

COMMUNITY BUILDING

MAPPING COMMUNITY ASSETS

Community assets are the physical and non-physical resources in a community used to improve the quality of community life. They can be anything from people to places to organizations. Any community asset can be applied to a community project. Assets are easily forgotten if they aren't written down and accessible to project leaders. To avoid this, mapping community assets is the practice of identifying, listing and analyzing these resources for use in community building work. According to Kretzmann and McKnight, assets in a community fall into three key categories:

- Gifts, skills, and experiences of community residents, such as plumbing, bookkeeping, playing a musical instrument, or running a small business.
- Strengths of local organizations such as civic clubs and youth organizations (see next page).
- Resources of local institutions such as schools, churches, government offices and libraries (see next page).

Other categories can include physical assets, such as land, buildings, and streets or financial assets.

People who work with communities suggest that communities can make more progress in their work if they build upon what is already in the community rather than focusing on the problems or needs. This is like looking at the glass as half full of water (what we have) rather than half empty (what we don't have or need).

Identifying assets and then using them to build on will help a community flourish. Many times, external resources such as federal or state money aren't available. The resources for change must come from within a community. Identifying and mobilizing community assets enables community residents to gain control over their lives. People can become active-shapers of their own destinies, instead of passive clients receiving services from a variety of agencies. The majority of improvement efforts are more effective, and longer-lasting, when community members dedicate their time and talents to changes they desire.

Examples of Local Organizations and Institutions

Organizations

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Animals | animal shelters |
| Artistic | musical, theatrical, writing |
| Business | Chamber of Commerce, business associations or clubs |
| Charitable | Red Cross, Cancer Society, United Way |
| Spiritual groups | service, prayer, acolytes, men's, women's, youth, seniors |
| Civic events | Old Home Day, July 4th, Halloween |
| Collectors | stamps, antiques, cars, coins |
| Ethnic | Sons of Italy, Sons of Norway |
| Health & fitness | aerobics, dieting, jogging, Visiting Nurses Assn |
| Interest groups | book clubs, historic |

Organizations

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Local media | community newspaper and radio, newsletter, cable access television |
| Men's groups | cultural, political, social, educational, political |
| Neighborhood | lake associations, neighborhood watch |
| Outdoor groups | hiking clubs, garden clubs, Audubon society, environmental, fish and game clubs |
| Political | Democrats, Republicans, Independents |
| School | Sports teams, chess, computer, PTA, Booster clubs |
| Self-help | Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, |
| Senior groups | senior citizens' clubs, AARP groups |
| Service clubs | Rotary, Kiwanis, Masonic Lodges |
| Social cause groups | peace, civil rights, animal rights |
| Sports leagues | bowling, basketball, volleyball, Little League |
| Study groups | bible |
| Support groups | "Friends of the Library" |
| Veteran groups | Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Amvets |
| Women's groups | cultural, political, social, educational, political |
| Youth groups | 4-H, Scouts, YM/YWCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters |

Institutions

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Community colleges or university | News media |
| Federal government offices | Parks |
| Hospitals, health clinics, or health care offices | Schools |
| Libraries | Social service agencies |
| Local government offices | State government offices |

Resources:

Kretzmann, John P and John L. McKnight. Building Communities from the Inside Out, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 1993.

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