

Handout # 10: Most Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) About Asset Mapping



1. *What exactly is Community Asset Mapping? (1 of 3: Academic definition)*

From a Michigan State University [Best Practices Brief](#) (468 Kb PDF):

“Community Asset Mapping is a capacity-focused way of redeveloping devastated communities. This positive approach is proposed as a substitute for the traditional deficits focus on a community’s needs and problems. Using problems to formulate human service interventions targets resources to service providers rather than residents, fragments efforts to provide solutions, places reliance on outside resources and outside experts, and leads to a maintenance and survival mentality rather than to community development.

Instead, they propose the development of policies and activities based on an understanding, or ‘map,’ of the community’s resources — individual capacities and abilities, and organizational resources with the potential for promoting personal and community development. This ‘mapping’ is designed to promote connections or relationships between individuals, between individuals and organizations, and between organizations and organizations.

The asset-based approach does not remove the need for outside resources, but makes their use more effective.

The community assets approach

- starts with what is present in the community
- concentrates on the agenda-building and problem-solving capacity of the residents
- stresses local determination, investment, creativity, and control

Community Asset Mapping utilizes community surveys and tools for the mobilizing of individuals and organizations to make connections and build capacity. The information obtained through the survey process must be organized and accessed in an inventory format. It can be computerized as a data base inventory (such as in CCAMP www.thecommunityconnection.org). CCAMP’s computerized mapping can be used to manage and mobilize people as assets as well as show the location of assets on a geographic map, as well as the attributes attached to each asset.



The Community Asset Mapping process as outlined by Kretzmann and McKnight is intended to initiate a process that will fully mobilize a community to use its assets around a vision and a plan to solve its own problems. Their guidebook provides considerable detail about how this might be accomplished, with numerous examples of the types of connections that can be developed (*Building Communities From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*).

2. ***What exactly is Community Asset Mapping? (2 of 3: Generic definition)***

“From a positive youth and community development perspective, it helps to think of our communities in terms of their wealth—in people, things, services, and resources that they possess,” says author Dr. Diane Dorfman. ‘To build from what you have requires asking different kinds of questions to learn different kinds of things about where you live.’

Learning how to ask what communities have to offer begins a process of building and developing. It brings knowledge, skills, and capacities out into the open, where they can work together to everyone’s benefit. As the web of assets grows, so does the potential for the community.

An asset map is an inventory of the strengths and gifts of the people who make up a community. Asset mapping is a process that reveals the assets (e.g., gifts, talents, passion, resources, etc.) of the entire community and highlights the interconnections among them, which in turn reveals how to access those assets.

Through a series of questions and exercises in a typical asset mapping training, community members first learn to uncover their personal assets, both tangible and intangible, material and nonmaterial. Then they expand to take stock of their community, listing all of its special features. CCAMP users learn how to modify a survey template to uncover the hidden assets in their community, those from people or places that are not familiar.

Connections to people can also become connections to resource-filled institutions. Likewise, a connection to an organization or institution may actually conceal a personal relationship.

3. ***What exactly is Community Asset Mapping? (3 of 3: Simple)***

Community Asset mapping, in its simplest form, means having a conversation about skills, interests and resources with another person, group or organization in your community. It begins with looking at and mapping (taking inventory of) the wealth of the community in terms of its assets: people, places, things, culture and tradition. An Asset Mapping Survey acts as a roadmap to guide the conversation. Learning how to ask what people and communities have to offer begins a process of relationship building and community connection. CCAMP’s asset mapping surveys promote guided conversations about people’s skills, hopes and dreams as the beginning of a relationship process. All of CCAMP’s surveys are meant to be modified to better fit the culture of the local community. More information can be found at www.thecommunityconnection.org.

4. ***What is an Individual Asset Mapping Survey?***

An Individual asset mapping survey is an inventory (listing) of the strengths and gifts as well as the needs, hopes and dreams of the people who make up a community (e.g., classroom, grade level, an entire school, neighborhood, workplace, faith community, etc.). Asset mapping

(conversations about skills and interests recorded on surveys) reveals the assets of the people in a targeted community and highlights the interconnections among them, which in turn reveals how to access those assets. For examples of Individual Asset Mapping Surveys, please visit: www.thecommunityconnection.org.

5. *Why do asset mapping?*

These conversations—recorded on surveys—bring knowledge, skills, and capacities out into the open, where they can work together, making connections for everyone’s benefit. As the web of assets grows, so does the potential for the community to improve its quality of life. In this way, the potential for creating a *circle of support* around every child, youth and family becomes real.

6. *How do I train my Asset Mapping Teams?*

The [CCAMP Handbook](#) found at www.thecommunityconnection.org is an excellent resource for everything you need to know about asset mapping. In Section One, you’ll be introduced to how to build and train your asset mapping team (chapter 3) and how to make connections once you’ve completed some of your asset mapping (chapter 4). Section Two contains multiple handouts and worksheets for an asset mapping training with on-going supervision. Along with the CCAMP Handbook you have technical assistance by email and phone locally and at CT Assets Network. Beyond this, you may contact the authors of CCAMP and be networked with similar CCAMP initiatives throughout the country.

7. *Why use the CCAMP resource bank database?*

CCAMP’s resource bank database uses technology to help us work smarter, not harder by organizing our ability to care and make connections of people to resources. CCAMP is a web-based technology that harnesses the power of the internet to organize, manage and mobilize information from asset mapping surveys for a vibrant natural social support network.

8. *What is an appropriate minimum age for an asset mapper? What is a ‘minimum age’ asset mapper capable of? What tasks should they be assigned?*

Asset mapping means having a conversation with another person or group, using an Asset Mapping Survey as a guide. A child who is able to use an asset mapping survey to conduct a guided conversation could easily make an excellent asset mapper. Since the most effective asset mapping conversations take place between individuals who already know one another, children in a classroom might map one another by having a conversation about the things they already love to do as well as the things they’d like to try. A teacher might facilitate a classroom asset mapping activity. Note: the younger the age, the more supervision required.

9. *Should an under 18 year old asset mapper enter a stranger’s home?*

As stated above, the most effective asset mapping conversations take place between individuals who already know one another. They also take place in familiar or group settings, such as classrooms, association meetings, block parties, faith communities, etc. We recommend that asset mapping be done by peer or adult/youth teams who might asset map in environments where they live, work or play. Adults should also assess the safety of any given setting and apply their local rules and guidelines for safety.

10. *Should an asset mapper over the age of 18 enter a stranger’s home?*

Building on the response to the previous question, it is recommend that when asset mapping

door to door in a neighborhood (or anywhere for that matter), to do so in teams of two. Experience tells us that youth-adult teams are very effective.

11. *Should an adult always accompany an under 18 year old asset mapper?*

It depends. If a minor is mapping in his or her school—carrying out guided conversations with a survey—with a peer group, that may be considered safe. Safety, in this situation is the result of several variables being present: a public place, peer to peer conversations, in a school or faith community with adults nearby, etc.

12. *If an interviewee thinks the questions are too personal, how should I respond?*

It's important to validate the concerns of interviewees. Let them know you want them to be comfortable, that you hope they will share with you only information they are comfortable sharing, that you are grateful they are willing to let you know what their boundaries are, and that you are willing to stop the interview whenever they would like.

13. *If an interviewee asks how this information will be used, how should I respond?*

The intended use of survey data and who will have access to that data will be different for every community. Initially you can use the introductory panel on the survey itself as a guide to the purpose and goals of the project. Check with your project coordinator, who may have developed an “elevator speech” to address just such questions. Over time you may be motivated to immerse yourself in the project more deeply in order to be able to speak more personally, with sincerity and passion about the project.

14. *If an interviewee asks how their information will be kept confidential, how should I respond?*

The CCAMP system provides the full range of security features that limit access to information on the data base. Let interviewees know about these access levels. This information is given to the asset mapper during training and supervision. Remember, as an asset mapper you represent the project. The level of trust that interviewees place in you, as well as in the project champion and the catalyst organization and its partners will affect the level of trust with which interviewees will approach an asset mapping experience. One reason to begin mapping within our own networks is that a certain level of trust already exists. A rule of thumb to follow is to begin asset mapping conversations with your “inner circle” of friends, neighbors, program members or colleagues—then work your way out to wider circles.

15. *If I interview one person in a family and the other members in the family wish to “be mapped”, how should I respond to the other family members?* There are many ways to respond to individuals who would like to be asset mapped. You might set a time to map each one individually. Or, better yet, you might suggest they participate as a group in the asset mapping process.

16. *If someone asks, why we are doing this work, how should I respond?*

The asset mapping survey has been designed to introduce people to your unique project. It and other marketing materials, such as a brochure, can give people insight into your mission and goals. Your own personal enthusiasm for a commitment to the process and outcome of asset mapping may be the best response you can give.

17. *How many interviews should an asset mapper be expected to complete and by what timeframe?*

Each asset mapper will have his/her personal network or assigned targeted community group in

which to conduct survey guided conversations. Some mappers will facilitate groups to fill out the survey. Others may primarily asset map their friend, family, work or school network one by one. Asset mappers and program coordinators should estimate numbers within a fairly narrow timeframe. If mappers are expected to meet their “quota” within a month and do not meet them, or surpass even their own expectations, then monthly opportunities to resolve problems (i.e., supervision) and celebrate success will benefit the project.

18. *If I interview a business/church/synagogue, do I asset map the entire staff or only the person in charge?*

Organization mapping is conducted using the *win-win principle* in mind. Acknowledging the mutual benefit you’re looking to achieve will serve to engage and motivate business/faith and other community organizations to participate. Your respect for their time—they can input their organizations goals, resources and needs on the internet in minutes—will encourage them to engage their own program staff in inputting their information as well so that you access information at multiple levels within organizations about each program.

19. *If I receive back incomplete asset map information, what is the best response to the interviewee?*

Accurate data input will improve the outcome of your information searches on the database and the outcome of your project.

20. *If an interviewee would like to complete the survey during their personal time, should they mail it back to me, or should I visit them again? If they mail it back to me, what is the recommended amount of time I should provide for their completion?*

The survey is a tool used to guide a conversation. Discuss with the interviewee how he or she would like to proceed. Consider your own timeline: when did you promise the surveys would be returned to the program coordinator? Sometimes a quick turn around is easier for everyone; otherwise the survey could get lost in a pile of paperwork left undone. Discuss and choose options that you are both comfortable with.

21. *What information on the asset survey is mandatory for completion?*

There is nothing in this process that is mandatory. Usually, an asset mapper will encourage an interviewee to check the top 5 to 7 skills (assets) they may be willing to share and the top 5 to 7 interests (needs) on the paper survey for which they would like to receive some support or training. Suggesting a limit on what gets checked off keeps it real and increases the potential for meaningful future connections.

22. *How do I appropriately explain to an interviewee what “S = willing to SHARE my gift or talent” means?*

Consider what you, yourself, love to do that you’d be willing to share with others—something that you are passionate about. Share that story with your interviewee. The Search Institute calls this your Spark—an activity that energizes you. If you’re a dancer, perhaps you’d be willing to donate a lesson or two to a fundraising auction for a cause you believe in. If you love kids and gardens, perhaps you’d be willing to teach a three session Saturday class to youth on how to grow flowers or kitchen herbs. Sometimes all it takes is an example or two to make an idea clear. “S” can also be considered to indicate a “skill” you’re willing to share.

23. *If they ask, “How much of my personal time this SHARING would involve?” how should I respond?*

The point of a community connection asset mapping process is to achieve mutually beneficial problem solving or goal setting by people helping people. Interviewees will determine their own availability, and can contribute as much or as little time as they like. Sometimes, when a person is interviewed, they believe they will be able to contribute very little or a lot of time. Then, when they're contacted, their circumstances have changed. This is common in community work. People are always free to decline a request to contribute their time or skills.

24. *What if an interviewee asks me about liability issues regarding community use of their space? How do I respond?*

Organizations and individuals deal with liability issues all the time. Organizations have policies and procedures to protect and guide them. Individuals also have insurance, for example, to protect them if someone falls and gets hurt on their property. Interviewees should refer to their existing policies and procedures to ensure they have appropriate coverage.

25. *Is it best to call and arrange an interview time with businesses/individuals or should I visit them without an initial phone call?*

There is no “best” way to arrange an interview time. Some asset mappers insert an item into a meeting agenda, and approach their group/association with ideas about how asset mapping can help them achieve their own goals as well as benefit the wider community. Then they schedule time to asset map the group at the next meeting. Some asset mappers engage friends and family during the course of regular conversations about what's keeping them passionate about their own lives. Use your network to help make your introductions to business people and individuals you don't know run smoothly. “Cold calling” a business man or woman and getting the results you're looking for is a fine art. Most of us benefit from a referral from a mutual acquaintance or friend.

26. *How long does it usually take to do a survey?*

On average, it takes about 20 to 30 minutes to complete one survey face-to-face. Some people may ask you for a survey so they can complete it at home. This often results in never seeing the survey again, or not having the entire survey completed correctly. In these cases, we recommend you set a time and place to follow-up with the person to insure that he or she has completed the survey adequately. Always remember that when it comes to databases, garbage in will always be garbage out.

27. *How would I asset map a whole group at the same time?*

There may come a time when you find yourself in the presence of a moderate size family or group of friends (3 to 6 people) or a department of people at work (6 to 10) or a classroom of students (up to 25 students). How might you “survey” or have a “conversation” with the whole group at the same time? In these situations, experienced asset mappers would pass out a survey to each individual in the group. The mapper explains the details of the project —why his or her group is asset mapping—and each person fills out their name and address, etc. Then when everyone is ready, the mapper will walk or guide the group through each category with its list of skills and interests, asking each person to check the top 5 to 7 skills (assets) they might be willing to share and the top 5 to 7 interests (needs) they would like to learn about or develop in their own lives. As the mapper, you may ask each person or a few people to volunteer to share with the larger group what they have checked off and why. This may give ideas to others in the group who may not fully understand what the survey is about. In the end, collect the surveys and let the group know that someone is likely to contact them in the near future (one to six

months) inviting them to share a skill with someone or to join a class or group to further develop one of your interests. Remind each person that they are always free to decline an offer to get involved.