTO MY LIBRARY / MUSEUM

Review the types of assets that can be found within a library/museum.

Use the next page to document your organization's assets.

Personnel

Expertise In/Outside of Job; Ability to Teach:

Art
Music
Athletics

Individual Abilities:

Finances
Community History Writers
Health Care

Individual Traits:

Ideas
Energy
Enthusiasm

Technical Training:

Computers
Communications
Investigation and Research

Networks of Connections

Knowledge of Community

Leadership Development

Constituents

Individual Abilities and Interests

Individual Traits:
Ideas, Energy, Idealism

Linkages to Community

Collective Abilities and Interests

Space and Facilities

Meeting Rooms
Break Rooms or Kitchen
Glass Display Cases
Computer Rooms
Drinking Fountains
Gardens
Bulletin Boards
Lobbies
Parking Lots
Bathrooms

Expertise

Classes:
GED, Literacy, Language

Education Workshops:

Crime Prevention
Computer Literacy
Healthy Eating
Storytelling
Leadership Skills

Knowledge of Community

Education and Training Courses

Networks of Connections

Private Institutions
Public Institutions
Associations
Individuals

Materials and Equipment

Books, Magazines, and Newspapers
Computers and Software
Scanner
Desks, Chairs, and Other Furniture
Fax and Copier
Digital Camera
Telephones for Hearing Impaired
Artwork
Literacy and GED Materials
Community History Files
Information on Community Organizations
Social Service Resources

Economic Power

Job Training
Sponsor Fundraisers
Hire Local People
Assist in Writing and Submitting Grants for Community Projects
Purchasing Power
Power to Generate and Receive Special Funds Through Bond Issues, Government, and Foundations

VARIATION

Add this activity for a deeper exploration of how you can catalyze community with your organization's assets:

As a group, spend 10-20 minutes to:

- *Underline in green* those assets that are currently being offered to or used by residents and associations to resource their own projects, ideas, and activities.
- *Underline in blue* those assets that aren't being offered or used, but easily could be.
- *Underline in red* those assets that you want to offer, but currently have barriers (such as insitutional rules or policies) blocking them from easily being offered to or used to support community-driven efforts.

Next, spend 15-20 minutes discussing action steps to follow the ideas that emerged from this review. Some possible questions:

- *How might we celebrate and build upon the ways we are already supporting community? What successes and benefits have we seen from this?*
- *What next steps can we take to make the "easy to offer" assets more available to community?*
- *How can we remove barriers to those assets we underlined in red?*

For a more in-depth organizational asset-mapping process, see ["A Guide to Building Sustainable Organizations from the Inside Out"](#) by Deb Punttenney.

INVENTORY YOUR LIBRARY/MUSEUM'S ASSETS

Your organization is filled with people, knowledge, and materials that should be recognized and shared.

- Identify your library/museum's assets
- Document these assets
- List the ways in which these assets can be shared with the surrounding community

A WINDOW INTO MY LIBRARY / MUSEUM

Personnel

Space and Facilities

Materials and Equipment

Expertise

Constituents

Networks of Connections

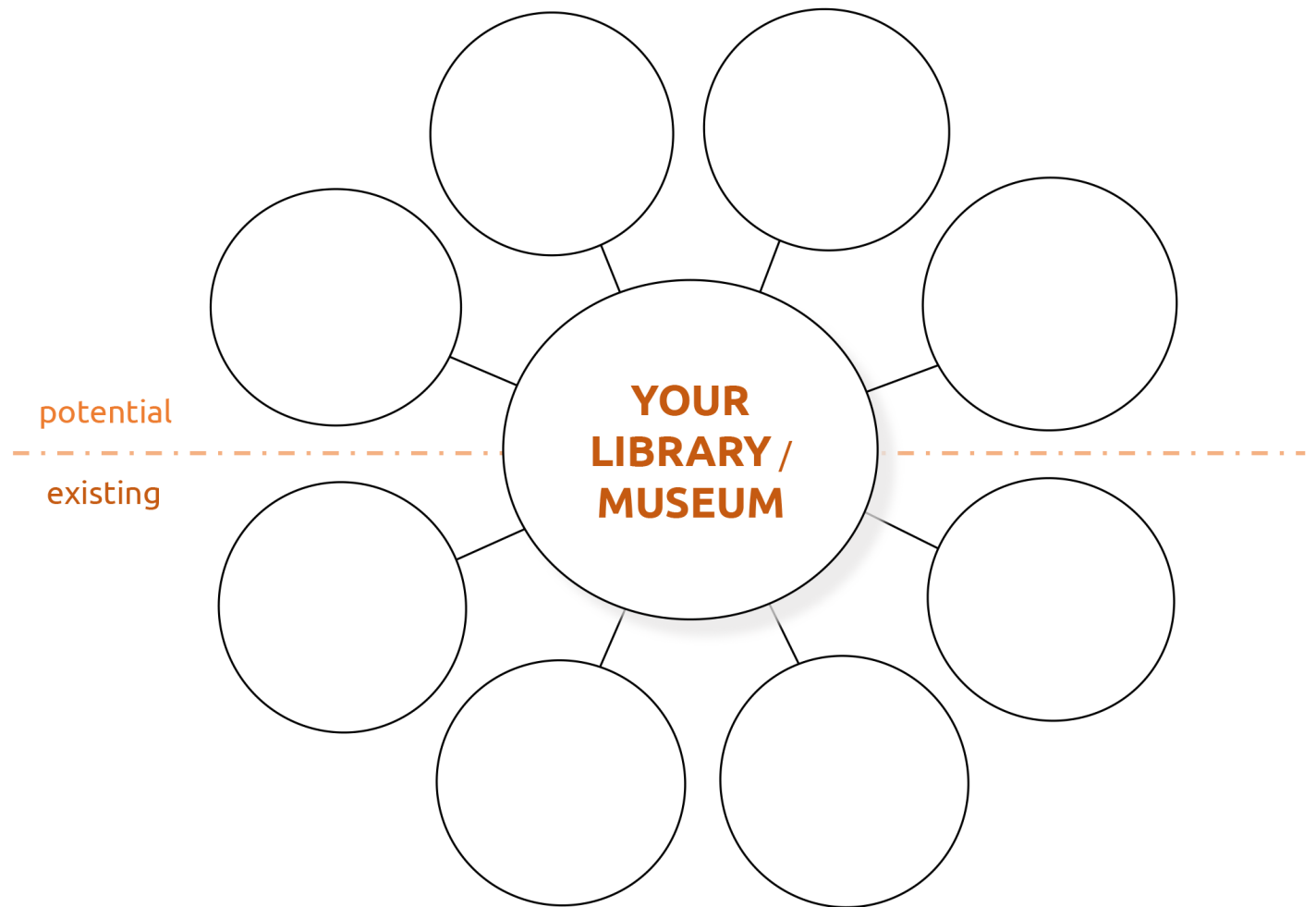
Economic Power

INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS STRATEGY MAP

Use this tool to illustrate partnerships that your library or museum already has with other institutions in your community and to think about new partnerships that might be useful to your library.

Source: [The Engaged Library](#)

Partnerships with Institutions



MAPPING EMPLOYEE ASSETS

Source: [“A Guide to Building Sustainable Organizations from the Inside Out”](#)

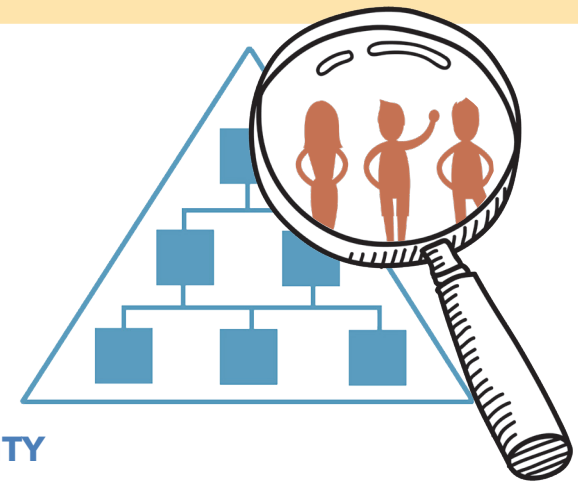
by Deb Punttenney

The Goals of This Exercise

- *To think about each individual employee in a multidimensional way and develop a more complete view of who the employee really is and what they contribute to the overall organizational asset map.*
- *To identify what each employee would most like to be doing within the organization and what responsibilities would make the most of their capacities.*
- *To identify ways to connect each employee’s interests and abilities with the most appropriate responsibilities within the organization.*
- *To expand the avenues for contribution to be based on what each employee brings to the table.*
- *To identify opportunities for employee development in terms of training, education, and leadership.*

For this exercise, try to think more deeply about who each employee really is in terms of the many capacities each brings to work with the organization and how each one represents a part of the organization’s employee assets.

Employees are often thought of primarily in terms of the specific job they do, and organizations sometimes fail to explore more deeply what contributions each one might make if more were known about them. If an organization is successful in really knowing its employees, it is more able to develop the kinds of opportunities for involvement that will fully utilize and reward each individual. This exercise provides the opportunity to examine employee capacities and how they fit into what is happening at the organization and also to explore how their capacities might be better utilized based on their own interests and potential.



GROUP ACTIVITY

For the group activity, each participant should use a blank copy of the Employee Asset Map included at the end of this section. Group members should spend about 20 minutes thinking independently and filling in the boxes on the worksheet. At the end of this period, all participants should share something about the specific employee assets they were able to identify. A discussion can then occur among the group about how much participants actually know about their employees and what they included on their asset map. The discussion should spark new ideas for everyone about what kinds of things may be viewed as employee assets.

ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITY

The completion of the final employee map should be accomplished as an internal activity within each organization. Each individual should invite others within the organization to assist in the process. This activity may be carried out as an organizational activity, in which case the group may be selected from among members of the board, committee members, or others, or it may be viewed as an activity most suitable for employees to carry out among themselves. The goal is to generate a visual and text-based map of the organization’s employee assets and capacities.

The following questions may be used as a guide for exploring the organization’s employee assets in an in-depth manner. The written answers to the questions form the text-based asset map; when transferred to the appropriate boxes of the Employee Asset Map, a visual version is produced. Once each organization has completed a visual and text version of the map, the working group can come together again to learn about how other participating organizations see their employees as assets and how they might mobilize these employee assets more fully.

A. CONTRIBUTIONS AND INTERESTS WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

1. What skills—general and specific—does the employee possess? Be sure to explore those skills that may be beyond the scope of the work the employee currently does for the organization.
2. What special qualifications does the employee possess? Are they currently using these qualifications in their work for the organization?
3. How much does the employee work? Would the employee prefer to work more or less than they currently does?
4. Is the employee happiest when working with others or working independently? Is this preference accommodated within the employee's job description?
5. What interests—general and specific—does the employee possess? Be sure to explore those interests that may be beyond the scope of the work the employee currently does for the organization.
6. In which of the organization's programs or activities is the employee most interested? Is this interest accommodated in the employee's job description?
7. What are the employee's actual responsibilities? Might they be changed in order to allow the organization to tap into more of the employee's capacities?

B. CONNECTIONS OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION

1. What business and corporate connections does the employee possess?
2. What kinds of connections does the employee possess with other professionals?
3. What connections does the employee have with government entities?
4. What connections does the employee have with related organizations or other nonprofit organizations?
5. What assets does the employee possess in terms of family connections, activities, and relationships in their personal life, religious commitments?
6. What other assets does the employee possess in terms of connections outside the organization?
7. Are these assets in the form of connections outside the organization being utilized to the fullest in terms of the contribution the employee makes to the organization?

Seven Asset-Based Community Development Principles for Institutions

by Tom Mosgaller



1. **Don't get in the way.**
2. **Don't get in front.**
3. **Every system has some primary functions, and citizen/taxpayers expect that primary function to be performed** (*e.g. plow the snow, pick up the trash, maintain the peace, teach children to stop, drop and roll*).
4. **Know your neighborhoods.**
5. **Think partnerships...** "We can do this, but you can do _____."
6. **If we can't address the problem, who do we know who can?**

THE THREE PRIMARY QUESTIONS:

What can we do to support neighbors?

(What can they do themselves?)

What help can we offer? *(What can citizens do with a little help? e.g., small grants and loan programs)*

What must we as the keepers of the commons do?

(What is our responsibility in supporting community?)

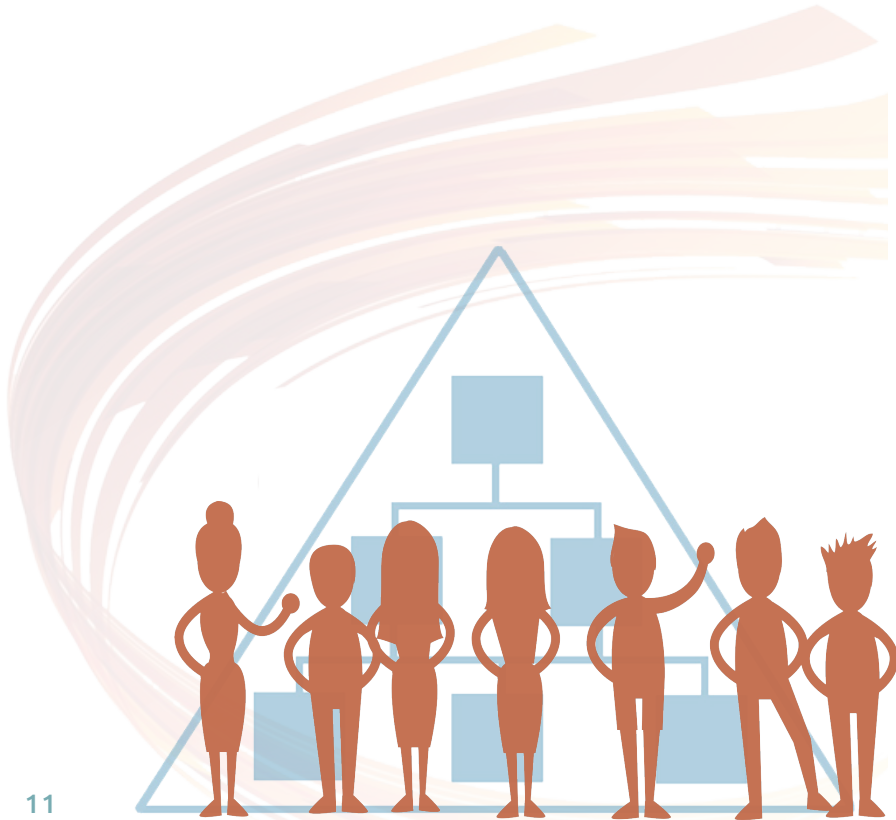
7. **Measures of successful systems are those that create and recreate citizens/associations as producers of their future.**

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION:

Will this intervention enhance or inhibit the natural association of citizens in the community?

MAPPING EMPLOYEE ASSETS

EMPLOYEE ASSET MAP



Corporate & Business Connections	Connections with Professionals	Connections with Government	CONNECTIONS OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION
General Interests	EMPLOYEE NAME	Program/Activity Interests	CONNECTIONS AND INTERESTS WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION
Responsibility 1	Responsibility 2	Responsibility 3	CONNECTIONS AND INTERESTS WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION
Time Available - FT/PT	Specific Interests	Works with Others/ Works Independently	CONNECTIONS OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION
General Skills	Specific Skills	Special Qualifications	
Connections with Related Organizations and Foundations	Other Assets	Family/Personal Live/ Religious Assets	

MAPPING WHO WE KNOW

“Six Degrees of Separation”

Source: [“A Guide to Building Sustainable Organizations from the Inside Out”](#)

by Deb Puntteney

The Goals of This Exercise

- *To identify all the individuals and groups that comprise the entire connection base of the organization.*
- *To think about the connection base in an expanded sense, that is, through the idea of “six degrees of separation.”*
- *To think about what advantages might accrue to the organization if efforts were made to tap into the assets from every part of the connection base.*

For this exercise, participants should try to think about themselves as connected to every individual and group on the planet and about the degree to which they are distanced from them.

The idea is that six degrees of separation is the maximum and that everyone can trace themselves to everyone else via a series of no more than six sets of connections. It will not be possible to trace all relationships, but it is a fun exercise to think in these terms and participants will be surprised by the number of important connections they are able to identify. Some of these connections will be potential new relationships for the organization, and thinking about them in a systematic way can open new opportunities for developing them.



GROUP ACTIVITY

For the group activity, each participant should use a blank copy of the **Mapping Who We Know: Six Degrees of Separation** tool included at the end of this section. Group members should spend about 20 minutes thinking independently and filling in the boxes on the worksheet. At the end of this period, participants should share something about the connection base they were able to identify within six degrees of separation of themselves. A fun discussion can then occur among group members about just how many and how interesting a set of connections they really have. The discussion should spark new ideas for everyone about the nature of the organization’s relationship network and for expanding it.

ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITY

The completion of the final map of who people know should be accomplished as an internal activity within each organization. This activity may be carried out as an organizational activity, in which case the group may be selected from among whatever parts of the organization seem appropriate. The goal is to generate a visual and text-based map of the organization’s connection base. Serious reflection can then occur about which of the connections it might be reasonable to approach and for what specific purpose. Once each organization has completed its map, the working group can come together again to learn how other participating organizations see their connection base and how they might mobilize these assets more fully.

Community Connections	Political & Government Connections	Other Connections
Personal & Family Connections	Who Are You?	Foundation & Other Philanthropic Connections
Religious Connections	Colleagues & Business Connections	Voluntary & Associational Connections



REFERENCES

McKnight, J. (2019). [Differentiating the Functions of Institutions and Associations: A Geometry Lesson](https://johnmcknight.org). Retrieved from <https://johnmcknight.org>.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Community Catalyst Asset-Mapping Toolkit:

INTRO: [Asset Mapping Overview & User Guide](#)

- TOOLS:
- 1: [Individual Gifts & Skills](#)
 - 2: [Resident-led Associations](#)
 - 3: [Institutional Assets](#) (*this document*)
 - 4: [Agency-led Asset-Mapping](#)

CCI Stories of Practice: [Woodland Zoo / Seattle Youth Climate Action Network](#)
[Emory Rose Archives Library](#)
[Free Library of Philadelphia Catalyst Toolkit](#)



Institutions and Shifting Power:

[A Guide to Building Sustainable Organizations from the Inside Out: An Organizational Capacity Building Toolbox](#) (Puntenney)

[Navigating the Power Dynamics between Institutions and their Communities](#) (White)

[Tips for Working with Neighborhoods](#) (Duncan)

[Rekindling Democracy: A Professional's Guide to Working in Citizen Space](#) (Russell)

[Why Neighboring Matters in Institutional Mission](#) (Mattson)

[When A Place at the Table's Not Enough](#) (Answer, Mattson)

[Neighborhood Planning: Doing "With," not "For"](#) (Tamarack)

[Enabling Productive Leaders: The Role of a New Kind of Leader](#) (McKnight)

[Differentiating the Functions of Institutions and Associations: A Geometry Lesson](#) (McKnight)

[A Guide to Mapping Local Business Assets and Mobilizing Local Business Capacities](#) (Kretzmann, McKnight, Puntenney)

[The Careless Society: Community and its Counterfeits](#) (McKnight)



TO LEARN MORE about the IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative, visit www.imls.gov/cci

This toolkit was prepared by the ABCD Evaluation Team for the IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative, composed of faculty and staff from the Asset Based Community Development Institute.
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