



UCLA CENTER FOR HEALTH POLICY RESEARCH

Section 1: Asset Mapping

Purpose

Asset mapping provides information about the strengths and resources of a community and can help uncover solutions. Once community strengths and resources are inventoried and depicted in a map, you can more easily think about how to build on these assets to address community needs and improve health. Finally, asset mapping promotes community involvement, ownership, and empowerment.

What is a community asset?

A community asset or resource is anything that improves the quality of community life.

Assets include:

- The capacities and abilities of community members.
- A physical structure or place. For example, a school, hospital, or church. Maybe a library, recreation center, or social club.
- A business that provides jobs and supports the local economy.
- Associations of citizens. For example, a Neighborhood Watch or a Parent Teacher Association.
- Local private, public, and nonprofit institutions or organizations.

When to use Asset Mapping

- *You want to start a new local program and need information about available resources.* For example, you are interested in teen mothers finishing their education. You could draw a community asset map that identifies school drop-out prevention, tutoring, and education counseling programs for young teen mothers. This helps you see what already exists, or if support services are lacking. You may find it is necessary to develop a program to help young mothers finish their education.
- *You are making program decisions.* An asset map can help you identify community assets and concerns. The map results help determine new directions for your program or identify new programs that need to be developed. For example, an asset map of food banks and nutrition resources for low-income families in your neighborhood may reveal that there is a lack of programs, or that existing programs are located in areas that are not accessible to families in your service area.

- *You want to mobilize and empower the community.* If you involve different community members in constructing the asset map, the process itself can be an organizing tool. For example, mapping local public services and identifying the dollars spent per community member can mobilize residents to lobby city or county council members to improve local public services.

Planning Asset Mapping

Identifying and mapping assets in your community can be easier than you think. The following are the steps to create an asset map.

- 1.1 Define community boundaries*
- 1.2 Identify and involve partners*
- 1.3 Determine what type of assets to include*
- 1.4 List the assets of groups*
- 1.5 List the assets of individuals*
- 1.6 Organize assets on a map*

1.1 Define community boundaries

The first step is to define your community's boundaries. Remember that geographic boundaries of cities or towns do not always reflect citizens' perceptions of their community or neighborhood. Decide what streets or landmarks are your boundaries. Use your partnership and residents to decide.

1.2 Identify and involve partners

Find people and organizations that share your interests. It is also important to involve people and organizations that have different community networks and knowledge about the neighborhood (its resources, residents and problems). Involve key people with a stake in your issue. Finally, involve enough people—community residents, organization staff, or volunteers—to complete all the activities needed to finish the asset map.

1.3 Determine what type of assets to include

There are lots of different types of assets. The most obvious are money and access to economic resources. Others include physical assets (buildings), knowledge and skills, political connections, legitimacy in the community, and access to the public (such as the media and clergy). Identify any specific skills or assets needed to address the issue on which you are focusing. For example, if you are looking at assets around physical activity among children, you may want to identify parks and recreation centers, YMCAs, athletic clubs or leagues, recreation classes at community colleges or after-school fitness programs. Link your purpose with the kinds of assets you want to identify.

1.4 List the assets of groups*

Make an inventory of all the groups (associations, organizations, and institutions) in your community.

- A. Begin by creating a list of those groups that are known. Use your partnership to help add to your list.
- B. Use other sources of information. These can include:
 - The **yellow pages**.
 - Local **neighborhood/city directories**, published for your community.
 - Lists of **neighborhood businesses**. Ask your Chamber of Commerce.
 - Published **lists of organizations or social service directories**. For example, the United Way publishes local directories with information on local organizations.
 - Lists of organizations, which are not generally published. **Community resource guides** produced by local organizations may be helpful.
 - The **local newspaper**. Print sources—such as local newsletters and regional papers—can give you insight into community happenings and resources.
 - **Bulletin boards**. Physical bulletin boards and community calendars can offer a wealth of information. They may be found at local recreation facilities, churches or other faith-based organizations and on local cable television.
 - **Local parks, recreation facilities, and community centers**. They may be the meeting places for many local associations and groups, such as volunteer, social, or special interest groups. Check the activity calendars of these centers to identify formal and informal local groups.
 - Your **friends and colleagues**. They may know about other lists available or know of groups, organizations, or community assets that are not on any lists.
- C. Update your list. It may be helpful to organize the list and make notes about:
 - Location
 - Type of services offered
 - Public-private membership

* Adapted from *Identifying Community Assets and Resources* by Bill Berkowitz and Eric Wadud. Retrieved from Community Toolbox-University of Kansas Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development, June 17, 2003.

- Public-private governance
- Their available resources (material, facilities, staff)
- Their influence
- Their legitimacy

You now have an inventory of groups and group assets in your community—the associations, organizations, and institutions that are a fundamental part of community life and can be used for community development.

1.5 List the assets of individuals*

Another technique is to compile the assets of individuals. This approach can be more challenging as there are many more people than groups. You can get some of this information from key stakeholders—that is, key people who are familiar and knowledgeable about the community and its residents. You can also develop a door-to-door survey to identify individual assets. However, surveying the community in such a way is expensive and time consuming.

Identifying individual assets works best when working with a small community. The following are some helpful tips:

- A. Decide on the community or area you want to cover.
- B. Identify groups of individuals where asset identification may be helpful.
- C. Determine the assets you want to identify from individuals and draft your survey questions accordingly. Develop separate questions for knowledge, skills, contacts, and other types of resources of interest to you.
 - If taking an inventory of skills, decide what kind of skills you want: academic, computer skills, organizing, parenting, speaking different languages? Be as specific as possible.
- D. Design a method to ask questions. Different ways of gathering data include:
 - Mailing out a survey
 - Dropping off a survey at various locations
 - Using a door to door survey
 - Using a telephone survey

* Adapted from *Identifying Community Assets and Resources* by Bill Berkowitz and Eric Wadud. Retrieved from Community Toolbox-University of Kansas Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development, June 17, 2003.

- Conducting interviews
- Conducting group interviews

⇒ Each method has its pros and cons. Test your questions on a sample group and make revisions based on their answers and suggestions.

1.6 Organize assets on a map

Maps are important visual aids that help highlight available resources. Maps also explore resources and assets, and show the relationships among assets. Mapping community assets on street maps allows communities to see if there is a concentration of available programs, service overlaps, gaps in services, and unmet community health needs. The street map may highlight the need for developing programs to meet particular health needs of a community, and be helpful in writing grant proposals and talking to policy makers. The following describes how to map community assets using a street map.

General steps for mapping community assets on a street map:

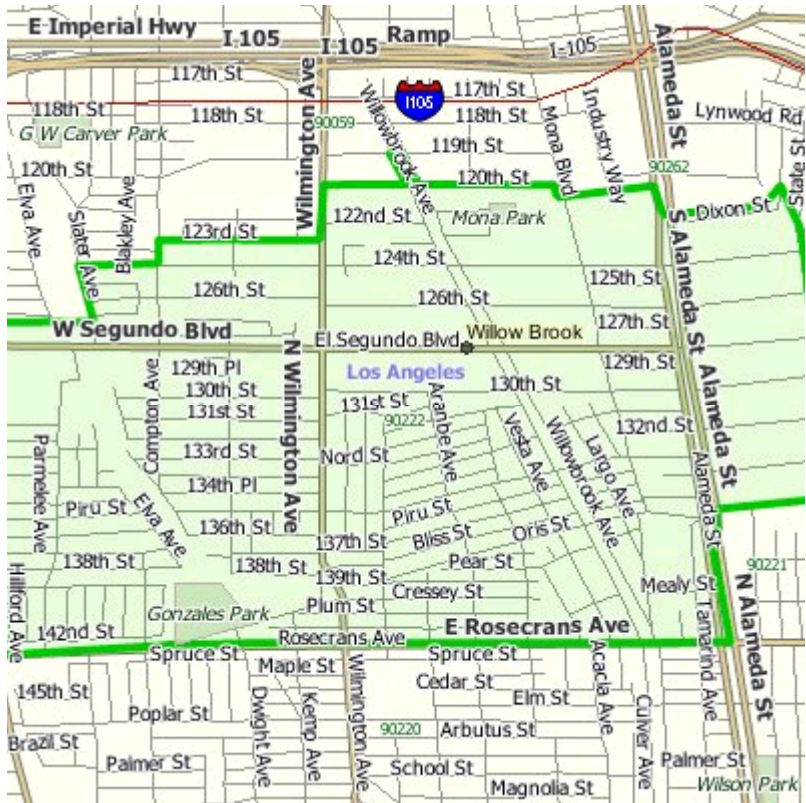
- Find a map that contains the area you identified in 1.1 above. You can get a map of your community from different sources. Contact your local government (city hall) to see if they have a map of your community. You can also go to the following websites <http://www.mapquest.com>, <http://maps.yahoo.com> or <http://www.thomas.com> to find and print out an area map of your neighborhood. Remember to look for an area map that provides many details of your community and its boundaries, such as major streets, parks, freeways, lakes, or other landmarks.
- Compile a list of resources from 1.4 (groups) and 1.5 (individuals) above. Organize your findings by identifying the type of services provided or type of available skills; note the street address of every resource you have identified.
- Use dot stickers to identify the location of the groups and organizations you have found. Use different colors for different types of resources. This map becomes a visual representation of your findings, and perhaps reveals gaps in services and identifies areas for further work or improvement.
- If you have information on individuals, decide if you want to map each individual (such as mapping key community contacts at their organization's address) or types of individuals (for example, putting a number on a dot to indicate how many people in an area have nursing degrees).
- Summarize key points about what your members see on the map. You might ask: What are the underused assets? What resources could be included in your activities that are not currently involved? Where are the most obvious gaps, and how might they be filled?

- Use the asset mapping project as an opportunity to identify and develop relationships. The ways residents or interested parties talk and interact with each other—and form relationships—is a major part of community development.
- Determine what to do with the community asset map and with whom you will share the results. The next steps could be redirecting program priorities, applying for grant proposals, informing city board members, or contacting policy makers or funders.

General guidelines for presenting asset map data:

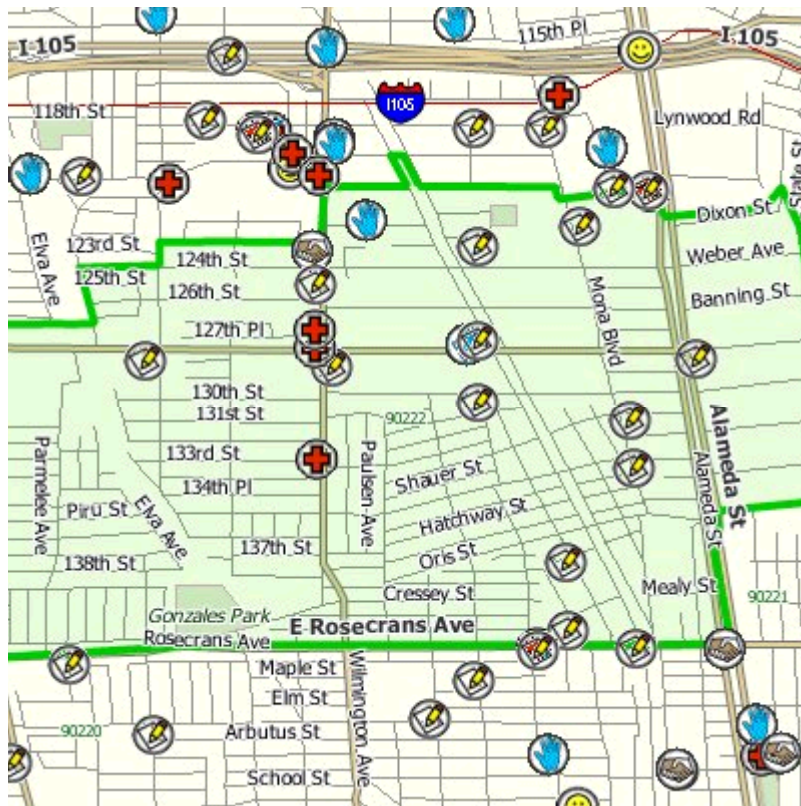
- The area map should be specific enough that it clearly shows your defined community boundaries.
- Enlarge the map if needed. Leave a border around the map with enough room to add a map legend and title.
- Purchase color dot stickers. Create icons for each asset that you have identified, by hand or on the computer. In your map you could include health services, parks and recreation facilities, businesses, clinics, schools, and transportation facilities.
- Create a legend that accompanies the color sticker dot.
- Sticker dots representing organizations or services might overlap on the area map. In this case it is fine to approximate the location.
- Remember that the map should not only be visually appealing but also highlight something. For example, show gaps in services, areas where services are needed, or where there exists a cluster of services in only one geographic area.

Figure 1. Map of a Los Angeles Community



This map was retrieved from Healthy-Children-Healthy City Asset Mapping Project at <http://www.healthycity.org/>

Figure 2. Asset Map of a Los Angeles Community



Site Legend

	Basic Needs
	Education
	Health Care
	Mental Health Care and Counseling
	Organizational / Community / International Services

This map was retrieved from Healthy-Children-Healthy City Asset Mapping Project at <http://www.healthycity.org/>

Advantages and Disadvantages of Asset Maps

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds on existing community assets • Mapping the inventory creates a visual depiction of existing and lacking assets • Data can be used to raise awareness about the availability of assets, develop or improve services and programs, or to apply for funding • Can generate a lot of community participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding the right maps can be difficult, and mapping software can be expensive and difficult to use • Some community assets will be difficult to map if they don't have a physical location • Needs community buy-in and collaboration to adequately inventory up-to-date community resources

Resources:

To download geographic maps of your neighborhood from the internet: You can access neighborhood maps from Mapquest: <http://www.mapquest.com>, Yahoo! Maps: <http://maps.yahoo.com>, or the Thomas Brothers Maps: <http://www.thomas.com>. Right click on your mouse and select "copy." Then paste the map into a new document.

Websites that map important neighborhood information or available services:

- *Neighborhood Knowledge California*, <http://www.nkca.ucla.edu>. It assembles and maps a variety of databases that can be used in neighborhood research. It maps and displays many demographic indicators by city, such as income, race, education, age, language spoken at home, and housing.
- *Neighborhood Knowledge Los Angeles*, <http://nkla.ucla.edu>. NKLA is a Los Angeles wide interactive website focusing mostly on housing and neighborhood conditions.
- *Healthy-Children-Healthy City Asset Mapping Project*, <http://www.healthycity.org>. This website maps human and social service sites, public schools and non-profit organizations throughout Los Angeles County, where you can create a general asset map of your neighborhood. It may serve as a helpful first activity in conducting the community resource inventory.

Examples of asset maps:

- Community Building Resources; Community Capacity Building & Asset Mapping:
http://www.cbr-aimhigh.com/workshops/asset_maps.htm
- Youth Community Asset Mapping (see Mapping Gallery):
<http://www.eya.ca/youthmappers/>

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