



PALM BEACH COUNTY
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

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Palm Beach County
Board of County Commissioners

RESIDENT EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM



MODULE 5 ASSET MAPPING AND NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS



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Introduction

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, writer and pioneering aviator

Neighborhoods are too often defined by their needs and problems – e.g. unemployment rate, drug abuse, ineffective schools, crime, and poverty. Viewing a community as a place of need rather than one with positive attributes discourages residents to step up, be proactive and take control of their communities, as well as create a continued cycle of dependency on public resources.

In this module, you will learn about asset mapping and neighborhood assets, types of asset maps, how they are used and how to create one for your community. You will also learn about the benefits of developing a neighborhood plan, how to use it, and its key components.

Community asset-mapping rejects the habit of describing communities by listing their problems. Instead of focusing on the needs or the deficits, community asset-mapping focuses on the hidden wealth that exists in all communities. Churches, local businesses, nonprofit organizations, voluntary associations and parks are all assets with valuable resources to offer. Retirees, artists, musicians, and ordinary youth and adult residents are also assets, and can contribute their individual skills, gifts and passions.¹

Strong caring neighborhoods are created by discovering assets from within and building on them. Residents should ask “What can we achieve with what we already have to get what we need?” Asset mapping is a tool that helps the community identify local and outside assets. These assets can be physical, institutions and residents’ skills and talents. The creation of an asset map helps residents to focus on what is good about their neighborhood and to discover hidden “wealth” in the skills and talents of residents. Once the assets are cataloged, they can become the basis of a neighborhood plan and used to tackle neighborhood projects.

Neighborhood plans are an effective tool that can help residents focus their resources and energy so that the goals and objectives of the plan can be achieved. Neighborhood plans engage residents in identifying a future vision for their community and provide strategies and recommendations for achieving that vision. They are concrete documents, and can be used by the neighborhood leadership to direct their work in improving their community, apply for grants, gain political support for projects, and track progress towards their goals.

¹ Ebony Howard. Unlocking Your Community’s Hidden Strengths, A Guidebook to Community Asset-Mapping, Alabama Youth Justice Alliance & The Southern Poverty Law Center.

<https://www.splcenter.org/20121126/unlocking-your-community%E2%80%99s-hidden-strengths-guidebook-community-asset-mapping>

Community participation in both asset mapping and neighborhood planning is necessary to ensure that they both have resident buy-in, and to make sure that a broad section of residents is represented. The more residents participate in the process, the more support the documents and subsequent projects will have. The Office of Community Revitalization can provide technical assistance to neighborhood groups that desire to develop an asset map and/or a neighborhood plan.

Asset Mapping

Asset Mapping is a group exercise that helps communities to see themselves from a new perspective and to identify directions for revitalization which may not have been recognized before. It helps residents to think positively about the place in which they live and work, producing a common view of what is considered important in the community. It also challenges residents to recognize how other people see and experience the same community and space. It is the starting point for strategic planning because it identifies what assets the community has and how they might be utilized in the future.²

What is a Neighborhood Asset?

Assets are things that contribute to the quality of life in a neighborhood. We inventory local assets so that they can be used towards community improvement. A neighborhood group or association decides how they will categorize their assets based on the neighborhoods unique characteristics. Here are some examples of asset categories:

- **Physical** Assets– All neighborhoods have physical or built assets. They include, but are not limited to: housing stock, location; parks and open areas, tree canopy, etc.
- **Social** – These are the values and culture of the community, including traditions and attitudes of sharing, cooperation, and mutual support. Do neighbors help each other? Do people gather to socialize? Are there shared values? Does the neighborhood have a history?
- **Economic** – These are the hobs and businesses which provide livelihoods, and include: local businesses, services such as grocery stores, and employment centers. These can also include grant funders and governmental resources.
- **Public (Service)**– These assets include:
 - Infrastructure – potable water, sewerage system, sidewalks, streets and streetlights;
 - Schools;
 - Hospitals;
 - Transportation; and
 - Other services provided by government.
- **Intangible** – These are usually undiscovered or underutilized skills, expertise and willingness to volunteer and participate in working towards common goals. They include the skills, talents and passions of residents that can be harnessed to change the community.

² Sustainable Communities: A Guide to Community Asset Mapping, Falls Brook Centre

Examples of Assets

Individual	Institutional	Governmental
Skills Talents Experiences Professional Personal Resources Leadership Networks	Churches Colleges and universities Elderly care facilities Police/Fire departments Hospitals and Clinics Mental health facilities Libraries Schools Transportation	State/City/Local government Federal government agencies Neighborhood Associations Neighborhood Coalitions Military facilities Small business administration State education agency Telecommunications
Organizational	Physical/Land	Culture
Small and large businesses Citizen groups/clubs Community centers Home-based enterprises Radio/TV stations Nonprofit Organizations	Utility Companies Parks and recreational facilities Real estate agencies Waste management facilities Chamber of Commerce	Historic/Arts council groups Councils for cultural affairs Tourism City council Museums/galleries

Adapted: Connecting to Success: Neighborhood Networks and Asset Mapping Guide, U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development

Exercise

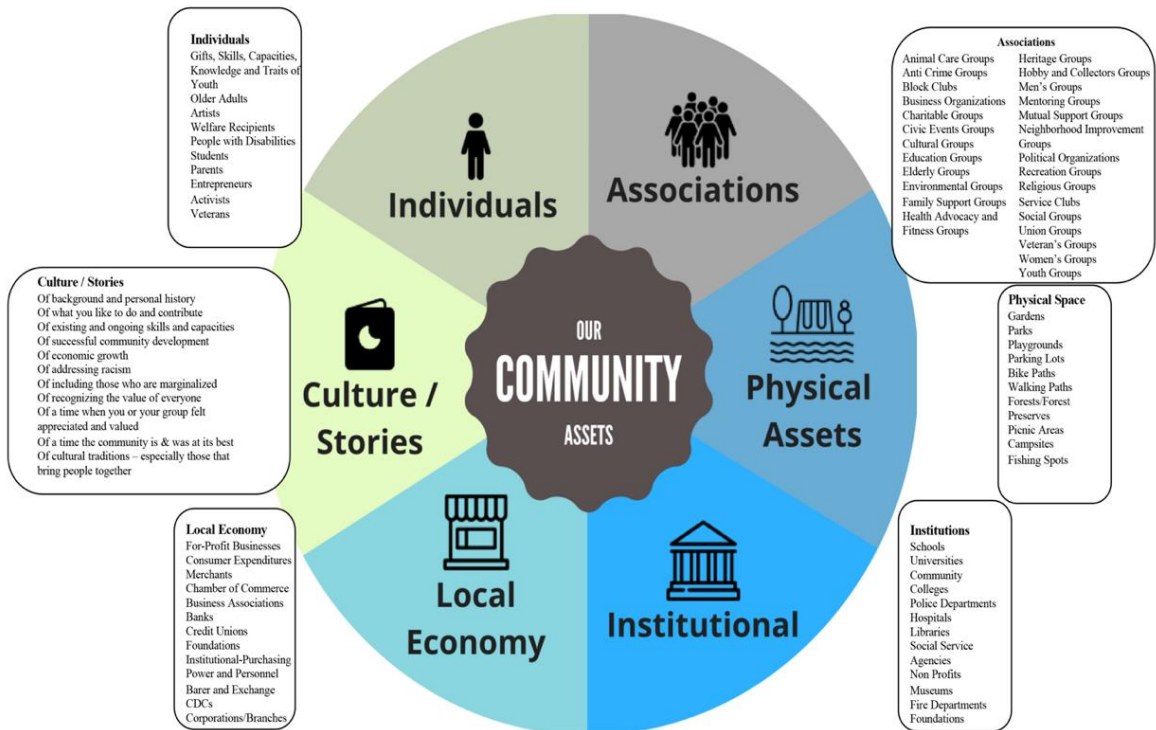
How many assets can you name in your neighborhood?

Types of Asset Maps

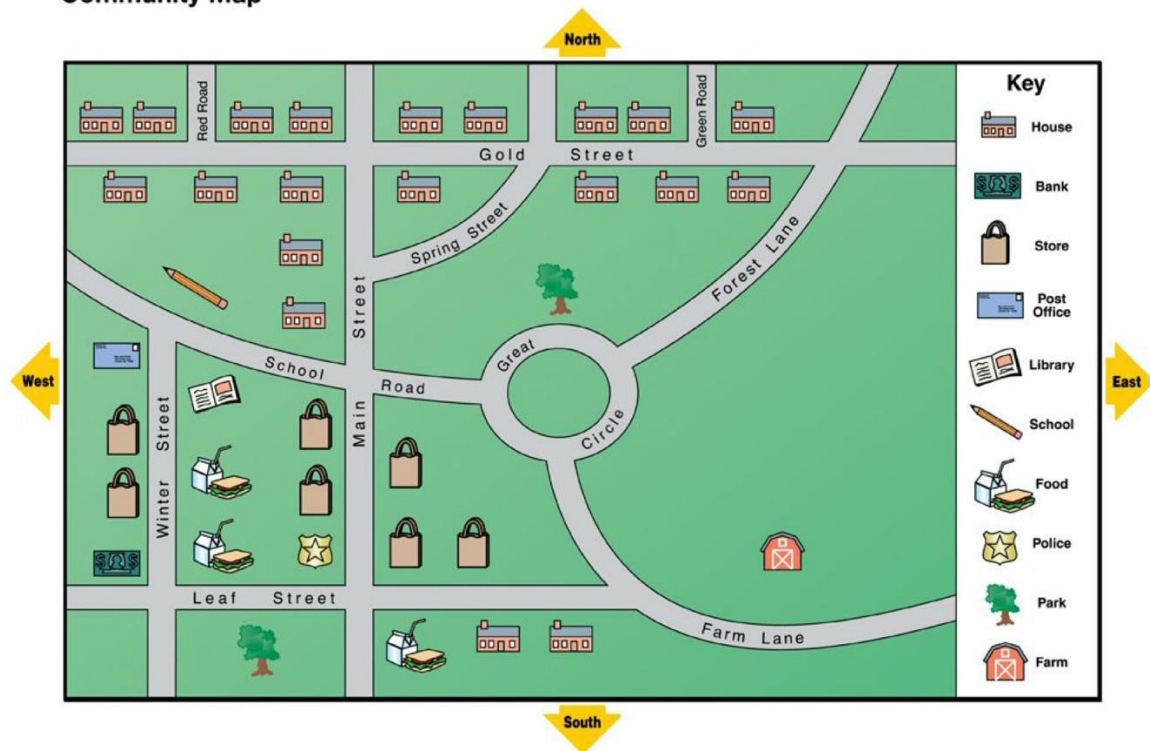
Asset maps are not always geographic in form. Some asset maps are simply a listing of a neighborhood's assets by category – physical, institutional, etc. How your neighborhood decides to design its asset map is driven by how it will be used.

Examples of Asset Maps





Community Map



Exercise

What would you include in your neighborhood's asset map?

Gathering residents, local business owners and non-profits to develop an asset map is, in itself, a positive effort. It shows that people care about the community and are willing to take time out of their day to work together. Other benefits of developing an asset map include:

- Fostering a greater sense of community pride and ownership;
- Helping everyone see the community through a different lens;
- Identifying assets and skills possessed by residents, businesses, organizations and institutions that can support neighborhoods to reach their optimum potential;
- Recognizing existing assets, strengths and gifts that otherwise may be overlooked, taken for granted or are outside of our vision;
- Developing relationships and building on them in collaboration towards common goals. The process of asset mapping allows residents to “connect the dots” and find ways to get projects done;
- Creating greater opportunities for volunteerism by allowing residents to utilize their individual interests and skills; and

How Are Asset Maps Used?

Neighborhoods can use asset maps for many purposes depending on their needs and desires. These include:

- To paint a broad picture of the community, one that is not solely focused on deficits;
- To develop a community involvement directory to discover formal and informal groups, and ways residents can get involved in them;
- To develop a neighborhood business directory listing neighborhood businesses and services so that residents can support the local economy;
- To create an individual asset database cataloging the gifts, talents, interests, and resources of individuals so these can be tapped into for the betterment of the community; and
- To be ready to respond to emergencies by cataloging water and gas lines, residents with equipment and other emergency supplies and are willing to assist in times of need.

What are the Steps to Create an Asset Map?³

The process to create an asset map depends on how your neighborhood group or association intends to use it. If you intend to use the asset map as the basis of a neighborhood plan or to apply for large grants, then you should have a more comprehensive approach to determining your community’s assets. However, if you are looking to use asset mapping as a community exercise to create positive energy and generate new ideas, then you can simplify the process. The steps below illustrate the basic methodology to be followed to create an asset map:

³ Adapted from *Identifying Community Assets and Resources* by Bi8ll Berkowitz and Eric Wadud. Retrieved from Community Toolbox-University of Kansas Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development, June 3, 2021.

- **Define the purpose of the asset map** - Ask your group what they hope to achieve by creating an asset map. Identifying your specific goal will aid in setting objectives and formatting processes to accomplish positive results. Kretzmann and McKnight (1997) suggest 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?
- **Define the boundaries** – It may be obvious the need to map the assets within your neighborhood. However, you should consider including assets that exist outside the neighborhood which provide or could provide resources and/or services to residents – schools, businesses, health clinics, parks, transportation, hospitals and libraries for example.
- **Identify and involve partners** – Based on the intended use of the asset map, make sure you invite people that have a stake in the outcome – namely residents, potential grant funders, nonprofit partners, representatives of local government and local business owners. Make sure you get a good cross section of people, so the end product has local buy-in.
- **Determine what types of assets to include** – Assets do not have to physically exist in your neighborhood. An example would be a nonprofit that serves people in the neighborhood but that is not located within the community. Another example would be local schools and churches.
- **List the assets of groups and individuals**– Make an inventory of all the groups (associations, organizations, and institutions) in your community. Identify the local associations like sports clubs and local institutions such as schools, libraries, etc. Another technique is to compile a list of the skills, capacities, experiences, passions, of individuals in the community that can contribute to its strengthening.
- **Organize assets on a map** – Use an asset map template to organize the information collected to make it more presentable.

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Neighborhood Plans

What is a Neighborhood Plan?

A neighborhood plan is a detailed vision for the future of a neighborhood. In essence, it is a road map that, if properly followed, can help you achieve real results for your community. The goal of neighborhood planning is to enhance the ability of the neighborhood to organize itself to identify problems and solve them in partnership with elected officials, businesses, nonprofits and public agencies. Neighborhood planning is an opportunity for citizens to take a proactive role in the planning process and decide how to go about improving the social and physical conditions of a neighborhood.

A neighborhood plan does not have to be complex, nor does it have to be done by professionals. Residents are the experts on the existing conditions, the assets and what needs improvement. Professionals can assist the neighborhood with maps and knowledge of local government regulations and opportunities to access funds for projects. However, the goals and objectives of the plan should be driven by input from residents.

What are the Benefits of Having a Neighborhood Plan?

A neighborhood that has a plan in place is primed for success. Without a plan, neighborhoods often lurch from one crisis to the next, never addressing the underlying issues and conditions of the neighborhood. True transformation occurs when a community has a vision for its future, outlines the actions that need to be undertaken, and periodically assesses the progress of achieving the goals and objectives established within the plan.

A neighborhood plan:

- **Promotes a sense of hope** – When a plan is written down, people can see a way forward to achieve the community's vision.
- **Describes clearly what the neighborhood wants accomplished.**
- **Serves as an advocacy tool** -Having a well thought out plan with specific goals and objectives shows potential grant funders and your local government that your neighborhood is ready and able to be an effective partner.
- **Helps the neighborhood leaders stay focused** - The neighborhood leaders will be responsible for initiating actions that support the goals and objectives of the plan. Leaders should ask themselves "how are the actions we are taking helping us to achieve the vision of the plan?"

How Do We Use Our Neighborhood Plan?

The plan is the neighborhood's road map and a guide to help achieve the goals and objectives outlined in that plan. The neighborhood will not change if the plan is not implemented. A plan is only good if it is followed.

Because resources such as money and volunteers are generally scarce, it is imperative that residents' efforts and funds be channeled toward achieving the goals and objectives established within the plan. The plan should be revisited periodically to determine the neighborhood's progress and to adjust for external forces that may have impacted the neighborhood and the plan's goals and objectives.

Neighborhood leaders should use the plan for the following purposes:

- As a basis to lobby for neighborhood projects, such as infrastructure, historic preservation funds, parks etc., that are under the purview of governmental agencies;
- To adequately guide efforts and resource allocations to ensure that the goals and objectives are being achieved.
- As a tool to rally residents toward volunteerism focused on achieving the goals and objectives. The skills and interests of residents discovered during the asset mapping process should be utilized as a valuable tool in the revitalization process.
- As a backbone for funding applications for grants. Foundations and grant funders look for organizations that have a focus and achievable goals and objectives.

The Elements of a Neighborhood Plan

A neighborhood plan can include as many elements or chapters as a neighborhood deems important to its success. However, it is best if the plan is concise and easy to follow. Below are the suggested plan sections:

- **Introduction** – This section provides a summary of the plan and a brief description of the neighborhood, including:
 - the location;
 - the history of the neighborhood;
 - prior planning efforts;
 - a description of the planning process; and
 - the overall vision resulting from resident's input
- **Physical Description of the Neighborhood** – This section describes the existing conditions of the neighborhood, and includes the following:
 - Location-** The location of the neighborhood relative to the County, major roads and landmarks.
 - Land use and zoning** – Land use and zoning describe the type of building that are allowed in an area and how they will need to be sited on a particular property. Land

use and zoning maps are included in this section of the plan. For information about land use and zoning and/or how to obtain the maps for your community, please contact the Office of Community Revitalization.

- **Housing stock** – Describe the type and general condition of the homes in the neighborhood. Below are some housing characteristics to address:
 - What types of housing are in the neighborhood – single-family, duplex or multi-family?
 - Approximately when were most of the homes built?
 - Do a large percentage of the homes need improvement?
 - What are the housing sales prices and/or rents?
 - What percentage of the homes are owner-occupied versus non-owner occupied?
 - Are there vacant lots where new housing could be constructed?
- **Commercial and Institutional Uses** - Describe the commercial uses in the neighborhood. Do they serve residents' needs? Do the businesses employ neighborhood residents? Is there anything needed which is not currently available in the neighborhood? Some neighborhoods lack grocery stores, parks and other vital commercial uses.
- **Infrastructure** – This includes a description of the available infrastructure and/or infrastructure deficiencies (e.g. potable water and sewer system, streets, streetlights, sidewalks and parks to name a few). Is the infrastructure complete? Are repairs and/or any replacements needed? For assistance, please contact the Office of Community Revitalization.
- **Demographics** – Demographics describe the make-up of the residents of the neighborhood. Knowing the demographics of the neighborhood is crucial to developing goals and objectives. This information will guide what type of grants, programs and projects can be procured to assist residents. Included in this section of the Plan are:
 - Median age of residents
 - Number of households in the neighborhood
 - Medium household size
 - Income of residents
 - Race
 - Language spoken in the home
 - Education level

For demographic information, please contact Vivian Ryland, Senior Planner, at 561.233.5318 or at vryland@pbcgov.org

- **Quality of Life Indicators**– “Quality of life can be described as the standard of health, comfort, and happiness experienced by an individual or group - the things that are needed for a good quality of life.”

There are eight generally accepted indicators of quality of life. These include:

- Income and Jobs – Do residents make enough money to cover housing and other costs? Do they have to utilize payday lenders?
- Housing conditions – Is the neighborhood housing decent and affordable?
- Health – Do residents have health insurance? Do residents have access to medical and mental health care?
- Education – Do the majority of residents have a high school, college or technical diploma?
- Environmental Quality – Are residents exposed to environmental toxins?
- Personal Security – Do residents feel safe in their homes and the neighborhood?
- Civic Engagement – Do residents participate in neighborhood activities? Are they engaged in neighborhood life?
- Work/Life Balance – Do residents have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet thereby leaving little family time?

Your neighborhood may choose to include all or just some of the quality of life indicators in your plan. However, it is important to gain an in-depth understanding of issues facing residents so that their needs can be addressed in the plan. This information can come from census data, surveys and planning workshops with residents.



- **Goals and Objectives** – This is the portion of the plan that outlines the specific goals and tasks or actions that will need to be undertaken to help achieve the stated goals. This section will be based on the information from the prior sections of the plan, community concerns, and a shared vision for the future of the community.
- **Implementation** - This portion of the plan includes all of the strategies and actions that are proposed in the preceding plan section in detail. Ideally, this section will assign the estimated cost of implementing a particular strategy, a timeframe for when a strategy or action is to be implemented, and the individuals or entity that is responsible for undertaking each task.