

This section includes an exercise for conducting mapping of the assets in your community. This process may be adapted to fit the needs of your community.

Community asset mapping, the process of taking inventory of community health resources, is a collaborative process where coalitions inventory and then create a map of the resources, skills, and talents of individuals, associations, groups, organizations, and existing infrastructure of their community. Mapping focuses on creating a complete picture of a community's strengths and needs, creates links between these different parts of the community, and highlights the unique and significant characteristics of its surrounding landscape. This knowledge is useful to revitalize relationships and mutual support, rebuild communities and neighborhoods, and rediscover collective power.

ASSET MAPPING, WHEN DEVELOPED IN CONJUNCTION WITH A COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT, COMPLIMENTS STRATEGIC PLANNING EFFORTS BY OUTLINING CURRENT RESOURCES.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ASSET?

A community asset (or community resource, a very similar term) is anything that can be used to improve the quality of community life. And this means:

- It can be a *person* - The stay-at-home mom or dad who organizes a playgroup. The church member who starts a discussion group on spirituality. The firefighter who's willing to risk his life to keep the community safe. These are all community assets.
- It can be a *physical structure or place* - a school, hospital, church, library, recreation center, social club. It could be a town landmark or symbol. It might also be an unused building that could house a community hospice, or a second floor room ideal for community meetings. Or it might be a public place that already belongs to the community - a park, a wetland, or other open space.
- It can be a community service that makes life better for some or all community members - good public transportation, early childhood education center, community recycling facilities.
- It can be a *business* that provides jobs and supports the local economy.

Everyone in the community is a potential community asset and a force for community improvement. Everyone has some skills or talents, and everyone can provide knowledge about the community, connections to the people they know, and the kind of support that every effort needs - making phone calls, stuffing envelopes, giving people information, moving equipment or supplies - whatever needs doing.

A student of communities, John McKnight, has noted:
"Every single person has capacities, abilities, and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed, and gifts given."¹

WHY ASSET MAP?

Every community has a cadre of assets and resources that can be used to build and support the health of a community. Asset mapping allows communities to initiate a dialogue with community members vested in utilizing available assets and resources to support health improvements in the community. This process can be utilized in any community, and offers an effective strategy for determining the skills of local residents and involving organizations to utilize their resources for community benefit.

Asset mapping begins with the understanding that all local residents, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnic background, place of residence, or other characteristics, can play an effective role in addressing important local matters. This approach provides community residents an opportunity to have a voice in determining how local concerns can best be addressed, and respond to these issues in a coordinated, collaborative manner.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS OF ASSET MAPPING¹

1. Assets can be used as a foundation for community improvement.
2. External resources (i.e. Federal and state money) or grants may not be available. Therefore, the resources for change must come from within each community.
3. Identifying and mobilizing community assets enables community residents to become active shapers of their own destinies.
4. Improvement efforts are more effective, and longer-lasting, when community members dedicate their time and talents to changes they desire. Communities feel a sense of empowerment because they have been part of the process along each step of the way.
5. Full understanding of the community. Knowing the community's resources and strengths makes it easier to understand what kinds of programs or initiatives might be possible to address the community's needs.

STEPS IN MAPPING COMMUNITY ASSETS

Effective asset mapping follows several key steps necessary to discover the resources, activities, and interests that exist within the community to support chronic disease prevention and control. The mapping process provides a comprehensive and inclusive way to look at these assets and resources that can support policy and environmental change.



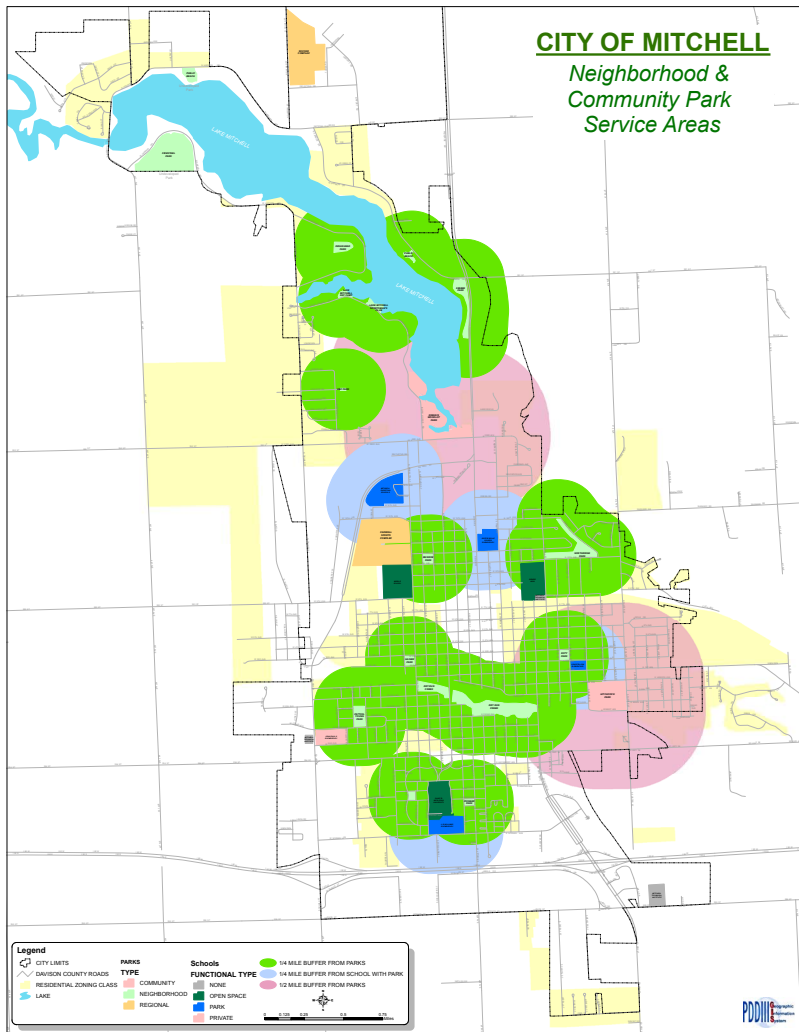
- 1. Define community.** Determine geographic boundaries that align with the community in the CHNA. Refer to the section in the toolkit titled *Understand your Community*, one of the *Core Process Steps in a Community Health Needs Assessment* for guidance.
- 2. Convene core mapping group.** This may be the core group assembled in the coalition or may be specific to the mapping process.
- 3. Organization.** A logical process of preparing to inventory that includes: project collaboration, desired outcomes, preparing a budget, and determining methods to use.
- 4. Select asset inventories and gather information.** There are multiple levels of assets that can be inventoried in a community. A community may choose to map all of them or just a few. Once the inventories are selected, gather all the information. See the *Identifying and Inventorying Assets* template in the *Tools and Templates* of this section for examples and guidance in collecting the information. Assets may be categorized into these groupings:
 - Statistical Inventory
 - Skills Inventory
 - Local Economic Inventory
 - Informal Associations Inventory
 - Local Institutions Inventory
 - Physical Space Inventory
 - Cultural Resources Inventory

5. Create the map. Once all asset information is collected, it is often helpful to put it on a map. An asset map identifies community strengths and resources, as well as unmet needs. Maps are good visual aids; seeing the data displayed increases insight and understanding. There are several ways to go about this.

1. One method is to find a large street map of the community, with few other markings. Mark with a dot, tag, or push-pin (maybe color-coded by type) the geographic location of the groups and organizations found.
2. A second method is conducted by computer, such as Geographic Information Systems or GIS. Software programs are available to do this, and your local planning districts may be able to assist as well. These programs are more flexible and sophisticated and create “overlays,” visually placing one category of map over another to change the visual patterns.

PREPARING AN INVENTORY MAP IS MORE THAN JUST GATHERING DATA AND INFORMATION. IT IS A DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT TOOL THAT REVEALS THE HIDDEN AND POTENTIAL ASSETS IN A COMMUNITY.

Included is an example of a GIS mapping exercise, created by Planning and Development District III, for the city of Mitchell, SD. The City was interested in conducting a park-capacity analysis to see if all residential development was being adequately served by neighborhood, community, and regional parks.



Remember, always structure the map to fit the needs of the project, neighborhood, or community. Use the *Template for Steps in Mapping Community Assets* to assist and guide asset mapping efforts, located in the Tools and Templates of this section.

USING THE MAP

The next step, and likely most important, is to make sure the assets and resources inventoried get used. There is value just in expanding personal awareness of what exists in the community, but by sharing the results, it can also expand the awareness of others. Determine how best to maximize the use of these mapped assets to improve the health of the community. Some suggestions include:

1. Health improvement planning. Community development and improvement planning should include what assets are available in the community that will support actions and objectives.
2. Catalyst for partnership. Asset mapping aggregates the knowledge possessed by a few individuals and makes it available to others who may conceive of new ways to leverage the assets. A visual resource map, prepared as part of the mapping process, can help demonstrate to stakeholders that they work within a regional “community.” As leaders see common interests and organizational links, they may be inspired to strengthen or form partnerships.
3. Motivational tool for implementation. The process of creating the asset map may positively affect community engagement. Engaging leaders in the analytical phase of an effort can motivate their participation in the implementation phase.

Suggestions on how to share the mapped results community wide:

1. Publish the assets identified – on a website, in a community newsletter, in a community service section in the local newspaper – make them available to all community members to stimulate public asset knowledge and use.
2. Target a particular neighborhood or other area for development, on the basis of the asset patterns found.
3. Find new ways to bring groups and organizations together, to learn about each other’s assets – and perhaps to work collaboratively on projects.
4. Create a school curriculum to teach local students about these assets, thus enriching their knowledge of the community and building community pride.
5. Keep records how assets are used in the community, and use those records to generate ideas for improving asset exchange.
6. Set up structured programs for asset exchange, which can range from individual skill swaps to institutional cost-sharing.

Understanding that community value constantly changes, asset mapping is an ongoing process. New assets are always coming on the scene; it’s good to keep up to date on them. Asset identification should be a regular part of community life, so that community assets can be taken advantage of when they’re needed.

CONCLUSION

Value can be found in every community. Asset mapping effectively helps an organization discover the value of and build upon the strengths of its community. By determining assets and resources already available positions a community better able to plan for the future and ensure constant community awareness.

Asset mapping is a great lead to the integration of these assets with the data collected and defined in a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). The development and sustainability of a community rests on its ability to uncover and build on the strengths and assets of its people. Once the full breadth of people, skills and talents, and economic resources that exist in a community are mapped and inventoried, a community can use this information to support a comprehensive community health needs assessment.

Communities that map their assets are better equipped to attract partnership support, improve the quality of life of residents, and to understand the potential and opportunities that exist in the community that support the community coalition goals.

Tools and Templates

Template for Steps in Mapping Community Assets – Use the mapping process to provide a comprehensive and inclusive way to look at a community's assets and resources.

Template for Identifying and Inventorying Assets - Use the template to help identify community assets and resources.

Resources

Refer to the following resources for additional information on mapping and inventorying community assets and resources.

Asset Mapping
Identifying Community Assets and Resources. Community Tool Box, University of Kansas.
Participatory Asset Mapping Toolkit. Healthy City.
Asset Mapping Guide. Grow Our Region.
Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets. John P. Kretzmann, John L. McKnight.
Mapping the Assets of Your Community: A Key component for Building Local Capacity. Lionel J. Beaulieu, Southern Rural Development Center.
Asset Mapping. University Outreach and Extension, University of Missouri System and Lincoln University.
Connecting to Success, Neighborhood Networks Asset Mapping Guide. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Multifamily Housing Programs.

References

1. Berkowitz, B. & Wadud, E. (2013). Chapter 3. Assessing Community Needs and Resources, Section 8. Identifying Community Assets and Resources. In *The Community Tool Box, University of Kansas*. Retrieved from http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1043.aspx
2. Downie, M. & Community Living Association. (2013). Resources. In the *Community Crew Resource Hub*. Retrieved from <http://www.communitycrewclub.com>
3. Sustainable Cities Research Institute. (2013). Map assets in your community. In the *Brighter Futures Together Toolkit*, Sustainable Communities North East Initiative. Retrieved from <http://www.brighterfuturestogether.co.uk/brighter-futures-together-toolkit/map-assets-in-your-community>

