



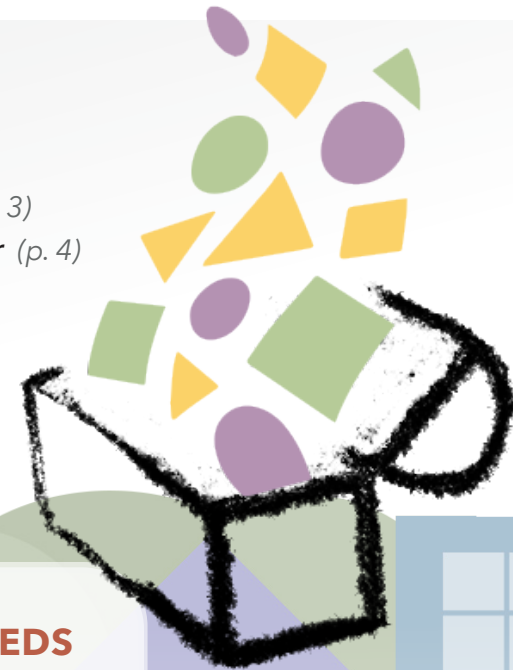
ASSET MAPPING

USER GUIDE: OVERVIEW

a tool for mobilizing local assets and growing community power

User Guide Sections:

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When we want to create change in our community, the first step in an asset-based, community-driven approach is to gather the neighbors and begin naming the good and the gifts. John McKnight, one of the founders of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), often says,

"You can't do anything with a need, so why start there?"

When we choose to start with gifts, neighbors experience their own power as they affirm together that they can create the change that is needed.

How can libraries and museums help? Organizations like libraries and museums can be wonderful conveners and catalysts! By inviting neighbors in your community to do the work of asset mapping, you are not only gathering data about gifts, assets, and capacity to create change, but you are creating that very change in the process of shifting the conversation.

THE HARM OF STARTING WITH NEEDS

Communities that experience social or economic marginalization, oppression, or disinvestment are often defined by needs and deficits. Outsiders often come into these communities and begin to tackle problems by listing everything that is wrong. Just think of the language we hear in community development or nonprofit work...

"at-risk youth"

"gangs"

"failing schools"

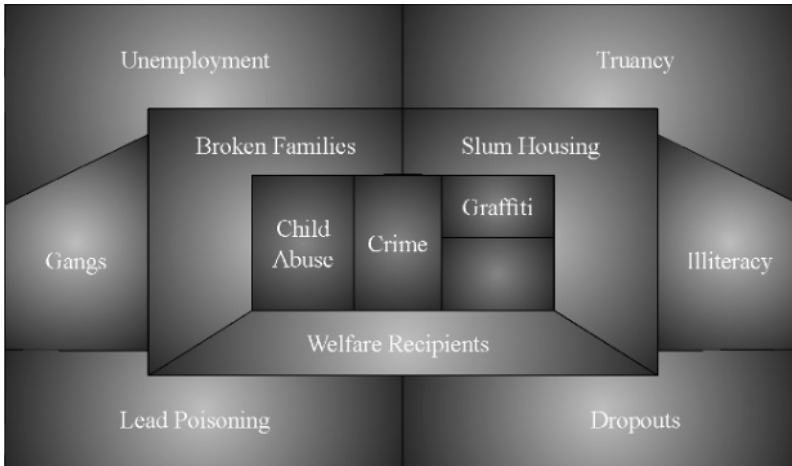
"unemployed"

"crime"

"welfare moms"

It is no wonder people who live in these neighborhoods sometimes feel helpless or hopeless. No one wants to be defined by what we lack or by what others perceived to be lacking.

Deficit- or needs-based thinking leads us to a map that fails to name the gifts already present to create the change we need. It labels people and communities rather than supporting people to access the power they and their neighbors already have to create change.



COMMUNITY NEEDS MAP: What we see when looking at a neighborhood through a deficiency lens. (Source: ABCD Institute)

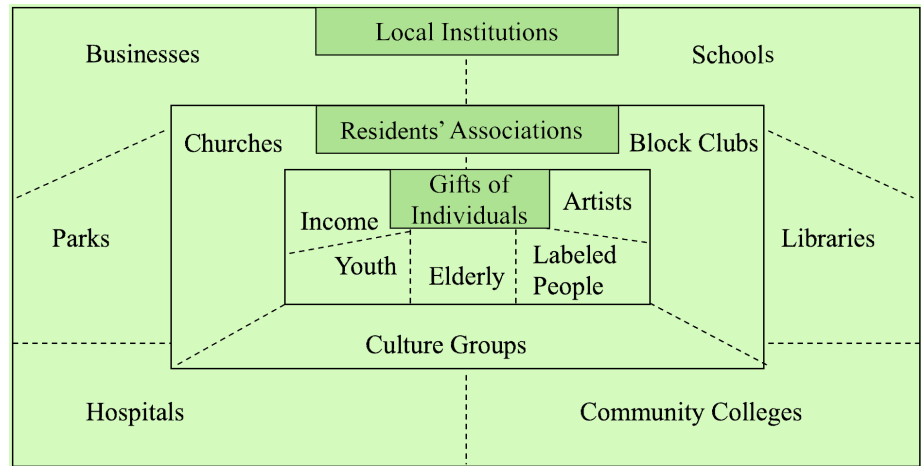
A needs orientation also forms a harmful power imbalance between community members and outside professionals and agencies. When residents are characterized mainly by their problems or needs, outside professionals and experts become seen as “saviors” with the specialized training, equipment, or resources to fix local problems. Communities and residents can also internalize these negative portraits of themselves and their communities, with many consequences.

Consequences of a Deficiency Focus

- **Fragmentation**
- **Funding flows to service providers rather than residents**
- **Distorts community leadership**
- **Perception that only outsiders can help**
- **Ensures deepening cycle of dependence**
- **Targets isolated individual clients, blocking a holistic community approach**
- **Discourages partnership**
- **Gifts and assets of labeled individuals and groups remain untapped**

STARTING WITH WHAT'S STRONG

ABCD proposes another way. This approach starts with the giftedness of our neighbors. We believe that there is no one we don't need, that everyone has gifts (despite their deficiencies), and that every single neighborhood is filled with people, associations, and organizations that have gifts and capacities to change their communities together.



COMMUNITY ASSET MAP: The abundance of assets that become visible when looking at a neighborhood through an asset lens. (Source: ABCD Institute)

This approach acknowledges people and communities have needs and problems, and asks: “What do we (the community) have already to meet our needs or solve our own problems?”

Starting in this way grants communities greater control over change efforts. It also avoids wastefully “importing” resources from outside a community in the form of outside services, skills, or expertise that community members already possess or can access through their existing relationships or efforts. In other words, it is common knowledge to take stock of what we have in our pantry and garden (local assets) before going shopping to buy what we don't already have (services, programs, or outside resources).

Asset maps are an antidote and alternative to the deficit maps that underpin the way that many institutions approach community and community



engagement. Mapping assets reminds neighbors and the paid professionals seeking to help them that neighborhoods and residents already possess an abundance of gifts, skills, and expertise. We are reminded that “you can’t do anything with a need” and that solving problems and achieving a better life starts with looking at the “palette” of assets available in every block, household, and individual. Asset mapping makes this idea concrete and places this palette at every community member’s fingertips.

Asset mapping has been used by many cultures and communities for centuries, especially those who have endured oppression and disinvestment.

In the early 1990s, John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann provided documentation of this “asset mentality” utilized by communities across the US United States after extensively researching what methods residents used to improve their well-being and solve problems. They presented ABCD as a framework to describe these practices. ABCD can provide a useful shared language that can be used by anyone as they use and share this approach around the world.

Because the idea of beginning with assets is not new, we encourage you to view the asset-mapping tools that follow as something to pick up and use creatively alongside the residents of your own unique community. We also encourage you to look out for ways in which the communities you serve may already practice asset mapping in their own unique ways and to work with them to support their practices.

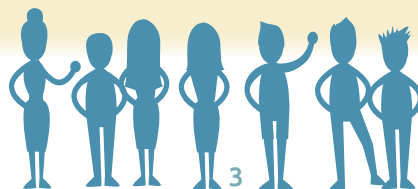


MAPPING ASSETS TO GROW RESIDENT POWER

Asset mapping is ultimately about moving power into the hands of residents and associations in a community so that they can imagine and take the action that they want to take in their community. An asset-based, community-driven approach is grounded in four primary questions that can help us focus on the heart of where resident power lies.

FOUR KEY QUESTIONS

1. **What functions can community members perform by themselves?**
2. **What can community members do with some additional help from government and agencies?**
3. **What community functions must government and agencies do on their own?**
4. **What should government and agencies stop doing?**



Asset mapping can help answer these four questions in practical, concrete ways to drive local action. However, to spark and sustain real local change, we need to ask these three questions in the right order. It is critical to begin with question one, focusing first on the existing capacities of residents and their associations before moving to questions two through four. By doing this, we uncover energy and resources already present that residents themselves can easily tap into to become drivers of their own solutions.

Institutions can play a powerful role by coming alongside residents to support their work or ideas by making their institutional assets available. Local organizations seeking to utilize asset mapping should prioritize the concrete discovery of resident and association assets.

In line with the slogan from the independent living movement, “Nothing about us without us,” it is crucial to plan asset mapping so that residents play a leading role—if not at first, then with residents having growing control, leadership, and ownership over time.

"Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. But with the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished, the people will say, 'We have done this ourselves.'"

~ Lao Tzu

The most creative, expansive asset mapping and mobilization happens when residents "own" the map as theirs to create, update, and draw from to activate resources and build relationships. Through doing so, residents can discover their own capacity to work collectively to address the issues they care about and to realize their shared aspirations.

This discovery process can also reveal the best ways that local institutions can support community initiatives and problem solving. As we answer question one ("What functions can community members perform by themselves?"), the answers to the other questions naturally emerge, especially how institutions like libraries and museums can support resident action.

The result is a community in which everyone is giving from their strengths and playing their most natural roles to create positive change.

HOW MAPPING ASSETS GROWS RESIDENT POWER

Looking at a community through an "asset lens" and making assets visible enables community members to be in more powerful relationship with each other. It also enables them to connect things they didn't previously recognize were there and therefore were disconnected. This process can also help libraries, museums, and other organizations seeking to serve communities to be in a more equitable relationship with community members by placing residents in control as experts with abundant resources at hand.

There are four primary ways asset mapping leads to power:

- 1. Reveal and discover/uncover a community's strengths** (active and latent), especially those of its residents and their associational life. While other tools and processes highlight the physical strengths, civic community, institutions, or other resources in a community and cast organizations as conveners or catalysts, very few focus on revealing and mobilizing the existing capacities of residents and their associations. When working on strengthening communities and local problem solving, those are often the most powerful levers for creative, sustainable change.
- 2. Develop a sense of power and community pride** among participants.
- 3. Provide real data for imagining action the community has the power to take.**
- 4. Guide future relationship building** that can further discover and connect assets, creating even more community power. Relationships are essential for taking and sustaining action and can also become a powerful vehicle for discovering, connecting, and activating assets into the future.

To be effective, asset mapping should be approached as one part of a larger process and commitment toward growing the power of residents and their associations (i.e., resident-led groups and networks). Asset mapping involves community residents playing a leading role in uncovering, activating, and connecting their own assets.

STORY of PRACTICE

Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (Atlanta, GA)



Emory Rose Library utilized an ongoing practice of asset mapping to uncover talented individuals, activists, grassroots groups, and community-oriented local organizations that shared their passion for addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the African American community.

The library was able to convene, connect, and mobilize these groups and individuals, forming new partnerships that have continued beyond the library's IMLS Community Catalyst Grant.

[See more here.](#)

TYPES OF ASSETS AND ASSET MAPPING

Most of a community's assets can be found in one or more of six areas:

1. Individual Gifts and Talents

The gifts, skills, and talents of neighbors

2. Associations

Small, voluntary groups led by residents

3. Institutions

Organizations of paid staff (businesses, nonprofits, government)

4. Physical Space

Physical assets such as parks, lakes, etc.

5. Economy and Exchange

Spaces of exchange, barter, business

6. Culture and Stories *Local stories, cultures, and traditions*



Physical Space Mapping

- *What is in the neighborhood? Parks, schools, libraries, community centers, hospitals and clinics, apartments, single family homes, neighborhood businesses, bike and walking paths, green spaces, vacant lots, etc.*
- *What happens where: block club activity, recreation/sports, crime, senior activities, youth activities, clean-ups, code problems, housing type, etc.*

Neighborhood Economy Mapping

- *How money flows in (and out) of the neighborhood*
- *Neighborhood business development*
- *Spaces of informal barter and exchange*

Culture and Stories

- *...of existing skills and capacities, background and personal histories*
- *...of recognizing and valuing everyone and including those who are marginalized*
- *...of a time when the community is at its best*
- *Local heritage, traditions, identity, and values*

(Source: [Asset Mapping Handout - Mike Green](#) & Pacific Community Solutions)

Below are some examples of ways communities have found it useful to map assets:

Individual Asset Inventories

- *Gifts, skills, talents*
- *Dreams, hopes*
- *Fears*
- *Motivation to act (what someone cares about enough to act on)*

Associational Mapping

- *Associations you know*
- *Associations you don't know*
- *What do they currently do?*
- *What have they talked about doing but haven't done yet?*
- *What might they do if they were asked?*

Institutional Mapping

- *Gifts of employees and volunteers*
- *Physical space and equipment*
- *How money is spent: supplies, services, hiring, etc.*
- *Current relationships with community*

STORY of PRACTICE

WaterMarks was a comprehensive, citywide public art initiative design that invited Milwaukee residents to explore their connections to the land, the rivers, and the lake through the unique perspective of the arts. Facilitated by the Haggerty Museum of Art with funding from the IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative, the project employed asset mapping and learning conversations to forge innovative new partnerships with community members and resident-led associations.



Project team member Nora Barr reflects, *"We learned through the process of engaging our partners to value their assets, their neighborhoods, and their communities, and to see ourselves as trying to complement what was already there. Certainly, the community members were engaged with these issues and had strong leadership in their own communities, so that we became partners in enhancing the neighborhood by bringing the special skill-set of public art and connections with artists and scientists."*

READ
FULL STORY
HERE



TIPS AND CAUTIONS

Despite good intentions, efforts to map local asset can often get hijacked or compromised to be less effective. This can happen under the influence of old habits or institutional agendas or through a misunderstanding of the purpose or spirit of asset mapping.

To the right is a basic breakdown of what asset mapping is, and what it is not, followed by points to hold in mind to avoid losing the purpose and power of asset mapping in your own practice.



WHAT ASSET MAPPING IS

- ✓ *A way for community members to gain clarity about what was previously invisible ("making the invisible visible")*
- ✓ *A community-driven process*
- ✓ *Owned by residents*
- ✓ *A way to strengthen an organization's commitment to building citizen power, local relationships, and self-determination*
- ✓ *An ongoing, emergent, iterative process*

... AND IS NOT

- ✗ *A list*
- ✗ *An action step to be performed by agencies*
- ✗ *Done to or for community members by outside agencies or professionals (rather than enabling the community to do it for themselves)*
- ✗ *A list of institutional assets or services*
- ✗ *A complete and final picture of what is useful in a community*

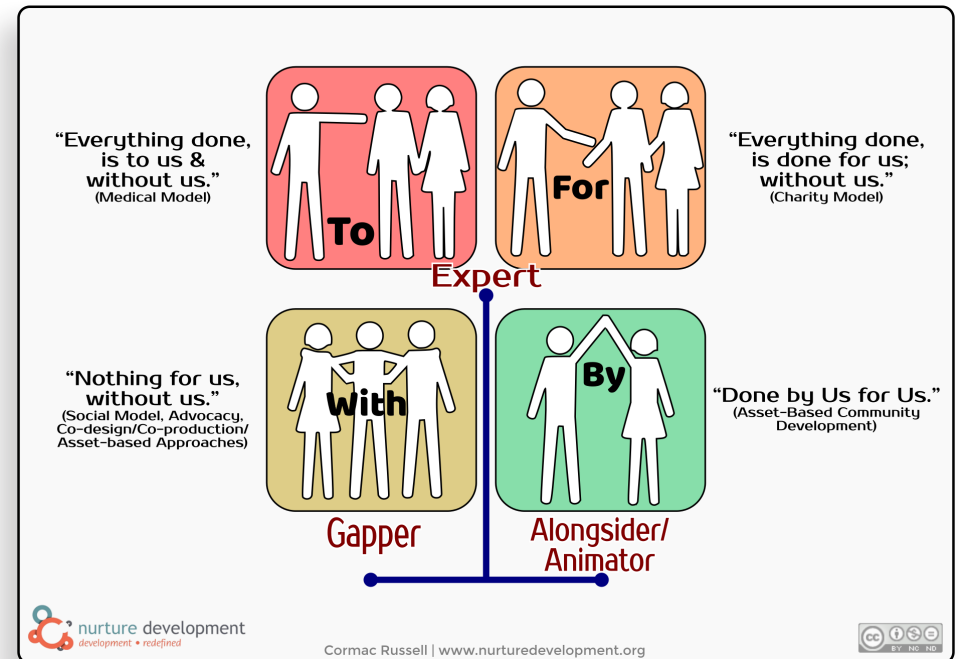


Asset Mapping: "To," "For," or "By" Community Members?

As staff of an organization interested in animating local capacities, it can be tempting to jump right into asset mapping. However, mapping assets works best as one piece of a longer process to transform your organization's relationship with communities and community members, and owners of an asset-mapping process should be residents themselves.

"To use a building metaphor," writes ABCD Institute Faculty member Cormac Russell, "asset mapping is analogous to the scaffolding that goes up around a house. We have been witness to a number of examples where outside agencies have done an asset map to or for communities and assumed they had completed some action step. Imagine a developer putting up scaffolding around a building you wanted developed and claiming they were finished simply because they'd erected the scaffolding! Well, that's exactly what people who are doing asset mapping to or for communities are saying to those communities: 'We've done the map, so now your community is built.' But in fact, no connecting has been done."

Why is this important? Russell adds, "If [asset mapping] isn't done and owned by community in an ongoing, iterative, and deeply discursive manner, it can be misused to feed the agendas of outside agencies. At worst, asset mapping can turn into asset stripping and result in volunteers being recruited as cheap alternatives to program and services previously funded by the state."

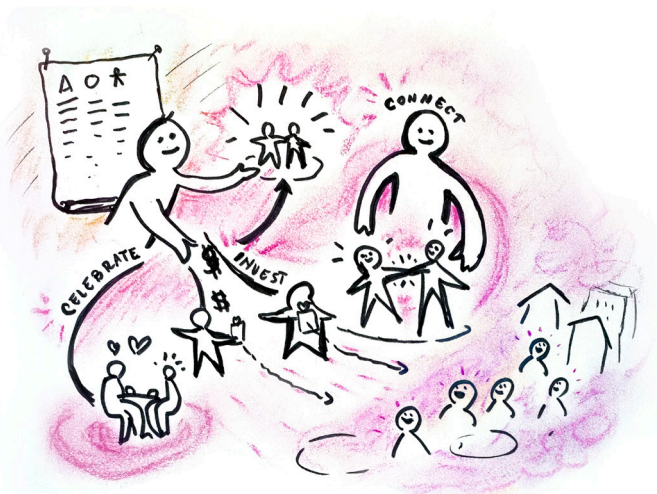


While increasing resident ownership is the goal, this is not to say that institutions and their staff cannot act powerfully as the initiators and ongoing supporters of an asset-mapping process.

A Role for Institutions

What role can institutions play in asset mapping? While there are many forms this role can take, there are four primary asset mapping steps institutions like libraries or museums can help with:

- 1. Convening and hosting.** Often, an agency, library, or museum is a trusted institution in the community. If they convene and host something, residents often trust that it'll be worth their time.
- 2. Framing what is important.** (Otherwise the conversation can go all over the place!)



Libraries and museums can be powerful animators of resident-led change by revealing, connecting, celebrating, and investing in often unseen local assets.

3. Facilitating the mapping, especially the first mapping session.

4. Helping folks determine for themselves what action they want to take.

By supporting in this way, institutions can enable community members to more freely engage in the asset mapping themselves as well as the action they are inspired to take after the mapping.

Asset mapping done only by organizational staff can be useful for those paid practitioners to get practice thinking about assets and gathering their own shared knowledge of the community. It can also help to identify connectors, associations, or other parties that may make great partners in bringing community members together to begin discovering assets.

However, this should be seen only as an early step that can “prime the pump” by introducing strength-based thinking. As you and your team gain familiarity and confidence with processes, you can more effectively support community residents to take the lead in mapping, connecting, and activating these assets. An in-house asset-mapping exercise can also enable you to identify potential partners such as resident connector-leaders, associations, or other community-minded local institutions that might work with you on asset mapping.

After assets have been revealed, institutions can play additional roles to connect and mobilize by offering their resources including staff support, facility space, technology, contacts, and institutional prestige or by publicly celebrating the work that residents go on to do.



watch: *Cormac Russell speaking to Community Catalyst Grantees on resident-centered asset mapping*

FOUR ASSET-MAPPING METHODS

There are countless ways to map assets, and the practice is an evolving one you are invited to adapt and build upon! Below you will find four approaches to asset mapping that have been developed by community-builders across the world. They represent a range of options from short-term to longer-term and processes geared toward institutions as facilitators as well as processes anyone can use.

Again, the most important ingredient in any asset-mapping process is that it is aimed toward residents becoming the lead “mappers” of assets, owners of the map, and drivers of action, building relationships from the ground up and going beyond documenting assets to connect and activate assets to be powerful together.

Before launching any particular asset-mapping process, it's also important to gather enough resources, institutional support, and shared vision among your core team to feel confident in and committed to supporting residents to take the lead on the ideas and opportunities that emerge from the mapping.

Four Sample Methods for Mapping Assets

Below is a snapshot of four methods for mapping assets outlined in this User Guide's companion documents. As mentioned, there are endless ways to map a community's assets, some of which you can explore in the "Additional Reading" section at the end of this document.

1. **Mapping Individual Gifts** Two, quick fun tools for discovering and connecting individual gifts
2. **Mapping Associations** A tool to begin mapping your community's resident associations
3. **Agency-Led Asset Mapping With Communities** A simple process libraries and museums can use to bring residents together for an asset-mapping session with the aim to spark further resident-led mapping and action
4. **Listening Campaign** Allows a group or organization to uncover community assets in a focused 6- to 7-week period while also building relationships, identifying resident connectors, and generating excitement around local abundance



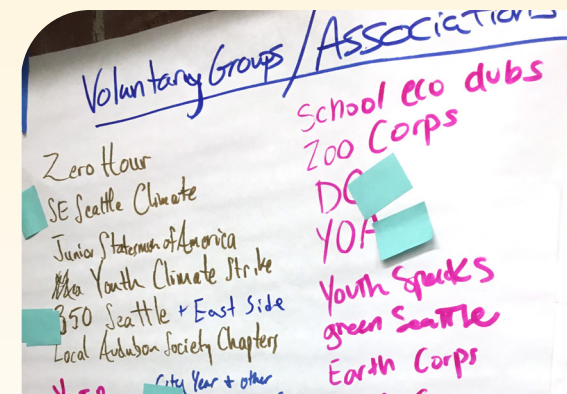
The Seattle Youth Climate Action Network team, facilitated by staff at the Seattle Woodland Zoo, creatively utilized asset mapping to open the way for young people who had become active in the network to act more powerfully within the network as leaders, contributors, and decision makers.

Their process exemplified key practices that can make asset mapping powerful: including everyday residents (not just professionals) as contributors and owners, framing asset mapping in terms of actions participants might take, prioritizing follow-up to support ongoing action, embracing asset mapping as a tool to guide relationship-building, and using asset mapping as an iterative process.

[See more at here.](#)

TIPS for SUCCESSFUL ASSET MAPPING

- ✓ *Include residents as participants and contributors, ideally at a minimum 3:1 resident-to-staff ratio to create a power balance. Support residents to lead and "own" the mapping as time goes on.*
- ✓ *Approach it as an ongoing, iterative process and part of a larger commitment to embracing a community-centered, asset-based approach.*
- ✓ *Combine asset mapping with other asset-based tools including learning conversations, the power ladder, working with connectors, and storytelling (see next page).*
- ✓ *Map an area that residents are likely to identify as "their neighborhood." A "people-sized" area can help residents engage, feel more capable of making a difference, and build new and fruitful relationships with their neighbors.*
- ✓ *As an institution, embrace your role as a convener, connector, and potential investor in the skills, ideas, and activities that emerge.*
- ✓ *Host activities creatively so they are fun, engaging, and accessible for all. Offer food, transportation or childcare, and other small touches to give a festive "community" feel to your gatherings, such as including music and decorations. Use a space comfortable to residents and patronize neighborhood businesses (caterer, photographer, etc.).*



CONCLUSION

Ultimately, asset mapping is what we do naturally when we shift the way we see our communities—from seeing them as full of needs to be filled by our or other agencies' services to seeing them as filled with abundant talents, resources, and valuable resident-led change efforts and ideas that are waiting to be noticed, valued, and connected.

As paid professionals, our asset-mapping efforts can spark growing waves of community-led activity and connection. The key lies in whether we can step into the role of “alongsiders” whose goal is to highlight, strengthen, and activate what residents can and want to do. We can nurture local power by starting with residents' own capacities and talents as we intentionally practice “leading by stepping back.”

We hope you enjoy “making the invisible visible” as you experiment with asset mapping to unleash resident power. Feel free to be creative as you explore the “Four Sample Methods for Mapping Assets” (p. 8) that make up this toolkit as well as the additional resources below.

COMPLEMENTARY TOOLS *for asset maps*

[Discovering, Partnering With, and Hiring Connectors](#)

[Learning Conversations](#)

[Power Ladder](#)

ADDITIONAL READING *to support community-centered practice*

[When People Care Enough to Act/Strategies for Institutions as Servants](#) (Green)

[From Input to Ownership: How Nonprofits Can Engage with the People They Serve to Carry Out Their Missions](#) (Bridgespan Group)

[The Four Essential Elements of an Asset-Based Community Development Process](#) (McKnight & Russell)

[Emergent Strategy](#) (brown)

[The Shift: Participant-Centered Rubric](#) (Denver Foundation)

[Exemplary Materials for Designing a Community Building Initiative in a Neighborhood](#) (Woodlawn Organization & ABCD Institute)

[A Study of the Community Benefits Provided by Local Associations](#) (ABCD Institute)

www.abcdinstitute.org (ABCD Institute website)

BACKGROUND

In 2016, an IMLS town hall and report focused on “[Strengthening Networks, Sparking Change](#)” revealed a demand among libraries and museums for tools and approaches that could increase their capacity in community engagement. Starting in October 2017, 24 organizations were awarded IMLS Community Catalyst funding and launched projects with the goal to become catalysts of change in their communities.

Funding recipients varied widely in their organization type and size, community, and the issues upon which they focused. Though diverse, the grant recipients shared a common goal of catalyzing communities by forging and/or supporting powerful partnerships, discovering and complementing existing momentum among residents, and supporting community leadership.

Community Catalyst Initiative grant recipients also received training, coaching, and peer learning facilitated by DePaul University (DPU) and consultants from the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute.

Asset-Based Community Development is an approach to community engagement that promotes existing local assets and the capacities and leadership of local citizens and associations as the starting point for creating sustainable community development. The approach focuses on improving community well-being by fostering resident-driven action with the support of local organizations and agencies through identifying the skills, talents, and knowledge of local residents.

Developmental Evaluation (DE) is founded on the notion that evaluation and evaluators should function primarily to support learning and innovation of program decision makers—those “doing the work.” The approach is ideal for dynamic environments involving uncertainty, nonlinear paths of action and development, that is, the types of diverse spaces where the IMLS grant recipients work. DE utilizes trained consultants to provide continual reflection, sense-making, and assistance with producing measurements that innovators can use immediately for decision making.

AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

These tools and examples were developed by the DPU and ABCD Evaluation Teams for the Community Catalyst Initiative, composed of faculty and staff from the Asset Based Community Development Institute.

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The Steans Center is a university-wide community engagement center at DePaul University in Chicago, IL. Reflecting the Catholic, Vincentian and Urban mission of the university, the mission of the Steans Center is to develop mutually beneficial relationships with community organizations to engage DePaul students in educational opportunities grounded in Vincentian values of respect for human dignity and the quest for social justice. Asset-based Community Development is at the core of the Center's approach to promoting community engagement of faculty, staff and students.

To learn more, visit www.resources.depaul.edu

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