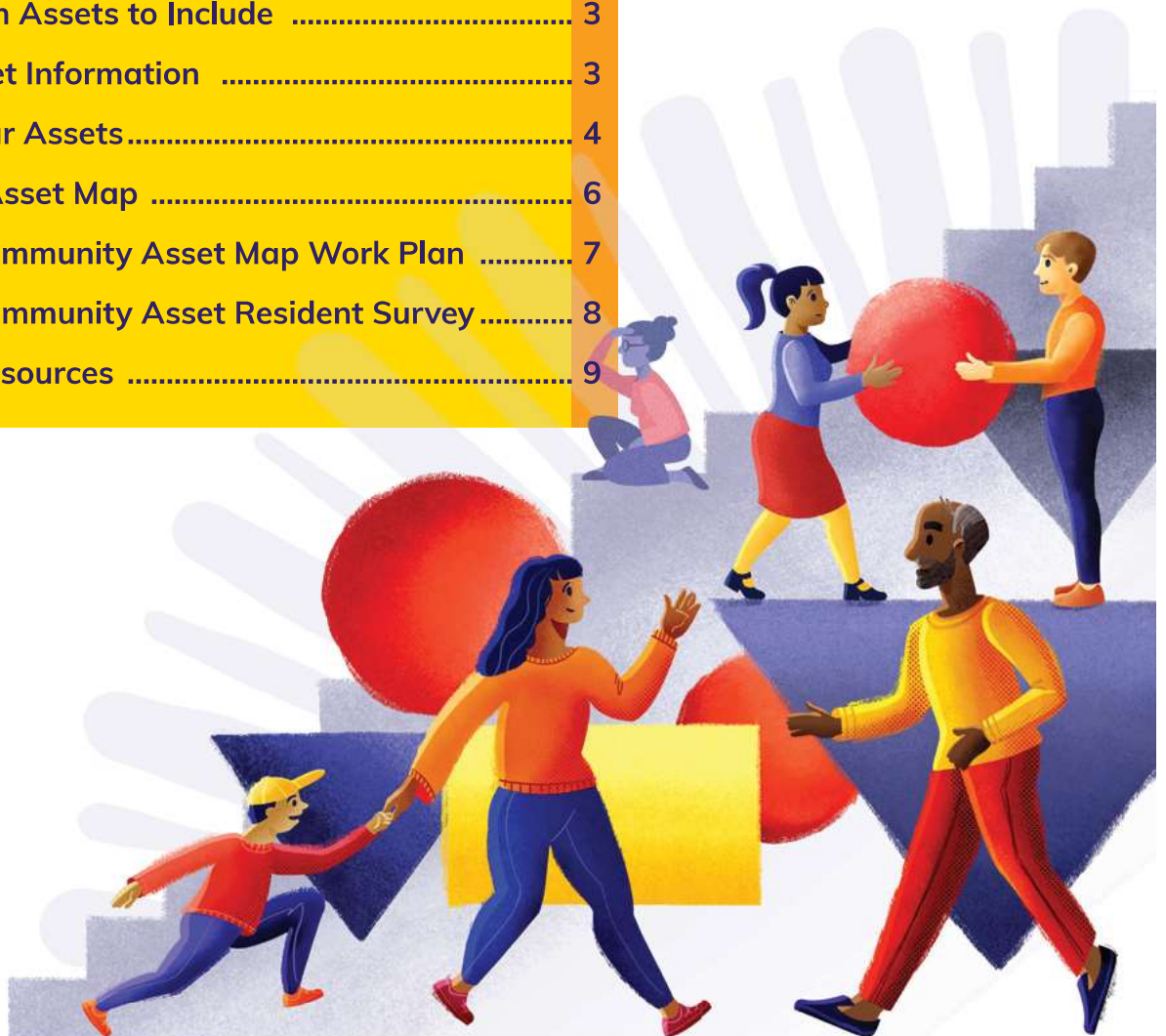


A Toolkit for Community Assessment

Community Asset Mapping

The following steps for developing an asset map will be reviewed in this toolkit:

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Rural communities often face increased health disparities when compared to their urban counterparts in the United States. Limited access to education, employment, housing, services, transportation, and other resources are among the barriers rural residents face to accessing and engaging in healthcare services. Identifying, developing, and connecting to resources within a community can help allay treatment gaps and meet the need for a population that is historically underserved.

Asset mapping refers to the general process of identifying and gathering information about a community's assets. An asset is any resource or strength found already within a community which can be used to uncover effective solutions, to promote social inclusion, and improve the health and well-being of its citizens. Inventorying resources already available makes it easier to coordinate and increase accessibility to care while also providing a framework for effective community planning and development. Knowing what is available can help shape important decisions such how best to allocate finite funding within a rural community.

In addition, asset mapping promotes community involvement, ownership, and empowerment. It is a strengths-based approach which relies on the core belief that good things already exist within a community. Asset mapping focuses on what a neighborhood has, instead of its deficits, and assumes that many solutions to a community's problems already exist within the community. Approaching communities from an asset-based perspective empowers its members to recognize and utilize their own strengths and to see their community through a positive lens.

In this guide, each step of the process of developing and utilizing a community asset map is reviewed with accompanying worksheets and resources. The ultimate goal of this tool is to work with rural stakeholders to maximize resource utilization, identify and address gaps in services, and leverage indigenous community assets to build stronger rural communities.

Defining the purpose

The first step in creating a community asset map is to determine what your goals are for the map. What do you hope to accomplish? Do you want to find resources for new mothers? People with substance use disorders? Low-income dental care? Defining your objectives will guide the process of developing your map and keep you on target.

Determining community boundaries

Next, decide what areas you will include as a part of the community you are mapping. Will you be focusing on one neighborhood or a wider community such an entire town or county? Maybe on specific zip codes? Or school districts? Determining the boundaries of your map will help to focus your efforts on identifying assets that are relevant and accessible.

“A community can only be built by focusing on the strengths and capacities of the citizens who call it home.”
—John Kretzman, Asset-Based Development Institute

Deciding Which Assets to Include

Keeping your ultimate purpose in mind, determine what types of assets will help you meet your objective(s). As previously mentioned, a community asset (or resource) is anything that improves the quality of community life for its members. Assets can include:

- **The capacities, skills, and abilities of community members.** Residents can be empowered to use their individual gifts and resources to build and support the community. Consider the stay-at-home parent who organizes a neighborhood playgroup to relieve working parents or the natural community organizer who leads a blood drive.
- **Citizen groups, clubs, or associations.** Clubs or associations are generally defined as a group of local community members joined together with a common goal. Determine what local voluntary associations, clubs, or networks are available and active in your community that might be a source of support for your objectives. Examples may include your local PTA, 12 step support groups, neighborhood watches, and civil service clubs.
- **Public institutions and services.** Look at what services and resources are already provided and available in your community through public funding. This may include police and fire departments, schools, libraries, and parks.
- **Private and non-profit organizations.** These are the organizations in your community that serve a specific role in support of the community's welfare. This may include local hospitals, pharmacies, faith-based organizations, and social service providers.
- **Funding sources.** Knowing what funding sources are available in the community can expand opportunities as needs and treatment gaps are identified in the mapping process. These may include local credit unions, foundations, philanthropists, supportive businesses, and fundraisers (through church/school/community/etc.)

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

Gathering Asset Information

Once you have identified what assets to include in your map, the next step is to collect, record, and inventory them for easy access and review. You can find assets in the community through a variety of different methods and resources. Consider the following:

- **Search engines/yellow pages.** Use key terms to locate specific types of resources in your community.
- **The local newspaper.** Regional periodicals (printed or online!) can be a great resource for up-to-date information on community events and organizations.
- **Community websites.** Frequently towns and cities will have their own websites which provide a one stop shop for all sorts of helpful information. Not only can you pay your water bill, but you can also access information about local resources and events while you do it!
- **Community bulletin boards.** Community bulletin boards capture upcoming events and the latest happenings posted by members of the community. They can be found in common spaces such as local parks, houses on worship, laundromats, post offices, libraries, etc.

- **Social media.** Social media can be a great tool for gathering assets. Follow prominent community leaders, institutions, and organizations. Join a community's Facebook group or subreddit. Connect with community members via apps such as [Nextdoor](#).
- **211.** Call your local 211 United Way helpline to get information about social services and support resources in and near your community.
- **Existing community resource guides.** Frequently local social service organizations or chambers of commerce will have ongoing, updated community resource guides available for public access. It's a great way to access a wealth of information without all the legwork!
- **Faith-based communities.** Houses of worship are usually well-versed in a community's resources as they work with members to help make ends meet. Some even have their own community support funds that are available for residents to use when other options are limited.
- **Local parks, recreational facilities, and community centers.** These can be great resources for physical activity and meeting spaces.
- **Community members.** Perhaps your greatest source of information is the community members themselves. They may hold intel that is not on any easy-to-find online lists. The more people included, the more comprehensive and exhaustive your map will be.
 - ✓ Connect with members via phone interviews, email or cyber communication, canvassing neighborhoods, or through a community event.
 - ✓ Prepare a survey to gather information. Ask residents to identify local assets they are aware of, community resources they believe could become assets if improved or developed, and assets or resources that they believe are missing from the community. Surveys are also a great opportunity to catalog individual gifts, talents, and resources that can be used as community assets! (See Appendix 2 for a sample resident survey)

As you gather assets, it may be helpful to record pertinent information about each one including:

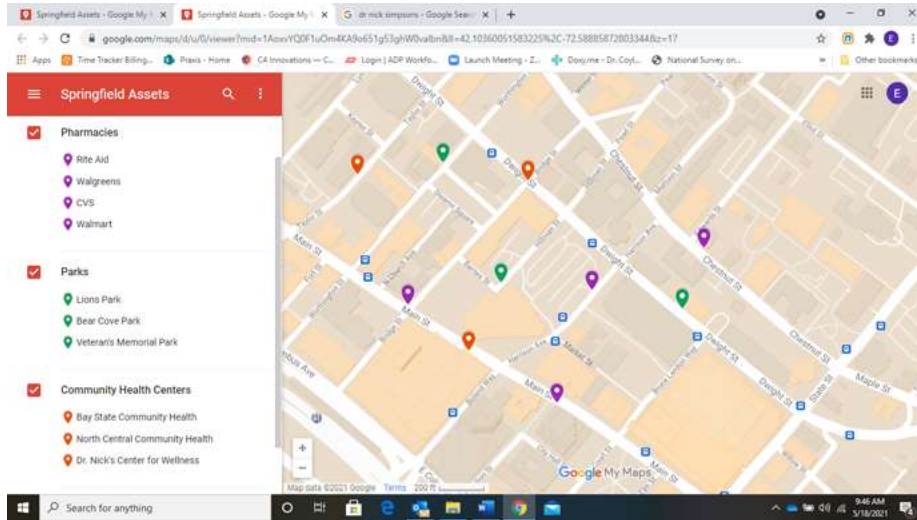
- Location
- Information sources (website, social media, etc.)
- Contact person
- Type of resource
- Services offered
- Populations served

Organizing Your Assets

The next step is to organize your assets in a way that makes them accessible and increases your insight and understanding of what's available and where service overlaps and gaps may exist. There is no right or wrong way to do this—how to do it is up to you and what works best for your needs. Many options exist for organizing your assets in a meaningful way:

- **Physical maps:** Creating a physical map in a shared, common space can be a great way to visualize the assets in your community and the relationships between them. The first step is to find a map that is representative of the community you are reviewing. You can request a map of your community from your local city hall or print one off from websites such as MapQuest, Google Maps, or Yahoo Maps. Create a legend and use colored dot stickers or push pins to identify the location and types of assets you have found as part of your mapping project.
- **Online maps.** Online maps are great because they can be easily accessed and shared. Multiple users can access the same map and contribute to the process. While there are many software programs available, [Google's My Maps](#) is a good starting place as it is affordable (free!) and user friendly.

The website allows you to create personalized, shareable maps where you can add locations, text, and even photos for each asset!



Online Google “My Maps” Asset Map

- **A comprehensive list.** Another way to organize your assets is by creating a comprehensive list of what is available. You can do this by creating a list alphabetically, by type of resource, or by creating a searchable document, such as an excel sheet. Excel is a great way of organizing your assets and their information in one easy to use document. Get started using our [Rural Asset Mapping Tool](#).
- **A database.** Creating a searchable database allows you to find applicable assets at your fingertips! Using a program such as [Microsoft Access](#), you can create your own database to share with others for widespread access.
- **Visual models.** A final option is to use a visual model of some form to present your assets and the relationships between them. Examples include a Venn diagram, brainstorm cloud, or a concentric circle model (as shown below).



Concentric Circle Asset Model

Again, the method doesn't matter as much as the main objective of presenting the community's assets in a way that makes them easy to see and clear on how they can connect and be combined to meet the community's needs.

Utilizing Your Asset Map

The last and perhaps most important step is to ensure the assets you have identified get utilized and leveraged for maximum community benefit. Making assets easily identifiable and accessible is an important function of a community asset map, but it can also provide other important information.

Start by trying to identify any patterns you see. Where is the community excelling? Are there assets that are underutilized that could be expanded? Are there any obvious gaps in services or resources where a need is not being filled? The answers to these and similar questions can lay the foundation for determining future priorities, targeting funding allocation, and facilitating conversations with community leaders and policy makers to shape the community's future trajectory.

Community Asset Maps can help to:

- **Address gaps in services.** When looking at your map, do you notice areas where a needed resource is sparse? Identifying gaps in services can help to reallocate funding and resources to address those deficits. This is also known as a gap analysis. A gap analysis attempts to answer 3 questions: Where are we currently? Where do we want to be? And how do we get there? Use our [gap analysis tool](#) to get the process started.
- **Explore how assets can be mobilized to address needs identified.** It can encourage out of the box thinking and creative problems solving as already existing assets can be adapted to meet the need. Consider librarians who were recruited during the opioid epidemic to use and carry Narcan to help allay fatal overdoses in the community.
- **Promote community pride and engagement.** Showcasing a community's strengths engenders pride in its members and promotes active engagement and investment in its success. Make sure to share your map with community members!
- **Strengthen and build relationships.** Your asset map can identify existing relationships within the community to be nurtured and as well as new alliances which can be built to promote successful community development in the future.

Remember your map is only as good as the accuracy of your information. Contact information changes, services get altered, programs shut down, and new assets are incoming. Recruit community members to be your eyes and ears and encourage ongoing sharing of information. Check in with local institutions on a regular basis for any updates to programming. Schedule a yearly review to ensure the material is being refreshed on a regular basis. Ongoing collaboration and regular review of resources ensures your asset map continue to be a force for community success.

Appendix 1: Community Asset Map Work Plan

Use the following questions to develop a workplan for your community asset map:

- What is your main objective(s) for developing your community asset map?
- What area will you be mapping (Neighborhood? Town? County? Etc.)?
- What types of assets will you include?
- What sources will you use to gather asset information?
- How will you organize and present your assets?
- How will you share your map and findings? Who will you share with?
- How will you maintain your asset map to reflect up-to-date information?

Appendix 2: Community Asset Resident Survey

Use the following questions to develop a workplan for your community asset map:

Thank you for taking the time to complete our survey. Your responses help us to showcase the resources in our community, to better meet the needs of our residents, and to plan for our future.

- In what ways are you/have you been/do you want to be involved in the community?
- What would you say are our community's greatest assets or features?
- What would you like to see in the community that doesn't exist now? Or what could be improved on?
- What skills, talents, resources, or supplies do you have that you would be willing to share with community efforts?
- What clubs, associations, or networks are you apart of (or would like to be)?
- Is there anything in particular that you are needing?
- What are the positive activities, events, or resources that are happening in the community you think others should know about?
- How do you receive information on community events and resources? What is the best way to reach you?