

Guidesheet: Asset Mapping

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What is Asset Mapping?

Asset Mapping: the process of identifying, connecting and mobilising the strengths, skills, resources, opportunities and experiences that exist within a community, otherwise known as assets, to create or enhance natural social support networks where people live and work.

As the name Asset Based Community Driven Efforts suggests, identifying and making visible a community's assets, or 'Asset Mapping' is an integral part of any ABCDE initiative. Essentially, asset mapping involves discovering, recording, connecting and mobilising the assets of a community. The four most important aspects of the asset mapping process are –

- Discovery and learning – asset mapping is about having fresh eyes, seeing community resources in a new light and making the invisible, visible.
- Relationship building – asset mapping begins with conversation. It is not so much about cataloguing and compiling lists as it is about making connections, building relationships and in doing so, unlocking unrealised potential.
- Connecting – connecting residents to assets and projects in meaningful ways is key to shifting / relocating power and responsibility from agencies and governments to initiate and drive citizen centred community development. When residents feel empowered by, and in control of their assets, they can more easily make the shift from client to citizen.
- Celebrating – revealing the asset richness of any community provides an opportunity to celebrate and share pride.

"How do you know what you need, if you don't know what you already have?"

(Cormac Russell)

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."

(Marcel Proust)

What is the Value and Purpose of Asset Mapping?

Broadly speaking, the value and purpose of undertaking an asset mapping exercise is to help residents / members discover, connect, act upon and celebrate the assets and resources a community already has that may be utilised to help build a healthier, more inclusive and connected community that is able to problem solve and 'kick some goals', from the inside out. Put simply, by identifying and mapping assets, communities put themselves in the best possible position to unlock their full potential.

More specifically, the asset mapping process can be undertaken to achieve the following outcomes –

- Allow communities to discover that every resident has skills, talents, ideas and passions that are relevant to community well-being, and every time residents are given the opportunity to exercise their abilities and ideas the community is strengthened.
- Unlock and build upon local opportunities, potential and capacity within the community to turn common ideas into positive action.
- Grow local leadership by connecting and engaging residents around local assets.
- Problem solve and develop projects without having to rely on external resources and leadership.
- Build and enhance relationships between residents, organisations and institutions by drawing on strengths, connections and common goals and building social capital by creating and growing networks of trust and reciprocity.
- Help residents create a shared awareness and understanding of local resources as they discover, connect, act upon and celebrate the assets that exist within their community.

Types of Assets

Every community will have the following assets and these should be discovered and recorded as part of the asset mapping process.

Individual Assets: the skills, talents, passions, ideas, experiences, knowledge and expertise of individuals within the community.

Institutional Assets: organisations, clubs, churches, schools, libraries, colleges and universities, health facilities, child care facilities, aged care facilities, emergency services (e.g. police, fire).

Social Networks: the formal and informal networks that exist between individuals and groups and associations.

Economic Assets: local businesses, home based enterprises, local markets and various forms of exchange e.g. time banking, swap meets, tool libraries etc.

Physical Assets: physical infrastructure – built environment – roads, facilities, public spaces, playgrounds, car parks and natural environment – parks, community gardens, walk / bike trails.

Stories, Cultural and Spiritual Assets: museums, history, art galleries and public art, stories, traditions, rituals, world views, belief systems, values, things that give value to life.

“The most important asset in any community is its people – the skills, talents, passions, knowledge and expertise of individuals within the community.”

The Asset Mapping Process

Identifying and mapping assets in any community can be a simple or intensive process depending on the purpose. Every asset mapping process will be different. There is no cookie cutter method. However, here a few key steps that should be followed to help make the process easier and more successful.

1. **Define the purpose**
2. **Define your community boundaries**

3. **Identify and involve stakeholders**
4. **Identify the methods**
5. **Identify the assets**
6. **Apply and connect the knowledge**

1. Define the purpose

Ask yourself, or the group / team, what you hope to achieve by carrying out an asset mapping project. For example, you may want to better connect newly arrived migrants to the community or create leadership and engagement opportunities for young people to become more successful. By outlining a specific goal, you can design better questions. Asking the right questions is key to unlocking potential and making the invisible visible. If you do not have a specific purpose in mind, the process of asset mapping can itself reveal opportunities as residents become excited when they discover how asset rich their community really is. Kretzmann and McKnight (1997) advise that you or your group answer the following question: *“How will the skills and capacities of local people be translated into meeting community building goals?”*

2. Define your community or project boundaries

Determine the boundaries that your asset map will include. Are you developing an asset map of a street, suburb, a non-geographically defined community or the wider community? Are you creating a map based on specific interests or topics (i.e. transit options, parks, restaurants, dog parks)?

3. Identify and involve stakeholders

“Every community has more assets than any one person knows.”
(Mike Green)

Mike Green's quote really sums it up. In other words, asset mapping should involve everyone. Depending on the purpose, different individuals and groups will have varying knowledge of a community's assets and will respond to different methods of revealing and recording those assets.

4. Identify the tools

The idea is to ensure the asset mapping process is fun, visible and results in building relationships whilst sharing knowledge. The key to asset mapping is to GET CREATIVE. The asset mapping process should be undertaken with a cross section of groups / individuals across the community, and the tools used should be appropriate for each group. Examples of tools are given in the section below.

5. Identify the assets

Once you have chosen a method(s), the asset identification process begins. This is not just about listing assets. The most important aspect of identifying assets is asking the right questions. The aim is to tease out the hidden knowledge. For example, you can list a neighbourhood centre as an asset, but asking the right questions will give it the context and meaning that is key to unlocking potential. Questions you might ask in this case are – Who currently uses the neighbourhood centre? What activities is it used for? What activities could it be used for? What physical assets does it have? What are its connections to the community?

6. Apply and connect the knowledge

Remember, creating an asset map is about building relationships whilst sharing knowledge. The knowledge acquired should be used to further enhance relationship

relationships and strengthen community by providing opportunities for residents to get involved and utilise the talents, skills and assets they have discovered to achieve tangible outcomes. In other words – how will you apply this knowledge to build and strengthen community? What will you do with the information you have discovered? How will you apply it to your original purpose? Asset maps are a work in progress. They are constantly changing and involving. Displaying the knowledge where it can be easily accessed and modified (if needs be) is important.

You can view how the Organisation ‘Sacred Suds’ has applied the Asset Mapping Process here – <https://vimeo.com/121487830>

Asset Mapping Tools

There are many ways that a community can discover and map its assets, and ideally a combination of tools should be used. Employing more than one tool will ensure the process is kept, fun, fresh, relevant and responsive. Residents need to be able to easily share knowledge and information, but also that information needs to be made easily accessible. It is also important to remember that the asset mapping process begins with conversation. Discovering what residents care about, their interests, passion, ideas, experiences, skills and talents is the very essence of asset mapping. In light of this, the most favoured methods of asset mapping are those which allow residents to interact, share knowledge and get creative. Traditionally, tools and methods of asset mapping involved surveys and interviews. Whilst these tools are still useful, more creative ways to asset map are emerging and proving very effective.

- **Community Street Audits:** essentially this involves gathering a group of residents and going out into the neighbourhood with cameras and notebooks and recording observations and information. Can also be extended to include walking groups and neighbourhood watch groups.
- **Websites:** websites are a great way to record and display information. Member login allows residents to directly contribute content. See Connect Warrnambool <http://www.connectwarrnambool.com.au/> and All We Need Is Right Here www.allweneedisrighthere.org.
- **To do / Best of Lists:** this asset mapping exercise can be a lot of fun. Get a group of residents together and compile lists with titles like ‘50 Things Kids Can Do in our Community Before they Turn 12’ or, ‘The ten best places to go for a walk in our Community’, or, ‘The five best places to eat dinner in our Community’. The information can then be reproduced and distributed to other residents and tourists.
- **Film:** a great way to record and display the passions, skills and talents of residents, as well as showcase other assets. Utilising local filmmakers and talent enhances the process. They can be short videos or feature films. See this example: Participatory Community Asset Mapping <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K33GFMLb9U8>.
- **Events:** events that are organised by residents for the local community are an invaluable asset mapping opportunity as the relationship building aspect is truly emphasised in the planning and execution of any event. They also help reveal so many hidden assets, passions, skills and talents. Events especially relevant to the asset mapping process include – community treasure hunts, races (amazing race, homemade billy cart race etc), community get to know each other BBQ, community cook offs, street parties, teddy bears picnics – the list is endless!

- **Story Telling / Story Harvesting:** collecting stories of residents is a very useful way to asset map as it reveals the individual passions, skills and talents of residents. It also breaks down barriers and builds trust and strengthens relationships as people open up and share their story. As Cormac Russell points out, 'it is very hard to judge someone when you know their story'. You can also get really creative with how stories are displayed and shared with the community.
- **Public art displays:** murals, sculptures, photovoice – static, ephemeral, evolving – harnessing the talents of local artists and bridging those talents with the knowledge of residents can be a powerful way to engage the creative community to connect residents around assets.
- **Google maps / table top mapping:** simply involves gathering a group around a map and pinpointing assets and relevant information. Google map allows the same concept to be applied online. A google map can be shared with a number of residents who can contribute and embedded into a website for the broader community to access. This embedded Google Map from Toronto Urban Growers is a brilliant example of how Google Maps can be used for recoding and displaying information - <http://torontourbangrowers.org/map>
- **Love Notes:** love Notes can be a powerful asset mapping exercise. Gives residents a chance to share what they love about their community with other residents and outsiders. Essentially, residents are asked to write down what they love about where they live and then these 'love notes' are displayed creatively. The options for getting creative are endless.
- **Communi-tree:** this is a creative way for residents to share the passions, skills and talents and the groups, clubs and organisations they belong too. There are many ways you can display a 'communi-tree' – as a graphical display or a physical display. Essentially, the 'branches' form the categories e.g. passions, clubs and organisations, skills, institutions, physical assets etc and the 'leaves' represent the information.
- **Organisational:** Organisations harbour some of a community's most useful assets. Organisational assets include, programs and services, personnel / staff, equipment, physical spaces / infrastructure, networks and connections and history.
- **Workshops:** workshops are a great way to brainstorm and discuss community assets in groups. They are also a useful way to bring together natural leaders, community connectors and community minded people. Workshops allow you to use more formal tools to asset map. Useful asset mapping activities that can be undertaken in a workshop include playing the 'We Can' Game and using post-it notes to share individual's gifts of the head, heart and hand.
- **Surveys:** surveys are the traditional way to asset map and they certainly have value. Surveys are especially useful when looking to map the individual assets of all the members who might belong to a particular organisation or church for example.
- **Directories:** every community is likely to have directories for businesses, facilities, clubs and organisation and services. In terms of getting a broad idea of what exists in a community directories are a good place to start.
- **Social Media:** community pages on social media have become a very useful tool in the asset mapping tool box. Information pages, buy, swap, sell pages and community discussion pages are all useful in revealing assets.

To discuss how these tools further and how they might best be utilised for asset mapping in your community, please contact the Bank of I.D.E.A.S. on (08) 6293 1848 or email md@bankofideas.com.au