

Mapping Community Strengths and Assets

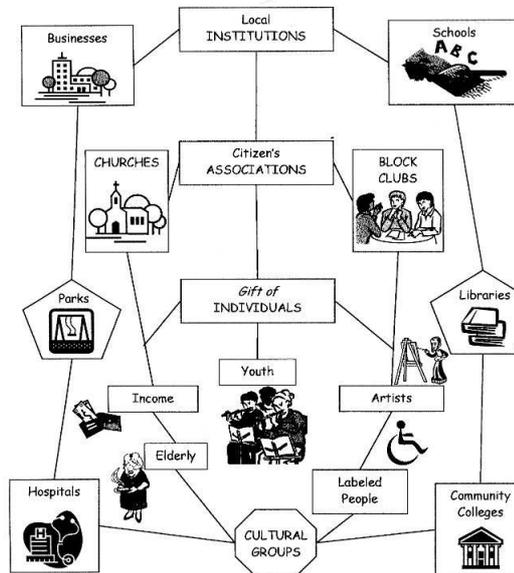
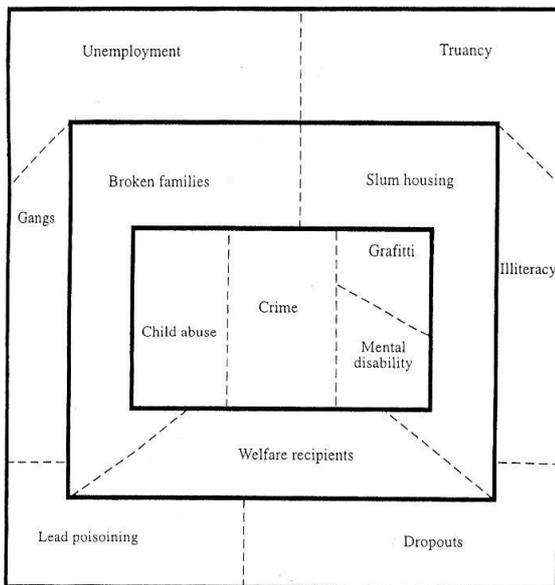
Introduction

Taking a strengths-based approach is one of the core principles of community-led development. This resource describes how to take a strength- or asset-based approach and is a useful tool to help explore and capture the gifts, talents and strengths in your community.

About Asset Mapping

Conceived in the USA by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann, asset-based community development encourages 'mapping' as a way to for local communities to uncover their strengths and assets, which can then be used to link and leverage new possibilities and resources.

Discovering the strengths and assets of a local community helps move from a negative, problems-based picture to a more positive, strengths-based one. When focusing on the problems in your community, as in Picture A, needs and issues dominate and are all boxed into problem silos. Problem-fixing solutions and services are often provided by outside professionals which keeps local people in the position of consumers of services and programmes, believing their well-being depends on external help, rather than being an active citizen.



Kretzmann and McKnight

Picture A

Picture B

By contrast, Picture B shows an asset map, which can only be created by people living, working and investing in a community who know that place: local people. An asset mapping process identifies what a community **does** have rather than what it doesn't. It intentionally looks for strengths, gifts and resources that might not be well understood or shared.

There are many different ways to map community assets. One useful way is to brainstorm in a group. This exploration process can be supported by working through some common asset categories. Below we have used those identified by the [ABCD Institute](#) and we've added an important Aotearoa dimension to them. Don't get bogged down by what should go where: many assets can sit in multiple places. This process is about creating an overall picture of local gifts, resources and assets from your collective knowledge, so you can better connect and leverage what you already have.

1. **The assets of individuals** - These are their skills, knowledge, networks, time, interests and passions. They can be described as skills of the heart, head and hands.

| | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| HEAD  <i>(Things I know something about, and would enjoy talking about, or teaching to others, e.g. local history, conservation, strategic planning, Te Reo, Thai cooking etc)</i> | HEART  <i>(Things I care deeply about, e.g. environment, local food, animal welfare, women's rights, youth employment etc)</i> | HANDS  <i>(Things I know how to do and enjoy, e.g. knitting, making jam, rock climbing, cooking, gardening, project planning, designing websites etc)</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

2. **The assets of associations** - This is not just formal community organisations or voluntary groups. It includes all the informal networks and ways that people come together: football teams, community gardens, pub quiz teams, Lions Clubs, workplaces, and so on. For example, a pub quiz team has members of common interest, but it could also offer fundraising, networks and people power for other community-led projects.
3. **The assets of organisations** - This is not just the services that organisations deliver locally, but also the other assets they control or that are publicly owned. For example, parks, community centres, kindergartens, kōhanga, marae and scout halls. In fact, it covers anything that could support the community to improve its well-being. It also includes staff and the influence and expertise they can use to support new ideas.
4. **The physical assets of an area** - What open spaces, landscapes, street layouts, transport infrastructure, cycleways, walkways, historical sites and buildings are in the area? Mapping these assets helps people to appreciate their value and to realise their other potential uses.
5. **The cultural assets of an area** - Everyday life is full of creativity, culture, heritage and history. This involves mapping the talents for music, drama, art, cultural performance, ethnic groups, and the opportunities for everyone to express themselves in ways that reflect their values and identities, improve understanding and promote their voices.
6. **The economic assets of an area** - Economic activity is at the heart of community resilience. What skills and talents are or are not being used in the local economy? How do local associations or groups contribute to the local economy by attracting investment and generating jobs and income? E.g.

festivals, fishing competitions, etc. Could public spending in the area be used to employ local people instead of outside professionals? How could the residents spend more of their money in local shops and businesses and increase local economic activity? What ideas do people have for new enterprises that leverage the existing strengths/assets of this place?

7. **The assets of whānau, hapū and iwi** - In Aotearoa New Zealand, another asset mapping layer is also important to consider: that of whānau/hapū/iwi and Māori organisations within communities. These sit in multiple dimensions across a community asset map and impact across all of it. The template below helps to identify local whānau/hapū/iwi and Māori organisations and the assets, strengths and resources that they hold and share. These will be diverse and may incorporate elements such as whenua (land), awa (waterways), tikanga and kawa (cultural beliefs, values and practices) and much more.

Other resources

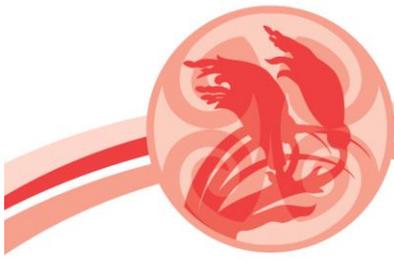
You can download a great [asset mapping workbook](#) and a [tool kit](#) from the ABCD Institute.

For a fun asset mapping activity for all ages, check out Violence Free Waitakere's [Community Treasure Hunt resource](#).



An Asset Mapping Template to Help with Local Brainstorming

| | The assets, strengths and resources in our community are |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Gifts of individuals: Heart Head Hands | |
| Whānau, hapū, iwi | |
| Associations & Networks | |
| Organisations and institutions | |



| | The assets, strengths and resources in our community are |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Physical & natural environment | |
| Culture and identity | |
| Local economy & enterprise | |