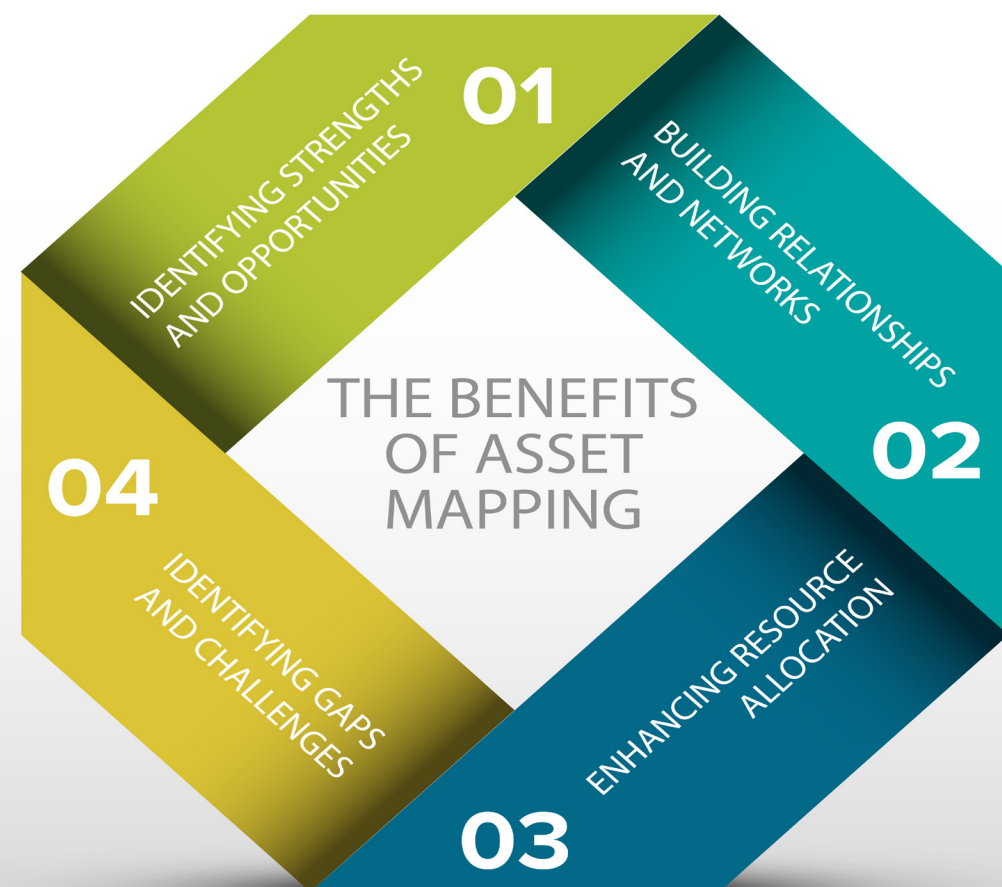


# MOBILIZING COMMUNITY RESOURCES THROUGH ASSET MAPPING

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Planning for growth and sustainability often involves assessing community strengths and gaps. A needs assessment is a popular approach local governments use to support community initiatives and inform strategic planning. However, while effective, the needs-based approach often starts from the perspective of what is missing, resulting in the perception that the community is “deficient,” that networks and relationships are damaged, and that programs and services are lacking.

A different approach gaining traction nationwide is the capacity-focused method of asset mapping. This process adopts a positive, strengths-based perspective that identifies and maps community assets to provide additional perspective. Asset mapping supports unlocking community potential for greater impact by taking inventory of existing resources, building upon them, and mobilizing them to address community needs. Instead of depending solely on statistical data, which often misses the connection between needs and resources, asset mapping helps communities understand they may not be lacking resources, but rather, resources are not functioning at maximum capacity.



## THE BENEFITS OF ASSET MAPPING

Asset mapping aims to use research to understand community relationships, structures, and problem-solving abilities by identifying resources. This approach differs from other planning methods in that it focuses on what a community has rather than what it lacks.

Asset mapping offers tangible benefits to communities. By empowering individuals and neighborhoods to recognize their own strengths and capacities, it fosters a sense of ownership and community pride. It also helps identify overlaps and gaps, leading to a more efficient allocation of resources. Furthermore, it provides a deeper understanding of community needs, enabling more targeted and effective community development initiatives.

Asset mapping plays a crucial role in community transformation. It helps answer key questions such as the skills and abilities needed to address an issue, who or what is available to do the work, and the asset limitations. By providing these insights, asset mapping acts as a catalyst, connecting skilled organizations with community members needing those skills and vice versa.

In many cases, building an inventory of assets complements the traditional deficit-oriented needs assessment, creating a hybrid approach that can address community needs more holistically. Coordinating the two strategies better identifies gaps while incorporating strengths and expands boundaries to involve not only who should define needs but also who should deliver solutions.

## USING ASSET MAPPING

Asset mapping can be useful for mobilizing community resources to start new programs or

redirecting existing ones. For example, it can be applied specifically to affordable housing initiatives to determine areas of opportunity based upon relationships between housing, employment, and transportation, or map racial/ethnic concentrations in relation to cultural assets. While the approach can be tailored to a community’s specific needs, there are guiding principles to consider.

- 1. Identify Assets:** Start by inventorying community assets or focusing on project-specific assets. Assets are anything that improves quality or creates value, tangible or intangible, including community members, physical structures or places, businesses, associations, and public or private institutions or organizations.
- 2. Categorize Assets:** Categorizing assets helps to clearly understand what exists versus what is needed and provides an opportunity to determine what resources can be leveraged to achieve outcomes. This step also identifies gaps in programs and services.
- 3. Map Assets:** Once assets are categorized, identify the capacity of individuals, organizations, and institutions in your community. This step establishes a baseline for building on existing resources and determining the necessary partnerships to achieve desired outcomes.
- 4. Analyze Assets:** Analyzing assets’ strengths and weaknesses helps to determine their potential value and impact. It will also determine how assets can be mobilized at maximum capacity to achieve outcomes.
- 5. Leverage Assets:** Use asset mapping results to identify opportunities and address challenges. Asset mapping can be an impactful tool for strategic planning, program development, and community engagement.

### PEOPLE AS ASSETS

A core concept of asset mapping is that people are assets, and everyone has a gift or talent that can serve the community. This idea stems from the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model, which holds that strong, safe, and healthy neighborhoods and communities are built on their residents' and associations' strengths and capacities. According to D. Duncan's "Asset Mapping Toolkit: Eight Steps to Increase Residential Engagement," "We cannot build strong, caring neighborhoods without unlocking the potential of residents" (resources.depaul.edu).

The asset mapping approach is community-driven, supports inclusion, and credits individuals and associations for their skills and knowledge. This builds powerful communities and healthy neighborhoods. Asset mapping allows and encourages community members to be proactive in solutions and recognizes that individuals and associations can address certain community needs. This fosters independence and makes improvement efforts more effective.



Image credit: ABCD Toolkit

### PUTTING ASSET MAPPING INTO PRACTICE

The Florida Housing Coalition believes in uplifting our Florida community partners and has recently begun employing asset mapping in our work. This method, often paired with the components of the needs assessment, has successfully promoted positive conversations about community change, altered perceptions about community deficiencies, and fostered an understanding that while there are needs, our communities are strong and prosperous.

*Through this work, we help communities lean into their strengths and mobilize resources for maximum impact.*

*We encourage communities to experiment with traditional planning methods and consider alternative or hybrid approaches for determining needs.*



**CARTER BURTON** is the Director of Housing and Community Development, focusing on assisting local governments serve individuals and communities most in need. Carter can be reached via email at burton@flhousing.org.

#### For More Information



Introduction to Community Asset Mapping, 26 August 2009, Mary E. Homan, MA, Missouri Institute of Mental Health, University of Missouri School of Medicine.



NA TIG Week: Combining Needs Assessment and Asset Mapping in Complex Evaluations by Madhawa "Mads" Palihapitiya, Sheila Robinson, March 20, 2018.



The Power of Asset Mapping - Charting Opportunities: The Art of Asset Mapping, Updated: 12 Apr 2024



UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, Health DATA Program - Data, Advocacy and Technical Assistance



D. Duncan Asset Mapping Toolkit Eight Steps to Increase Residential Engagement



Introduction To Community Asset Mapping, Uploaded by Jace Bacolor, Center for Court Innovation.