Mapping the Assets of Your Community:

A Key component for Building Local Capacity

OBJECTIVES

1. To compare and contrast the needs assessment and community asset mapping approaches for addressing local issues.

2. To outline the three major arenas in which the community asset mapping technique is most commonly applied (individuals, institutions and informal organizations).

3. To demonstrate how a community asset mapping approach can be used to discover potential entrepreneurs and emerging community leaders.

4. To showcase how the asset-mapping model can be applied to the creation of a sound economic development strategy for the community.

TOTAL TIME REQUIRED

1.5 to 2.5 hours (depending upon how many activities you plan to use in your presentation)

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Background reading
  - ❖ *Mapping the Assets of the Community: A Framework for Building Local Capacity*
- Exercises/activities sheets
  - ❖ *Two Approaches to Solving Community Concerns: Problem-solving vs. Appreciative Inquiry*
  - ❖ *Capacity Inventory of Individuals*
  - ❖ *Community Participation and Leadership Inventory*
  - ❖ *Inventory of Local Institutions Worksheet*
  - ❖ *Group Skills of Volunteer Organization Members*
- PowerPoint slides
- Newsprint and masking tape

AUDIO/VISUAL EQUIPMENT

- Laptop computer
- Overhead projector

Directions and Training Tips

Introduction

1. Begin this session by stating the following to your audience:

   In many communities in America, activities are being undertaken that are designed to identify the major problems facing their community. Unfortunately, when communities start by taking a hard look at all of their problems, they are already going down the wrong path for achieving effective community problem solving. Without question, the best way for a community to tackle the challenges it faces is to first understand the talents and resources that exists in the community right now - resources that can be used to address the host of important issues impacting their community.

2. Using Slide 2, present the outline of what you will be discussing in your session.

3. Discuss how needs are commonly defined and what we mean when we discuss needs assessment (Slides 3 and 4). Next, note that we when start with needs, we are putting the cart before the horse (Slide 5). The better approach is to begin with capacity-development (Slide 6). Discuss the various elements contained on Slide 6.

4. Introduce Slide 7 and state that the dilemma we face when we discuss needs assessment is that we are implying that the community's pitcher is half-empty. On the other hand, when we focus on community assets, we are making the statement that the community's pitcher is half full. The important issue to point out is this: "Does it not make more sense to first understand what talents, skills and resources exist in the community (i.e., the half-full component of the pitcher) and then use these resources to address the problems and challenges existing in our community (i.e., the half-empty portion of the pitcher)?

5. Contrast the key features of needs versus assets using Slide 8. Indicate that the asset approach is a more appropriate beginning point for helping bring about improvements in our communities.

   Optional Activity: If you have 2 to 2.5 hours to discuss asset-based community development, you might want to administer the first activity ("Two Approaches to Solving Community Concerns: Problem-solving vs. Appreciative Inquiry"). This activity serves as an excellent introductory exercise for showcasing the different approaches for initiating a plan for the community. One activity embraces the more traditional needs or deficiencies approach, while the second showcases the positive features of a community (HINT: Don't reveal this to the groups until they have completed this exercise).

   You want to make sure that once the activity is completed, you ask each group to reflect on how they felt during the process of doing this activity.

Asset-Based Community Development

1. Begin this portion of the presentation by stating that there are three important features of community asset mapping. Use Slide 9 to present and discuss these three elements.

2. Using Slide 10, ask how local assets can be uncovered. Moving to the next slide (Slide 11), you state that we do so by giving attention to three major arenas in the community, namely: (1) the talents and skills of individuals; (2) the resources available through formal institutions in the community; and (3) the assets found in local informal organizations.

3. In Slide 12, you will note that asset mapping begins with individuals. A key point you want to make is that when the talents and skills of individuals are recognized and used, these individuals feel empowered. They are contributing something positive to their community. As such, it contributes to the development "OF" the community (which means we are strengthening the capacity of individuals to take action on important local matters).

4. AT THIS POINT, ask individuals to take a sheet of paper and write down all the talents and skills that they believe they possess. Tell them to think of every skill that they have. Once they have completed their list, have each person count the total number of skills they identified. Have them write this number on a small piece of paper. Have someone in the group collect all the slips of paper and then add up all the skills the group has identified. Have the individual report to the group the total number of skills that were uncovered through this exercise
(TIP: you may also want to calculate the average number of skills that the group generated from this exercise).

5. Using Slides 13 through 17, present the four components associated with the capacity inventory of individuals and then briefly discuss each of these four components.

6. AT THIS POINT, distribute the "Capacity Inventory of Individuals" form and have each person complete Part I. In order to save time, ask them to complete only the first column (that is, the column that captures all the skills that the individuals state that they possess). It will take participants about 10 minutes to complete the inventory. After they have completed the questionnaire, ask each participant to count the number of skills that they checked. Ask them to add up the total number of skills that they ended up checking and have them write the total number on a piece of paper. As was done earlier, have a person collect all the slips of paper and have them sum up all the numbers. Have that person report the results (including the average number of skills per person). Compare this total/average with the total/average uncovered earlier. Take a moment to remind participants of the valuable role that the inventory can play in helping local people realize all the talents that they do have that can be beneficial to the community.

TIP: If you want . . . You can vary your activity by having people complete the section on "Enterprising Interests and Experiences." This portion of the capacity inventory is intended to uncover potential home, micro-based or small businesses that could be formed or strengthened in the community. It's a great way to focus on local job creation or business strengthening strategies that can help expand the local economy.

Mapping the Assets of Local Formal Institutions
1. The second major area that we focus on in asset mapping is the formal institutions that exist in the community. Introduce Slide 18 as a way to provide the sociological definition of community institutions. Each item on this slide should be introduced one at a time. Before you reveal the last portion of the slide (the one that states that the major institutions in the community can be captured by the acronym, KEEPRA), pose this very same question to your group. Ask them, "what do you think are the major institutions that exist in most local communities?" Have them generate ideas, and once you have secured their opinions, introduce this last bullet on Slide 18 that reveals the word "KEEPRA."

2. Show Slide 19. It has a visual portrayal and the words for each institution in the community. As you can see, the first letter from each of these institutions, when taken together, spells KEEPRA.

3. Slides 20 and 21 state that too often, communities have failed to effectively capture the resources that local institutions can offer that are of benefit to the community. Slide 21 specifies how we can capture the resources of local institutions. The last item on this slide is designed to acknowledge the fact that many institutions have ties to organizations outside the community. In some cases, it is their central office (like a bank whose regional office may be located outside the state). These outside links may provide important avenues to securing grants or gifts that can help the community address high priority issues in the locality.

4. After presenting Slide 21, ask your group to think about the assets that local schools might offer to the community. Begin listing on a newsprint or blackboard what the group is offering as ideas. Do this for about 2 to 3 minutes. Then introduce Slide 22. This slide introduces a number of ideas of the various ways in which the assets of schools could be used to build your community.

5. Slide 23 takes a slightly different approach to asset mapping. In Slides 21 and 22 the main interest was in showcasing the type of resources that exist in many local institutions. Slide 23 focuses on the role that local institutions can play in contributing in a more meaningful way to local improvement activities. Share with the group the variety of ways that local institutions can help build and strengthen their local community. We offer seven specific ways, but there are more that you and/or your group may uncover.

   Optional Activity: If time permits, ask your group to organize themselves into pairs (two persons per group). Distribute the "Inventory of Local Institutions Worksheet" and indicate that you want one person from the two-person group to interview the other person using this form. It is required that the person being interviewed must belong to some type of formal institution (such as a civic group, religious-related organization, parent-teacher group, etc.). That person will be asked to respond to the questions concerning his/her organization. The interviewer will jot down the information on the worksheet.

   About 15 minutes later, the trainer should stop the discussion and ask 2 to 3 interviewers to share highlights of the information they gathered about the persons they interviewed. Remind them to only present the highlights, and not all the information they have gathered.

   This activity is designed to help the group realize how valuable it is to take the time to gather information about groups since we may find that various groups are focusing attention on similar issues (such as after school programs, elder care, health care services, or job training for low-income people). By linking the hard work of these organizations, we increase the level of resources and energy being devoted to these issues within the community. Greater coordination is likely to improve the chances that these important issues will be effectively addressed.

Informal Organizations: The Third Component of Asset Mapping
1. Briefly introduce the third element of community asset mapping. This component gives attention to the various informal groups existing in the community. Use Slides 24 to 27 to highlight what informal groups in the community are about, why they are important to the community, different examples of informal groups, and the approaches you might use to help locate such groups. Let the group know that locating these groups is not an easy task, but they are the best source of finding people who may not be highly visible in the community and who have a variety of talents/skills that can be very useful in tackling local community improvement activities.

Putting the Pieces Together: Community Economic Development as an Example

1. Having presented information about the three key elements of asset-based community development, you now want to present how the technique can be used to develop an economic development plan for the community. Slide 28 presents five important steps that can be used to do so. The first step represents all the talents and skills that have been located as a result of the community asset mapping process. Having done so, what is next?

   The second bullet in Slide 28 states that an effort should be made to link up the resources of people, institutions and informal groups whenever feasible. Who do you link up? Those people and groups (formal or informal) that have demonstrated interest in the same type of issues.

   The third bullet of this slide tries to determine how the assets uncovered can be used to address local needs and issues (such as those dealing with economic development).

   The fourth bullet seeks to broaden the involvement of more people and groups in creating a vision and plan for the community's economic health.

   The final bullet serves to remind us of the various ties that local institutions might have with organizations outside the community (which would be uncovered using the "Inventory of Local Institutions Worksheet"). These external linkages can offer access to resources (i.e., people, financial support) that might be mobilized to help address local priority issues. For example, some local institutions might be tied to national firms that offer grant monies to local communities that are involved in various types of community improvement activities (for example, both the Walton Foundation and Target Department Stores provide support to worthy community projects).

Strengthening Local Leadership: An Asset-Based Approach

1. An optional component of your presentation is one that focuses on the expansion of the leadership in the community. If you happen to live in a community that is in desperate need of need leaders, you might want to use this section to help locate a pool of potential leaders.

2. Use Slide 29 to introduce the topic. Slides 30 and 31 are based on a recent book by the Drucker Foundation that states that effective communities must move from a centralized process of making decisions (that is, decisions that are made by only a handful of powerful and influential people) to a polycentric approach, one in which many people are involved in a variety of local issues. Slide 31 offers visual portrayal of this change, one that shifts from a pyramid structure of leadership (with only a few people at the top making all the decisions) to that of a series of concentric circles with each circle representing a different group of people involved in local issues. Where the concentric circles overlap is where you find people being involved in more than one issue, but this number is fairly small relative to the total number of people involved in the various issues.

3. Slides 32 and 33 outline the process of uncovering emerging leaders. The first thing a community must recognize is that it has several people that have begun to develop their leadership skills, many as a result of their involvement in formal and informal organizations and groups. Slide 33 outlines the procedures that can be used to find these people. The first is a more simplistic approach. It finds potential leaders using the information captured in Part II of the "Capacity Inventory of Individuals." A more in-depth assessment of a community's potential leadership can be undertaken using the "Community Participation and Leadership Inventory" form. Such an inventory can be included as part of the "Capacity Inventory

of Individuals" that a community undertakes of local residents, or it can be done as a separate effort. If done separately, you may want to make sure a section on "Personal Information" is included on the form (much like that included in Part IV of the "Capacity Inventory of Individuals" form).

4. Slide 34 highlights some important insights that John Gardner, a recognized expert on leadership, has stated about "the seeds of leadership." His comments are presented for the purpose of reminding your group that nearly every important leader in our nation probably began by getting involved in some small project in his/her community. That is why it is so important not to overlook those that have begun to show early signs of leadership in your community.

By the way, these emerging leaders are ideal candidates for taking part in local leadership development programs that Extension educators, community colleges and/or others may want to implement in the locality. By helping further strengthen the skills of these emerging leaders, the chances are quite strong that they will become more actively engaged in important community betterment projects.

Optional Activity: If your interest is on community leadership development efforts, you may want to administer the "Community Participation and Leadership Inventory" form to your group. Have each person complete the form and then ask them to organize themselves into groups containing 5 to 7 people. Ask members within each group to share the nature and variety of their leadership experiences. Have someone in each group record the highlights of these experiences. After 15 to 20 minutes has expired, ask the recorder from each group to briefly share the leadership experiences that were uncovered in their respective groups. The purpose of this exercise is to help the group realize the large pool of leadership that exists in their various groups already.

Summary

Slide 35 simply reintroduces the three important dimensions associated with community asset mapping - one that focuses on people, formal institutions and informal organizations. It reminds your group that a solid asset mapping process requires that careful attention be devoted to each of these three components.

A Final Comment

Another form being provided to you is the "Group Skills of Volunteer Organization Members." While not addressed in any way in the module on asset mapping, it is offered as a resource to use. The form is designed to uncover the skills that members must bring to an organization or committee. If some of these skills are not present, chances are the committee will not function as efficiently or effectively. As such, it is a good idea to administer this form to current or potential committee members. When certain skills are not present on the committee, try to find individuals with these skills and recruit them to join the committee.

Additional Background Reading

Green, Gary P. and Anna Haines. (2002). *Asset Building and Community Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kretzmann, John P. and John L. McKnight. (1993.) *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications.